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Facilitation as an ADR process

When people are heard, the healing begins

Roberta Mead

Increasingly decision-makers engage with their community not only to inform but also to hear their stakeholders' views. The authenticity of the consultation can perhaps be gauged by the questions posed, the facilitated discussion and the influence the community's views have on the final decisions.

Facilitation of structured community discussion allows individuals' opinions to be spoken, heard, shared and recorded - and votes to be taken should that be necessary.

Consider the diversity of stakeholders and wealth of views facing the owners and decision-makers of the World Trade Centre following the events of 11 September 2001 and the resultant redevelopment of Ground Zero.

From town hall to summit

Enter, literally, the 21st century town hall meeting - a citizens' summit,

'Listening to the City - Remember and Rebuild'. Welcome to the Jacob Javits Convention Centre. Midtown Manhattan, 20 July 2002. In one room for the one non-stop day - 5000 participants, each with a voting keypad, 10 people per table, each with a facilitator and laptop; a lead facilitator with a detailed script on the centre stage, televised on concert-style video screens hanging throughout the auditorium; a theme team ready to read and feedback laptop-relayed views; a production team, floor managers, area co-ordinators, catering team, first aid, security and press from all over the

This is the non-profit organisation AmericaSpeaks' line of business -21st century town hall meetings. This one would cost SUS2.5M. Five hundred (500) volunteer facilitators had been selected from emailed invitations and website registrations of credentials and



30 words of suitability. Most, of course, were from the US – with a predominance from New York. Six other countries were also represented! Afghanistan, Canada, Colombia, South Africa, United Kingdom and Australia. I was the Australian – and felt privileged to be included. My notification email read 'we are pleased to confirm you as a facilitator for Listening to the City on July 20 in New York City. Please make all the necessary arrangements to be at your orientation on July 19.'

Planning and preparation

All 500 of us attended one of three three-hour orientations the day before the event, which was our first introduction to the format and proceedings of the day. Our role was detailed and described as 'the human face of the day', the host, anchor, timekeeper, scribe, monitor and facilitator of our allocated table. We were advised to go 'home' and study the six proposed plans and familiarise ourselves with the detailed agenda.

I chose to visit the site in preparation for understanding the street layout and plans – a profound and moving experience in itself. The 16 acre site, now a hole in the ground, once comprised five buildings, a subway station and a PATH train interchange. Legally, the holder of the 99 year lease, let in July 2001 to Laurence Silverstein (an Australian), could rebuild exactly the space that had been lost:

- 10 million square feet of office space,
- 600,000 square feet of retail space, and
 600,000 square feet of hotel
- (Marriott World Trade Centre).
 Participants had also registered
 on a website, and in addition, specific
 groups were targeted to attend so
 that ideally each table could be a
 microcosm of Lower Manhattan
 and other interested citizens. One
 participant was to be the laptop
 operator for the table, with whom



Figure 1: Signage for 'Listening to the City'

entries made on the table's behalf.

On the day the event began with a soloist singing 'America the Beautiful', followed by short presentations from representatives of the decision-makers – the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. Subsequently six concept plans were presented, each representing a different configuration of the space to be rebuilt. None of the concept buildings was tall.

of Lower Manhattan residents versus others, or groups by age range or ethnicity – depending on the context of the question. Technology was a key to the process of the day.

The day proceeded with a very tight agenda – questions being posed by the lead facilitator and displayed on the video screens followed by timed discussion at the tables with discussion recorded via the laptop and frequently sent to the theme team. A count-down clock kept discussion on time – and

Everyone could be heard,
and no matter what their view,
it could be recorded in one of the categories.
This was a key factor in the
success of the consultation.

Managing the process

At the start of the day, participants entered their demographic details into their individual voting keypads – gender, age, race, ethnicity, residential area, household income, relationship to the events of September 11, and reason for attending this event. This same keypad was used for frequent voting throughout the day, allowing the vote to be displayed according to the demographics – for example the vote

questions were closed accordingly. Within two or three minutes of closing, the 'themes' from the room, as determined by the trained 20 person 'theme team' were displayed on the overhead screens, validating table discussions. Voting was similarly displayed in histograms or percentages, giving almost instant feedback to the room.

Questions included, for example 'your hopes and fears for the site'. The

we would work closely and check the



theme for hopes was for 'inspiration, boldness and distinction', and for fears was 'mediocrity and grief'. This warmup question essentially set the scene. The day was then relentlessly driven from the centre stage, without any breaks. Bagged lunches were brought to the table and somehow eaten during discussion.

The noise of 5000 people talking in the one room was such that intense focus was required by everyone at the table - especially the facilitator - to overcome distractions and keep the table focussed on the current question,

Fortunately consensus was not required as there was provision to enter the 'majority view' and 'strongly held minority views'. Everyone could be heard, and no matter what their view, it could be recorded in one of the categories.

> ensuring entries were made accurately by the scribe, and checked with the group. Fortunately consensus was not required as there was provision to enter the 'majority view' and 'strongly held minority views'. Everyone could be heard, and no matter what their view, it could be recorded in one of the categories. This was a key factor in the success of the consultation.

Each concept plan was considered in turn, with questions about likes and dislikes of each. Ultimately the preferred concept plan vote was taken, followed by questions to address the economic and cultural life of Lower Manhattan, given the impact of the exodus from the area, unemployment, and the changes in the perception of life in that part of Manhattan.

The predominant themes and messages from the day included the following:

- The preliminary plans were appropriate, although they were too cluttered and not tall enough.
- Be bold in design this is New York

- City and the skyline must be distinctive.
- · Go out to international competition for design.
- Don't build on the 'footprints' of the twin towers - they are hallowed ground.
- The memorial must be inspirational. The AmericaSpeaks format includes the representatives of the decision makers speaking at the conclusion of the day, saying what they've heard from the event. In so doing, the spokesperson was soundly corrected by participants, who essentially wanted

the owners of the site to buy back the 99 year lease so that the legal contract allowing the rebuilding of all the space would no longer apply, and therefore open space on the site would be possible.

It was a fascinating, extending and stand out experience – but did the decision-makers listen to the city? To test the authenticity of the consultation, the question is 'have participants' views influenced the decisions?'

Post-facilitation developments

Since 'Listening to the City' on 20 July 2002, the following have been included in the redevelopment process:

- architectural companies, both US and international, varying from traditional to avant-garde, were selected to submit concept plans based on a brief which included criteria from the citizens' summit:
 - not building on the footprints of the twin towers
 - office space could be built in any part of Manhattan and over the next few years rather than all immediately
 - building on the WTC site could be in stages, but builders must show that the area will not continually be under construction
- distinctive and bold design was encouraged.
- · Plans subsequently submitted were indeed tall, bold and innovative. They included ideas of vertical cities, hanging gardens in the sky, twisting

skyscrapers and spires higher than any other structure in the world. In what was referred to as 'the most important urban redevelopment challenge for the new century', architects not surprisingly added building safety features to allay fears of people working in the structures, although the upper floors would be decorative rather than designed as office space.

• By December 2002, designs were displayed at the Wintergarden adjacent to the site, and again public feedback was sought. From the nine submissions, two were shortlisted one from 'Think' in New York City, and the other from 'Studio Daniel Libeskind' in Berlin. In March 2003 this latter firm's design was finally chosen. The design will be further revised and modified, but essentially includes a 70 storey building with a 540 metre spire, indoor gardens and preservation of part of the pit and the bathtub wall as elements of the memorial. Additionally the positioning of the buildings gives rise to a sunlight memorial every 11 September. It appears, however, that there is still much negotiation necessary on a variety of fronts before building commences.

Returning, then, to the question of the authenticity of the consultation, it appears the themes of the participants on 20 July have in fact significantly influenced the events that followed. The City was in fact heard, and in that process, influenced the redevelopment of the site.

The facilitation process supported that outcome by:

- the selection of questions to ask participants, ensuring they were the key questions, correctly phrased to elicit the results
- allowing sufficient time for discussion of questions 20-30 minutes for each
- the facilitation role of including everyone and all points of view, entries to the laptop being checked with the group for accuracy of interpretation, and using skills to maintain concentration, focus and listening
- considered and non-judgmental listening
- · following a structured process
- · allowing large numbers to participate

on the day, followed by a one-day event of 300, for others who could not attend, and subsequently an online facilitated forum to canvas still other views.

Bringing it home

Twelve months later, on 13 September 2003, an AmericaSpeaks-style event called 'Dialogue with the City', was held in Perth. Hosted by Allanah MacTiernan, Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, and orchestrated from her office with support from America Speaks, 1100 people participated in planning Perth, to make it the world's most liveable city by 2030. In that time, the population of Perth will grow from 1.46 million to an estimated 2.2 million, requiring 370,000 new homes and 350,000 new jobs.

My role as Facilitator Co-ordinator included facilitator orientation at the full-day training for our 130 volunteer facilitators, 130 volunteer scribes, floor managers and area staff. Passing on the experience of a table facilitator and taking an active part in planning and running the event afforded a timely opportunity for a different view of the process and the complexities involved. As a table facilitator, the concern is for 10 participants, whereas in this new role, the focus was on the whole room and the overall production of the event.

Both participants and facilitators reported the day a great success – again because participants' views were heard in answer to specific questions, which were themed and presented back to the room. In this event, a 1.5 metre x 1 metre map of about a 50km radius of Perth was supplied to each table of participants for them to plan their

preferred city style, the location of dwellings and areas to be protected. General discussion was therefore converted into practical planning decisions, highlighting the competing demands and tensions between points of view when lines are actually drawn on a map.

Success in staging this day was reliant on the extensive work done by the planning team, and the relationships in place with the team. Communication on the day was via radio head sets, meaning that information could be checked or changed quickly. Included in the radio conversation was the Area Team, so everyone was receiving the same information and undertaking tasks as the day unfolded. There were four areas in the room, each with an Area Manager, who worked with 20-30 table facilitators, each on a table of eight participants plus a trained scribe using a laptop.

The mandatory training day for all facilitators and scribes, where they learnt in the role of participants about the content and process of the day, was a key to the success of the event. In addition, the goodwill and enthusiasm of the participants on the Dialogue day was overwhelmingly cited as a major success factor.

To date, reports have been produced and a process implemented to engage liaison teams and working groups to further develop strategies in support of the Dialogue themes, which included:

- a vision of a vibrant, compact and accessible city with a unique sense of place and managed urban growth
- values of sustainability, inclusiveness, innovation and creativity, and equity

contributions

Contributions to the ADR Bulletin for 2004 are welcome

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Submissions should be presented as a Word file, attached to an email.



- principles of
 - enhanced efficiency of urban land use and infrastructure
 - protection and rehabilitation of the environment and improved resource efficiency and energy use
 - enhanced community vitality and cohesiveness.

Conclusion

In both cases described in this article, the issues to be discussed were determined by the authorities, and in the process of facilitated discussion views were canvassed and votes taken to prioritise those views in order to influence decision-makers. This is essentially 'busy facilitation', meaning that the agenda moves quickly and is not in the table facilitator's control. In this situation, the facilitator's tasks are to maintain focus on the current question, keep things moving, timekeep, hear from everyone, summarise views for the scribe, and simply look after the well-being of the participants and the group as far as possible.

Perhaps the challenges for the facilitator are working in a noisy and unfamiliar environment with an unknown group, developing rapport quickly, focusing, hearing all views without judgment, maintaining their own energy for the day, really listening and accurately summarising the discussion for the record.

Facilitated discussion as used in the cases described here is considered an early intervention ADR process. Facilitation essentially means 'to make easy' or 'help forward', and in these cases, it primarily allows early inclusion of stakeholder opinions in decisions under consideration.

Facilitation of authentic consultation may pre-empt other ADR processes further down the track, and lead to inclusive and balanced decisions as projects progress. Research shows that once included in the process, people are more willing to go along with decisions, even if their preferred outcome is not substantiated. Being heard appears to be powerful, if only we, as facilitators, can hear.

Website links for further information: <www.listeningtothecity.org> <www.dpi.wa.gov.au/dialogue/>.

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