

Move Beyond Polarity: Effective Governance Processes for All

Friday, May 16th | 12:45 PM

Move Beyond Polarity

Effective Governance Processes for All

NLC RISC Trustees Conference 5/16/25



Panel Members

Dave Bartholomay Mayor, Circle Pines MN

Luke Fischer Executive Director, LMC

Dan Greensweig Administrator, LMCIT

 Alison Zelms Chair LMCIT Board of Trustees and Rochester MN City Administrator

Facilitator

Aimee Gourlay LMCIT, Collaboration Services Manager

Agenda

- Why focus on processes to manage polarity?
- LMCIT Culture of Civility
- LMC Good Governance Support for Cities
- Problem Solving Framework: Supporting Council and Community Engagement
- Onboarding
- Questions/Comments

Current Environment

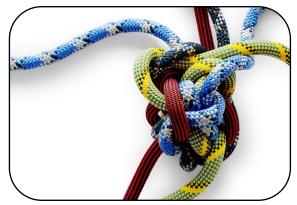
Volatile





Uncertain

Complex





Ambiguous

VUCA Impacts Behavior, Civility

We are right and you are wrong evil

CONFLICT

Communication Breakdown

Denial

Aggression

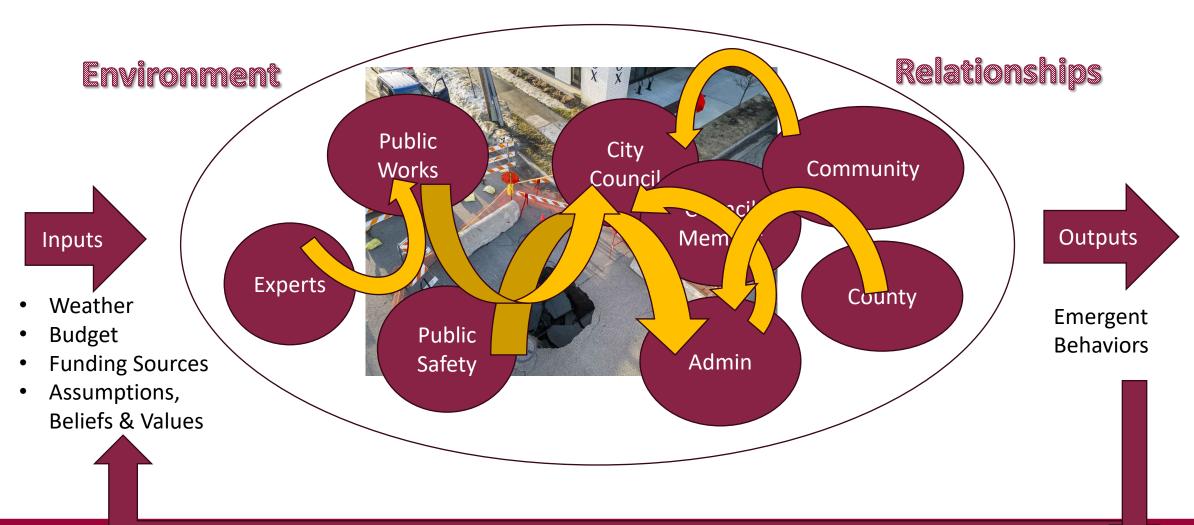
Polarity

Sickness

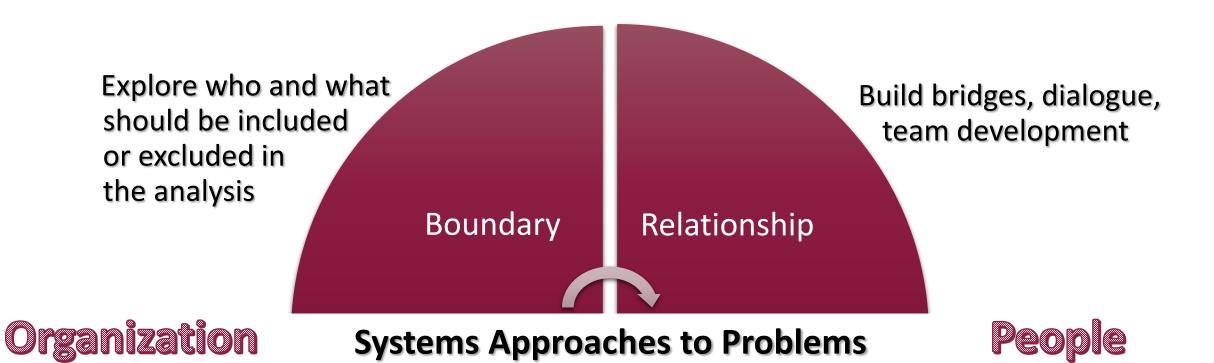
Hopelessness

We are right and you are wrong stupid

Systems Impact Civility: View of a Pothole Problem



Feedback



Develop viable and responsive organization. Clear and transparent processes.

Processes

Perspective

Explore multiple perspectives, seek mutual resolutions

Processes Set Expectations for Civility

- Define desired outcomes
- Deeper understanding shared values
- Provide a structured framework for decision making
- Ensure transparency and accountability
- Clarify roles & responsibilities
- Plan for engagement
- Proactively manage disruptions rather than react when tensions are at their highest

Dan Greensweig Administrator, LMCIT Civility is not just the absence of incivility but has its own proactive attributes, characteristics, and dynamics.

The promotion of civility in the workplace not only leads to healthier organizations, but also enhances costefficiency, effectively averting the loss of both human and economic capital.

Peng, Advancing Workplace Civility: A systematic review and meta-analysis of definitions, measurements and associated factors

- What civility is NOT
- Red flags for councils
 - Can't make decisions
 - Community concern
 - Long meetings
 - Excessive number of split votes
 - Recurring agenda items
 - Social media ripples through community
 - Threats
 - Staff leaving
 - Council members quitting
 - Lack of trust
 - Conspiracy theories

Civility Efforts

Person-Centered, Behavior Oriented



Culture of Civility

Group Focus, Who We Want to Be



- Local government meetings emphasize process over dialogue
 - Citizen litigants vs. citizen community members
 - Systems were set up for transparency and efficiency
- What don't we tolerate?
 - Shut up/shut down
 - Personal attacks

LMCIT "Common Sense" Civility

- Avoiding lawsuits vs. building a thriving community
 - What's the role of a pool?
 - Do the right thing for the right reasons in the right way
- Focus on what you control city issues
- Harm reduction

LMCIT "Common Sense" Civility

- Collaboration
 - Value added mindset
 - Common set of facts counter "truth decay"
 - Processes fit the forum to the fuss
- Engagement which helps adaptation
 - Doing together builds political/social capital
 - Shared community value
 - · Go to community instead of waiting for them to come to you

LMC Good Governance Support

Luke Fischer

Executive Director, LMC

Existing strategies to combat incivility have focused on modifying individual behavior, but opportunities may exist to reduce incivility through ... organizations.

Pattani, et. al., Organizational Factors Contributing to Incivility at an Academic Medical Center and Systems-Based Solutions (studying incivility in medicine)





LEAGUE of MINNESOTA CITIES

Supporting Council and Community Engagement

Alison Zelms

Trustee, LMCIT, Rochester MN City Administrator

(Participants said) that the community engagement process had a profound impact on them and has exposed them to the complexities of government decision-making, which allowed them to be more empathetic to the process. Further, the data strongly suggested that the panelists came out of the experience with a deepened sense of democratic voice and agency.

NLC RISC, On the Frontlines of Today's Cities: Civil Discourse, Engagement and Trust Building, report of citizen assembly in Petaluma, CA

Problem Solving Framework:

Disclaimer: Your Organizational Culture must be ready and supported to do Problem-Solving well





Problem Solving Framework: Supporting Council

- Appreciate that your council members make difficult decisions
 - Council members' responsibility to engage with citizens
 - Dealing with "in your face" pressure is psychologically abnormal
 - Information symmetry is our friend



"Boring" council meetings

- Does the Council know this is coming?
- How could this be smoother?
 - Study Session...engagement first or later...
- Is this ready for primetime?
- How will the open comment go?

Appropriate Community Engagement

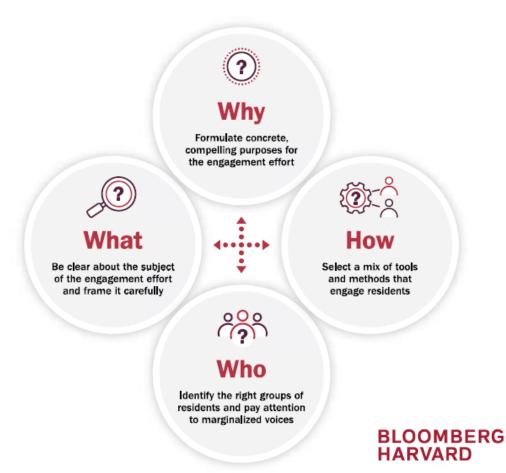
Planning is critical

- Ask Why: Align and Identify Problems and Solutions
- Ask What: Understand the Participant's Role
 - ✓ Thinking, talking or doing something about it?
 What's the scope?
- Ask Who: Include Essential Voices
 - ✓ Experts? Experiencers?
- Ask How: Chose the Right Tools and Methods
 - ! Getting this wrong can be worse than doing nothing

Listen (and demonstrate understanding)
Communicate to share information, be transparent

*From "City Leader Guide on Civic Engagement – Designing Pathways for Participatory Problem-Solving"

Figure 4
Four Essential Design Questions

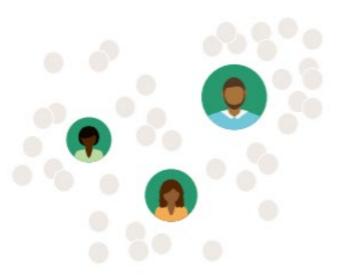


Leadership

Example – Co-Design

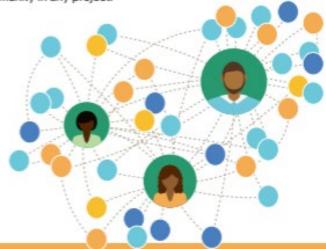
TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Traditional approaches tend to engage the "usual suspects" who are often treated as universal token representatives of the communities they are part of. This approach offers a very limited, and often inaccurate, perspective on community experiences and values.



COMMUNITY CO-DESIGN

In a co-design approach, the community co-designers (who are from under-represented communities) are conduits to difficult-to-reach community networks (friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, etc.). In this way you have access to a much broader and more diverse collection of perspectives and experiences from those that would not be accessible through other methods. In short, the co-design process is a cost effective, equitable, and mutually beneficial way to include community in any project.

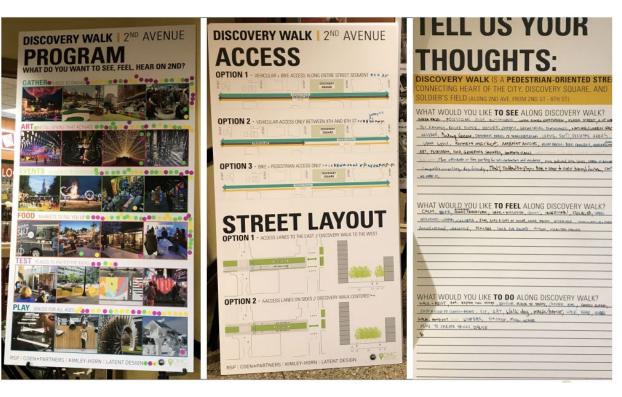


TIPS:

Part of the focus of co-design is to create a communication and personals links with your organization/agency where they did not exist in the past. Identifying and prioritizing the involvement of communities' who have the most to gain from a project and currently least access to provide perspective, should be central to your recruitment approach.

Early and accessible options to influence project/ policy design is essential for successful co-design. Too often, organizations will offer listening sessions during workhours and only when the project is nearing completion.

Where we Started and Ended





Courtesty of Andrew Robinson, 21DronesMedia https://www.21dronesmedia.com/

Onboarding

Dave Bartholomay

Mayor, Circle Pines MN

Onboarding research reveals that effective onboarding boosts employee retention, increase productivity, enhance engagement and strengthen company culture.

Society for Human Resource Management

Onboarding

- Who runs for office?
- Emphasize behavior/culture/team in addition to technical/logistical
- Early focus on building relationships and trust among electeds
- Importance of dialogue and listening
- Unsuccessful? Prepare to marginalize and isolate
- Example

Questions/Comments

Thank you!