The Stakeholder Engagement Process

Mastering the principles and practices of community collaboration

**The Stakeholder Engagement Process** is both a way of thinking and a disciplined way of working together. The process creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides and shapes a collective conversation among a diverse group of cross-sector stakeholders. It provides a common language and a common approach that enables people to develop a shared understanding of a problem and co-create solutions together at a systems level.

**How do you solve a complex social problem?**

- **You diagnose it by redesigning the underlying system that’s causing the problem.**

**Systemкарт: It’s a systems thing, not a single thing.**

A social system is made up of the internalized components of people and groups organized around a clearly defined purpose or goal. Making the parts of a system better doesn’t guarantee that the system as a whole will be better. What truly matters is how the parts interact with one another. Yet it’s our normal preference to “solve” problems by improving the parts, rather than to system and redesign the system itself. By redesigning a system, it’s possible to “dissolve” a problem by changing the underlying conditions that caused it in the first place.

**How do you redesign a system?**

- **By transforming relationships among those people who shape the system.**

**Relationships: Transforming a system is about transforming relationships.**

A key part of a system is the way we work together. Transforming a system is ultimately about transforming relationships among people who shape the system. It’s everyone’s responsibility to understand how these relationships work and how they can be judiciously balanced and shaped over time, fundamentally changing the way people work together.

**How do you transform relationships?**

- **Through well-structured processes that help people work together in new ways.**

**Process: Redesigning a system is a social process.**

Transforming a system requires a well-structured approach for building trusting relationships through which stakeholders can develop a shared understanding of the system and co-create solutions together. A disciplined stakeholder engagement process is both a way of thinking and a defined way of working together. It creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides engagement process is both a way of thinking and a defined way of working together. It creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides engagement process is both a way of thinking and a defined way of working together. It creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides engagement process is both a way of thinking and a defined way of working together. It creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides engagement process is both a way of thinking and a defined way of working together. It creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides engagement process is both a way of thinking and a defined way of working together. It creates a kind of “community operating system” that guides

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A Guiding Team

- A guiding team is a small leadership group that works to shape the relationships among the people, programs, and organizations to achieve the essential goal of the whole system. The team acts as the glue for collaboration, serving and supporting the collective work, rather than working vertically within organizations, a guiding team works horizontally across programs, organizations, and even the public, private, and social sectors of society.

**What kind of leadership is needed?**

- Complex systems demand two complementary styles of leadership that act in concert: organizational leadership and collective leadership.

**Leadership: Complex systems demand a different approach to leadership.**

Systems are composed of both parts and the interrelationships among them. These two distinct aspects of a system must be tended to in very different ways. Accordingly, complex systems are best served by two complementary styles of leadership that act in concert. Organizational leadership works on improving the parts of a system (efficiency). Collective leadership works on developing the relatedness of the whole toward the essential purpose of the system (effectiveness). And, because complex systems cannot be centrally managed, there must be a willingness to take responsibility for the well-being of the whole system by operating in service, rather than in control.

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 behavior: How can we shape our relationships to improve the way we work together?
- How can we coordinate and align our work to achieve better outcomes?
- How can we structure ourselves to increase our collective capacity?
- How can we continuously improve our work and the process itself?

**Guiding Questions**

- What is the challenge worth addressing?
- Are we here and why are we working together to redesign a social system whose underlying conditions need to change?

**Frameworks**

- Positive Deviance: What’s Already Working?
- What have we already done that could be scaled up, connected, coordinated, and aligned?
- What improvements might we contribute to the collective effort?

**Guiding Questions**

- What are the high-level things we could do together that no one organization could do alone?
- What is the collective work that could emerge from the context, relationships, and work?

**BEHAVIORS**

4. **HOW: REDESIGN THE SYSTEM BY CHANGING WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER**

The fourth stage of the process is about redesigning the system by fundamentally changing ways of working together. The redesign of the system demands that the stakeholders change their ways of working together by improving the relationships among them and organizing themselves around the collectively agreed upon aims of the system.

**Guiding Questions**

- What does it mean to improve the way we work together?
- How can we structure ourselves to continuously improve our work and the process itself?

**Frameworks**

- Is there a portfolio of projects that offer a combination of substantive short-term wins, as well as more ambitious, long-term systemic strategies that may not show impact for several years?
- What is the structure for the collaborative—guiding team, coordinating, and aligned of it—what could be scaled up, connected, coordinated, and aligned?

**Behaviors**

3. **WHAT: CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS TOGETHER**

The third stage of the process is about shifting the collective focus from problem solving to co-creation. This is the stage where people begin to see catalytic projects that stakeholders experience new ways of working together.

**Guiding Questions**

- What do we want to co-create together?
- How can we continuously improve our relationships to address a common challenge at a systems level?

**Frameworks**

- Has the group designed and developed a few rapid-catalytic projects that could be scaled up, connected, coordinated, and aligned?
- How can we shape our relationships to improve the way we work together?

**Shared Understanding**

**1. WHY: GET THE SYSTEM IN THE ROOM**

The first stage of the engagement process is about the relatedness of the people and organizations that make up the system. It is the transformation of the key stakeholder relationships that ultimately transforms the system itself.

**Guiding Questions**

- How do we get the system in the room?
- What do we need to be engaged to get a microcosm of the system in the room?

**Frameworks**

- Is there a guiding team who wants to take responsibility for the success of the whole system?
- What needs to be engaged to get a microcosm of the system in the room?

**BELIEFS**

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