

Feeding Outcomes of Dialogue Processes into Decision-making

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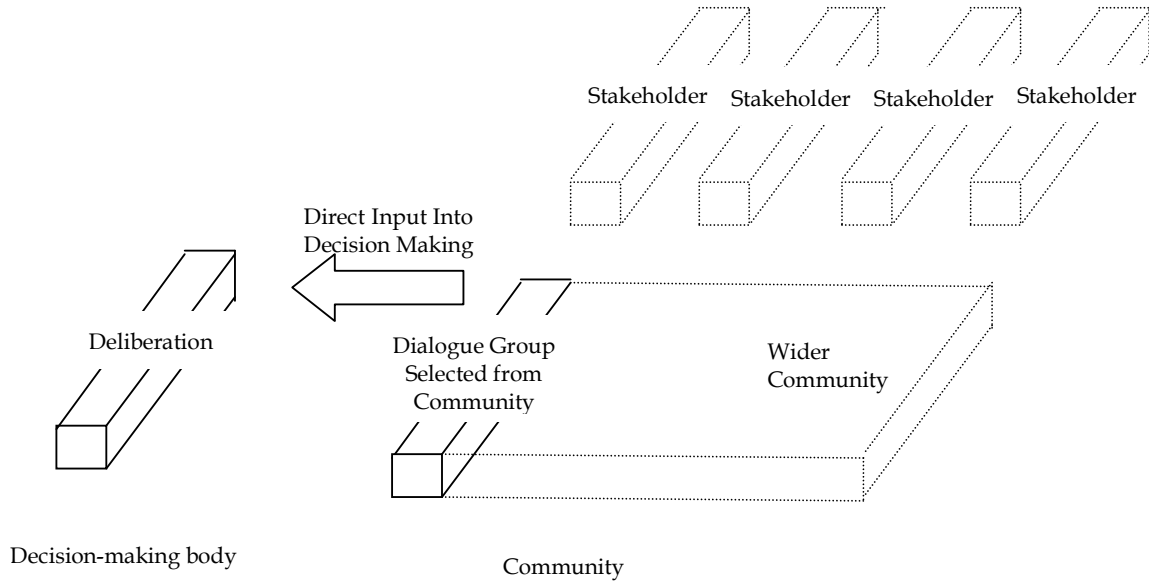
Earlier work by the authors and other sources have outlined the trend in expectations regarding the possibilities for interaction between decision-makers, stakeholders and the wider community. This article moves on to briefly outline two options for how the results from any particular dialogue process can be fed into decision-making.

The diagram below, presents the two possibilities in diagrammatic form. Model One shows the overall elements that need to be considered. These are the decision-making body, stakeholders, the wider community and the dialogue group selected from the community. Model One shows the situation where the outcomes of the deliberation by the dialogue group selected from the community is fed back directly into the decision-making taking place in the decision-making body. Where this occurs there does not need to be too much emphasis on feeding the outcomes of the dialogue out to other players in the overall system. A citizen's jury that fed directly into decision-making by a local authority would be an example of this.

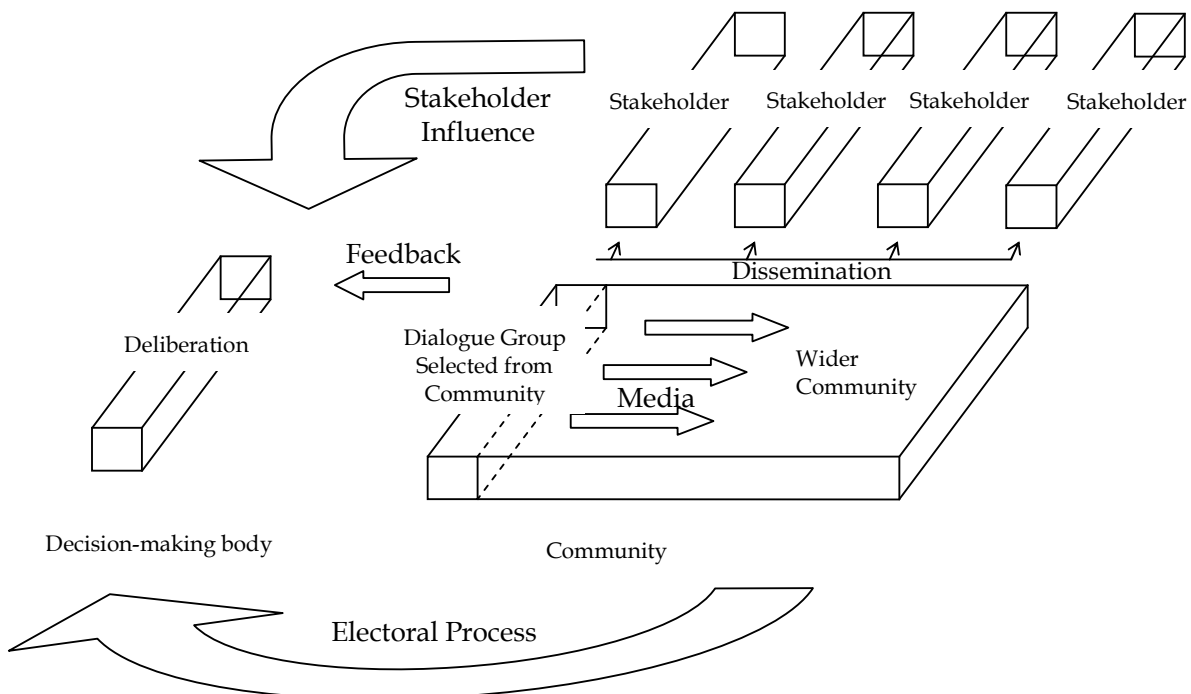
In contrast, Model Two illustrates the more complex situation which does not presume that the outcomes from a dialogue will feed directly and immediately into a decision-making process. In this case there needs to be much more attention paid to the way in which outcomes from the dialogue group are fed back to the range of players in the overall system. In this model the information about outcomes is disseminated to the whole range of stakeholders which, in turn, may ultimately influence decision-making. In addition there is dissemination via the media to the wider community, which has the potential to influence decision-making through the electoral process or indirectly through influencing other stakeholder groups.

Diagram : Two models of how the Outcomes of a Deliberative Process can be Fed Back into Decision-making

Model One: Direct Input Into Decision Making



Model Two: Indirect Dissemination Model



The purpose of this diagram is to illustrate the complexity of the link between specific dialogue processes and decision-making. In designing dialogue processes we need to be clear if it is intended for the outcome of such processes to have a direct influence on immediate decision-making. If this is not the case, it is essential that those designing a dialogue process pay careful attention to the way in which information about the outcome of the process will be fed back and disseminated to the wider community, stakeholders and decision makers. If this is not done, then no matter how well conducted a specific dialogue process is and no matter how much was spent on it, the amount spent will have been largely wasted. The event is likely to remain an isolated process disengaged from wider societal decision-making regarding the policy issue being considered.

The diagram also highlights that any specific dialogue process is located within a wider system of interaction between diverse stakeholder and decision-making groups in the community. Therefore the decision to use a particular dialogue process needs to be taken in the wider context of a strategic overview of all of the important interactions already occurring within the relevant community.

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