

SECTION ONE

THE SURROUND SOUND OF DIALOGUE:

POWER AND VALUES

REFLECTIONS ON POWER AND VALUES

Like “air and water” power and values flow and swirl inside and around dialogue-based interactions, seeping and percolating up differently in different places at different times. Values are about who we are, and power about what we can do to each other. Values are inside; power is outside. Values inform how we perceive our interests. Power energizes the positions we take. Power and values influence whether prospective participants to a dialogue based interaction decide to enter into it or not, to stay engaged or not, how they perceive their interests, and the choices they make in relation to them.

Values are the lens through which we see the world, and others see us. Values include the beliefs and attributes we see in ourselves others see when they listen and look at us. Values are rooted in history, which is to a people what memory is to a person. Culture, religion, and race are built on a foundation of values, and provide the filters through which we see the world and interpret the actions of others in different ways, and others see us and define who we are and interpret our actions. We think of values in understanding who we are and who we are not- as a community, an organization, a people, a country. Organizations define and represent themselves through a set of values, sometimes explicitly declared for the world within and outside, sometimes implicit and more like glue. So, too, with

professionals.

Often the professional imprint they bring to the way in which they define and respond to problems is often even much deeper than cultural or national imprints. They implicitly, and explicitly, seek to characterize and solve the problem in terms familiar to them - like vacuum cleaners seeking to suction up the challenge into their own image amenable to their tool kit of concepts and competencies.

Power flows from might and rights. It comes in many forms and with many labels - orders and judgements, threats and campaigns, gavels and guns. We speak of the power of people, groups, organizations and institutions on the one hand, and of powerful interests, and powerful influences. But we also speak of power in other senses, such as the power of an idea. . With power and values come drama and energy; peace and war; fighting and talking.

Power is underpinned by authority based governance and judicial structures and the cultures that surround them. How

they are given expression and applied is part of the stage for the role - the legitimacy and acceptability - of dialogue based approaches within the social order. The implication is not only in terms of how choices will be made but whether there is any role for dialogue at all. In much of the world this choice is circumscribed by the rule of law and the institutions around it; in autocratic parts of the world it is managed by the simple expediency of eliminating it, in any form. Democratic values are built on the right to chose who shall exercise authority; the governance institutions through which the authority is exercised set the rules within which choice is exercised. Choice in relation to authority is always constrained to lesser or greater degrees .The way in which authority based processes interconnect with dialogue based interactions is central to any discussion of dialogue and context

SECTION TWO

WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

WHAT KIND OF DIALOGUES ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The essence of dialogue is a purposeful conversation, in which the participants are open to the possibility that the views they hold when they come into the conversation may evolve over the course of it. It is a conversation that may occur on one occasion or on an ongoing basis. The heart of a dialogue is willingness to listen.

When I use the term dialogue in a ‘stand alone’ way my sense of this is a current is that it is running increasingly more clearly and nearer to the surface as we move from Public Meetings and Workshops to Advisory Committees and Negotiations as he uses those terms. My primary focus is where current runs strongest. I feel the need to make this clear as it has implications as to how one might read and interpret some of what is said subsequently.

Dialogues take place in many settings. A dialogue may be as basic as two people in conversation, at home or at work, living out there daily life. Sometimes it involves multiple groups and organizational thinking and acting with a passion underpinned with intensely held and diverse and values; my focus is more in this direction. Sometimes the purpose is to address an everyday problem, or perhaps to seek common ground on a project or a plan; but it also includes settings where the parties are deeply conflicted and are seeking ways to find a preferable outcome than continuing to fight.

Dialogue has been described as “ a conversation in which people

Dialogue as a term is used in different ways by different people. For some within the professional community, it represents a distinct compartment of process activity. Used in this sense, it conveys the notion of learning and thinking together that opens up a new field of possibilities. Others use the term to imply something more akin to values, and an associated set of attributes that manifest in different ways at different times in different “processes” It is in this later sense that the Think Pieces apply the term, and hence they also speak of dialogue based processes. (This needs further work but is an important linking piece - also see the Dialogue Journal at page 15)

think together in a relationship.” Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to possibilities that result from simply being in a relationship with others (Isaacs). This goes a little further than I am comfortable going.

First, it seems to suggest the need for a new and distinct category in Howard’s process array - as I said, I am more comfortable thinking of dialogue as a “current” flowing across a variety of categories running deeper, and wider, and truer in some than in others.

Secondly, I do not see relationship as a condition or precursor to dialogue but an outcome of it. This point is most clearly evidenced where the environment is highly conflicted, where no relationship exists, and the challenge is to find a way through dialogue to build a relationship sufficient to start, and then sustain a dialogue. The dialectic between dialogue and relationship is dynamic, iterative, and fluid.

—Glenn Sigurdson

SEVEN KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF DIALOGUE PROCESSES

It will be helpful to identify the scope of dialogue that concerns us, since it may be said that dialogue of some sort is characteristic of any and all verbal interaction. The following seven characteristics are typically associated with mediation, consensus building, and collaborative processes in the public arena.

- 1) Direct, face-to-face discussion. That opportunity does not exclude the use of other, less direct forms of communication that may play a significant role throughout the engagement (see Figure 2. right).
- 2) Deliberation intended to enhance participants' mutual education and understanding. Again, other goals may be relevant as well. However this is a key element for any engagement to be considered dialogic.
- 3) Typically inclusive of participants and involving multiple sectors. Although there are certainly exceptions, dialogic engagement is not generally reserved to an elite few, or even elected or appointed officials, but often involves private citizens' groups and businesses.
- 4) Openness and flexibility of process. One key component of such processes is the ability to structure the process in accordance with participant needs. Such flexibility is not always seen as an advantage by critics of these processes, who are concerned with violations of due process, reduced access to public record, and bypassing of public officials.
- 5) A focus on finding collaborative solutions. Not all participants necessarily support that intention, and discussion may still be highly conflictual. Nonetheless, the stated intention is to develop solutions that are workable and

acceptable for all participants.

6) Consensus or some variation as the basis for decisions.

Consensus has two essential meanings. The first is a decision of a discrete group that has been developed cooperatively and that is acceptable enough that all group members can support it, or at least not oppose it. For some groups, that means that all members must sign off on all components of that decision. Other groups might operate by defining consensus as a “significant majority.” In this case, one or two members’ opposition would not stop a proposal from moving forward.

*Consensus also refers more generally to development within some population of adequate support for a particular proposal or set of proposals, such that a decision is seen as legitimate and able to be implemented successfully despite remaining criticism or opposition.

*Significant concerns specific to consensus processes include the amount of time required to work through issues and a concern that consensus requires such significant compromise that agreement becomes meaningless. ENDNOTE 4

7) Use of a third-party convenor, mediator or facilitator. This third party is supposed to be (but in fact may not always be) independent and impartial. Neither should the third party advocate for a particular solution, Rather, the mediator or facilitator is supposed to help people talk and negotiate with one another in effective ways.

—Frank Dukes

Attributes (or some such title)

- *The parties include organizations, usually from the public and private sectors
- *The organizations are represented by individuals (or representatives)
- *They are assisted by an intervener (mediator, facilitator)
- *They involve face-to-face exchanges
- *Engagement is triggered by some specific set of concerns or issues
- *The purpose is to reach agreement on some outcome. That outcome may be:
 - Substantive undertakings (such as design of physical project or a process)
 - A regulation or legislation
 - A joint policy or joint policy statement
 - An exchange of views for the purpose of making some joint statement or communiqué
 - Others?

The challenge of dialogues is intensified where conflict is rife--here the challenge is overcoming the parties' concerns about risks they may run in coming to the table, and the development of mutual expectations as to roles, responsibilities, and procedures ("groundrules") that will negate these risks.

Dialogue based processes -such as negotiation, consensus building, collaboration and mediation (assisted negotiation) - are not "alternatives" to legal, legislative, or administrative processes. They are often undertaken by private citizens' groups and businesses, but can also be utilized by government agencies. There is a considerable difference between dialogues among individuals whose own interests are at stake, and dialogues among people who are at the table in a representative capacity, such as spokesmen for broader organizations or constituencies.

Dialogue is a word that invites no boundaries. The situations in which these dialogue-based processes have the potential to arise is broad and diverse. From this limitless field of vision we must first make it explicit that our focus is on challenging public conversations. An important consideration for each of the authors was to further define and clarify the situational attributes which framed their observations.

What are the nature of the dialogues that we are talking about here?

In general, we are examining dialogue-based processes that are multi-sector, involve at least some sort of public resource, and have some quality of "agreement seeking" associated with them.. These processes engage a society's interest, and are often inadequately described as consensus building and collaborative processes. Examples include: representatives of a private business negotiating with community representatives over the site of a new facility; a multi-lateral negotiation concerning a proposed

policy change involving public, private for-profit, and private non-profit representatives; an agency convening a multi-sector advisory group to secure legitimacy for a controversial decision; an attempt to reconstruct a war-torn society that has suffered ethnic or racial conflict.

—Gerald Cormick

Bellman implicitly widens out the Cormick attribute list by including within his process array processes that are conventionally referred to as public-participation processes, in which the purpose is engaging to inform, as opposed to agree, and then beyond agreement seeking to those with a permanent authority structure like a commission with defined term and mandate. They flow across a range of situations where the participants are invited across a range from listening and informing to agreeing, but all are “advisory” in nature in the sense that they take place within a legal architecture that requires a further final decision making authority. Typically, these activities are interactive (probably involving meetings); facilitated/mediated; usually (but not necessarily) Government initiated and funded; open to the Public; initiated on an ad hoc basis to address a current matter (see chart following page)