

PROJECT TEAM ORGANISATION & "CLIENTS"

1 PROJECT TEAM ORGANISATION

The project team organisation needs to accurately reflect the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in delivering the project.

A typical project team organisation is shown below at Figure 1. This is suitable where the project is created by the organisation undertaking it, either in response to an identified business need that requires a solution, or in pursuit of a business strategy (such as growth of the organisation's portfolio of properties).

The organisation undertaking the project is free to determine the project objectives and on what basis the project should proceed, if at all. Although there will inevitably be stakeholders (other organisations or people with a legitimate interest in the project), ultimately the project is under the control of the organisation undertaking it.

The organisation employs suppliers (such as consultants and contractors) to help them achieve their aims. It manages its stakeholders by either the provision of information, or offering some opportunity to influence the project objectives, the project processes and/or the project products. The opportunity to influence is usually achieved by establishing a Project Board and/or a User Panel.

Figure 1
TYPICAL PROJECT TEAM ORGANISATION

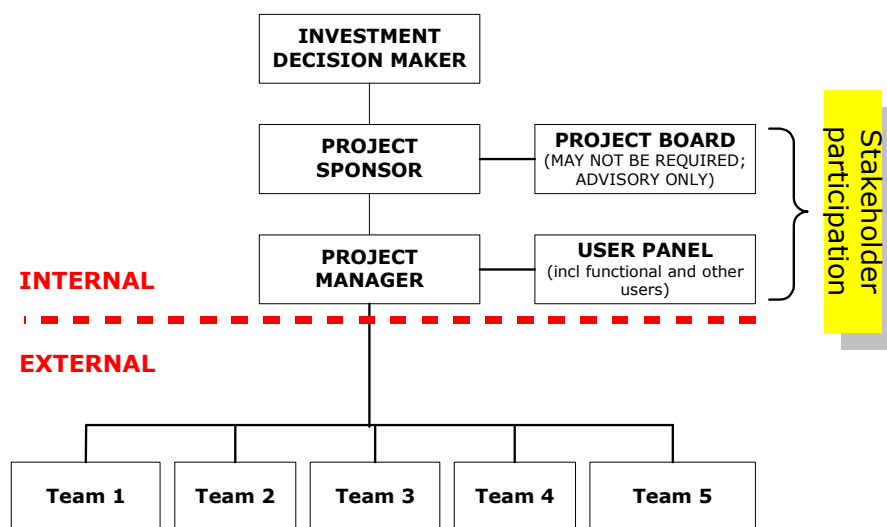
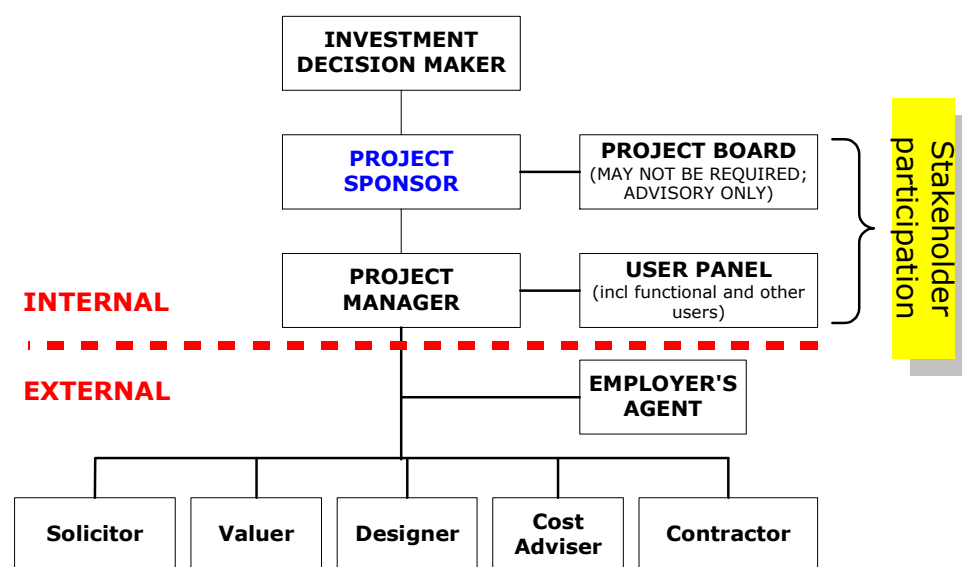


Figure 2 illustrates a typical project team organisation for a housing association project. The Investment Decision Maker is usually the Executive Team or Board of the RSL, the Project Sponsor is the Development Director and the Project Manager the Development Officer. Apart from unusually risky projects, there is usually no Project Board. The User Panel is not usually formally established, but the benefit of the views of users is captured through a series of bilateral discussions between the Project Manager and User Representatives ("consulting with housing management and maintenance").

Figure 2
TYPICAL RSL PROJECT TEAM ORGANISATION



2 ACCOUNTABILITY & CLIENTS

Accountability runs from the Project Manager to the Project Sponsor to the Investment Decision Maker. In RSL terms, the Development Officer/Project Manager is accountable to the Development Director, who is in turn accountable to the Senior Management Team/Chief Exec/Board for successful delivery of the project.

So what about the usual assertion that "our client is housing management", or "our clients are the residents"?

This is a well-meant but ultimately inaccurate statement.

Residents, housing management and maintenance staff all have very useful contributions to make when assessing the quality of proposed designs. The sensible Project Manager tries to tap into that pool of expertise - by having a formal or informal User Panel.

However, it is clear that although they may be influential, residents, housing management and maintenance staff are not clients because there will be occasions where their requests have to be denied by the Project Manager. The Project Manager's responsibilities are wider than simply ensuring that the appropriate quality is achieved - they also have to deliver the project within the agreed budget. As residents, housing management and maintenance staff do not have the authority

to increase project budgets (in most RSL's), they do not have the authority and power of a "client". They are therefore an important stakeholder but not a client.

So why do so many RSL develop and staff refer to housing management and maintenance colleagues, or residents as "their client"? It is done to illustrate the level of importance that Development staff attach to the views of residents and colleagues; it is an attempt to provide comfort to user representatives that they are seen as having an important contribution to make, and are not to be easily ignored. In many cases this is an honest attempt by Development teams to signal a change from previous practices where projects have been "Development-led", and the views of housing management and maintenance colleagues (and sometimes residents) have been given very little weight in the RSL's decision-making process. (In some cases the use of the term "client" by Development staff may be straightforward lipservice to try to disguise a Development-led approach.)

So when used in this context, the term "client" is an honorary term, rather than a proper description of the role of residents, housing management and maintenance staff. There is nothing wrong in using such mechanisms to provide comfort to colleagues that their views will be taken seriously, unless the mechanism produces its own problems.

This sometimes happens in RSL's; everybody understands that a client is a very powerful figure who gets what they demand. If, for example, housing management staff are referred to by the Project Manager as his/her client, they will expect to be treated as a client. When their requests for changes to the designs are refused by the Project Manager (for whatever reason), this can leave people feeling confused and aggrieved. They are being referred to as the client but not treated as the client. This can lead to cynicism and a deterioration in relationships between the teams.

In many RSL's the term "client" is used (albeit inaccurately), and good relationships are maintained between the teams because there is a clear understanding of the reality of the roles of the different participants. However, this is despite the use of misleading terms rather than because of it.

In summary, residents, housing management and maintenance colleagues are more accurately defined as key stakeholders rather than clients.