

The Parallel Involvement Process

People Support What They Help Create

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DECISION MAKING

“People want input into decisions that affect them prior to those decisions being finalized.” —Stephen Haines

Haines Centre for Strategic Management’s basic premise about successful planning and change has resulted in the development of a unique *Parallel Involvement Process* concept unlike any other. It is based on a truism of life: *People Support What They Help Create*.

OVERVIEW

The Haines Centre for Strategic Management’s *planning and change model* provides the opportunity for optimum involvement throughout the planning and change process by all key stakeholders, be it a board, employees, middle managers, stockholders as well as customers or any other external groups. The Centre’s involvement model advocates “organized participation,” unlike other models which often have either too much (public sector) or no (private sector) stakeholder involvement in the process.

The Haines Centre’s experience with organizations focuses clearly on the dynamic tension between ownership of the strategies for change by the leadership team and acceptance, or buy-in, of the plan by the key stakeholders who are crucial to the successful implementation of the desired change. Both Profit and Not-For-Profit organizations have successfully used the *Parallel Involvement Process* to increase communication and participation in planning and change. The reason for this success is because the *Parallel Involvement Process* is conducted in a very organized, planned, and participative way.

It is recommended that a *Parallel Involvement Process meeting* be held with key stakeholders after each phase of the Strategic Planning and Change Management process. **The purpose is twofold:**

1. To share information and provide feedback to the core leadership team

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- in order to troubleshoot and improve the plans, and
2. To gain understanding, acceptance (i.e., buy-in), and commitment to the overall direction and implementation of the plan.

Typically, the *Parallel Involvement Process* is conducted in meetings held “in parallel” with the planning phases. These meetings provide the opportunity to obtain feedback for the question “*Is there anything fundamentally wrong with this draft document or direction?*” Once this is discussed then the facilitator can move participants into subgroups. Each subgroup has a facilitator (chosen from the core planning team) who is trained to keep the process both positive and productive.

Tailoring the details of key stakeholder involvement is determined by the core planning team prior to beginning the actual *Strategic Planning and Change Management* process. This results in a much higher probability of successful implementation of the plan or major change.

PARALLEL INVOLVEMENT PROCESS STEPS

Trust
“Trust is a big part of successful change. The way you build trust is by practicing the politics of inclusion.” –David Osborne

1. Analyze stakeholders

A stakeholder is any group or individual who is affected by the advancement of the organization’s objectives. Examples might include: business units/department, management, owners, customers, union/labor, suppliers, community, media, industry/associations, governments, consumer advocates, real estate and financial institutions.

2. Identify key stakeholders

Who is involved in the *Parallel Involvement Process* meetings is essential. Selection is based upon their importance to both the development and advancement of the Strategic Management (Planning and Change) process.

3. Plan the meeting

After selection of key stakeholders, decide in detail what you want to accomplish at the meetings. Then plan the best way to run the *Parallel Involvement Process* meetings.

The purpose of the *Parallel Involvement Process* meetings

- To explain the strategic planning effort and their role/involvement in the process
- To understand the draft documents clearly
- Give input and feedback to the core planning team.

Guarantee—your feedback will be seriously considered.

Limitation—input is gathered from many different people. Therefore, it is impossible for each person's input to be automatically placed in the final document exactly as desired

4. Prepare the facilitators

Hold a short orientation and training session with those planning team members involved in the *Parallel Involvement Process* to ensure they are coordinated, in agreement and comfortable with their role.

5. Conduct the meeting and gather feedback

Thoughtful planning results in fewer implementation problems and less resistance to change. When change happens cooperatively, people feel you're "doing it with them rather than to them."

Use an agenda to stay on task. **Be very clear that this is** an information sharing and input/feedback meeting. It is not a decision making meeting.

Prepare a form to gather feedback from the meeting participants.

- Feedback on the outcomes
- Feedback on the processes or core strategies
- Feedback on the input activities

6. Share the feedback

Share with the full planning team the feedback received at the *Parallel Involvement Process* meetings.

7. Refine the plan

Refine the plan based on the *Parallel Involvement Process* feedback.

There are two potential planning team problems:

- Rewriting documents unnecessarily (re-inventing the wheel; ditching sound decisions already made).
- Replacing provocative words to make the document more palatable (thus watering it down to meaningless or mixed messages).

8. Provide feedback on the changes made

Once plans have been updated, it is a good idea to share the input with those who were involved in your *Parallel Involvement Process*. One way is to provide a comparison of the old plan and the new plan, explaining reasons for change. A second way is to highlight the changes on the new plans, much the same way a legal document is reviewed.

Note: If you need more than one round of Parallel Involvement Process meetings—as is often the case—simply repeat the necessary steps. (See Strategic Planning & Change Management Cycle chart for a full schematic of the Parallel Involvement Process.)

PARALLEL INVOLVEMENT PROCESS MEETING OPTIONS

There are a many things to consider when preparing for *Parallel Involvement Process* meetings. Success in achieving goals is determined by careful preplanning.

Focus first on middle managers who are the Strategic Plan implementers and thus require special TLC. They must take ownership of the plan and be committed to the change process to ensure success.

For best results, it is important to either get on the stakeholder agenda — taking care to allow enough time to adequately present your material and gain their cooperation— or schedule special small group forums.

Take opportunities to present plan at regular staff meetings and all employee meetings of core planning team members. If the organization is very large,

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use employee focus groups to break the job down into manageable sections.

A working session with the board of directors to get their approval and support of the entire plan and implementation process may also be needed.

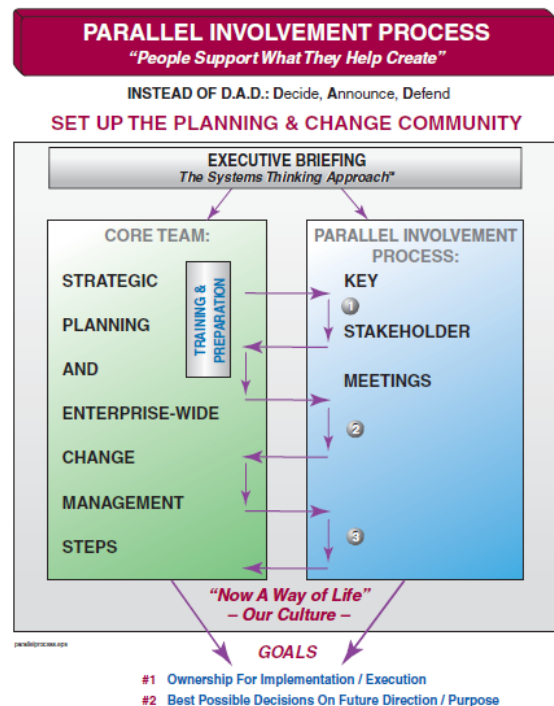
When holding public meetings, proper facility setup and management of large groups are tasks that need attention. Keep in mind that you may have less control of who will attend your meetings (i.e. lack of key stakeholders in attendance at this forum).

PARALLEL INVOLVEMENT PROCESS MEETING

Stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of the organization's objectives. This includes groups and individuals **INSIDE** your organization or **OUTSIDE** your organization.

Key points to remember

1. Meeting facilitators must be active members of the strategic planning team. In addition, run the *Parallel Involvement Process* meetings with two facilitators.
2. Explain the Strategic Plan concept or model first.
3. Explain the documents next. Don't just read the documents, educate the participants.
 - a. Make sure that the participants fully understand the concepts or intent and the specific meaning of key words and phrases.
4. Make sure "draft" is written on all documents.
5. Once the stakeholders start giving feedback, make sure they feel that they have been heard. The best way to do this is:



- a. Repeat back the essence of their statements.
 - b. Empathize with their feelings; not just the words.
 - c. Write down their statements on a flip chart and check with them to ensure accuracy (or better yet, have a second facilitator do so).
6. Focus discussions on substance, on the spirit or intent of the documents.
 7. If parts of a document or letter must be explained, use objective phrases like, “The intent was...” or “What was meant was...”
 8. Check their views vs. the documents you’ve just reviewed. Are they in fundamental agreement?
 9. At the conclusion, state actions that will be taken at the next meeting and later follow up!
 10. Thank them.

Additional ideas to consider

11. Go to stakeholders if at all possible—take the first step.
12. Take documents to meetings in “bite-size pieces” to ensure they are discussed and that the entire plan is not presented all at once.
13. As a general rule, don’t get feedback in a large group setting; break into subgroups with facilitators for each one (use flip charts). Meeting with the whole group should only take place at the beginning and end of the process
14. The best group size for excellent feedback is 10-15 people.
15. It is often useful to script each meeting. If not, be sure to develop a common set of PowerPoints or handouts for each meeting for consistency and clarity.
16. Decide whether everyone should have handouts of all the documents.
17. Help stakeholders to be clear on *means vs. ends* and *The Systems Thinking Approach*[®] that underlies good planning and implementation.
18. Allow enough meeting time for questions and answers. Give people time for ideas and reactions to be written down and turned in later
19. Key Success Measures (KSMs)—also called corporate goals—are the most difficult documents to gain feedback on. Consider asking only about the areas

of success to measure first, working the actual measurements and targets later with only the parties responsible for their approval and accountability

20. If you don't agree with feedback/comments, just collect data. Do not comment unless it is a big item that is crucial to explain. This meeting is an information sharing and feedback meeting; it is not a decision-making meeting. That will be done at the next planning meeting.
21. Beware of piecemeal versus big picture conversations—don't let the audience break down the discussion into isolated documents or paragraphs. Everything goes together and must be taken in context.
22. If there is a need to redirect a vocal person use a flip chart to capture their comments, checking with them for accuracy, and then move on.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT CYCLE

In summary, a complete Strategic Management process with a full set of Parallel Involvement Process meetings might look like this:

Step #	Strategic Management Process	Staff Support Team Role	Stakeholder Meetings (Face – to – Face) Combine Meetings as appropriate	Strategic Planning Update (Internal Communications)
1	Plan-to-Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for stakeholder meetings and communication • Training of planning team and facilitators for stakeholder meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kick-off meeting of Strategic Planning concept 	
2	Desired Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning team member • Participate in Parallel Involvement Process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Vision, Mission, and Values 	After each Strategic Management Session
3	Key Success Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning team member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review key success measures 	After each Strategic Management Session
4	Current State Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and present Current State Assessment data to Strategic Planning Team 		
5	Strategy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning team member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review core strategies and 	After each Strategic

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in Parallel Involvement Process 	Yearly Action Priorities	Management Session
6	Business Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for the 3-Year Business Unit planning (optional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop business unit 3-year plans 	
7	Annual Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for Annual Department Planning and Large Group Annual Review and Update Meeting Participate in Parallel Involvement Process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop department/ business unit annual plans 	After Strategic Management Session
8	Plan – to - Implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare final Strategic Planning Document Communications plan Yearly Map of Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information meetings 	After each Strategic Management Session
9	Strategy Implementation and Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of Strategic Change Leadership Team 		
10	Annual Review and Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation for Annual Strategic Review and Update Sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in implementation meetings on a quarterly basis or as appropriate Attend Annual Review and Update meetings 	After each Strategic Management Session

PARALLEL INVOLVEMENT PROCESS MEETING SAMPLE AGENDA AND MATERIALS

(Prework: This *Parallel Involvement Process* Article)

Agenda:

- I. Welcome, introductions, purpose, agenda
- II. Strategic Planning explained along with WIIFM (what’s in it for me)
- III. Explain “draft” documents

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IV. Gather feedback on the draft documents and record the key points on flip charts

V. Closure/next steps

PowerPoint or flip charts to be used at the meeting

- Strategic Planning (A-B-C-D-E model) overview
- Agenda, purposes
- *Parallel Involvement Process* purpose
 - 1) To share information and provide feedback to the core leadership team in order to troubleshoot and improve the plans, and
 - 2) To gain understanding, acceptance (i.e., buy-in), and commitment to the overall direction and implementation of the plan.

Documents for the meeting

- All draft documents to be covered

We wish you the best of luck in conducting the *Parallel Involvement Process*. Remember: “*People support what they help create.*” If individuals affected by the strategic plan are not involved in the *Parallel Involvement Process* during the planning and change process—resistance will be far greater. In other words, “pay me now or pay me later.”

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