

8 WAYS TO AVOID DECISION MAKER DISASTER

Don't forget to engage one of your most critical stakeholder groups – decision makers. It's a crucial and often challenging step in every engagement journey. Unfortunately, it's also one of the top reasons processes fall over.

WHY MAKE THE EFFORT?

You need decision makers to champion your process, not oppose it. They make the final decision, so they control the level of influence your community or stakeholders have over the issue. This affects every part of your process: from the promise you make to the activities you undertake.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Get this bit wrong and you face a myriad of potential consequences, such as:

- project delays,
- mid-process back tracking,
- project cancellation,
- damage to reputation and relationships,
- community and stakeholder outrage,
- poor process outcomes,
- negative effect on future processes.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON MISTAKES?

Common errors include:

- involving decision makers too late,
- not involving decision makers at all,
- attempting to involve decision makers but executing it poorly,
- leaving it too long between touch-points with decision makers.

WHY DO PEOPLE GET IT WRONG?

Engaging decision makers can be daunting. Common reasons for getting it wrong include:

- fear decision makers will stop or control a process,
- belief that decision makers don't play a role until the end of the process,
- barriers to reaching or engaging with decision makers (e.g. hierarchies, no avenues),
- lack of skill in pitching a process at the right level,
- belief that because no formal sign-off is officially required, no engagement is needed.

1

UNDERSTAND THE AVENUES

Work out who should convey information via what channel and in what format. Unsure? Ask a trusted leader for advice.

2

PRESENT A STRONG CASE

Present and get sign off on a process business case before you commence detailed design.

3

PITCH AT THE RIGHT LEVEL

Avoid getting into the 'how' (methodology) and stay strategic. Focus on context (e.g. engagement purpose, drivers, level of influence, overarching timelines).

4

AGREE ON THE PROMISE

Ensure the level of influence is agreed and understood. Check there is clarity around what this means for their role.

5

IDENTIFY WHEN AND HOW THEY CAN TAKE PART

Identify all the ways decision makers can be involved in the process beyond the final decision. There's input opportunities (e.g. feedback during planning phase or speaking at a deliberative forum), however the most valuable contribution is often listening and observing during sessions.

6

TOUCH BASE EARLY AND OFTEN

Consider timing. Build in decision maker briefings and touchpoints throughout the process and align them with milestones.

7

CONNECT THEM WITH THEIR PEERS

Give decision makers an opportunity to hear from those who have 'walked in their shoes' either in person or via case studies and videos.

8

PREPARE THEM FOR THE ROLLER COASTER

Challenging times moments are normal and expected. Prepare them for tricky situations, angst, ideas they don't expect and other 'wobbly' moments.



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