

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATIVE PLANNING

What do organizations gain from the use of participative planning and problem-solving? I see five benefits, beginning with the most concrete and immediate, but also including some that are longer term enhancers of productivity and effectiveness.

- The specific plans themselves – strategies, solutions, action plans. A world of rapid change requires constant planning and replanning, as circumstances change, as new competitors burst on the scene, as events require mid-course correction. So organizations need more planning and problem-solving today; they cannot run on automatic pilot. Thus, bringing together those with expertise and a stake in an issue is the fastest way to tackle problems, address opportunities, and define new directions.
 - Greater commitment – and ability – to implement decisions and strategies. When people participate in a planning process, they are certainly more likely to be committed to the plans, because they have talked them through, because the plans reflect their own thinking, and because the group has developed consensus. This is just common sense – although it did take scores of careful social science studies to convince some managers of this obvious truth. But organizations also find their own people better equipped to carry out the plans when they participate in shaping them because they are more knowledgeable and informed. They better understand the needs, the goals, and where their own responsibilities fit in with those of others.
 - More innovation – a larger portfolio of ideas, involvement of more people in the planning process, especially a mixture of people with different perspectives, generates new insights into problems and encourages a fresh look at opportunities. The cross-fertilization from a group bringing diverse backgrounds to a planning task can sometimes result in breakthrough strategies. I call this “Kaleidoscope thinking” – the ability to challenge traditional assumptions and define new patterns and possibilities.
 - A common framework for decision-making, communication, planning, and problem-solving. The team-building effects of participation extend well beyond the “high” of a successful planning session. A group with a common vocabulary and methodology for working together – e.g., a sense of how to conduct a meeting – does not have to argue over procedures but can go right to work. Thus, meetings become more productive, and teamwork is enhanced.
 - Encouragement of initiative and responsibility. This is the least tangible and longest-term benefit, and perhaps the most important. People who have been involved in participative planning are more likely to feel a sense of ownership for their part of the organization. They are more likely to take action when they see a problem or an opportunity, rather than assume it’s someone else’s responsibility
- Rosabeth Moss Kanter, from *Winning Through Participation*; Professor, Harvard School of Business