

Tools for Change: The Power-Interest Matrix

What is it?

The Power-Interest Matrix is a technique used to analyse stakeholders in a change program according to (as the name suggests) their level of interest in the proposed changes, and their power to influence those changes. Each stakeholder is plotted on a 2x2 matrix with interest on one axis, and power on the other, with each axis running from low to high.

This creates a four-quadrant grid with varying combinations of power and interest:

- Low interest and low power: the 'Crowd'
- High interest and low power: Subjects
- Low interest and high power: Context Setters
- High interest and high power: Players.

Who would use it? What would they use it for?

A power-interest matrix would be used by the steering committee or working group of a change program early in the effort as a means of identifying supporters and opponents of the change.

The working group would, in a workshop setting, plot stakeholders one-by-one in the respective quadrant in which they are at present, and also where they need to be. The working group can then plan accordingly how to move the respective stakeholders from where they are to where they need to be.

Why is it important?

Change is always political; it's important to know early on who the supporters and allies are – and the detractors and neutral parties – so you can plan accordingly and prevent the change program from being derailed. Power-interest matrices help to identify the interests and power bases that *must* be accounted for to address the issue at hand and whose buy-in should be sought or who should be 'co-opted'.

A power-interest matrix also provides a 'first pass' guide to who needs to be influenced in which direction. This sets the scene for what changes the overall program needs to include.

How do you use it?

Tape four flip chart sheets to a wall to form a single surface two sheets high and two sheets wide. Draw the two axes with a marking pen. The working group then brainstorms who the stakeholders are and writes the name of each on a label, either a Post-it note or index card (one stakeholder per label). A facilitator would then, guided by the deliberations of the working group members, attach each label on the grid (use blu-tack for index cards). Labels should then be collected from ↗

↗ one per member in a round-robin fashion until all labels other than duplicates are placed on the matrix.

The group should then discuss the implications of the resulting placements, and which stakeholders need to be 'repositioned' for the change program to be successful. Interestingly, the point is not necessarily to get everyone in the Player quadrant; it may be to 'immobilise' a detractor or resistant stakeholder so that they are moved from the Player to the Subject quadrant (for example by reconstituting a committee so that that person is no longer involved and their resistance is short-circuited) or to the Context Setter quadrant (say, by being re-deploying a resistor onto a different project).

What does it look like?

The figure below shows a hypothetical power-interest matrix for an organisation's introduction of Enterprise Risk Management (ERM is an approach for identifying, assessing and managing risks - individual and system-wide – at all levels of an organisation). It combines the current ('as is') and desired ('to be') states on the one graph. As an added innovation, each stakeholder has been colour-coded to show their degree of cooperation or buy-in (the green cells with graded shading signify moving a party from indifference or opposition to support). In this case the change effort will centre on winning over the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Branch General Managers, which will in turn bring along Level 4 managers. Frontline staff will also be a key focus of the initiative.

