

Sample Questions for Stakeholders

The following questions may help stakeholders in their initial meetings and later interviews to reach agreements about:

- The general issue to be addressed
- The organizational goal to be reached within the general issue to be addressed
- Expected job outcomes needed to reach the organizational goal
- Expected outcomes of the OPQ process
- The stakeholder group members that will be involved
- Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
- Timing and next steps in the process

Business need/goal and perceived problem

- What is the organizational business need/goal? What is the organization trying to accomplish?
- What types and how many levels of goals are we dealing with?
- What is the timeline for achieving the organizational goal?
- What is the performance issue or problem that needs to be addressed? Or, what performance problem is most important to fix in order to reach this organizational goal?
- What would be the results if this problem were addressed? What would the situation look like if there was no problem? (The answer to this question should re-confirm what the organization is trying to accomplish and/or expected outcomes of the process.)

(Note: stakeholders often have a general sense about what might be causing the problem(s) and ideas for solutions. However, care should be taken not to accept any of these causes or solutions as "truth" without further investigation.)

- What are the possible causes?
- What are possible solutions?
- What are potential constraints? (political, financial, etc.)
- Is the problem worth solving? Discuss and make comparisons if possible with similar organizations and best practices.

Stakeholders and partners

- Who are the key stakeholders? What individuals need to be involved as key stakeholders in addition to the ones already identified?
- Do the stakeholders all see the problem and the goal in the same way? If not, what are the differences in perspective? How will the stakeholder group come to an agreement on the general issue and organizational goal to be addressed?

- How will stakeholders work together to achieve the goal? What will be the various roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders?
- Who are the organization's partners and competitors?

Performers and performance

- What components/performers (staff/departments/facilities/organizations) are most involved in achieving the business goals specified above? Which components affect the problem area identified above?
- How would improved staff or organizational performance help us reach these goals?
- What are the desired outcomes from the performers (staff/departments/facilities/organizations) that are most involved in achieving the organizational goals? (i.e., what is the end result of the things that the performers do that is valuable toward achieving the organizational goals?)
- What are the processes and tasks that performers carry out to produce the desired outcomes?
- How do these components and processes relate? Where do they interact or intersect?
- What standards or indicators are currently used to measure performance of these processes and tasks?
- How well are employees/departments performing in this area now?
- How do we [or this organization/department/unit of the Ministry] currently gather this kind of performance data?

Factors affecting desired performance

Stakeholders may have an even more specific sense about what might be causing the problem(s). As stakeholders continue to explore the performance issues, the following questions may be helpful in getting a more detailed picture and in preparing a plan and instruments for more detailed data collection.

- Let us look at the positive side for a moment. What helps employees/departments do their work well?
- What hinders them from doing their job well?

Depending on the answers to the above questions, there may be several follow-up questions.

Organizational systems: How well do organizational systems support the kind of performance you want to see?

- Do employees have clear job expectations and authority, communicated orally and in writing?
- Are job descriptions in alignment with the organization's strategic direction and supported by clear policies and processes, and realistic workloads?

- Is there a sustainable system of supportive supervision that promotes joint problem-solving, mentoring, and two-way communication?
- How effective are the management systems (finance, human resources, logistics/supply chain, information)?

Incentives: Does the organization provide enough of the right incentives to make the work worth doing?

- Do employees receive fair compensation, including salary, benefits, allowances, and other non-monetary forms of compensation?
- How is good performance rewarded or recognized? What consequences are present for poor performance? How well do employees understand what kinds of performance will result in rewards, recognition or negative consequences?
- How well do employees know the performance standards? How do they find out about them?
- What are the opportunities in the organization for career advancement or engaging, meaningful work?

Tools and physical environment: Do employees have the necessary tools and physical resources they need to work effectively?

- Do employees have the equipment, supplies, job aids, service standards and protocols, and recordkeeping instruments they need?
- Are adequate supplies of drugs and other commodities on hand?
- What measures are in place so that the workplace is safe from infection transmission, accidents, and workplace violence for its employees and clients?
- How reliable and up to date are the information technology and communication systems?

Skills and knowledge: Do employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to do their jobs?

- Basic literacy and math skills?
- Clinical, technical, vocational, or professional knowledge and skills?
- Critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills?

Individual attributes: Do personal attributes of individuals affect their ability to work together and achieve their goals?

- Do the mission of the organization and various aspects of the job motivate the employee to perform well?
- Does the job allow the employee to use his/her strengths?
- How does the employee's understanding of the roles and rights of women/men in the world contribute positively or negatively to his/her performance?

- How do the employee's religious, ethical, and moral values support or prohibit the employee from performing her/his job as expected?
- How does the employee's own identity related to gender, ethnicity, caste, or class affect her/his ability to perform as expected?

External environment: Is employee or institutional performance affected by factors in the external environment (outside of your organization or institution)?

- What are the national policies, regulations, standards, and professional scopes of work that organizations and employees must adhere to?
- What societal norms regarding culture, class, religion, ethnicity, and gender may affect the performance of the organization and employees?
- What is the condition of the national and local infrastructure networks—e.g., roads, water supply, waste management, power supply, telecommunications/internet, public transportation, buildings?
- Have there been political changes in the government that affect the ability of the organization and employees to perform?

As the meetings and conversations progress, the following question may become important:

- [Stakeholder] has mentioned that they see [issue] as important in terms of performance. How do you see that issue? Is this something you agree with? Think would be important?

Tips

Be persistent yet diplomatic in helping people to be descriptive, specific or clear when they respond to questions about performance. Mid- or top-level employees often have an intuitive sense that change needs to occur, but sometimes they have trouble defining what they want. In many instances, they have not been asked questions about performance in quite the same way as proposed here. They may respond with words like “things” or “medical necessities” or “good work”. The art of these meetings is to know when, how, and how much to press for specifics.

It is critical to use results-oriented questions and to be prepared to follow up as appropriate. Many customers/clients are more comfortable discussing inputs and “what is needed to do better” (e.g., supplies or training or better facilities) than results. People can identify results when questioned in the right way, but it takes some degree of patience and a clear understanding on the part of the interviewer as to what is a result and what is an input.

Note-taking will be helpful during these initial meetings. The OPQ leader must have good questions, ask them at the right time, ask follow-up questions appropriately to get more depth and assure understanding, and take notes. Notes need to be thorough and clear enough so that the meaning can be understood days later when you have time to go through them to look for important patterns and themes.

Agree on next steps in the process, taking into consideration the information gathered regarding timeline, resources, agreements, roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. Put this information and agreements into a letter or notes and share with all stakeholders.