

PMTALES

THE STAKEHOLDER
FIELD GUIDE



Spot. Identify. Survive.

D. B. TRENCH



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THE STAKEHOLDER FIELD GUIDE



*A premium field manual for identifying project creatures,
reading habitat signals, and surviving stakeholder encounters in the wild.*

D.B. Trench

FIELD ISSUE RECORD

A premium field guide deserves a proper owner.



This field guide belongs to

Name:

Project or expedition:

Date issued:

Most recent habitat encountered:

For best results, keep this guide within reach of meeting rooms, steering committees, hallway ambushes, status rituals, and any location where someone says “quick question” with suspicious confidence.

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The PMTales Stakeholder Field Guide is a premium field manual created for project professionals operating in live delivery environments. All original text in this front matter and back matter package is written for the PMTales ecosystem and designed to sit alongside the one hundred creature cards that make up the full guide.

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BEFORE YOU ENTER THE HABITAT

A collector's note from the edge of the meeting room.



Projects rarely collapse because one obvious villain stepped into frame and announced their intentions. More often, collapse is preceded by patterns: a decision that never quite lands, a requirement that grows another limb, a vendor promise so polished it squeaks, a status report that remains green while the corridor outside quietly catches fire.

This field guide exists for those moments.

It is designed to feel like something you would pull from a satchel in the wild: part manual, part survival instrument, part beautifully organized warning system. It should help a reader identify the pattern quickly, find the right creature card, confirm the signs, and choose a response before the damage becomes structural.

Use it live. Use it after the meeting. Use it when the “small concern” arrives seventeen minutes too late. Use it when a project has stopped making sense and the team needs language sharper than “something feels off.”

Above all, remember the first law of the habitat: behaviors repeat before outcomes collapse. The faster you can classify the creature, the better your odds of leaving with the schedule intact.

Field principle

Do not wait for complete certainty before responding to a pattern. In the wild, early recognition beats perfect diagnosis.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



The book is organized by creature families rather than a simple alphabetical index. In live project conditions, you usually notice symptoms before you know exactly which archetype has surfaced. A team goes quiet. Scope starts stretching. Approvals evaporate. A workshop appears where a decision should have been. The family structure helps you move from symptom to specimen quickly.

Begin with the family dividers. They narrow the habitat, outline the defining traits, and give you a first-response posture. Once the pattern is clear, move to the inserted creature cards for individual identification.

Each creature card should be treated as a field specimen: recognizable behaviors, likely habitat, common calls, risk profile, and practical survival guidance. Some encounters are clean. Most are not. In real conditions, several creatures may appear together and reinforce one another.

This guide therefore serves two purposes at once: identification and containment. It helps you name what is in front of you—and then respond in a way that protects scope, schedule, decision quality, and your remaining will to live.

Recommended workflow

1. Identify the dominant symptom.
2. Use the family divider to narrow the habitat.
3. Flip to the relevant creature card.
4. Confirm the behavior using actual evidence, not vibes.
5. Apply containment before the creature recruits allies.

FIELD ATLAS: THE CREATURE FAMILIES

The fastest route from symptom to specimen.



Archetype range	Family	Primary hazard
1–10	Vision & Strategy Distorters	Shifting goals, aspirational deadlines, KPI theatre.
11–20	Leadership Black Holes	Approvals disappear, decisions collapse into silence.
21–30	Priority & Focus Saboteurs	Fragmented attention, derailment, urgent chaos.
31–40	Team Dynamics Disruptors	Invisible work, communication gaps, internal unpredictability.
41–50	Accountability Evaders	Ownership diffuses, actions drift, no one holds the line.
51–60	Stakeholder Specters	Phantom feedback, shadow influence, disappearing approvers.
61–70	Expectation & Requirement Mutators	Scope and success criteria mutate without permission.
71–80	Vendor & Consultant Creatures	Proof-light promises and polished implementation theatre.
81–95	Tools & Process Beasts	Toolchain traps, process mazes, versioning disasters.
96–100	PM Heroes	The rare stabilizers who restore signal, order, and delivery.

THREAT LEVELS & RESPONSE POSTURES



Threat level	Field meaning	Recommended posture
I — Trace activity	A minor nuisance. Contained early, it stays anecdotal.	Document, redirect, do not overreact.
II — Recurring disruptor	The behavior is repeating and beginning to cost time.	Name the pattern, tighten structure, assign ownership.
III — Delivery threat	Scope, schedule, quality, or alignment is now at risk.	Formalize decisions, raise visibility, constrain ambiguity.
IV — Cross-functional predator	Damage crosses teams, ceremonies, or governance layers.	Escalate with options, timelines, and explicit impacts.
V — Habitat event	The creature is distorting the operating environment itself.	Reset baselines, involve sponsors, and establish containment fast.

RAPID RECOGNITION IN THE WILD

When the creature is nearby but the species is not yet confirmed.



First sign in the wild	Likely family	Turn to
Goals keep changing, deadlines become interpretive literature, metrics look reassuring but empty.	Vision & Strategy Distorters	1–10
Everything stalls while an approval, decision, or sponsor response drifts into deep space.	Leadership Black Holes	11–20
Your day is broken into urgent fragments, side-requests, and endless reprioritization.	Priority & Focus Saboteurs	21–30
Important work happens off-stage and surprises surface after the fact.	Team Dynamics Disruptors	31–40
No task seems to belong to anyone for more than five consecutive minutes.	Accountability Evaders	41–50
Feedback arrives late, vaguely, and from people who were somehow not in the room.	Stakeholder Specters	51–60
Requirements grow new limbs after discovery is supposedly complete.	Expectation & Requirement Mutators	61–70
The vendor demo sparkles while the delivery reality starts smoking.	Vendor & Consultant Creatures	71–80
The tool, template, workflow, or legacy system becomes the main obstacle.	Tools & Process Beasts	81–95
Someone calmly restores order, tracks the risk, and saves the expedition.	PM Heroes	96–100

FAMILY I

THE VISION & STRATEGY DISTORTERS

ARCHETYPES 1–10 · Where inspiration leaves the rails and baselines begin to beg for mercy.



TYPICAL HABITAT Strategy workshops, quarterly planning sessions, executive updates, kickoff meetings, KPI reviews.	PRIMARY DAMAGE Baseline drift, metric theatre, false alignment, elegant confusion dressed as strategy.
COMMON CALLS “Can we make this more ambitious?” “The timeline is directional.” “Let’s measure something higher level.”	FIELD PAGES Creature cards 1–10.

Every project begins with a vision—until someone stretches it, distorts it, redefines it, or inflates it beyond measurable physics. These stakeholders operate at the strategic altitude where inspiration becomes confusion and direction becomes a moving target. Their intentions are often noble; their impact is usually expensive.

They bend goals, timelines, and KPIs with charismatic ease, leaving project managers clutching baselines like life preservers in open water.

DEFINING TRAITS

- Direction changes mid-flight.
- Vague but passionate big-picture thinking.
- Deadlines described as aspirational rather than contractual.
- Metrics that look good but prove almost nothing.

GENERAL SURVIVAL GUIDANCE

- Anchor everything to documented baselines.
- Visualize trade-offs instead of debating them abstractly.
- Reconfirm success criteria more often than feels reasonable.
- Never assume the goal is stable—verify it, then verify it again.

Field note

When the vision starts sounding bigger and clearer at the same time, check your wallet. These creatures thrive where ambition outruns definition. Pin down success, trade-offs, and who will pay for the extra sparkle.

THE GOALPOST MOVER

Alters project targets on a whim, creating endless pursuit of ever-moving success.



BEHAVIORS

- Redefines 'done' mid-sprint
- Adds enhancements disguised as clarifications
- Shifts expectations without acknowledging impact

THREAT LEVEL



HOW TO SURVIVE

- Document acceptance criteria early
- Require written approvals

AFTERWORD

On surviving the habitat with your sense of humour intact.



A good field guide does not remove the wilderness. It simply gives the traveller better odds.

That is the spirit of this book. The creatures documented here are exaggerated, theatrical, and absurd in all the right ways—but the underlying patterns are real. Anyone who has worked long enough in project environments has seen versions of them: the drifting sponsor, the ornamental metric, the agenda hijack, the polished vendor illusion, the ghost approver who materializes exactly three minutes after the wrong decision was made.

The point is not cynicism. The point is recognition.

Once a pattern can be named, it can be discussed without vagueness. Once it can be discussed, it can be documented. Once it can be documented, it can be interrupted. Once it can be interrupted, a project has a chance.

Carry the guide accordingly. Keep it close. And when the habitat turns strange, remember: calm observation beats panic, documentation beats folklore, and a well-timed decision log has saved more expeditions than optimism ever did.

ABOUT D.B. TRENCH



D.B. Trench writes from the project-management frontier, where governance rituals multiply, stakeholders roam freely, and every “quick update” carries the potential for ecological collapse. The PMTales voice is built for recognition, relief, and sharp practical insight wrapped in satire.

This field guide sits inside that same world: entertaining enough to gift, useful enough to keep within arm’s reach, and precise enough to serve as a survival instrument when the wildlife becomes active.

About PMTales

PMTales is the story-driven project management brand for people who have survived absurd systems, status theatre, scope creep, stakeholder mythology, and the strange emotional weather of delivery work. Distinctive on the surface. Practical underneath. Built from the trench outward.

FURTHER EXPEDITIONS FROM THE TRENCH LIBRARY

- ◆ Everything is on Fire
- ◆ Fluent in Nonsense
- ◆ Once Upon a Deliverable
- ◆ Scope Creep
- ◆ Stakeholder Field Guide
- ◆ Tales from The Trench

Navigate the Wilds of Stakeholder Behavior

Equip yourself for the untamed world of project management with this indispensable field guide—crafted for PMs who must spot elusive stakeholders, identify their types, and survive challenging encounters.

Spot the Creatures

Recognize the stakeholder who hides in your meeting rooms.



Identify the Archetypes

Learn the defining traits of 100 stakeholder archetypes.



Survive the Encounter

Use field-tested scripts & strategies.



Field Responses:

- Practical Scripts & Strategies
- Practical Scripts & Strategies

“An essential guide for any PM caught in the stakeholder jungle.”