

# Transcript | Stakeholder Management 101

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Hello! Hello, everybody, and welcome to today's panel event.

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You are in the right place. Welcome to Stakeholder Management 101.

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My name is Joel, and I am the Events Manager here at Apolitical.

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It would be great to hear from all of you, so please do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for. It's always lovely to see who's in the room.

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Um, today is all about learning to manage stakeholders in high-stakes public sector environments.

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You'll hear from experienced civil servants on how to manage personalities, competing priorities, and internal divisions.

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To find the answers you need to move your work forward.

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For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, well, first of all, welcome. Apolitical is the world's largest community for government.

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used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 170 countries.

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Our mission is to make government smarter, and we do this by equipping public servants worldwide with the knowledge and skills they need to lead.

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I want to begin today's event with a special welcome to those of you who are joining us today from Rwanda, perhaps Kigali or elsewhere across that beautiful country. We have a large new cohort of learners from Rwanda onboarding to apolitical at the moment.

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take our fantastic and free AI training. Many are frontline public servants whose first native language might not be English, so I wanted to say a very special welcome to you.

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This may be your very first apolitical event, so I invite you to sit back and enjoy the conversation today and hear from the experts that I'll introduce shortly.

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And for all returning apolitical members, a Happy New Year. I hope you will extend a warm welcome to our new Rwandan colleagues and show them what a vibrant conversation they can expect at a political event.

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Um, okay, I'll just dive into the chat quick. Wow, I can see loads in there already. Um, we've got people dialing in from Canada, from Washington, D.C.

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from Jersey, Chicago, Nova Scotia, Canada. Uh, wow, all over the place. These are coming thick and fast. Uh, Worcestershire County Council England, hello. Uh, Peterborough, uh, Saskatoon, uh, welcome, welcome, Cardiff.

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Wow, yeah, they're coming too thick and fast for me to read, but, uh, please do keep posting, and we love to see where you are all dialing in from. It really makes it feel, uh, yeah, it feels brilliant.

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Um, so I'm just going to get a couple of technical notes out the way before we get into today's conversation.

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Um, this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the Apolitical website.

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Please do not record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer.

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Closed captions are available, and they can be toggled on or off in your screen settings. My colleague Julia has also just posted that in the chat, so you can have a read-up on that if you didn't catch it.

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Okay, before we introduce our speakers, we are going to run a few quick polls, just to get a sense of where you are coming to today's conversation from.

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So, if we can have a look at the first poll that should pop up.

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Here we are. At what stage of your work do stakeholder challenges most often arise?

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Is it at the start, when shaping the problem or approach?

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Is it when securing buy-in or approval? During delivery or implementation, when priorities change or new information emerges.

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near deadlines or under time pressure, or something else, if there's something not listed there that you fill, please do post that in the chat. It's great to get wide perspectives.

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I'll just give you a moment to vote. Christian said, can I say all evenly, yes, you can, absolutely.

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Okay, results are in, um, and oh, it's quite, quite close. Um, it looks like the leading.

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answer is when securing buy-in or approval. I think that is probably to be expected. Um... Uh, coming at a close second at the start when shaping the problem or approach, so managing those stakeholders in those... in those early stages, um, yeah, key challenges arising there.

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And then, uh, 19% during delivery or implementation, and 21% of you.

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when priorities change or new information emerges. Interesting. Well, thank you for completing that first one. Um, we've got another poll for you, um, which should now pop up.

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So when you need input or a decision from a stakeholder, what is most likely to delay progress?

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Is it that they're too busy? Is it that they don't see the issue as a priority?

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Uh, that can... that can happen. There's disagreement among stakeholders. You don't feel confident chasing them. That can be quite daunting for senior stakeholders.

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It's unclear who has the authority to decide, yeah, that can be quite common. Or, again, something else, please do post in the chat.

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Oh, I saw in the chat just from the previous poll as well, Lisa said.

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Uh, when stakeholders have inconsistent goals, that is... that is where challenges most arise. Yeah, we hear that a lot.

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Um, okay, results from poll 2. Looks like, yeah, the leading two, so they don't see the issue as a priority, so big challenges there around stakeholders.

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trying, like, trying to make them see why the issue is a priority. And they're too busy to respond.

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Uh, I think we probably all understand that, stakeholders are very busy and trying to kind of get their time.

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to prioritize, uh, the things you're working on can be challenging.

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So thank you so much for completing that. That's really, really good to see and really helps kind of set the context for.

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for today's event. Um, now, on to the best bits, introducing our wonderful speakers.

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We're fortunate to have 3 brilliant guests, Corey Zarek, Jordan Thompson, and Samantha Tulloch joining us today.

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So, uh, Corey Zarek has two decades of experience working in public service and public interest roles.

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most recently serving as the Deputy administrator of the US Digital Service, the 200-plus person technology team based at the White House.

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Previously, she worked for the US National Archives and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, where she was Deputy US Chief Technology Officer under President Barack Obama.

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In 2020, Corey co-founded US Digital Response, and in 2021, she co-founded Technologists for the Public Good.

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Jordan Thompson is the Senior Director of Intergovernmental and External Engagement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the IRCC.

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In this role, he leads relationships with Canadian provinces and territories, as well as key immigration partners.

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He has extensive experience leading engagement processes, including in support of the development of Canada's annual immigration Levels Plan.

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and IRCC's Council of Newcomers. and holds a certificate in public participation from the International Association of Public Participation.

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And Samantha Tulloch is a digital advisor, speaker, and coach who focuses on the human side of change, confidence, and decision making.

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She has previously worked across local authorities, central government departments, and regulated environments, giving first-hand understanding of the realities and constraints public servants face.

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Our approach to stakeholder management centers on trust, psychological safety, and player communication as the foundation for ethical influence and persuasion.

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You can read the full bios of our speakers by visiting the resources tab that should be.

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somewhere at the bottom of your screen, and heading to the speaker section. Welcome, all of you, it's lovely to have you all here.

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So, I'm going to kick things off with an icebreaker, so you'll each have about 30 seconds to share your response, and we'd also love to hear everyone who's dialed in today, and we'd love to hear your responses in the chat to these, uh, to these.

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this little icebreaker. So, if stakeholder management were a sport, what role would you play?

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Coach, referee, team captain. Or something else. Uh, just think on your answers, um, and again, please do get those posted in the chat. Um, Corey, I'm going to come to you first.

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Okay, well, um, thanks so much, Joel, and hi, everybody. Great to be with you today.

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Um, this is tough, because, you know, when it comes to stakeholder management, you're playing all the roles at different times, but I will... I'll start with Coach. I think, um, you know, the coach has a stake in.

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the outcome on, like, a referee who's really meant to be neutral, um, so there is sort of a, you know, um... something you're driving toward. Um, it is also your job to kind of wrangle and organize the various different participants, uh, so much like a coach, perhaps.

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Um, so yeah, so I think I'll stick with Coach for this one.

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Nice. Perfect. Okay, Jordan, how about you?

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Hi, good morning, everyone. Nice to be here. I'm not a sports guy, so I hope I found a position that actually exists on some sort of team, but I'm going to go with offensive coordinator.

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I think so much about stakeholder management is not only watching what our team is doing and thinking about where we need to be.

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But also kind of watching for those signals. Whereas the other team going, where have they moved down the field to make sure that what we are about to do is also responding to where they are.

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I will say, though, shout-out, I also think a really good answer in the chat is Ball Boy.

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Sometimes you're just trying to get things done.

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Yeah, love that. Okay, Samantha, how about you?

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Thank you, Sarah, for having me. I'm happy to be here.

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Um, for me, even though I am a coach, I would say when it comes to managing stakeholders, for me, it's definitely as a referee. I've been in several kind of sticky situations where I'm having to bring people together, sometimes separate people before things get a bit too messy.

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And generally, just kind of keep, keeping things. taken over by acting as that, that middle person.

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Fantastic. Thank you so much, and I've seen loads of great, uh, comments in the chat as well.

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Uh, JC Bringer of Oranges at half-time, love that, brilliant. Um, we've got Boot Boys, the general dog's Body, we've got Bull Boy.

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Um, yeah, brilliant responses. Personally, I think I'm probably... I'm in an operational delivery role, uh, apolitical, so I think I'd be, like, a running back, like, receiving the ball, running it to the finish line.

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Um, lovely! Well, thank you for those, uh, those responses to that, um, really nice way to kind of kick off. So let's get into the meat of the actual panel.

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Um, so we're going to start with understanding exactly what stakeholder management means in public service. So, Corey, I'm going to come to you first. You've had years of experience in the public sector, managing stakeholders, including at the White House.

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Uh, what do we actually mean when we talk about stakeholder management in the context of public service?

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Sure, so, you know, in public service, we have, uh, you know, a responsibility, um, a duty, and really a privilege, uh, to serve as a steward for the public in the roles that we take on. And in... taking on these roles, we also need to account for as much of the public perspective as possible. Um, you know, we're there representing the public on their behalf.

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Um, and so public participation is a critical part of good government, good governance, uh, and that comes from.

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Including the general public, usually through proxies of stakeholders or stakeholder groups, and as much government as possible. So managing that public participation by first, making it possible. We have to make that a priority, public participation has to be part of the work that you take on.

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Um, that's the start. And then being mindful to be inclusive, making space for different perspectives, especially divergent ones.

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Um, some of the most challenging moments are when you are challenged, and that helps you arrive at what is usually the better outcome.

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Um, and all of that is, you know, a key part of stakeholder management.

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I think another key part that we... we sometimes, um, forget once we get down the path is, um, feedback loops. And so, ensuring that through this process, we're also being transparent, we're being.

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accountable about what from our stakeholders' perspectives and viewpoints we are taking and applying, what we are opting away from, and why, when we can offer that. But ensuring that

we're also, you know, really running that process the full way around, and not just sort of taking in.

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Um, stakeholder perspectives into, you know, that opaque black box.

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Brilliant. Thank you so much. Um... Jordan, I'm going to come to you next. You've spent almost two decades in the Canadian Civil Service.

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What stakeholder management situations have you found to be the most challenging?

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Yeah, thank you. I think... I think the poll was an interesting insight to this question as well, right? Because you had all the things that we confront, and when I drafted a list last night of all the things I found challenging, it's.

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It's all the things that make being a public servant challenging quite often, right? Changing directions, lack of guidance.

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No clear goalposts, tight timelines, lack of resources. But I think, actually, one of the biggest challenges as a public servant is when you've got competing interests.

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Right? And as public servants, we're organized by mandate.

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Often into different departments or different, um, areas of the government, and we have a specific.

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role that we're asked to fill. Sometimes those can be in complete conflict.

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But this is where I really like what Corey said. I actually think, not so much of stakeholder management, but of stakeholder engagement.

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I think that when you've got those competing interests, our goal as public servants is to create that engaging.

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Opportunity, we intentionally reach out. We don't say, okay, competing interest, we're never going to solve this. We actively look for ways.

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to bring those two interests together. an inclusive manner, and I think the key word I want to emphasize is intentional, in an intentional way.

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called to resolve some of those competing interests.

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Brilliant, thank you. Um, Samantha, I'm going to come to you next.

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Um, you've spent your career navigating stakeholder dynamics yourself and teaching others how to do it.

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What are some helpful tips for someone at the beginning of a project, or potentially in a new role.

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that will involve significant stakeholder management. Have you got any tips?

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Yes, so there's the usual things that you would do, so especially if you're working on a project, which is to identify your.

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your stakeholders are then categorised them also. Um, but one of the most, um, important analysis tools that I've used is a power influence matrix, where you take a.

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quadrant, and then... and then map people according to how much power that they have in terms of their roles and opinions.

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In your... in your project or initiative, but also how much influence they have. So I'm just going to share a really quick story in which I was managing a massive office move for... for a local government authority based in London. I saw some people from London in the chat.

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So hello to you. Um, and so, um, one of the main sticking points wasn't the people being moved to different office.

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locations. It wasn't the senior managers that kind of wanted it to be done by a certain day. The main sticking point was one man.

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Working in the... in the, um, networks team. So if he wasn't bought into the change, if he didn't actually agree.

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to work in weekends and work in the bank holiday Monday, our projects just wouldn't have.

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taken off. And so, in order to manage that, I started to build up that.

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relationship with him really quickly in order to help him see the importance of our project, and therefore get, get him to give up his weekend.

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Yeah, brilliant, yeah, mapping out the stakeholders, I think, is absolutely vital, and actually, we had a, um.

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I had a little comment there from... oh, I just lost the chat, there we go, from Ken that says, it feels like we should also track how much different stakeholders will be impacted, regardless of how much, sort of, influence they have, which, yeah, I think that really echoes that.

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Okay, great! So, um, now kind of moving on to more, uh, sort of navigating these complex dynamics, Samantha, I'm actually going to come straight back.

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to you, what have you learned about navigating power dynamics, especially when dealing with.

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senior leaders who don't see the issue the same way you do, or might leave you out of the decision-making process.

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But I have... I've had both situations, so what I found is, when you're dealing with a senior stakeholder who doesn't necessarily see things in the same way that.

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That you do, then applying, um, the, um, facts.

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principle, which is thinking about the kind of preferred learning and.

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And communication style, and applying that, so that's V-A-K-K-S.

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And, um, thinking about, is that seeing a stakeholder someone who responds better to maybe.

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Um, written, um, updates, or what kind of... is, is, is, is email there.

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Their preferred choice of communication, or is it best.

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if I just, um, kind of go up to that stakeholder, maybe.

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grab them by the coffee machine, maybe just knock on their door and.

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And quickly ask my questions so that can get the answer quickly, or is it someone where I should perhaps invite them to one of the, um, project events so that they can see firsthand the importance and.

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impact, so really thinking about it from the other person's shoes.

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in order to adjust the way that you then engage with that person.

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Yeah, so important. Um, here at Apolitical, we actually use, um, user manuals.

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So we all kind of write our own user manuals that explain kind of the best way to communicate with me and stuff, and it's a really helpful way to kind of.

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just understand, like, our stakeholders want to be communicated with, so, um... Yeah, very, very interesting. Um, Jordan, coming back to you, um... What assumptions do we often make when managing stakeholders, and how can we adjust those to make our work with them more productive?

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Yeah, thanks. I mean, I really want to dovetail from what Samantha just said. We make all sorts of assumptions about the people we work with.

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So, I mean, the first assumption we often make, and I'm guilty of this, you approach a stakeholder management or stakeholder engagement perspective, and you think you're using the same language. You think you understand the problem similarly.

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I remember leading a large-scale engagement with a variety of tech companies.

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And I kept saying, well, you know, as in your HR plans, you know, you would have this in your HR plans.

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And finally, someone said, Jordan, we don't have HR plans.

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I was like, oh, well, this conversation just got a lot more interesting.

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So I think we assume that people have things that we don't. I think the other big trap that we can fall into sometimes as public servants is.

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we think that other people are exactly where we are, that they've thought about this as much as we have.

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Right? That they've labored over the memo, or the options paper as much as we have.

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Um, I, again. two weeks ago, I was briefing one of my superiors, and I dove into my briefing.

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And my superiors stopped me and said, Jordan. You are way too into this.

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I've had 7 meetings already today, and I have no idea what you're talking about.

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So I think we need to challenge ourselves on assumptions, both are we assuming we think we know what the other people know? Are we assuming that they're where we are?

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And then ask ourselves, how can we meet them.

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more to where they are. I think one of the key things that I tried to do, um, you know, to correct some of these assumptions is I do ask myself, okay, what is it I need to offer?

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To help bring these people along, to help bring my partners into the process.

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I think education is a big piece we often forget about in the context of stakeholder management, and I'll give you two examples.

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During the pandemic, I worked at Canada's Public Health Agency.

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And it was my job to run emergency exercises so that we were ready for the next big pandemic.

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You can imagine, you're fighting one pandemic, nobody wants to talk about doing an exercise for the next pandemic.

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But we did a series of things to try to increase engagement, try to increase awareness and education. We launched.

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kind of a fun question and answer. a quiz every day in our daily newsletter.

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We started holding information sessions about exercises, and then over a series of months, we were able to kind of increase awareness.

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increase education about exercises and why they were important.

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which subsequently led to an increase in participation in what it was we're trying to do.

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I'll give you one other quick example, you know, kind of of the benefit of thinking about what your partners need from you.

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I operate at IRCC, a council of newcomers. These are 12 individuals from across Canada who have arrived in our country as immigrants within the last 10 years.

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When we started this group, we were asking them really, you know, what we thought were fun and interesting questions, but we were never getting answers, and we couldn't figure out what the problem was.

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And we realized our questions were starting halfway into the middle of the book. We had done nothing to provide an introduction or an education.

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So we actually course-corrected there. In this case, we now offer prep meetings with our Council of Newcomers, where they get an hour to learn from us, to explore, to ask us questions that they might be afraid.

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to ask in front of others, such that when they do then meet with our senior management as part of a formal meeting.

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They feel equipped and ready to engage. So just two examples about how you can check yourself on assuming that other people know where you... what.

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what you know, and that they are where you're at.

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Yeah, so key, it's so easy to kind of assume knowledge and assume priorities, um, when you're... when, you know, when something's all-consuming for you, if it's a project that is your.

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absolute number one priority. It's hard to kind of.

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Realize that that might not be the case for everyone, and you kind of have to make that case before winning them over.

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And... brilliant, thank you so much. Um, Corey, coming back to you, often civil servants must manage stakeholders in environments.

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with constrained resources, I'm sure a lot of people, um, can... can, uh... agree on that. Um, what are some methods that yield results even when external resources cannot be relied upon?

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Sure, I mean, you know, one constant in stakeholder engagement, hacking government is that resources will be constrained. Um, and so working really creatively, uh, is part of the game, right?

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So I'm thinking about, from the U.S. Perspective, um, you know, I'm based in Washington, D.C, and we're all the way on one side of our.

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Massive country, um, when we're working on stakeholder engagement.

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Particularly in, you know, the analog era. physically traveling across our country is a feat, and that's expensive, um, and it's logistically challenging, and it's not always possible. And the good news is, yes, technology has advanced, but as someone pointed out in the chat, people really value face-to-face time. Um, and so, you know, balancing the ability to do some face-to-face engagement and also.

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leveraging the technology that we have at our disposal now, um, is, you know, an interesting and tricky balance to strike, but an important one, particularly when.

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resources are constrained. Um, so a few things that I have seen work well.

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Um, one, on the kind of, uh, physical, uh, let's meet in person, um, approaches, um, partnering up with other organizations, often in the US, we partner with universities to, um, kind of leverage their physical footprint, leverage their reach, um, to, uh, hold in-person or even virtual, but in-person sessions, gatherings, convenings, etc.

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Um, those have been really strong ways for government entities to.

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you know, sort of, uh, team up with a local or regional partner and reach a lot of folks. Um, partnering with NGOs, you know, doesn't have to be a university, but thinking about just external partnerships with kind of, like, trusted and validated, um, entities, like, that's a big one. Um, another, then, is, is, um.

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Working in the open, um, you can really build a lot of trust and invite public participation the more.

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openly, you're able to work and kind of adapt your efforts. So I talked about, you know, the importance of feedback loops, etc. Um, thinking about posting, uh, if you're working on a policy, posting that draft policy for comment. And, you know, using, uh, tools like, um.

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GitHub or other, uh, you know, software that can allow for folks to comment in real time and provide their input, and for you to, as the public servant, your team, your office, to be able to respond and, um, you know, back to, uh, the, you know, the accountability, like.

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Thank you, we've incorporated this into our draft, or thank you, here's why we will not incorporate this into our draft, etc. Um, you know, these various tools and platforms do exist, uh, for participation and can be incredibly valuable, um, and, um, you know, I think, like, just.

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taking advantage of what's out there. Um, I know that feels very obvious, but, um, that's.

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That's, uh, easier said than done, you know, approvals are tricky in government, but when your resources are constrained, you know, putting in that legwork up front to figure out how you will bring people together and, um.

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getting to the approvals that you need before you start the process is a really important part.

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Yeah, absolutely. And I guess, actually, I mean, bit of a shameless plug, um, for me, but, um, communities are a fantastic place to kind of go and get advice on things like this as well.

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And, uh, at Apolitical, we've got communities, so do check them out if you haven't.

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Um, okay, we're gonna move on to, um, sort of more discussing around getting results. So, um, Jordan, as a public servant, you understand, obviously, how difficult it can be to move a project forward.

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Can you tell us how curiosity can help drive results with stakeholders, particularly when they work on other teams or in other departments?

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Yeah, for sure. I wanna, um, start kind of my observation here by saying I think sometimes, as publishers, and I'll speak for myself, sorry, I shouldn't generalize.

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I have a habit of... you're in a project, you're trying to get something done, you're thinking, what do I need? What do I need? What do I need to do next?

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And we kind of get ourselves into these story loops about, oh, if only that person would do this, and if only they would do that.

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And I worked with a coach who, you know, I was discussing this.

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particular habit of mine. Um, you know, and her mantra was, Jordan, stop thinking.

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start noticing. And so I think that if you bring that into a stakeholder management perspective, it says, okay, let's get curious.

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If I'm having challenges, or others aren't working with me, what is it maybe that they need?

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Is there something that we can meet on and maybe, you know, think about how do you collaborate?

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I'll give you an example from my current job just 2 weeks ago, I met with a colleague.

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whom I had not been getting the feedback I needed on a particular project. And I said, hey, what's up with you?

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What's new in your world? And then she was able to share with me the challenges she was facing, and said, oh, interesting.

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I actually have a way that I can solve that problem for you if we work together on this problem that I've got.

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And so, it was... it was kind of just this moment of, like.

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I wasn't going to think my way out of this problem. I took a step back and said, what do you need? And then you look for, back to kind of my opening comment about your biggest challenge in stakeholder engagement and management.

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in governments, when you've got competing interests, I don't think the interests are sometimes always competing. I think you've got things that could align.

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And you could work together to help advance things.

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Um, so I think that's one way. Let's get curious about where our partners are and what we could do to help them help themselves.

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I think the second piece we need to get curious about is.

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Are we giving our partners what they need to be active participants throughout?

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So I've already spoken a little bit about education, but I do want to, like, you know, kind of emphasize the role of relationships and keeping that communication ongoing.

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I think so often in public service, you know, we do a big launch meeting for a project, and then we don't follow up again.

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until we're done. And, you know, in one of those poll questions at the start, it's like, your biggest challenge for me is often at deadlines, because then people finally start paying attention.

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But they haven't paid attention to date, and then usually they identify a problem.

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So I think getting curious about how can you build those relationships throughout the process of your engagement.

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It is not something you do at the start and at the end.

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And I can tell you, I had a near miss this past summer.

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I had been sending emails to project partners. I, you know, didn't hear back from them, assumed everything was great. I didn't take the time to personally check in with some people.

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And I had one person come up at the end of our project, say, you never told me any of this.

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Doesn't matter that I sent emails or that I tried, I had never done that personal connection to kind of do the touch base.

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So I think it may feel like a burden, but I think it's something we should ask ourselves, okay, what does this other person need? Where can I meet them? And maybe personal, face-to-face, even on Teams.

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a good way to touch base throughout a project to make sure you're avoiding projects at the end.

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Yeah, absolutely love that, and I mean, you can see the emoji reactions are flying off, but yeah, like.

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curiosity mindset is so, so important, and, um, yeah.

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Um, Samantha, coming back to you, in your experience as both a public servant and as a coach and mentor.

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What tools or mindsets have you found most effective for driving outcomes with senior leadership?

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So this... this really builds on, um, Jordan's point, um, about, kind of, being curious, and the application of.

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event being curious. So, it kind of boils down to that, what's in it for me?

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Which is about trying to. think about things from... from someone else's view.

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viewpoint, and then adjusting your... messaging, or kind of your, um, your key phrasing in order to really tap into that.

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that person's need, or drive or passion. So, for example, if there's a kind of sticking point in your project where maybe approvals are.

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Uh, just not... not happening, um. You could kind of pause and... And think, okay, if I... if I think about all of the key players, so if it's the, um... If it's the director of finance, what...

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What is it that I need to say to that person?

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In order to get them really kind of bought in, making a... making a decision and kind of really.

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driving things, things forward. So, yes, I'm generalizing here, but... But you may want to focus on maybe some of the, um, financial impacts.

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In terms of a delay to approvals versus if I'm speaking to maybe the chief of staff.

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Well, then I can focus on some of the impacts of change, fatigue of.

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Um, lack of morale of staff in terms of not moving things forward, so... focusing on different angles of the issue, but then phrasing it according to the various stakeholders that you're speaking with.

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Yeah, absolutely. I think, yeah, that piece of just really understanding your stakeholder is just coming through so strongly, and um... Yeah. Thank you so much. Um... Corey, another question for you. Can you tell us about a time in your career when you've had to deliver results by working with challenging stakeholders? And let us know, kind of, what you learned from the process?

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Yeah, I mean, you know, anytime you're in a public service role, you're making hard decisions, you know, as my colleagues mentioned, there are just endless competing interests.

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Um, and it's, it's your responsibility, it's your duty, your privilege to get to, um, manage through that. I think the best way to do so is, um.

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is, you know, kind of honestly and head on, and so I'm thinking of an example, um.

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Um, gosh, probably 10 years ago now, um, we were working on a policy process in the U.S. Government to adopt a policy for open source software, which, you know, feels like a bygone era. But it was novel at the time, and my goodness, you can imagine that software companies who, um, sold the same software to our government over and over and over and over again were very concerned about their bottom line.

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Because, um, you know, obvious reasons. And so, um, it was important for us to pull those vendors together to, um.

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hear what they had to say, to hear their concerns, to consider what sorts of middle ground we might reach, um, to assuage them. Obviously, we weren't trying to.

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But an entire sector out of business, um, and that didn't happen, uh, 10 years later, right? Everyone's doing just fine. Um... But it was, you know, a really challenging and important.

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part of it, and I think I'm thinking back to preparing for those.

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sessions, which we did, you know, invited them in, in person, sat around a large conference table, um, heard their concerns, it was painful. Um, you are on the receiving end of a lot of challenging comments. Um, it can get personal, it is divisive, it is challenging.

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That's part of our jobs sometimes. Um, and I think for, you know, in that example, just, um, having.

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the colleagues and the relationships that we had where we could, um.

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sort of prepare for that, um, be there to support each other, recognize that was going to be a challenging situation we were in, um, and also in the room, like, in the moment, in that challenge, um, kind of naming it, you know? We recognize that we have different points of view here. We have different interests that we are working toward. You have a job to do, I have a job to do. Um, you know, really sort of depersonalizing the situation based on the, you know, the.

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the motivations, the taskings, etc, um, that we all brought to the table, um, you know, that helped a little bit, but sometimes it really just is challenging. Sometimes it really just is hard, um, and that's.

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part of the job, and being prepared for that, and, you know, having the support, the systems, the resources, the colleagues to call to help prep you, um, that's part of.

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the deal as well.

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Yeah, for sure. Yeah, tackling... tackling a challenge with that kind of head-on.

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openness and honesty, I guess it sounds simple, but in practice, there's a lot of work that has to kind of go into that to kind of put all your cards on the table, be like, this is where we're at.

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And move forward from there, but that is... that is a way to get that wheel turning. Um, okay, we're nearly at the time for Q&A, but I just want to ask one more, one more sort of panel question, and maybe if we can try and kind of do some quick-fire answers for this one.

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And this is just about, sort of, advice. So, um, I'd like to maybe, Samantha, I'll start with you, ask the three of you, what advice would you give to someone who feels.

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stuck. They've tried relationship building, but they're just not seeing that progress.

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What advice would you have, Samantha?

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It has to be... really be clear about your strengths and.

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tap into them, so take... take whichever kind of strengths test or personality test is out there, and be really clear about what your kind of superpower or strength is, and use that.

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in order to really, kind of, either find a different way in order to build.

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relationships, or actually try to have influence in some other way. If I can quickly add, so, so my, my, um... My superpower is because of my introversion, and so therefore, read in a room is.

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is something which I thrive on. So, even if I don't necessarily want to be the kind of loudest voice.

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in the room, I will listen to the different views, pick out the similar points, play it back.

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In order to use that as some of the relationship and trust building.

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Brilliant, yeah, great advice there. I'm very similar, and uh, yeah, that really resonates. Uh, Jordan, how about you? Any advice for someone that feels stuck?

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The first thing that came to mind is, don't take it personally. I mean, it might be a personal disagreement, right? It might be a personality thing, but chances are, remember, we all work in the public service, it's a big system, everyone's got stuff going on.

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So, I mean, I'm kind of gonna... draw a bid on what I just said around curiosities. I mean, A, don't take it personal, so don't stew on it, don't hold it in, don't let it bubble inside you, and say.

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what could I try that I haven't tried? Like, and I think, you know, to kind of... I like what Corey just said. Sometimes it's just about sitting down and saying, what are you worried about, and what am I worried about?

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Like, we all bring these fears, and I've already talked about assumptions, we bring these worries into these negotiations, and I think that can color how we communicate.

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I'd be really tempted to just have a human conversation, maybe not so project-focused for a minute.

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Yeah. Great advice. Um, Corey, any, any final tips for someone who's stuck?

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Yeah, I have 3. One... plus one plus a million to the curiosity point, you know, we've talked about that a good bit here, but just really would lean into that, um, two, when you can, point back to the overarching law, policy, announcement, speech, whatever it is. So, for example, in the open source, um.

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example I just gave, um, that was something the president had announced we were doing. Like, it was going to happen. The president said it, it's happening. Um, so, you know, it was helpful to sort of name that in the room, like, this is the thing that's going to happen, let us all, like, get there somehow. Um, and then finally, when you can find an executive sponsor.

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Um, sometimes you really just do need someone up the chain to.

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unstuck, and having that air cover is pretty critical, so anytime you're starting a process for whatever it is that you're doing, having that executive sponsor to call back to, to bring into the stakeholder engagement session, sometimes, you know, that kind of.

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fancy title helps occasionally. Um, so, uh, yeah, that's my last one.

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Fantastic. Brilliant. Well, some great advice there, so hopefully, if you're listening and you are.

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stuck in one of these situations, then hopefully that advice has resonated and can help you move that project forward.

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Okay, great. Well, thank you so much, uh, panel, uh, for all of those responses. Really, really insightful.

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Um, audience, please do remember to keep sharing any questions you have for today's speakers.

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We've got a lot of questions from you already, both pre-submitted and in the Zoom Q&A, so we'll try and get through as many as you can, but do keep them coming. We will do our best to answer as many as possible. Just make sure you are submitting them in the Zoom Q&A tab.

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It just makes it easier for us to kind of pick them up and get them, get them over and to our wonderful panellists. So, um, okay, on to the Q&A. So, um.

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The first question here from Jennifer, I'm going to direct to you, Jordan.

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Um, when consulting on a project. How do you ensure that harder-to-reach or less influential stakeholders are heard? Stakeholders that are more influential and have more resources can naturally become the most vocal and dominant in the room.

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How do you seek out the kind of new voices and new perspectives?

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Yeah, it's a great question, right? Like, and the thought to my mind is, like, the squeaky wheel always gets the grease, and we know this, you always have a couple stakeholders that always appear and ask for the same things.

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I'm actually a big fan of just something as basic as doing a stakeholder mapping.

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Right? So at the start of any project, I hope that people take some time and say, okay, who are my stakeholders?

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Uh, not just the usual ones, but the unusual ones. I mean, in the immigration context, you know, I know that I have businesses, but I also have settlement providers, I have unions that are interested in what I'm doing, so... You have to think about your different sectors.

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And I... my kind of advice when I talk to staff about this is.

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You're always looking to triangulate a point of view.

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Right? So, every time you've got one viewpoint, you should get two or three others to see how they play off against each other, and I think you do that by creating a map, identifying who you maybe haven't talked to, and then you actively pursue them as part of your project.

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Um, I think that works really well with external engagement, right? So I was talking mostly about civil society.

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But it might also apply in the context of your own government department.

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You're working on an initiative, but have you talked to the folks, you know, who are in charge of diversity, equity, inclusion?

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Have you talked to, um, you know, other corporate areas or even IT to think about what their perspective is?

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I think it's a basic stakeholder mapping. And then making sure that any opinion you have, you have kind of 2 or 3 other ones that either play off that or compete with it, so you've got a complete picture.

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Fantastic, thank you so much. Um, another question here from, uh, Tatender, um, for you, Samantha.

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So, um, Dependents asked, how do you deal with different communication preferences, given the move to remote working? So, um, I presume a lot of us are either working virtually or hybrid still.

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Um, so yeah, how do you deal with the different communication preferences with remote working? It's not always easy to communicate outside of email and Teams calls, so do you have any kind of tips there?

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Yeah, whilst technology is great and has kind of given us more.

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more flexibility, it can make it more challenging. So, um... Uh, one example that I've had is that I started working for a central government department.

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Uh, in the first week of lockdown, and so during that time, no one had the cameras on, and so I had to build trust and kind of relationships quickly.

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what speaking to initials on the screen. Um, and for 2 years, I probably met about 8 or 9 people in person.

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So, in order to, um, overcome that, every first conversation that I had with.

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people, um, I... I... I kind of. combined just simply pass the asking them, what is your preference in terms of.

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in terms of when I need to communicate with you, or ask you a question, is it email, or is it just me sending you a Teams message, or simply just calling you on... So that people would then tell me. So that's one thing.

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And then the, um, second thing is... Um, during every couple of conversation outside, we try to find out something personal.

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about that person, which is a fine line to toe, because obviously you don't want to kind of go around and kind of cross a line, but.

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But starting to build relationships with people, as people.

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So that any time, when you are speaking with them, then just ask them about.

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About how their dog is, about how their parent is, and then... and if you... if you find it tough in terms of retaining that.

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information, just simply write. write a note down, so... so in my, um, notebook, I had a whole page with.

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people's names, and just... and just a couple of things about their personal life, so that as I keep on speaking to them, as I said, I was only speaking to initials, but as I'm speaking to them, I'm painting a picture of them.

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as a person in order to build that rapport.

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Amazing. Yeah, two brilliant, brilliant tips there, thank you.

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Um, Corey, I've got a question here for you from Javier, who has asked, how can stakeholder management help overcome siloed public institutions, where units focus only on their formal mandates.

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But complex projects, uh, require cross-functional collaboration beyond individual responsibilities, so... How do we kind of, uh, overcome those silos?

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Yeah, I mean, that gets back to a couple of the, um... tips I mentioned a moment ago. I think, one, having an executive sponsor wherever they sit is really important, um, because let's say we're talking about, um, a project that requires 2 or 3 agencies. Whoever.

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Your executive in your agency has a counterpart or a peer, um, who's also looking after their agency's participation in the thing, and so I think, like, leaning on those folks to, um, you know, kind of channel up to them to bring together the different agency partners. For example, to, you know, sort of have.

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start to build those relationships and recognize the shared goal that they're all working toward, like, that's, you know, one way.

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I think working in the open is another, um, you know, it really helps to, uh, be able to see what's happening across government. I think one of the funniest things.

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That we realized that I realized, um, you know, working in the U.S. Government is, um, when we started to publish more data, uh, openly when we started to publish more, um.

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information, the biggest users of our data was us, right? It was other government employees and other government entities who were accessing.

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data or resources from, you know, their peers and counterparts, and so I think it's, um... I think something maybe Jordan just said, which is, like, folks get really focused on the thing in front of them, like, the thing that they're responsible for that they have to do, it's understandable, it's human nature. Um, and so, in a.

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Situation here where, you know, we're. engaging in managing stakeholders even internally, um, it's a little bit our responsibility, um, our obligation to, uh, help people remember to lift their heads up and look around and see each other.

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Nice. Amazing. Thank you so much. And Jordan, I've got another question here from you, uh, for you.

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From, um, EMEA, who has asked, how would you balance interest versus values with regards to stakeholder engagement for issues or projects with serious time constraints?

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So that kind of interest versus values piece.

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Yeah, I... This is a tough one, because there's... we've talked about it a bit already, but, like, there's both the spoken elements of engagement and the unspoken, right?

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I think just the fact the question's being asked indicates to me that we're aware that those two things are at play.

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Right? Like, so you have a conversation, usually it's an interest-based, but it's being informed by your values underneath, and it's kind of coloring how the commentary is happening.

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I mean, my best advice here is... is... Observe it, notice it, call it. I would be tempted even in this situation to.

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And I think we're kind of into conversation, too, sometimes around facilitation, when you talk about stakeholder engagement, how do you facilitate that conversation? How do you open the space.

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to have a frank exchange. Do you have a conversation at the start of a meeting, like, about the values we all bring, why this is important to us? What are our mutual objectives? Like, kind of...

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get some of that on the table. to then, you know, it's almost like you're asking people to declare their interest at the start of the... sorry, their values, so that then you can better understand and interpret kind of the interest conversations that follow.

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So, I mean, this is really a question, I think, about psychology and how you want to set up your facilitation to me.

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But that's, I think, you know, think about. nature or a series of questions that kind of work across the continuum, maybe starting with values, unpacking assumptions.

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And then you can get into the nitty-gritty.

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Yeah, for sure. I think that also touches on what Samantha mentioned earlier around that sort of stakeholder mapping and really... but really understanding individual stakeholders.

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At that project launch. Um... Fantastic, thank you. Um, Samantha, actually, another... another question here for you from, uh, James, who has asked, how can I prevent one stakeholder from dominating in a forum?

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So, do you have any tips for James?

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Mm-hmm, that's an interesting and sometimes a common one. Um... So, uh... I would say the... So there are... there are different ways that you can manage that. You could... if that person is.

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dominating, but... but the actual value is... is, um, good in, in, in terms of the.

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their, um, contribution, you could potentially have a... Uh, quite work with that person, and... and then maybe just... just kind of.

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speak to them about, kind of, ways in which both of you could encourage.

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The other members of the group, or kind of members of the project to speak up. If it's the opposite, and the person is sometimes quite.

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disruptive to your meetings, um, you could... potentially think about whether to, um, split up those.

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Um, meetings so that, um, you could have kind of a subcommittee, um, so that that.

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person maybe isn't... isn't part of that. So, maybe there's a working group that, um, you could set up, which, which the person doesn't necessarily form part of, or you could actually assign them a role during that meeting.

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So... so, um, you could say, on the... on the agenda, it's item number 5, which.

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in which we are covering risks, and so person X is going to be leading that, so that you have.

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in essence, constrain their, um, their own contribution by designating them a gender item.

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Right, right.

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Do you mind if I jump in? Like, just a super... practical tip that I learned from another facilitator. So, I mean, we talked about different ways to engage, whether you do that face-to-face, there is an advantage to online. I've used something that someone taught me called the waterfall technique.

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So you pose a question to your group, everyone has to write their answer in the chat.

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But nobody gets to send their answer until you say go. Then you say go, and everyone's answers start populating right away.

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I'd use that to then have everybody's perspective on the table, and then as facilitator, said, okay, I'm going to call on this person or that person.

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And if you know there's a disruptive one, you don't go to that person first.

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So that's just a super interesting thing that someone taught me that I really like to facilitate, and to... allow you to zero in on voices that you might not otherwise hear.

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Wow, that is... that is a great tip, which, uh, yeah, I think I'll definitely be stealing that one. Um... Okay, actually, I suppose we're sort of on the topic of these sort of slightly difficult, uh, situations. So, Corey, I've got quite a tricky one here for you from, uh, Robert, who has.

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Asked, what strategies can you use when some stakeholders agree with you publicly, but might undermine decisions behind the scenes?

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And actually, I'm going to sort of roll this in. We've got another question from Dorota, who has asked kind of the opposite situation, where a stakeholder sort of initial.

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initially provides an agreement in, like, a one-to-one discussion, but then backs out in a public forum. How do you kind of handle that when a stakeholder.

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Flip-flops, I suppose.

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Yeah, I mean, it's... It's important to take into account all of the perspectives you receive publicly or privately, right? And to kind of hold those. I think at the end of the day, your responsibility as a public servant is to make the best choice for the outcomes you're responsible for. And, um...

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you know, I joke sometimes, but when you're in government, like, everybody's usually a little bit mad at you, um, right? And it's maybe how you know you're getting it somewhat, right? You're not pleasing everyone. And so, whether the person is publicly or privately with you or against you, or whatever the, you know, example is here, um, you're still.

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responsible for arriving at the right outcome, the best outcome.

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For, you know, everyone. Um, and that will inevitably mean, um.

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Whether public or private, uh, folks are going to be unhappy. Um, and I think, like, we're not striving for that. We really do want to arrive at an outcome that.

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pleases most people in the ways that are most advantageous, but just accepting that that's part of the deal, I think is some of, you know, what we get to do as public servants. And so, um... acknowledging the feedback, acknowledging the, um, inputs, um, in ways that are appropriate without.

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blowing up anyone's spot, no need to name names, um, but, you know, I think you acknowledge and move on.

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Nice, yeah, yeah, for sure. Um, great. I've got... I've actually got another question, which I might... I might do, because we are running quite close to time, and I'd quite like to hear all three of your perspectives on this, which kind of goes off this.

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this topic, and we've talked a lot about, kind of, um, understanding the other stakeholders' priorities and approaches and things.

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Um, Ken has asked, um. What can help keep us open to changing our approach, and not just focusing on convincing people to come along with our idea?

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Really interesting question here. So, Jordan, I'd like to get your perspective first, but then, um, Samantha, Corey, I'd like to.

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kind of hear your take on it as well. How do you kind of... Keep open to change, and not just focus on convincing people.

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Great question. I don't know if I get it right, and my private or my work life, to be honest.

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But I, I... I don't know... in Canada, we have a code of ethics for public servants.

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And one of our values as public servants is excellence.

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And that we are always to strive for excellence, uh, for... integrity in our analysis and our work. And so I... Ken, I'm not sure you're going to find this a satisfying answer, but.

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I just think, as public servants, we are called.

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to be bigger than ourselves. Um, so reminding yourself that, reminding your team that, reminding ourselves that, uh.

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We are stewards of public trust, and that we are to maintain that public trust, and one of the ways you do that.

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is by making good, evidence-based policy decisions that are not influenced.

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or to the extent possible, minimize. personal influence or personal, you know, viewpoint, so... It's a little bit of a call to a higher... Um, purpose or objective of your organization, and making sure you're rooting that, you know, whatever the value is in your organization.

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for us in Canada's excellence, stewardship. democracy, reminding your team of that is one way to have the conversation stay at a larger level.

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Fantastic, thank you, Jordan. Um, Samantha, Corey, anything you kind of want to add to that?

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Yeah, um... So, I will sometimes pause and kind of.

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Um, I had to ask myself questions about how... about how I would feel about the.

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the change... if I was the person that was impacted by it. And if I have a struggle in that, sometimes what.

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what I might do, which is a good tip.

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Um, is to set up a change champions Group and ask the people that are.

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That are mainly impacted, that are the most impacted by the change. So, um, when I, um, spoke about the project where I.

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Where I moved the various, um, social care workers into, um.

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into different buildings. My initial feeling was. Of course, this is something that makes sense. We are saving money in terms of the public purse. We are being much more efficient, but then, as I kept on speaking to those staff members, they kind of helped me to understand the massive emotional and physical impact on them in terms of moving office. So I guess just speaking to a range of people.

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And then just... and kind of using it as a... as a... as a litmus test in order to measure and assess your own feelings and capacity to change.

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Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Um, Corey, any final tips for, kind of, keeping open to the change?

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Yeah. So, this won't work in Samantha's example, but most things in government aren't a... firm switchover, and it's done like this forever. Moving off as kind of is. But, um, if you're thinking about a policy intervention or some type of, you know, project or program you're rolling out, um, in government, we love a pilot.

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We love a pilot because we can test and learn and iterate and adjust. And, um... you know, I'm a big believer in that, right? And in setting.

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public accountings for when we will do so. So this is a pilot we'll run for 90 days, and at that point, we will assess various XYZ, um.

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impacts and outcomes and make adjustments as needed, and do so in the open. I think, like, being able to make those, um, make those changes, make those adjustments to acknowledge that some of this.

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the perspectives being brought are valid, they're important, and also we will need to see how this actually works in practice, um, rather than theory, uh, before we really know the full extent of any, you know, of our choices, of our outcomes. And so I think being, um.

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as... whenever possible, uh, being set up to, uh, revisit the, um... scope, the scale, the inputs, outcomes, etc. Is a really important part of any kind of work that we do.

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Sure. Well, brilliant. Okay, we've got to kind of wrap up now. I've realized we've only got about 2 minutes left, so I'm sorry if we didn't get to your question, um, but yeah, please do get involved in our communities and post your questions there. There's a wealth of.

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support out there. Um, we've had some incredible wisdom from each of our speakers, so I'd like you.

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to join me in thanking Corey, Jordan, and Samantha. I can see the emojis, the virtual round of applause is flying, so, um, yeah, thank you all so much. And thanks to you, our brilliant audience, for being so invested in your learning and so engaged in this topic. It's always great to just see the chat and all the questions coming in.

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Uh, the team's going to pull up a quick poll just to see how you felt about today's event, so please do answer, it helps us in improving our content.

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Um, before you go, and while you're responding to that poll, I want to share a few more events that you can register for to join us again soon. As a reminder, if you're not available to join live, you can always register, and we will send you the recording of all of our events the following day.

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So, um, do get registering of any of interest coming up next Tuesday, you can join us for how to adapt your writing for any audience.

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Where communication experts will share tools that ensure the recipient of your writing truly understand it.

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Uh, in early February, we'll be exploring apps for working with spreadsheets, so you can learn to save both time and effort on routine spreadsheet tasks.

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And the week after, join us for How to Craft a Brilliant briefing notes, where you'll learn how to deliver information.

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The busy stakeholders efficiently and effectively. Okay, that is really all we have time for today. We hope you found it helpful, and we want to say a huge thank you to our speakers, and to everyone who made today happen, and to you for taking time out of your busy days. Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and resources, and we hope to see you at another A Political event very soon. Have a great day, everyone.

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Goodbye