Learning Dynamics
News to Peruse
Volume XXXVI No.1 March 2026

The Value of Soliciting Input from Stakeholders

"*Never be so sure of what you want that you wouldn't take something better.*" Chris Voss

This article is about something you already know and most likely do. So, why read this? Because it is almost certain you are not doing it as fully as necessary, resulting in less than optimal, to potentially disastrous, outcomes. Implementing this idea properly will enhance your decision process, improve implementation, improve stakeholder satisfaction and/or adoption, enhance revenue, cut expense, and improve profits.

The simple guidance is that business leaders must ensure all stakeholder groups are involved in every initiation, design, decision, and implementation process. Why isn't what you are already doing enough? It is because you know what you want, you know your job and the job of the people below you, and you are very busy. So, you save the time by limiting or eliminating stakeholder input. This unwittingly, and unfortunately, prevents you from arriving at a better solution and the compounding benefits that flow from it.

THE NEED IS CLEAR. Examples of the ramifications from inadequately including stakeholders in the design, planning, and implementation process are everywhere. You can find examples in your own company and/or have seen them in other companies. These examples can be seen in customers or employees who are disgruntled or disengaged from a newly implemented customer "benefit," or friction between different departments from a new process or software. Big business isn't exempt either, as evidenced by the New Coke (spent millions questioning customers on taste but failed to inquire about purchasing preference), McDonald's Arch Burger (failed to inquire if customers were interested in the superior product) and the $6.8 billion Airbus 380 (production teams failed to communicate with each other) debacles.

The message is clear - before designing, selecting and implementing any and every change, ensure you inquire of representatives from each stakeholder group that will be impacted. Following are some suggestions to help you implement this.

1. At a minimum you can help ensure that every sign-off to a change has a specific section identifying the stakeholders impacted, whether they were consulted throughout the process, and the nature of the inquiry or their contribution. The extent of this sign off will vary with the extent of the impact. The greater the impact including cost, extent of change, expected benefit, the greater the depth of this sign off.

2. You can also include in every project plan the specific requirement for stakeholder engagement in every phase of a project – initiation, planning, execution, and closing.

3. Spend thoughtful time designing the nature of stakeholder engagement. This would include scope of their involvement and, at a minimum a broad set of questions assessing stake-holder opinions, such as if they had a magic wand what they would do, what are their preferences, what do they want, and whether they would use/benefit from the company's efforts/changes. I can hear you shouting, "But Steve Jobs said he knew what the customer wanted before they knew," and this is true. The questioning process should not supplant management's decision process but should, and will, enhance management's decision and implementation process.

4. Establish real ongoing stakeholder input and feedback. For example, every company

(OVER)

should have a process (frequency and scope to be determined by the company) to intentionally meet with various stakeholders and solicit their specific and general input and feedback.

a. Specific inquiries can include asking customers about turn-around time, asking employees their impression of specific customer wants and desires, asking employees about a specific process with customers or between departments, asking vendors how you can enhance the use of their services, saving money and/or time, asking shareholders about shareholder communications, asking regulators about their views on a new product, asking independent audit professionals that are not auditing you about their view on a new procedure.
b. General inquiries can include asking what the various stakeholders like, dislike, would like to see, want...
c. Always ask the magic wand question: “What would you do if you had a magic wand?”

5. Two possible ways to implement this with employees would be:
   a. Include a cross-section of employees at all levels of the organization on every project (number of employees and extent of their involvement to vary based upon project scope and impact).
   b. Have periodic informal lunches with a small group of employees, especially lower-level employees from different departments where their managers are not present. The lunch would start with small talk (vacation plans, family...) and progress into inquiries about how to make the company better, what is working, what isn’t, and of course, include the magic wand question.

6. Implement the above employee-type involvement and reaching out with other stakeholder groups.

7. Other? If you had a magic wand and could change the way you solicit stakeholder ideas, design, implementation and adoption, what would you do?