

Can you really please *all* the people *all* the time?

This is a question I ask myself a lot when it comes to corporate reporting. Especially at this time of year – as I write this, we are in the latter, dizzying, stages of preparing bp’s annual report and sustainability report.

There are so many stakeholders to please and requirements to balance, quite frankly, delivering corporate reports can sometimes be an overwhelming task. But there are some things that can help make the job easier.

By Alice Revels

Give the people what they want

This can be easier said than done, but generally starting the project with a clear view of what stakeholders want helps. Having said that, inevitably that will change, so adaptability and patience are key. If your stakeholders don’t know what they want it’s your job to tease it out of them – cajole and coax them into helping you get what you need.

Practically speaking, we make use of many internal discussions, colleague forums and working groups, as I am sure many companies do. I find this is a good way to get people together who don’t often work together and can lead to good discussions as different perspectives are shared. With so many perspectives to balance though, being able to channel this into what needs to be done, when, is key.

Internal stakeholders are looking for you – as the project manager – to set out a clear timeline and set some boundaries in terms of what is needed from them. You not only have to manage your own time, you have to manage the time of many different people, including leaders and board members. In my team, we don’t do this all by ourselves, we work closely with our company secretary’s office, strategy and sustainability team and finance in particular, and between us I think we bring a good mix of understanding financial reporting, corporate reporting and governance more broadly, communications and ESG reporting trends. It’s important to work with others who understand the end users of corporate reports and can bring that point of view into what we produce.

Get what you want

I do find I sometimes underestimate just how much effort is involved in bringing people together, preparing for meetings, capturing actions, preparing materials for review, keeping everyone updated. Allowing enough time for this is critical.

Often as reporting teams we have to magic extra time from thin air – just when you think it is not possible to fit any more in, or respond to a changing deadline, or last minute feedback. I know it isn’t easy, but you need that magician’s ability to make it happen. Reporting is often the driver for getting ‘stuff’ done – and that has certainly been my experience over the years. Documenting key positions, defining things that haven’t yet been committed to paper, helping set out the company’s approach, identifying risks and issues, informing longer-wavelength projects. The value in reporting projects stretches long beyond the few hundred pages of content you come up with at the end of it.

No corporate report is an island

That value in reporting can only be realised if it is part of an organisation’s communication strategy. My team are part of the communications & advocacy function and that helps both inform what we do, but also gives us access to the heart of the company – responsible for pumping information out to employees but more widely to our outside stakeholders – investors, customers, prospective employees. I see our job as disseminating the company strategy and purpose, so making sure the annual corporate reporting programme is plugged into our corporate communications early is key – that way we can see how and where it can support other activity and vice versa.



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At bp we have an aim to be recognised as a leader in the transparency of our reporting. This is one of ten net zero aims for the company. In the twelve months since we set this ambition it has been both a galvanising goal but also a conversation starter and thought-provoker. Transparency is an end goal – how we get there is for us to work out. The fact that all the different stakeholders we work with have differing views of what this means is both fascinating and frustrating. But at the end of the day – having a strategic ambition will help us deliver better reporting. For me, it’s great to work for a company that has such an ambition, and a great professional challenge to deliver it. I am realistic that we won’t always get it right and we want to share what we do but also learn from others and bring that learning back into our team, and our reporting.

Reporting really is a continuous quest for ‘perfection’, that in reality is almost impossible to achieve. But having an ambition is generally what makes us better.

Pleasing some of the people some of the time

I think a lot of this comes down to mindset and perspective – you can please most of the people most of the time, but it takes hard work. Different stakeholders, both inside the company and outside it, want and need different things from corporate reports. It’s unlikely you will manage to satisfy everyone – but whether you view things from a minimum compliance perspective or from a leadership perspective – unifying everyone you work with behind a clear goal helps.

I accept that sometimes, if you try to please everyone, sometimes you end up pleasing no one. While I don’t believe that pleasing no one is really an option in our field of work, often you do need to compromise.

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I think pleasing different stakeholders will continue to be on that list for a while as we all adjust to the changing external world of reporting – and to the changing perspectives and demands of internal stakeholders too.

Good luck with your annual reports.



ALICE REVELS joined bp in 2018 to lead their corporate reporting team, ensuring bp responds transparently to reporting requirements and best practice developments. She has over ten years’ experience in responsible business, business ethics and ESG and sustainability issues in FTSE 100 companies, having worked at Lloyds Banking Group prior to bp. Alice has a BA (Hons) in Marketing.