Consensus Building, Collaborative Decision Making & Appreciative Inquiry

A New Approach to Planning for Change

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Planning as Communicative Action

- Emphasis placed on communication in post-modern planning
- Communication—institutional, political & power elite
- Collective sense of meaning is created among participants through shared discourse

7 Types of Participation

1. Token participation
2. Passive Participation
3. Participation by consultation
4. Participation for incentives
5. Functional participation
6. Interactive participation
7. Self-mobilization

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

8. Citizen control
7. Delegated power
6. Partnership
5. Placation
4. Consultation
3. Informing
2. Therapy
1. Manipulation


Policy Inclusiveness & the Status of Relationships

Planner as Consensus Builder

- Mediated negotiation—forging a working agreement among groups
- Consensus—group deliberation
- Face-to-face discussion
- Representative stakeholders
- Everyone is heard & taken seriously
- Shared information available to all
Planner as Consensus Builder

- Informed about each other’s interests
- Agree on facts & create options
- Group develops relevant choice criteria
- Group makes decisions on which they can all agree
- (Usually requires trained facilitator)

Transactive Planning and Collaborative Decision-making

- Small groups
- Face-to-face dialogue
- Mutual learning
- A series of small transactions and compromises will lead to big decisions.
- Mutual understanding & support will result.

Use Positive Approach to Identify Issues & Set Goals

- “NEPA has got it wrong!” (scoping)
- Don’t start by identifying issues first!
  - It focuses on the negative.
  - It polarizes members.
  - It leads to stereotyping other members.
- Do use the “round robin of values.”

The Round-Robin of Values

- Each member silently writes list of what they like or value about the subject of discussion.
- Go around the group, ask each member to present one value from their list – repeat until all values are displayed.

Appreciative Inquiry & Change

- Most change processes are based on problem-solving processes.
- We start by asking “what’s the problem?”
- When we do that, we focus energy on what we want less of and work to “fix” things.
- Appreciative Inquiry is based on a different set of assumptions.
Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

1. You create more effective organizations by focusing on what you want more of, not what you want less of.

2. Whatever you want more of already exists, even if only in small quantities.

3. It’s easier to create change by amplifying the positive qualities of a group or organization than by trying to fix the negative qualities.

4. Through the act of inquiry we create the social realities we are trying to understand.

5. Getting people to inquire together into the best examples of what they want more of creates its own momentum toward creating more positive organizations.

Appreciative Inquiry Steps

- What is your dream?
  - Silently generate your dream for what a perfect future would look like . . .
  - Share your dream . . .
  - What would have to happen to get you to this desired condition?

Next Steps

- Develop criteria to judge options
- Provide constant lines of feedback to constituency groups all along the way
- Discuss alternatives of non-compliance
- Agree among group to monitor the outcomes
- Shared decisions are 100% more likely to be implemented

Key references


Additional sources at: http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org/index.htm