

## **Community Engagement: A Relational Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Community engagement is increasingly being employed by organisations as a key strategy to incorporate representative community opinions into decision-making. Governments have recognised the benefits of engaged, participatory civic opinion to guide complex social issues and have legislated for consultation to be included in major social projects. Simultaneously community members are looking for ways to be actively involved in decisions that affect their communities and make organisations accountable for their decisions. Public relations practitioners are increasingly being called to manage these programs. Community engagement founded on a relational theory can be used to extend the discussion of community engagement and guide the context of this practice. This paper briefly reviews the major research perspectives of community engagement and proposes a typology of engagement employing a relational framework to contribute to the existing body of community engagement research. An exploratory study of 20 Australian infrastructure projects with a consultation component are analysed applying this framework. While research findings showed no evidence of discrimination between the terms engagement, consultation, and participation, a range of tactics supported both collaborative and advocacy approaches. The implications for adopting a relational framework for public relations are discussed.

## **Introduction**

The trend to a more socially-inclusive and responsive form of organisational decision-making supports an increasing belief that engaging a community for specific programs can lead to better organisational and social outcomes (Adams & Hess, 2001; Bruning, McGrew, & Cooper, 2006; Everett, 2001). In Australia for example, major infrastructure projects now have a mandatory community involvement requirement, as historically, local community opinion has not been a valued part of organisational decision-making process. Public relations practitioners are playing a dominant role in developing, managing and reporting on community engagement activities, yet little guidance is offered by the literature to inform practice. This paper responds to this problem through firstly, reviewing the theoretical foundations of community engagement practice and proposes a relational framework. The next section of the paper applies this framework to analyse community consultation or engagement practices from 20 Australian infrastructure cases. The implications for public relations and engagement practice are presented in the final section

## **The Engagement Philosophy**

Community engagement is a communication strategy or philosophy that orientates and drives a community communication program. In a community setting, engagement provides a high level of interest by community members in a key problem or topic and may predispose members to act, be involved, or even ignore the topic or issue. Engagement is described a set of attitudes that predispose an individual to action (Barkan, 1998, p. 64). These views rely on interest, trust, knowledge, a sense of civic pride, and a feeling of belonging and support held by the individual (Barkan, 1998). Engagement is characterised by effort and emotional involvement and is an important motivator for action, or as Barkan Zimmer-Gembeck et. al (2006). Barkan suggests engagement is an important motivator for action, or as Zimmer-Gembeck et. al (2006) describe, as observable demonstrations of motivation characterised by effort and emotional involvement. The act of engaging therefore needs to be based on appeals of relevance, context, emotion, and problem recognition (Littlejohn, 1999). Community engagement thus captures both the intent of communicating with a community group and the facilitating of actions to empower community members' interest. Community engagement therefore creates and demands a context conducive for organization-public communication as the goal is to enable organizations to make decisions that reflect representative opinions for social and civic benefits (Adams & Hess, 2001).

## **Community Engagement Typology**

Community engagement is achieved through activities that develop knowledge, skills, values and motivation (O'Connor, 2006). In practice, this is achieved through the creation of awareness and interest of community members through communication programs such as community information, community consultation, and community participation. A typology of community engagement can contribute to the theoretical and applied distinctions of community information, consultation, and participation and advance future research to understand the role of these strategies in engaging communities. Hunt (2002) argues classificational schemata such as typologies are primary tools to organise phenomena to advance theory development (Hunt, 2002). This paper adopts Harvey's (1969, cited in Hunt, 2002) approach to logically partition engagement practices into a typology of community

engagement offering a classification system reflecting classes of engagement philosophies, strategies and tactics “that are homogeneous with respect to some categorical properties (Hunt, 2002, p. 223). The typology also explicates processes as rules or guides for public relations activities to further define and delineate engagement concepts (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

### **Community information**

Successful community engagement is founded on effective, appropriate, and timely information provided to community members. The act of engaging, gaining attention and interest in information provided to communities needs to be based on appeals of relevance, context, emotion, and problem recognition (Littlejohn, 1999). A community information program in the context of community engagement can be defined as the one-way dissemination of concepts (information) relating to a topic or problem to a pre-defined community group, public, or individual members of a community.

A community information program provides facts, context, relevance, or position of an organisational decision and relies on one-way communication channels or situations where the design of the communication interaction is limiting, for example, large public meetings, shopping centre displays, or direct mail brochures.

### **Community Consultation**

Community consultation is defined as the process used to solicit opinions and views by individuals and interested community members relating to a specific organisation-defined issue. Community consultation also recognises that although community members groups may exert influence, the organisation retains the right to make the decision (Bishop & Davis, 2002; Brackertz, Zwart, Meredyth, & Ralston, 2005; Thomas, 1990). The purpose of community consultation therefore is to capture a diverse range of opinions from interested community members, rather than capturing the views of every community member (Spicker, 2006). Consultation therefore requires no promise of influence; after consulting, “the manager makes a decision which may or may not reflect the influence of the group” (Vroom & Yetton cited in Thomas, 1990, p. 437) . This distinction is important yet it is not uncommon to find terms engagement, consultation, and participation, used interchangeably with an implication that the community has been consulted *and* participated in a decision-making process.

### **Community Participation**

Community participation suggests an active role by community members in the creation of meaning and developing solutions to complex social problems or proposed solutions that affect a specific community (Janse & Konijnendijk, 2007). In the context of a typology of community engagement, community participation is conceptualised as the active involvement by community members to jointly develop meanings and negotiate solutions to an issue through dialogic processes in interaction with the focal organisation. The elements of action and engagement by individuals are common to other definitions. The OECD (2001) considers participation as an active partnership where citizens engage in defining processes

and content with a recognition of capacity and the acknowledgement of equality for citizens; highlighting that final responsibility for decisions rests with government. Tang and Waters (2005) also describe community participation as actions to encourage community members through relevant channels and tactics to be involved in planning tasks. Specifically this includes the identification of issues, concerns and information that relates to the problem, and the development and evaluation of solutions to the problem .

A number of scholars have addressed the essential ingredients of participation programs. Bishop and Davis (2002) argue participation involves an expectation by community members that they have a voice in the power sharing process. Janse and Konijnendijk (2007) suggest community participation describes a two-way communication of knowledge and feedback before decision making occurs. Participation therefore relies on all parties to not only have an ability to communicate their definition of meaning but also to collaborate (Hung, 2005) or participate constructively (Heylings & Bravo, 2007). Communication between organisations and its publics is necessary to achieve a dialogue, ultimately to empower communities and increase trust between all parties (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Janse & Konijnendijk, 2007). Participation as the highest order indicates true collaboration and power sharing subscribed by Anstein's (1969) ladder of participation.

### **RQ1 How are the terms information, engagement, consultation, and participation used contemporary Australian consultation projects?**

#### *Relational Framework*

A relational perspective to community engagement offers a departure from the current focus on power sharing emerging from the community consultation and participation literature (Arnstein, 1969; Boxelaar, Paine, & Beilin, 2006; Ray, Dozier, Broom, & Hofstetter, 2006; Shand & Arnberg, 1996) and presents a theory-based framework for exploring these phenomena (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000; Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003). As relationship management is central to accommodating diversity in perspective (Spicer, 1997), this study furthers the application of a relationship model (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006; Ledingham, 2001) considered appropriate for the current social engagement agenda (Gregory, 2003).

A relational perspective is founded on communication (Broom et al., 2000) as a process "to create or negotiate shared understandings" (Ledingham, 2001, p. 205) with community members. Derived from systems theory, a relational perspective suggests the outcomes of a organisational-public relationship are based on patterns of interaction and mutual adaptation over time (Broom et al., 2000). As Broom et al (2000) argue the relationship is defined by the antecedents, relational concepts, and consequences of that exchange. Ongoing communication between an organisation and community members "helps to develop the stable, long-term relationships that an organisation needs to build support from stakeholders and to manage conflict when it occurs" (Grunig & Repper, 1992). The following model applies these concepts within a relational framework to further explore and extend community engagement theory (see figure 1). The model is then explicated in the following discussion to provide definitional clarity.

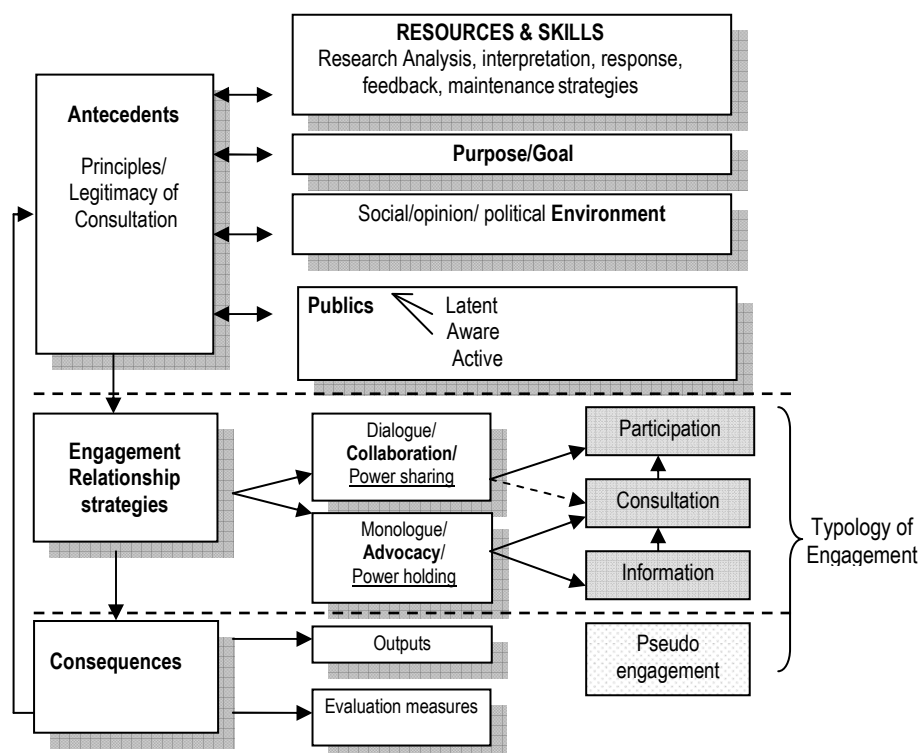


Figure 1: A relational model of community engagement

### *Antecedents*

Antecedents of a relationship are the causes of the relationship (Broom et al., 2000). In community engagement, this would include the organisational resources, engagement goals, social environment, and publics. The engagement goals or objectives may range from a lower order output objective associated with program implementation such as to meet the requirements of the EIS, or an impact objective associated with intended outcomes of the program such as to raise awareness or to influence behaviour of a community group. Organisational resources are allocated to the processes of researching the publics, development and implementation of tactics to meet the needs of the parties to the relationship, and tracking the current social public opinion that surround the key issue for consultation.

### *Community Publics*

Central to examining community engagement is 'community' (Adams & Hess, 2001) yet a notion chorused in the literature is the vagueness of the concept (Cruse, Dollery, & Wallis, 2005; Reddel & Woolcock, 2004). The difficulty in defining 'community' reflects the diversity of individuals or publics that actually surround any project requiring community input (Cruse et al., 2005) and responding to the complexity of stakeholders or publics within a community remains a key challenge (Janse & Konijnendijk, 2007). Parlerm (1999) supports a broader definition of community as it responds to the diversity of actors who can potentially participate in the decision making process. Thomas (1990) supports involving the public as a singular (simple) entity, "means that all members of the public have the opportunity to

become involved, not that all members of the public actually become involved” (Thomas, 1990, p. 443 *notes*).

Community is commonly characterised as either stakeholders or publics (general or community). Freeman (1984) defines stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by organisational purpose” (p. 52). From a community engagement perspective, stakeholders are defined as “groups or categories of people who directly and demonstrably gain or lose rights and/or resources through development operations” (Schwartz & Deruyttere, 1996, p. 11). Publics are defined as “an active social unit consisting of all those affected who recognise a common problem for which they seek common solutions” (Dewey, 1927, cited in Cutlip et al., 2006, p. 209). Categorising community members into publics (Grunig & Repper, 1992) refines the complexity of an homogenous community or stakeholder groups based on how key groups that exist in a community relate to the issue in terms of involvement, context, and impact (Cutlip et al., 2006). A key point noted by Adams and Hess (2001) is the importance of understanding community identities and values, yet community is often defined in community engagement projects geographically. To adequately engage community groups to collaborate in project decision making requires adequate research to not only identify the key publics, current social opinions and drivers of opinion, but also appropriate communication tactics to reach these groups (Schwartz & Deruyttere, 1996).

## **RQ2. How is the concept of ‘community’ described in consultation design?**

### *Relationship strategies*

Organisation-public relationships are created when there is an interdependence between an organisation and its publics, either voluntary or forced, that creates consequences for both parties (Hung, 2005). In community engagement, relationship strategies determine the way an organisation communicates with a community. Communication is recognised as one of the most significant factors accounting for the total behaviour of the organisation (Persson, 2006) and in engagement programs, communication frames determine the way an organisation communicates with a community (Spicer, 1997).

Communication frames construct social reality (Scheufele, 1999) through selection and salience (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) argues framing selects “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Frames therefore define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993, p. 52), a concept elaborated by Spicer (1997) who argues the adopted communication frame, specifically an advocacy or collaborative frame, influences the way communication is defined and used in organisation-community interactions.

Advocacy and collaboration communication frames can be used to differentiate community engagement strategies of information, consultation, and participation. Advocacy is a one way communication frame encased in monologue, while collaborative approaches are more aligned with symmetrical models of public relations and seek to affirm relationships through dialogic frames (Spicer, 1997). Spicer’s advocacy approach to communication is often used in consultation projects viewed as tokenistic (Arnstein, 1969) or legitimizing

rather than integrating community views (Persson, 2006). Heath (2007) acknowledges advocacy's rhetorical heritage and suggests advocacy is both the content and process of discourse in response to a rhetorical problem; a dialogue of ideas. In a community engagement context, advocacy frames are used in community information strategies, and have a shared role with dialogue in consultation programs.

Collaborative approaches are more aligned with symmetrical models of public relations and seek to affirm relationships through dialogic frames (Spicer, 1997). Spicer (1997) suggests collaborative approaches can only be successful when the contextual knowledge (values, beliefs, and opinions) held by and influencing publics is recognised. This recognition comes from an investment by all parties, through action, to seek a mutually acceptable solution (Toth, 2000). Collaboration in this context can be viewed as achieving a shared vision, maintaining or enhancing a position or as a strategy to respond to a new environment or situation (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). In a community engagement context, collaborative frames are used in community participation strategies, and have a shared role with dialogue in consultation programs.

### **RQ3 Do communication tactics used in Australian consultation projects seek to promote advocacy or collaborative approaches?**

#### *Consequences*

The consequences of a relationship are the changing goal states resulting from the relationship strategies (Broom et al., 2000). In community engagement, these may be the achievement of the organisational goals or purpose, or may have some impact on the social or political environment, such as an increase in activist activities, a shift in public opinion about the project or increasing media attention. Any of these outcomes will in turn influence the relationship antecedents and the tactics used to communicate with community stakeholders or publics. Arnstein's (1969) identification of tokenistic participation sets up the need to evaluate both the engagement process and the outcomes of the communication program. The focus of evaluation in public relations practice in communication planning (Walker, 1994; Xavier, Johnston, Patel, Watson, & Simmons, 2005) and the need to make a case for engagement program performance and budget requirements (Xavier et al., 2005) given the mandated requirements of engagement practice, establish evaluation as a necessary inclusion to program planning.

### **RQ4 How are Australian consultation project evaluated?**

#### *Methodology*

This exploratory study employs a historical and comparative perspective to analyse community consultation and participation cases against academic frameworks. A coding instrument was drawn from the literature (see table 1) founded on relational frameworks of antecedents, processes and consequences (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

*Data sample and analysis and coding*

Community engagement and more specifically, community consultation, has been legislated into major infrastructure development in Australia. State and regulatory frameworks mandate an investigation of social impact categories through an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In most Australian states, the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) oversees the policy for EIAs. The EPA describes the EIA as “the process of identifying, evaluating and mitigating the biophysical, social, and other relevant effects of development proposals prior to major decisions being taken and commitments made” (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998). Community engagement is noted as an essential part of this process and prescriptive “how to” guides exist to guide practice.

The sample for this study is taken from major infrastructure projects undertaken in Australia from 2001 to 2006 with an EIS or EIA published as part of their study and have a mandatory community consultation component, and have published reports available detailing the project on the Internet. The cases and data sources are summarised in table 2.

**Table 2 – Sample - data sources**

<b>Case</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
1. Tugun Bypass	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
2. Clermont Coal Mine	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
3. Black Springs Wind Farm	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
4. Alcan Gove Alumina	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
5. Dyno Moranbah Ammonium Nitrate Project	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
6. Tennyson Tennis Centre	Project Terms of Reference (TOR) Community consultation/ engagement plan
7. Caltex Clean Fuels	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
8. Menindee Lakes	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
9. Abbot Point Coal Terminal	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
10 Coffs Harbour Sewerage	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
11 Moorland to Herons Creek	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
12 Southern Regional Water Alliance	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
13 BHP Stybarrow	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
14 North South Bypass Tunnel	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
15 Brisbane Airport parallel runway	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
16 Burnett-River Dam (Paradise Dam)	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
17 Camden Gas Project Joint Venture	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
18 Woodlawn Wind Farm	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
19 QLD Coke and Energy Stanwell	Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
20 Woodside Otway Gas Project	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

For this study, the specific unit of analysis was the community consultation chapter, section, or plan. These documents detail the project goals, objectives and evaluation mechanisms for the projects and provide communication approaches guiding the processes of information, engagement, consultation and participation by affected communities. These documents also engagement philosophies approach including tactics, timing and process of the consultation project

Mapping against the relational framework and category criteria are presented in table 3. The categories were generated from the literature and from normative practice evidenced in engagement documents.

**Table 3 – Categories and criteria**

<b>Relational</b>	<b>Category criteria</b>
Antecedent	Terminology- label e.g. ; consultation, engagement, participation Terminology – community e.g. ; community, stakeholders, publics Community (identifiers) e.g. ; research, prioritised, data base, demographic, opinion leaders Goals e.g. ; Inform/ engage/ consult/ participate Resources Methodology/ skills e.g. ; Analysis, Feedback Objectives e.g. ; Output/ impact
Strategies	Tactics – process e.g. ; Advocacy/ monologue Tactics - actual
Consequences	Outputs and outcomes e.g. ; Goal achievement, longer term relationship Evaluation e.g. self appraisal/ scientific

To respond to the research questions, a coding instrument was developed after a review of relevant literature on community engagement, community information, community consultation and community participation. The instrument captured a number of descriptive categories relating to the normative use of terms, description of publics, stakeholders and community, communication framing, associated tactics used to engage with community members and evaluation indicators.

Data were coded by one researcher against the categories and units listed in table 3. The research instrument was piloted on one case prior to data collection then one conceptual category was further refined. Following refinement, the instrument was further tested on two cases. This resulted in a reliability score of .9 for the instrument. During the coding process, reliability was checked and sustained at this level. Data from the 20 cases were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency counts and descriptive statistics were calculated for the relevant variables. The coding sheet is available from the author.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations for this study. The small sample indicates the results are not generalisable beyond the population of the Australian cases explored. The data sources are a secondary source reporting on consultation activity and the author recognises these official reports may not accurately reflect full dialogue of consultative approaches undertaken. In addition, the mandated consultation guidelines may predetermine the descriptive use of terminology or scope of community engagement activities. This was addressed somewhat by analysing the narrative text within the documents being alert for other terminology. The descriptive nature of the method supports an exploratory study and limits the knowledge gained from this approach.

## **Results**

*Research question one: How is the concept of ‘community’ described in consultation design?*  
Across the cases, a combination of the term ‘community and stakeholders’ dominated with more than 70% using this term, with 20% exclusively using the term stakeholder. This differentiation between community and stakeholder differentiates an affected public and an interested public, identifying some groups are impacted by an infrastructure project more than others. Only 5% applied the terms ‘community’ or ‘general public’. Publics were

identified by a range of mechanisms across the cases including using published interest groups and relevant government departments (5%). A combination of these methods and secondary research was found in 65% of cases. Geographical and demographic identification of publics was found in 10% of cases that may reflect the role that government and regulators play in the approval of infrastructure and redevelopment projects. Predetermined databases and research as the prime source of public identification was used in 5% of cases.

*Research question two: How are the terms information, engagement, consultation, and participation used contemporary Australian consultation projects?*

The term consultation dominated the cases, reflecting the guidelines and terminology imposed by the EIS process. However 30% of cases referred to some form of engagement with community members. In these cases, there was no evidence found to distinguish the use of the term engagement and consultation suggesting that the term was indiscriminate rather than purposeful. A presentation of these results is in table 4.

**Table 4: Terminology**

Terminology	Use %
Consultation	70
Engagement	10
Consultation and Engagement	20

*Research question three: Do communication tactics used in Australian consultation projects seek to promote advocacy or collaborative approaches?*

A range of monologue and dialogue promoting tactics were used across all cases. More than half of all cases (55%) used up to five monologue tactics, with 45% of cases using up to nine monologue tactics. The type and frequency of tactics used by each case is presented in table 5.

**Table 5: Frequency and type of Monologue tactics used**

Tactic – Advocacy - Monologue	% use
Newsletter	95
Advertising	90
Phone Hotline	90
Media Releases	75
Fact Sheet	65
Information kits	40
Direct Mail/ Letters	40
Contact Cards	5

Dialogic or two-way communication tactics were used in all cases, with 70% of cases using up to five dialogic tactics to communicate with community groups. Individual meetings with key groups and individuals were the most popular tactics, while broader scientific methods to discover community opinions, such as surveys and focus groups were the least used. While public displays and open days were classified as dialogic, this was based on an assumption that the display was manned with staff that possessed the knowledge and skills to undertake dialogue with community members in a meaningful way. In some cases, this was not explicit. The breakdown of dialogic tactics used by each case is presented in table 6.

**Table 6: Frequency and type of Dialogue tactics used**

Tactic – Collaborative-Dialogue	% use
Meetings – key groups	85
Meetings - individuals	80
Presentations	80
Briefings	75
Public Displays/ Open Days	70
Meetings – General public	45
Workshops	35
Survey	35
Focus Groups	5

*Research question four: How are Australian consultation project evaluated*

Evaluation of the specific consultation program undertaken was not evidenced in any of the sample cases. Instead the success of the program was integrated into reporting of measures of output or implementation effectiveness (Cutlip et al., 2006). Output or implementation effectiveness documents the adequacy of tactics and effort of the communication practitioner and is often demonstrated by counts of attendances, stories placed in media, counts of meetings held and gross impressions (Cutlip et al., 2006). In this study, outputs counted included the number of meetings held, newspaper editorials achieved, people briefed and feedback forms received. Impact effectiveness measures respond to the specific project objects and if the overall program goal was achieved. Only 15% of cases reported evaluation of impact effectiveness (Cutlip et al., 2006) of the project (integrating broad communication processes) based on survey or feedback criteria. Forty percent of cases reported no mechanism to gauge effectiveness of the consultation process. A summary is presented in table 7.

**Table 7: Evaluation of engagement/consultation program**

Evidence of evaluation	% use
Evaluation – scientific approach	15
Self claimed	35
Assumed	10
None stated	40

**Discussion and implications**

Given the increasing role of public relations practitioners in developing, managing and reporting on community engagement activities, little guidance is offered by the literature to inform practice. The aim of this paper was to explore current engagement practices using a typology of engagement and propose a relational framework and to manage this complex task and respond to this need.

Community consultation has certainly evolved beyond providing information about intentions to the relevant community as a response to greater demands for corporate social

responsibility and community demands for real involvement in decision making (Barbaro, 2006). With infrastructure projects the opportunity for community members to solve social infrastructure requirements will always be limited by a lack of professional and technical knowledge needed to respond to such issues.

Differentiation between meanings of the terms engagement, consultation and participation remains one of the key challenges for organisations seeking to involve community opinions in decision-making and communities seeking to be involved. Terminology is used interchangeably both in practice and in the literature (Cruse et al., 2005) and implications of indistinct terms requires for projects to clearly articulate the engagement goals, allocate resources, and identify and differentiate between stakeholders and publics. The articulation of goals will also determine genuine collaboration and advocacy approaches (Spicer, 1997) to facilitating the engagement relationship and ultimately contribute to Arnstein's (1969) model of citizen participation founded on power sharing. Grunig and Huang (2000) argue power imbalance is a natural phenomenon in organisation-public relationships, as organisations and publics struggle to promote self-interests in current or future scenarios (Persson, 2006). Further research is needed to understand the interplay between power sharing and Spicer's (1997) collaborative advocacy approaches.

The range of tactics used in the cases indicated a balance of advocacy and collaborative approaches. Bracketz et al (2005) cautions however that in the context of community engagement, the provision of information alone does not constitute community consultation or participation. While this remains outside the scope of this study, the provision of information alone constituting consultation is a common claim in practice. The lack of relationship between terminology used, such as employing the term engagement, and an increase in dialogic tactics however was not found suggesting the use of the terms may have been indiscriminate, or reflective of popular culture.

The evidence that organisations are differentiating between community and stakeholder reflects recognition of the difference between an affected public and an interested public and discriminates between groups impacted more than others by an infrastructure project. The diversity of community opinions and complexity of managing both advocacy and collaborative approaches remains a constant, particularly in major infrastructure projects that potentially benefit some, more than others, in a community.

Evaluation of community engagement processes and outcomes is surprising given the regulation of the consultation requirement for planning approval. This may have been due to the focus on satisfying the requirements stipulated by the EIS process, and not considerate of the value of the relationship, both short and long term, for the organisation undertaking the redevelopment. This finding is consistent with other research on evaluation of public relations impact by practitioners in Australia (Xavier et al., 2005). From a relational perspective, evaluation needs to account for relationship dimensions (Grunig & Huang, 2000) and the communication process undertaken by practitioners to advance community engagement.

Public relations is founded on identifying, developing and responding to relationships collaboratively through effective communication with community members (Cutlip et al., 2006). The literature informing community involvement has evolved from the public policy and administration literature founded on power sharing to frame participation. Taking a relational perspective founded on communication will respond to Grunig's (2000) call for

public relations to embrace collaborative values to guide research, practice and contribute to moving “democratic societies away from confrontation and divisiveness to more collaborative cultures” (p. 45).

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