

From Monologue to Dialogue: an overview of consultation methods

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1 Definition of Community Dialogue Processes

Dialogue, public dialogue, public participation, citizen participation (Fiorino 1990) are a range of processes which are referred to in this report under the generic heading of *community dialogue* processes. There is some variation in the way in which these different terms are used in the literature. However there are two elements that are believed to characterise a genuine community dialogue process. For a process to be a *community dialogue* process it should involve the following elements (Kass 2000):

- Deliberation – careful consideration of evidence, social interaction, discussion and debate, consideration of a range of views, and the opportunity to re-evaluate initial positions.
- Inclusion – involvement of a diverse range of individuals and groups, including previously excluded groups who are not represented in the normal stakeholder discussions.

There is a range of arguments put forward in the literature for using community dialogue processes (Controller and Auditor General 1998), (Hillary Commission 2001). These have been summarised by Fiorino (1990) who identified three major reasons lying behind the desire to conduct community dialogue processes. These are:

- A *normative argument* that the community has a right to such dialogue processes simply as a consequence of its right to democracy. This could be called a *citizens' rights-based reason*.
- A *substantive argument* that such processes are as likely, or more likely, to get to a correct conclusion than a system just using expert advisors (some believe an example of this is the discovery of the hazardous nature of Agent Orange). This could be called a *quality-based reason* – improving the quality of decisions that are made.
- An *instrumental argument* that community dialogue processes increase the legitimacy and ease of implementation of the results of decision making processed. This could be called an *acceptance-based reason*.

Taken together, these views from the literature have led us to define community dialogue processes as: *specifically designed processes at the community level (rather than government and institutional) that involve both deliberation and inclusion and are based on the belief that such inclusion is a citizen's right, may improve the accuracy of decision making and may assist in the community's acceptance of decisions.*

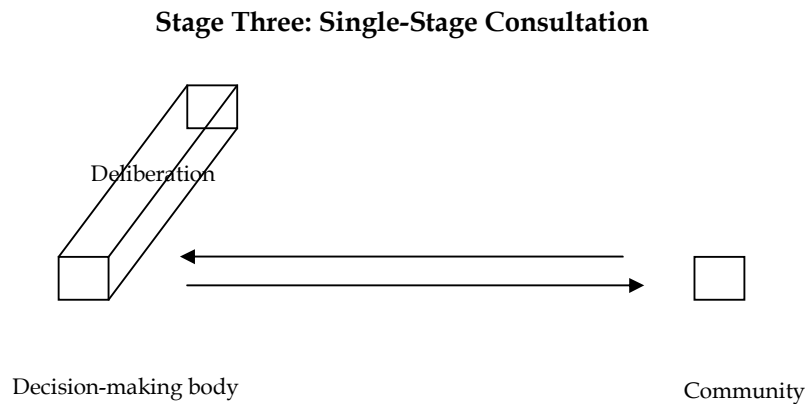
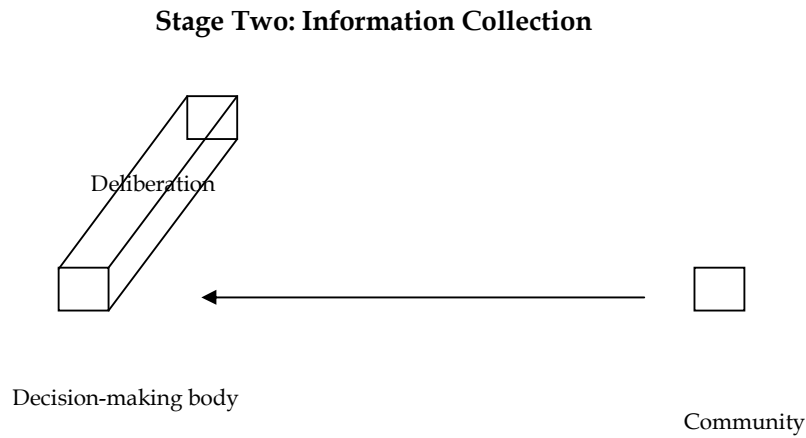
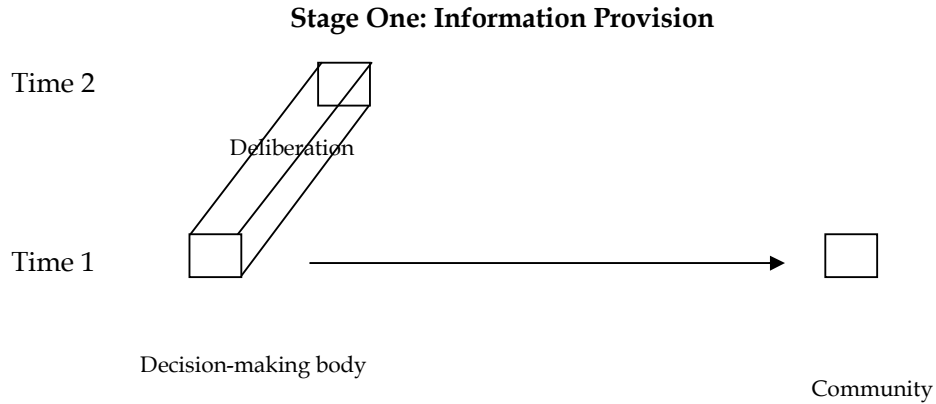
2 Progression From Information Provision Towards Dialogue

Why is public administration giving increasing attention to community dialogue processes? The last few decades have seen a clear progression in thinking about what is desirable regarding the interaction between decision-makers, stakeholders and the community. Thinking has moved from an early stage where *provision of information* by decision-makers to the community was thought to be sufficient. Now it is increasingly believed that there should be an ongoing *dialogue process* that provides sufficient resources and time for a community to adequately deliberate on a topic.

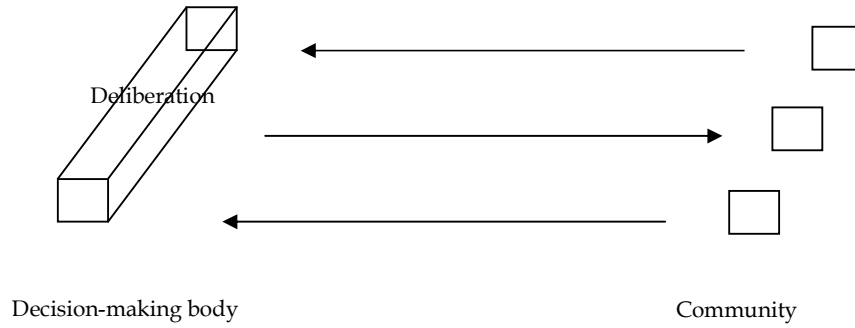
This historic trend is set out in Diagram One. The diagram shows a decision-making body, the community, and the interaction between them over time. From a conceptual point of view, a progression can be seen proceeding through a series of stages with increasing opportunities for deliberation on the part of the community. Stage One shows *information provision* where a decision-making body provides information to the community regarding an aspect of its deliberation about an issue at one point in time. Stage Two is *information collection* where information is collected from the community as input into deliberation by the decision-making body. Stage Three is *single-stage consultation* where there is two-way interaction between the decision-making body and the community, as input into the decision-making body's deliberations, still at only one point in time. Stage Four is *multi-stage consultation* where there is information provision by the decision-making body, information collection from the community and then information provision reporting on the outcome of the decision-making body's deliberations. This begins to allow for some deliberation by the community. The fifth and last stage is *dialogue process* where there is iterative interaction between the decision-making body and the community, and both are able to progressively deliberate on the issue throughout. There has been a progressive trend in thinking about public administration, which is reflected in Diagram One. The increasing attention to dialogue processes means that it is now being considered as a possibility within consultation planning. While Diagram One sets out a progression towards

dialogue processes, this should not be taken to imply that the earlier 'stages' of consultation/dialogue should not continue to be used extensively as and when appropriate.

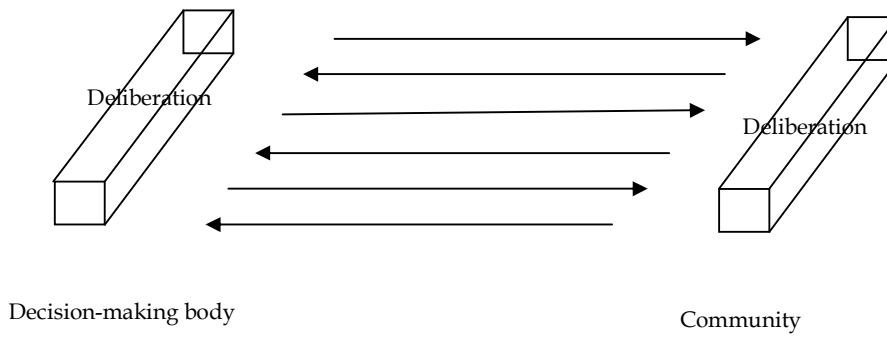
Diagram One: Progressive Phases in the Interaction Between Decision-Making Bodies and the Community



Stage Four: Multi-Stage Consultation



Stage Five: Dialogue Process



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