

## **Project Promotion: Creating and Communicating Your Project Vision**

*Richard Branton and Kelli Wynn*

### ***Your Project Vision: What is it? Why do you need it? How does it get created?***

Industry research, as well as Advanced Strategies' personal experience in managing software development projects, has shown that approximately 80% of all software development projects are delivered late, over budget, without expected functionality, and/or they fail altogether. A major factor contributing to these failures is the loss of the resources necessary to achieve a success.

How can you, then, as the project leader, ensure commitment for your projects so as to prevent the loss of these critical resources? One extremely important thing you must do is to communicate your vision of the effort to various stakeholders. A *stakeholder* is anyone who may be impacted by the effort and/or anyone who can impact the success of the effort. Your vision should include the business purpose along with your personal expectations and hopes of what will be achieved from a successful effort. The vision also clarifies to them why the project is important, why resources should be dedicated, or if they are the resource, why they should dedicate themselves to ensure success. Whether the stakeholder is a sponsor funding the effort or a team member dedicated to achieving quality work, creating and communicating a project vision can motivate the stakeholders to be responsive and committed to the effort.

There are several essential elements in creating and communicating your project vision. The first element is the formal project definition. The project definition should state in business terms why the project was originally funded and what business results are expected from the effort. If your vision for the project is not in alignment with the organization's vision, you are less likely to get commitment from the necessary stakeholders.

The second key element is your personal assessment of the importance of the project. This includes your personal values and philosophies of how to run a standard project. These assessments, values, and philosophies should shape the formal project definition to create a basic message. For example, if your project is to enable faster customer service and you see this as an opportunity to establish the value of IT for the business, this will influence how you communicate your enthusiasm for the project. Together with the business intentions, your personal project vision will begin to clearly define to others why this project is important and why it deserves continued commitment until it is accomplished.

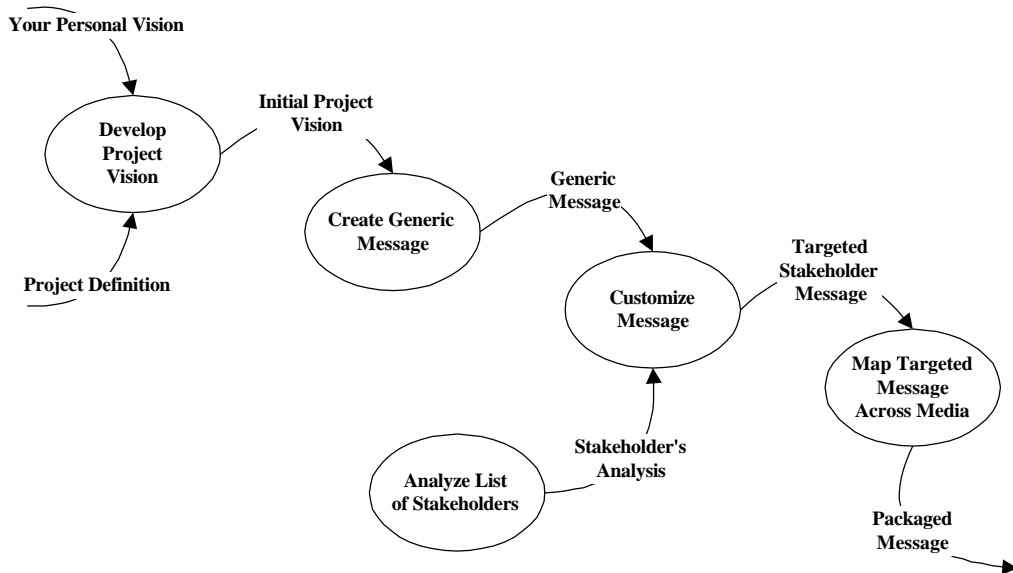
The third key element is to identify and analyze your stakeholders. In order to identify the list of stakeholders, consider who you need commitment from in order to succeed. Examples might include steering committees, project team members, project team family members, and end users. After the stakeholder list is identified, some analysis of each stakeholder should be done to understand their interests and goals. The analysis should answer questions like these:

- What are their individual interests and needs regarding the effort?
- What do they stand to lose if it fails?
- What do they know about this effort and what do you need them to know to secure their commitment to it?
- What might this individual fear about this effort?

By asking and answering this type of question, you can begin to put emphasis on the concerns of the stakeholders. Understanding how the project might address the stakeholder's goals will help you to emphasize the appropriate pieces of your basic message to gain their commitment. The analysis is critical to this process because without understanding what is important to the receiver of the message, even the best message can go unnoticed, misunderstood, or rejected.

The last key element is to identify the amount of time and media available to communicate your message. Sometimes you may only have 5 minutes to discuss your project, like in an elevator ride where every minute and every word counts. Other times you may have 30 minutes to give a formal presentation. While the basic message remains the same, the time and media are factors that will shape the message to the target audience based on the completed stakeholder analysis. The process model in Figure 1 defines the order in gathering and building the key elements needed to communicate your basic message to a particular audience via a specific communication media.

**Figure 1**



Using the first two elements, the project definition and your personal vision, you can derive the initial project vision. This vision should state in your terms why this effort is important. Why should people render their services and/or resources necessary to achieve the project's goals?

Once you develop the initial project vision, you then create a generic message that will be the central theme or focal point behind each unique delivery. However, the message at this point is not meant to be targeted toward a specific audience. It is not until you analyze the list of stakeholders that you will be able to shape and customize the generic message to their interests. Customizing the generic message also means determining what actions you do or do not want and how your message gets them to respond appropriately. Note: It is important to remember *not* to tell the individual you *know* their personal fears or wants, but merely to express the points in such a way that it appeals to them without directly letting them know you "figured them out".

Since there will be varying lengths and media in which you must deliver each of these messages, each message can be mapped to a particular media.

**Figure 2**

Examples of Message Media with Varying Lengths				
Media/Length	Written	Oral	Graphic	Animation (Video)
5 second	Title	Sound Byte	Icon	Clip
15 second	Generic			

<b>60 second</b>	Message	"Elevator Ride" Conversation "Water Cooler" Conversation	PowerPoint Presentation	Commercial
<b>5 -10 minute</b>				Info-mercial
<b>30 minute</b>				
<b>2 + hours</b>	Training Document			

The matrix in Figure 2 shows a few examples of how the generic message can be rolled up or expanded according to time constraints and media available for delivering the message. For example, the written message can be as tight as a title or as elaborate as a full training document. By taking your generic message you can expand on the key components of the message.

Another important point to remember is that everyone on the project team should be able to present, at the very least, the 5-second through the 5-minute version of the message. This is essential since they will often find themselves at "the water cooler" or in the "elevator ride" situations.

As the focal point of the project, the vision not only provides commitment to the effort itself, but it is used to build the team. It gives the team and the organization something to rally around. With the vision as the focus of the project, the project leader is relieved from being the center of attention. The team can look to the vision for understanding and guidance so the project leader can then be freed up to provide an environment in which people can do their jobs successfully. Furthermore if something happens to you, the project leader, the team still has direction and a basis for moving forward to get the job done.

A well-developed and well-delivered vision can really help to secure commitment from your stakeholders. The project vision takes little over-all effort to create and communicate, but we at Advanced Strategies have seen it become a very powerful tool for success.