



How to ensure progress in a highly contested project

The challenge

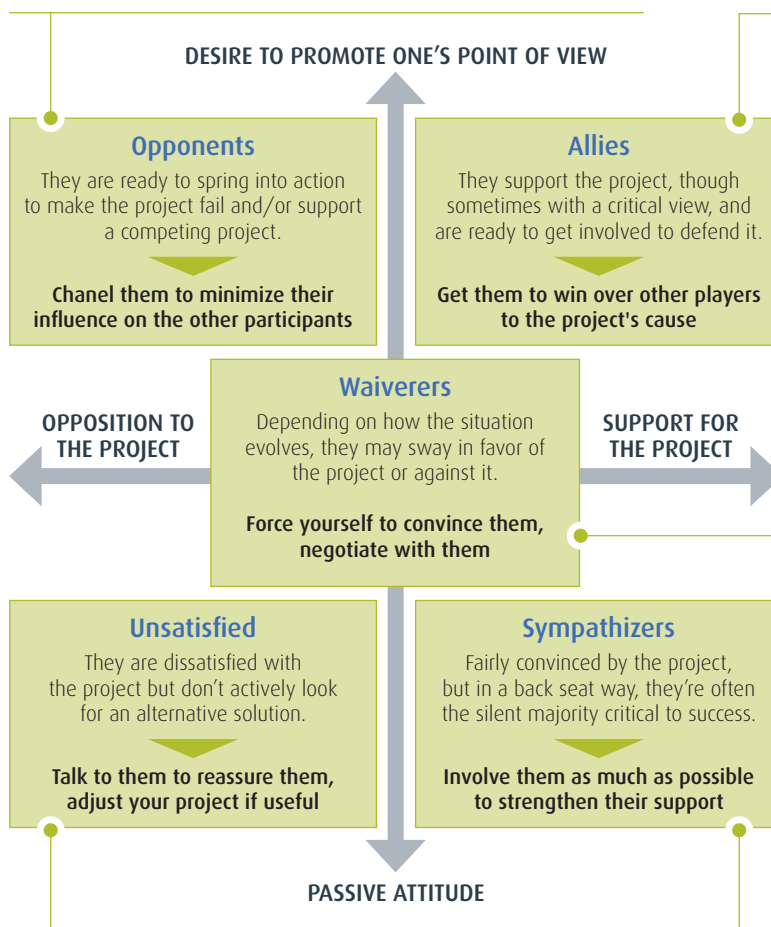
Many projects are faced with opposition. How can they then be prevented from getting bogged down? The initial reflex is to focus on trying to convince your opponents. This is a mistake! For example, it may be much more effective to concentrate your efforts on the project's supporters, leading them to convince the undecided and thus creating a force that will sweep any diehard opponents away. In politically sensitive contexts, you need to have a good view of all the players present, including those who don't express themselves, in order to adopt the most suitable strategy.

Map all the players

In defining your strategy you will need to identify both those who are obviously for or against the project, but also those you could call on to generate a favorable reaction to the project.

- **Don't confuse opponents with critics:** diehards will use all your arguments against you, while a critic whose doubts have been dispelled can become a precious ally.
- **Don't waste your time** trying to change the opinions of militant opponents. Try above all to limit their impact on others.
- **Defuse attacks** to avoid raising doubts in others. But avoid getting into an open conflict as your image as project manager might suffer. *E.g.: Call on your allies to deal with disputes.*

- **Rely on allies** to convince other players. *E.g.: Entrust them with missions.*
- **Update them** with regular project progress reports so they can effectively act as relays to other players.
- Be sure to **maintain cohesion** amongst your allies: the appearance of discord could be fatal.
- **Take account of their suggestions:** the flipside of their active involvement is that they could turn into active opponents if the project didn't evolve in the way they wish.



- **Don't forget waiverers!** Help them express themselves and show you are listening.
- **Be prepared to adjust your project** if that can help you to win support.
- **Call on your allies** to take the time to talk to them and convince them.
- **Monitor the impact of opponents** and counter their attacks systematically.

- **Question unsatisfied** on the protests that the project raises. You may identify the reasons for their dissatisfaction and open discussions on potential solutions.
- Discuss the project's **positive aspects** with them, and highlight **secondary advantages**. You will help them "make do" with the project.
- When possible, accept to **modify the project** to limit the points of disagreement.

- **Keep sympathizers updated on progress**, and encourage them to let you know how they feel, as they won't express themselves spontaneously and could back down without your knowing.
- **Multiply opportunities of involving them** by entrusting them with specific missions, to anchor their support.
- **Show them you take account of their suggestions.** They will feel more involved, and more willing to defend the project.