

# Participation: A Long Process

**Definition** • According to Joelle Zask, **to participate** means: **to take part** (in a group working toward a shared goal), **to contribute** (by offering something of value), and **to benefit** (by receiving something in return).

## FIVE KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE PARTICIPATING

[OR INVITING OTHERS  
TO PARTICIPATE]



### WHY DO WE WANT TO INVOLVE PEOPLE?

1

It's essential to understand why an organization is initiating a **participatory process**. Participation should be seen as a tool serving a **specific purpose** –not as an end in itself. Clarifying the objectives behind participation **helps define its scope and relevance**.

### WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS?

2

Launching a participatory process requires identifying **who is included –or excluded– and according to what criteria**. There may be a gap between those invited to participate and those who actually engage in the process.

### HOW FAR ARE WE WILLING TO GO?

3

Agreeing on the expected level of participation is crucial. There are four main levels of involvement:

1. **Information** – Providing clear and complete information is a prerequisite for meaningful participation. No one can offer a valid opinion without being properly informed.
2. **Consultation** – People are invited to share their views, but do not contribute to shaping the proposal and may not see their input reflected in the outcome.
3. **Collaboration (Concertation)** – Participants are involved throughout the process and contribute to building the proposal, even if the final decision is not theirs.
4. **Co-decision** – This level grants participants decision-making power and shared responsibility for the final outcome.

### WHAT TOPICS ARE ON THE TABLE?

4

Clarifying the subject matter of the participatory process is essential. Is it about:

- **Operational choices** – practical, day-to-day decisions?
- **Managerial choices** – resource allocation, team organization?
- **Strategic choices** – long-term direction and positioning?

### IN WHAT SETTING DOES PARTICIPATION TAKE PLACE?

5

Participation happens in both **formal spaces** (AGMs, board meetings, team meetings) and **informal ones** (lunch breaks, coffee machine conversations, etc.). It's important to **distinguish between these spaces and define which topics are appropriate** for each. Since many important discussions start informally, **ensuring that information flows freely** and reaches the relevant parts of the organization is key.