

Managing Employee Involvement

Tool Description: One important consideration during organizing for an intervention is understanding who should participate. Sometimes issues are sensitive and confidentiality is essential, whereas other initiatives are best done with broad exposure and involvement. The Employee Involvement tool helps leaders and change agents evaluate what model of employee involvement is appropriate for each type of intervention. The reality is that there are trade-offs for all involvement models.

Uses: Choosing the right type of employee involvement increases productivity and commitment, and it reduces costs. Choosing the wrong type of employee involvement can be costly to the organization in time, solutions, and financial resources. Knowing your options helps you choose the best way to develop an effective approach to design.

Timing: This tool is generally used very early during an intervention. Sometimes, however, issues of employee involvement will surface during other phases of an intervention.

Choosing the Right Level of Employee Involvement: The following are several criteria that should be used to evaluate the right level of employee involvement:

Roles—There are times when most everyone in an organization should be involved in a decision. At other times, employees may not have the right information, desire or expertise to be involved in certain decisions. Therefore, when a project includes strategic issues, decisions, and requires strategic framing, involvement should and must lean toward management.

Skills—When employees have the competencies and/or aptitude to take the organization to its desired destination, then their involvement should be a viable option. Leaders most often cannot do front-line work, and therefore may not be able to design the right work solutions. Sometimes the needed competencies are not found internally and must be sought from the outside.

Resources—The more resources are reduced on the front-end of a project, the more time and resources are needed at the back end. Reduced employee involvement up front usually means longer and even more time-consuming involvement later (e.g. training). On the other hand, taking many employees off their jobs has a impact on the productivity of the organization.

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Data—If the data needed to make design choices are at the front-line of the organization, the front line should be involved in developing recommendations. Asking who has the data and who can articulate design choices/principles helps determine who should be involved.

Outputs—Matching the desired output to the right approach is another important variable. Large group design sessions are not the best approach to creating job descriptions, for example.

Commitment—The greater the need for employee buy-in, the greater the need for involvement. It has been said that people rarely argue with their own ideas. If a significant part of a design's success is the level of employee ownership, then a higher level of involvement is probably needed.

Some questions to consider when choosing the model of employee involvement are the following:

- How open can you be with employees about the intent and outcome of the project?
- How much control are you willing to give to employees in generating solutions?
- How urgent is getting the answer?
- How urgent is it to get the answer implemented?
- Can you do this, should you do this, without the employees' hearts?
- How much has already been decided?
- What is the risk of involving/not involving them in a meaningful way?
- What knowledge do they have to impact the work in meaningful ways?

See the continuum of Employee Involvement approaches on the next page and the implications of each model.

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External Experts (Consultants)	Managers Design	Managers Design, then Employees	Managers & Employees Design	Employees Design w/Mgmt. Direction	Critical Mass of Employees Involved
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