

Community Engagement — Putting People First in Building Sustainable Community Futures: Three Case Studies of Innovative Engagement Practice

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Abstract

One of the most problematic, challenging and frustrating aspects of developing great towns and cities is the need to balance social, cultural, economic and environmental needs with the appropriate hard and soft infrastructure. Often the 'soft' elements of this balancing act, the social and cultural needs of communities are not accounted for. These case studies outline the strategies used to engage councillors, council staff and the community in building the future of three very different communities in the remote north of Queensland, a Central Queensland rural area and a large urban city in South East Queensland.

The case studies highlight ways of ensuring that these change strategies deliver outcomes to the community such as improved social and cultural infrastructure in growth areas and recognition of the benefits of diverse cultures for community wellbeing. The key to this approach has been to identify very early that the focus should be both on the outcomes sought for the community and on a holistic view of the process as being about change for the individuals within the organisation, for the council delivering on sustainability and for the community.

Keywords

Social institutions, community engagement, organisational culture, change management, leadership

Introduction and context

This paper outlines three case studies that highlight the challenge and potentialities that are encountered when designing and building sustainable communities. The case studies represent communities with very different social, economic and environmental contexts. However, the underlying principles of engagement and of creating shared and sustainable outcomes are common across these different contexts. The three communities are:

- Nebo Shire in Central Queensland — a small rural shire
- Lockhart River in Cape York — a remote area council
- Ipswich City Council in South East Queensland — a large city council.

Common principles for successful engagement and community building strategies are explored in this paper. The principles are reflected at four levels of engagement that, in the authors' experience, have to be working well to ensure delivery of community outcomes and to support planning, strategy and sustainability. The four levels are:

1. within-organisation
2. between-organisations
3. organisation–community
4. community–community.

The paper also outlines the way in which theory in the areas of social institutions, community engagement, organisational culture, strategic performance, innovation, change management, complex adaptive systems, public policy and leadership has been leveraged to build capability and commitment at each of these levels. These theoretical foundations are explored and identified as the basis for action in each of the case studies. An example is the way in which organisations and communities act as social institutions that respond and facilitate social interaction at multiple levels through community engagement processes. Commitment to community engagement fosters, develops and contributes positively to change, with change ultimately becoming both planned and emergent. “Change should be a friend. It should happen by plan, not by accident” states Philip Crosby, and directs resource allocation to build a shared future direction.

Case study backgrounds

These three case studies have been selected because they reflect very diverse communities and also because the authors have been involved in the delivery of community engagement strategies in each of the areas. This section describes the community and the key engagement issues being addressed within the communities. Obviously there are many other activities happening within these communities that contribute to overall community outcomes and sustainability that are not able to be addressed in this paper.

Nebo Shire

The Nebo Shire is 100 kilometres west of Mackay in Central Queensland. The shire has a population of around 2500 across 550 square kilometres with two major towns, Nebo and Glenden. Key industries are mining, cattle grazing, other farming and mine support activities. This case study shows ways in which engagement approaches can be used to build an effective corporate plan. The shire used community engagement and change management techniques to develop a new five-year corporate plan.

The shire has only 2500 permanent residents but because of the recent increases in mining in the area, this population doubles weekly with temporary residents. This shire decided to develop its corporate plan from the ground up, learning what the community wanted and needed. It also considered the future, with another seven coal mines being developed in the next five years, which will treble the population of the shire weekly and place enormous pressure on the social, economic and built infrastructure.

Lockhart River in Cape York

Lockhart River is a community of about 800 Aboriginal people, located more than 780 kilometres north of Cairns on the eastern side of the Cape York Peninsula. The community is isolated by road for the wet season from December to May each year. People here experience huge economic and social disadvantage, for example, life expectancy in the Cape York communities is 20 years less than for white Australians. To address the issues associated with long-term disadvantage in the Lockhart River community, new engagement and social capital approaches to helping the community and government learn and take action together have been established through the Building Productive Partnerships project. Key activities of the project include the Learning Circles sponsored and driven by the Government Champion, Mr Jim Varghese, and the Community Plan developed by the Lockhart River Aboriginal Council. The formation of the Learning Circles has been a key initiative to provide a mechanism for community and government discuss ways forward for the community and will be a key point of discussion in this paper.

Ipswich City

Ipswich is 40 kilometres west of Brisbane, Queensland. Ipswich is at the centre of a corridor of suburbs that are rapidly changing character as the increasing population in South East Queensland moves west of Brisbane, through the western corridor. Therefore the Ipswich community is facing significant change over the next 20 years. The Ipswich population is projected to increase from its current population base of 137,000 to figures of 320,000 by 2026. Ipswich residents are currently drawn from 115 countries of origin and more than 85 different languages are spoken. At the same time Ipswich has a strong historical, traditional base which recent focus groups with the community have indicated needs to be preserved during growth. The challenge of responding to a diverse cultural community in the face of increasing population growth is not unique to Ipswich so there are many parts of this story that are common across local government both within Australia and internationally.

The Ipswich City Council will be the focus of discussion around the social institution that is committed to ensuring that the social, human and cultural needs of the city are planned for and the change processes put in place to manage the impact of over 183,000 additional people

becoming part of the Ipswich community over the next 20 years. The community engagement, i.e. social techniques and management processes, being undertaken within the institutional structure form the component of this case study — that is how change management and planning approaches are being used to build sustainability within and across the other social institutions that it contracts with to shape a desired future direction.

Strategies and associated interventions

This section of the paper provides details of the strategies employed in the community engagement process to build the capacity of the organisations (as social institutions) to ultimately contribute to clear sustainable outcomes for the community. While the strategies are presented in a linear and sequential way, the very nature of the community engagement processes involved and supporting the implementation of these strategies, overlapped, created connections and linkages at different levels and contributed to new opportunities.

These strategies have been broadly categorised under two headings to highlight the distinction and connectedness between these two areas that need to be factored in when designing, developing and implementing community engagement processes. These two areas are:

1. social institutions — where social institutions are the social actors, values, beliefs, social contracts, use of resources and performance measures, authority and enforcement that form the basis of an organisation or community
2. social interaction — where social interaction processes refers to the level of trust, solidarity, leadership, culture, self-organisation and group values that form the basis of an organisation or community (Cernea 1993).

1. Building the capacity of social institutions

Engaging key people (social actors) in developing a shared vision of the change you are seeking to make is essential to delivering effective engagement with communities. In each of these cases, a number of activities were used to build a collective and shared view of the actions and approaches required to take the community into the future.

Nebo Shire

The Nebo Shire Council five-year corporate plan was developed through engaging many of the communities within the shire. What has been important has been the involvement of many different people including the staff of Nebo Shire, councillors, community members and representatives of key community groups.

It was important to council to ensure that as many people as possible were involved in the consultation and engagement process. It was also important that the people consulted reflected the diversity of Nebo Shire. Nebo Shire has a combination of people who are here to work in the mines, people who have retired here, people who work on or run cattle properties and other primary industry businesses, and finally people who provide services to members of our community. Ways in which the community was consulted included:

- public meetings were held in the Nebo, Coppabella and Glenden townships
- a survey to all households in the Nebo Shire
- using the shire's *From the boardroom* newsletter to provide information about the corporate planning process
- all staff of the Nebo Shire Council had the opportunity to be involved in planning sessions. The majority of staff are also residents in Nebo Shire.

The public meetings, councillor planning, staff planning meetings and survey were all developed and designed using the principles of appreciative inquiry, participative action practice and of engaging the heart and mind in planning. These active participation techniques produced a far better result in terms of engaging the community than council had previously experienced.

Lockhart River

The Lockhart River Building Productive Partnerships approach is fundamentally different to the traditional government approach to dealing with the issues faced by Indigenous Communities. The traditional approach has often started with a pre-determined solution that is based in good intentions, but 'cooked up' outside the community and at times based on a set of basic assumptions about what is wrong within the community and about what needs to be 'fixed' without reference to the community. This traditional government way of thinking narrows the development of potential solutions to difficult problems and leaves the balance of power with government and not the community. It also limits the creativity and confidence of people in Lockhart River to do something about their situation and reduces their interest and need to take personal responsibility for creating change.

The aim of the Building Productive Partnerships strategy is to build community capacity and performance through a focus on:

- culture, which includes both traditional and contemporary culture and is a key element of individual and community identity (Schein 1992; Wheatley 1994)
- capability, which includes knowledge, skills, attitude and world view and can be developed through experience, mentoring, shadowing, education and/or training

- commitment, including engagement, motivation and confidence to take responsibility and to act to achieve results
- connections, which includes people getting in touch with themselves and their own life purpose, as well as building effective relationships with other people.

Ipswich

For Ipswich, the range of engagement activities included:

- development of a shared vision between key politicians and the management team responsible for social and community services for the Ipswich community. The vision was to identify the nature, type, level and sustainability of service provision over the next four years through a series of strategic planning workshops.
- agreement at council level to a Human Services Framework to respond to current and future service opportunities and resource demands. An excerpt from the framework is provided in Appendix 1.
- joint planning — established linkages between the economic, social and infrastructure planning of local government, and ensuring links to major planning efforts at state and federal government levels. This meant people working at each level of government had to spend time exploring what was similar and what was different in their visions of the future for Ipswich and identify ways to reflect their views in the overall approach for the city.

As for Nebo Shire and Lockhart River, the engagement approaches used within-organisation, across-organisation and with the community were participative, designed to build shared responsibility, positive, and aimed to create not just good relationships but the systems and structures to create sustained outcomes and performance for the community.

Performance systems and authority to act

In each of these case studies the development of community social capital and the connections between the ‘social institutions’ and their communities was dependent on building effective relationships through the community engagement activities outlined above. It was also dependent on the delivery of performance and other systems to adequately support the engagement agenda and the activities identified by communities as key to their futures.

Nebo

For Nebo Shire the 2005–2010 Corporate Plan is the ‘artefact’ of the engagement process and in essence is the promise to deliver on the shared vision, social interaction and relationships developed through the community engagement process. The Corporate Plan incorporates the

views of the community and is a pragmatic document that aims to be deliverable through council as the key social institution in Nebo Shire.

Lockhart River

“The Lockhart River Community Plan is being used as a guiding document with activities arising from the ‘energy’ and leadership potential in the community. Dr Warren Hoey acknowledges the usefulness of this approach” (Lockhart River Community Plan 2005).

This Community Plan and the approach taken to develop it is different — it is a very personal picture of people’s stories, aspirations and what they want to do. I think working with people’s passions in this way will achieve sustainable results.

“No matter which group or individual is being worked with, the starting point is always the human “life force” — people’s passions, motivation, good stories and what asserts (physical, environmental, social, economic and spiritual) they have to build on. Performance strategies emerge from the “warm-up” of the community leaders, that is, what is important or motivating to them” (Clayton 1993).

The Community Plan also forms the basis of the performance plan and reporting systems for the Lockhart River Aboriginal Council and for future action in the community. The high level of ownership by councillors, by the community and by government agencies involved in its development meant that in addition to having the performance systems in place, there is also a strong relationship and shared vision and culture to engender ongoing delivery of the Plan (see Wheatley and Schien).

Ipswich

Performance systems were developed through focussing on the key areas for the Balanced Scorecard — financial performance, working with the community and stakeholders, internal systems and processes, and learning systems. These performance systems are embedded in thinking, reporting and planning and are also used in managing current and future resource needs and provide a way of managing the level and type of services that can and will be delivered. The Human Services Framework is the ‘artefact’ of this performance system and creates certainty around ways in which council can respond to and engage with the community as it deals with the massive growth in the city.

2. Engagement processes as social interactions

In each of these case studies, community engagement has been embedded in the planning and thinking for the future. In every case the initial focus was to build capacity within the organisation

and across organisations as the basis for developing good community engagement. That is, the culture, leadership capacity and social capital was examined and then developed to enable the council 'social actors' to model the way in which they want to interact with the community. Each of the case study areas used a different approach but the principles were the same and will be examined in the theory section below.

Leadership, organisational culture and change

Leadership and organisational culture has a significant influence on the ability of social institutions to plan for the future and then to be able to deliver services. Why focus on leadership capability and organisational culture? Organisation culture is the key to high performing organisations, and particularly to high performance over time (Collins 2001; Dunphy et al. 2002; Neuhauser et al. 2000). Leaders create the culture through their behaviour and by what they pay attention to (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1998; Schein 1992; Yalom 1985).

They also reinforce culture through the behaviours, systems, structures and reward processes they put in place. Other key elements of organisational culture are the stories and web of relationships that reinforce the organisational mythology and sensemaking (Weick 1995; Wenger 1998; Schein 1992; Snowden 2002).

Key actions in building the culture and leadership capabilities used in all of the case studies included:

- focussing on leadership development activities even where they are not called this. In Ipswich, leadership development activities were called planning but included activities and strategies to build the collective leadership capabilities and understandings of people in council and in the community.
- working with rather than against key cultural structures within the organisation. For example, in Nebo Shire planning had always incorporated public meetings, and there was an expectation by the community that this would happen and therefore it was included as a strategy in the engagement approach
- aiming to work collaboratively across boundaries within the councils, with community groups, community members and key stakeholders such as state and federal government rather than focussing on internal organisational silos
- identifying the organisational culture and associated needs. For example in Ipswich, the culture of the group of people delivering social and community services to Ipswich was assessed using Schein's model of culture (Schein 1992). This assessment indicated that the group would need to focus on building an identity with the Human Services Framework being

both an artefact of the culture and representing the espoused values and basic assumptions about the group's way of operating.

As we have said, leadership and culture of all types strongly influences the ability of councils and any type of organisation to engage with its staff, its councillors or formal leaders and its communities/customers. The skills required to build effective working relationships, to lead difficult consultation and engagement processes, to get people on the same page for planning are embedded in good leadership behaviour.

In writing about these three case studies we are making explicit the embedded assumptions behind the engagement approaches used to build capacity within the councils as social institutions, within communities as social institutions and within the practice of community engagement.

Engagement with the community

Recognising engagement as a social interaction means that the key to effective engagement is the development of relationships and ongoing mechanisms to keep councils and their communities close. In running engagement events, delivering presentations and training sessions on community engagement, it is clear that food, fun and festivity are key to building good social interactions and therefore effective engagement.

For Nebo Shire, engagement included:

- holding public planning meetings, starting from base level, with anyone from the community who wanted to be part of the program — with food and some fun included in the program
- involving the people who work for the shire as part of the planning sessions to build ownership and responsibility
- a survey of residents, asking about key issues and taking a positive approach to identifying potential areas for change.

For Lockhart River, engagement included strong interactive and participatory processes around:

- working with community members in a way that reflected their own culture
- using multiple approaches to engagement and using social events like church meetings, BBQs, football as the basis for engagement
- supporting and mentoring key people in the community who have the energy and drive to make a difference
- change management to harness a collective and forward looking approach to developing commitment and ownership to a future of a sustainable community.

For Ipswich, examples of engagement activities that are building better engagement include:

- the development of the Ipswich 2020 and Beyond Vision which established a series of community consultations, focus groups and programs that would support engagement between the community and council over the 20-year vision for the city
- establishment of an innovative engagement model that focuses on a place-based approach for young people to inform council decision-making processes in relation to service provision within their community
- reviewing and reframing of local consultative group structures that focus on providing advice and feedback on council's strategic initiatives such as the Ageing Study, Disability Action Plan and development of cultural plans.

Theoretical foundations

As noted, there are a number of common models of engagement and change used as the basis for planning, engagement and leader development across all three case studies. These theoretical models form the basis for action and for working in very different ways in delivering engagement activities and strategies that are interactive, create sustainability, recognise the positives, and recognise the history and strong capabilities of the people involved (even where they don't recognise them).

Effective leadership of engagement

Effective leadership is essential to successful engagement. What often isn't clear from the research and literature is that engagement and engagement leadership is messy, non-linear, often chaotic and confrontational. These issues are implied in the lists of capabilities and strategies required for success and the blockages that have to be managed to make things work but are rarely made explicit. A number of writers are focussing on the implications for leadership of complex community and government initiatives. Wheatley, Stacey, Pascale et al. and Lewin and Regine are all exploring the leadership capabilities that are required when organisations and communities are at the edge of chaos; that is, working in today's busy, changing world. Stacey's work and that of other writers in this field indicates that where there is complexity in the organisation, the people and the environment, high-level leadership and management skills are essential (Wheatley 1994; Stacey 2000; Pascale et al. 2000; Lewin and Regine 1999; Argyris 1994). This approach is also reflected in the work of Senge and others on leadership in the learning organisation (Senge in Hesselbein et al. 1996).

Blockages to engagement

Despite a strong focus on engagement in the public policy, welfare and human services literature for many years, there is still little mainstream leadership or organisational literature devoted to community engagement or engagement practice (Huxham and Vangen 2000, p. 1160). As Miles and Miles note, "although engagement and collaborative behaviour, particularly the creation and sharing of knowledge, occurs all around us, it is not viewed as a legitimate process in the business world" (Conger et al. 1999, p. 330; Wenger 1998).

Successful engagement requires a good understanding of the issues that can block collaboration.

These issues include:

- governance, legal and regulatory tradition (Conger et al. 1999, p. 333; Lawrence et al. 2002, p. 282)
- competitive confusion amongst members, including funding support (Stokes and Tyler 1997, p. 21)
- barriers to trust (Conger et al. 1999, p. 340)
- control issues and barriers to funding (Conger et al. 1999, p. 340; Stokes and Tyler 1997, p. 21)
- lack of time — it often takes significant time to achieve a visible outcome (Conger et al. 1999, p. 340; Stokes and Tyler 1997, p. 21)
- poor collaborative leadership capability (Conger et al. 1999, p. 340)
- lack of awareness and discussion of the ideological basis of the collaborative approach that each person brings with them (Conger et al. 1999, p. 340)
- diversity of perspectives (El Ansari et al. 2001, p. 217)
- difficulty in evaluating success (El Ansari et al. 2001, p. 217)
- no clear boundaries about the engagement context (Lawrence et al. 2002, p. 283)
- complexity of the environment and the task (Ashkenas et al. 2002, p. 141).

This paper argues that effective leaders, if they and their group members establish effective relationships, information flows, shared vision/stories and the right structures, systems and processes, will be able to deal with these difficulties before they arise (Boas 2000; Stacey 2000).

Another issue that blocks engagement is the lack of recognition in mainstream management literature that collaboration is a legitimate organisational paradigm (Stokes and Tyler 1997, p. 19). There is generally no shared view in the strategic management and leadership literature of the importance of engagement and of collaboration as a mechanism to improve community economic and social outcomes. Working on the assumption that leaders and decision-makers are influenced by what they read and hear from these writers and researchers, leaders in

collaboration have a tough job in ensuring that senior managers, decision-makers and key sponsors continue to support these activities. This is particularly so in our experience when the engagement activity is going through the 'chaotic' phases of development, where the objective isn't clear, there is conflict in the group and action is not happening.

It is also important to recognise that full engagement isn't always the answer. There are many options to solve organisational or community social and economic difficulties that should be explored in addition to collaboration as part of the scoping of the issue or project being dealt with (McKenndall 1996; Ashkenas et al. 2002, p. 145).

Very few authors identified through this research talked about the dark side of leading engagement activities. Some of them talked about the dark side of engagement — what goes wrong — which led to the list outlined above. However, each of the competencies/capabilities identified in the previous section is based on a set of assumptions — see Schein (1992) and Argyris (1994) about ways to analyse these assumptions — that also require a further set of skills. Questions of what happens when it all goes wrong, how collaborative leaders operate under pressure and how to pick up the pieces are generally not addressed, possibly because the authors were working on 'selling' the idea of engagement.

As those of us who have worked in collaborative groups and projects, there are many stories about engagement activities that have failed to achieve their objectives and that have left unhappy people in their wake.

The 'how to' of engagement

The work of Tjosvold and Limerick et al. provides an approach to the development of engagement strategies, where structures and systems are put in place to develop collaborative individualism and dynamic interdependence amongst the members of the engagement group and therefore allow for sustainable and effective engagement (O'Looney 1994; Limerick et al. 1998). It is clear that engagement activities need to be supported by more than leadership capability. They require effective operating structures and agreements, a set of shared goals that are able to be achieved, people and funding as key resources, a planned and structured approach to development, and to fit within the political environment (Conger et al. 1999; Stokes and Tyler 1997).

Other models of engagement and collaboration include Sandfort, Eisler, and Stokes and Tyler. Sandfort suggests that in building collaboration, there is a need to consider not only the individual requirements of the engagement approach and issues of turf and interpersonal conflicts, but also

the group and organisational issues which can be mapped using complexity theory and systems mapping approaches (Sandfort 1999, p. 335; Stacey 2000a).

Eisler's research identifies seven stages of engagement: awareness, tentative exploration and mutual acknowledgement, trust building, collegiality, consensus, commitment and collaboration (from work by Cary). Eisler emphasises the need to create shared goals as a way of reducing interpersonal and task conflict and that collaborative groups need to recognise that conflict is part of the development and the path to success of the group (Eisler 1995, pp. 68-70).

Stokes and Tyler suggest a set of guidelines (from Melville and Blank) and principles that support successful participative engagement that include:

- Involve all key players
- Choose a realistic strategy
- Establish a shared vision
- Agree to disagree on the process
- Make promises you can keep
- Keep your eyes on the prize
- Build ownership at all levels
- Avoid red herrings
- Institutionalise the change
- Publicise your successes
- Recognise that successful engagement is a group and community development activity (Wenger 1998, p. 12; Levin and Cervantes 1999; Dick 1998)
- Participative engagement should be process oriented and create collective learning (Storck and Hill 2000)
- Know that engagement requires professional development and high level skills
- Evaluation has to be built into the process (preferably through action research approaches)
- Recognise that successful sustainable engagement takes time (Stokes and Tyler 1997, pp. 22-4; Cohen and Prusak 2001).

Developing engaging leaders

From the literature and research, key skills and capability areas for collaborative leader development are listed below. The list is extensive and to some extent idealistic, but it reflects the complexity and high levels of capability to successfully manage engagement, particularly as seen for these case studies where there are very difficult social and economic issues to face, or massive change is going to impact on the area.

Key capabilities include:

1. being able to work autonomously in a chaotic and difficult environment
2. having effective interpersonal skills and understanding how to engage others — including being empathetic and nurturing (emotional intelligence)
3. being intuitive, innovative and creative
4. being a transforming and charismatic leader
5. have and be able to develop effective networks
6. having a life-long learning focus for yourself, including an understanding of your own assumptions and behavioural responses
7. being able to build trust with others and to influence groups
8. having strong change facilitation skills and the ability to develop communities
9. understanding the broader political context and being politically skilled
10. understanding systems and complexity theory analyses — what is really going on and how to influence it
11. marketing and communication skills - telling the collaboration story
12. taking risks and being entrepreneurial
13. being pragmatic, achieving task outcomes and being able to identify and access sources of resources
14. patience and sense of humour (sense of humour isn't in the literature but in our experience it is a key).

More recent leadership theory and approaches clearly indicate that these skills can be developed, but they have to be developed in a planned and systematic way (Manz and Sims 2000; Hesselbein et al. 1996; Limerick et al. 1998, p. 101; Dubrin 1998, p. 387). Earlier models of leadership stated or implied that no development of leaders was required beyond technical and management skills such as project management, presentation skills, etc. — and many senior managers and opinion leaders still support this view.

The development of engaging and collaborative leaders is the work of another paper, but experience shows that the development approach has to be structured, experiential, work-related, include action-research elements and have an explicit set of assumptions about leadership including that leaders take responsibility for their own learning.

Those of us who are developing engagement strategies and the leaders who deliver on these strategies need to recognise that these leaders will be cutting across the general management paradigms of their organisations (social institutions), they will often be working with senior managers and stakeholders whose assumptions about leadership do not fit this model, also they

will be involved in complex work which requires a high level of skill and energy. Not recognising this and providing time for reflection and recognition of success can lead to burnout (Huxham and Vangen 2000, p. 1171; Sandfort 2001).

Results

To date, the following has been achieved for Nebo Lockhart River and Ipswich.

For Nebo:

- Council has a much clearer idea of the needs and views of the community
- There is a basis on which to progress social infrastructure development
- A commitment to building capacity within the community and within volunteer and non-government organisations to support social capital development
- There is stronger ownership of the corporate plan by community members
- There is an ongoing basis for dialogue between the Nebo Shire Council and the community.

For Cape York:

The Building Productive Partnerships approach is a work in progress, but early research shows there are many improvements and outcomes already, including:

- stronger collaboration and connections between government and community, as well as across government resulting in more integrated policy and service delivery
- increased community capability to collectively influence difficult policy, governance and service delivery issues, as well as participate in planning and decision-making
- renewed interest in issues of community and culture by community, government and business
- increased commitment from stakeholders and more 'energy' for innovation and action
- increased number of positive stories about how people's lives have changed, how they are taking more responsibility and achieving more than they ever imagined
- increased community leadership capability, resulting in the formation of new economic and social ventures, which previously floundered.

For Ipswich:

- Strengthened relationships between managers and the politicians responsible for social infrastructure development as evidenced by increased dialogue in committee meetings in regards to benefits and issues on service delivery programs
- Higher level of collaboration between managers on key programs and initiatives within and external to the department leading to innovation in program delivery
- Improved communication and development of innovative responses to program development between councillors and managers

- Managers undertaking the development planning and performance frameworks including the Human Service Delivery Framework for Ipswich
- Establishment of agreed performance goals that will assist in communicating with councillors and the broader community the reality of managing constrained resources to delivery services in a growth environment.

Conclusion

Putting people first in building strong community engagement processes to support sustainable communities is challenging and rewarding. It simply is a case of determining where the energy will be focussed at building individual capability within institutional capacity at multiple levels of the institution — be they at grassroots level, within and across the organisation or with other institutions within the community. The necessity for community engagement processes to focus on the individuals participation, inclusion, trust and commitment to 'group values' of shaping a desired future for a sustainable community becomes the hallmark of success.

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