

GRADS *of* LIFE

Stakeholder Engagement in a Skills-First Movement

Scaling skills-first success leverages key stakeholder groups throughout the change process

Overview

Effective stakeholder engagement requires developing a deep understanding of the stakeholder groups involved in your skills-first transformation to ensure that the right people are engaged in the right activities to mobilize change. Involving key stakeholders early in the change process helps to surface concerns or resistance proactively and allows change leaders to more accurately anticipate other obstacles to inform timely mitigation strategies. Utilizing strong two-way communication channels throughout the change provides opportunities to continually incorporate feedback and signals to stakeholders that their input is valued, bolstering buy-in and support.

When considering which internal stakeholders to engage, we commonly find that successful skills-first transformations include representation from executive leadership, hiring managers, IT, HR, and legal teams at minimum.



Steps for Building Stakeholder Engagement

These six steps will allow leadership or change management teams to mobilize and posture stakeholders effectively.

- 1. Stakeholder Identification:** Identify who can support effective decision-making, cause or prevent project delays, and build or damage trust
- 2. Stakeholder Prioritization:** Consider your stakeholder groups, reflecting on their degree of support and level of influence
- 3. Stakeholder Analysis:** Assess how stakeholder allies and champions can be leveraged to address resistance from the organization
- 4. Stakeholder Mapping:** Use a stakeholder map as a visual overview of stakeholder identification and analysis to map needs, identify priorities, and plan communication and engagement strategies
- 5. Stakeholder Engagement Plan:** Prepare a plan that lists recommended engagement strategies that leverage feedback mechanisms and address resistance
- 6. Information Sharing:** Create a stakeholder engagement report that tracks progress, feedback, outcomes, and impact

Stakeholder Bias and Mitigation

As individuals progress along the **Change Adoption Curve**, they may show initial hesitation or demonstrate various levels of commitment to the change over time. Appropriate mitigation strategies can be deployed as needed to mitigate bias and support progress.

Stage	1. Awareness	2. Understanding	3. Acceptance	4. Ownership
Behavioral Indicators	Denial of the potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some display of doubt I already have a degree, Skills-First won't affect me I don't have a degree, but the org won't really let me move into corporate roles The org changes all the time, I doubt Skills-First will stick 	Active resistance and disengagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This doesn't make sense; why are we doing this? Why should I change? The old way worked just fine I don't understand how to find new roles for Skills-First. This new system is confusing and hard to navigate 	Accepting of the change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am excited to explore new roles I've seen a lot of great candidates come through under the Skills-First platform I didn't realize how many good internal and external candidates we could have been overlooking 	Dedication to supporting the change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the future instead of dwelling on the past Clear sense of personal role in Skills-First and how to provide individual impact
Leadership Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give employees plenty of information Let them know what changes are planned, who will be affected, how, and on what timetable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to employees; they don't want solutions, they want their responses and reactions acknowledged Ensure employees are trained on new systems and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide practical encouragement and support Involve employees in planning and setting goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide forums and opportunities to discuss change Recognize and reward those who respond well to the change

Key Takeaways

- **Enlist champions at every level of the organization** — Empower change champions with resources to evangelize the benefits of a skills-first approach. Ensure executive leadership and change champions are visible and vocal proponents of the change, modeling desired behaviors.
- **Actively identify, analyze, and address resistance** — Enable a process for stakeholders to provide feedback on what is working and what requires improvement; address feedback promptly and publicly to build accountability.

Supporting Resources and Tools

Stakeholder Mapping Template

Companies can leverage this stakeholder mapping matrix to identify and categorize potential stakeholders. Building an initial understanding of a stakeholder's level of support and influence can inform the best ways to engage with and support them.

The goal is to build as many potential partners and allies as possible. A strong base of support can quickly build momentum in the organization by amplifying communication on the strategic value of a skills-first transformation and sharing personal experiences or success stories. Remember that opponents or adversaries to change are just as important to engage, as they can derail progress if not given clarity on the "why" and "how".

