

1-1-2015

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Recommended Citation

Weymouth, Robert and Hartz-Karp, Janette Professor (2015) "Deliberative Collaborative Governance as a Democratic Reform to Resolve Wicked Problems and Improve Trust," *Journal of Economic and Social Policy*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://epubs.scu.edu.au/jesp/vol17/iss1/4>

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Deliberative Collaborative Governance as a Democratic Reform to Resolve Wicked Problems and Improve Trust

Abstract

A persistent and increasing governance challenge has appeared in the last several decades in mature democracies at all levels from national to local that stems from declining trust levels in government by citizens. This lack of trust leads to multiple policy implementation problems for governments, city and regional local governments alike, especially those facing complex sustainability issues - wicked problems

A process known as deliberative collaborative governance that enables more meaningful public participation in issues that matter, with greater decision-making transparency, accountability and perceived legitimacy, has been demonstrably effective in helping to redress the governance gap.

National and international examples of deliberative collaborative governance over the last two decades illustrate the potential of this method to close the governance gap. A four year action research case study in a regional town in Western Australia is used to illustrate how deliberative collaborative governance has positively affected the implementation of local government policy and operations including their responses to wicked problems, and reduced the governance gap.

Keywords

Deliberative, Collaborative, Governance, Democracy, Participatory Budgeting, Wicked Problems, Trust

Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of all the City of Greater Geraldton staff who contributed to the deliberative collaborative governance program, the consultants who supported this process and the community participants who gave life to it over the last four years.

Introduction

Megatrends are usually considered to be long term systemic changes in the way human societies function, or more precisely – “...a collection of trends, patterns of economic, social or environmental activity that will change the way people live and the science and technology products they demand” (Hajkowicz, 2012, p. 4)

The dual megatrends of emergent wicked problems and the decline of public trust facing all levels of government present significant challenges to existing governance structures. In particular, this duality has created a ‘governance gap’ between the expectations of citizens and the ability of governments to meet these expectations, including resolving the challenges of an increasingly unpredictable world. This dilemma is particularly acute for regional Australian local governments, which are subjected to declining levels of trust in their governance as well as bearing the brunt of a suite of wicked problems including climate change and settlement viability.

We show that these two megatrends, the rise of wicked problems and declining trust in governance, are locked in a vicious cycle of feedback loops that increasingly erode government’s ability to meet tough challenges. Existing government structures, siloed, technocratic and hierarchical, have been incapable of effectively addressing wicked problems, and of meeting the public’s expectation that it is government’s job to resolve such issues. This apparent lack of capability further erodes public trust, which makes it even harder to address the challenges – and so the governance gap widens. In our view, one critical element to breaching this governance gap is to fundamentally reform existing governance structures. To explain this reform, we have coined a new term, ‘Deliberative Collaborative Governance’ (DCG), defined as discursive politics to co-decide issues that matter. We contend that this reform has the capacity to change the existing system dynamics in regional governance to create a virtuous cycle, where greater collective ‘ownership’ of wicked problems and potential solutions will decrease unrealistic expectations of what government can and cannot do, and increase the likelihood of more effective outcomes. This in turn, will increase public trust in government and hence cultivate a willingness and capacity to take part in future collaborative responses to wicked problems. In this four year case study, we present evidence of the successful implementation of DCG in a local government context, outlining the reasons for its success and highlighting its impacts on complex problem resolution and levels of public trust; suggesting it can become an institutionalised democratic reform.

The megatrend of declining public trust in government

Declining public trust in government has spread across almost all advanced industrial democracies over the last third of the twentieth century, creating a trend that is so universal in its appearance that it has led some scholars to label it “a new feature of contemporary politics, rather than a short-term reaction to problems of governance” (Dalton, 2005, p. 149). The research on this trend has generally concluded that such a situation is unhealthy for societies affected by it (Cook, 2009).

We take a political science perspective on trust as an important resource within social systems (Kramer and Cook, 2004). In particular, for political leaders in a democracy, a lack of trust does not allow them to make long-term decisions and resource commitments necessary for good governance (Hetherington, 1998; Scholz and Lubell, 1998). Moreover, we contend that although trust may not always be required for cooperation (Cook, 2009; Hardin, 2013), in the case of wicked problems, it is an important ingredient for their effective resolution. It is key to understanding and unravelling the inherent complexities of wicked problems; and is also critical to a solution culture (Clarke and Stewart, 1997; Mascarenhas, 2009). Indeed, as King notes, “...trust is a fundamental strategy for collectively coping with wicked problems” (King, 1993, p. 112). Conversely, the “dark heart” of mistrust (King, 1993, p. 114) confounds government’s ability to effectively address wicked problems, which in turn, further reduces public trust (Blind, 2007; Levi and Stoker, 2000; SSC, 2012).

World-wide data, including in Australia, shows the magnitude of the distrust megatrend. The USA data sets on trust, which are the most long-term and complete, show long term declines in the extent to which respondents could trust the government to do the right thing most of the time; whether politicians cared what people thought; and whether most government officials were honest and acted for the benefit of all. For example, trust levels decreased from highs of 70 per cent at mid-century, to the end of the 20th century when only 33 per cent of those surveyed believed that they could trust the government to do the right thing most of the time (Dalton, 2005). Even with compulsory voting for State and Federal elections, Australia does not appear to have escaped this trend. Though there is no large scale consistent set of data for Australia (Gollop, 2004), the Australian survey of social attitudes (Evans, 2011) found that between 2005 and 2013, those people who do not have trust in government rose from 26 per cent to 47 per cent; and the Scanlon Foundation national survey found that between 2009 and 2012, the proportion of Australians indicating that government could “almost never” be trusted increased from 8 per cent to 24 per cent (Markus, 2013). As a corollary, Australian trust in government decreased for a third consecutive year, in a multinational trust survey

going down from 52 per cent in 2011 to 43 per cent in 2013 (Edelman, 2013).

This decreasing level of trust applies similarly to local government. A worldwide survey of trust in local government by the World Justice project found trust attitudes in Australia are indistinguishable from those in the United States with 51 per cent of respondents having little or no trust in their local government (Ponce, 2014). In Western Australia, surveys by the Local Government Association (WALGA) found that on average the community cannot bring themselves to even “slightly agree” (on a seven-point Likert scale) that their local council is trustworthy (WALGA, 2014).

The proposed reasons for this low level of trust in our civic institutions are prolific and contested. The Australian experience suggests that it is primarily driven by the public demanding a different relationship with their governments and being more willing to challenge the existing order to get it (Dalton, 2005). Fixes for dwindling levels of trust have tended to focus on ways to restructure the existing political order, such as through media reform, campaign finance reform, and restoring the dignity of the political offices. However, where such proposals have been implemented, they have led to temporary increases in trust followed by a rapid return to low trust values and continued downward trending (Dalton, 2005).

The converse side of this trust issue – public officials’ trust in ordinary citizens – has not been as extensively explored. However, in our view, enduring trust has to be a two-way issue, so the lack of data on the degree to which officials in government administrations trust their publics is a significant gap, which is addressed in the following study. Prior to outlining this case study, however, the relationship between decreasing public trust and government’s incapacity to resolve wicked problems needs to be explored.

The megatrend of emergent wicked problems

During the 1970s, the concept of the ‘wicked problem’ was put forward to help reframe thinking around the challenges facing modern societies (Rittel and Webber, 1973). The authors described an emerging, qualitatively different class of difficult social problem such as poverty, crime and social division, which they compared with less difficult, ‘tame’ problems. Since then, thinking has broadened into a field of thought with typologies including problem classifications such as puzzles (Ackoff, 1974), ill-structured problems (Simon, 1973) and social messes (Horn, 2001). The term ‘wicked problems’ has now entered into general discourse, and is often described in the literature as one of the globe’s megatrends, needing urgent attention.

Degrees of 'wickedness' may exist when a problem contains some elements of definitional criteria but not others, and as the mix of elements changes over time. The following list summarises criteria that we and others have used to assess the wickedness of a problem (Briggs, 2007) and (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013).

- Wicked problems are not easily definable and cannot be fully understood until a solution is proposed.
- Wicked problems have no agreed stopping rules.
- Solutions to wicked problems are not subjectively true or false.
- No particular solution can be generalised to other wicked problems.
- Wicked problems have a large or poorly described set of possible solutions.
- Wicked problems have high stakes and important consequences.

Examples of wicked problems that confront our case study area, Greater Geraldton, and indeed much of regional Australia, include: Indigenous health disadvantage (Briggs, 2007); fracking and agriculture (Briggs, 2007); fisheries and coastal governance (Jentoft and Chuenpagdee, 2009); water resources management (Light, Medema, and Adamowski, 2013); climate change (Lazarus, 2008); and urban planning (Rittel and Webber, 1973).

There are a range of approaches that categorise ways of resolving wicked problems. In this study, the way power is shared amongst those affected by the wicked problem is the organising heuristic. Three power distributions have been suggested: authoritative, competitive and collaborative (Roberts, 2000). Although each represents a valid approach, depending on urgency, available resources and other contexts, the collaborative approach is generally agreed to be the most comprehensive and effective (Carcasson, 2013; Roberts, 2000; Walker and Ostrom, 2009). The key reason as to why the authoritarian and competitive approaches are understood to be inadequate modes of resolving wicked problems is due their inherent characteristics which tend to produce unintended consequences. These include the authoritarian mode's need to be seen to be *doing something*, and the competitive mode's need to put narrow political/commercial success/survival above the broader problem resolution. An additional complication lies in the administrative silos present in many organisations that augment unhealthy internal competition and inhibit the information sharing and collaboration that can resolve wicked problems (Head, 2008).

Critiques of the collaborative approach have noted its own intrinsic governance difficulties including the requirement of responsibility for managing wicked problems falling to the stakeholders themselves, as opposed to a competitive market or single organisation (Grint, 2008; Kahane, Loftson, Herriman, and Hardy, 2013).

Almost by definition, these parties will view each other as not having the recognised qualifications for solving this problem or even the authority to do so. It has been suggested that leadership in collaboration would be required to resolve this. This would involve taking action to enable other stakeholders to act with collective purpose by accepting group responsibility for the problem and its solution (Fien and Wilson, 2014).

This case study has focused on ways to arrive at this collective purpose and group responsibility through a particular collaborative governance approach, termed as Deliberative Collaborative Governance (DCG). While this case study explores the efficacy of DCG, it is not proposed that this is the only pathway to resolving wicked problems and increasing trust in government. Both these dilemmas are inevitably context-specific and other approaches may be more effective in particular cultures and situations.

The Deliberative Collaborative Governance (DCG) Approach

Gollagher and Hartz-Karp have proposed a particular collaborative governance approach they have termed Deliberative Collaborative Governance (DCG) which they contend as likely to be the most effective in resolving wicked problems, and they have described sustainability examples from across the globe that exhibit at least some of the characteristics of this approach (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013). The term DCG was coined to address some of the key critiques of two related approaches – Deliberative Democracy and Collaborative Governance.

The theory and practice of Deliberative Democracy – inclusive, deliberative, influential participation in policy development and decision-making - underpins the following study. However this term is not relied on, in part because the critiques of this approach have outlined weaknesses, at least in practice, that need to be addressed if a new form of collaborative governance is to be sustainable. The most frequent of these critiques point to the tendency of deliberative democrats to focus on individual deliberation processes rather than their institutionalisation. Specifically, these critiques highlight the disengagement of deliberative democracy minipublics from the broad public, and their inadequacies in terms of incorporating the views of lobbyists, of addressing vested interests, and of influencing policy (Hendriks, 2009, 2011). It is also argued that there is dissonance between deliberative democratic practice and theory and the current governance systems. On the theoretical front, it is contended that the existing Madisonian representative democracies, in which deliberative democracy generally operates, manifest distrust of uninformed and self-centred publics in their operation and design (Hindess, 2002). Hence, the creation of periodically elected representatives and government

administrations is purposefully intended to divest the operations of government from voters¹ and this undermines the ability of the deliberative and representative systems to co-operate. This distrust of citizens has privileged other actors in the current system, who then resist deliberative reforms. Such actors, identified as interest groups (Hendriks, 2011), can take a dim view of the deliberations and recommendations of a body of randomly selected citizens which the interest groups are ill adapted to interact with, or unable to influence. Other critiques include contestations that ordinary people are neither interested in, nor capable of deliberating complex issues. Some of these critiques and claims are based less on evidence and more on unfounded assumptions, fears and misinformation (Pateman, 2012).

The most problematic critique of deliberative democracy as it relates to sustainable collaborative governance is its lack of success in reforming existing democratic institutions. This critique notes that although proliferating rapidly, the deliberative democracy movement has failed to secure institutionalisation in the existing governance structure in all but a few places around the world, and hence has failed to “democratise democracy” (Pateman, 2012). This failure may manifest in political elites, like media commentators and politicians (Boswell, Niemeyer, and Hendriks, 2013), viewing deliberative democratic processes as unworkable, or a revolutionary movement intending to overthrow the existing system, or alternatively, as an abrogation of the duties of duly elected representatives. Other manifestations involve the suggestion that such increased participation in policy making is often only a facade that helps to legitimise the existing hierarchical political system (Lewis and Marsh, 2012). Critiques also point to conflicting value claims, such as the validity of the descriptive representativeness of deliberate democracy versus the principal-agent representativeness of the existing democratic system (Parkinson, 2004), and evidence of the difficulties of creating participation that is truly open to all aspects of the public (Barnes, Newman, Knops, and Sullivan, 2003). This single case study cannot address all these critiques. However, the broad question of whether this work has ‘democratised democracy’ is addressed in the discussions of the success characteristics of this work. Other critiques such as their one-off nature, focus on process, lack of influence, and inadequacies regarding interest groups are addressed in discussions of the ways this work has differed from other deliberative democracy initiatives.

The newly coined concept of Deliberative Collaborative Governance (DCG)

¹ This embedded distrust of citizens adds support to the earlier discussed idea that that the decline in trust of the public in government has its roots in a more educated public willing to challenge elite administrators and representatives. From this perspective, citizens have become more aware of the distrust built into the system, believe the assumptions of the distrust to be unfounded and have therefore lost confidence in the system over recent decades.

reframes deliberative democracy to focus on the transformative reform that is envisaged – a new form of collaborative governance that is solidly grounded in discursiveness and descriptive representativeness (i.e. resembling a representative sample of the population). DCG unites elements of the broad field of collaborative governance with that of deliberative democracy. Ansell and Gash define collaborative governance as an “arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (Ansell and Gash, 2008, p. 544). This concept involves an actor participating with other organised actors in the governance structure (unions, government departments, NGO’s) that results in genuine attempts at partnership to formulate policies and create recommendations (Ansell and Gash, 2008). However, as Gollagher and Hartz-Karp argue, the key to more effectively addressing wicked problems is the holistic understanding of the system involved; and achieving this will also require the “*practical wisdom*” (Booth, 2006) of everyday people (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013). The general public not only bring unique knowledge, experience and pragmatism to a problem, they also bring a representative legitimacy that can go some way to redressing the suspicion and distrust that undermines an effective resolution.

The underlying principles and practices of deliberative democracy can bridge this gap by emphasising:

... the indispensable role of ‘ordinary citizens’ in identifying and weighing policy options, establishing priorities, and articulating a direction for action on the part of both government and the community. It does not constitute an alternative to representative democracy; rather, it suggests how democracy might be improved by attending to the ‘depopulated’ democratic political arena, the ‘public space’ in which people engage each other in discussion of the challenges and opportunities facing them collectively.

(Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013, p. 2348)

The literature highlights reasons why the inclusion of everyday people in decision-making might be important to building trust and social capital. Engagement with fellow citizens in a structured deliberative form has been shown to increase the likelihood that a given person will seek out more civic engagement (Gastil, 2008). Moreover, civic engagement (including participation in politics and public affairs) has been the strongest determinant of trust in government (Keele, 2007). This gives reason to believe that experiences of deliberative democracy by governments should increase trust in those governments, a prediction that is borne out by case studies (Pytlikzillig, Tomkins, Herian, and Hoppe, 2012).

The deliberative democratic drive to regenerate citizen agency in modern democratic practice, together with the urgent need to devise more effective ways of addressing wicked problems converge in the concept of deliberative collaborative governance. This is supported in the case study literature which "...suggests that deliberative (rather than neo-managerialist) theories of administration are better suited for the "collective puzzlement of society" that wicked problems require" (Durant and Legge, 2006, p. 309).

For the purposes of this paper we use Gollagher and Hartz-Karp's definition of DCG as involving any governance action that:

- (1) 'ordinary citizens' participate (along with one or more government agencies and/or other stakeholding groups) in collaboratively performing tasks such as setting priorities, crafting or analysing policy proposals, devising plans, and recommending actions;
- (2) participants deliberate together concerning options for action or policy adoption; and
- (3) the public's role is that of a full partner with influence sufficient to secure positive responses from the other stakeholders. (Gollagher and Hartz-Karp, 2013, p. 2356).

Obviously, one case study is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the efficacy of DCG as a democratic reform to resolve wicked problems and in so doing, improve typically low levels of public trust. However, the following section outlines a four year action research study where this reform program was implemented, with the aim of pursuing a worthwhile pathway to greater sustainability in regional development.

A case study approach exploring the efficacy of DCG in resolving wicked problems while improving public trust: Greater Geraldton, Western Australia

The Greater Geraldton City-Region, situated 424 kilometres north of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia, provides an informative case study in the implementation of deliberative collaborative governance in a regional area beset by wicked problems and typically low public trust in government. In the past, economic development of the region has been driven by fishing and agriculture (wheat and wool), but collapsing fish stocks and drought in agricultural areas have resulted in the emergence of mining as a key economic driver. However, the full economic potential of the mining boom is offset by the use of fly-in fly-out

workforces that provide minimal benefit to the City Region. Tourism has become more important to the economy, however remains under-developed. Although demographic projections suggest the population will double to between 80,000 and 100,000 residents by 2020 – 2030, such expansion is not universally supported, with many residents preferring the ‘country feel and lifestyle’ of the status quo. As with other regional areas in Australia, critical, ‘big picture’ decisions affecting the area tend to be made at the State and Federal level. Regardless, the City Region needs to find ways to resolve its share of the \$15 billion national infrastructure backlog, estimated at around \$3 million per annum per council (Dollery, 2012), an increasingly constrained and controversial operational budget (CGG, 2013), and the ‘inherently wicked’ urban land use planning for projected population growth (Rittel and Webber, 1973). In essence Greater Geraldton, provides a representative archetype of Australian regional cities, facing a number of wicked problems.

Although Greater Geraldton, like most other local governments, had been consulting with its residents, in the main, such efforts were perceived by the public to be ‘too little too late’. As a result, residents showed signs of being alienated from the institutions of government (e.g. in low local government voting rates), disinterested in the government’s attempts at consultation (rarely participating in any numbers), and frustrated, sometimes angry or even outraged with the decisions of the local government (gleaned through informal discussions with editor Geraldton Guardian during 2010, semi-structured interviews with study participants in 2012-13 and a formal interview with Geraldton CEO in February 2010). Correspondingly, public officials felt dissatisfied with this state of affairs, feeling that their consultations were not worth the effort since the general public was indifferent, ill-informed, or narrowly and unalterably self-interested (as assessed during informal discussions with Geraldton staff and Councillors during 2010). This led the then CEO of Greater Geraldton to initiate the ‘Geraldton 2029 and Beyond’ initiative, over four years from 2010 – 2014, as a joint research project between the City of Greater Geraldton and Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute, to more collaboratively address the region’s future sustainability – trialling Deliberative Collaborative Governance.

This action research project aimed to test whether DCG would be an effective means of resolving wicked problems as they emerged, and whether such a process would positively impact the levels of public trust in local government and vice versa. The project applied the principles of adaptive management – applying a flexible, responsive approach with systematic deliberative learning to continuously improve participation in the resolution of wicked problems. Hence, in response to emergent opportunities and threats, the project creatively deployed a comprehensive range of deliberative democracy techniques - small and large scale, face-to-face and online, incorporating social media and the regular press - in order

to broaden and deepen participation in the resolution of emergent wicked problems. The effects of these techniques on trust, policy outcomes, attitudes of participants, administration staff and political elites were assessed through a mixture of methods. These included analysis of quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, direct observation and electronic records of deliberations and policy documents and budgets.

Pioneering forms of Deliberative Collaborative Governance

Instituting authentic collaborative governance - empowered participatory decision-making that is ongoing and trusted - is problematic in the existing hierarchical, technocratic systems of government. Like other collaborative governance initiatives, this action research began by adding to the existing institutions of government a new branch that included broad stakeholder participation in some policy development and decision-making areas. This approach is consistent with the recognised importance of engagement with existing interest groups and elites in decision-making (Boswell et al., 2013; Hendriks, 2011). Accordingly, an 'Alliance Governance Group' was instituted, consisting of industry, government, Indigenous Australians, and Non Government Organisation representatives, invited by the Mayor. To broaden transparency and inclusion, these stakeholders were joined by several everyday citizens who were randomly selected at a public meeting from a pool of volunteers who responded to advertisements in the local newspaper. The intention was for this Alliance Governance Group to be more than an advisory committee. Its purpose was to oversee the upcoming public deliberation processes to ensure their fairness, comprehensiveness, and transparency; and if needed, to prioritise proposals that resulted from these deliberations, then assist with their implementation. To address these demands, the Alliance Governance Group met 'as-needed', or every three months by default. The Group did not have final decision-making authority and any decisions needed to be approved either by the elected Council, or by the City administration if the recommendations fell within their jurisdiction.

Over time, this lack of decision-making power eroded the perceived efficacy of the Alliance Group, causing many of the high profile members to lose interest, and by mutual agreement, it was disbanded after a few years. This lack of influence stemmed from local government legislation and regulation in the Western Australian Local Government Act (2005), which places decision-making authority firmly in the hands of the elected Council, with only limited sharing or delegating power at the discretion of elected officials. Additionally, within the Geraldton Council, a number of elected members were concerned about the potential displacement of their own role and power, so the Alliance Group existed in tepid

waters. The literature has exposed such dilemmas in other venues, with the strictures of the Act and the attitude of such Councillors clearly reflecting the elite attitudes of the current ‘principal-agent’ model of representative democracy (Boswell et al., 2013; Parkinson, 2004). The demise of the Alliance Group highlighted the importance of decision-makers agreeing and committing to the influence of any public participation prior to its commencement if the continuing effort and good will of citizens was to be nurtured. For the leadership of the City of Greater Geraldton, this brought to light a system dynamic that was not clear beforehand. If a dedicated and empowered body of non-elected Alliance Group members could not easily coexist with local government, given its cultural and legislative constraints (a wicked governance problem), then a different means of collaborative governance would need to be pioneered.

Out of this learning was a positive, unintended consequence of the Alliance Group – an improved understanding by its members of the important role everyday citizens could play in resolving complex problems. This began an improvement in the trust relationship between members which further resulted in several industry heads, Indigenous leaders, the editor of the local newspaper, (the Geraldton Guardian), and the coordinator of the Indigenous radio station continuing to work with the City as informal partners in the ongoing project of developing deliberative collaborative governance to resolve tough problems. This informal relationship, particularly with the editor of the very widely read Guardian, was effective in altering the typically more combative relationship between a local government and the local media for the duration of the project. The agreed aim of the media relationship was to enhance the community’s interest in and understanding of complex issues, and to improve the effectiveness of public discourse, including through the Guardian’s social media channels. This was important, since in Greater Geraldton, the local newspaper is a significant political actor as many more people get their daily news from the local paper rather than the state/national press than is typical in larger metropolitan centres.

Previously, like most newspapers needing buyers/readers, the Geraldton Guardian had focused on sensationalism (locally called “*muck-raking*”). Unfortunately for the broad dissemination of DCG, it appears that dissent and outrage is news, whereas mutual understanding, agreement and satisfaction (key success factors of public deliberation) is rarely deemed newsworthy and does not make it to print. The informal alliance with the Guardian did not mean that the newspaper forswore its role of the ‘Fourth Estate’ by becoming uncritically supportive of City and Council decisions, or indeed of all public engagement initiatives. Rather, its role simply expanded to create broader public interest and discourse in the issues under discussion as well as shaping elite opinion, if not favourably, then fairly toward deliberative reforms. Notably, when a proposal for a bike path extension along the

beach front (an outcome of a public deliberation initiative) encountered strong resistance by adjacent high market value home owners, there were 3,000 comments from City residents on the newspaper's Facebook page – a show of support that the City considered significant in their decision.

Over the four years of the project, public deliberation initiatives were created and designed in response to emergent wicked problems. They were both 'bottom up' initiatives instigated by the grass roots, as well as 'top down', instigated by the local government. In terms of grass roots initiatives, a relatively unique problem for Greater Geraldton was the paucity of civic interest groups. In contrast with issues at other levels of government and in other circumstances (Hendriks, 2011), the presence and influence of local civic interest groups in Greater Geraldton is comparatively low (with the exception of sporting clubs). Hence, there is little upward strength from the grass roots, with few bonding or bridging organisations that could generate social capital (Putnam, 2000). To ameliorate this situation, a volunteer program was initiated through an advertisement in the Geraldton Guardian for 'Community Champions' - volunteers who could help to seed public interest in issues that mattered to the community. Forty Community Champions were trained to hold grass roots, small group public deliberations, the first being World Cafes². These were held to understand the sort of community that residents wanted for Geraldton now and into the future. The outcomes of these deliberations on what people wanted to keep and change, and their suggestions for change were prioritised by the Alliance Group together with the Champions, and where possible, were implemented forthwith. However, some of these changes, such as 'planting one million trees' and 'making Geraldton the bike capital of the West' were anything but short term projects, although significant progress has been made in these initiatives (Papas, 2013).

An online deliberation/social media platform, CivicEvolution (initially piloted internally by City staff in November 2010 and advertised to the public in early 2011) was customised to complement the grass roots face-to-face deliberations by the Champions. The aim was to foster digital deliberative collaborative governance. It was hoped that this would allow broader participation by parts of the community that preferred this medium, or were unable engage easily because of time or distance. The software platform enabled self-managed groups of people with a

² At a World Café, nine or more people sit around small tables as in a café, with each person moving progressively from table to table through several rounds of conversation. A host remains at each table, helping incoming people to have deeper conversations and link ideas to create a whole-group dialogue. Participants at each table write down and/or illustrate the main points from their discussion, and these become the record of the meeting. In total, 36 World Cafes were held from May – June 2010, with a total of around 400 participants.

common interest (encouraged to participate through newspaper articles and outreach to existing civic groups) to come together online to propose projects, and deliberate to develop a joint proposal. If at least four of the online team members ‘signed off’ on a final proposal, it would be submitted and prioritised for support and funding by the Alliance Governance Group. While many online deliberation groups commenced, very few completed their proposals and submitted them to the Alliance Governance Group. Much was learned from this experience. Online deliberation, unsupported by an external facilitator, is atypical of how people interact online – which is characteristically monologic ‘dump and run’ commentary, with intermittent and greatly varying degrees of interest in and commitment to an issue. Such discussion tends to be possibly informative and certainly entertaining, but rarely thoughtful, respectful, egalitarian discourse. In short it was found that social media interaction very rarely reflects high quality deliberation necessary to DCG. Although this innovative digital grass roots online deliberation initiative was also short lived, it has led to subsequent pioneering efforts in combining online and in-person deliberation by the authors, which it is hoped will be far more fruitful.

The ‘Community Champions’ also ran the second phase of stimulating grass roots initiatives (some Champions had remained involved and others were elicited). The Champions were trained in, and then organised Community Cafes³. The intent of the Cafes was to follow up on issues raised during the prior deliberations about the importance of retaining the “*Gero Feel*”, no matter what future development eventuated. The debate about planned increases in urban density had also been taken up in the press. This represented a classic wicked problem, which would be directly confronted in the City’s next plan to focus on Geraldton’s future natural and urban form. The Conversation Cafes were also augmented by requests to schools and the broad community to submit photos, drawings, poems, essays of what the “*Gero feel*” meant to them. From the school children’s artwork, the City created bookmarks, postcards, and banners, all of which are in constant use by the City to reinforce community identity. The outputs of the Conversation Cafes as well as the artwork were used as background information for the large-scale public deliberation on the urban form that followed.

These initiatives run by the Community Champions did produce concrete outcomes that were helpful within the scope of the projects described above, but they were not able to sustain the effort of stimulating grass roots participation. Without the

³ A Community Café is a small, hosted, drop-in conversation among diverse people about their views and feelings about issues of importance. They are held in real cafes or other public places to enhance the sense of inclusivity and creativity that can spontaneously occur when people get together. The aim is to foster inquiry rather than debate about issues that matter, and to speak with the heart and the mind.

continued support of the City in training and support, as well as initiating areas to progress (which the City was unable to resource), this initiative gradually faded and ended.

Although these early attempts to pioneer various forms of bottom-up deliberative collaborative governance did not eventuate into long-standing, self-perpetuating, innovative modes of governance, other empowered public deliberation initiatives had more success. Meaningful community participation was achieved and maintained through the constant practice of instituting deliberative ‘minipublics’ of randomly sampled everyday people deliberating together to resolve tough issues for the City as they arose. A ‘minipublic’ has been described as follows:

...an educative forum that aims to create nearly ideal conditions for citizens to form, articulate, and refine opinions about particular public issues through conversations with one another (Fung, 2011, p. 184).

The literature on minipublics has often been critical of their inability to bring about systemic change because they are mostly one-off initiatives that rarely result in structural changes in governance (Pateman, 2012). However, we contend that the Greater Geraldton ‘minipublics’ have been able to bring about systemic change, but in a different way to that envisaged in the literature. That is, while Greater Geraldton ‘minipublics’ were not often systematically repeated for the same specific issue, the principles and processes of minipublics were systematically repeated over an extended period (at least the four years of the study) as the City’s most effective response to emergent wicked problems and sustainability opportunities. The literature on minipublics also demonstrates their beneficial aspects as well - in particular, the evidence that they are an effective means of reaching a considered, coherent community voice (Lafont, 2014). This outcome was achieved by all the Greater Geraldton ‘minipublics’, with each one submitting to the City and Council a Final Report of their agreed recommendations together with a coherent rationale for their decisions.

In Greater Geraldton it has also been observed that the success of DCG has created the conditions for more ambitious collaborations. Each time a ‘minipublic’ has resolved a complex issue to the satisfaction of public officials and the public (often to the surprise of both), confidence in this modus operandi has increased. In an adaptive manner, when complex or contentious issues then arose, or opportunities presented, care was taken to ensure the most appropriate public deliberation technique or techniques to address that issue and match the confidence level of the City and public was selected. The result has been that the City has tended to achieve a way forward that has had growing legitimacy, acceptability and hence ease of implementation than the top-down decision-making with minimal consultation that

was prominent prior to this project.

The diagram below illustrates how a comprehensive range of deliberative minipublics addressed a wide variety of wicked problems that arose during the four years of this action research. The initial attempts at DCG are also shown and each of the public deliberation minipublics used are described in the boxes below with brief descriptions of the particular context, problem and outcome⁴. However, the most important feature of the diagram below is that each public deliberation had a designated purpose to address an emergent challenge (e.g. planning for the digital future given the early implementation of the National Broadband Network, and managing the budget in a time of deficit), and emergent government requirements (e.g. developing a strategic community plan to drive the City Region's operations; and developing new Statutory and Precinct Plans given the local government merger into 'Greater Geraldton').

⁴ An additional project – “Proposed Deliberation: Community Grants” has also been included to describe a minipublic tasked with allocating the sizable community grants program that the City administers. At the time of publication this project remains subject to feasibility and budget considerations.

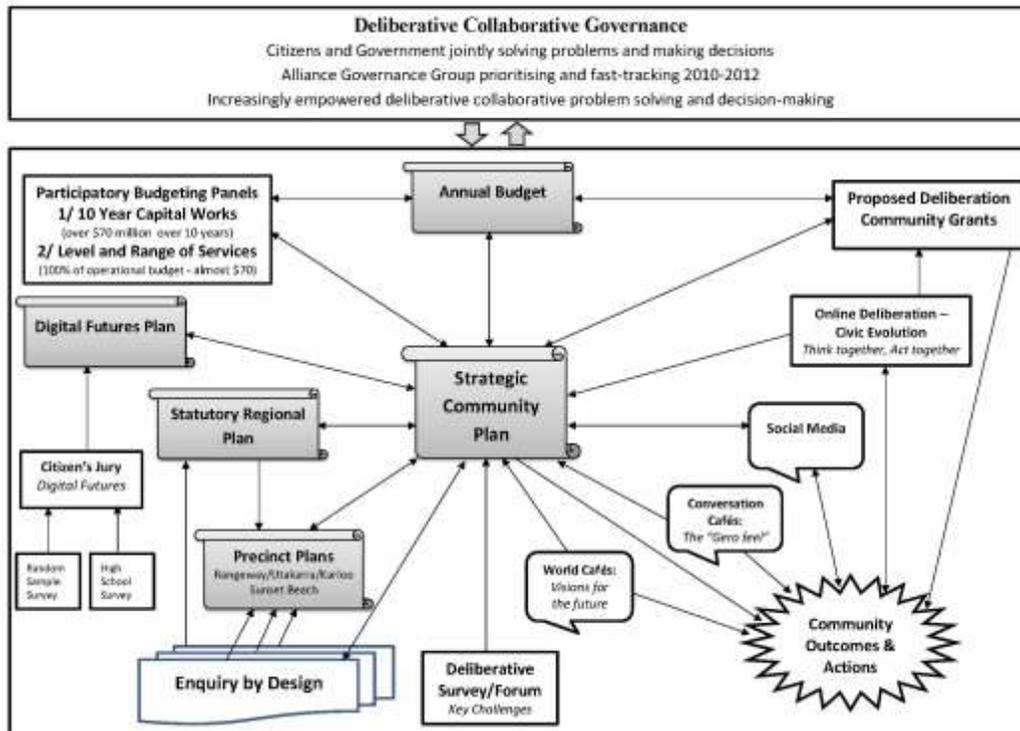


Figure 1: Geraldton Deliberative Collaborative Governance program – “2029 and Beyond”⁵

DCG initiatives implemented in Greater Geraldton

Deliberative Survey/Forum: The purpose of this initiative was to learn more about public views on a range of strategic challenges facing the city region such as an expanding fly-in-fly-out workforce, increasing carbon footprint, and a growing urban population. A comprehensive survey was sent to 3,000 randomly sampled citizens to assess community views on these challenges. Survey recipients were also invited to a one day forum to discuss these issues further. Around 200 people attended. The survey was administered to all forum participants prior to and after the deliberations. The results of first survey represented the community’s top-of-the-mind views; the second established that the deliberating group was representative of the broader population’s views; and the third noted any shifts in views as a result of deliberation.

⁵ Readers more visually inclined are referred to the City’s YouTube site (<https://www.youtube.com/user/GreaterGeraldton/videos>) which contains several videos illustrating the program elements described in this paper.

During the one-day forum, participants heard expert presentations from differing viewpoints and had opportunities to question and deliberate on these challenges. The forum applied a “21st Century Dialogue” technique that supports large numbers of people (hundreds, even thousands) to deliberate in small groups by using networked computers that enable the outcomes of small group deliberations to be consolidated into a coherent whole-of-room voice. Innovative software, ‘CivicEvolution’, was used to capture all the discussions of the small group deliberations, project the major themes back into the room virtually in ‘real time’, and prioritise where useful. Presenters from different viewpoints addressed the issues raised in the survey. The small deliberation groups discussed these and determined gaps, further questions and alternative viewpoints. This iterative process was repeated throughout the deliberation day with different sets of presenters. There was no attempt to reach consensus.

Analysis of the survey results showed that forum participants were indeed good attitudinal representatives of the broader community; and in a result surprising to City staff and Councillors, after deliberation, they showed even stronger support for the City to invest in increased sustainability measures, including carbon neutrality, and showed an increased resistance to a fly-in fly-out workforce. Based on this, the City adjusted its policies. One immediate outcome was the implementation of an ambitious stakeholder deliberation of all stakeholders in the Region’s energy chain, which produced a joint private/public proposal to the Federal Government to support plans for an alternative energy City Region project. Unfortunately, the State Government would not support the plan, despite the strong support of the Federal Government at that time.

Citizens Jury (CJ): As part of the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge grant in 2012 a citizen’s jury was created of 25 volunteers, from a demographically stratified random sample of residents. Called the ‘Community Trustees’ they deliberated over a period of 3 weeks around their ‘charge’ of producing a Digital Futures plan for the City. Their deliberations were supported by background materials and presentations from ‘expert witnesses’ from the IBM Smarter Cities Team, followed up by ‘cross-examination’ of the presenters, and small group deliberations. Additionally, surveys about Geraldton’s digital situation were sent to the general community and all high school students in years 10-12 and these results also informed the deliberations of the jury. Under professional facilitation the jurors deliberated in small groups and in plenary, to seek common ground, which provided the basis for their recommendations for a joint Digital Futures Plan. This Plan was personally presented to the Hon Stephen Conroy, Federal Minister for Broadband, Communications, and the Digital Economy.

Enquiry-By-Design (EBD): Following an amalgamation to form the new local

government entity of Greater Geraldton a new statutory regional plan and precinct plans were required to create an inclusive land use planning strategy for the new City Region. In August 2011 an Enquiry-By-Design urban planning process called 'Designing our City' was held over three days. It sought interactive win-win solutions for urban planning/design/renewal. A multidisciplinary team of technical experts from statutory planning, state government agencies, and academia worked with around 200 community participants, made up of invited stakeholders, randomly sampled residents, and volunteers. The process started with the forum developing a set of community values using small group deliberation aided by networked computers and the 'CivicEvolution' platform. This was followed by briefings from multidisciplinary experts on best practice urban design. Exploration of what the community valued and what needed to be changed then followed. Based on this information, the multi-disciplinary team prepared six possible planning scenarios for further deliberation, which they presented to the forum on the following afternoon. Participants gave their extensive feedback on these scenarios, which were then reduced in number and presented back to the forum on the 3rd afternoon. From this final round of feedback a consolidated planning scenario for Greater Geraldton was generated. Information elicited in this process was also used (together with the results from the other public deliberations) to help inform Greater Geraldton's Strategic Community Plan (<http://integratedplanning.dlg.wa.gov.au/>) that drives the City Region's budget and operations.

Following this EBD process and its broad-scale findings, several precinct EBDs were implemented. The first was held in the most socio-economically deprived area of the City, with a disproportionately large proportion of Indigenous residents and State Housing in comparison to the region. As well as small group deliberation and presentations, participants went on a walking tour of a key part the precinct to further understand the issues. At the completion of the precinct EBD, a small scale Participatory Budgeting (PB) process was held to allocate a budget of \$30,000+ for immediate improvements to local parks. With the assistance of community members, their preferred projects were implemented soon thereafter. A second precinct level EBD (and small scale PB), was also held in a different (and less deprived) socio-economic area where there was considerable opportunity for redesign. These participatory budgeting events provided valuable experience for the City in this type of exercise and the EBD processes provided strong grounds for the Council and City planning professionals to judge the local development and land use aspirations of the precincts.

Deliberative Participatory Budgeting Panel (PB): Unlike more traditional PB processes across the globe that entrust citizens to allocate around 10 per cent of a City budget, the deliberative PB Panel is charged with 100 per cent of a City budget.

A Panel of 25-40 randomly sampled residents, stratified according to demographics, deliberate over a series of workshops to understand the budgeting processes, develop funding options, assess them, and make recommendations. These recommendations are submitted to elected officials, who have already publicly committed to the extent of influence the Panel findings will have.

In Greater Geraldton, there were two deliberative PBs, the first PB was charged with recommending how to spend 100 per cent of the infrastructure budget over 10 years, and the second PB with allocating 100 per cent of the operational budget. Twenty-five randomly selected participants participated throughout the first PB and thirty-five participated throughout the second PB

Both PB Panels followed an extensive deliberation process that involved: learning to understand their role and the role of deliberative democracy; understanding the City budgeting process, the content of their 'charge' in terms of the City's entire range capital works projects (1st PB), and services (2nd PB); agreeing to a set of values and criteria upon which to evaluate each of the services or infrastructure; assessing the options and calibrating the findings between all the small groups; prioritising options; determining recommendations; and writing their Final Report and presenting it to the City and Council.

Through the support of networked computers using the CivicEvolution platform, the theming of ideas and reasons, priorities and reports could be carried out virtually in 'real time'. In so doing, the results of the small groups could be continually calibrated and discrepancies discussed; and the findings to be reported each day could be discussed, modified and agreed to prior to the dissemination of the day's Participant Report.

Each participant received this daily Participant Report as did the City staff involved. This enabled the City to discuss the Panel's findings after each session and if needed, to engage in a dialogue with the Panel in the following session. In some instances, the Panelists requested more information. In some instances, the CEO gave advice to the Panel, sometimes heeded, and sometimes not, depending on the Panels' consensus.

In terms of outreach to the broader public, both PBs endeavoured to achieve this, with the first PB inviting community capital works proposals for assessment (over 100 received) which were added to the existing City list to be prioritised; and the second PB presenting their draft recommendations on the range and level of service to a large community forum and requesting feedback. In addition, social media and the partnership with the local newspaper enabled the publication, dissemination and

discussion of information with the broader public before, during, and after the deliberations.

The public deliberation initiatives implemented over this four year case study involved around 2,000 people from a community of 40,000 people⁶ and were evaluated in a number of ways to try and understand impacts in the areas of collaborative governance, trust dynamics and deliberation. To ensure that quality deliberation occurred during the initiatives, quantitative surveys based on commonly accepted deliberation factors (Knobloch, Gastil, Reedy, and Cramer Walsh, 2013) were distributed to participants following each initiative. Quantitative surveys based on previous studies were also used to assess trust attitudes and civic engagement (Pytlikzillig et al., 2012), attitudes toward sustainability issues, as well as participation expectations (Bailey, Blandford, Grossardt, and Ripy, 2011) amongst participants before and after initiatives as well as the baseline level of these attitudes in the general community. Semi-structured, in-person qualitative interviews were conducted with participants, overseeing group members, administration staff and elected members of Council at various stages throughout the DCG program to add explanatory depth to the quantitative tools allowed a more open exploration of the effects of initiatives. Finally, direct observation of the initiatives and governance meetings of decision-making bodies such as Council and the Alliance Governance Group by researchers supplemented the reflective data described above.

DCG in Greater Geraldton and its impact on trust

Overall, the research conducted during the four year DCG process in Greater Geraldton that had involved several thousand participants, showed that DCG had made an impact on declining levels of public trust in government. Specifically, results of participant surveys administered prior and post public deliberative initiatives, showed that the vast majority believed that the City had conducted engagements in which they could have their own voice heard, hear the voices of others, get access to unbiased information, and create outcomes that represented all those present, which the City was more than likely to implement. Specific quantitative measurements of attitudinal trust in participants and the community are discussed around Figure 2 below.

On the other side of the trust relationship, the City staff had gained skills and confidence in a new way of operating in partnership with the community, and this manifested in more efficient and effective engagement. Importantly, interviews

⁶ Peripherally, an estimated additional 5,000 citizens have been involved through social media.

with staff members who had directly participated in collaboration events, regardless of organisational position, showed their increased trust in the ability of the community to come to good decisions. From the elected member's side, interviews and informal public statements indicated that their trust in the DCG approach had grown. This was also supported by the aggregated trust attitude of the Council, evidenced by the majoritarian voting decision making process as well as their consistent approval of the outcomes of an increasingly wide range of DCG activities. This is not to imply that this increase in trust was linear. An amalgamation of local Councils to form the Greater Geraldton Region resulted in significant changes in Council membership during this time. Interview evidence from the staff and researchers indicated that all the work done with the prior Councillors to elicit understanding and support for the DCG agenda, including trust and willingness to share power, had to begin anew with the new elected members. Fortunately, the elected Mayor continued to support the DCG process, as did several other Councillors, often spending all day observing the public deliberations. Their attitudes appeared to support a view noted in the literature (Parkinson, 2004), that elected officials legitimacy was significantly improved when the descriptive representativeness of deliberative minipublics was fused with their role as trustees and delegates of the people; i.e. that this form of governance compensated for the weaknesses of each type of representation.

It should also be noted, that while the Council as a body showed a consistent willingness to seriously consider and mostly accept the coherent voice of the minipublics, individual Councillors were not unanimously comfortable with the DCG process. As one of the incumbent members remarked, *“That’s what I’m here for, to make decisions on behalf of the residents. They don’t want to make the difficult decisions – that’s why they elect me”* (though they didn’t at the following election). Individual, unsupportive views such as these did not alter the trajectory of trust in the public that built over time, both for the elected members and City staff. It is our contention that this continuous improvement was a function of Deliberative Collaborative Governance being applied systematically by the City leadership to tough issues over a considerable period of time, with consistent success.

The largest setback in the trend of increasing community-wide trust occurred during the final year of the ‘2029 and Beyond’ initiative, when the City decided to significantly raise property rates and service charges with minimal community participation. The City had determined that this rate rise was required to address cost shifting from the State Government, looming infrastructure backlogs, and a revaluation of assets (ABCNews, 2012). Simply advertising in the local paper to inform the community of the rate rise, together with a formal request for feedback,

no longer met community expectations of sharing in important decision-making processes. The resulting outrage manifested in several ways. A social media and petition campaign against the rate rises rapidly gained large popular support (Davis, 2012). A scheduled half council election immediately after the rate rise saw many new candidates stand on platforms of reform related to rates, and almost all incumbents standing for re-election lost their seats to these reform candidates. Significantly, a citizen activist group spontaneously formed (CGGRDC, 2012) and raised a complaint against the City in the judicial forum of the State Administrative Tribunal. During the mediation process, a number of commitments were made to avoid the matter going to hearing, including a commitment by the City to more collaboration and transparency with the community on the following year's budget (CGG, 2013). The mechanism proposed for this collaboration was Participatory Budgeting (PB). This resulted in the implementation of two deliberative Panel PBs - one PB on the City's entire operational budget, and another on the long term capital works program. In terms of DCG, an unfortunate situation was turned into a significant opportunity.

Deliberative Participatory Budgeting Panels – and their potential as a democratic reform

Budgeting at all levels of government exhibits many of the characteristics of wicked problems. There are many divergent views on the impacts and end goals of budgeting, with significant expenditure of common funds involved, and recurrent and shifting goals of spending. Local government budgeting can be even more problematic with revenue sources limited by regulation, strident and powerful community demands for often divergent outcomes, and increasing cost shifting from other levels of government. Public budgeting has previously been regarded as the prerogative of finance and treasury departments, with the final allocation of resources determined by public sector officials. However, particularly in the developing world and increasingly in the western world, this assumption is increasingly being contested through the implementation of participatory budgeting.

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic decision-making process that entrusts citizens (and sometimes non-citizens, too) to allocate public budgets. It involves a set of principles and a variety of methods to enable and empower everyday people to deliberate amongst themselves and with government officials over the allocation of public resources. PBs have now spread across the globe, most prolifically in developing countries, where they are often supported by the World Bank – precisely because they are likely to enhance democracy by improving civic participation in decision-making, bringing transparency and accountability to local governments,

increasing the public legitimacy of decisions made, and improving social wellbeing (Goldfrank, 2012). However, such PBs are entrusted to allocate only approximately 10 per cent of a City-Region's budget (Avritzer, 2006). This markedly contrasts with a recent Australian innovation – a deliberative Panel PB involving 100 per cent of a City-Region's budget.

The more traditional PB depends on community groups developing proposals to spend around 10 per cent of a budget, which are then voted upon by the broader public with the most popular being implemented. The unique Australian PB experience, as previously explained, involves a minipublic Panel of randomly sampled residents, stratified according to demographics, who deliberate over a series of workshops to understand the City Region budgeting processes, develop funding options for 100 per cent of the budget, assess them, and make recommendations which then influence the budgeting decisions made. Canada Bay in New South Wales, Australia pioneered this form of PB with 100 per cent of their operational budget, with elected officials accepting most proposals and endeavouring to find ways to support the intent of others if they weren't accepted (Thompson, 2012). The City of Greater Melbourne People's Panel has recently submitted their recommended allocation of the 5 year City budget, with a positive response from the elected officials, although their detailed response is yet to be announced (Green, 2014). Greater Geraldton is the first example of a randomly sample PB Panels allocating 100 per cent of the operational budget as well as 100 per cent of the 10 year capital works budget; with the elected officials accepting the key recommendations in full.

Both Geraldton PBs have demonstrated their democratic legitimacy in terms of process and outcomes through a variety of mechanisms. In terms of process, participant surveys showed consistently high rates of satisfaction (described later). The small group calibration and iterative learning aspect of the deliberations strengthened claims of the Panels being independent yet well informed and internally consistent. An "*Independent Review Committee*" (IRC) of 5 prominent community members and the Mayor as chair further supported these claims. The IRC was tasked with verifying the representativeness of each Panel⁷, the usefulness and adequacy of the information provided, and the time, information, and support given to Panelists. They also played the role of ombudsman for Panel members when issues arose. IRC members attended each Panel session, observed the facilitation and discussion, and then without staff and facilitators present, met with

⁷ In terms of the descriptive representativeness of the two PB Panels, an independent local demographer, elicited the random samples, which were stratified by age, gender, Indigenous and multi-cultural background, as well as residential location (as a proxy for socio-economic level).

Panelists to review their day's experience. They then debriefed the project team to make improvements for the following week.

In Greater Geraldton, the history of effective implementation of DCG was important in reassuring both government and the public that the proposed PBs were not such a high risk venture as initially seemed. The publically demonstrated influence of each of the outcomes of the deliberative exercises in Figure 1 had established that the local government and other interest groups were willing to trust the capacity of the community to make informed, communitarian decisions. The goals of these deliberative events were clearly and publically stated prior to the event and evaluation of the success of event against those goals was conducted by external academic researchers and used to inform upcoming designs and drive continual improvement. The outreach and recruitment for these exercises had also striven for high levels of representation and inclusiveness, including the politically marginalised such as the economically disadvantaged and young people. The City had opened up its participation efforts across multiple areas of its operation over many years to demonstrate its broad shift in approach and had broadened its communication attempts through social media and its alliance with the independent local paper. Finally, the use of adaptive management thinking had enabled DCG to effectively resolve Greater Geraldton's emergent wicked problems as they arose and shift strategies as problem understanding shifted. In sum, DCG implementation in Geraldton had fostered a community willing and able to deliberate complex issues and elected officials and staff willing to entrust them to reach communitarian conclusions (Hartz-Karp, 2012). Hence, when fiscal wicked problems arose, the City and the people were more willing to support empowered public participation in their resolution.

The PB Results – Public trust, the resolution of wicked problems and democratic reform.

Both PB's were successful in terms of effectively resolving wicked budgeting problems as well as redressing trust deficits. In terms of effective problem resolution, Panel members rated the quality of the deliberation process very highly. Some of the final survey results were as follows: 97 per cent said they understood the issues under discussion very well; 93 per cent said they learnt about the issues and got new information very well or quite well; and 100 per cent said they heard from people with differing viewpoints very well or quite well. These results do not imply a lack of divergence of opinion, which is expected in wicked problems, rather they represent levels of satisfaction with the outputs of the process and facilitation. Participant observation of small group discussions during the phases of clarifying common values and prioritising projects and services revealed strong levels of

dissent, sometimes quite passionate and emotional. Indeed one instance required the facilitator to apply dispute resolution techniques to resolve the impasse. This apparent disconnect between the quantitative survey data and the participant observation was clarified through the qualitative interviews with participants. Several participants explained how they felt able to hear strongly held views and express their own, but through the facilitated deliberation process, felt they had come to a conclusion that best suited all perspectives. Some participants likened this to a cathartic process, describing that it felt like “*giving birth to a child*”, or “*rushing into a darkened tunnel and emerging into the light on the other side*” or “*having a storm sweep over you before the sun emerges from the clouds*”.

In terms of the quality of the solutions to the wicked problems of infrastructure prioritisation and the range and level of service determination, all those involved - the PB participants/Panelists, the City administration, and the elected Council, rated the process and results as very useful and satisfactory. During interviews and surveys, the overwhelming majority of the PB Panelists indicated that they were satisfied with the final recommendations and report they had created, and that it synthesised not only the consensus of the Panel as representatives of the community, but also the expertise of the City staff. The Council endorsed the Report of the Capital Works Panel and instructed the CEO to implement the existing prioritisation, and utilise the Panel’s rating system for future assessment of infrastructure. The Range and Level of Services report was also endorsed by Council and was used to form the budget for the 2014/2015 financial year. Clearly, given their acceptance by the decision-makers and apparently, by the broader community, both PBs had effectively resolved the wicked problem of allocating declining budgets but also had dissipated the fears of an ill-informed and selfish citizenry.

The PBs also resulted in significant improvements in the level of public trust in local government. Participant surveys were conducted prior to and after each deliberation day, and were enhanced by qualitative interviews to further understand the quality of deliberations, participant levels of trust and confidence in government’s performance and participant’s sense of personal efficacy and civic spirit. A large survey based on trust, governance, and civic behaviours and attitudes was also sent to a random sample of 2,000 Geraldton residents before the beginning of the Range and Level of Services Panel. The data from these surveys is shown below with indicative curves to assist visualisation of the attitude distributions.

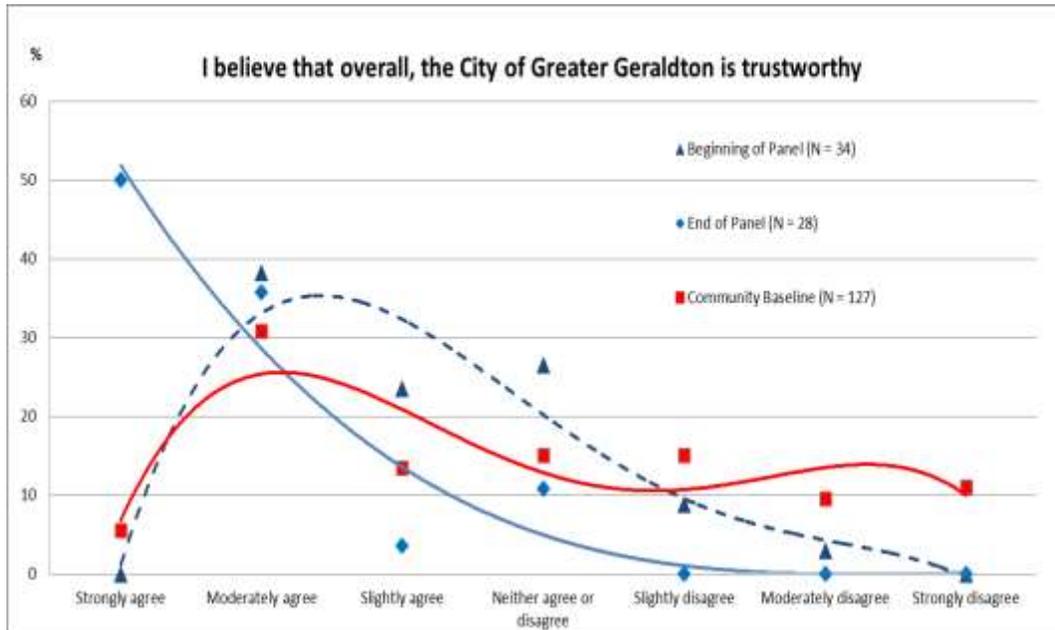


Figure 2: Survey results regarding the trustworthiness of the City of Greater Geraldton (2013)

The most significant result in Figure 2 was the shift in the attitude distribution of the Panelists by the conclusion of their PB. At that time, all participants found the City more trustworthy, with the greatest increase in the ‘strongly agree’ category. Interviews with participants to further understand this shift indicated that their belief in City officials’ competency and benevolence (whether they act in the best interests of the community) had radically shifted. At the root of their change in attitude over the PB, most interviewees pointed to a greater understanding of the complexity and size of the problems that the City struggles with as well as a reassessment of City staff as more well-intentioned and competent than previously believed. The City, like many public organisations, has not been lacking in its efforts to promote its work in traditional and social media. Hence, we contend that the understanding and shift in trust came from the nature of the deliberation process, not from the information per se that was imparted. In the power sharing implicit in the shaping of the budget, the City gave a strong motivation to the Panelists to learn as deeply as possible because of the important influence their work was going to have their fellow residents. Backed by this motivation, the collaboration and iterative nature of the learning with the City staff built personal trust with the Panelists and led to a reassessment of the complexity of the City budget problems and the competency of the staff in dealing with them. We believe this shared collaborative experience of the production (and presentation) of the final report is

key to the improvements in trust as well as acceptance of the outcomes by the larger organisation as legitimate.

Conclusion

Overall, it is contended here that this action research has achieved a useful level of democratic reform that could well be repeated elsewhere. Deliberative Collaborative Governance over time appeared to bridge the lack of trust that had hampered collaboration, which in turn had exacerbated perceptions of poor government performance in addressing wicked problems, i.e. it had helped to bridge the governance gap between performance and trust. This case study lends hope to the contention DCG has the capacity to change the existing system dynamics to create a virtuous cycle, where greater collective 'ownership' of wicked problems and potential solutions will decrease unrealistic expectations of what government can and cannot do, and increase the likelihood of more effective outcomes. Moreover, this in turn, will increase public trust in government and hence willingness and capacity to take part in future collaborative responses to wicked problems.

At a systemic level, rather than a series of stand-alone bargaining moments, the collaborative governance program evolved, applying adaptive management principles to respond to emergent challenges and opportunities. Around 20 different public deliberation initiatives were implemented, each one designed according to the specific purpose of the issue needing resolution. Many different public deliberation techniques were utilised, often modified and combined in order to achieve the purpose. There were also innovations such as the deliberative PB Panel process, and the online and face-to-face online deliberation platforms. Each project process was designed according to its context and customised to fit the purpose, deemed to be successful strategies in the literature on wicked problems. Over the length of this study, adaptive management ensured the DCG process was resilient, able to withstand setbacks and respond to unanticipated events, adapting processes, techniques and timelines to ensure their relevance.

Some trial and error learning from the Geraldton case study included: the inadequacies of new structures to support collaborative governance; the inadequacies of social media and online deliberation to address complex issues; and the need for public administrators to shift available community development resources from the predominant focus on educating in an endeavour to change public attitudes and behaviours, to a more responsive process of creating opportunities for everyday people to collaboratively problem solve, collaboratively make decisions, and (where feasible), to collaboratively enact the joint decisions

developed on issues of importance to them. This learning led to further understanding about mutuality of trust, namely the need for mutual respect and trust between those who govern and those governed. It became clear, given the somewhat precarious nature of the trust relationship between government and the community, that it will likely require those in power to make the first move – to entrust ordinary people to collaboratively problem solve and partner in decision making. In particular, whether initiatives emanated from the grassroots or were initiated by government, meaningful public participation in joint problem solving and decision-making will need iterative, two-way communication between ‘experts’ and lay people, with decision-makers finding new ways to better share information, and creating more spaces for entrusting citizens to effectively participate in the resolution of wicked problems .

The results of this case study have shown that is possible to avoid many of the shortcomings discussed in the collaborative governance and deliberative democracy literature. Decisions made after quality public deliberation consistently aimed to achieve the good of the community, rather than self-interest. Decisions made by descriptively representative minipublics in particular, appeared to hold greater legitimacy with interest groups, political actors, media elites and the public, and hence were more easily implemented. For these reasons, and also because the breadth of viewpoints had been carefully considered, the challenges of wicked problems were more likely to be effectively addressed. Finally, closing the virtuous cycle, since this new form of collaborative governance was more open, accountable and inclusive, it engendered greater trust between government and its constituents.

Obviously, one case study is insufficient evidence to comprehensively demonstrate the efficacy of DCG as a democratic reform to resolve wicked problems and in so doing, improve typically low levels of public trust. However, we contend this four year action research study provides evidence of the critical importance of DCG in allowing Australian regions to tackle wicked problems and address some of the most significant megatrend challenges of our time.

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