

Matching Public Interaction Skills with Desired Outcomes

Jan Inglis

Abstract

Public interaction requires certain sets of skills. The more we want from the interaction, the more skill the form of interaction will require from us. This article surveys selected public involvement typologies and proposes that skills-identification warrants more attention than it is usually given. Identifying the skills best suited to the purpose and goals of a participatory process is important because, when skills match the requirements of the task, outcomes are more likely to match expectations. I introduce the 'Scale of Public Interactions' as a useful and graphic way to stimulate discussion of the different skill sets required to achieve outcomes defined by increasing levels of interaction complexity. The Scale points to a gap that exists between the most common forms of public interaction and those required to achieve comprehensive social change. I suggest that new skills and a developmentally-designed process must be learned and employed to bridge this gap.

This article will be of interest to people working with complex social issues: public participation practitioners, deliberative democracy practitioners, non-profit directors, government leaders, evaluators, policymakers, journalists, and grant-makers, among others. In the paper I describe a tool for ascertaining whether methods of public interaction are aligned with intended outcomes and compare this tool to other typologies of public participation. I try to answer questions about why some activities do not produce the hoped-for social impacts. This article does not attempt to teach skills of facilitation but does conclude with recommendations of resources for developing skills if facilitators wish to consider processes for achieving comprehensive social change. I hope the paper will motivate inquiry into assumptions about the effectiveness of common forms of interaction.

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Introduction

For thousands of years, human beings have been gathering in formal and informal groups to talk about their needs and concerns, and to voice their views about what should be done to meet challenges and improve quality of life. In contemporary societies, there are many varieties of interaction between members of the public, and they are known by many different names. There are public meetings, conversation cafés, citizen juries, town hall meetings, study circles, deliberative forums, generative dialogues, mediated conflict negotiations, and consensus-building, to name just a few. For each of these approaches to working with challenges that inevitably arise when human beings interact, there are proponents and advocates who believe passionately that the particular methods they use are essential for building social capital and fostering the development of participatory democracy. Some practitioners are motivated to empower the public to respond to a certain problem or issue. Others are inspired to transform the world by contributing to a global movement that offers hope for a more-just and sustainable world.

Participatory democracy, increased social capital, and sustainability are worthy ideals many of us share. They also are very large and general ideals that need certain public interaction skill sets to support them. These skill sets can be cultivated only through well-considered progressive stages. What assumptions do we make about the efficacy of our usual forms of public interaction for developing these processes, and for moving us toward these ideals? To answer this question, participants and practitioners need a way to ascertain whether the public interaction process being proposed is appropriate for achieving the desired outcome; i.e., whether there is a good match between the process and the skills needed for achieving that outcome. If this assessment is inadequate or faulty, much time, resources, and goodwill may be wasted.

Complex Tasks Require Complex Skills

In many cases, the initiators of public processes gather people to talk with only a vague explanation, or even understanding, of how the process will address a public problem thoroughly and productively. Although inclusion and diversity are important principles, more needs to

happen than just filling a room, recording on flip charts, and categorising comments on sticky notes. Participants and practitioners need to be precise and explicit about the outcomes they wish to achieve and how the form of public interaction they plan to use will support those outcomes. Just as we would not expect beginning students of arithmetic to perform advanced calculus armed with only addition and multiplication skills, we should not expect the public to tackle the complex issues of crime, homelessness, or air quality using the simple communication skills of casual talk. We can easily recognise that calculus is a more complex, higher form of mathematics requiring a progressive development of skills and is not a subject that can be taught when readiness is not established. How can we begin to recognise that public interaction aiming at comprehensive social change is a more-complex form of interaction that also requires a progressive development of skills and is not just a technique to be facilitated without understanding the preconditions for readiness?

Without a method by which to recognise the different levels of complexity in the tasks of public interaction, many facilitators will attempt to work with simple forms of public interaction in order to accomplish complex tasks. For example, casual talk and reactive opinionated talk, common in many of our public interactions, are not adequate to achieve the quality of commitment, structure, time, and focus needed to support multi-stakeholder decision-making about complex public issues. Lack of discernment with regard to the skills required to hold such a discussion can result in wasted hours, frustration with public meetings, apathy, and even cynicism about public processes.

Working with a complex issue is very different from working with a simple one.* The public interaction skill set for responding to a complex issue calls for a different quality and amount of time and commitment than working with a simple issue. It requires a different way of talking, thinking, deciding, and acting together. Complex issues have many facets, layers, and perspectives regarding their causes, impacts, and responses. All of these variables need to be identified and worked through systematically before such issues can be addressed productively. Most social interactions do not support this engagement.

Moreover, a different type of structure and focus for gathering people is required to ensure adequate attention is given to a complex issue. Comprehensive social change demands more than working with key individuals in leadership training or personal communication programs.

* See the article by McKinney and Harmon in this issue. — *ed.*

It requires us to develop structures to support our collective skills and thereby create a new civic culture, i.e., new norms of relating to each other when addressing public issues. The locus of social change resides not only in the development of our individual character, but in the culture we share and participate in. The norms that affect the ways we relate to one another publicly both influence and are influenced by changes in our institutions and in the policies we make through those institutions.

Models of Public Involvement

The field of public participation—a wide range of skill-based practices for promoting productive public discourse and action—is expanding rapidly. A brief overview of the field and some definitions of participation are included here in order to place the Scale of Public Interactions in context and to establish its relevance to other approaches.*

There are several examples of scales of public participation showing progressive continuums based on different themes. One of the earliest is the ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’ developed by Arnstein in 1969.¹ This typology, influential for many years, described eight steps based on the increasing power of citizens to control decision-making.

Subsequently, other ladders of participation² have been developed for the purpose of characterising the relative influence of policymakers and the public on decision-making. In 1991, Daniel Yankelovich looked at the change in people’s views on an issue over time. He reported that, through engagement with an issue, people’s views progress from spontaneous, reactive opinions to a considered ‘public judgment’.³ He elaborated on this account by constructing a continuum of seven stages of public opinion.⁴

In 2005, Rowe and Frewer developed a typology of public participation based on the flow of information.⁵ They identified three categories: (a) public communication (flow from the government to the public); (b) public consultation (flow from the public to government); and (c) public participation (flow between the public and government). The term ‘participation’ has since been expanded to include engagement, deliberative democracy, collaboration, and

* An overview of the numerous definitions, models, spectrums, and criteria for effectiveness can be found in recent and extensive research conducted for the Health Council of Canada. See Gauvin, F. P., and J. Abelson (eds.), *Primer on Public Involvement*, CPRN (2006). See also Baker, M., J. Coaffee, and G. Sheriff, *Achieving successful participation in the new UK spatial planning system* (2006). Retrieved February 25, 2007 at http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/907/AchievingSuccessfulParticipation_id1504907.pdf

partnership⁶. Also in 2005, the International Association for Public Participation created the Public Participation Spectrum, which identifies goals and promises within each of five levels of public impact.⁷

There are also several lists of conditions or features believed to be essential for high-quality public participation. For Rowe and Frewer, the key elements are representativeness, independence, early involvement, influence on policy decisions, providing information, resource accessibility, and structured decision-making.⁸ Placing the focus on learning, Petts identified five key management practices that support the learning required for effective public engagement: recruiting of representative interests, active facilitation, collaborative framing, optimising interaction, and managing the unexpected.⁹

Yet despite so much discussion of different ‘continuums’ of public participation, very little research exists that indicates whether the various aims and goals of the many diverse approaches are being achieved consistently, or that tells us whether the features of ‘good’ participation processes reliably lead to significant impacts.¹⁰ Many typologies specify purposes, aims, and ideals without even identifying either the particular skills or the developmental progression of skills needed to achieve what the processes aspire to accomplish.

The Scale of Public Interactions

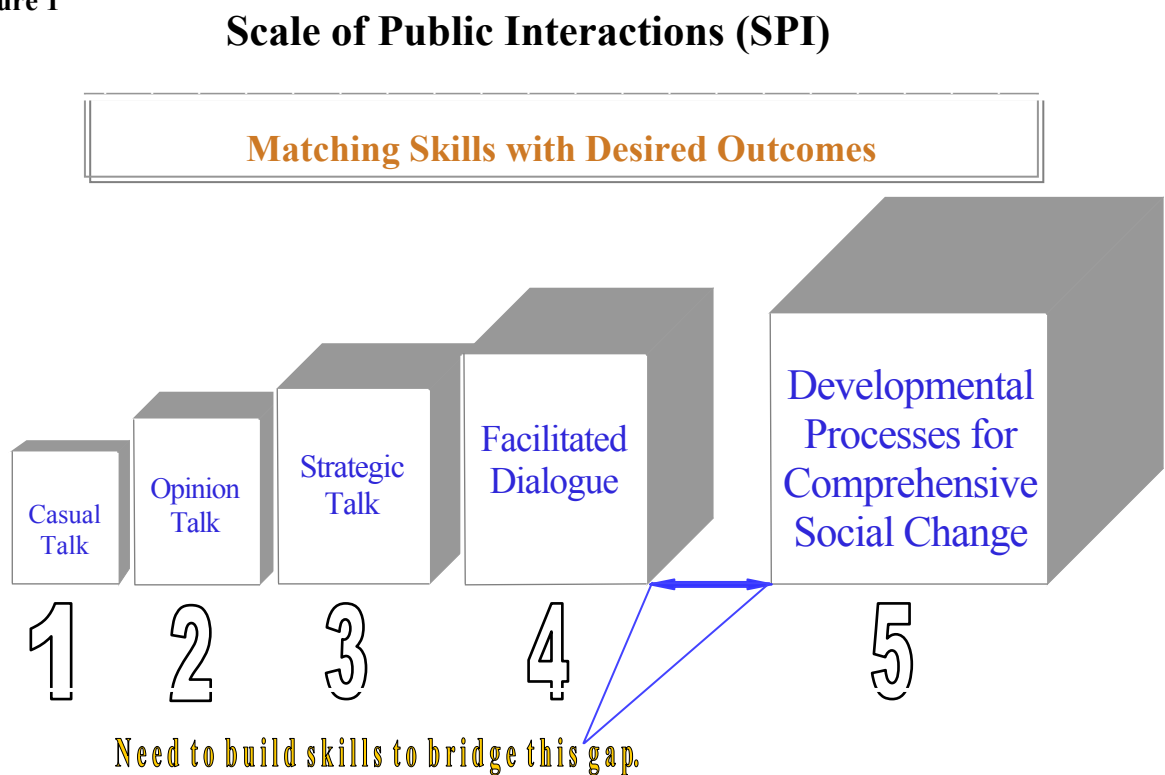
The ‘*Scale of Public Interactions*’ (SPI) presented in Figure 1, below, takes a new approach to categorisation that differs from the typologies noted above. It was developed by applying a measurement based on a theory in behavioural science to the tasks in various forms of public interaction. That theory, developed by Commons and Pekker,¹¹ features a method for scoring the complexity of any task. The SPI conceives public interaction as a progression of tasks. These tasks produce different outcomes, and different sets of skills are required to achieve those outcomes.

The focus of the SPI is thus the functional match between the ‘what’ (i.e., the desired outcome of a given form of public participation) and the ‘how’ (the skills, and application of those skills, required to produce the intended outcome). We use the term ‘interaction’ to direct attention to the skills required to perform the relational task. ‘Interaction’ differs from the terms ‘involvement’ and ‘participation’, which speak more to the direction and degree of influence participants are able to exert.

The SPI also draws our attention to the gap that exists between the interactive processes prevalent in society and those that will be needed if we truly want to engage in participatory democracy and comprehensive social change. Highlighting the existence of a gap draws attention to the need to learn new skills.*

Figure 1 depicts a continuum of public interaction ranging from casual talk to the kind of structured interactions needed to support comprehensive social change. The different sizes of the blocks represent the relative degree of complexity involved with each task along the continuum, reflecting the idea that public interaction constitutes a progression of increasingly complex tasks.

Figure 1



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The numbered scale (1 through 5) applies to two different dimensions. First, increasing the space between a number and the number following it indicates that the demands made by the tasks required for successful interaction in the succeeding block go beyond simply adding

* To access diverse resources on gap analysis, see http://www.google.ca/search?hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=com.google:en-US:official&hs=vgz&defl=en&q=define:Gap+Analysis&sa=X&oi=glossary_definition&ct=title. Retrieved September 18, 2007.

another task or another piece to the same task. As we move along the scale from 1 to 5, the tasks become both qualitatively and quantitatively more intricate. Second, as the following discussion explains, the scale also reflects demands in focus, time, commitment, structure, and inclusiveness that rise non-linearly as complexity increases. The SPI thus ranges from a requirement of little or no structure (in the case of casual conversations) to the need for intricate structures and processes capable of supporting comprehensive social change over time.

In the following sections, I take up the question of what can and cannot be accomplished through interactions at different points on the SPI. To illustrate how the scale works, I use hypothetical examples, drawn from my own experience with the issue of affordable housing.

SPI 1: Casual Talk

‘Casual talk’ runs the gamut from ‘how the meeting went this morning’, to the weather forecast for the weekend, to our reactions upon hearing the news of the latest disaster. Casual talk consists of mostly concrete fragments of communication that reveal the ‘tip of the iceberg’, leaving the rest of the iceberg below the surface, unnamed and unaddressed. Beneficial outcomes of this form of interaction include the exchange of information and the maintenance of friendly relationships with others. These interactions are personal in the sense that they occur at the level of exchanges between individuals and are typically spontaneous, requiring little structure or preparation. For example:

You observe and participate in a number of brief exchanges during lunch and between presentations at a regional conference on affordable housing. Someone mentions how much house prices in her community have gone up. Someone else says in passing that he knows the speaker’s daughter, while another complains about the lack of parking space. Others compare notes, and schedule a meeting for later in the week.

This ‘small talk’ is random and ‘light’. It requires little in the way of time, effort, focus, commitment, or skill beyond what people need to function in their day-to-day lives. When people want to be pleasant, avoid disagreement, and stay relaxed they may also avoid controversial topics that elicit divergent perspectives and strong opinions.

SPI 2: Opinion Talk

‘Opinion talk’ includes the interactions of casual talk and the skills such talk requires, but adds the activity of, and the skills needed for, stating individual views and opinions about what is, what ought to be, who should do what, and who shouldn’t do what. Opinion talk consists largely of general statements, observations, and assertions. People might say things like, ‘There’s only one way...’, ‘Everybody knows...’, ‘It happens all the time...’, and so forth. Opinion talk is declarative and prompts ‘yes’ / ‘no’ responses that themselves are ‘categorical’—they are offered without qualification or without options other than agreement and disagreement. Nevertheless, opinion talk can be beneficial if it creates opportunities for people to make themselves heard or to take a stand. Although assertions can divide people, they can also draw people together, thereby generating the ‘social capital’ for those who have found like-minded others. Interaction of the opinion type requires little structure and little investment of time, energy, or commitment (unless it is part of an organised activity such as a formal public debate). For example:

You take part in a small-group discussion at the regional conference on affordable housing. The facilitator asks participants to go around the table, each taking three minutes to address the question, ‘What is the best way to control soaring house prices in your community?’ One person says the only solution is zoning controls. Another believes zoning controls would mean developers would not be attracted to the area. A third participant contends the whole problem is the influx of newcomers. A fourth scolds that no one should talk about profits from development when some people can’t afford a place to live. Another argues that money budgeted for recreation centres should be spent on low-income housing.

The roundtable discussion in this example had the benefit of allowing participants to voice their opinions. However, by itself it did not lead, and would not have led, to the deeper exploration required to make progress toward resolving the issue of affordable housing. By inviting each individual to offer his or her idea of the ‘best’ solution, it encouraged participants to argue in favour of a particular position. This sort of ‘dueling solutions’ talk narrows the scope of consideration and hence excludes information and analysis germane to a complex issue like affordable housing. Because it permits unqualified assertions, SP2 talk can—and frequently

does—easily push people into reactive stances that polarise discussion and induce participants to filter out evidence, experience, judgements, and arguments that support alternative views. SPI 2 talk is typical of many of our public communicative interactions—even those that invoke the virtues of deliberation, collaboration, or dialogue.

SPI 3: Strategic Talk

‘Strategic talk’ includes the preceding skill of ‘opinion talk’ (stating personal opinions and voicing responses) and adds linear cause-and-effect logic that supports those responses—e.g., if we do activity ‘x’ then the outcome ‘y’ will happen. Strategic talk commonly takes place in small-group meetings intended to achieve a pre-determined end. Such meetings follow agendas composed of ‘action-items’ (such as influencing, negotiating, visioning, deciding, assigning, and so on) that collectively serve as the strategic ‘means’ by which the end will be accomplished. The desired outcome of strategic talk is an action or set of actions that constitute a plan for solving a problem, responding to a challenge or opportunity, or meeting a need. Often, strategic talk involves advice from experts. From experience we know that strategic talk requires more time, commitment, and structure than casual conversation or opinion-based debate. Strategic interactions may build social capital through the creation or maintenance of networks, visibility, and influence. For example:

The non-profit housing society holds a four-hour meeting to create its strategic plan for the next year. Its purpose is to continue the effort to reduce homelessness in the city. Participants set as their chief objective reducing homelessness by five percent in the coming year. Their strategy is to achieve the five-percent reduction by obtaining funding to erect one new building; by renting and refurbishing two others; and by finding space for three new temporary shelters. They also reach agreement on who will take responsibility for which tasks, and they establish a timeline for completing those tasks.

At some point, strategic talk proves helpful, even indispensable. Its down side, however, is that it can abet a ‘rush to action’ when a problem, need, or opportunity has not been studied adequately and a widely shared understanding of it remains to be achieved. Homelessness is a good example of the sort of problem or need people—often with the best intentions—rush to

address before it has been grasped fully by everyone whose contribution is essential to solving it (or even substantially mitigating it). It's not so much that a given diagnosis (e.g., people are homeless because there are not enough affordable homes) or a particular response (e.g., build more affordable homes) is necessarily mistaken as it is that each is apt to be a *partial* diagnosis or response. Strategic talk about a problem like homelessness will prove ineffective if it is based on an incomplete assessment of the problem, such as failing to take sufficient notice of its multiple, interconnected root causes, which in turn require multiple, complementary, sustained responses by a large number and wide range of responders. Strategic talk about a complex problem may forestall or alleviate a crisis, but it can also lead to short-term, 'band-aid' efforts that do little long-term good.

SPI 4: Facilitated Dialogue

'Facilitated dialogue' includes the skills of strategic thinking and talk and adds the skill of recognising and grasping complexity by noting the connections between peoples' various perspectives, reasons, situations, and relationships. It provides structured processes that afford people opportunities to learn together by enquiring about each other's views and concerns, explaining their own, and endeavouring to identify points on which they can agree (or perhaps at least 'live with'). Facilitated dialogue pays special heed to the importance of good relationships among individuals and groups, and hence shows a special regard for including the 'voices' of all who are affected by a problem, issue, or need and would be affected by a proposed response.

Dialogical talk is a form of communicative interaction that enables and encourages participants to reach deeper and to grasp the complex roots of people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour (their own not least of all), and hence into the ultimate sources of persistent, seemingly intractable problems, issues, and needs. To see and understand a matter from all perspectives clearly demands from participants a considerable investment of time, commitment, and painstaking communication. For example:

After sustained, vocal pressure from citizens, the provincial government sets up a series of facilitated dialogues in several communities to raise public awareness of and concern about the lack of affordable housing. Local councils take responsibility for recruiting people from as many economic sectors and demographic categories as

possible, including individuals and families who know homelessness from first-hand experience. Unfortunately, even though they are urged to participate, many people close to the issue do not attend. Those who do attend, however, agree on ground rules that include listening without interrupting and trying their best to understand without judging. Some participants voice their reaction to learning of the paradoxical high incidence, yet near-invisibility, of homelessness in an affluent society like theirs. Some suggest collaborations and partnerships between various community organisations and institutions, such as churches, food banks, charitable foundations, and police. All comments, questions, and ideas are recorded on flip charts, which become the basis for a report written for the Ministry, made available to the public through the news media, agencies, and local councils.

In contrast to the instance of ‘strategic talk’ described earlier, participants in this example of ‘facilitated dialogue’ achieved degrees of understanding and connection with the issue, and with each other, that were much more ‘up-close and personal’. For those who participated, the effects of rising housing costs came to be seen more clearly—and felt more sharply—through the shared meaning that dialogue helped them develop. On the other hand, the skills required for productive dialogue might eventually bog people down when the task before them is to weigh competing solutions, balance divergent perspectives, set priorities, and come to decisions. The gratification some people experience when they can engage in the ‘big talk’ of exploring and making meaning together may unintentionally exclude others who are not comfortable with the requirements for such discourse. For some it may produce an experience of “feel good” bonding and gratitude for having surfaced more understanding. Having finally arrived at this experience, people may not want to disturb it to face the tensions and trade offs inherent in making decisions amidst diverse options.

SPI 5: Developmental Processes for Comprehensive Social Change

‘Processes for comprehensive social change’ build on and extend the inclusiveness and connective discourse of ‘facilitated dialogue’. Such processes attempt to be as comprehensive as possible so that pragmatic, systemic action can be taken to address the many aspects of complex

problems or issues. The potential benefit of comprehensive processes is the effective matching of complex, multi-perspective responses with the multiple dimensions of public issues.

Comprehensive interactive discourse differs in important ways from ordinary forms of public interaction. It goes beyond meetings, beyond even well-attended conferences with jam-packed agendas. It requires a progression of structured public sessions, each building on the one before it, that increasingly enhance the ability and inclination of all stakeholders to invest sustained energy in building the foundation for comprehensive social change. (Stakeholders include those who feel the impact of a problem or issue; those who will be affected by a change in its shape, nature, or status; those who contribute to solving or resolving it; and those who bear responsibility or possess resources for mounting an effective response.¹²)

Public interaction of the SPI 5 type is characteristic of what we might call ‘developmentally-designed’ public interaction processes. Such processes use and build upon developmentally-prior abilities, dispositions, and skills in order to support the emergence of new ones that build the social capital needed to respond effectively to complex public problems and issues. SPI 5 processes both draw upon the variety of skills required for SPI 1 through 4 and support progress beyond the limitations of these forms of interaction.

If they are designed in a manner that gives them a ‘developmental structure’, and if they are used repeatedly over time, public interaction processes offer a number of benefits. They foster the acquisition by citizens of new abilities, dispositions, and skills, such as those required for setting collective priorities and integrating or balancing multiple perspectives. They cultivate good intentions and public-spirited motivation to effect social change (Ross, 2007).

Although SPI 5 processes may seem time-consuming, in the long-run they may prove to be more efficient and effective than alternatives, because they anticipate and circumvent common interaction pitfalls that lead to polarisation and sabotaging of cooperative efforts.

The unique value of SPI 5 lies in five features:

- Its capacity to help people identify and analyse the root causes of complex problems;
- Its capacity to help people develop multi-stakeholder action systems to address those root causes;
- Its capacity to elicit from people responses that range from voluntary actions to transpartisan institutional policymaking;
- Its capacity to promote the institutionalisation of methods for deliberative democratic decision-making; and
- Its capacity to help people sustain coordinated efforts, to evaluate those efforts, and to adjust their actions accordingly.

Consider this example:

A small group of citizens are greatly concerned about the shortage of affordable housing in their city. They represent a wide range of perspectives and experiences in the community. They know affordable housing is a complex matter.

Members of the group commit themselves to a seven-week series of meetings: structured, facilitated sessions, each three hours long. Although the problem is complex, and the process is a long one, participants understand that each step is necessary. The exercises they engage in for mapping the problem allow them to see the connections between affordable housing and other concerns in their community, such as transportation, zoning bylaws, opportunities for entry-level employment, and safety. They learn why there is no ‘quick fix’ solution—the problem is embedded deeply in their community’s attitudes, behaviours, organisational structures and bylaws. Their grasp of the root causes of the problem leads them to take ‘ownership’ of it and to accept responsibility for addressing it.

The group’s members do not rush to a solution, but rather spend time carefully selecting a critical question to begin working on in depth. They realise that no single action by one group will budge the problem, so they develop several options for answering that question, each of which they build by viewing it through a particular perspective. The options also reflect the fact that individuals and organisations in the community might spontaneously initiate action, while other actions would require public support for policies to be implemented and monitored by government agencies.

Because the options for responding to the problem would in one way or another affect the entire community, broad community consideration is needed. So these concerned citizens invite the whole community to spend a Saturday afternoon deliberating the options, weighing the trade-offs and working toward a response everyone can go along with.

As a result, for several weeks after the public deliberative decision-making event small committees meet to plan and implement the actions chosen by community participants. Six months later, the community must make a decision regarding its community centre. It is able to use the same sequence of steps to address that issue.

Deliberation, it should be noted, is essential for genuine, effective democratic decision-making on complex questions.¹³ But deliberation does not happen automatically in the public realm. Well-designed structures are needed to help people with different interests, motivations, and capacities enquire and reflect together.¹⁴ In order to respond effectively to a problem, need, or issue, citizens must have access to a public deliberative process that leads to actions that will begin to transform its root causes. They can do so only

when the process in which they participate reveals fully and clearly the many layers and facets that give the problem, need, or issue its complexity.

Table 1

Types of Public Interactions

	SPI 1 Casual Talk	SPI 2 Opinion Talk	SPI 3 Strategic Talk	SPI 4 Facilitated Dialogue	SPI 5 Processes for Comprehensive Social Change
Desired outcome	Recognition of similarity. Sense of belonging.	Expression of individuality, identification of differences.	Effective implementation of goals and objectives.	Understanding of relational context. Building common ground.	Comprehensive social change.
Benefits developed through interaction	Exchange information. Maintain relationships.	Express reactions. Increase social capital by affiliating with like-minded.	Plan rational solutions for specific problems using linear planning.	See larger context, share concerns, ask questions, express diverse views, inquire into meaning.	Develop multi-stakeholder processes for interaction. Build social capital. Deliberative democracy. Comprehensive action.
Skills required for the interaction to produce desired outcomes	Communicate about interest, events, etc. Little time, commitment, or structure required.	Assert different opinions. Little time, commitment, or structure required.	Strategise, logically plan, negotiate, decide. More time, commitment, and structure required.	Include multiple perspectives, foster mutual understanding. More time, commitment, and structure required.	Co-ordinate multiple perspectives and layers of complexity. Critical reflection. Set priorities, identify and weigh options. Much more time, commitment and structure required.
Limitations next interaction must overcome	Cannot deal with risk of being different.	Absolute assertions lack logical explanation. Results in in-groups and out-groups.	Complex issues treated as if they are simple. Short-term, fragmented solutions.	Difficulty prioritising and weighing contradictory perspectives required to make decisions and take action.	Requires commitment to learning, integrating, and institutionalising new skills and processes

Identifying a Gap in Public Interaction Skills

Each step on the Scale of Public Interactions (SPI) makes clear that new skills are required to respond to the increasingly complex demands of the next form of public interaction. For example, the skills adequate to accomplish the task of Casual Talk (SPI 1) or Opinion Talk (SPI 2) are inadequate for the rational planning tasks required of Strategic Talk (SPI 3). Similarly, the skills for SPI 3 are inadequate for achieving the inclusivity and awareness of contexts required of Facilitated Dialogue (SPI 4). And despite the value of SPI 4 for certain purposes, the skills it requires are necessary but not sufficient for the requirements of Processes for Comprehensive Social Change (SPI 5).

The Scale of Public Interactions also reveals the gap between the hopes, assumptions, and expectations about outcomes often associated with SPI 3 and 4, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the skills required to deal with complex public issues. We cannot leave this gap unbridged if we truly want the field of public participation to offer credible, effective processes for stakeholders to use when addressing challenging problems or issues. Progressing beyond this gap will require an investment in learning more-specialised skills to create inclusive, democratic processes that focus on root causes and systemic responses.

Resources for Comprehensive Social Change

One of the most important resources required for comprehensive social change is our own willingness to define clearly the outcomes we want from our public interaction processes. A clear definition of outcomes will suggest methods for assessing the tasks required and the ability of the form of interaction to support the skills needed to perform those tasks, and by performing those tasks successfully, to achieve the desired outcome.

Torbert & Associates (2004) have developed a tool for fostering the development of personal, public, and political interactions. Called *Action Inquiry*, it helps users recognise and address gaps involving intent, communication, and action. Similarly, *The Integral Process for Working on Complex Public Issues* offers a method for supporting SPI 5 outcomes.¹⁵ It provides a structured process that helps people analyse root causes, use systematic means of framing and deliberating issues, and design and implement comprehensive action systems. The *Integral Community Coach Training Program* is another example of a program designed to develop skill sets to address SPI 5 needs.¹⁶ ‘Community Coaches’ are change agents in formal and informal

leadership roles who work to create comprehensive social change through developmental and integral approaches to complex public problems and issues.*

Conclusion

All forms of public interaction are important, but each is distinctive. By referring to the Scale of Public Interactions, public officials, non-profit organisers, facilitators, and citizens can better judge whether the public interaction skills they are using, or are planning to use, will yield the outcomes they hope to achieve. If we want to produce the range of outcomes that lead to sustainable and comprehensive social change, then we must use forms of interaction capable of bringing about that change. Good intentions for social change need to be supplemented with good attention to skills and processes that support that social change. SPI 5 approaches elicit from people their best abilities and motivations, and thereby move them forward in their efforts to address social challenges in the most effective way possible.

If we knew how to produce technical ‘fixes’ for complex matters of public concern, we would have employed them by now. But complex social challenges by their nature resist technical solutions. Clearly, we need new public interaction skills—specifically, new forms of problem-identification and issue-resolution. Building capacities and devising processes for responding systemically to the complex challenges facing society is new learning-territory for us all. If human beings are ‘hardwired’ to adapt to challenges they encounter in their environment, then processes that tap into and work patiently with this innate predisposition offer us the best hope for success.

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* The foregoing resources are those known to the author at this time. I am developing a website (www.comprehensivesocialchange.org) to list more resources for comprehensive social change that meet the criteria outlined in SPI 5. Readers are invited to offer information about resources that might be included in this list. Comments and information concerning resources can be sent to info@integrativelearninginstitute.com.

Notes

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