

Communication is to strategic planning what salt is to soup

By Auscar Wambiya

Without communication at the inception of the strategic planning idea through to the execution and evaluation stage, strategic planning is largely tasteless. Just like soup without salt. The place of communication in the whole strategic planning journey can therefore not be underestimated. Here, we quickly review how to communicate more effectively to ensure that the strategic plan delivers on its promises.

First, be transparent and share as much of the strategy as possible. It is important to be open right at the onset on why the organization needs a strategic plan, what it intends to cure, how we will go about the process of its development and execution and why we all need to get involved no matter the rank and file. This will require easy language that can be understood by all and sundry, given the diverse levels of qualifications that could be existent in an organization. The use of jargon that is understood by only the elites in an organization tends to limit the scope of participation and negates the essence of strategic planning.

Second, communicate comprehensively by explaining the process and ideas behind the process. As you become more open and transparent, you will soon realize that people have questions and are interested in knowing the explanations behind the explanations. Provide details as much as possible and explain why you cannot provide the details that you will not have provided so that suspicion is dealt with completely. Being comprehensive also means making available reference documents in case participants in the strategic planning process want to make references. The strategic implementation team must also be individuals with comprehensive understanding of the strategic planning process to help with those seeking clarifications.

Third, make communication personal by showing that you're implementing the strategy yourself. While delegation is good and recommended, the need to offer leadership in the strategic planning and implementation process need not be compromised by those charged with the overall responsibility of implementing the plan. Leading from the front inspires action and evokes interest, much more than sitting at the ivory tower to offer instructions.

Fourth, repeat, listen and refresh by asking questions to encourage participation and overcome obstacles. Appreciate diversity among the strategic plan actors and that there could be those who are slow in adapting to the new realities being proposed by the strategic planning process. This will require repetition. Asking questions will also help with harnessing of indigenous knowledge while creating an atmosphere where openness inspire new and creative ideas useful for the strategic planning process.

Finally, it would be critical to match the message to the moment by always considering the people involved in the discussion and fine tuning your message accordingly. Because strategic planning process cuts across diverse groups, messages must be fine tuned to meet levels and capacities throughout the process. While gathering data to beef the strategic plan content, ensure that the data collection instruments are customised based on targeted respondents and not similar in design, content and scope due to the diversity of the respondents. That way, quality response based on capacities would be guaranteed.

The writer is a Consultant in Strategy, Leadership and Governance