

# Project Management Continuous Stakeholder Engagement

... Communication, Current Reality, Prioritization

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**A** Project Manager arrives at his or her desk every morning and is faced with the first dilemma of the day. How is my project doing? What happened yesterday that might have changed anything for the better or worst? Has my project deviated from the planned scope, schedule, cost or quality requirements? Do we need to take immediate action to get my project back in line with our baseline?

Of course, today the answers to these questions will come at the next project meeting. With any luck, perhaps a stakeholder on the project team will have the where-with-all to understand that fixing problems sooner rather than later can save time and money and he / she will call to deliver the bad news; but don't count on it. No one likes to deliver bad news. You can only hope that there are people on your project team with a work ethic that accepts ownership of their responsibilities; someone that really cares about the project's success.

Project Management has a new dynamic with a tool that allows the user to continuously **monitor, balance, and prioritize** a number of project aspects simultaneously. Project Stakeholder Engagement (PSE) is just that; unlimited anonymous communication from all designated stakeholders to allow a continuous, minute by minute, active monitoring, assessment, and prioritization of a project. This is a way to solve for **Current Project Reality versus Current Project Perception**. Many Project Managers (especially those that are certified PMP's) have many tools at their disposal. Most of them are using project planning and tracking tools based on milestones and a "PULL" system; meaning they need to go out and "PULL" Information from project team members. This new approach requires participants to "PUSH" information to the Project Manager by removing one of the big barriers to **free information flow**...fear of failure, or reprisal. The anonymous nature of the tool solves this particular problem and encourages free information flow. The result is more accurate project status and the ability to solve project roadblocks before they become too large or too late to overcome. Project Managers are often overly optimistic about the accuracy of information they are receiving. Then, when projects start to slip, they catch the flack for not knowing the issues or reporting status with poor accuracy. Project Stakeholders (Functional and Operational Managers / Directors / VP's) trust that the information they are receiving is accurate (especially during early status reporting), only to be disappointed by missed milestones, late or over budget projects, or all together project failures (cancelations). Project cancelation rates are actually alarmingly high.

- This will make the Project Manager's job easier and their reporting more accurate, providing early insight to potential problems BEFORE they are catastrophic (making them, their projects and the teams more successful).
- For Project Stakeholders, it will improve project success rates, on-time project execution, faster ROI, and happier and more productive employees and teams.

**This is a living document** that offers a continuous overall project rating for the Project Manager; reporting the current condition of the project and the current conditions of the individual pre-selected attributes for each project. Each Stakeholder will have the opportunity to anonymously weigh in at random times or on a scheduled basis (or both) answering between 10 and 25 questions. The tool may be configured to disregard anonymity. Answers previously recorded may be updated at any time and periodic global updates may be scheduled at any time. An integral quantitative analysis tool will help the Project Manager focus on channeling efforts into areas that have immediate and significant needs. And finally, the tool will allow you to see specific comments made anonymously (or not) by stakeholders, customers (both internal and external), vendors, and partners in answer to specific questions regarding

subjects such as barriers faced in dealing with specific issues. These comments may be entered into the tool at any time and revised at any time. Analyzing these comments will allow you to develop ideas for improving these processes.

**Here is an example of how this dynamic Project management tool will work:** There are questions around the status of materials needed for your project. The people responsible for procurement of material for your project, on Monday at 3:20pm, have not received the necessary materials and so they answer the questions in the negative. The project manager looks at the charts and sees red. He/she can drill down to see why that section of the chart is red and sees **exactly** why this project is not progressing. On Tuesday at 2:30pm some of the materials needed arrive (but not all) and the responsible procurement people make an entry in the system. The entry takes about two minutes. The next time the Project Manager checks the chart the corresponding section has turned yellow. He/she can then drill down (or not) to see why that slice of the pie has turned yellow and how that specific project's progress has improved. It is a living document meant to actually help the Project Manager control what is happening without having meetings or waiting for the next meeting to get an update. The axiom is that the sooner a problem can be addressed the better (and least expensive) it is to fix it and the more control you have over the project.

This is a Management level tool that provides continuous oversight.

## ***How do you accurately measure current project reality and project performance and drive the right changes?***

Would you like to gain insight into your project and be able to continuously track progress?

Would you like to allow your stakeholders to randomly and anonymously update their information about their specific function and have the updated results immediately available?

Can you detect problem areas in a meaningful way and react quickly?

Do you know how to discover long running problems?

Can you dynamically identify specific areas for improvement?

Do you know how to create Project Effectiveness, Organizational Focus & Alignment, and effective Project Performance?

Can you identify the gaps between knowing that something is wrong and knowing why it is wrong in the execution of a specific project?

Do you know the "Current Reality" of your entire Project; and how each project attribute interacts to create that reality?

## ***It's about Performance... Today!***

Do you want to know what's really going on...right now?

Your project stakeholders are eager to help and you may be ignoring the best business intelligence available.



## ***On time, on budget is the goal of every project. Knowledge is the driver.***

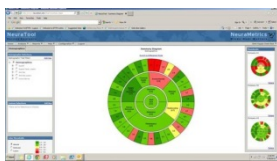
The NeuraMetrics methodology allows you to evaluate a project by simultaneously performing a self-assessment of the various aspects that make up the Project. This self-assessment continuously determines how well, or poorly, your project is progressing with regard to attributes determined by you around your established goals and objectives. All of the scores in the continuous assessment help to relate how close the scored attributes are to the ideal. Examples of Continuously Monitored Project Attributes:

- Unsolved risks
- Deadline status
- Milestones
- Resources
- Change
- Project duration
- Personnel availability
- Time and costs required for completion
- Scope and deliverables

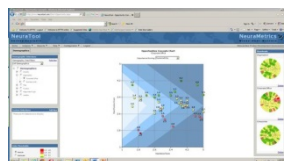
This online application allows you to continuously self-assess project performance by investigating the attributes you have determined are most important and then it helps you dynamically measure performance relative to the entire Project. It provides a yardstick for your project attributes and measures them against your norm.

It then takes the collected data and automatically positions it in an Opportunities Concepts Analysis graphic representation that helps the Project Manager prioritize investment into the attributes that have the greatest need for immediate and significant improvement.

It is a performance improvement tool that utilizes web-based technology and current starting conditions to assist in the understanding of your "current reality" as it pertains to your Project Management function. It enables the evaluation of overall performance and determines improvement potential. The tool will offer Project Managers the ability to go to a secure website 24/7 to analyze the project and how each project attribute relates to project success. The tool is based on Six Sigma principles and Behavioral Performance Intelligence™. Most Project Managers leave the Dashboard (live) on a monitor in order to be able to view updates as they occur.



"Big Picture" analysis. See your project and its strengths and weaknesses in one view and then drill down for details.



Focus on channeling time and effort into areas that have the largest potential for immediate and significant improvement.



Continuously compare project attributes and manage inconsistencies using strategic and actionable data.

## Philosophy

**T**he organization must establish a standard approach to planning and executing its projects and must develop and/or make available common Project Management tools and software. Project planning and execution, that follows a formal methodology, along with commonly-used tools, templates, guidelines, and standards, will contribute to increased productivity and higher project quality. Also,

establishing a standard Project methodology and a common set of tools helps facilitate continuous improvement within the Project for success. PSE offers an on-line anonymous query that gathers Behavioral Performance Intelligence™ and gives Project Managers excellent in depth visibility into their projects. It continuously examines each project with random or scheduled anonymous input (or both) from internal project stakeholders, customers (both internal and external), vendors, and partners. It directs each question in the query only to the proper respondent type(s) to minimize the number of questions any one stakeholder has to answer and has the questions that are asked match the depth of knowledge of that stakeholder. No stakeholder should receive a question that contains subject matter that does not match his or her subject matter expertise.

Project Managers analyze their function with a big picture overview that characterizes each project and gives way to an individualized approach that allows the manager to concentrate on specific areas of concern.

Figure #1 is the Big Picture Analysis showing all the attributes and their status

Figure #2 is the Opportunities Concept Analysis that helps prioritize mitigating attribute issues

The Project will be **continuously monitored** to keep the Project Manager aware of daily activity and progress.

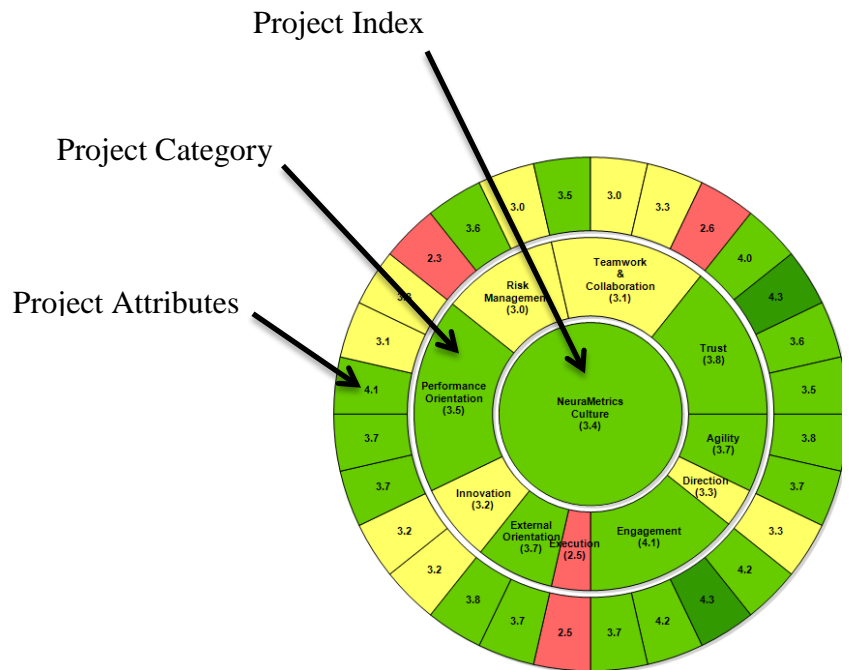
Appropriate questions for specific stakeholders will be developed in collaboration with the user organization to establish a final configuration.

Demographic Selections, Respondent Types, Importance Traits, and the Question Response Matrix matching questions to project Stakeholders etc. will be accomplished in collaboration with the user.

Project Index: A quantitative score for the entire Project determined by the scores of the individual categories

Project Category: A quantitative score determined by the scores related to the various attributes

Project Attributes: Scores determined by continuous assessment (Stakeholder input). These scores and colors will change immediately with project updates.



One of several individualized approaches available to concentrate on specific areas of concern is called The Opportunity Concepts Analysis. It presents the project in terms of its individual attributes scores and their importance to the company. This analysis allows the Project Manager to focus on channeling time and effort into areas that have the largest potential for immediate and significant improvement.

Attribute scores and colors will change immediately with project updates and the chart will reposition the attributes according to the new priority for action.

Attributes that score high and are important should be explored as areas of potential leverage or strategic advantage.

Attributes that score low and are important should be explored as areas for prioritized improvement.

Average scoring attributes that are of low importance should receive deferred consideration.

This chart allows management to focus on channeling investment into areas that have the largest potential for immediate and significant improvement for the entire Project.

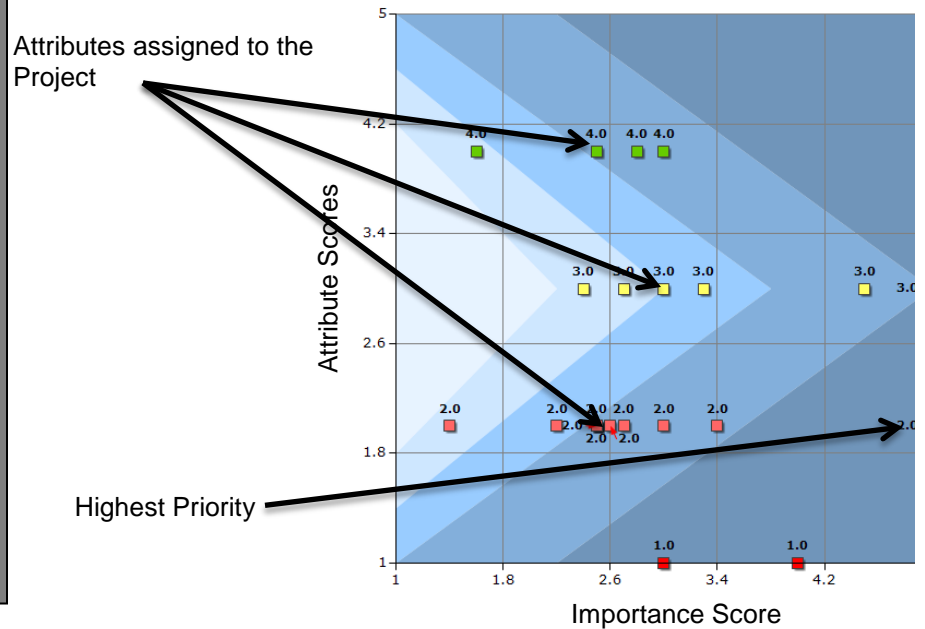


Figure #2

## Resources

The Project Manager and project management teams should be empowered to work as entrepreneurs. In order to truly accomplish this, three factors must be present.

1. Autonomy requires giving the project teams the accountability and authority to manage their projects.
2. The Project Manager should create a supportive and nurturing environment that does not require project managers to engage in self-promotion to be recognized.
3. Daily anonymous interaction with the PSE tool should be encouraged (even mandated) to help build the team confidence and keep things moving with minimum stress on everyone. Interaction need only take about two to five minutes per day with an option to be configured to be anonymous.

## Communications

Communication on clearly identified expectations and the means of communication should be focused on the needs of the project management team and stakeholder groups. Developing open communications and anonymous inputs to the Project Stakeholder Engagement tool promotes the identification of problems early in the project, when they are less costly to resolve.

Anonymous continuous communication with the PSE tool will work to develop healthy relationships between team members by eliminating adversarial relationships and cultivating mutual support.

## **NeuraMetrics' tools deliver knowledge that is strategic and actionable.**

NeuraMetrics has delivered on line quantitative, self-assessment tools world-wide to evaluate performance, procedures, and policies in a standardized manner.

### **Conclusion**

***T***his application becomes a **business operations tool** that allows ***Project Managers*** to ***continuously monitor and manage their projects.***

By devising a means of skillfully and pervasively continuously eliciting opinions from the stakeholders, a Project Manager can achieve superior insight and better outcomes across the board.

### **About the Author:**

Michael St. Angelo is the President and CEO of NeuraMetrics Inc. Mike has held executive sales and marketing positions at a company that was the worldwide leader in process automation, an industry analysis firm that studied and advised major corporations and utilities and a company that marketed enterprise software. He has led the development of an efficient and robust method to conduct mission critical, process and organizational assessments, benchmarking and analysis. His methodology and tools offer expanded insight into causes of organizational performance including analysis of process behaviors. Mike has taught undergraduate courses and provides freelance articles occasionally for industry publications. He may be reached at:

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