



Program Strategy and Positioning Blueprint

How to Build a Powerful Initiative and Get Executive Buy-In

By using a consultative approach for your initiatives, you are setting the stage to build strong alignment and secure key decision maker's support. Do your homework ahead of time. This blueprint only works if you have benchmark data and a strong execution plan ready to go. Being prepared is the best way to get your programs the recognition they deserve and to have the greatest impact possible.

Strategy #1: Align

This is the starting point and where you need to get your arms around the big picture. Here you will make sure that your program supports your organization's mission, vision and values. You should also take into account the short-term and long-term strategic goals of your company and be crystal clear on how your program initiative can support them.

ASK: "What are your biggest frustrations when it comes to employee engagement, benefit utilization, health care costs, leadership development?"

ASK: "What do you think is the biggest obstacles to achieving"

ASK: "How is this challenge impacting our profitability, customer service, employee satisfaction, etc.? Are there opportunities that we are missing out on because of this issue?"

ASK: "Do we know how much this challenge is costing us?"

ASK: "What will happen to your company/department if this this challenge is not addressed?"

EXPLAIN: "I'd like to share how the overall objectives of this initiative/project line up with our company's top business goals for the year and how it can help to address the challenges, costs or opportunities we just identified."

RISK FACTOR: Out of Sync from the Start

If your program is not aligned with organization's goals, then you can expect it to be the first thing cut from the budget. You must be able to defend how this program is critical to moving the company's goals forward and embed the program strategy in the company's strategy.

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Strategy #2: Assess

Follow the data. Use surveys, focus groups and other research methods to gather and analyze benchmark data from both internal and external stakeholders. This data needs to support the benefits/results that can be accomplished by implementing your initiative. If possible, tie it to real numbers based on your employee population so you can prove the value.

ASK: "What value would addressing this issue, challenge or opportunity have on the company?"

ASK: "What measurable impact would you expect to see first if this initiative were helping to address this issue?"

EXPLAIN: "Let me share with you industry benchmark data on what other top companies are doing to address this issue and the results they have seen."

EXPLAIN: "If we apply this same data to our organization, it looks like we could save \$\$ dollars in expenses next year. Does that sound reasonable to you?"

RISK FACTOR: Flying Blind

Without data to back up your plan - whether it's external about your industry, or internal data in the form of climate data, employee satisfaction scores or utilization rates on benefits programs - then you will have a hard time validating your program. And without benchmark data, you will be flying blind when the time comes to show the program's results.

Strategy #3: Address

Time to write the plan, taking into account everything you've learned. Here you will design your program strategy and success measures, and create the communication, marketing and rollout plan.

ASK: "Based on what we have discussed so far, it seems we are in agreement that X is a top priority for our company and would save us a significant amount of money if addressed. With other programs we have going on right now, what level of priority is addressing this issue for you?" *(Based on the level of priority, you may want to have two options to present for the roll-out of your initiative. One option may be a "phased" approach that takes into account other priorities that are more important. The second option would be a more comprehensive approach that focuses on your initiative as a top priority for the company.)*

EXPLAIN: "I've put together a proposed roll out plan that would require your internal communication and visible support to be successful. Can I share that with you now?"

Be sure that your plan has clear goals and measures and that the right stakeholders are involved in communication and support. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly outlined regarding plan execution and timelines for deliverables are defined.

RISK FACTOR: Doomed from the start

If your program plan does not address the key issues above, you can expect a lackluster rollout, resentment or even sabotage from key departments or leaders not included in the planning, and general confusion over the program's purpose. In short, it will fail.



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Strategy #4: Act

A well written plan is great but execution is everything – and it's where many plans fail. This is where the rubber hits the road and the rollout gets underway. It's where you lean on your internal champions to help promote the benefits and sell your program. And with every step you should track and communicate success and make adjustments as necessary.

ASK: "Are there any upcoming initiatives or dates on the calendar we need to be aware of or need to work around?"

ASK: "Are there any other groups or departments that should be brought into the discussions at this point?"

EXPLAIN: "I would like to agree that we meet to discuss ROI on the program monthly and to drive communication of the results. I've scheduled a 30 minute check in the last Friday of every month."

RISK FACTOR: *Lost in the shuffle*

The risk factor of a bad roll out, is your program getting lost in the noise of all the other competing programs. Other company priorities – with superior roll-out plans and champions – will take over and your program will lose momentum and be forgotten.

Strategy #5: Adjust

So, how'd it go? Because you have clearly defined and specific success measures (see Address above), you can quickly and easily evaluate results, recognize impacts of change, adapt and adjust if necessary.

ASK: "How quickly can we determine – and communicate – the early wins in the program?"

ASK: "How quickly can we incorporate feedback and changes?"

Keep your key stakeholders in the loop with any updates or changes to the plan and why you are shifting gears. What is being said about your initiative around the "water cooler" is many times just as important as the verbal and visible support from your internal champions. Incorporate feedback mechanisms (observable and measureable) that will keep your program flexible, meet employee needs and support company goals.

RISK FACTOR: *See no evil, hear no evil*

This risk factor is a lack of sustainability. You fail to listen to initial feedback and make the necessary adjustments, and instead plow ahead with the plan as written. The result is a short-term, low impact plan with because you did not adjust and adapt the plan.