

How to Involve People in Decisions That Affect Them

The primary objectives of this guide are twofold: Firstly, to engage a substantial number of employees, without limitation, in vital strategic and organizational matters that directly impact them before implementation. Secondly, to foster teamwork and a sense of ownership by actively involving individuals in the development of the strategic plan.

The outlined process can be applied in two ways: Firstly, it is applicable to all stakeholder categories, both internal and external, regardless of the desired number of participants. Secondly, it serves as a mechanism for obtaining regular feedback on the strategic plan, change management initiatives, and the overarching participative leadership philosophy for your client organization.

PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

Based on experiences working with different organizations, the significance lies in striking a dynamic balance between leadership's ownership of change strategies and the acceptance and buy-in of these plans by key stakeholders crucial for successful implementation.

The recommended approach involves adopting a parallel process that involves conducting real-time meetings with key stakeholders. This serves two purposes: firstly, to share information and gather feedback from stakeholders, allowing for troubleshooting and plan improvements, and secondly, to gain their understanding, acceptance, and commitment to the overall direction and execution of the plan.

Typically, these meetings run concurrently with the planning or change phases. It begins by seeking feedback on the draft document or direction with the question, "Is there anything fundamentally wrong with this draft document or direction?" Subsequently, subgroup discussions are facilitated in an interactive manner to encourage positive and negative comments. Each subgroup has a designated facilitator from the core planning and change steering teams, trained to maintain a positive and productive process.

The specifics of involving key stakeholders are tailored by the core planning team prior to commencing the strategic planning and change management process. This approach significantly enhances the likelihood of successful plan implementation or major organizational changes.

PARALLEL PROCESS STEPS

To ensure effective stakeholder engagement in the strategic management process, begin by analyzing and identifying all stakeholders impacted by the organization's objectives. Identify key stakeholders whose involvement in parallel process meetings is essential for the successful development and achievement of the strategic management plan.

Convene the leadership team to carefully plan and organize the parallel process meetings, making decisions about stakeholder involvement, meeting logistics, and feedback on specific documents. Conduct a brief orientation and training session for planning team members involved in the parallel process to ensure they are well-prepared. During the parallel process meetings, explain the strategic planning and change effort, seek clarity on draft documents, and gather input and feedback from stakeholders.

Emphasize that all feedback will be seriously considered, although it may not always be possible to incorporate every suggestion verbatim. Collect feedback and present it to the full planning and change team, refining plans and processes based on the input received. Share the updates made to the plans with participants in the parallel process, providing explanations for changes if needed.

If multiple rounds of parallel process meetings are required, repeat the steps accordingly to ensure comprehensive stakeholder involvement and feedback. This approach will foster teamwork and ownership among stakeholders, contributing to a successful implementation of the strategic plan and change management initiatives.

PARALLEL PROCESS MEETING OPTIONS

When preparing for your parallel process meetings, thorough pre-planning is crucial to achieving your goals successfully.

Begin by focusing on middle managers, as they play a pivotal role as implementers of the strategic plan and require special attention to ensure their ownership and commitment to the change process.

For optimal outcomes, consider incorporating your agenda into one of the regular meetings of your stakeholders, allowing sufficient time for a comprehensive presentation and gaining their cooperation. Alternatively, schedule special small-group forums for in-depth discussions.

Leverage opportunities to present your plan during regular staff meetings and all-employee gatherings, involving core planning team members. In the case of large organizations, consider using employee focus groups to facilitate discussions in more manageable sections.

In some instances, it may be necessary to hold a working session with the board of directors to secure their approval and support for the entire plan and implementation process.

If you plan to conduct public meetings, make sure to arrange proper facility setup and management, especially when dealing with large groups. Keep in mind that with public meetings, you may have less control over the attendance of key stakeholders, so it's essential to be prepared for a diverse audience.

PARALLEL PROCESS MEETING HINTS

During the parallel process meetings, it is crucial to limit participation to the core strategic planning team, as they possess the necessary expertise. Running the meetings in pairs allows for effective collaboration. Start by providing an explanation of the strategic plan's concept or model. Ensure clarity in understanding the documents by elaborating on their content instead of merely reading them. Clearly label all documents as drafts to set the context appropriately.

When stakeholders offer feedback, demonstrate active listening by summarizing their statements, empathizing with their feelings, and documenting their input on a flip chart. Focus discussions on the substance and spirit of the documents rather than getting lost in minor details. Use explanatory phrases like "The intent was..." when addressing specific sections. Compare stakeholders' views with the reviewed documents to gauge fundamental agreement.

End the meetings by outlining the planned actions based on feedback and scheduling the next session. Express gratitude to all attendees for their involvement. Whenever possible, take the initiative to go to the stakeholders rather than expecting them to come to you. Present documents in manageable portions during meetings to facilitate comprehension. Prefer smaller subgroups with facilitators for gathering feedback, starting and ending the session with the whole group for coherence.

Aim for a group size of 10 to 15 people to ensure effective and valuable feedback. Consider scripting the meetings or using consistent overheads for clarity. Decide in advance whether attendees should receive handouts. Allocate sufficient meeting time for thorough discussions or provide opportunities for participants to submit ideas and reactions later. When addressing Key Success Factors, prioritize inquiries about measurable areas of success before involving parties responsible for final approvals and accountability.

Handle disagreements by collecting data and avoiding immediate comments; major items requiring explanation can be addressed in subsequent planning meetings. Maintain a holistic perspective on the plan, emphasizing its interconnected nature and discouraging the fragmentation of elements during feedback sessions. To redirect vocal participants, use a flip chart to collect their comments, verify accuracy, and move forward smoothly.

SUMMARY

Best of luck in your parallel process. Remember that people are more supportive of what they contribute to creating. Engage them in the parallel process during the planning and change phases to minimize resistance.