

# engaging PEOPLE

Newsletter from  
Twyford Consulting  
*Specialists in  
Engaging People*

Volume 12 No. 2

December 2007  
Edition

## Developing a “culture” of engagement

BY VICKI VAARTJES

When it comes to engagement, we believe that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for organisations and communities. Our approach (Figure 1), targets three “domains” of engagement. We realise the need to work in all three of these domains to encourage the development of a “culture” of engagement.

At the centre are the organisation’s **leaders**, those charged with responsibility to determine policy, strategy, direction and focus. Our work at this level includes improving the way executive leaders engage with each other across boundaries, to create strong integrated leadership teams, and equipping leaders with the knowledge and capabilities they need to reinforce a “culture” of engagement.

The next domain is that of **internal stakeholders** – the staff and workforces responsible for creating the outcomes of the organisation. In this domain, the focus of our effort is in equipping middle and front line managers, and work teams with the capabilities they need to create and sustain engagement-filled workplace environments.

Last and by no means least, are the **external stakeholders** represented by the outside ring – those in the community and in other organisations

that are impacted by, and interested in the activities of the organisation. This is the domain of “community engagement” and our work here focuses on developing the practical skills of community engagement practitioners and providing practical support in the design and implementation of engagement initiatives.



*New addition to our team, Dr Steve Smith*

To help our clients engage across all three layers we have welcomed into our team Dr Stephen Smith, whose skills nicely complement our collective capabilities as specialists in engaging people. Steve is a welcome addition to our team and brings national and international experience in implementing employee learning and development programs in a broad range of businesses. He has unique professional experience and academic qualifications in the areas of leadership development, succession planning, business management, executive coaching, social systems, knowledge management, action learning, strategic development, and clinical counselling. Welcome Steve!



Figure 1: Our multi-dimensional approach to engagement

*A flexible and dynamic team of consultants which specialises in engaging people to make better decisions*

# Engagement - what do we really mean?

BY VICKI VAARTJES

Driving home recently, it struck me that being engaged in something is a lot like driving a car “in gear”. You become engrossed, propelled purposefully and energetically forward toward your goal – getting to your destination safely. Being in gear means you can accommodate the stops and starts of the traffic, and pull up the inclines. Being disengaged on the other hand is like coasting along in “neutral” and maybe even stalling on the uphill runs. Moving forward? Yes. Purposefully and energetically? Not even close!

At the start of our newly revised “Company Profile” are the words:  
*“We believe that organisations and communities generate better outcomes when people within them are engaged and involved.”*

What do we really mean when we say “engaged”? Is it just rhetoric, a buzz word? How do we create an environment where engagement is possible if we understand so little of what it actually is?

Engagement can be defined as “a state of being”, an “emotional engagement or commitment”. A state of being? This suggests that engagement is related to the essence or nature of our “being” as humans. Pretty deep and a bit hard to get our heads around the practical implications! Even our mechanical metaphor of “being in gear” leaves us cold when it comes to the practical realities of engagement.

So how to understand what “engagement” means? Our own direct experience is a great place to start. We know what it is like to be deeply engaged in what we are doing – so thoroughly engrossed that we forget about other peripheral things, such as the time or the fact that we are hungry. Engagement generates a state of deep enjoyment.

It is an experience that strengthens our capability and engenders a sense of purpose. It feels good, and it is safe to say that we have all experienced that at some time in our lives.

Engagement is a fundamentally human condition applicable to all people irrespective of where they are and what they do. Maslow considered engagement in work that is meaningful and fulfilling to be one of the basic human needs. So one could argue that we are pre-programmed to pursue activities that fulfil this need. We see this intrinsic drive in the way that people select and pursue their careers, sports and hobbies.

What a relief! It turns out that as “agents” of engagement, we don’t need to do all the work to create it – what we need to do is understand how to best engage those who have been attracted to our organisation or community and meet them in the middle. It is a two way conversation involving those who can be engaged and those who want to do the engaging.

Engagement isn’t essential, as long as you do not need the understanding, capability and commitment of others to implement any plans or decisions. If you do need these things, and the success of the initiative depends upon them, then an engagement strategy that fits within your time and budget constraints is essential.

Remember that in the end engagement is a human process. To engage others deeply and meaningfully around any deliberation, we must be willing to bring ourselves deeply and meaningfully into the discussion. Anything less is like coasting in neutral.



Dr Vicki Vaartjes

## Avoiding the crocodiles!

BY JOHN DENGATE

This year I have been working with a local council to help them avoid the crocodiles. Council wanted to upgrade its small and inadequate civic centre – Council offices and community facilities – while making sure ratepayers’ money was spent wisely. The crocodiles were the many issues and stakeholders that need to be considered in such decisions – ready to bite you on the bum!

The client was quite willing to engage with the community around getting it right, but had already agreed to move forward with the project.

The traditional thinking would have been to provide information to the public using some public forums, and move on with the detailed design. This approach was challenged, with value recognized in taking the stakeholders on the journey, especially helping people to understand the background and what had already been decided.

Some subtle but important changes to the engagement strategy included making the process more **deliberative** ie building knowledge, and allowing people time to “chew” on that prior to

providing considered input.

This was done in a number of ways:

- rather than one-off public events, activities were built as a sequence of workshops, meetings and an open house so people built understanding over time.
- the events themselves had simple creative elements that allowed people to “connect the dots” through experience, exploration and discussion. We used a world café discussion, a tour with a twist, audio visual presentations, and cardstorming.
- Random selection was used to augment the self selected attendees to ensure the diversity of the area’s ratepayers was reflected in the deliberation and subsequent feedback to Council

These small but important design elements focused on deliberation and increased the confidence of both the community, and the elected officials, in the outcome.

It has also helped avoid the sharp teeth!



John Dengate

# Vote 1 Deliberation

BY STUART WATERS

Being something of a masochist I spent much of November 24<sup>th</sup> standing in the rain handing out “how to vote” forms for the federal election. My local booth is a quiet backwater so I had plenty of time to ponder the mysteries of our democracy while trying to ignore the water trickling down my neck.

Of course elections are all about voting and voting is all about winning. The candidate with the most votes wins the Seat. The party with the most Seats wins Government.

This ritual of voting for or against something is deeply entrenched in our culture. As practitioners of community engagement we often encounter the desire to resolve issues, find solutions, or reject proposals with a vote. Rarely does a public meeting go by without someone calling for a “show of hands” or moving a motion and demanding a vote.

While voting is what we are most familiar with there is a growing recognition of the power of processes that ask us to do more than tick a box or raise our hand. Deliberative processes require us to engage with material and ideas. We enter into dialogue with others. We hear diverse perspectives. We ask

questions, challenge others and are challenged. We think and talk. Having deliberated in this way we are in a position to provide meaningful and considered input that can support better decisions.

While deliberating about deliberation on election day I was pleased to reflect on the processes we run for our clients; you can read about some in this newsletter. We must be able to incorporate into our electoral system some of the techniques we regularly use in our community engagement practice. Others are having these thoughts too, with exciting developments all over the world in the area of deliberative democracy.

So I say yes to deliberation. Yes to providing people with meaningful information. Yes to dialogue rather than debate. Yes to providing decision-makers with quality input. Yes to inclusive processes. Yes to drawing on collective wisdom.

All those in favour raise your hand...



*Stuart Waters*

# Deliberation in practice

BY VIVIEN TWYFORD

About 4.30 pm last Sunday my colleague John Dengate and I were driving home from a northern Sydney suburb, exhausted after having facilitated a deliberative process during the day. I really enjoy facilitating. Working “in the moment” with a group of people to solve problems is an exciting thing to do. There is something special and very powerful about problem solving in a group.

Often, after a successful facilitation I am on a high. I have seen the power of the group emerge, I have seen dialogue and activity generate new and innovative solutions and I have seen wise and lasting decisions achieved. This was our feeling last Sunday.

But not all my efforts are successful and it helps to reflect on what makes one group work well while another is hi-jacked by bickering, factionalism, arguments and dissent.

Some time ago I read an article by Dr Lyn Carson of the University of Sydney on the topic of deliberative processes and later I heard her speak at an IAP2 conference. Dr Carson suggests that a deliberative process needs 3 elements. First, the people in the room need to be representative of the community of interest affected by the decision to be made. Second, the processes must be truly deliberative, which means those deliberating must be appropriately informed, have the opportunity to challenge, question and enter into genuine dialogue about the topic and be supported through a process that encourages listening and a free exchange of ideas and opinions prior to decision-making. Thirdly, the outcome of the deliberations must have a real influence on the final decision.

These 3 elements make sense to me. In the deliberative process in Sydney the 45 people in the room were representative of the broader population in the local government area across 3

dimensions, place of residence, age and gender. They had been selected in two ways. Firstly 16 people who had attended a public information session and who had nominated as deliberative participants were selected. Secondly a random group of 34 participants were selected from local residents to ensure a balance across suburb of residence, age and gender. In all last Sunday, 50 people agreed to come, 45 actually turned up.

The deliberative process followed a site tour. This allowed even those who had not followed the issues to have a personal understanding of the constraints and opportunities of the site and to ask questions. Sitting down to lunch together allowed the group to get to know each other informally. Then they worked together all afternoon in a process designed to help them set expectations and boundaries of working together, understand the scope of their work, explore the information provided, listen to and understand the views of others and then come to a decision that most participants could live with. Some decision-makers, community members and the media observed the process.

Time will tell how much influence the outcome of this process will have on the decision-makers. We believe the messages sent by the group are clear and powerful and will influence the decision yet to be made. It was a great experience for us and for the participants.

If processes like this are carefully designed and implemented, and are both observable and transparent in their ability to influence decisions, not only will “wicked” problems be solved, but also positive and significant relationships will be forged to benefit both community members and decision makers.



*Vivien Twyford*

# A Challenge Rewarded

BY MAX HARDY

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

"Congratulations, you won!"

"Fantastic! Won what?"

"Project of the Year!"

"Really? Wow!.....You serious? Really??"

Bea Briggs, former IAP2 President, called me from Mexico, her adopted home. Several former Presidents of IAP2 made the decision. The project...well it's sort of complicated to explain. I will try.

Craig Wallace, the Chair of the ACT Disability Advisory Council had heard we had run some innovative deliberative processes. He invited me to help him to design and implement a process whereby the Canberra community can rate themselves on their progress toward a vision.



*Craig Wallace ex-Chair ACT Disability Advisory Council.*

ACT Disability Reform Group in 2002 are readily available for people with disabilities and families throughout their lives.

The ACT Disability Advisory Council launched the document on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004. The Council issued this Challenge to improve the way the community involves, supports and provides for people with disabilities.

The Disability Advisory Council was given responsibility by the Minister for preparing a biennial scorecard on community progress towards meeting Challenge 2014.

## Our Approach

In mid 2006 Craig and I tailored a Citizens' Jury approach, as a powerful and inclusive approach to producing this scorecard. Specifically, a Jury provided a way to get the community involved in renewing the challenge and in a sense it means that the community itself issues the scorecard.

A cross section of people in Canberra were recruited to listen to stories, consider various pieces of evidence to complete the scorecard. Their analysis, commitment and their wise recommendations were totally amazing. Check out this link if you want to find out what they said [http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/5233/Scorecard\\_Compiled\\_Report\\_2711061.pdf](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/5233/Scorecard_Compiled_Report_2711061.pdf)

Since the Citizens' Jury report was delivered a range of actions have been taken to take the ACT closer toward the vision known as Challenge 2014.



*Max Hardy holding the IAP2 Core Values Award 'Project of the Year' 2007*

## My Reflections

It is hard to know whether this project is more 'deserving' than a number of others I have had a hand in. I do think it was innovative. I also think there were a number of factors that made it work really well.

- A client, Craig Wallace and the entire ACT Disability Advisory Council, who were really committed to doing something meaningful, and were prepared to try something different.
  - Connections with key people in government who were willing to become involved and give it a go
  - Strong existing networks to draw people in and to generate interest in the project
  - A strong project team.
- And what have I learnt?
- As a society we continue to under-estimate the extent to which so-called ordinary citizens can rise to the challenge when given good information, time to think and deliberate, and the responsibility to act in the interests of all.

Won an Award! Cool.

## Background

Challenge 2014 is a vision for the future of disability in the ACT. It is a 10-year vision that describes a world where the vision and values developed by the

## Taking our Book to the World

Early in 2007 Twyford Consulting published *Beyond Public Meetings: Connecting Community Engagement with Decision-Making*, a practical guide to planning community engagement. Based on our many years' experience *Beyond Public Meetings* identifies the basics: who is a community, what is community engagement and what are the major challenges. It explores these elements using interesting case studies and describes in detail the three foundations of good community engagement: values-based; decision-oriented and goal-driven.

In response to demand, particularly from NZ, the UK and North America, *Beyond Public Meetings* is now available internationally. No matter where you are, you can purchase our book from a convenient location:

Our website ([www.twyford.com.au](http://www.twyford.com.au))

Amazon.com ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))

Capital Books in Wellington NZ (04 473 9358, fax 04 472 3163, email [info@capitalbooks.co.nz](mailto:info@capitalbooks.co.nz))

IAP2 Denver Office (Dina Alengi Storz, [dina@iap2.org](mailto:dina@iap2.org))

### EDITOR:

Vivien Twyford

### WRITTEN BY:

Vivien Twyford

Max Hardy

John Dengate

Dr Vicki Vaartjes

Stuart Waters

### DESIGNED BY:

Graphic Connection

### PRINTED BY:

Westonprint, Kiama

Vivien Twyford Communication  
Pty. Limited ABN 61 050 535 923

Trading as

Twyford  
Consulting

1st Floor

156 Keira Street

Wollongong

NSW 2500

Australia

MAIL

PO Box 6004

Wollongong

NSW 2500

Australia

TELEPHONE

(02) 4226 4040

FACSIMILE

(02) 4226 4042

EMAIL

[twyford@twyford.com.au](mailto:twyford@twyford.com.au)

WEBSITE

[www.twyford.com.au](http://www.twyford.com.au)

### UNSUBSCRIBE

If you no longer wish to receive the Twyford Consulting newsletter, please email [twyford@twyford.com.au](mailto:twyford@twyford.com.au), phone (02) 4226 4040 or fax (02) 4226 4042 to ask to be removed from the mailing list.