

# In a joint venture, don't fish with strawberries!

Eddie Obeng says joint ventures require a multi-faceted, objective outlook.



It's another month. Another milestone missed. Another 'chat' you have to have. Another report you have to make to your boss, explaining why the project continues to veer off track.

It's bad enough trying to run a project in your own organisation but these joint ventures... Well, you have no control over them, no ability to really influence. And showing them the contract seems to make no difference!

They promise to do something and then they don't and there's nothing you can do about it. You've explained a hundred times if you've explained once, why it is so important to your organisation that you receive the structural analysis and market survey data from them. But they just don't get it, they always seem to have some other priority!

So, what's going wrong; and what can you do about it?

**Joint ventures have become increasingly common and popular - but this doesn't mean that they have become any easier.**

Because of the Third and Fifth Laws of Change\* we know that it is important to understand who is driving the change the project represents and who actually has to change and has to deliver the change.

So, we end up with categories of 'external projects', 'commercial projects' and 'turnkey projects'. In these, one party asks another to deliver something to them. Most of the change and work to be done is in a different organisation but, as a rule, because money changes hands, the people who are to deliver the change are 'up for it'. (Can you imagine if you asked a builder to build an extension for you and then he sulked that he hadn't been fully consulted in the decision to change your house!)

For a turnkey project, your organisation drives the change and another one delivers a result to you. In a commercial project it is the opposite.

For external projects generally the main areas of contention are the

contract, the money, the quality and timeliness of deliverables. Significant effort is spent on policing activities and any breach of trust simply adds bureaucracy to the policing activity.

'Internal projects' are projects where the people having to deliver are in the same organisation as those driving the change. No money changes hands in this situation. In fact, the money on the project is only made after the project, through improved ways of working, processes, etc. Here the challenge is different. Organisational politics and power games are common. People have agendas they keep well hidden, under the table. Resources are stolen, goals are shifted and performance is fudged.

And then we have joint ventures... In a joint venture you get **all the challenges of an external project PLUS all the challenges of an internal project!**

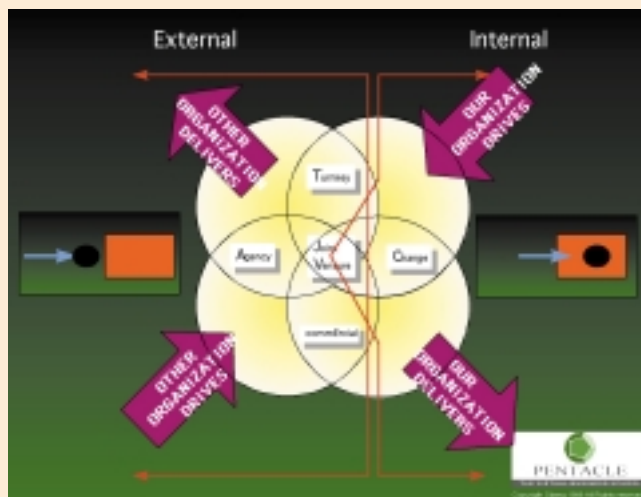
*...these joint ventures ... Well ... you have no control over them, no ability to really influence. And showing them the contract seems to make no difference!*

*They promise to do something and then they don't ... they just don't get it. They always seem to have some other priority!*

And that's why you need to clone yourself. You must have an alter ego.

Your alter ego has to view every issue from the other side while you view it from your side.

A classic mistake which project managers on joint venture projects make is not to really understand the politics and priorities on the other side.



Here's a question. 'Do you like strawberries?' Most people answer 'yes' to this.

Here's a suggestion. 'Let's go fishing'. And why not, since we like strawberries ourselves, use strawberries as bait?

I can almost hear you thinking, 'That's ridiculous!' at which point I ask, 'Why is it ridiculous?' I guess you then reply, 'Because fish don't like strawberries!'

### That is precisely my point!

When you are in a joint venture you really need to think about the other side. What do fish like? They like worms – but you don't. Remember the other organisation has very different reasons for entering the joint venture – worms. As a project leader you need to fully understand both sides of the situation if you are to gain the commitment to deliver to the overall goal you need.

So stop fishing with strawberries and start fishing with worms!

*Delivering projects in the complex New World is one of Dr Eddie Obeng's passions. If you want to make sure that in delivering your project, even when you are on your own, you are not alone - subscribe to allchange.com the on-line club for project leaders, programme managers and change agents.*

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\* See All Change! FT Publishing People Create Change - People Constrain Change. The challenge of change is the inverse of the accumulated complacency