

Deliberation as a Key to Community Engagement

Hartz-Karp J

Community Engagement Consultant, Western Australian Minister and Department for
Planning and Infrastructure, Australia

Abstract

Community Engagement has become the new catchphrase in Australia to describe the involvement of citizens in the development of policies, plans and decisions. The problem for policy makers and the public is that 'engagement' is fast losing credibility, being seen as new spin for the same thing — input by the few, without apparent impact. If community engagement is to inspire trust from the community, it needs to be clearly differentiated from traditional community consultation, and there needs to be evidence that it will lead to better outcomes for citizens and government. It has been suggested that three critical elements differentiate engagement from traditional community consultation — inclusion, deliberation and influence (Carson and Hartz-Karp forthcoming). It is proposed here that deliberation is the nexus of these elements. Without deliberation, engagement is vacuous.

In Western Australia, in the portfolio of Planning and Infrastructure, we have been pioneering new ways of improving public deliberation as part of the political process, using Citizens' Juries, Consensus Conferences, Deliberative Surveys, Televotes, Consensus Forums, Multi-Criteria Analysis Conferences and 21st Century Town Meetings. A number of these techniques are examined to discern what can be learnt about improving the 'completeness' (Fishkin 1995) of deliberation, and their contribution to quality decision-making. Elements examined include opportunities for an inclusive group of citizens to:

- speak honestly and openly
- seriously consider differing viewpoints and values
- thoroughly understand the issues and their implications
- reframe issues
- seek a range of solutions
- consider criteria for evaluating the best outcomes
- search for common ground

and for the outcomes of these deliberations to be heard and taken seriously.

This paper proposes that deliberative practice can reinforce itself, potentially becoming integral to public life.

In terms of deliberative theory, it is proposed that the WA experience could influence current deliberative theory which is often inadequate for practitioner needs, and overlooks co-creative

deliberative techniques that may achieve greater quality decision-making, in favour of more controlled, linear techniques.

Keywords

Community engagement, deliberation, innovative techniques, consensus, deliberative democracy

Introduction: Role of deliberation in community engagement

In Australia, almost any initiative involving the community, including public education (explaining how it is) and community consultation (requesting input) is now called community engagement. This is not helpful in an environment where such initiatives have tended to create a 'vicious cycle' (Senge 1994) that results in a reduction of, rather than an increase in, social capital (Hartz-Karp 2004).

Carson and Hartz-Karp (forthcoming) suggest that there are three critical elements of community engagement:

- influence: capacity to influence policy and decision-making
- inclusion: representative of population, inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values, equal opportunity to participate
- deliberation: open dialogue, access to information, space to understand and reframe issues, respect, movement toward consensus.

At the nexus of these three elements is deliberation. Inclusiveness alone sets up false expectations. Influence without inclusion and deliberation is likely to reduce public trust. However, neither is deliberation alone sufficient for effective community engagement. The three elements working together create synergy. Public deliberation is likely to be 'incomplete' or 'less deliberative' (Fishkin 1995, p. 41) if participation is not inclusive and if the outcomes have no influence.

Carson and Hartz-Karp propose that the effective integration of these elements is likely to result in a 'virtuous cycle' (Senge 1994) of increased social capital. Theoretically, Giddens' (1984) structuration theory appears to support this contention. Giddens proposes a cluster of structures (the above social behaviours would be an example) creating a feedback loop of unintended consequences, a 'reproductive cycle', in this instance, a 'homeostatic loop' which reinforces the initial behaviours (pp. 27-28).

Burkhalter et al. (2002) elaborate on the potential of deliberative practice to reinforce itself:

"In essence, we posit that participating in face-to-face deliberation strengthens the cognitions, attitudes and habits conducive to future deliberation" (p. 413).

If this is the case, it becomes critical firstly to define what is meant by deliberation, and then to discern the sorts of practices that can lead to more 'complete' deliberation.

According to Gastil (2000), public deliberation can be defined as:

"Discussion that involves judicious argument, critical listening, and earnest decision making. Following the writings of John Dewey, full deliberation includes a careful examination of a problem or issue, the identification of possible solutions, the establishment or reaffirmation of evaluative criteria, and the use of these criteria in identifying an optimal solution" (p. 22).

Burkhalter et al. (2002) broaden this view as follows:

"Public participation is a combination of careful problem analysis and an egalitarian process in which participants have adequate speaking opportunities, and engage in attentive listening or dialogue that bridges divergent ways of speaking and knowing" (p. 398).

In brief, public deliberation involves a careful weighing of the consequences of various options for action together with the views of others (Mathews 1994, p. 110). In addition, this weighing should produce quality decision-making outcomes that aim to and do influence public policy. (Gaventa 2004).

Taking account of theorists' views and experience in the field, it is suggested here that public deliberation is maximised when an inclusive group of citizens have opportunities to:

- speak honestly and openly
- seriously consider differing viewpoints and values
- thoroughly understand the issues and their implications
- reframe issues
- seek a range of solutions
- consider criteria for evaluating the best outcomes
- search for common ground

and when the outcomes of these deliberations are heard and taken seriously.

There is no single way to ensure that any deliberation will maximise each of these opportunities. Indeed, each engagement will vary not only in terms of the opportunities offered, but the extent to which different groups of participants take them up. As Fishkin (1995 p. 41) notes, the aim needs to be to improve the 'completeness' of deliberative engagement, not trying to perfect it.

This paper examines a number of innovative community engagement initiatives pioneered by the Western Australian portfolio of Planning and Infrastructure that highlight different ways of achieving deliberative potential.

The Western Australian context

The Australian Labor Party has governed WA for four and a half years from 2001 to 2005. At the outset of Labor's first term of office there was a commitment to improving public engagement. At that time, the new Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Alannah MacTiernan, determined she would champion community engagement as a means to democratic renewal. As community engagement consultant to the Minister, I was given the task of pioneering innovative ways of engaging the community in joint decision-making with government.

Minister MacTiernan explained her position to an international audience as follows:

“Long before we were elected to represent the people of our State, we were asking the question: “Can government be done better?”

Can we give new life to the concept of democracy — of government by the people — by weaving ordinary citizens more deeply into our decision-making processes; and through that process build community?”

She explained her focus on deliberation as follows:

“If people are not presented with the complexities of an issue, they don't have to extend beyond their own perceived self-interest; or engage with other points of view.

They don't have to understand the difficulty in balancing competing interests.

We must find a way of presenting government not as the arbitrator of opposing camps, but as the facilitator, bringing divergent voices together to hammer out a way forward” (MacTiernan 2004).

The task was daunting. Documentation on innovative techniques was dispersed, invariably superficial in terms of the processes used, and often self-promotional rather than analytic. In retrospect, the relative isolation we felt probably worked in our favour. Over the next four and a half years, we improvised, adapted and combined community engagement techniques without apology. We carried out our own interpretation of Citizens' Juries, Consensus Conferences, Deliberative Surveys, Televotes, Consensus Forums, Multi-Criteria Analysis Conferences and 21st Century Town Meetings.

In each instance, we began with a problem or opportunity within the portfolio, determined who needed to be involved and how, matched this with the most appropriate engagement technique or set of techniques, and carried it out. The portfolio departments were invariably wary and sometimes opposed to these innovative techniques — anxious about lack of precedents, concerned about the perceived sidelining of their expertise, and worried about budgets. However, the Minister backed every initiative, persuading and encouraging the departments not only to participate, but to deliver on the outcomes of the deliberations. Despite the punishing time-table of a “mega” portfolio, the Minister was integral to each lead-up, deliberative event and follow-up.

During each initiative, we aimed to improve representativeness, deliberativeness and influence. In each instance, it was the quality of deliberation that determined the success or otherwise of the initiative. A number of examples will be outlined to highlight what worked well, what did not, and what measures we took as a result.

Exploring guidelines for deliberative processes

Example: Consensus forum — Road Train Summit

From the outset, we were clear that any community engagement we pioneered would set new standards or guidelines for public deliberation to resolve problems faced by the planning and infrastructure portfolio.

One such problem was the considerable community concern over the increasing incursion of long vehicles and road trains into the metropolitan area on routes that were perceived to be neither safe nor appropriate. The community believed that its issues and voice were being ignored. Highly organised and persuasive protests and lobby groups emerged. The incoming Labor government imposed limitations on route expansion. These were greeted with outrage from the industry, and dire warnings of its impact on the State’s economy. Emotions were running high. The Minister decided to hold a Road Train Summit, consisting of four Consensus Forums in the metropolitan and regional areas

The Consensus Forum provides a way for lay people, representative of the community, to deliberate about technically complex issues together with those who are ‘expert’ in the area¹. The issues are explored using the best available knowledge and the widest possible views. A number of solutions are put forward. Where consensus is achieved, these views become integral to the decision making process. Following the Forum, representatives from the community, industry and government, continue working together through to the implementation of the Forum’s recommendations.

¹ For further discussion on Consensus Forums, see <<http://www.21stcenturydialogue.com>> under initiatives.

Initial guidelines for deliberation

The Road Train Summit utilised a variety of ways to increase opportunities for honest and open dialogue, comprehensive information, consideration of differing viewpoints and the search for common ground. These formed initial guidelines for deliberation:

- a) recruiting and seating participants to maximise diversity
- b) small group, facilitated discussion
- c) preparation and presentation of papers by stakeholders from each viewpoint
- d) opportunities to question those views
- e) empathetic listening to understand the divergent viewpoints
- f) agreement to the key questions that needed to be resolved
- g) development of a broad range of creative options to resolve those questions
- h) development of consensus
- i) clarification of how the consensus would be utilised.

Each of these initial guidelines is described, using the Road Train Summit as an exemplar.

a) Recruiting and seating to maximise diversity

The approximately one hundred participants who attended each of the four forums were representative of the population. They included:

- one-third who responded to invitations to a random sample of residents asking them to be a citizen for the day — half of whom lived on or near major freight routes, and half from across the region under discussion
- one-third who responded to invitations to a broad range of stakeholders from the community, industry and government
- one-third who responded to broadly placed advertisements in newspapers, industry and community publications, on radio, and in well frequented truck stops.

To encourage egalitarian diversity — bridging dialogue (Burkhalter et al. 2002), participants were purposefully seated in small groups of ten, in an arrangement akin to a bad wedding where each person was placed next to someone they did not know and were not likely to agree with. For example, someone who lived on a freight route was seated next to a truck driver, who had a regulator on his other side and an environmentalist opposite, and so forth.

b) Small group, facilitated discussion

Each round table was facilitated. In this instance, facilitators were Labor, Liberal and Green members of parliament, as well as CEOs and executive teams of the Departments involved. Under instructions from the Minister, the facilitators undertook a two-hour training session to listen and encourage others to speak (possibly a new experience for some) and to

understand the agenda. A designated, trained scribe from one of the Departments assisted at each table. A lead facilitator orchestrated the proceedings.

c) Preparation and presentation of papers by diverse stakeholders

The Minister, together with a small community reference group nominated by her, determined the differing viewpoints that needed to be heard. Each group was requested to write a paper and present it briefly at the Forum. All papers were distributed to delegates over one week before the Forum with a letter from the Minister requesting that they be read before the day to enable effective deliberation.

The process of acquiring papers from different viewpoints was not straightforward. For example, one community paper was defamatory and potentially libellous, but when this was pointed out to the author, he accused government of censorship. The industry group said their paper needed be considerably longer than any of the others and they wanted more time to present. This was not acceptable to either the organisers or the other presenters. Industry felt they were being hamstrung. Each of these issues had to be carefully negotiated to avoid walk-outs which would have jeopardised the deliberative process.

d) Opportunities to question these views

Each of the presenting stakeholders joined a panel, sometimes with the support of another from their group. Questions were asked from the room. The session ran over time, being liberally sprinkled with advocacy rather than inquiry, and emotion rather than interest in others' viewpoints.

e) Empathetic listening to understand the divergent views

The following exercise became the pivotal point of the day, altering the mood of the room from open hostility to cooperative problem solving. The tables were set a task of empathetic listening, where each stakeholder's point of view needed to be thoroughly understood by the other stakeholders at the table before proceeding. For example, until the people living on the side of the freight route could describe how it was to be a truck driver to the satisfaction of the truck driver, the table did not progress. Three voices needed to be understood — the community (residents, community groups and environmentalists), the industry (truck drivers and others from the industry) and the regulators (local and state government). This exercise was significant for each Road Train Forum; the mood of the room perceptibly shifted from antagonism to collaboration.

f) Agreement to the key questions that needed to be resolved

The Department and Community Reference Group developed a list of key issues to be resolved. These were sent to the various stakeholder groups for input. The final list was determined and agreed to at a plenary session of the Forum.

g) Development of a broad range of creative options to resolve these questions

To determine a broad range of options to address each issue, and to ascertain the extent of consensus from the room, a technique called 'Station Rounds' was used. Each issue to be resolved was written at the top of a flip-chart placed intermittently around the circumference of the room. With one table team at each flip-chart, team members brainstormed options to address that issue. After approximately seven minutes, the teams moved on to the next flip chart. The scribe remained behind to explain the issues documented to the incoming group.

h) Development of consensus

The incoming team members negotiated the extent of their consensus with the options written by the prior team, adding next to each item:

- a tick — can live with it
- a cross — cannot live with it
- a question mark — can live with it only if ... and an additional comment was written.

The team then added their options to the list.

Finally, each individual prioritised the most important options that had achieved consensus around the room, using coloured stickers representing short, medium and long-term priorities. These were totalled to determine the priority short, medium and long-term consensus options. The technique used was a 'Nominal Group Technique'.

Prioritised consensus options were then taken to the next Forum to determine the extent of State-wide consensus. By the end of the four Forums, there was a lengthy and broad list of consensus items for the Government to consider.

i) Clarification of how the consensus would be utilised

Prior to the Summit, and at each Forum, the Minister stated that where consensus could be achieved, the Government would respond by devising ways to incorporate that consensus into the regulatory framework.

All consensus options were referred on to an Implementation Steering Team of community, industry, state and local government representatives from the Forums, chosen by the Minister. This Team worked together over several months to create a Final Report that translated the consensus options into actions to be undertaken under a series of key strategies.

A number of the consensus actions were quite radical, requiring negotiation with interstate ministers and departments. Others required organisational change. The Minister was at the forefront of these negotiations.

All Forum participants received quarterly feedback newsletters outlining the progress made against each action target. At the end of two years, each action agenda in the Final Report had been put into effect.

This exemplifies the kind of citizen influence outlined by Carson and Hartz-Karp (forthcoming) and Gaventa (2004).

Standardising what was learnt

The deliberation changed a divisive, emotive issue into a joint problem-solving venture. Feedback from the stakeholders changed radically from negative, cynical, emotional and on occasion abusive, to highly positive. As one renowned cynic emailed his stakeholder group after the forum — “it was peace, light and all that stuff”.

Much from the Road Train Summit became accepted practice in the community engagements to follow. This included:

- recruitment using the one-third, one-third, one-third formula
- pre-arranged seating that maximised diversity
- clarity of impact or influence stated at the outset
- comprehensive, open-book information from varying viewpoints
- small group, facilitated dialogue with trained facilitators
- establishment of an engagement process rather than an event, with community, industry and government representatives involved from the outset through to implementation in working groups.

On the other hand, in some of the initiatives that followed, several clear diversions from this format were incorporated — with good reason:

- i) separating experts and lobbyists from the deliberations by using only random sample participants, with experts and lobbyists taking ‘expert witness’ roles
- ii) finding diverse ways to create and evaluate options
- iii) creating different opportunities to reframe the issue
- iv) finding diverse ways to seek common ground.

Further guidelines for deliberation

While the Road Train Summit provided some important clues to effective engagement, it was soon realised the standardised ways of achieving deliberation did not work in all situations. This was particularly true when an unresolved issue had resulted in a highly effective lobby

group with only one solution to a problem. In our experience, such lobby groups agreed, albeit reluctantly, to participate as partners in the community engagement process, including being members of the Steering Team. However, as the process unfolded, their purpose was clearly to achieve a predetermined solution, not to examine others' points of view or other options as required by most deliberative theorists including Gastil (2000), Burkhalter et al. (2002), Fishkin (1995) and Matthews (1994).

j) Random sampling and the role of single-issue lobby groups

The advantage of using only random sample participants rather than the 'one-third, one-third, one-third' formula was highlighted after two Consensus Forums that were less than successful in terms of deliberation. Both involved communities that had developed strong, vocal lobby groups promoting a single planning option that was not acceptable to government. In each instance, the lobby group had agreed to participate in the community engagement initiative planned, including being on the Steering Team. However, on the day of the Forum, their participation was fraught. Unwelcome initiatives included the distribution of their own literature as participants walked in the door, lobby group colleagues protesting outside, threatened walk-outs, grabbing the microphone from the facilitator to speak, and moving from table to table to instruct others what to say. It became clear that if the community as a whole was to be engaged, the single-issue lobbyists needed an alternative role (Carson 2001), and diversity bridging dialogue needed to evolve (Burkhalter et al. 2002).

With the Citizens' Jury, the Consensus Conference and the Deliberative Survey, the participants were all randomly selected. The WA Electoral Commission carried out the random selection. The Minister together with Steering Team determined the geographic boundaries for the sample. Recipients received a letter from the Minister, asking if they would agree to be a citizen for the day to deliberate on an issue of local importance. Over a number of initiatives, the percentage of participants agreeing to participate varied from ten per cent to twenty five per cent of those receiving letters. When the numbers agreeing to participate exceeded the designated number, the Steering Group determined the method of culling. On one occasion, the instruction given was to select participants to maximise geographic dispersion. Mostly, however, the Steering Team chose a process that selected a further random sample from the original random sample list.

Examples of Random Selection

Citizens' Jury

A Citizens' Jury is a structured method of obtaining detailed, considered views from members of the public, who arbitrate between alternatives. Between sixteen and twenty-four jurors hear evidence from a range of 'expert witnesses' and from this informed viewpoint, draw conclusions, which they recommend to the public body. The WA juries have deliberated over

one day (with a further half-day prior to the event to understand the process, receive background briefing papers and request further information). In the USA and UK they typically deliberate over five days.

In the Reid Highway Jury, lobby groups were asked to become 'expert witnesses', with the task of informing the deliberations by giving a presentation and being on a panel to answer questions. The Steering Team made it a pre-condition of juror selection that the potential jurors could only reach the final selection if they said they had not been part of a Reid Highway lobby group.

Consensus Conference

A Consensus Conference is a process similar to a Citizens' Jury. However, the jurors have greater autonomy and there is public participation in the hearings.

In the Albany Administration Centre initiative, the Steering Team determined that if too many potential jurors responded to the invitation, there would be a further random sample carried out. This occurred.

Each of the lobby groups was invited to have a representative participate in the hearings as an 'expert witness'. Other witnesses included private and public sector experts on the various issues under contention. The lobby groups could also join the audience of approximately one hundred people. Along with other audience members, they could submit questions of other 'expert witnesses' to the jurors, who could then choose whether or not to ask the question.

Deliberative Survey

In a Deliberative Survey, a random sample of 200 to 400 participants fill out a questionnaire, following which they deliberate on the issues (in WA for a day, in the USA typically for four days). Participants listen to and question a broad range of experts, and discuss between themselves. At the close of the deliberations, participants fill out the questionnaire for a second time. An independent researcher, selected by the initiating agency according to government protocols, analyses the data and writes a final report. This includes the results of the 'top of the mind' survey as well as the more 'deliberated' survey, noting any shifts in attitudes and views that occur as a result of the deliberations. The aim is to discern what a representative group think about an issue before and after opportunities for comprehensive information and deliberation.

At the Scarborough Deliberative Survey, lobbyists did not participate with the community in the dialogue unless they had been randomly selected as a community representative. However, to ensure transparency, each of the key lobby and stakeholder groups was allowed 3 representatives to observe the proceedings. Observers were requested not to talk to

participants during the proceedings. When one lobbyist then tried to talk to several tables, it caused contention from the industry group even though the lobbyist intervention occurred during the discussion of questions to be asked. That experience has now meant that organisers are more wary of allowing interest groups to observe the proceedings. Clearly the new roles remain a learning experience for all involved.

ii) Diverse ways to create and weigh options

Theorists (Matthews 1994; Gastil 2000) have suggested that the creating and weighting of options is critical to deliberation. One technique that carries this out very carefully is multi criteria analysis. The Multi Criteria Analysis Conference described below achieves this in a more scientifically rigorous way than other more qualitative deliberations where the weighing and assessing of options tends to be talked through rather than quantitatively analysed.

The Multi Criteria Analysis Conference also clearly separates the role of technical experts from the community. Historically, the role of experts in community deliberations has been contentious. Community members have expressed anger at being over-ruled and not heard by credentialed experts. Experts have expressed concern that uninformed community members are undermining their know-how (Carson 2001). In the Multi Criteria Analysis Conference, the roles of each are clearly designated and separated.

Examples of Weighing Options — Multi Criteria Analysis (MCA)

A multi criteria analysis is a decision-aiding technique to analyse alternatives to complex problems using weighted triple bottom line criteria (social, environmental and economic) that are developed by all stakeholders. The end result is the 'best fit' option.

The MCA Conference process consists of four key components: a set of alternative options, a set of criteria for comparing the alternatives, weighting to attach a measure of importance to each criteria, and a method of ranking the alternatives based on how well they satisfy the criteria. This is a literal, linear application of John Dewey's criteria based, deliberative standards as described by Gastil (2000).

The community has the task of developing the options and criteria and later weighting the criteria in terms of importance. Their focus is on creativity and value judgements. The technical experts have the task of rating each option against each criterion using both qualitative and quantitative data. Their focus is on technical data analysis.

The process involves four steps:

- the involvement of the community from the beginning of the process
- an initial forum of all participants to determine the options and criteria

- an expert panel to rate the options against the criteria using quantitative and qualitative data, all of which is input to a specialised computer software package
- a second forum of all participants to weight the criteria according to their importance. Using both the quantitative and qualitative data, together with the value judgement weightings, the computer software determines the best options.

In the Agricultural Lime Route Multi Criteria Analysis Conference, a Steering Group of community, industry and government members oversaw the process to ensure it was fair and transparent, including choosing the most appropriate representatives for the technical expert panel, and overseeing the production of briefing papers to ensure all viewpoints were represented.

The 100 participants at the forum were selected according to the one-third, one-third, one-third formula described earlier, and were seated at small facilitated tables. At the first forum, participants confirmed that there were only two potential freight route options to bring agricultural lime from the coast to the farming areas. They also developed a list of criteria to compare the two routes, covering social, environmental and economic impacts. Since this technique requires the lead facilitator to include each option and criterion put forward, there was no prolonged deliberation other than to attempt to define each criterion proposed.

The Expert panel then met in separate sessions to score each of the routes according to each criterion. The relevant government agencies provided the technical advice requested. This often took weeks to collect.

The second forum was held two months later, attended by the same one hundred participants who attended the first workshop — with no noticeable drop-off. Each participant provided an importance weighting between zero and one hundred to each criterion. These weights were then submitted to computers and analysed by the MCA software.

To reduce the likelihood of results being dominated by a larger interest group, participants were also asked to nominate which aspect of the ‘triple bottom line’ (economic, environmental, social or all of the above) they felt they most represented. The weights for each interest group were averaged and then the averages were averaged.

The scores obtained from the Expert Panel were combined with the weights submitted by the participants and analysed by a specialised computer program. These results were immediately projected back into the room on a large screen, and the outcome of the clear preference of one route over the other was discussed.

While the Multi Criteria Analysis Conference is statistically rigorous, it can also be expensive. For example, the MCA Conference for the east west freight route generated twenty-one options and thirty-nine criteria. Each option had to be assessed against each criterion — using quantitative data where possible. This generated enormous amount of technical work and hence considerable cost.

On the other side of the ledger, however, by integrating the values and priorities of the community with the knowledge of technical experts who are required to balance social, economic and environmental criteria, the community and the technical experts are more likely to achieve some synergy in resolving the issue.

In the more qualitative deliberations such as the citizens' juries and consensus forums, utilising a simplified version of multi criteria analysis has been very helpful. In the Reid Highway Citizens' Jury, the jurors developed a series of creative options and determined the criteria for judging the best route. They discussed which criteria were more important than others and as a result of these deliberations, it became apparent that one option was clearly the most preferred. Their decision was unanimous. This looser, more interactive approach seems more in line with the engaged deliberative visions of Matthews (1994) and Burkhalter et al. (2002)

In the Albany Administration Centre jury, on the other hand, the jurors decided to carry out a more rigorous multi criteria analysis. They determined the options and the criteria, and then divided up the task of finding data to help analyse each option against each criterion. They talked through this data, and then each juror separately gave a numerical weight to each criterion. Following this, they analysed and then individually rated each option against each criterion. Their scores were added to reach the preferred option. Interestingly, in this instance, there was not the unanimous sense of juror confidence in the final result as that achieved through the more deliberative efforts of the Reid Highway jurors.

iii) Opportunities to reframe the issues

From our experience, a welcome, though unintended consequence of effective deliberation has been participant reframing of the issues. This has been a critical element to finding common ground and a way forward. Lakoff (2002) explains the importance of reframing as follows:

“Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or a bad outcome of our actions” (p. xv).

By reframing the issues, participants have been able to move away from adversarial positions into stewardship of a solution.

Often, it was only when common ground had been reached that it became apparent where the issue had been reframed. This was not a conscious process on the part of the participants or the facilitator. It emerged as a result of greater understanding of and empathy towards different viewpoints. In each instance, reframing provided surprising results. They were surprising in that they seemed obvious and easy rather than laboriously contrived and negotiated.

Examples of Reframing Issues

Prior to the Reid Highway Citizens' Jury, the Department understood the problem at hand to be one of road traffic flows. The key concerns they had heard from the two communities regarding the proposed exit were of the 'not in my back yard' variety. Since the exit and resulting traffic would inevitably flow into one of the two communities, the Department figured they were in a win-lose situation.

However, as a result of the jurors' exploration of viewpoints and deliberation, they reframed the problem from a traffic flow problem, which they felt was easily resolved, to a safety problem - protecting the schoolchildren at the affected school and nearby playground. This reframing enabled them to arrive at a unanimous decision. Moreover, both communities accepted the result with equanimity.

Similarly, the Road Train Summit reframed the issues from a problem of determining what long trucks could go where, to resolving how to make these trucks accountable to the community.

Dialogue with the City, explained below, began with a problem of where do we fit the increasing population into greater Perth, and what will it look like? This was reframed by the process to become, how do we want the increasing population of Perth to live, and how do we want to plan to achieve this?

It is proposed here that in effective engagement, the elements of deliberation work together to create a synergy that enables participants to reframe the issue so alternative and emergent solutions or trade-offs are possible. This is often the best approach to finding what Gastil (2000) calls an 'optimal solution'.

iv) Diverse ways to find common ground

Regardless of the amount of discussion and definition during community engagement initiatives, we found that the term consensus seemed to generate misunderstanding and dissention. Hence, keeping the intent of consensus in mind, we adopted an alternative —

seeking common ground. This concept enabled a focus on points of congruence without the concern about unanimous approval that often accompanied the term consensus.

When time is constrained as in many of the community engagement initiatives carried out by the portfolio, reaching congruence on a direction forward within a specified timeframe becomes critical. To ensure this occurs, agendas are tightly created and deliberations are time constrained. Tools and techniques are often used to assist in the development of common ground.

Examples of Finding Common Ground

One such tool was described earlier in the description of the Road Train Summit — ‘Station Rounds’. This technologically simple tool enables small group discussion and whole-of-group consensus to develop concurrently.

Another effective technique is the 21st century town meeting, a large scale public participation process developed by AmericaSpeaks¹.

21st Century Town Meeting

This process uses small group, facilitated deliberation together with networked computer technology to enable the room’s key themes to be broadcast to the entire room virtually in ‘real time’. Table inputs are relayed to a theme team who synthesise the results and display them to the room on large screens. Key issues are prioritised, with each participant nominating their individual preferences. In the USA, individual key pads are used to prioritise. Given their high cost, in WA, individual ratings or rankings are input to the computer and then displayed on the screens as histograms.

The largest of these 21st Century Town Meetings in Western Australia was *Dialogue with the City*, where 1,100 participants deliberated on how best to manage the future growth of the Perth metropolitan area. The stated aim was to make Perth the world’s most liveable city by 2030. Participants, again made up of the one-third, one-third, one-third formula described earlier, were purposefully seated at tables of ten, with a trained facilitator and scribe.

In this methodology, it is usual practice for each table to select its scribe from the participants at the table. However, *Dialogue with the City* involved a complex mapping game that required input to the computer, so scribes were pre-selected. Scribes, facilitators and other support staff were volunteers from the private and public sectors. Prior to the event, they participated in a full day training session to practice with the technology and work through the agenda.

¹ AmericaSpeaks, a not-for-profit pioneer of large-scale civic engagement designed and developed this new kind of town meeting. Carolyn Lukensmeyer and her team kindly offered advice to *Dialogue with the City*, with Joe Goldman travelling to Perth to assist us.

The agenda was structured into a series of questions with thirty to forty minutes for teams at tables to respond and input their views to the computer. Individuals had the opportunity to write their views on an activity sheet at the beginning of each session. When the deliberations began at the tables, individual ideas could be input to the computer as could the team's commonly held ideas and also any strongly held minority views. The latter enabled the ideas of those who disagreed with the team inputs to be recorded. Five minutes before the close of each session, a chime sounded and a stop clock was broadcast to the room on large screens. At the close of the five minutes, a gong sounded and the computer input session was closed.

The networked computers relayed all inputs to a theme team of eight independent analysts. Working in pairs with a set number of tables, the theme team synthesised the table inputs to form a set of up to ten key themes. These were then broadcast to the room on large screens. When required, the themes were prioritised by the room or highlighted for more in depth analysis.

Community engagement in planning often faces a dilemma. While broad concepts of environmental, social and economic sustainability are heralded, they are rapidly discarded if they cut across individual interests (the NIMBY syndrome — Not In My Back Yard). To avoid the *Dialogue* becoming a theoretical rather than a practical exercise, a regional mapping game was introduced. This planning tool, originally devised by Fregonese Calthorpe Associates,² encourages citizen understanding and input to regional plans.

The Perth *Dialogue* game enabled participants to take the role of planners in creating their preferred future shape of the city and surrounds.

Participants needed to choose between four potential scenarios to manage the predicted growth of metropolitan Perth. These scenarios had been discussed in background papers received before the forum, in a one-hour TV production and with speakers and materials on the day. Each table deliberated the pros and cons of each scenario (as suggested by Matthews 1994) and prioritised the scenario they preferred.

Each scenario was represented by a package containing different density 'chips' (or game pieces of differing colours and sizes), based on Geographic Information Systems data (a digital mapping and analysis system). The chips represented the housing densities, industry and commercial areas required by 2030. Participants needed to place these on the map.

² Fregonese and Associates, in particular John Fregonese, a not-for-profit pioneer in designing new ways of engaging citizens in urban design, including a regional planning game used throughout the USA, kindly allowed us to use their ideas to develop our own planning game.

They could also trade chips with other scenarios. The table needed to agree on its plan, then stick the chips onto the map, and finally enter the data into the computer using mapping grids.

To complete the map required participants to find practical solutions to planning dilemmas. This was no easy assignment. Participants needed to negotiate with others at their table and make trade-offs to complete the task of allocating the housing, industry, open space and transport links needed by 2030. From the participant feedback, this proved to be an important learning experience.

Dialogue with the City focused on learning from prior community engagement initiatives to make the dialogue more 'complete' (Fishkin 1995).

Special listening and learning sessions were held with people whose voices had not been adequately heard in the past — Indigenous, non English speaking background and young people. The information gained at these sessions was used as a prelude to deliberative sessions at the large forum.

Greater attention was paid to sharing information using as many ways as possible including regular feature articles in the major newspaper, the one hour TV program, computer based fly-throughs of the area, written materials with maps, pictures and simple English explanations, and two excellent guest speakers from overseas who had dealt with similar problems. This multi-modal approach addressed the 'divergent ways of speaking and knowing' noted by Burkhalter et al. (2002)

From the feedback received, the planning game elicited more intense, honest dialogue than the usual discussion sessions. Trade-offs were seriously negotiated and alternatives sought.

To further reassure participants that their issues were being heard and heeded, at the close of the *Dialogue with the City* forum each participant received a Preliminary Report that documented all the key findings of the day. A few weeks later, they received a copy of the map they had developed with their table, as well as the integrated map for the room, together with a more in-depth analysis of the inputs in a Final Report.

Over one hundred participants worked together over the next nine months in a series of teams to develop a community planning strategy. At various points, drafts were distributed to all one thousand one hundred *Dialogue* participants for their feedback. One year later, Cabinet approved the new plan in principle. Currently, local *Dialogues* are being supported to determine how the broad plan can work at local level.

The participant feedback from *Dialogue with the City*³ was overwhelmingly positive. Forty-two per cent said they changed their views as a result of the dialogue, while many more admitted to broadening their views. Over ninety-nine per cent of participants thought the deliberations went okay or great. Importantly for the future of community engagement, ninety-seven per cent indicated they would like to participate in such an event again.

Indeed, each time we have run a *Dialogue* in Western Australia, participant feedback reports have shown that between ninety-five and ninety-eight per cent of participants indicate that they would like to participate in such an event again. This strongly suggests the possibility of a 'virtuous cycle' (Senge 1994) or a 'reproductive cycle' (Giddens 1984) that supported, could generate increasing demand for and participation in public deliberations.

Conclusion

The innovative community engagement techniques we have used in WA — the consensus forums, citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative surveys, multi criteria analysis conferences and deliberative surveys — have added to our understanding of achieving more 'complete' deliberation. From our experience, there is no one model that maximises the potential for deliberation. Indeed, each tends to have great strengths in some aspects of deliberation but only weak opportunities in others.

The adapting and combining of deliberative techniques in the Australian experience (Carson and Hartz-Karp forthcoming) has also surfaced some of the inadequacies of current deliberative theories. Apart from Fishkin (1995), who focuses on shifts in perspectives following deliberation, most public deliberation theorists are interested in improving the quality of decision-making (Gaventa 2004, Gastil 2000). Much of this deliberative theory tends to be structured, linear and causal. However, our Western Australian experience has demonstrated that the quality of citizens' decision making is improved when there is more interactive, creative, emergent deliberation. Such deliberation enables new options and ideas to surface that often do not emerge under more quantitative, restricted, reductionist practices. In short, in terms of improved public decision making, the more linear practices are certainly more controlled and efficient, but often not as effective as practices that foster co-creative consensus.

From our experience, deliberative theories have provided inadequate guidance to enable practitioners to maximise their efforts. In terms of achieving better decision-making, the WA experience could provide an opportunity for practice to influence theory.

³ "*Dialogue with the City, Participant Feedback*" (2003). Internal report for the Western Australian Department for Planning and Infrastructure

Previously, it has been suggested that effective engagement relies upon two foundations — the creation of trust and opportunities to reframe (Hartz-Karp 2004). Overwhelmingly, participants of community engagement have expressed increased trust of government at the end of the engagement process. Moreover, participants have felt most satisfied when they have arrived at a place of common ground, usually achieved through a reframing of the issue. From our experience, reframing has occurred when the deliberative elements / guidelines have worked together to create a synergy that enables participants to reframe the issue so alternative and emergent solutions or trade-offs are possible. From participants' willingness to give up their time and continue to be engaged, our experience has supported the notion of the 'reproductive cycle' that builds the capacity to deliberate and the trust to engage.

If there is any one factor that is critical to deliberation, it is the goodwill of all involved. The community needs to be willing to listen to other viewpoints, participate in respectful dialogue and co-operatively resolve problems. Government needs to be willing to provide real opportunities for deliberation, with open book information, and a commitment not only to listen but to heed the outcomes of the community engagement.

A critical element to achieving this is leadership. Western Australia has been fortunate to have a Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Hon. Alannah MacTiernan MLA, who, from the beginning of her term of government, has championed 'participatory democracy' (2004). This leadership has enabled those in her portfolio to experience high quality deliberation, which in turn, has made them more receptive to continuing the effort.

It should be noted, however, that to date, this pioneering has not made a significant change to government overall. The disincentives are great. The media has been caustic about 'too much democracy'. The single issue lobby groups have been highly vocal about 'sham' processes that involve random samples rather than those 'who care'. The voices of those who have participated in deliberative events and have appreciated the experience have not been judged to be newsworthy. Government agencies, in the main, have remained more comfortable with community consultation over which they have greater control than community engagement which requires shared partnering with the community.

Nonetheless, a start has been made. With increasingly complex and contentious problems facing government, creative solutions and shared decision-making are likely to become more advantageous. Effective deliberation will be critical. While we are unlikely to perfect it, we can work to continually improve it. In so doing, we can enhance respectful dialogue with the community, and heighten the sense of citizenship and cooperation for the common good. This in turn can create a 'virtuous cycle' where we increase civic engagement and social capital.

References

- Burkhalter S, Gastil J & Kelshaw T A 2002, 'Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Model of Public Deliberation in Small Face-to-Face Groups', *Communication Theory, Public Deliberation in Small Groups*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 398-422.
- Carson L 2001, 'Innovative Consultation Processes and the Changing Role of Activism', *Third Sector Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 7-22.
- Carson L & Hartz-Karp J forthcoming, 'Adapting and Combining Deliberative Designs: Juries, Polls, and Forums', in Gastil G & Levine P *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century*, Jossey Bass, USA, pp. 120-38.
- Fishkin J 1995, *The Voice of the People*, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Gastil J 2000, *By Popular Demand*, University California Press, Berkeley.
- Gaventa J 2004, 'Strengthening Participatory Approaches to Local Governance: Learning the Lessons from Abroad', *National Civic Review*, vol. 93, no. 4, pp. 16-27.
- Giddens A 1984, *The Constitution of Society*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Hartz-Karp J 2004, 'Harmonising Divergent Voices: Sharing the Challenge of Decision-Making', *Public Administration Today*, vol. 2 (Dec–Feb), pp. 14-19.
- Lakoff G 2002, *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know your Values and Frame the Debate*, Chelsea Green Publishing, Vermont.
- MacTiernan A 2004, 'Dialogue with the City', *Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management*, Presentation to Jury, Singapore, 21 October.
- Mathews D 1994, *Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice*. University of Illinois Press, Chicago.
- Senge P et al. 1994, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation*, Currency/Doubleday, USA.