Institutional Transparency in Processes, Communication, and Data

Transparency at the institutional level provides the university community with an opportunity to see that there is a commitment to inclusive excellence at the highest level of university leadership. Transparency comes through the communication of information and clear engagement of institutional stakeholders. Lack of transparency undermines full accessibility to university engagement, lack of clarity for institutional goal-setting and strategic planning, and establishing systems of accountability.

What is transparency?

- Clear, unhindered honesty in the way that business is conducted.
- A lack of hidden agenda or conditions, accompanied by the availability of full information required for collaboration, cooperation, and collective decision-making.
- Essential condition for a free and open exchange whereby the rules and reasons behind decisions are fair and clear to all engaged parties.

Transparent Communication

1. Communicate about important DEI issues more than once; continuously and consistently.
2. Use different types of media (email, campus newsletters, social media), over the course of time to ensure the message is received by everyone (e.g. faculty, staff, students, community stakeholders, etc.).

Transparent and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement

- Make the discussion of DEI both a top-down and bottom-up process, one that begins with executive leadership and becomes an integral part of campus conversation and daily life.
- Employ a variety of forums and formats: speeches, educational programs, town hall meetings, roundtables, online discussions, social media, and campus wide events.
- When developing working groups, include members from each of the key stakeholder groups that will be affected by the work at hand. In general, the purpose and mission of the committee should be taken into consideration when deciding upon membership.
Engage your team in the decision-making process as appropriate!

This does not mean the team has to MAKE the decision, but they should be a PART of the decision.

What are the benefits of transparent decision making?
- Team members learn how to trust one another
- Team members gain appreciation for the process of decision making
- Teams understand the goal of the decision
- Teams create space for minority viewpoints
- The team can help identify options for solutions and collectively learn from mistakes

Leaders, when making decisions about communication, processes, and data:
- Come to your team ready to learn
- Respect their experiences
- Guide the process so that all voices are heard
- Be open about the goals and parameters of the project or change
- Listen

STEP-WISE PROCESS FOR MAKING MORE TRANSPARENT DECISIONS

PHASE I: PICK A PROCESS

Step 1. Choose a process to exercise transparent communication and engagement.

Which processes are you frequently asked to clarify or justify? Hiring? Planning? Setting strategic goals? Promotions? Manager performance appraisals? Budget allocations?

Step 2. Reflect on the following questions to ask yourself to guide transparency:
Is the process currently documented in a place that all constituents know about and can access? If not, go ahead and create that documentation now (it doesn't have to be too detailed; just explain the different steps of the process and how it
works). You may find that the process isn't clear or consistent enough to document. In that case, document it the way you think it should work in the ideal case.

Does the completed process documentation explain how decisions are made at various points? For example, in a travel approval process, does it explain how a decision to approve or deny a request is made?

What are the inputs of the process? For example, when determining departmental goals for the year, what data is used for key performance indicators? Whose feedback is sought and incorporated? Who has the opportunity to review or "sign off"?

What assumptions does this process make? For example, in promotion decisions, do you assume that all eligible candidates are considered for promotion at the appropriate time?

What are the outputs of the process? For example, in assessing the performance of the managers, is the result shared with the manager being evaluated? Are any aspects of the review shared more broadly with the manager’s direct reports (areas for improvement, for example)?

Revise the documentation of the process until you are satisfied that it adequately explains the process and anticipates the potential questions.

**PHASE 2: GATHER FEEDBACK**

**Step 1. Encourage team members to provide feedback on the process.**

**Strategies for soliciting feedback:**
Post the process somewhere people can find it internally and note where they can make comments or provide feedback. A Google document works great with the ability to comment on specific text or suggest changes directly in the text.

Share the process document via email, inviting feedback

Mention the process document and ask for feedback during team meetings or one-on-one conversations
Give people a time window within which to provide feedback, and send periodic reminders during that window.

**Remember:** Silence does not equal endorsement. If you do not receive feedback, ask why. Are people too busy? Is the process not as important to people as you thought? Have you effectively articulated what you're asking for?

**Step 2. Iterate**

As you get feedback about the process, engage the team in revising and iterating on the process. Incorporate ideas and suggestions for improvement, and ask for confirmation that the intended feedback has been applied. If you don't agree with a suggestion, be open to the discussion and ask yourself why you don't agree and what the merits are of one method versus another.

Setting a timeframe for collecting feedback and iterating is helpful to move things forward. Once feedback has been collected and reviewed, discussed and applied, post the final process for the team to review.

**PHASE 3: IMPLEMENT**

Implementing a process is often the hardest phase of the initiative. But if you've taken account of feedback when revising your process, people should already been anticipating it and will likely be more supportive. The documentation you have from the iterative process above is a great tool to keep you accountable on the implementation.

**Step 1.** Review requirements for implementation. Many processes that can benefit from increased transparency simply require doing things a little differently.

**Step 2.** Set a timeline for implementation. Review the timeline with team members so they know what to expect. If the new process requires a process change for others, be sure to provide enough time for people to adapt to the new behavior, and provide communication and reminders.
Step 3. Follow up. After using the process for 3-6 months, check in with your team members to see how it's going. Is the new process more transparent? More effective? More predictable? Do you have any lessons learned that could be used to improve the process further?

References


