

## First Published London Connects Change Management – Managing Expectations by Barry Tuckwood



Whether your role is primarily in writing or editing reports and other documents you will often have discussed what at first seemed to its author to be a nuance, something which appears to be trivial but is, to the keen eyes and ears of a colleague, something which provides serious ambiguities and lends itself to confusion. Such is the way of a variety of words which are often used in an attempt to specify what is expected. Here are some examples:

- Adequate
- Satisfactory
- Enough
- Good
- Bad
- Weak
- Poor

All of these are unquantified qualifiers; they merely provide a subjective judgment of what is sufficient rather than a clear specification of what is required. Using words such as these prevents us from managing expectations. I will use an example to clarify this.

The expression 'adequate staff facilities will be provided' includes an unquantified qualifier. What is 'adequate'? Fully connected flushing toilets and washbasins with gold fittings, or a jungle latrine? An espresso coffee maker than can deliver

ten cups in five minutes or a kettle over a gas flame? A gym for an hour, or space to eat a sandwich at your desk?

Many years ago I had the good fortune to be on a new building site for six months. We needed an office with facilities that would be acceptable to ourselves and our visitors for the entire period of the job. It would need heating, lighting, filing space, and it had to be secure. We would need elementary catering and toilets as well as a meeting room with a table for ten. This was not difficult to achieve provided it was properly specified.

Another job, no less important, only required on-site facilities for 3 days. Did we need our own accommodation in the same way? Of course not – it would not have been justifiable. And yet the actual needs on site were much the same.

What was adequate for the possible ten minute meeting during the second project would not have been sufficient for the protracted and detailed discussions for the first. Now, over twenty years later, how would I distinguish between them?

The earlier project engaged more people from more organisations during a period of 6 months. Not being on site for the whole period, their expectation would be one of a serious meeting to ensure a sound understanding that would enable decisions and progress over a four week period.

The second required much faster decisions; with people on a 24/7 rota for the whole of those 2-3 days. The planning was detailed over a 48 hour period with clear risks. There were processes for escalating any problems so that decisions could be made that would be implemented over very short periods – perhaps only fifteen minutes. You do not need to sit down around a board table for two hours in these circumstances; 4 people for ten minutes were the most that was required.

The clear message from these experiences is that clarity is required at the beginning. The challenges are in deciding for individual circumstances what will be required, and in ensuring that the actual provision fits that need. Overall, success is in meeting expectations. And you can't do that with vague words like 'enough'. You must be precise.

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