

Innovation In Strategy Development: Bringing Employee and Expert Opinion Into Strategy Development

Industry & Client Situation

An energy industry holding company involved in a comprehensive long-term strategy development initiative was seeking knowledge from recognized experts about industry evolution. At the same time, the client wanted to inform its employees about critical issues facing the industry and solicit input on the process from them. As a Fortune 1000 company, accomplishing all of these goals in a short amount of time presented a challenge.

Approach

Two of the most critical flaws of most strategy development efforts are limited employee involvement and buy-in, and the ability to solicit a wide range of external points of view. To address the needs of the strategy development process in a time-sensitive manner, Bridge structured and managed seven half-day seminars that addressed topics ranging from distribution technologies to energy markets to engaging employees in their jobs.

Hundreds of employees (executives to bargaining unit members), board members, and select customers, community members, regulators, and media attended each of the seminars. The diverse audience served to inform multiple stakeholders and surface concerns of all participants.

The seminars were constructed to address key issues and provide a diversity of views through facilitated panel discussions. Panelists were Bridge or client contacts considered to be subject-matter experts on the seminar topic. There was no representation of the company viewpoints on the panels—only potential inputs to the strategy process.

During the discussion, employees were given the opportunity to ask questions during an interactive Q&A segment with panelists. The questions and panelist responses provided a wealth of information as well as a window on employee and external constituent concerns. Informal small group breakout sessions gave audience members an additional opportunity to react and provide input to the strategy process.

Seminars were videotaped and distributed to interested employees and Board members. Bridge later used video summaries of the seminars during a Board meeting to present a snapshot of expert opinion on the future of the utility industry and to demonstrate employee enthusiasm and involvement.

Results

Reaction to the seminars from employees, executives, and external stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive. The seminar format achieved the goal of bringing together employees, Board members, regulators, customers, and community members to educate them about the challenges facing the industry. Points of view espoused by panelists inspired the discussions of the strategy teams. Panelists were also unexpectedly generous with their time in follow up discussions and supporting information.

Buy-in was also far beyond expectations. Employees, particularly at the lower levels of the company, appreciated the opportunity to participate alongside executives and receive direct responses to their questions. Board members increased their awareness of issues and witnessed employee, customer, and regulatory feedback. The process and discussion topics received favorable and extensive coverage in a variety of local and industry publications.

The seminars are now a milestone in a broader cultural transformation.