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Multi-stakeholder Engagement

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Abstract

This paper uses an innovative methodology - the Triple Task - to propose a new framework for organising multi-stakeholders in decision making. Whilst recognising the intrinsic values of group work (including shared views, wide option selection, public spirited focus, legitimacy of decisions and improved intellectual content) and keeping in mind the numerous issues which confuse and obscure clear findings from group work (including multiple roles for participants, bias due to domination and distortion emerging from uneven group inputs) this paper uses an innovative theory and methodology - the Triple Task - to propose a new framework for organising multi-stakeholder consultations. The Triple Task methodology was applied to test the new framework on multi-stakeholders in the context of education in Abu Dhabi, where various small groups were tasked and assessed using the methodology. The results indicate that moving participants from heterogeneous to homogenous groups results on these groups becoming more focused in their outcomes with greater clarity in the thinking of group members.

Keywords: Triple Task; Decision Making; Group Dynamics; Stakeholder Consultations

1. Introduction

Engaging multiple stakeholders in decision-making has gained more prominence in recent years. Enhanced by customer-oriented public sector management philosophy and participatory approaches to planning and policy-making, stakeholder participation has been perceived to add value and improve the quality of public decisions (Abelson et al., 2003; Altman & Petkus, 1994; Beierle, 2000; Forsyth, 2010; Innes & Booher, 2004; Kerkhof, 2006; Renn et al., 1993; Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Watson et al., 1991). The philosophy of governance that promotes reciprocal obligations between citizens and governments has also contributed to the rise of multi-stakeholder engagement in the decision-making and policy-making processes (Hajer, 2003).

In this context, Van de Kerkhof (2006) contends that in contemporary society, decision-making occurs within the context of a citizenry that is increasingly well educated, knowledgeable and more critical in its judgments. In public policymaking, Van de Kerkhof (2006) attributes the trend towards greater stakeholder participation, at least in part, to a growing disillusionment with the power of scientific knowledge in contemporary decision-making processes. While scientific expertise has traditionally played an important role in decision-making and has seen scientists wield significant influence on public policy, Rip (1985) posits that pragmatic rationalism has required scientific experts also possess a clear understanding and appreciation of the socio-political contexts in which advice is given and decisions made, including the impact of advice on stakeholders (Jasanoff, 1990; Rip, 1985). To this end, scientific considerations must be balanced against socio-political factors in both the decision-making and policy formulation processes¹.

Fearon (1998) argued that among the benefits of deliberative public participation in decision-making processes is that it provides stakeholders with opportunities to:

- Share views on a subject that voting does not allow, including the ability to communicate an intensity and relative weighting of preferences.
- Generate and consider a wider range of options that might not have been considered otherwise.
- Support more public-spirited proposals in contrast to those motivated by self-interest.
- Increase the legitimacy of decisions and ease implementation or compliance.

¹ A case in point is a growing public participation in scientific research, sometimes referred to as 'crowd-source science', where amateur scientists collaborate with professional scientists in research that has been facilitated by advances in technology and has seen non-scientists become more involved in decision-making and policy formulation, including contributing to decisions concerning the development and application of science and technology in society (McCallie et al., 2009).

- Improve the moral or intellectual qualities of participants (Abelson et al., 2003).

Other motivations for increasing public engagement in decision-making include the pursuit of legitimacy, transparency and accountability, gaining public support for potentially unpopular decisions and developing social capital and a greater sense of community (Abelson et al., 2003). As a result, governments have increasingly sought to build public participation into the decision-making processes when feasible, in what is often referred to as ‘deliberative democracy’ (Rowe & Frewer, 2000; Van de Kerkhof, 2006). Furthermore, a wider participation of stakeholders contributes to the successful implementation of policies and programmes (Forsyth, 2010). This is particularly apparent in cases when the support of the group is important to ensuring successful implementation. Vroom (2003) emphasises the importance of a group-focused approach to decision-making when high-quality solutions and critical decisions are needed.

While there is broad agreement in the literature regarding the valuable contribution stakeholder participation can make in solving complex problems, improving the quality of decision-making and in policy formulation and implementation processes, questions have been raised concerning the effectiveness of different methods and processes adopted to facilitate public participation (Abelson et al., 2003; Innes & Booher, 2004). Methods can differ in various ways, including participant selection, the number of participants, provision of information, type of input obtained and the number of discussions/deliberations held. Unfortunately, systemic comparisons of the relative merits of the different methods are hindered by the absence of benchmarks against which methods can be compared and assessed (Abelson et al., 2003; Rowe & Frewer, 2000).

This paper uses an innovative method for facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement by looking at the dynamics of work among groups and at the ways they think, plan and decide in a collaborative manners and then generating a new framework for structuring multi-stakeholder consultations. We build on the Triple Task Method (TTM) as a process that “sets out the basis for understanding group dynamics” (Bell & Morse 2012, pp. 44-45). We utilise the TTM as a method that attempts to blend systems practice traditions with elements of the psychodynamic tradition – most specifically as expounded by Bridger in his Double Task model (Bridger, 2007). We look at three flows of the work of stakeholder groups:

- 1 The work of the group;
- 2 The group’s work as understood externally: from the outside in;
- 3 The group’s own reflection: from the inside out (cf. Bell and Morse 2012 pages 44 - 45).

We use Triple Task as a way to provide what can be best described as *Eductive Observation* (EO). Eductive, or drawing out, because the groups discover and draw out their own new and creative ideas. Observation because, at a high level of abstraction, all three tasks are

observed, interpreted and then the views are shared, compared and triangulated by the facilitator team.

In our research we utilise the Triple Task 'Theory' and innovate on the specifics of the Triple Task Methodology. We focus on strategic level multi-stakeholder engagement to suggest policies and sets of indicators required for performance measurement in the schools of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The research comprised a couple of 'two-day' workshops carried out in March and May 2013 where groups representing the various stakeholders and interests considered the role and value of Indicators and Policy with regard to performance measurement in the context of schools in Abu Dhabi. In considering this, the views of Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) professionals, professional Administrators from Schools (Heads, Deputy Heads, etc.) and Parents with children in the schooling system in Abu Dhabi were assessed working in group contexts.

The research is based on three working hypotheses relating to the ways in which stakeholder groups might be expected to behave when confronted by the task of assessing performance measurement. The hypotheses tested what is intended to be 'common sense' and are as follows:

H1: All stakeholder homogenous groups (e.g. school administrators), because of their homogeneity, would be expected to select a range of common indicators related to their stakeholder interest.

H2: Heterogeneous groups, because of their diversity, would be expected to produce a more diverse process of discovery.

The stakeholders worked with over the two days spent one day in their homogeneous group, then spent the other day in a mixed or heterogeneous group. From this change, a further hypothesis can be made:

H3: Groups going from heterogeneity to homogeneity might be expected to be as, or more, effective in their second formation as they move from mixed understandings to more shared views.

2. The Question of Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement Methods

Much attention has been given to the relative merits of, and conceptual frameworks for, public participation in decision-making. More recently, however, the focus has shifted towards the design of more informed, effective and legitimate methods of engagement with the public and their participation (Abelson et al., 2003).

There are various methods of multi-stakeholder engagement and participation. There are, however, limited evaluative studies on the effectiveness of each of these methods. Abelson

et al. (2003) conducted a review of empirical studies of deliberative methods of public participation (i.e. collaborative problem-solving discussions) and their potential contribution to decision-making processes. They concluded that a critical element of deliberative processes - such as citizen juries and panels - was that they allowed "individuals with different backgrounds, interests and values to listen, understand, potentially persuade and ultimately come to more reasoned, informed and public-spirited decisions." Abelson et al. (2003) contrasted this "social process" to other approaches such as coercion, manipulation or deception. However, the study also highlighted a number of weaknesses of deliberative methods including the:

- Small number of citizens that can meaningfully deliberate at any one time.
- Selection of citizens to be included in the deliberation processes (e.g. mix of experts versus lay people; obtaining a representative sample).
- Amount of information presented and speed at which participants are asked to review and interpret it.
- Costs associated with deliberative methods, such as citizen juries.
- The impact of recommendations, especially where citizens have no delegated decision-making authority.

Innes & Booher (2004) argued that legally required methods of public participation in the US – such as public hearings or review and comment procedures - have failed to achieve greater public participation or incorporate a broad spectrum of public participation into planning and decision-making processes. Moreover, they claimed methods of participation often antagonised members of the public, with procedural requirements seen as discouraging public input.

After reviewing different participation models, Innes & Booher (2004) recommended 'collaborative participation' – or deliberative public participation – in which citizens engage in 'authentic dialogue', are equally empowered and informed, each is listened to respectfully and where each works towards a task of mutual interest. They claimed that this leads to an increased understanding and acceptance of information as through listening, people develop an understanding of the perspectives of others and realise the legitimacy of their ideas. Moreover, collaborative processes were seen to build networks that promote social capital and trust, jointly developed objectives and solutions and innovative approaches to policy challenges.

Van de Kerkhof (2006) highlighted the important difference between deliberation² and consensus, indicating that consensus building is characterised as a process of negotiation

² Deliberative approaches to public participation require that participants be provided with information about the issues being considered. They are encouraged to discuss and challenge this information, exchange opinions and viewpoints and weigh and balance arguments before making a final decision regarding specific or alternative policy options.

which seeks to reach a joint decision that meets the needs of all stakeholders. The study concluded that the consensus approach faced a number of constraints, including: a bias in participant selection as sceptical participants were sometimes discouraged from joining discussions; a tendency for groups to focus on the most tractable problems and difficulties reaching a consensus when groups comprised members with heterogeneous interests, backgrounds and viewpoints. A deliberative approach to stakeholder contributions was found to overcome these constraints by encouraging open dialogue which led to improved decision-making.

Research by Forsyth (2010) determined that the effectiveness of group decision-making was reduced by:

- Communication problems and an inability of group members to clearly express themselves
- ‘Shared information bias’, where groups focus discussions on examining details that two or more of the group members know in common rather than discussing unshared information
- Judgment errors that are often exacerbated in a group context and cause people to overlook important information and overuse unimportant information.

Stakeholder Composition Impact on the Quality of Deliberations and Outcomes

Postmes et al. (2001) conducted a study of the quality of group decision-making, which highlighted the importance of how different groups deal with information and how this affects the quality of decisions made. The study addressed the importance of ‘groupthink’, a theory first discussed by Janis (1972), where group cohesion and a desire for consensus override a realistic appraisal of the decision alternatives. The study determined that, “groups in the consensus norm condition made poorer decisions and valued shared information more highly than groups in the critical norm condition.”³ Consensus groups were found to be more conservative in accepting new evidence and more cautious about challenging the value of shared information. In contrast, groups in the critical norm condition were found to be more probing, challenging and investigative and made greater use of previously unshared information. Interestingly, group cohesiveness was not found to be a cause of a group’s preference for consensus. Rather, group history was determined to affect the formation of group norms, which in turn had a significant impact on the quality of group decisions.

³ ‘Group norms’ were defined as a standard or rule that is accepted by members of the group as applying to themselves and other group members, prescribing appropriate thought and behaviour within the group (Postmes et al., 2001, p. 919).

Wolfe & Putler (2002) questioned the validity of assumptions in normative stakeholder theory that stakeholder role (e.g. shareholder, employee, customers, supplier, etc.) constitutes a 'binding tie' among individual stakeholders resulting in a homogenous set of priorities within stakeholder groups. A key assumption of stakeholder theory was that self-interest (e.g. wages and job security in the case of employees or dividend earnings in the case of shareholders) is the central motivating factor that creates the binding tie that generates homogenous priorities and influences behaviour within role-based stakeholder groups. However, contrary to this assumption, the study found that self-interest did not represent the primary motivation of individuals, and homogeneity existed to only a limited extent within stakeholder groups. The self-interest assumption was found to be overly simplistic and not reflective of the complex social and organisational realities which enterprises face in developing effective approaches to stakeholder management.

3. Process of Engagement: Some of the Prescribed Solutions

There are various solutions in the literature to address the problems encountered in designing effective methods of stakeholder engagement in decision-making. These range from ways of identifying stakeholders to group composition and how group members communicate when deliberating on an issue.

Group Identification and Composition

Accurately identifying stakeholders and understanding their priorities is vitally important for the effective management of stakeholder relationships and enables organisational priorities and actions to be aligned with stakeholder needs. A study by Wolfe & Putler (2002) debunked the assumption in stakeholder theory that groups tend to be more or less homogeneous and can be classified by their roles. Their research indicated that stakeholders can more accurately be defined by their *interests* rather than their *role*, and that members of role-based stakeholder groups can have heterogeneous interests and priorities. Effective stakeholder management therefore requires that managers understand the underlying priorities within stakeholder groups.

Mitchell et al. (1997) presented a theory of stakeholder identification and salience that can be used to explain to whom and to what managers should pay attention. They argue that managers must know which stakeholders hold a legitimate claim (i.e. moral, legal and property-based) on them and their organisations, as well as the type and level of stakeholder power (Wood, 1994) and the urgency of their claims. Beyond that, Mitchell et al. (1997) argue that managers must also understand the dynamic and heterogeneous interests and priorities that exist within stakeholder groups. They predict that the salience of a particular stakeholder will be low if only one attribute (i.e. power, legitimacy or urgency) is present, moderate if two are present and high if all three are present.

Abelson et al. (2003) discuss group composition and the use of citizen juries, panels and consensus conferences to integrate information provided by technical experts with public values provided by non-expert citizens who act as 'value consultants' in decision-making processes. These approaches also offer opportunities to address representational problems by enabling a range of views at local, regional or national level to be included. Also discussed is the use of deliberative polling which combines the benefits of traditional opinion polls with large representation, offering opportunities for discussion and deliberation. However, the significant costs associated with this approach have limited its application.

To combat 'groupthink' and its deleterious impact on the quality of decision-making, Postmes et al. (2001) recommend exposing group norms and attempting to transform them should they place unreasonable pressure on group members to comply.

Group Communication

Research into methods of group communication and how groups interact and influence one another indicates that when groups are informed that there is a single correct answer and are they asked to 'solve' the problem, they tend to reach more correct solutions than groups that are instructed that the information is incomplete and are invited to 'judge' which solution is likely to be the most correct between alternatives. This suggests that groups asked to 'solve' a problem devote more time to considering critical cues that distinguish between decision alternatives, whereas groups assigned to 'judge' a task tend to overlook important information (Laughlin, 1980 & 2011; Stasser & Stewart, 1992).

Innes & Booher (2004) contend that one of the biggest problems in group communication is *information*, including "who controls it and whether it is trustworthy," as this has a direct impact on the quality of decision-making. They highlight the benefits of joint fact finding as a means by which stakeholders can question data, potentially uncover errors and generate more accurate information that can be used in the deliberation processes. In order to also advance fairness and justice through group communication and collaborative participation, they recommend that dialogue be inclusive and that action be taken to ensure weaker stakeholders are effectively represented. Ultimately they argued that participation must be fair, representative, well informed and transparent.

Insofar as shared information is more highly valued in group decision-making due to group norms that value consensus building, Postmes et al. (2001) argue that strategies aimed at reducing consensus group norm conditions are likely to result in greater value being placed on unshared information leading to improved decision-making. Further to this and in order to avoid the problems associated with 'groupthink', Forsyth (2010) makes the following recommendations with regard to group communications:

- Limit premature seeking of concurrence.
- Correct misperceptions and errors.

- Improve group's decisional methods.

A study by Maznevski (1994) of literature on group decision-making indicates that the diversity of group members can lead to groups producing an increased number of solutions and alternatives to problems. This reflects the ability of diverse groups to view problems in a variety of ways, while also offering a varied range of skills and knowledge conducive to superior decision-making. Nevertheless, Maznevski (1994) contends that diversity can also present obstacles to smooth communication and interaction which can, in turn, reduce group performance in decision-making. In order to overcome these problems, Maznevski (1994) argues that group members should, "be made aware of communication processes and the preconditions and of the role of communication in group performance". Preconditions are discussed in detail in Maznevski's article, but include, inter alia, a shared social reality (e.g. shared language base and perspective), an ability to take the perspective of others into account, a motivation to communicate and an agreement among participants with regard to how these interactions will take place.

4. Innovating in Stakeholder Engagement

In an attempt to bridge the chasm in the process of stakeholder engagement between the position favouring diversity in group membership and that inclined towards homogeneity among participating actors, we tested an innovative approach to assess the dynamics of work among groups and the ways they think, plan and decide in a collaborative manner, both in the homogenous and heterogeneous formations. We utilised the Triple Task Theory to provide an innovative way of looking at three flows of the work of stakeholders:

- 1 The work of the groups in terms of their outcomes;
- 2 The work of the groups as understood externally, from the outside in;
- 3 The groups' own reflection: from the inside out.

The Triple Task according to Bell and Morse comprises three steps:

"Task 1: The task undertaken by groups. This is the process normally undertaken within the participatory process and which generates the insights. We would normally expect Task 1 to relate to some issue of importance to the group.

Task 2: An assessment of the group dynamic in Task 1 made by the facilitator(s) of the participatory process. This assessment is based upon what are in practice largely visual clues as to how the groups are working, but will also be based to an extent on the presentations made by group members during Task 1.

Task 3: An assessment made by the members of their group dynamic while undertaking Task 1. This will, of course, have some overlap with Task 2 but could also conceivably be quite different as the facilitators are having to draw their insights from ‘outside’ the groups” (Bell & Morse 2012, p.45). In their book, Bell and Morse describe the means by which each element of the TTM is to be undertaken. Task 1 is accomplished by the use of a participatory technique known as Imagine (Bell, 2011), but with particular focus being made of a technique called Rich Pictures (Bell & Morse, 2013). In Task 1 the groups, once convened, engage in sharing ideas by the drawing of a free form ‘Rich Picture’ – this allows the group to share task representations and share cognition about the context (van Ginkel et al., 2008). The Rich Picture is a device to allow people to share and converse with each other in a mode of optimal indiscretion. Task 1 comprises, therefore, a shared interpretation (i.e. an agreed assessment made by the facilitators) of outputs from Imagine such as the Rich Picture. Figure 1 is an example of a Rich Picture taken from the current research project and Table 1 is a table which sets out guidelines, adapted from those used by Bell and Morse in their 2012 book, for interpreting Imagine Rich Picture output on a four point scale (in this adaptation the polarity of the table is reversed from Bell and Morse’s book to make it consistent with the polarity of the other two Tasks).

Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 about here

Interpretation of the group output is agreed among the facilitators to the process. This interpretation took the form of a discussion based upon the richness of the Rich Picture according to the scale provided in Table 1. Each groups Imagine contribution was therefore ascribed a value between 1 and 4 where a score of 1 would represent a perfect score (systemic output).

Task 2 is undertaken by the facilitators observing the group process and ranking the behaviour observed on a seven point scale relating to four categories – of the group’s **B**eing or general sense of mood, the way the group **E**ngages in its work, how it **C**ontextualises the group activity within its existing frame of understanding and how the group **M**anages its operation – the abbreviation for this approach is BECM (Bell and Morse 2011). The BECM criteria are set out in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The facilitators observe each group three times during each day, one at a time, and independently of each other. Then, ‘blind’ to each other’s assessment, they share their various scores. The Facilitators agree on an assessment for each group for each stage of the

day and agree on an overall BECM score for each group overall which will be in the range between 1 and 7 where 1 would represent a perfect score (reflective practitioners).

In the current research both of these approaches are adopted, however, the third stage of the Triple Task has been innovated upon and adapted. Originally, the third task was undertaken by use of a questionnaire and related analysis process called SYMLOG (a **S**ystem for the **M**ultiple **L**evel of **O**bservation of **G**roups). SYMLOG is a well-known established quantitative means to review internal group dynamic and comes with a wealth of process and quantitative assessment (Bales et al., 1979; Blumberg 2006; Nowack 1987; Park 1985;). It is however very different in tone and approach when compared to Task 1 and 2: Imagine and BECM. The background influence to the first two tasks is from classic participatory and systems approaches to group work – in the spirit of such thinkers as Donald Schon, Robert Chambers and Robert Flood (Chambers 1997; Flood 1999; Schon 1983). Imagine and BECM are essentially qualitative devices which rely for their authentication on the triangulation of observation by the researchers engaged in their analysis.

At the time of the research described here, the BECM matrix had already been applied as the basis of the observer-orientated approach contained in Task 2 (Bell & Morse 2013) and extensively as a means to assess student performance in teaching at the Open University. The BECM matrix was derived from the action learning cycle described by Bell and Lane (1998) but refined by Zimmer (2001). Drawing on the group learning work of Kolb (1984) and Houston (1995), Zimmer (2001) defined the way in which BECM could be seen as fitting within the action learning cycle. In a sequence of steps he demonstrated how the BECM approach both confirmed the logic of the cycle and, through reflective engagement with the output from the matrix, enhanced student learning. The capacity of the BECM approach to be applied rapidly and the outputs to be potentially available for participants of group dynamic processes to consider and review was attractive. In their 2013 paper Bell and Morse discussed the value of applying BECM to the Task 3 role. They observed:

“A more ‘open’ version of BECM is being planned by us as a research tool. This would require the approach to be used ‘outside in’, as is the case at present, but also ‘inside out’; allowing members of the researched group to undertake their own self-analysis and perhaps to contest/ compare this to the outsiders view. This kind of approach is in keeping with advocates of self-analysis (Horney 1994; Moon 1999) and ties in with earlier work undertaken by one of the authors (Bell 1992; Bell 1997). The benefits of such an innovation might be multiplex:

- allowing the group to consciously review its progress and, in an ethical sense, to take responsibility for the reporting on the group owned work;
- therefore, to explore its behaviour and to respond to its own assessment;
- thus, tackling difficult issues that are now explicit but that might otherwise remain obscure; and

- possibly improving group dynamic in certain contexts.” (Bell & Morse 2011, p. 331)

Whilst we cannot claim to have achieved all these aims, this current study is a step towards a more rapid and open participant review form of enquiry.

Arising from this, the third part of the Triple Task was conceived as a brief questionnaire (allowing for easy and rapid completion by participants), comprising two series of eight questions. The first series of eight questions related to how each group member felt their group operated. The second series of eight questions related to how the individual felt when working within the group. For each set of eight questions, two are probing each of the BECM criteria of Being, Engaging, Contextualising and Managing. Responses are assessed in terms of ‘Rarely’, ‘Sometimes’ and ‘Frequently’. An example of a questionnaire relating to one of the groups in this research project is shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here.

In the interpretation of the group’s self-assessment of their dynamic, the research team looked for unanimous responses to questions. With small groups (such as the group of four shown in Table 3) only the unanimous responses were taken into account. With larger groups of six or seven - where unanimity is less likely - the second highest scores were also included in analysis. The intention of the analysis is to gather information from the group about areas where they strongly agreed on how they felt their work progressed. The concentration on unanimity or near unanimity in response to questions is not intended to deny future deeper exploration of the data but, for this study, we were interested in gaining a rapid and as unambiguous as possible view of the group’s self-perception. In this self-analysis, they provide an inside knowledge of the group dynamic which can subsequently be compared to the observed output from the groups (as shown in Task 1) and the observed behaviour of the group (as monitored in Task 2). It was intended that the new version of the third Task – conforming to what Robert Chambers defined as ‘quick and dirty’ would, nonetheless, provide insights into the invisible (to the facilitator) effectiveness of the group and help the research team to understand multi-stakeholder collaborative planning. It would also present as a rapidly adoptable methodology which others could apply in complex contexts requiring detailed group analysis.

5. Findings: How Various Group Formations Affected Nature of Indicators and Policies

We tested the hypotheses set out earlier in this paper in order to review the learning journey of the groups. We applied TTM as a means to assess the views of the individuals within group formations – both homogenous (ADEC, Administrator or Parent) and heterogeneous (a mix of the three). We should say at this point that our sample size is small, there is overlap in roles between the three stakeholder groupings noted (Parents may well

also be Administrators, etc.) and we recognise that our findings require further, exhaustive research in order to replicate our results.

For the first workshop in March 2013, the thirty participants were organised in groups. All participants processes experience vagaries including problems of incentive, people not showing up on the day or leaving early (to mention but three). Therefore in this case, the research team tried as much as possible to ensure that the groups had a balance of participants representing a range in terms of seniority in organisation, age and gender. The groups which emerged were as follows:

Day 1: Groups A1, B1, C1, X1, Y1 and Z1

Where A1 are ADEC personnel, B1 are Administrators and C1 are Parents. X1, Y1 and Z1 are mixed groups of ADEC, Administrator and Parent groups.

Day 2: Groups A2, B2, C2, X2, Y2 and Z2

Where A2, B2 and C2 are mixed groups of ADEC, Administrators and Parent groups. Group X2 is comprised of ADEC personnel, Y2 are Administrators and Z2 are Parents.

Each group comprised between five and seven individuals. During this workshop, the groups considered the question: "What indicators are considered to be most valuable in the performance measurement of schools among all key stakeholders?"

For the second workshop in May 2013 the nineteen participants were placed in three groups on each day – these were organised as follows:

Day 1: Groups X1, Y1 and Z1

Where X1, Y1 and Z1 are mixed groups of Schools Administrators, Parents and ADEC staff.

Day 2: Groups X2, Y2 and Z2

Where Group X2 is comprised of ADEC, Y2 are Administration and Z2 are Parents.

The second workshop had half the participants of the first and the groups ranged in size from four to seven. During this workshop, the groups considered the question: What policies are considered to be most valuable in the performance measurement of schools among all key stakeholders?

For both workshops the groups were provided with identical guidance and methods. Each participant would experience the workshop twice; once in a homogeneous group and once in a heterogeneous group. We ensured that some participants experienced the homogenous group first whereas others experienced the heterogeneous group structure first. Participants were encouraged via Imagine to draw a shared Rich Picture of the

situation as they understand it. Following this and a briefing to all groups in plenary, the groups were asked to draw out 'Tasks' (things that need to be done to improve the current situation) and 'Issues' (items that need to be addressed – possibly problems) evident in the Rich Picture, to link these Tasks and Issues to current indicator or policy areas of concern and to prioritise their indicator or policy thinking. At the end of each day the groups were asked to feedback their assessment of the current priority indicator or policy considerations for the school sector in Abu Dhabi.

Some generalisations can be made regarding the quality of both events and the nature of all of the groups. The workshops were held on the INSEAD campus in Abu Dhabi. Both workshops were well attended although the second workshop was slightly disappointing in this regard with fewer participants. Those participants who did attend were very positive in outlook, were willing to go along with the research process and treated all elements of the workshop with a serious dedication which provided a superb tone for the event. We need to note that an element of self-selection comes into the tonality of groups. Probably already committed, group players were more likely to attend the events. That being noted, there was no visible evidence of undue conflict or annoyance between participants and both events appeared to be undertaken in good humour.

The key observations arising from the exercise - both in terms of outcome and process

A great deal of data was stored over the four days of the two workshops. Three facilitators engaged with the groups, leading them in the Imagine process, observing them via BECM and collating the questionnaires. The data for the three Tasks of TTM are presented in Tables 4 to 6.

Insert Tables 4, 5 and 6 about here

Given our hypotheses and the original questions described earlier in this paper, we can make a number of observations at this stage both in terms of the concrete outcomes of the groups' work and in terms of the process and dynamic of the groups observed.

Outcomes from the Hypotheses

At this point we can make some general observations arising from comparison of the groups as measured against the original hypotheses; we set these out in table form in Table 7

Insert Table 7 about here

The table indicates that our (admittedly small) sample supports all five hypotheses. Even with the small size of the sample we were pleased to see the hypotheses supported. We argue that the potential to now apply these hypotheses as working axioms for further analysis and the further innovation of the Triple Task Method is a powerful output from this study.

Outcomes from the groups in terms of reported views

We deal with these in terms of each Workshop separately.

Workshop 1. In answer to our primary questions:

“What indicators are considered to be most valuable in performance measurement of schools among all key stakeholders?”

In order these are: suitability of curriculum, ICT, safety facilities, student performance, teacher qualifications, involvement of parents, alumni, employment.

“How do indicators support and, at the same time represent the routine of education assessment?”

The fact that the curriculum indicator – an indicator which could be seen as primary in assessing education – is the top priority, shows that there is a possible correlation between indicators and routine (meaning: a sequence of actions regularly followed) education assessment. The manner in which all diverse stakeholders engaged in the process of indicator assessment and the range of indicators developed over the two days (84) provides an insight into the routine manner in which indicators are called upon and applied in the management of education.

“How do different stakeholders view the value of different indicators?”

Some tendencies are reasonably clear from our small sample. For example parents tend to look for child safety and IT in the curriculum. Administrators are also interested in safety and security but also look to items like professional development and ADEC have a more strategic assessment relating to performance, qualifications and curriculum. In mixed groups the indicators appear less focused and more mixed but this is consistent with the overall hypotheses behind this research.

“How do different stakeholders engage with ideas from other stakeholder groups concerning different indicators?”

In the workshops we noted little discernible difference between the mood and tone of the various stakeholder groups. The Triple Task identified that mixed groups often had significant self-perceived issues with their internal dynamic and yet, groups of all make-up were able to undertake the tasks provided and work together to produce the outputs requested to a reasonable standard.

“How malleable are different stakeholders when confronted by alternative view to their own?”

The heterogeneous groups had more and deeper self-perceived internal issues when dealing with each other (although Y1 bucked this trend – a point which emphasises the difficulty of applying generalisable rules from this qualitative research). The indicators which

they produced were significantly differentiated across the groups. Only eight indicators were well supported (by five or more groups) but of the eighty four indicators noted by the groups over a third were noted by only one, two or three groups. The mixed groups on both days produced wide ranging indicators and this implies that different stakeholders are open to and able, to accept alternative views.

“What are the implications for indicator development and performance measurement routines at organisations with multiple stakeholders?”

The implications are that multi-stakeholders, if engaged with each other in a benign and tolerant atmosphere such as that represented in this workshop process, seem capable of working together reasonably well, even if the self-perception of the groups in some cases is that they are divided.

Workshop 2. Our primary question was:

“What policies are considered to be most valuable in the performance measurement of schools among all key stakeholders?”

Among all groups of all kinds is the primacy of policy in the area of child health and safety. This was the only policy area highlighted by all six groups. The four top frequency policy areas for the groups were:

Safety, Security and Health	7 incidents
Teaching Learning and Development	6 incidents
Governance	4 incidents
Inspection	4 incidents

“How do policies support and, at the same time, represent the routine of education assessment?”

Many of the groups really struggled with this nature of thinking in terms of routine policy. Policy as a routine of education assessment was only linked closely to the ADEC group.

“How do different stakeholders view the value of different policies?”

The groups shared the importance of health and safety but it would be accurate to infer from the results that the groups did not value different policies; rather they valued different visions of policy. The ADEC group valued policy as a strategic tool, whereas the Administrators and Parents did not really understand Policy as a clear idea and therefore did not have clarity of vision in terms of different policy values.

“How do different stakeholders engage with ideas from other stakeholder groups concerning different policies?”

In the mixed groups similar themes arose as in the groups where the three types were segregated into ADEC, Administrators and Parents. All groups showed tolerance to different ideas. However, there was greater clarity of thinking in the homogenous stakeholder groups.

“How malleable are different stakeholders when confronted by alternative views to their own?”

Tolerance to alternative views was noted in the mixed groups. However, it was also noted that some ADEC personnel were frustrated by the lack of understanding of the purpose and nature of policy by the other stakeholders.

“What are the implications for policy development and performance measurement routines at organisations with multiple stakeholders?”

If performance measurement routine is to become clear and unambiguous, the policy which drives it needs greater clarity and force in the mixed stakeholder groups.

Outcome from the TTM Observation of the Group Dynamic

Our sample size is small and our approach experimental, yet we do feel that we can suggest some overall conclusions on the group dynamic involved by making use of the Triple Task:

- Task 1 Imagine - both group types (homogeneous and heterogeneous) improved from day 1 to day 2
- Task 2 BECM - both group types improved from day 1 to day 2
- Task 3 Self-reflection questionnaire - groups going from homogeneous, single stakeholder type to mixed stakeholder type lose self-perceived cohesion
- Task 3 Self-reflection questionnaire - groups going from heterogeneous, mixed stakeholder groups to single stakeholder groups gain self-perceived cohesion

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In our study, the move from heterogeneous groups to homogenous ones has shown that groups become more focused in their outcomes with a greater clarity in the thinking of group members. This reflects a key relevant aspect for multi-stakeholder discussions that can adopt a two level deliberation. Deliberations can start among members from various and mixed backgrounds and interests especially when the issues at stake have unclear outcomes. This allows various stakeholders to put forward their points of view. Our findings concur with those of Maznevski (1994) who showed how diversity of group members leads to groups producing multiple solutions and alternatives. The second level of deliberation, however, needs to happen among homogenous stakeholders who by now become more

aware of the issues and their multi-facets and can engage in more focused discussions ultimately producing clearer outcomes.

We were surprised to notice general improvement in the quality and outcome of the discussions on the second day for all groups. Participatory techniques do not usually engage with repetition of task and yet we found that the repetition of the *Imagine* process with different group composition provided higher quality and more insightful group work on the second pass. Such improvement would need further testing but is quite interesting for participatory and multi-stakeholder engagement and particularly for those deliberating on a policy or programme reflecting the significance of repeating such exercises to improve the quality of their outcomes.

The questionnaire, the third element of TT demonstrates the main changes in the types of group over the two days: the growing cohesion of the homogenous groups following a period within heterogeneous groups, and the comparative lack of cohesion in the groups moving from homogeneity to heterogeneity. Although this may not be particularly surprising, it does suggest an interesting process point for future work with groups. We suggest that sensitivity to the internal dynamic of the group (demonstrated in behaviours and views presented in the 'inside out' questionnaire but not observed from the less sensitive 'outside in' BECM) was needed to provide the sensitivity to recognise hard-to-observe changes in the group dynamic.

Our third observation relates to the manner in which groups 'become' or 'emerge' over a period. We feel that there is evidence here that each group develops a signature and that this emerges over the period they exist. We also believe that TTM is capable of 'reading' the Emergent Group Signature or EGS and recognising trends in-group behaviour as a result.

The EGS insight arose from the evidence based, triangulated (three facilitators comparing and cross checking observation) interpretative art which the Triple Task methodology required for this research. There are some general and common sense rules (expressed here as hypotheses) of group work and process which are generally supported by this research (with exceptions and special cases of course) but our overwhelming conclusion is that TTM provided a means to identify the intelligible uniqueness of each groups collective nature and expression –the EGS. The groups signature is unique to the time and place of reading and will probably not remain beyond this time and place but, at the time of identification, it is a telling means to assess the groups inner and outer state of being and its frame of group mind to the task it is requested to undertake.

Limitations of the Methodology

Triple Task analysis of groups is a far from perfect science. Many issues beset the work of groups (e.g. see Esser, 1998; Janis, 1972) and the interpretation of group outputs (see Jim & Xu, 2002). The Triple Task Method, as described in this article, suggests a means whereby a team of facilitators can triangulate observations around a trine process of analysis.

However, this version of TTM has weaknesses both at a meta-level and in terms of each of the three tasks. At a meta-level, there is the potential for subjective 'group think' within the facilitator team. Facilitator group think implies that the facilitator team may convince itself that certain behaviours are common or revealed and will continue with this belief because it is a useful and or successful interpretation. This is a form of team wishful thinking and relates to discourses around the notion of successification (Bradford & Hey, 2007). The facilitation team was aware of this issue and consciously attempted to avoid presumptions about group behaviour and outputs. Also, at the meta-level, in common with many other research projects, sample size is an issue. The research described here relates to two workshop events and, although the team applied identical methods in both cases, a larger sample would allow for a higher degree of confidence in the interpretation of the results.

In terms of each of the three tasks, a number of issues needed to be carefully monitored for potential errors.

Task 1 tends to favour extrovert group members. They will be more likely to get their ideas across and to dominate conversation. Attention needs to be paid to the behaviour of all group members.

Task 2 is a snapshot. Even though three team members took snapshots of the behaviour of the groups throughout, there is still a probability that a range of alternative behaviours could have been present when the facilitation team was not present. Clearly, without a constant presence from all facilitators at all times, this issue proved unavoidable.

Task 3, as applied in this study, only analyses unanimous or near unanimous responses from groups. Many minority views would be fascinating to assess but, in this paper, we do not attempt this although we hope to return to a deeper analysis of minority trends in the data at a later date.

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Figure 1



Table 1

Criteria	Levels			
	4: Incoherent rich picture.	3: Semi-incoherent rich picture.	2: Semi coherent rich picture.	1: coherent rich picture.
I. Colour relevance	Hardly any or no colour. Not used for any discernable reason	Little colour, rarely used to emphasise meaning	Colours in some places, sometimes used to emphasise meaning	Vibrant colours, attention to additional colouring for meaning
II. Kinetic	Hardly any or no variation in line width and no use of symbol – drawing limited to lines – wide use of words and acronyms	Little variation of line width, small use of symbol – substantial use of words or acronyms	Some variation of line width and shape, a limited use of symbol – some use of words	Vibrant line width and shape, much agitated use of symbol – little or no use of words
III. Mood expression	No evidence of a story, fracture and /or isolated elements.	Little evidence of a narrative theme	Some evidence of a narrative positive or negative	Evidence of a strong ‘story’ and narrative direction (positive or negative)
IV. Evidence for focus on the issue being explored (i.e. relevance)	No explicit reference to the issue being explored	Little reference to the issue being explored	Occasional reference to the issue being explored	Frequent reference to the issue being explored
Interpretation	Linear, step by step analysis	Evidence of some systemic insight but mainly linear	More systemic, evidence of holistic thinking	Systemic output

Table 2 BECM

Broad guidelines for team assessment – the group shows ...	Being - respecting perspectives The group is ...	Engaging with complex situations: the group shows that ...	Contextualising an approach: The group does ...	Managing practice: the group manages by...
1. That it has internalised the concepts/ skills associated with effective practice - can use and apply ideas in a logical way - varying approach in reflection with context. The group can adapt and change approach in creative ways. Learning is bi-directional. Evidence of realistic, astute, practical judgement and perception	Self-aware, aware of others and ethically focused. Written material uses 2nd and 3rd order language ('I' and 'We')	Complexity seen as being within the nature of relationships not something overwhelming 'in the world'. The group understands that good qualities emerge from reflective engagement	adapt concepts, approach and methodology to context with ease, responsibility and creativity.	inviting and welcoming others to join in and share enquiry. The group is aware of the value of people sharing in enquiry. They appreciate the need for evaluating own managing. The group is responsive to opportunities and 'environmental' problems
2. A solid grasp of methods which can be applied over a wide range of contexts – without the innovative ability to reflect imaginatively. Good straightforward and sensible approach. Potential but needs to develop reflective capability	Aware and sometimes self-aware. Evidence of considering ethical issues. Frequent use of 'I' and 'we' in group discourse	Complexity usually seen as being understandable and not something overwhelming 'in the world'	Some good at adapting approach to context. Good grasp of approach and methodology	Providing the where-with-all for mutual and effective enquiry. It demonstrates awareness of modes of managing (for, with, or enabling others to). It acknowledges the need to be responsive to environment
3. That it has good qualities and can manage an enquiry but understanding of arguments and engaging are flawed and limited. Not wholly confident about methods.	Aware but not really self-aware. Some use of Ethical approaches. Written material uses mainly 1st order language ('it', 'them')	Complexity sometimes seen as being understandable and not something overwhelming 'in the world'	Generally well at adapting approach to context. Better than adequate grasp of approach and develops own methodology	Sometimes providing mutual effective enquiry and sometimes aware of different modes of managing. Some, though inconsistent acknowledgement of, and responsiveness to, the environment
4. That it has adopted an instrumentalist (line of least resistance) approach to getting through. Has difficulty contextualising approaches to changing circumstances - low to poor ability to engage reflectively.	Very limited awareness. Very limited thought about the ethics of an intervention as demonstrated by use of 'it' and 'them' language	Complexity usually 'in the world' - sometimes abstractly considered as being understandable	sometimes prove to be able at adapting approach to context. Adequate grasp of approach - applies methods and sometime methodologies	Showing little but occasional thought of viability in enquiry - fairly instrumentalist. Little acknowledgement of environment outside immediate managerial concerns
5. Some reference to methods but mainly an instrumentalist approach of the most limited and basic kind. No coherent logical thread going through work. Work full of bald and stereotypical 'this is what you want to hear' comments but not based on learning. Repeating known and preferred ideas without thought.	Not aware of how the self is or relates to others as demonstrated by limited use of 'it' and 'them' language.	Complexity is always 'in the world' – always divorced completely from different perceptions including that of the practitioner	Not prove able to adapt approach to context. Very limited grasp of approach -applies methods in a simple, though not incomplete systematic, unreflective manner	Highly instrumentalist. Little awareness of different modes of managing. The style tends to be a narrow and sketchy focus on elements bound within a presumed 'system'.
6. Little of reflection on behaviour. A few isolated points. Grossly flawed understanding and representation of points. Incoherent.	Domination and self-assertion. Possible signs of egoistic attitude permeating reports, accompanied with dogmatic assertions	Complexity is someone else's fault	not adapt approach to context. Muddy view of any approach - square peg in round hole	Showing no awareness of different modes of managing. Non-responsive to values, beliefs and circumstances outside the managers own sphere.
7. No understanding of methods for reflection. Joining the dots.	A tyranny. Frequent use of dogmatic assertions and no evidence at all of being self-critical	Complexity is not understandable and chaos is expected	Not have any kind of grasp of systems concepts or approaches at all	Flagrant abuse of others values, beliefs and circumstances. No idea of what 'managing' involves

Table 3 Third Task Questionnaire for Group Z2

Your group:	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
felt like a warm place to be with people who were sociable			4
people said very little to each other; quiet	4		
got on with each other			4
had some tough-minded and powerful people who dominated the discussion	3		1
was task-oriented and focused on the problem at hand. There was a lot of problem-solving based on what we already knew		1	3
thinking was constrained tended to be tramlined into an 'established' point of view. What we did had to be right according to our existing culture	2	1	1
had a nice atmosphere and was equalitarian in management style, with everyone given an opportunity to contribute			4
worked like a group of business-like managers and made sure that it delivered what we were supposed to.			4
In my group I felt like:	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
making others feel comfortable and sociable		1	3
Not saying a lot .. I was restrained.	2	2	
I cooperated with others.		1	3
I was assertive and made sure my point was made		2	2
I was using established social beliefs and values – they dominated our discussions	1	2	1
What we thought about was set out in terms of what we already knew and believed		2	2
I was a good manager. Helping others to have their say		4	
I was effective and managed in a good way .. progress was made		3	1

6 uniform responses, one negative and one sometimes.

Table 4

Task 1 data	Type	WS1	WS2	Average
A1		Ho	3	
B1		Ho	3	
C1		Ho	2.75	Day 1: 2.9
A2		Het	1.5	
B2		Het	1.5	
C2		Het	2.25	Day 2: 1.8
X1		Het	1.5	3
Y1		Het	1.5	4
Z1		Het	2.5	2 Day 1: 2.4
X2		Ho	2	1.75
Y2		Ho	2.75	1.25
Z2		Ho	1.5	1.5 Day 2: 1.8

Table 5

Task 2 data	WS1	WS2	
A1	Ho	3.65	
B1	Ho	3	
C1	Ho	2.3	Day 1: 3.0
A2	Het	2.5	
B2	Het	2.7	
C2	Het	2.4	Day 2: 2.5
X1	Het	1.6	3.5
Y1	Het	1.8	3.4
Z1	Het	2.1	2.25 Day 1: 2.4
X2	Ho	2.6	2.5
Y2	Ho	2	1.95
Z2	Ho	2.2	2.3 Day 2: 2.3

Table 6

Task 3 data	WS1	WS2	
A1	Ho	5	
B1	Ho	4	
C1	Ho	1	Day 1: 3.3
A2	Het	5	
B2	Het	6	
C2	Het	7	Day 2: 6
X1	Het	5	7
Y1	Het	1	7
Z1	Het	5	5 Day 1: 5
X2	Ho	4	3
Y2	Ho	3	2
Z2	Ho	2	2 Day 2: 2.7

Table 7 Hypotheses assessment for the two workshops

Original hypotheses	Results from Workshop 1	Results from Workshop 2	Comments
All stakeholder homogenous groups (e.g. school administrators), because of their homogeneity would be expected to select a range of common indicators/policies related to their stakeholder interest.	The homogenous groups did tend to favour indicators in their own area of interest.	The Homogenous groups chose policy inferences which demonstrated their stakeholder focus on the topic.	Hypothesis generally supported.
Heterogeneous groups, because of their diversity, would be expected to produce a more diverse process of discovery.	The heterogeneous groups did produce a slightly wider and more diverse set of indicators.	Heterogeneous groups were diverse and more mixed and less focused in their process.	Hypothesis supported
Groups going from heterogeneity to homogeneity might be expected to be as or more effective in their second formation as they move from mixed understandings to more shared views.	Groups moving from heterogeneity to homogeneity gained in effectiveness.	Groups moving from heterogeneity to homogeneity gained in effectiveness.	Hypothesis supported
Heterogeneous groups might be expected to be more diverse.	Heterogenous groups often have the worst self-assessment - they tend to think that they are less comfortable with each other	Observed as correct	Hypothesis supported
Homogeneous groups might be expected to be less diverse.	Homogenous groups have a better opinion of themselves and their work	Observed as correct	Hypothesis supported

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