

Stakeholder engagement

Workshop report (08 July 2010)

Risk governance, as defined by IRGC, must consider involving a wide array of actors, from experts to decision-makers to the general public. It embraces the idea of inclusive governance, i.e. that communication and exchange with interested and affected parties can improve decisions about risk issues. Public demands for participation and engagement are steadily increasing, but engagement does not automatically result in a useful, cost-efficient and more equitable output. For example, in recent years engagement processes (particularly related to the deployment of new technological advances) have led to decision-making being paralysed either by single-interest groups dominating the discourse, or by a lack of management or skills on the part of the convenors, thus preventing the adoption of new technologies and the benefits that they can generate.

Given the significance of stakeholder engagement for appropriate risk governance, IRGC held a workshop on 8 July 2010, where members of IRGC's Scientific and Technical Council and invited experts discussed various aspects of stakeholder engagement, with a view to deciding whether IRGC could add value to this field. Half a dozen participants presented existing guidance documents on stakeholder engagement which could potentially be incorporated in IRGC's work, or recommended by IRGC. These presentations prompted a lively discussion on best practices, the key points of which were the following:

- Every engagement process has to have a clear goal; convenors must know why they are doing it and what kind of result they expect.
- An effective stakeholder engagement process needs to be well managed, which is, if not an art-form, at least a highly skilled craftsmanship
- Crucial are the matters of *inclusion* (fair representation of relevant stakeholders) and *closure* (fair competition of arguments).
- 'Standards for engagement' could usefully be employed to ensure that participating stakeholders conduct themselves in a way that serves the outcome (e.g. not presenting biased information, avoiding ideological argumentation etc).
- To lend structure and ensure useful results, it is important to clearly define which area/topic each engagement process is meant to cover and which it is not (e.g. risk management, but not risk assessment or evaluation). There are lessons to be learned in this regard from the field of radioactive waste management.
- An engagement process needs to ensure transparency of the process and that all participants understand the information provided and how it was collected and analysed.
- Close attention needs to be paid to facts vs. values
- When it is advisable to include lay people (or the general public -not only interest groups) the aim should be to make as representative a selection as possible
- It is necessary to make the engagement process a partnership / cooperation process, as opposed to a competition between different interests and ideologies
- The timing of the engagement process is crucial. E.g. in the case of new technologies, it is often done too early or too late and therefore becomes irrelevant. When done too early, it can misguide the decision process. On the other hand, it may also be advisable to ensure public participation early on, already in the framing process.

Apart from the 'science' of engagement, participants also discussed the value of employing it in the first place. A justification for stakeholder engagement processes in political decision-making was that they can counter-balance the influence of lobbies (commercial or ideological). On the other hand, the risk of engagement processes being used as window-dressing by those in power was raised. One participant even suggested that the need for public engagement in policy-making can be a way of acknowledging the failure of the democratic process.

The workshop moderator suggested a model of six different ‘perspectives of engagement’ as a means of structuring the process. Before embarking on an engagement exercise, there would need to be agreement on which perspective to apply and which analytical tools should be used as a result.

1. functionalist (aim to improve output quality);
2. neo-liberal (to give representative value of affected population);
3. deliberative (includes debating normative validity and truth criteria);
4. anthropological (jury model);
5. emancipatory (to empower underprivileged groups); and
6. post-modern (to demonstrate and acknowledge diversity and dissent)

Another expert presented the below model of the ‘spectrum of processes’ <http://pubcollab.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/spectrum-2008-oct-2008-rev-2.pdf> which presents a framework of steps to take for convenors depending on the purpose of the stakeholder engagement exercise (see below):

SPECTRUM OF PROCESSES FOR COLLABORATION AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING IN PUBLIC DECISIONS¹

	EXPLORE/INFORM	CONSULT	ADVISE	DECIDE	IMPLEMENT
Outcomes ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved understanding of issues, process, etc. Lists of concerns Information needs identified Explore differing perspectives Build relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments on draft policies Suggestions for approaches Priority concerns/issues Discussion of options Call for action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus or majority recommendations, on options, proposals or actions, often directed to public entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus-based agreements among agencies and constituent groups on policies, lawsuits or rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-party agreements to implement collaborative action and strategic plans
Sample Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Groups Conferences Open houses Dialogues Roundtable Discussions Forums Summits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public meetings Workshops Charettes Town Hall Meetings (w & w/o deliberative polls) Community Visioning Scoping meetings Public Hearings Dialogues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory Committees Task Forces Citizen Advisory Boards Work Groups Policy Dialogues Visioning Processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulatory Negotiation Negotiated settlement of lawsuits, permits, cleanup plans, etc. Consensus meetings Mediated negotiations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative Planning processes Partnerships for Action Strategic Planning Committees Implementation Committees
Use When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early in projects when issues are under development When broad public education and support are needed When stakeholders see need to connect, but are wary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want to test proposals and solicit public and stakeholder ideas Want to explore possibility of joint action before committing to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want to develop agreement among various constituencies on recommendations, e.g. to public officials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want certainty of implementation for a specific public decision Conditions are there for successful negotiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want to develop meaningful on-going partnership to solve a problem of mutual concern To implement joint strategic action
Conditions for Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants will attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are questions or proposals for comment Affected groups and/or the public are willing to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can represent broad spectrum of affected groups Players agree to devote time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can represent all affected interests and potential “blockers” All agree upfront to implement results, incl. “sponsor” Time, information, incentives and resources are available for negotiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agree to support the goal for the effort Participants agree to invest time and resources Conditions exist for successful negotiations

¹ Developed by Suzanne Orenstein, Lucy Moore, and Susan Sherry, members of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Future of Collaboration and Consensus on Public Issues, in consideration of and inspiration from the spectra developed by International Association for Public Involvement (http://www.iap2.org/associations/4748/files/IAP2%20Spectrum_vertical.pdf) and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (<http://www.thataway.org/exchange/files/docs/dd3streams1-08.pdf>).

² While all types of processes have intrinsic value on their own, those on the right side of the spectrum tend to include early phases akin to those on the left side and those on the left side often support participants in moving to next steps akin to those on the right side.

One question that the workshop aimed to resolve is whether IRGC should dedicate resources to develop guidelines for stakeholder involvement. In view of the many such guidelines that already exist the Scientific and Technical Council was of the opinion that the most suitable contribution that IRGC could make in this field would be to create guidelines, probably in the form of a web-based tool, which would guide convenors to existing guidance documents that have relevance for systemic, trans-boundary, emerging risks.