

# The Organisational Politics of Taxonomies ISKO July 2015

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## CORPORATE TAXONOMY

- People Management
- Learning & Development
- Performance Management
- Recruitment

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# Agenda


- Our approach
- Understanding today's information environment
- The role of taxonomies in knowledge organisation
- Understanding stakeholders
- Managing stakeholder dynamics
- Establishing frameworks & rules for taxonomy projects
- Conclusion

The case studies discussed in this presentation are based on real situations. They have been deliberately kept anonymous for business and commercial reasons, and do not reflect the practices of our current employers.

# Organisational politics

“Organisational politics are a natural result of the fact that people think differently and want to act differently. This diversity creates a tension that must be resolved through political means.”

(Mitchell, 2005)



Organisational Behaviour

The diagram consists of five overlapping red circles arranged in two rows. The top row contains three circles labeled 'Organisational Behaviour', 'Human Resource Management', and 'Project Management'. The bottom row contains two circles labeled 'Social Psychology' and 'Change Management'. The circles overlap in the center. The background features a light blue gradient with three magnifying glasses over documents labeled 'case studies'.

Human Resource Management

Project Management

Social Psychology

Change Management

# Understanding Today's Information

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# Empowered Consumers

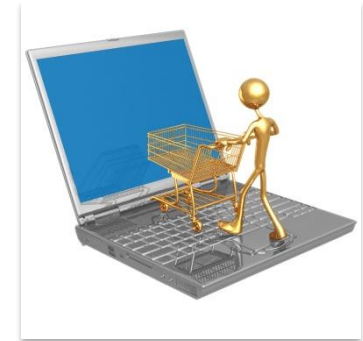
Effortless content  
discovery via  
multiple devices



Create,  
organise, tag  
content

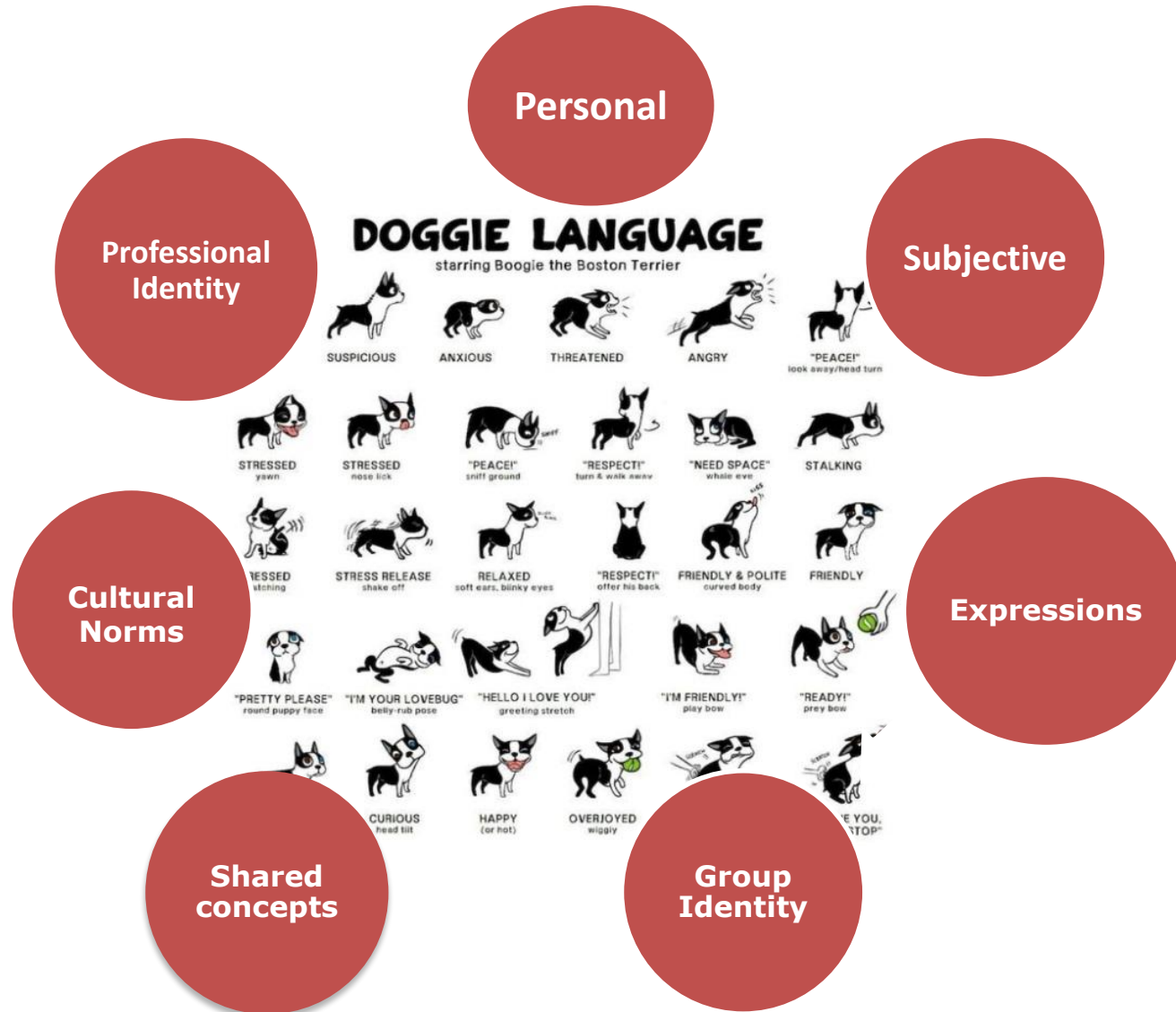


control over personal  
engagement  
experience





# The Nature of Language and Taxonomies





# The Nature of Language and Taxonomies

Unnatural

Talking a  
“foreign  
language”

Challenging  
established and  
familiar ways

Disruption to  
existing norms

# The Subjective Nature of Organising Information

- Natural to organise information based on personal mental models
- How each person "sees the world"

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- These models are influenced by our membership to:
  - Organisations
  - Interest Groups
  - Cultures
  - Professions
  - Teams
- Information we are exposed



# The Role of Taxonomies in Knowledge Organisation



# Understanding and Managing Stakeholders





# Understanding Stakeholders... Its Vital

Sponsor	project resources Stakeholder expectation Benefits Realisation	High - make or break the taxonomy
End users	Intuitive Supports Search & time saving	Can be high Lack of use will lead to system failure
Taxonomy developer	Satisfy stakeholder needs Appropriate for information governance/compliance requirements	Can be high (“expert power”) Can influence the design and structure
External regulatory or professional bodies	Compliance Theoretical considerations	Influence the design and structure
Other internal stakeholders	Competing projects/resources Impact on own agendas	Depends on the nature of their general influence



# Managing Stakeholder Dynamics



# The Accidental Sponsor

*The lack of information management understanding by executives, their role within it, and its effect on change has been identified as a number one issue in the literature.*

*(McLeod et al, 2010)*

Sponsor lack of understanding or buy-in can result:

- Perception that the taxonomy project is a low priority
- Lack of availability or involvement
- Inadvertent lack of support
- Lack support to manage issues



# Managing Stakeholder Dynamics

Managing Stakeholder Dynamics



Agendas -  
opportunities  
or  
roadblocks?



Political skill  
and agility  
key to  
managing  
risks and  
seizing  
opportunities.



Consensus



# Resistance and Project Engagement

## Managing Stakeholder Dynamics

- The change that taxonomies bring can be a major source of stress
- Challenging individual mental models
- Resistance can manifest in various behaviours:
  - Foot dragging
  - Inertia
  - Agreement by word of mouth but not actions
  - Disagreement for its sake
  - Passive resistance
  - Ignoring process



# Resistance and Project Engagement

## Managing Stakeholder Dynamics

Understand reasons in order to address resistance

- Loss of control
- Uncertainty and surprises
- Change in process
- Loss of face
- Concerns of competence
- More work
- Past resentments
- Sometimes the threat is real

*“The best thing  
leaders can do when  
the changes they  
seek pose significant  
threat is to be*

*honest,  
transparent,  
fast,  
and fair.”*

(Kanter 2012)





# Resistance to change and Engagement

## Managing Stakeholder Dynamics

- Share greater control
- Stakeholder decision making
- Level of involvement should start as early as possible
  - Early in the planning,
  - Information gathering and consultation,
  - Building
  - Group testing phases.

***The act of being  
changed  
is sometimes  
the heart  
of the issue***

*(Bergerman)*



# Group and Individual Dynamics

## Managing Stakeholder Dynamics

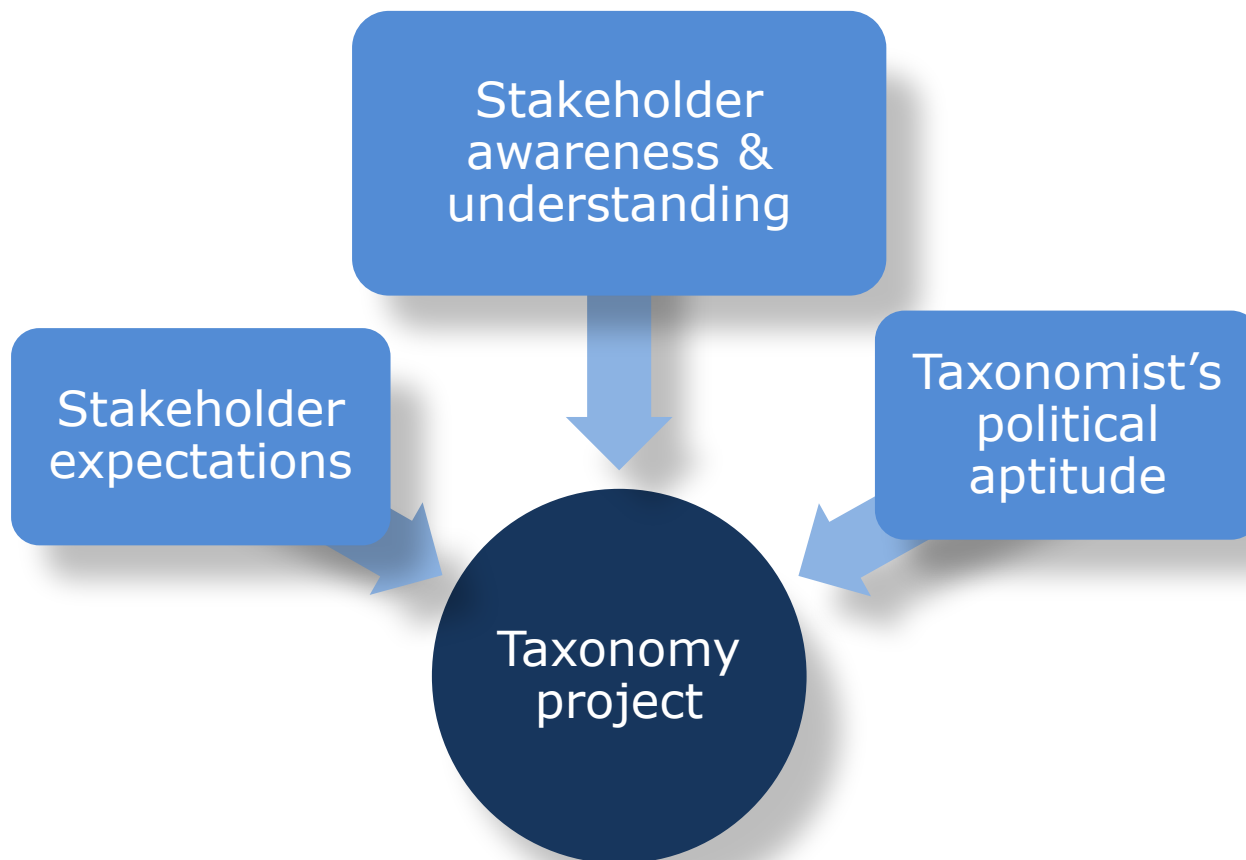
- Poor leadership
- “Group Think”
- Blocking development process
- Lack of participation
- Differing to senior individuals - knowledge not commensurate with seniority

- Create the opportunity for dominant individuals or natural leaders to take charge
- Unintentionally derail the approach

- Inappropriate taxonomy decisions
- No decisions being made
- Taxonomy does not meet its objectives



# Managing stakeholder dynamics.



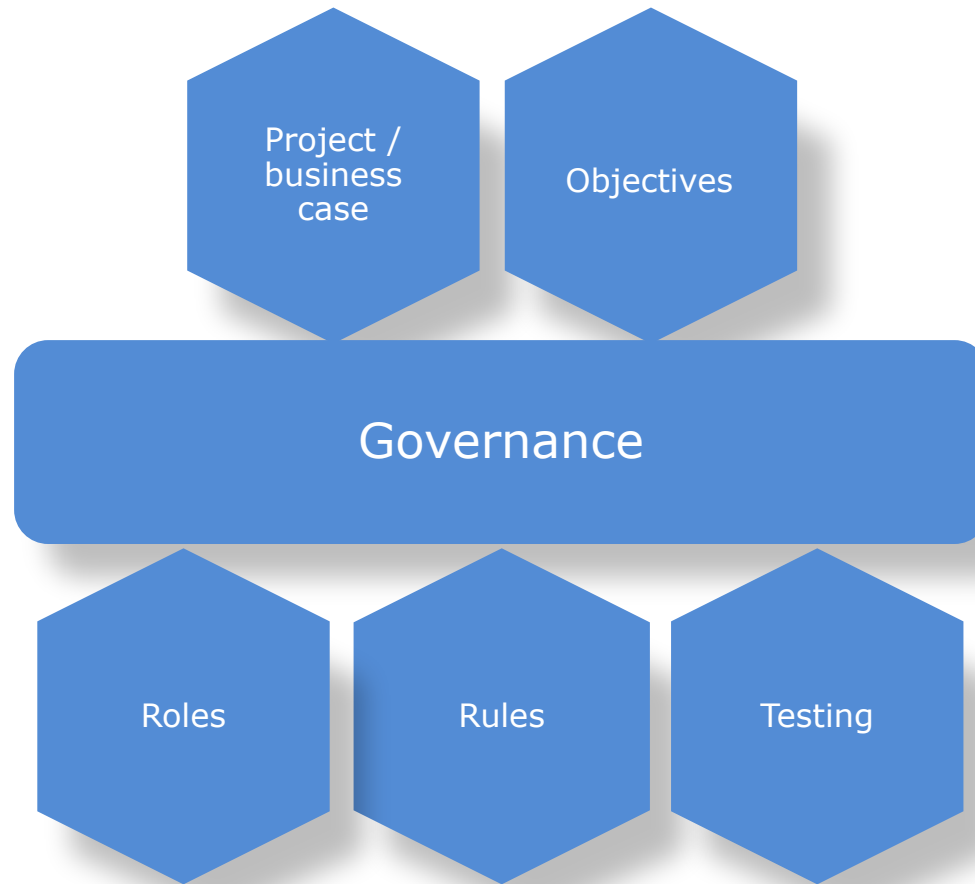


# Managing stakeholder dynamics, cont.

## Mitigating stakeholder behavioural issues

<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Cause</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigating action</b>
Disengagement / uninterested	Not all are sold on the idea; competing priorities	Poor attendance; little or no input; incompleteness or unsatisfactory	Rules of engagement and communication strategy at the outset
Power games	Individuals' values, beliefs and egos; extraneous matters and conflicts.	Resistance to suggestions; subjective and unrepresentative taxonomy	Framework and rules agreement; sponsor intervention
Asserting knowledge and individuality	Theory vs practice; siloed work practices	Impractical / unworkable; user rejection	Framework and rules communicated; objective testing
Appeasement – “yes” person	Trying to please everyone or the taxonomist.	Inconsistent, imprecise unsatisfactory taxonomy	Corporate objectives identified and communicated

# Framework and rules



# Conclusion

Taxonomies development technical process knowledge not enough.


Engagement of additional skills:

- ✓ Political awareness and agility
- ✓ Strong leadership
- ✓ Development Frameworks
- ✓ Stakeholder education
- ✓ Clear communication

*Be aware of the politics, manage it and capitalise on it in a positive way wherever possible.*

# Conclusion

## An invitation for further Research



Effectiveness of  
Suggested  
mitigating actions

Existence and effect  
of external and  
broader political  
issues and their  
impact on public  
facing taxonomies

?

# Thank you

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