

MANAGING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE BRIEFING PROCESS

ANN T.W. YU, QIPING SHEN

*Department of Building and real Estate, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University,
Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China.*

Abstract: Briefing is the first and the most important step in the design process, where the requirements of clients are defined and the objectives of the projects are identified. The briefing stage of construction projects has become the focus of design management research in the last two decades. It is because the briefing process is both critical to the successful delivery of construction projects and problematic in its effective. One of the problem areas is the inadequate involvement of relevant stakeholders. However, little attention is given to the management of multiple stakeholders in the briefing process. This paper introduces stakeholder management in the briefing process. It describes the importance of managing stakeholders in the early phase of the project and presents the methodology of analysing stakeholders to identify stakeholders, assess their needs, wants, commitment, interest and power as well as how to manage them. It concludes that managing multiple stakeholders is essential to the success of the briefing process. By so doing, the needs of all the stakeholders including the clients can be identified and clarified, making the briefing process more effective and efficient.

Keywords: Briefing, client's requirements, project stakeholders, stakeholder management

1. Introduction

Briefing (also known as architectural programming in USA) is the process of identifying and defining the requirements of the client organisation in the early design stage of a construction project. The briefing stage of construction projects has become the focus of design management research in the last two decades. The need to systematic identification and representation of the client's requirements has been raised by many researchers and practitioners (Karama and Anumba, 2002; Ryd, 2003; Yu et al., 2005). The main reason is that the briefing process is both critical to the satisfaction of clients as well as the successful delivery of construction projects. A considerable amount of research has focused on the problems encountered in briefing and the improvements of the process (Newman et al. 1981; O'Reilly, 1987; MacPherson et al. 1992; CIB, 1997; Salisbury, 1998; Barrett and Stanley, 1999; Karama and Anumba, 2001; Pena and Parshall, 2001). One of the problem areas is the inadequate involvement of relevant stakeholders. However, little attention is given to the management of multiple stakeholders in the briefing process. This paper introduces stakeholder management in the briefing process. It describes the importance of managing stakeholders in the early phase of the project and presents the methodology of analysing stakeholders to identify stakeholders, assess their needs, wants, commitment, interest and power as well as how to manage them.

2. The Briefing Process

The construction briefing process involves gathering, analysing, and synthesising information needed in the building process in order to inform decision-making and decision implementation. Further, the brief document should contain all the information used in the design process as a set of evaluation criteria to ensure an optimal solution to the building problem (Kelly et al. 2005). The briefing process is generally accepted to be divided into two major stages – Strategic Briefing and Project Briefing. It would seem that this two step approach is due to the nature of the early stage design problem. First, it is the task of strategic management to identify the organisational needs and then to decide whether a project of a general type and in a certain location is the most effective solution to those needs. Second, tactical management decisions are required on the performance specification of the project given the activities to be accommodated.

2.1. Strategic Briefing

The early stage of the briefing process is critical in ensuring that the objectives are clearly defined (Blyth and Worthington, 2001). The primary objective of strategic briefing study is to develop a strategic brief which describes in business language the reason for an investment in a physical asset, its purpose for the organisation and its important parameters. Hence, questions to be answered include “Why invest?” “Why invest now?” and “For what purpose is the investment?” The strategic briefing study explores a range of options for delivering the ‘business project’ such as refurbishment, renovation, extension, and possibly new build. Alternative process location solutions include outsourcing, subcontracting, or deletion of the process which may lead to downsizing and loss of facilities rather than their expansion. The strategic briefing study will structure information in a clear and unambiguous way to permit the ‘decision to proceed’ to be taken in the full knowledge of all the relevant facts at the time. The product of this stage is the strategic brief, which is the statement of the broad scope and purpose and purpose of the project and its key parameters including overall budget and programme, agreed at an early stage of the project (CIB, 1997).

2.2. Project Briefing

The project briefing study focuses on delivering the ‘technical project’; that is, the construction industry’s response to client requirements expressed in the strategic brief. The product of this stage is the project brief, which is the full statement of the client’s functional and operational requirements for the completed project. The project brief translates the strategic brief into construction terms, specifying performance requirements for each of the elements of the project. It will also include spatial relationships. The project brief provides the basis on which design can proceed.

3. Project Stakeholders

It is worth to distinguish the term client from stakeholders within construction project process. The client is considered as the sponsoring organisation or the initiator, who is directly responsible for the production and development of the project (Bresnen et al., 1990). The project stakeholders are defined as “individuals and organisations who are actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected as a result of project execution or successful project completion (PMI, 1996). Different stakeholders have different levels and types of investment and interest in construction projects and can be seen as multiple clients for the project in which they are involved. Those who advocate a stakeholder theory of organisations maintain that business needs to consider the interests of a wider range of groups apart from maximising the financial returns to the owners. Figure 1 presents the project stakeholders as interpreted by Cleland (1986). The instrumental view of stakeholder theory is to maintain a reasonable balance between different stakeholder interests. There is some (albeit limited) evidence that achieving an acceptable balance between stakeholder interests benefits performance as well as democratic preferences. As at the corporate level, project stakeholders are the people and groups with in an interest in the project, and who can affect the outcome. They represent a primary focus for the project manager, as he or she attempts to influence the behaviour of the main stakeholders in a way that helps and supports the project.

On the other hand, if stakeholders are not properly managed, several problems have been identified in the literature. For instance, a clear and comprehensive definition of project success or failure may not be determined, and consequently the project manager may strive to meet goals that were never intended by the stakeholders (Meredith and Mantel, 2003). Additional problems that contribute to project failure include poor scope and work definition, inadequate resources assigned to the project (both in terms of quantity and quality), unforeseen regulatory changes, and negative community reaction to the project (Black, 1995). These factors may be the major source of delays and cost overruns. It is suggested that all of these problems can be overcome if the stakeholders are actively included in the front end planning and integrated into the project team (Jergeas et al., 2000).



Figure 1 Project Stakeholders Network (Cleland, 1986)

4. A Methodology for Managing Stakeholders in the Briefing Process

In order to understand the various interested parties in the project, all types of stakeholders should be identified and represented during the early stages of the project. The stakeholders' commitment, interest and power should be assessed before the briefing exercise. During the briefing process it is important that all stakeholders' needs are assessed so that a satisfactory and realistic solution can be obtained. Much time and effort should be devoted to the key players in the briefing process. Important tasks for the project manager include:

- identify stakeholders in a project;
- assess their commitment;
- assess their power to help and hinder the change;
- assess their interests, and how this will affect what they think and do about the change;
- assess their needs as distinguish their wants from true needs
- manage relations with them – to gain their support, minimise opposition and generally create favourable attitudes to the change.

4.1. Identification of stakeholders

Project stakeholders are identified by their interests in the project resources and how those resources are likely to affect their well-being. A simple way to visualize this is to prepare a map showing the stakeholders in a project as described in the following:

- Write the name of the project in a circle at the centre of a sheet of paper.
- Draw other circles around the sheet, each identifying an individual or group whom you regard as having a stake in the project. Place the most significant nearer the centre; others around the edge.
- Check that all relevant interests have been included – senior management, colleagues, staff, and people in other organizations.

Kelly and Duerk (2002) propose that those with responsibility for the briefing process should undertake a test of the relative position of stakeholders. This test is known as the ACID test.

The ACID test is used to determine who should be a member of the briefing team and the details are as follows:

- A** Authorise – include those who have the authority to take decisions appropriate to the stage of the development of the project. Those have executive authority to take decisions are invaluable members of the value management team through their ability to immediately sanction a particular line of discovery or take a decision during the workshop which resolves an issue or unblocks a particular line of investigation.
- C** Consult – include experts who have to be consulted regarding particular aspects of the project during its evolution at the workshop. If a particular line of investigation is dependent upon consultation with an absent expert, workshop progress may be compromised.
- I** Inform – do not include those who have only to be informed of decisions reached during the workshop.
- D** Do – include those who are to carry out major tasks specified at the workshop. In this way those who are for example, to design or construct, based on decisions taken at the workshop will be fully conversant of that decision.

4.2. Assessment of their commitment

The next step is to assess the degree of commitment of the main stakeholders to the project. The project manager can assess the level of commitment of each stakeholder on a scale as shown in Table 1. Mark both current and desired levels on the scale for each stakeholder – such as ‘present’ = X, ‘hoped for’ = Y.

Table 1 Stakeholder commitment (Boddy, 2002)

Key Stakeholder	Vigorous opposition	Some opposition	Indifferent towards it	Will let it happen	Will help it happen	Will make it happen

4.3. Assessment of their interests

The next step is to assess the interests of the main stakeholders – those on whom you want to concentrate. This can be done on a grid as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Grid for summarising stakeholder interests and reactions (Boddy, 2002)

Stakeholder	Their goal	Current relationship	What is expected of them?	Positive or negative to them?	Likely reaction?	Ideas for action

4.4. Assessment of their power

Johnston and Scholes (1999) introduce the idea of analyzing not only the interests of stakeholders, but also their power in an organization's strategy (see Figure 2). This idea is also relevant at the level of the project, as it indicates what kind of relationship the manager needs to establish with each group. The acceptability of the direction of a project to key players (segment D) should be a major consideration. The manager needs to devote much time and effort to key players. Less effort, or a different kind of effort, will be acceptable to those in other segments. A major hazard to be aware of is that players may suddenly change their position – such as from Segment B to D. The project manager needs to adapt their approach accordingly.

		Level of interest	
		Low	High
Power	Low	A Minimal effort (e.g. general public)	B Keep informed (e.g. Local authority, contractor)
	High	C Keep satisfied (e.g. developer)	D Key players (e.g. designers, users)

Figure 2 Stakeholder mapping: power/interest matrix (Newcombe, 2003)

4.5. Assessment of their needs

In order to assess the true needs of the stakeholders, Charles Bytheway's technique of function diagramming which was given the acronym FAST (function analysis system technique) can be used (Charles Bytheway, 1965; Kelly et al, 2004). There are three steps to the construction of a function diagram:

(i) Generation of functions

The key stakeholders were asked to participate in a workshop to brainstorm the functions that are required by the project. These functions may be high order executive functions or relatively low order wants. All functions are expressed as an active verb plus a descriptive noun, and are recorded on sticky notes and scattered randomly across a large sheet of paper. A list of brainstormed functions for a residential development is shown on the Table 3.

Table 3 A list of brainstormed functions for a residential development

Secure environment Establish multi-function integration Enhance facilities Ensure user comfort Meet community needs Create pleasing environment Upgrade living standard Improve user interface Better utilization of land Change community perception Minimize nuisance to public Reduce deterioration Control finances Control operational cost Relieve compliant More recreational facilities Improve accessibility Increase flexibility Allow private participation Ensure buildability Ensure operability Ensure building lifetime Establish project brief Control programme	Please neighborhoods Reduce government accommodation Transfer responsibility to private sector Protect existing building Establish local community pressure Satisfy compensation Enhance environment Secure funding Create value Provide recreational space Enhance communication Reduce mosquitoes Reduce dust Preserve parking Suppress vibration Reduce noise Maintain access Monitor environment Monitor dust Satisfy safety Improve safety standard Limit cost
---	--

(ii) Classification of functions / construction of project function priority matrix:

At the completion of the brainstorming session all the participants are invited to sort the notes into a more organized form. The project function priority matrix is constructed by asking of each sticky note function whether it is technical or strategic and whether it constitutes a need or a want. The note is transferred to the appropriate box in the matrix where its position is ordered relative to the other function in the box (Table 4). The higher priorities are listed at the tops of the respective boxes. It should be emphasised to the team that this is an iterative process and therefore any team member is entitled to move a previously ordered sticky note. Although this sounds confrontational it is very rare for disagreement to occur and ultimately the correct ordering of all the functions is achieved.

(iii) Construction of function diagram:

A strategic or customer oriented Function Analysis System Technique (FAST) diagram, as shown in Figure 3 was constructed by focusing on the strategic needs and wants. The highest order needs formed the mission of the project with supporting functions being positioned to the right. The strategic wants were positioned below the centreline of the mission statement. The mission statement required word crafting to make it read as a flowing statement.

Table 4 The project function priority matrix

<i>Strategic needs</i> Secure environment Establish multi-function integration Enhance facilities Ensure user comfort Meet community needs Create pleasing environment Upgrade living standard Improve user interface Better utilization of land Change community perception Minimize nuisance to public Reduce deterioration Control finances Control operational cost Relieve compliant More recreational facilities Improve accessibility Increase flexibility	<i>Technical needs</i> Allow private participation Ensure buildability Ensure operability Ensure building lifetime Establish project brief Control programme Improve safety standard Limit cost
<i>Strategic Wants</i> Please neighborhoods Reduce government accommodation Transfer responsibility to private sector Protect existing building Establish local community pressure Satisfy compensation Enhance environment Secure funding Create value Provide recreational space Enhance communication	<i>Technical Wants</i> Reduce mosquitoes Reduce dust Preserve parking Suppress vibration Reduce noise Maintain access Monitor environment Monitor dust Satisfy safety

4.6. Managing stakeholders

The following issues are worth noting:

Relationships

- Identify key players and what can be done to help them before their assistance is needed. Build relationships before they are needed. It is always easier to receive a favor after it has been granted (Gray and Larson, 2002).
- Establish the links between stakeholders. There may be close links between some of these interest groups – or links may rapidly develop during the project. This refinement of stakeholder map may indicate how actions to deal with one group can affect others – either in favour of or against the project. Stakeholders talk to each other, and will pass bad news as well as good round the grapevine (Boddy, 2002).

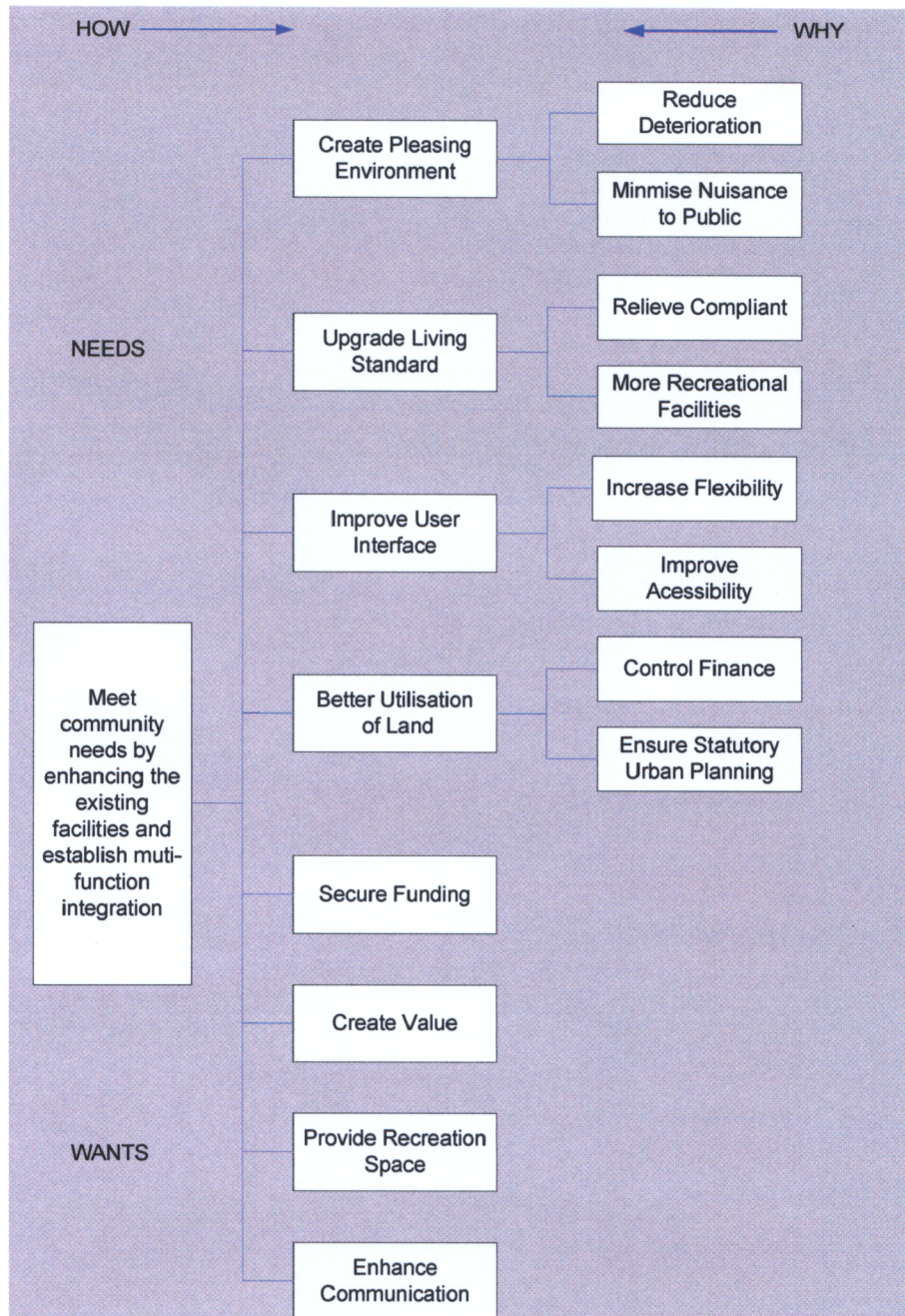


Figure 3 A strategic FAST Diagram

Sleepers

Not all stakeholders will be obvious at the start. Project staff may not anticipate their interests, and they themselves may not realize that the project will affect their position. They may still emerge later in the project to protect their interests. It is better that the project manager takes the initiative to seek them out and be aware of potential difficulties (Boddy, 2002).

Timing

The attitudes and actions of stakeholders may change as the project takes shape, and at different phases. The significance of this is that it emphasizes the dynamic nature of the relationship between the project and the stakeholders. Outside events, as well as the actions of the project manager, affect how the interest groups view the project. Sometimes this will bring them around as supporters – at other times the shift will be the other way. The project manager has to be vigilant, not take the current position of a stakeholder as certain, and be alert to external changes which may shift the position (Boddy, 2002).

Face-to-Face Contact

Trust is sustained through frequent face-to-face contact. Project managers must maintain frequent contact with key stakeholders to keep abreast of developments, assuage concerns, engage in reality testing, and focus attention on the project. Frequent face-to-face interactions affirm mutual respect and trust among others (Gray and Larson, 2002).

5. Conclusions

The importance of identifying project stakeholders and understanding their expectations and needs in the briefing process for a construction project has been discussed. Stakeholders with different levels and types of power and interest in construction projects have expectations that the project manager must manage. It is necessary to consider the interests of the project stakeholders and maintain a balance between different stakeholder interests. Much time and effort should be devoted to the key players of the project. The effective management of stakeholders in a project is an important key to success of the briefing process.

This paper has also introduced a methodology for managing multiple stakeholders in the briefing process. Once the project stakeholders are identified, their commitment, power and interests should be assessed before the briefing exercises. By so doing, the needs of all the stakeholders including the clients can be identified and clarified subsequently, making the briefing process more effective and efficient. The success of the briefing process is essential to the satisfaction of the clients as well as the successful delivery of construction projects. Therefore, it is worth to study the results and implications of using the proposed methodology as developed from the literature for managing the multiple stakeholders in the briefing process in real-life projects.

6. Acknowledgement

The work described in this paper was supported by the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (PolyU 5007/02E).

7. References

- Barrett, P.S. and Stanley, C. (1999). *Better Construction Briefing*, Blackwell Science, Oxford.
- Black, K. (1995). *Causes of Project Failure: A survey of Professional Engineers*, PM Network, November 21-24.
- Blyth, A. and Worthington, J. (2001). *Managing the Brief for Better Design*, Spon Press, London and New York.
- Boddy, D. (2002). *Managing projects – Building and Leading the Team*, Pearson Education, UK.

- Bresnen, M.J., Haslaam, C.O., Beardsworth, A.D., Bryman, A.E. and Kei, E.T. (1990). *Performance on site and the building client*, CIOB Occasional Paper, No.42.
- Bytheway, C.W. (1965). *Basic function determination technique*, Proceedings of the Fifth National Meeting of the Society of American Value Engineers, 2, 21-23.c
- Cleland, D.I. (1986). *Project stakeholder management*, Project Management Journal, 17(4), September, 36-43.
- Construction Industry Board (1997). *Briefing the Team*, CIB, Thomas Telford Publishing, London.
- Gray C. and Larson E. (2002). *Project Management: The complete guide for every manager*, McGraw-Hill, U.S.A.
- Jergeas, G.F., Williamson, E., Skulmoski, G.J. and Thomas, J.L. (2000). *Stakeholder Management on Construction Projects*, AACE International Transactions, 12.1-12.6.
- Johnson, G. and Scholes, K. (1999). *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, Prentice Hall, Hemel Hempstead.
- Kamara, J.M. and Anumba, C.J. (2001). *A Critical Appraisal of the Briefing Process in Construction*, Journal of Construction Research, 2(1), 13-24.
- Kamara, J.M., Anumba, C.J. and Evbuomwan N.F.O. (2002). *Capturing client requirements in construction projects*, Thomas Telford, London.
- Kelly, J. and Duerk, D. (2002). *Construction Project Briefing/Architectural Programming*, in Best Value in Construction, Kelly, J, Morledge, R. and Wilkinson, S. (eds.), Blackwell Science Ltd, 38-58.
- Kelly, J., Male, S. and Graham, D. (2004). *Value Management of Construction Projects*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK.
- Kelly, J., Hunter, K., Shen, G. and Yu, A. (2005). *Briefing form a facilities management perspective*, Facilities, 23(7/8), 356-367.
- MacPherson, S., Kelly, J.R. and Male, S.P. (1992). *The Briefing Process: A review and critique*, RICS.
- Meredith, J.R. and Mantel, S.J. (2003). *Project management: a managerial approach*, 5th edition, John Wiley, New York.
- Newman R., Jenks M., Dawson S., and Bacon V. (1981). *Brief formulation and the design of buildings*, Oxford Polytechnic.
- Newcombe, R. (2003). *From client to project stakeholders: a stakeholder mapping approach*, Construction Management and Economics, 21(8), 841-848.
- O'Reilly, J.J. (1987). *Better briefing means better buildings*, Building Research Establishment, DoE, U.K.
- Pena, W. and Parshall S.A. (2001). *Problem Seeking: An Architectural Programming Primer*, 4th edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., U.S.A.
- PMI (1996). *Project Management Body of Knowledge*. Newtown Square, PMI, PA.
- Ryd, N. (2003). *Exploring Construction Briefing From Document to Process*, Doktorsavhandlingar vid Chalmers Tekniska Hogskola, Sweden.
- Salisbury, F. (1998). *Briefing Your Architect*, 2nd edition, Architectural Press, Oxford.
- Yu, A.T.W., Shen, Q.P., Kelly, J. and Hunter, K. (2005). *Application of value management in project briefing*, Facilities, 23(7/8), 330-342.