



Tool

Meaningful stakeholder dialogue Promoting stakeholder commitment

SEER





Introduction

This tool is part of a collection of resources, including tools, knowledge documents, and training, designed to help companies prepare and conduct [meaningful dialogues](#) with their stakeholders. Meaningful stakeholder engagement is fundamental for (International) Responsible Business Conduct (IRBC) and is reflected in [all steps of the due diligence process](#) as included in the OECD guidelines.

If you want to engage in dialogue with stakeholders, you cannot automatically assume that stakeholders will respond to such an invitation. Since dialogue is a two-way process, you will have to consider the capacity and commitment of your stakeholder(s). This tool will help you understand what influences stakeholder commitment and how your company can actively promote and support it.



Factors that influence stakeholder commitment

Commitment is essential for meaningful dialogue, and fostering it requires a strategic approach. As a company, you must create an environment where stakeholders feel valued, heard, and see tangible outcomes from their participation. Below are several factors you can leverage to enhance stakeholder commitment.

1. Clarity about goals and expectations

Establishing clear objectives and expectations for the dialogue is crucial to engaging your stakeholders. Clearly communicating the 'why and how' of the dialogue and the reasons for involving them ensures everyone is aligned and working towards the same goals. Openness to feedback further enhances this alignment, leading to better communication and collaboration. It is important for stakeholders who are familiar with the due diligence process to understand the context of the dialogue within this process, increasing the chances of success as they are more likely to commit to the dialogue.

2. Your commitment to the dialogue

Your company's commitment to the dialogue directly influences the commitment of the other participants. This commitment is demonstrated through your sincerity in understanding stakeholders' interests and concerns, your willingness to prevent or address adverse impacts, and your readiness to make adjustments to business operations or processes based on the insights gained through dialogue. The time you invest and the continuity of the dialogue are also key indicators of your commitment. By embedding stakeholder dialogue into your (international) responsible business conduct (IRBC) policy, you clarify your dedication to stakeholders, helping them understand what to expect. The [tool](#) 'Preconditions for starting a dialogue' offers additional tips and actions to guide this process.

3. Compliance with agreements and transparency about the follow-up

A critical factor in maintaining stakeholder commitment is fulfilling the agreements and commitments made during the dialogue. It is important to be transparent about how you follow up on the dialogue's results and how these affect processes, decisions, and outcomes. When stakeholders trust that your company will act on its commitments, they are more likely to stay engaged.

4. Added value for the stakeholder

Stakeholders are more inclined to participate in dialogue when they perceive personal or collective value in the dialogue. This might include shared interests in the dialogue's outcomes, gaining valuable insights, building or strengthening collaborative relationships, or having the opportunity to influence a company's policies, strategies, goals, or actions.

5. Opportunities for engaging in dialogue

Stakeholders may face various barriers to engage in dialogue, which can affect their willingness to commit. These barriers can include time and capacity constraints, safety concerns, power imbalances, the presence of particular stakeholder groups or representatives, language, location, transportation, and timing issues. It is important to address these barriers by linking the dialogue to the stakeholders' perceptions, knowledge, and expertise. For more details, refer to Step 6 of the [tool](#) 'Identifying your stakeholders'. If stakeholders desire, you can also gather insights through other methods, such as periodic surveys or open forums. Ensure that these insights are followed up with discussions whenever possible.

6. Nature of the relationship between the company and stakeholder

A personal relationship with stakeholders enhances trust and reduces barriers to dialogue. Strengthening these relationships is crucial. Regular informal interactions, without a specific agenda, can help build trust. It is also important to minimise rotation among contact persons to maintain consistent and known points of contact.

The factors influencing commitment can vary significantly across stakeholder groups. More information about two commonly consulted groups in the context of IRBC is detailed below.



Commitment from suppliers

A supplier might already be focused on IRBC, with support from its management, which can be evident in how they discuss IRBC, acknowledge systemic or sensitive issues, recognise the value of responsible production, or exhibit a management attitude characterised by long-term planning and a people-oriented approach. On the other hand, some suppliers may avoid discussions about IRBC, adopt a defensive stance, or insist that there are no issues. This could stem from apprehension about engaging in dialogue, lack of time, or differing priorities. To foster supplier commitment to dialogue, consider the following points:

1. **The commercial interest** (leverage/purchasing volume and long-term purchasing commitment) determines whether a supplier, but also a purchasing company, engages in dialogue and their approach to it. If the purchasing volume is low or there is little commitment to a long-term relationship, the economic risk for the purchasing company is minimal, and the supplier's interest may also be limited, as they have little at stake. The commitment you request from the supplier regarding IRBC should be proportional to the current level of commercial commitment or what can be offered, see example.

Example

When rolling out a training program to suppliers, a significant difference was observed between the purchasing relationships of Company A and Company B with their respective suppliers. Company A had considerable influence and had built a personal relationship with its supplier, allowing the brand to offer the training as a gesture of support. As a result, the dialogue quickly gained momentum. In contrast, Company B's purchasing volume was minimal, even after increasing order quantities, and there was no personal relationship with the supplier. Consequently, the focus of the discussion remained centred on expanding business rather than fostering meaningful dialogue.

Commitment can be enhanced by collaborating with other purchasing brands to increase leverage, offering positive incentives like increased orders, or applying negative incentives such as temporarily suspending orders in cases of continued non-engagement when issues have been identified. Generally, it is advisable to keep your supplier base as small as possible and focus on establishing stable, long-term relationships with parties who are then more likely to engage in IRBC discussions.

2. **Equality in the purchasing relationship.** This includes fair pricing strategies and shared responsibility in addressing risks. In other words: to what extent you as a company support the supplier in their change or improvement processes. Show genuine interest in the local context and strive to understand the supplier's reality and perspective as if it were your own. This approach ensures that suppliers feel heard and valued.
3. **Actively promoting the importance of dialogue** on IRBC (or a specific topic) and convincingly stating everyone's added value can help engage suppliers who may be hesitant due to time constraints or a perceived lack of urgency. Sharing success stories from previous dialogues and demonstrating how corporate social responsibility is integrated into your own company can also be persuasive. This is particularly relevant for intermediaries in indirect trade relationships, such as importers or agents, who must endorse the importance of dialogue and IRBC and convey this to the supplier, see example on the next page.

Example

A company struggled to discuss IRBC with its supplier due to an intermediate trading relationship that hindered direct contact and did not emphasise the importance of IRBC. The intermediary claimed that the supplier was reluctant. Had the relationship been direct, the company could have initiated a dialogue about the reluctance and worked to address it. This experience highlighted the importance of involving agents and other intermediaries in IRBC and establishing clear agreements on roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, you can enlist other stakeholders to emphasise the importance of dialogue and convey the message, see example.

Example

A clothing company sought to engage in dialogue with suppliers about the results of digital surveys conducted among workers in five different clothing factories. To motivate suppliers to participate, the company emphasised the added value for both suppliers and employees. However, in some cases, this was not enough to secure commitment. The company then invited other suppliers who had previously participated in the process to share their experiences and the benefits they had gained. This approach proved successful in reassuring hesitant suppliers about the time investment, clarifying that there were no negative consequences, and highlighting how they could benefit from the survey results themselves.



Commitment from NGOs

Below are several key points that are particularly relevant when engaging with NGOs. However, this does not mean that you must fully meet these criteria before reaching out to NGOs.

1. Corporate commitment to identifying and addressing IRBC risks

Your company should be committed to identifying and acknowledging IRBC risks in your production countries and at production sites, involving rightsholders in the process, taking responsibility for preventing and addressing these risks, and critically evaluating your own contributions to these risks and impacts, such as through your purchasing practices.

Example

- Companies that consider compliance with **fundamentallabour rights** by suppliers and production countries in their purchasing practices contribute to creating an environment conducive to dialogue.
- Companies that (intend to) pay a fair price, thereby establishing a realistic economic foundation to combat systemic issues like child labour.

2. Commitment to structural dialogue on IRBC risks

Your company should be dedicated to engaging in ongoing dialogue about IRBC risks and (potential collaboration in) addressing these risks, particularly when the likelihood and severity of negative impacts are significant. It is important for a company to have a long-term vision for IRBC, which fosters confidence in a careful and comprehensive approach to risk management. NGOs prefer ongoing involvement rather than one-off engagements.

3. Commitment to contextualising risks and issues

Your company should be committed to placing particular risks and issues within the broader context of various IRBC risks and themes. For example, discussing freedom of association and collective bargaining as enabling rights in conversations about living wages.

Example

When supporting a minimum wage increase in a production country, it is important to research related risks, discuss them comprehensively, and address them where necessary. Wages, for instances, are closely connected to working hours.

Information and support

This tool is part of a collection of tools, knowledge documents and training to help companies set up and implement a [meaningful dialogue](#) with their stakeholders. Meaningful stakeholder engagement is fundamental for (international) responsible business conduct and is reflected in [all steps of the due diligence process](#) according to OECD guidelines.

Click on a topic below for more information and support preparing and conducting a meaningful stakeholder dialogue.



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Colophon

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