INVESTPUPPY UNVARNISHED

InvestPuppy

The invisible stakeholders

Serious about outcomes. Not serious about ourselves.

Every financial software implementation has two sets of stakeholders. The first set attended the workshops, reviewed the specification, and signed the project plan. The second set did not attend anything. They were not invited, or were invited once and sent a delegate, or were told the project was being handled by the first set and they would be consulted when relevant. They discovered the system on go-live day. They have been explaining why it does not work for them ever since.

1. Who Is Not in the Room

The workshop that produces the specification is not a representative sample of the people who will use the system. It is a sample of the people who were available, willing, and sufficiently senior to attend. These are not the same people.

The operations director attends. The portfolio analyst who processes thirty transactions a day does not. The head of compliance attends. The compliance officer who produces the monthly regulatory report does not.

> The specification that results from a workshop attended by senior stakeholders will correctly describe the high-level workflow. It will incompletely describe the exceptions, the edge cases, the manual processes, and the reporting requirements that matter most to the people who use the system every day. These are the things that generate post-go-live complaints. They were always present. Nobody asked.

2. The Map Is Not the Stakeholder

The stakeholder map is not the same as the stakeholder. This distinction is where most stakeholder engagement processes fail.

Stakeholder mapping produces a document. The document lists the stakeholders, their level of interest, their level of influence, and their communication plan. It is a governance artefact. It is not an engagement process.

Listing a stakeholder on a map, sending them a fortnightly summary, and asking them to confirm receipt is not stakeholder engagement. It is stakeholder administration. The two things are not the same, and confusing them is one of the primary reasons invisible stakeholders remain invisible.

3. The Empty Chair

There is a moment in every failed implementation where the invisible stakeholder becomes visible. It is usually about three weeks after go-live. And then someone — a compliance officer, a back-office analyst, a reporting team lead — says: this system does not do the thing I need it to do.

They are not wrong. The system does not do the thing they need it to do, because they were not in the room when the configuration decisions were made.

> *There is a more expensive version of this problem. It does not arrive at go-live. It arrives when regulatory requirements change after the system is live — and the architecture cannot accommodate the change because the compliance function was not involved in the design.*
>
> *By this point the project is closed, the team is disbanded, and the cost of the remediation is a new project.*
>
> ***The chair had their name on it. It was empty when the room was full.***

4. Finding the Invisible Stakeholders

The invisible stakeholder is not hard to find. They are the person who currently does, manually or in a legacy system, the thing the new system is supposed to replace. The question that finds them is not 'who is responsible for this function?' It is 'who does this work?'

Three things that surface invisible stakeholders before go-live:

One. A workflow walkthrough conducted with the people who do the work, not the people who manage it — specifically including the exception-handling processes that senior stakeholders may not know exist.

Two. A reporting requirement sign-off process that includes the recipients of every report the system will produce, not only the commissioners.

Three. A UAT process that requires sign-off from every function that will use the system in production. Sign-off by a project team member on behalf of a function is not sign-off.

The empty chair was always there.

It had a name on it.

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