

OPINION
LEADER
RESEARCH

Britain Speaks

Effective public engagement and better decision-making



Contents

1 Introduction	2
<i>Foreword by The Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt MP</i>	2
<i>Introduction by Viki Cooke and Deborah Mattinson, Joint CEOs, Opinion Leader Research</i>	3
2 Background	4
3 The spectrum of consultation	7
4 Methods	9
Citizens' juries	9
Deliberative workshops	10
Collaborative workshops	11
Reconvened approaches	12
Charrettes	13
Citizens' forums	14
Deliberative polling	15
Consensus conferences	16
21st Century town meetings	17
Online consultations	18
5 The future	19
6 What are the benefits for the commissioning organisation?	22
7 What are the benefits for the citizen?	24

1 Introduction

Foreword by The Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt MP, Secretary of State for Health

I welcome the thinking in this pamphlet as it marks the coming of age of a new approach to democracy.

We know that many people are feeling disaffected with public policy making in Britain – yet are more interested than ever in the issues themselves. The solution lies in creating a new relationship where citizens and government can gain a better understanding of each other's perspectives – and work together towards shared solutions.

We need to be bolder and more imaginative, finding better ways of creating real dialogue and involving people in the decisions that change their lives. Innovative methods of public involvement will play a vital role in making this happen.

I am determined to play my part in this democratic revolution and will be working hard to ensure that we use these pioneering approaches to help citizens have their say in shaping the future of our National Health Service.

*Introduction by Viki Cooke and Deborah Mattinson, Joint Chief Executives,
Opinion Leader Research*

Back in 1994 Anna Coote, then Deputy Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, contacted us at Opinion Leader Research. Working on a project about democracy, she had started exploring public involvement programmes across the world. Her team had got a good grasp of the theory but Anna wanted to see what happened in practice. She commissioned us to run Britain's first ever Citizens' Jury – on healthcare rationing – for the Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority.

We learned a lot and we saw how bringing the right people together, giving them authority, the information they needed, and an environment conducive to deliberation transformed the decision making process. The people's input made a real difference to the outcomes: they were competent and committed, and, when they really understood the trade-offs involved, sympathetic and able to work well in partnership with policy makers to stunning effect.

We were convinced, evangelical even – although it took some time for others to agree that public participation might be a good idea. We had challenging questions to address: Can people really get to grips with complex policy ideas? Will policy makers listen? Will the methodologies hold up? Which method will we use when? How can we involve enough people to have a real impact?

In the intervening decade we have worked on more than two hundred public participation exercises ranging from qualitative projects like Citizens' Juries, Parallel Workshops, Collaborative Workshops and Social Influencer Panels, through to large scale projects such as Citizens' Forums, Deliberative Hall Tests and online consultations. Matching method to purpose is part of our skill. Our Public Participation Unit has managed projects as diverse as the development of local transport strategy, improving take up of life long learning programmes, through to what level the minimum wage should be set at, or whether council tax should be increased.

We continue to innovate, learning lessons from our own extensive work and lessons from some of the vibrant international examples that we have come to know well. We remain evangelical. We know these methods, in the hands of experienced practitioners, really work.

We also know how they can change the organisations that use them for good.

2 Background

Democratic deficit

On May 5th 2005 61% of the public limped out to exercise their democratic right. Though marginally better than the previous general election in 2001, when turnout figures hit an all time low of 59%, the 2005 total confirmed this was not a glitch. These are the lowest figures in nearly a century.

But these figures hide the extent of the deficit amongst the democrats of the future: only 37% of 18-24 year olds voted and this figure continued a downward trend dropping 2% on 2001's statistic.

Breakdown in trust

Part of the reason for this democratic deficit has been the erosion of faith in party politics and government: from the sleaze scandals of the Conservative Party's years in power to the dashed hopes for a "whiter than white" Labour government, culminating in the breakdown of trust over the Iraq war and perceptions of slow public service improvements.

Polling data quantifies this, showing that over the last 30 years the proportion of people saying they trust government has more than halved.¹ Opinion Leader Research has found, amongst a panel of opinion leaders, 62% don't trust the Government to act in their best interest during sensitive times.

Politicians themselves are often distrusted as individuals and considered to communicate poorly. And the increasing sophistication of the Government's communications machine in the form of "spin" has contributed to the perception that the truth is, or can be, manipulated. This leads to cynicism.

Feeling a lack of dialogue and connection with their representatives further dents an increasingly informed and educated electorate's relationship with government. After a forum run by Opinion Leader Research about the future of public services, John Williams, Director of Public Services for the CBI, who sponsored the initiative said "The clear message from people was that they still feel they are not consulted on changes, are given little information and treated with a lack of respect".

Things are no better in the business world where scandals within the financial services industry and controversy over executive pay have all added to a prevailing mood of mistrust and scepticism of organisational motives. Our polling suggests that people want more human interaction with business; they want businesses to behave like trusted friends.

Savvy customers and consumers

“Knowledge is power” wrote English philosopher Francis Bacon at the end of the sixteenth century and knowledge now is no longer protected by ivory towers. The ability to access information, about whatever you want, whenever you want, has given the public unprecedented strength; with consumers increasingly taking control of the way they learn and inform themselves.

The rise of the internet is the ultimate tool of empowerment. The internet has changed the nature of influence and communications with bloggers and minority interests challenging organisations and authority. Some of the best-known weblogs attract the kind of traffic that even big-name e-commerce sites would be jealous of. Large organisations such as Microsoft have recognised the powerful influence of this phenomenon and, at the risk of some criticism of their own products, have decided to try to be part of it, by hiring their own celebrity blogger.

With the realisation of personal power, citizens’ expectations have increased. For public bodies, governments and commercial organisations that means accountability and transparency, as well as looking after their consumers as individuals and reacting to their needs. For instance, consumer concerns about the conditions of workers in the Far East, making products for companies like Nike, created such a backlash for the company that conditions were improved. The challenge must be finding ways to channel this new assertiveness.

Desire to regain citizenship and shared responsibility

Despite the democratic deficit many western democracies are suffering at a formal level, there is much action at a grassroots level – protest politics, once the preserve of leftwing radicals has become mainstream. There has been a surge in demonstrations, petitions, consumer politics and direct action. The antiwar marches of 2003 saw record numbers of protestors take to Britain’s streets, while pro-hunting rallies illustrated energetic levels of activism and involvement in issues that matter to people in their locality and that directly affect their lives. The success of the Make Poverty History campaign is a current example.

Our poll for the Power Inquiry amongst non-voters showed that when offered a list of issues (such as tax, the economy, the environment), and asked which “really mattered” to them, 94% of non-voters chose three or more issues.² Amongst this group 71% said they were likely to get involved in a process where they decided how and where local council money is spent. This polling data confirms that, despite a lack of connectivity with Westminster politics, there is a willingness to engage, and participate, in the issues of politics.

With a mistrust of those who have traditionally held authority in society we have identified a new type of persuader – “social influencers”. These are people who are engaged, articulate and informed individuals who shape opinions within their peer group. They are numerous and ubiquitous – you find them in the work place, on the PTA and in the pub. They can be an organisation’s most powerful ambassadors or its most dangerous detractors.

A more mature relationship between government and public, company and customer

There has been a fundamental change in the nature of authority, from an age of deference where the public looked up to and trusted distant power, and the credibility of a message grew with that distance, to a new age of reference. This is an age where the public is far less trusting of authority, preferring to seek out others with similar experiences to themselves, or media sources that have earned our respect.³ Evidence from our Opinion Leader Panel illustrates this, with 85% believing that we don’t trust less, but we trust differently, and that we are more likely to trust people we have a direct relationship with.

There is a gradual recognition that a different relationship is needed with the public, customers and clients if their custom is to be kept, and to maintain the legitimacy of our public bodies and governments. In the public sector there has been a realisation that organisations need the public to influence decisions if public services are to meet their needs and to allow their communities to flourish.

In government policy documents there are now many references such as “active citizenship” and “partnership” and, in some areas of policy, citizen participation has been made compulsory such as Primary Care Trusts, and urban regeneration funding.

This is a two way process with the emphasis not just on those in positions of power to consult, but also on the responsibility of the public to engage and take ownership.

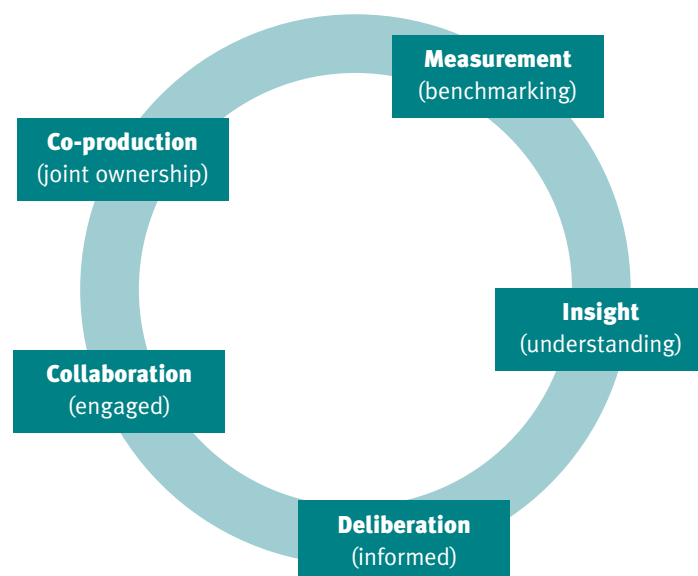
3 The spectrum of consultation

Companies and public sector organisations have for many years used a variety of methods to consult with their public or stakeholder groups: from methods such as surveys used to gauge opinion (measurement) to research techniques which give insight and understanding of the participants' opinions (insight). Over the last few years the public sector, in particular, has experimented with the form and quality of consultation and explored methods which allow participants time to discuss issues before reaching conclusions (deliberation) and collaborative consultation which engages directly in a dialogue with all stakeholders (collaboration).

Newer models of service delivery have changed the relationship between the public and the deliverer, demanding a new level of local partnership. Coupled with the higher expectations of the public for accountability, these new programmes have led to experiments in which the public and service providers, in partnership, are actively involved in decision making, management and ownership (co-production).

There is a place for this whole range of methodologies, each providing valid information and analysis. For more complex projects, methods are not used in isolation, but can be combined, dovetailing together to provide thorough consultation and more effective participation.

Across the world there has been interesting innovation and experimentation in the development of collaborative and deliberative engagement methods. We have drawn together many of those ideas in this section of our pamphlet followed by some ideas about co-production, which is in its infancy.



How do deliberative and collaborative approaches differ?

“A deliberative process is one which provides participants with relevant facts, from various perspectives, time to discuss and think critically about the issues before them, and an opportunity to enlarge their perspectives, opinions and understandings”.

Opinion Leader Research

Information. Whether with a large or small group of people the significant difference is that the participants are given information to help inform their view. This is often in written form as information sheets or booklets, but can be interviews with experts or witnesses. The quality and accessibility of this briefing material can be key to the credibility of a project.

Time. The consultation allows participants time to have a discussion and deliberate the topic. This can range from a few hours to days, or even over a much greater period of time to allow knowledge to be built up and reflected upon.

Independence. The status of the ‘group’ is independent of the project commissioners and any other interested parties. Participants are carefully recruited to broadly represent their community rather than more typical ‘open meetings’ which can be dominated by the voices of a small, self-interested minority.

Mutual respect. The creation of a consensual environment in which each ‘voice’ is treated equally is key for a project’s success and authority.

Influence. Clarity about the purpose, impact and use of the recommendations is crucial to a project and can enhance its credibility, particularly if the participants know their input results in a different outcome.

4 Methods

Here we have chosen some key deliberative and collaborative methods, and case studies, which illustrate ways of engaging the public. The appendix gives a more exhaustive list of practices from around the world.

Citizens' juries

In the early seventies the first experiments in deliberative consultation were developing either side of the Atlantic. In Minneapolis the "Citizens' Jury" was conceived.⁴ The cornerstone of a Citizens' Jury is the belief that once a small sample of a population have heard the evidence, their subsequent deliberations can fairly represent the conscience and intelligence of the community. This system involved a group of 10-20 people, randomly chosen, who cross examined various "witnesses", or experts, on an issue and then presented recommendations to a convening authority.

In Germany a way of organising public participation called Planungszellen or "planning cells" was created involving a number of simultaneous juries (cells) each with about 25 members all considering the same issues. The conclusions were then collated from the cells into a "citizen report".

UK experience

Drawing on these experiences a UK model for citizens' juries was developed by Opinion Leader Research in partnership with the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in 1994. Our system engaged a group of 16 citizens in discussions on a key question relating to a policy or service issue for between two and four days, again drawing on expert witnesses to help attain a deeper understanding of the issues.

CASE STUDY	Citizens' Jury on the place of the car in the London Borough of Lewisham's future transport plans, 2004.
Objective	To understand to what extent the car should fit in to future local transport planning, and how a balance can be achieved between the positive and negative aspects of car use.
Project	The jury, recruited to be representative of the local area, sat for two and a half days. Witnesses were chosen to represent a variety of transport perspectives and offer alternative considerations.
Outcome	Alister McClure, from Lewisham Council said: "Owing to the robustness and effective delivery of the jury, the council has been able to use the jury findings to strengthen its influence in regional and national policy." The Citizens' Jury has contributed to the national debate on Public Value.

Deliberative workshops

As interest in deliberative consultation has increased a variety of methods have been developed to fit projects' specifications. Workshops tend to be a more flexible form of engaging a representative group than a jury. Typically a series of workshops would be arranged across different locations each with between 12 and 20 people meeting for a one-day event, which is often task orientated. The workshops are facilitated by an independent body that makes recommendations to the commissioning organisation.

CASE STUDY	Big Lottery Fund workshops on priority setting in Lottery funding, 2004.
Objective	To engage the public in priority setting; understand the drivers of opinion on priority setting; and assess views on mechanisms for public involvement in the prioritising process.
Project	A series of six workshops was conducted with the general public across the UK. The agenda was designed to enable people to move beyond a simplistic discussion of popular and unpopular good causes to provide useful insights into drivers behind opinion.
Outcome	The findings have been used to brief stakeholders on the issues and have informed a wider consultation on its future policies and programmes.

Collaborative workshops

Collaborative workshops involve various stakeholders, e.g. the public, experts, employees, and management of an organisation, working together to develop recommendations that meet their needs most effectively.

This is a powerful process as it engages audiences in a dialogue that breaks down boundaries and agendas and allows for the cross fertilisation of ideas, with a view to arriving at shared understanding and meaningful solutions for improvements. The participation of policy makers demonstrates the importance of the consultation to the public and ensures that learnings translate into action. This process enables genuine collaboration between all parties to arrive at shared outcomes and constructive recommendations.

CASE STUDY	Department of Health (DH) and Office of Public Services Reform (OPSR) collaborative workshop on delivery of patient choice for elective surgery, 2003.
Objective	The aim of the discussions was to arrive at meaningful solutions and practical recommendations for the delivery of patient choice in elective surgery, and improve the overall experience for patients.
Project	A two-day consultation. The first day involved workshop discussions with patients which mapped out their experiences of the NHS and ended in the patients developing a draft policy. On day two, policy makers and health practitioners joined patients. Initially, they discussed the plans devised by the patients before moving into mixed groups to look at the Government's plans for patient choice in elective surgery in more detail. The groups reconvened for plenary sessions to explore convergent views and identify solutions to divergence.
Outcome	The findings were used to develop DH policy on patient choice with specific recommendations being piloted. The OPSR has been sharing the approach across public services to ensure that the customer experience is placed at the heart of public services' reform.

Reconvened approaches

It can be very effective to involve people in an ongoing dialogue through reconvening the same group of people. This allows the participants time to absorb the information they have been given, to learn more, and to talk to other people (e.g. members of their family). It is also a useful tool for clients to observe, as people learn more about an issue, how attitudes change and how views are formed.

CASE STUDY	Reconvened workshops for Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) on public attitudes towards embryo selection for tissue donation, 2004.
Objective	A project aimed at uncovering the public's understanding and handling of this complex issue. Most people had little knowledge of, or had generally not considered, the regulatory systems in relation to embryo selection to produce tissue donors. The consultation was configured to ensure that it got beyond knee-jerk responses to enable people to develop informed viewpoints and to engage in constructive debate.
Project	A two stage project. Firstly, exploring breadth of knowledge and attitudes on the issue via 6 extended group discussions. All 48 participants were then reconvened into a workshop that explored the evidence, future uses and regulatory options, with the help of experts.
Outcome	The findings, along with other evidence, prompted the HFEA board to change its policies and brought about the broadening of its rules, which govern this complex issue.

Charrettes

In the world of planning and redevelopment a technique called a “Charrette” has been designed.⁵ The system brings together stakeholders, members of a community, planners, professionals and staff, for a number of consecutive days. Workshops are then held using rapid dynamic interchange of ideas with the aim of producing concrete results in the form of a feasible plan and shared vision.

CASE STUDY	Charrette on the regeneration of Thurrock, 2004.
Objective	Creative responses to the regeneration of Thurrock within the Thames Gateway.
Project	Initially a mapping exercise gathered information about the local area. Artists and environmentalists were commissioned to respond to specific sites and issues to open up the debate. International case studies were showcased to demonstrate other projects relevant to this area. This was followed by three intensive charrette workshops which responded to the ideas and mapping exercise.
Outcome	Principles and visionary briefs have been created to inform the regeneration.

Citizens' forums

Using some of the techniques of deliberative workshops and citizens' juries this is deliberative consultation on a larger scale. The purpose of a forum is to apply the advantages of the small-scale models to a larger and more robust sample of the population – hundreds rather than tens. The forum, typically lasting one or two days, explores a topic in depth, aided by information sheets, expert speakers, small group and plenary sessions. Questionnaires are conducted at the beginning of the forum and the end to measure opinion and how it changes. A forum, by its sheer size and complexity of the debate, often generates useful publicity and profile for the topic and parties involved.

CASE STUDY	Forum on the future of public services, 2005.⁶
Objective	To stimulate a debate about how future public service provision can be shaped by the people and communities that use them and made more responsive.
Project	Initial group discussions with the public were conducted to scope out the issues, followed by a day long citizens' forum with 100 people from the Nottingham area. Participants considered if, why and how they would like to be involved in public services.
Outcome	The findings are currently being used to influence the wider debate on the future of public services.

Deliberative polling

James Fishkin of Stanford University has developed a method called deliberative polling. A random and representative sample of people (250-600) is sent carefully balanced briefing materials before a meeting in which participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. Participants' opinions are measured in a pre-deliberation poll, and then the original questions are asked post-debate showing the difference between the knee-jerk reaction and the considered, engaged public response.

Deliberative polling exercises have been conducted around the world, mainly in the USA, but also in Australia, the UK, Denmark and most recently in China where the model was used by a town planner to consult on a development plan.

CASE STUDY	Deliberative poll on military action in Iraq, Philadelphia USA, 2003.
Objective	To discuss whether the American Government should invade Iraq.
Project	343 people were brought together, from across the country. Because of the fast changing nature of the political climate around this subject in 2003, a similarly selected group was used as a control group for comparisons with the post-debate poll.
Outcome	The poll showed that most Americans would choose a moderate position on Iraq. After the poll 46% wanted the administration to shift its focus from Iraq to terrorism (57% of control group) and 14% agreed "this country would be better off if we just stayed home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other areas of the world" (before the conference 37% agreed with that statement). When one expert witness to the event, Zbigniew Brzezinski (former National Security Adviser to President Carter) was asked whether the body populace could be entrusted to make foreign policy decisions he said that before observing the poll he thought not, but after the event he felt "in terms of making basic sound judgments that provide a point of departure for rational conduct... I think they can do it."

Consensus conferences

In Denmark a system has been developed of engaging lay people in discussion about technology and science – the consensus conference. A panel of 10-16 citizens is selected randomly to represent the community: these citizens receive a thorough briefing on the subject so they are well prepared to ask questions at the conference. The conference, spread over a few days, is an open public meeting at which pro and anti speakers are questioned by the panel, and the public. The panel will strive to find a consensus with recommendations and expectations written into a document and presented to parliamentarians and all those involved.

This model has been used across the world but uniquely to Denmark it has become incorporated by the Danish Parliament into its democratic process. Consensus conferences are regularly organised by the Danish Board of Technology and their findings are routinely fed into Danish Government policy and legislation.

CASE STUDY	Consensus Conference, New GM Crops, Denmark, May 2005.
Objective	As a result of much informal debate about GM Crops, the Danish Board of Technology wanted to conduct a conference with the public to see how Danish citizens assess these crops and which pros and cons in the debate they consider important.
Project	Following the formula as described above.
Outcome	The findings have recently been presented to the Danish Parliament.

21st Century town meetings®

A 21st century version of the traditional New England town meeting has been devised by AmericaSpeaks to engage citizens in public decision-making.⁷ The gatherings are made up of hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. Divided into groups of 10–12 the participants channel their ideas and votes using wireless groupware computers and polling keypads, which are then reported instantaneously.

CASE STUDY	21st century town meeting, Listening to the City, New York USA 2002.
Objective	After the 9/11 terror attacks on New York, consultation was needed to engage the public and interested parties in the future of the World Trade Center site.
Project	Firstly, 600 people – mainly community leaders, issue advocates and planning professionals – met to shape a vision for the rebuilding process. A second meeting of 4500 members of the public was used to solicit input on the first site plans.
Outcome	The participants called for a new downtown area inspired in design with a mix of commerce, culture and homes for people of all income levels. These views have significantly influenced the plans for the rebuilding process.

Online consultations

With the increasing sophistication of the internet, and its users, much work has been done to develop ways of harnessing technology to improve and broaden deliberative and collaborative consultations. Local authorities, pressure groups, civil society groups and companies are using the internet to create opportunities for digital democracy – creating opportunities for their constituents to have a say in policy making.

Already in the UK, many local authorities and other organisations have elaborate websites providing detailed information, going some way to creating a more transparent and open operation. Innovative ways of holding a dialogue between state and citizen are being piloted such as online surgeries with councillors and e-petitioning.

The ability to reach people in their homes makes consultations easier for participants, but immediately eliminates those groups of people who do not have computers or internet links at home. Those willing to use the internet to take part in consultations are a self-selecting group – often male, white and under 30. The nature of online discussion is also very different from face-to-face debate and questions have been raised about how one can be sure who it is participating.

CASE STUDY	Swedish city of Kalix, the world's "first e-democracy project", 2000.
Objective	Online policy exercise to plan the renovation of the city centre.
Project	A website was created to provide detailed information about the city development plans, questionnaires to measure opinion, and a discussion forum and chat room for citizens to have dialogue with local politicians and each other. The programme ran over a two-week period and allowed citizens the opportunity of participating through traditional means (telephone, post or fax) as well as the internet, though 86% chose to contribute online. To ensure that only those that were entitled to vote voted, a password-protected website was created.
Outcome	The result of this project was the adoption of a widely popular design for the city centre.

5 The future

The demand, both politically and from the public, to consult citizens has progressed, in some quarters, to the belief that citizens could and should be part of decision-making (co-production). In deliberative and collaborative methods citizens tend to give recommendations, but the next stage is for participants to be given higher degrees of influence on those final decisions.

CASE STUDY	Participatory Budget Schemes, Porto Alegre Brazil, 1989 onwards.
Objective	In the Brazilian coastal city of Porto Alegre, after years of dictatorship the Workers Party (PT) was formed to take up the agenda of deepening democracy through “popular administration” of government. The PT began a creative experiment of engaging a wide spectrum of people to formulate city budgets.
Project	Each year the city runs a process that decides on where local council money should be allocated, what investments should be made and the budget’s priorities. In 2002 over 45000 citizens and 1000 local representatives were involved.
Outcome	The city has witnessed some impressive achievements, credit for which has largely been given to the participatory budget process. Between 1989 and 1996, the percentage of the population served by the municipal sewage system rose from 46% to 85%.

It is reported that poorer people in particular find it a more effective way to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens than voting in elections. And politically the PT has benefited. Since 1989, the Workers Party has won three consecutive municipal elections, which stands out against a record of well-known electoral failures of comparable leftist municipal administrations across Latin America.

This model is being experimented with across the world. In the UK a number of pilots are now underway which draw on the experiences in setting priorities for regeneration spending in New Deal for Communities programme areas. The Government, aware of the benefits to local services but also to local democracy is keen to encourage more participatory budgeting.⁸

Larger scale and obligatory experiments

By creating consultations that have much larger sample sizes – for instance, a thousand – the resulting findings and recommendations will be more robust and likely to be more effective in persuading the project commissioner of future directions. Opinion Leader Research has devised a number of models for conducting large-scale deliberative consultations which will be piloted over the next six months.

The concept of expanding the size of consultation to engage the public on a national level may rely on established brands and household figures, such as Richard and Judy or Radio 4's The Moral Maze, becoming co-owners, or presenters, of the consultation and the process being broadcast with an interactive element, therefore creating a national event.

In America there have also been plans for larger scale methodologies such as a proposal for a new national holiday, "Deliberation Day", for each presidential election year, which intends to energise the electoral process. On this day people throughout the country would meet in public spaces and engage in structured debates about issues that divide the candidates.

The idea of obligatory participation in public consultation has been raised in the UK. The idea would be to replicate the jury service system in which attendance is a civic duty that all members of the public are expected to perform.

Lay involvement across the board

The public sector has created some useful pioneering work in involving the public in decision-making, for instance hospitals running lay boards alongside the management board. Similarly in local authorities lay boards have been used to provide reaction to new ideas. But we are still some way from such ideas being translated to the private sector.

Employees are often an overlooked group who can be an organisation's most influential and powerful communicators. The challenge is harnessing the value of employees through engaging them in new and more dynamic ways, conducting real conversations with people that are about developing the strategy, not merely implementing it. There are some interesting projects engaging employees with company management and development in the private sector, for instance Asda's Colleague Circle scheme.

Engaging more diverse groups

A challenge for the future is engaging many more diverse groups of people. For instance people at risk of social exclusion such as drug addicts, children in care, homeless and other potentially vulnerable groups whose opinions are so valuable and with whom it is critically important to engage. The New Economics Foundation has designed a part card game and part policy making tool which has been used to involve people who might not be prepared to take part in more traditional forms of public consultation.

Another useful way of encouraging more diverse participation may be self-facilitated dialogue; that is discussion without a facilitator managing discussion and reporting findings back to the commissioning organisation. This empowers participants and creates an environment for a freer flow of ideas and more frank exchange of views.

Using more relaxed or informal settings for discussion is another emerging development in attempts to reinvigorate a sense of civic responsibility and involvement. The Royal Society for the advancement of Arts has drawn on its own history (established as a result of a discussion in a coffee house in the eighteenth century) to devise the Coffeehouse Challenge – an opportunity for people to come together and discuss issues that they feel are important and to generate innovative solutions. A Bristol Coffeehouse Challenge focused on waste and has inspired nearly a quarter of the population of a local village to examine its waste production in an attempt to become the country's first “zero waste parish”.

6 What are the benefits for the commissioning organisation?

Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission: “From the discussions that took place, we have gained much greater insight into the views of all participants in ways which are directly relevant to our conclusions and recommendations”.

Charity: “There is compelling evidence that involving people who are not professional stakeholders can make for better decisions”.

Local Councillor: “We believe that convenient ‘any time, anywhere’ participation is key to the future of local democracy”.

Arts body on consultation with the public: “...has helped ensure our involving disparate groups in a meaningful way”.

Better decisions: The more effectively communities are engaged in shaping their services the more likely it is that quality will be delivered. Citizens have a good sense of their needs and can contribute valuable information to the policy process but without a good research tool and environment to release it, this knowledge could be overlooked. Sometimes outcomes can even be rather surprising because involvement in these projects can be literally life changing for the participants. In Glasgow after a Citizens’ Jury about the city’s drugs problems, a participant decided to become a drugs adviser, and a project consulting young people about the future development of the Thames Gateway inspired several contributors to help turn their ideas into reality.

Different insights into public/consumer mindset: Unlike the reactive opinion supplied by a focus group, the deliberative method provides the view of an informed citizen – more thoughtful, detailed and balanced opinion, which takes into account different perspectives.

The findings will carry a weight of authority, which will have the interests of the community or public stakeholders at their core.

Sharing issues: When different stakeholders work together the process allows for both parties to learn and understand each other's perspective. The search for common ground enables all those involved to fully consider a number of potential solutions and tradeoffs – ideas that might not have been considered in isolation.

The sharing of issues and working together can help to reduce the chance of conflicts between parties and even strengthen community cohesion and build sustainable communities.

Building respect: A deliberative consultation can generate trust between citizens and the organisation. Involving the public in the decision-making process, revealing how issues are dealt with and verdicts reached can enhance confidence in that process. The commissioning organisation can also benefit from the openness of the procedures, which can have a very positive impact on the public and media.

When customers and organisations have collaborated to make decisions there will be greater loyalty from both sides in the project and its success.

Media value: Some deliberative projects, particularly forums, become significant events locally partly due to the size and involvement of local people, but also if the issue is of particular interest, generating media interest and even involvement, which is often positive. This clearly can be valuable for the commissioning organisation's reputation and standing.

Consultation can also help to turn a previously hostile media to be more supportive.

Democracy and accountability: For governments and public sector organisations the legitimacy of the institutions themselves may be strengthened, and the democratic institutions will be seen to be actively working. This is illustrated by the participatory budget schemes in Brazil.

7 What are the benefits for the citizen?

“Feeling that my view/opinion counted in the community”.

“The people who are in control are prepared to listen to the ordinary people”.

“Taking part in the jury was an interesting and thought-provoking experience. I have no doubt that I shall be much more interested in hearing about developments as a result of taking part”.

For the public many of the benefits mirror those experienced by the organisation, such as mutual respect and shared experience.

Education: Participants in a deliberative project will benefit from a fuller understanding and knowledge of an issue, and an opportunity to develop, more broadly, their skills and experience. This learning experience often motivates those involved to discover more independently.

Respect, value and responsibility: Consulting the public, in general, makes people feel that their opinion is valued. But with deliberative consultations, the further investment of time and information heightens this experience. If participants are also involved in making recommendations, or even decisions, there is likely to be an increased sense of responsibility for, and ownership in, the organisation.

Understanding tradeoffs: Through learning about the issues involved, citizens begin to appreciate and understand the need for trade-offs. In Australia a large collaborative project is underway to plan the future of the city of Perth. The public has had to grapple with the clash between their support, in principle, of the idea of creating a sustainable environment and, NIMBYism and the demands of the free market.

Citizenship and ownership: These types of consultations can act as a prompt for what it is to be a good citizen, and can enhance a sense of belonging and ownership in the service or organisation.

8 References

- ¹ Electoral Commission research, 2004.
- ² Opinion Leader Research poll for The Power Inquiry. Opinion Leader Research conducted 1,025 telephone interviews with people who were registered to vote but did not vote on May 5th 2005 (fieldwork date 9th-17th May)
- ³ “Power of influence in the age of reference”, Kate Watts, Admap, September 2003.
- ⁴ US Citizens’ juries were created by Ned Crosby of the Jefferson Center for New Democratic Processes.
- ⁵ The term “Charrette” evolved from a pre-1900 exercise at the École des Beaux Arts in France. Architectural students were given a design problem to solve within an allotted time. When the time was up, the students would rush their drawings from the studio to the école in a cart or “charrette”. The term therefore grew to mean the intense design exercise itself, (Definition from Carnegie Mellon University).
- ⁶ Research conducted by Opinion Leader Research for the National Consumer Council and the Confederation of British Industry.
- ⁷ Created by US organisation AmericaSpeaks.
- ⁸ “Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter”, Office of Deputy Prime Minister, 2005.

Appendix:

Other methodologies

NAME	METHOD
ByDesign/ elab (Origin: Canada)	Online large group asynchronous dialogue in a public space built to include background information. Aim: to foster widespread participation.
Citizens' Assembly (Origin: Canada)	Panel of citizens (100s) meet regularly to generate recommendations. E.g.: British Columbia's review of the electoral system, 2004.
Citizens' Deliberative Councils (Origin: USA)	Temporary council of citizens convened to deliberate issues concerning the public and to provide guidance for officials and the public. Face to face assembly, convened for a limited number of days.
Citizens' Election Forum (Origin: USA)	Meeting of 6 citizens panels every year to examine key public issues and share recommendations with the public. Before finalising their policy recommendations, each panel will check in with the larger "jury pool" to insure that their recommendations are not too far out of line with public opinion.
Citizens' Panels (Origin: UK)	Ongoing panels of around 1000-2000 representatives of the local community surveyed several times a year and often then consulted in subgroups for deliberative workshops. E.g.: 'Feedback', Southampton City Council.
CitizenSpace (Origin: UK)	Online approach enabling participants to search for, participate in, see results of, and propose new consultations. E.g.: Consultation on Prostitution Law Reform, 2004.
CitizenSpace (Origin: Australia)	Provides online list of government actions available for consultation and online dialogue to affect how government actions proceed from planning to completion. E.g. Engaging with Aboriginal Western Australians, 2004.
Constructive Conversations (Origin: USA)	Small group customised, structured dialogues to foster new relationships among polarised groups. Much attention paid to pre-meeting preparation, collaborative stance of facilitators, clarity of purpose. E.g.: Ongoing dialogues with pro-choice and pro-life leaders, USA 1995-2001.

NAME	METHOD
Conversation Café (Origin: USA)	A 90 minute conversation held in a public setting where anyone is welcome to join. Initiated in Seattle and partly developed as a result of 9/11. It was recognised that it could help people come together to talk about how the tragedy and aftermath effected them. Does not focus on moving to action.
Cross-media public consultations (Origin: Germany)	Described as “institutional embeddedness”. Close integration of face-to-face and online meetings, orientation to open results through active unbiased moderation. Application of highly developed ranking features used to focus discussion. E.g.: City of Berlin.
Danmarks Debatten (Origin: Denmark)	eDialogue tool developed to encourage public debates, emphasises well-defined topics, clear purposes and (pro)active and dedicated debate management.
Deliberative Mapping (Origin: UK)	Public consultation integrating expert and citizen assessments on science and technology issues. Using a mixture of: citizens’ panels, stakeholder decision analysis and multi-criteria mapping (a quantitative computer assisted interview process) and a scoring system to appraise the various options. E.g.: Discussion of treatment for end-stage kidney failure, 2004.
Dialogue by Design (Origin: UK)	Small to large online group dialogues. Offers a range of engagement services including online stakeholder engagement and public debates. Participants interact via facilitator proxy using email. A proprietary dialogueDX platform provides easy and rapid collection, collation and reporting of findings. E.g.: Surrey County Council Waste Plan, 2004.
Dialogue Circles (Origin: Canada)	Online dialogue accommodating large and small groups divided into “tables” of 14. Can support synchronous and asynchronous dialogues and can provide background materials (video, text, images) workbooks, scenarios and surveys.
Information Renaissance (Origin: USA)	Large scale online asynchronous dialogue on public issues that may be conducted over several weeks. Dialogues include panellists – public officials and issue experts – plus extensive background materials. E.g.: California plan for education, 2002.
Future Search Conferences (Origin: USA)	Stakeholders brought together for a 3 day meeting where participants attempt to create a shared community vision of the future. The system aims to reach consensus and find solutions. Key principles include: getting all stakeholders together in the same room, working through a sequence of structured tasks to discover common ground, working as peers and equals.

NAME	METHOD
Learning Circles	<p>A cooperative teaching and learning method that draws on personal experiences to find creative solutions to community issues and concerns. By emphasising personal experience over professional know-how, learning circles depend on open dialogue and careful listening. Coming together to explore a common problem or questions, participants in learning circles work closely over the course of two days (or longer) to challenge and develop each other's skills and understandings.</p>
National Issues Forum (Origin: USA)	<p>A network of locally sponsored public forums for the consideration of public policy issues. Issue books help inform the participants in their deliberation. The feedback is collated and presented to elected officials at a local, state and national level to give them insight into considered views of the public.</p>
Open House (Origin: Australia)	<p>A forum in which interested people can obtain information and register views. Held in a well-known space such as a library and operated for long periods so wide cross-section of the community can attend; conversations are free-flowing and directed by visitors. As a result the staff of the government agency can talk with many different members of the population.</p>
Open Space Technology (Origin: USA)	<p>Very flexible and informal approach involving large numbers of people where those present determine the issues to be discussed. The groups are self managed and leadership is constantly shared. The aim is for people to reflect and learn from one another to accomplish meaningful work often creating whole systems change. Work well where a complex issue must be resolved. Often participants are from very diverse backgrounds and there is the potential for conflict in views and ideas.</p>
Planning for Real (Origin: UK)	<p>Process of community consultation mainly used to involve the public in planning, development and environmental issues. Very accessible system, not requiring high literacy. Using models the public identify problems and solutions. E.g.: Pioneered by Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation in 70's.</p>
Platform for Online Deliberation (Origin: USA)	<p>Asynchronous online dialogues for small to medium sized groups. Includes online collaboration tools for collaborative writing, decision-making, storing and displaying group information.</p>
Small Group Dialogue (Origin: USA)	<p>An online discussion tool built to foster intimate, high quality exchanges. By limiting the group size and its lifespan, the emphasis is on each member's value. The system hopes to encourage a sense of belonging and an investment in frequent visits. E.g.: Project 540 dialogue with high school students, 2002.</p>

NAME	METHOD
Study Circles (Origin: Sweden)	<p>Group of 8-12 people from different backgrounds who meet several times to talk about an issue. All participants have an equal voice. The idea is to share concerns and look for ways to make things better. After small group discussions, people from all the study circles come together in a large community meeting to work on the ideas and form actions and change efforts.</p> <p>E.g.: How should we move forward after 9/11, 2002.</p>
TOM – “Tana Otsusta Mina” which means “Today I decide” (Origin: Estonia)	<p>Aims to enhance citizens’ participation in policy making process by allowing the public to comment on draft laws and submit their ideas for new laws. Proposals for legislation are discussed by the public over a two week period and then the author has 3 days to revise the proposal, then there is public voting on the proposal. If it receives more than 51% of the online vote it is put forward to the appropriate Government department.</p> <p>E.g.: initial experiment launched by Estonia Government 2001.</p>
Virtual Conference (Origin: Canada)	<p>Energy Technology Futures was created primarily as a research project to look at greenhouse gas emissions and economic growth in the future. One element of the consultation included a virtual conference using scenario-based methods inviting comments from all over the world; about 235 people registered.</p>
Visioning (Origin: organic)	<p>Helping a community establish a vision of the sort of future they would like for their area. May involve picturing alternative futures.</p> <p>E.g.: Local Agenda 21.</p>
Wisdom Council (Origin: USA)	<p>Public lottery every four months where a dozen citizens are chosen to meet for two half days to articulate the people’s concerns and perspectives. Through dynamic dialogue methods it facilitates everyone to form a unanimous “we the people” viewpoint.</p> <p>E.g.: Rogue Valley, Oregon.</p>
World Café (Origin: organic)	<p>A network of conversations discussing key questions facing society. The process starts with small intimate groups discussing the same issue – ideas are shared and cross-pollinated and collective knowledge grows, with innovative possibilities for action emerging. Can be conducted with very large numbers – successful experiments have been conducted with 1200.</p>

This appendix has been produced with reference to: various AmericaSpeaks publications; the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation; The Improvement and Development Agency, The Power Inquiry’s “Beyond the Ballot”, 2005, and “Bowling Together: Online public engagement in Policy Deliberation”, Stephen Coleman, Hansard Society.

Since 1994 the Public Participation Unit at Opinion Leader Research has managed over 200 deliberative consultations for clients including:

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Brown & Root
Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority
Camden Council
Camelot
Capital Shopping Centres
CBI
Central London Connexions
Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health
Countryside Agency
Crest Nicholson
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Education and Skills
Department of Health
DEFRA
Employment Service
English Partnerships
Environment Agency
Fife Council
Food Standards Agency
Girlguiding UK
Heritage Lottery Fund
Home Office
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
Health Professions Council
Invest in Fish South West
Islington Council
Kensington & Westminster Health Authority
Kings Fund
Land Securities
Learning and Skills Council
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