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BUILDING PUBLIC SECTOR CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
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1 Introduction

In Australia, poverty is conceived in relative rather than absolute terms, implying that it is “defined not in terms of a lack of sufficient resources to meet basic needs, but rather lacking the resources needed to be able to participate in the lifestyle and consumption patterns enjoyed by other Australians”.¹ In Australian policy discourse on socio-economic development, being ‘in need’, may be conceptualised in various ways, for example: poverty, determined in relation to an annualised income unit (by household type and size) ‘poverty line’;² spatial profiles of socio-economic disadvantage determined by indexes based on population measures of low-income earners, low educational attainment, high unemployment, rental dwellings, to name a few³; and vulnerable communities characterised by, among other factors, low or negative employment growth, above average growth in rates of unemployment or below-average reduction in rates of unemployment, adverse growth in incomes, greater concentrations in occupations and industries in decline and greater concentrations of low income households.⁴

Generally, metropolitan areas in Australia are continuing to concentrate disadvantage on the fringes and outer suburbs with a disproportionate level of disadvantage found as one travels further from the central business district.⁶ With some of the in-migration to cities stems from the decline in parts of rural and regional Australia,⁷ a significant component of population growth in Australian non-metropolitan areas is due to the in-migration, and retention, of low-income groups.⁸ This latter trend is most likely a result of the movable rent assistance payment and the availability of more affordable housing outside the major metropolitan areas.

1.1 Queensland Profile

Queensland, with a population of 3.65 million⁹, is, demographically, the most decentralised State in Australia, with more than 1.2 million people (around 35% of the population) living outside the State’s south-east corner. The south-east corner is fast becoming a mega metropolitan region, with 1% of the State’s land area housing two-thirds of the population. Population growth in Queensland will see it become the second most populous state after New South Wales by 2030, with the majority of the population concentrated in this south-east

² Ibid.
⁴ QCOSS and Social Action Office (1999), People and places a profile of growing disadvantage in Queensland. Queensland: QCOSS.
⁶ Ibid.
¹⁹ Department of Local Government and Planning (2002), Queensland POPULATION update 2, Demographic Trends Based on the 2001 Census, Queensland: Department of Local Government and Planning.
corner. Added to this growth, the topography of parts of the south-east resembles Los Angeles, presenting particular problems for the future in a car-dominated society.

The less densely populated rural area of Queensland has a strong industry sector, particularly through primary industries, mining, tourism and supporting service industries, which contribute significantly to the State’s economy. These rural based industries generate approximately 80% of Queensland’s export dollars and approximately 45% of all jobs in the State are directly dependent on these segments of the economy.

The most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in Queensland have been identified by the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) using an index based on a number of variables recognised as contributing to social disadvantage. These groups include sole parents, young single people and aged single people, with the most socio-economically disadvantaged localities including the majority of indigenous communities, mostly in rural/remote localities, and some metropolitan and regional urban localities.\(^\text{10}\)

### 1.2 Government responses

As with all other countries, determining the policy interventions most able to address the aetiology of socio-economic disadvantage in Australia is best done by working across a number of structural, social, cultural and individual fronts. For example, at a Queensland level, a number of the government's policy frameworks require state departments to consider the differential impacts of proposed programs on various communities of interest. For example, Regulatory Impact Statements are required to identify direct/indirect economic, social and environmental costs and benefits on communities of proposed legislation. Proposed substantive policy is required to include Rural/Regional Impact Statements, employment impact statements and address other social policy components such as Indigenous peoples’ policy and women’s policy when framing proposals.

While the requirement for impact statements across whole of government mandates attention to conditions surrounding socio-economic disadvantage, of greater significance to the alleviation of such conditions is the shift in the focus of governments from the narrower program-centred outputs to an outcomes orientation.\(^\text{11}\) In principle, an outcomes focus aims to align the provision of public service with identified need and helps position Government as enabler and partner of communities, focusing on whole and sustainable community outcomes.

Complementing the focus on outcomes, as is happening in Queensland, is an increasing trend in Australia and other countries to provide a greater role for citizens in policy making and service delivery and devolving policy implementation to local-level government-community partnerships. The espoused benefits of community

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\(^{10}\) QCOSS and Social Action Office (1999), *People and places a profile of growing disadvantage in Queensland*. Queensland: QCOSS.

engagement for governments include greater policy reach, legitimacy of decisions secured through participative decision-making, networking knowledge for more robust problem-solving, alignment of resources with needs, to name a few. For communities, the benefits include opportunities to influence government decision-making, a government that is more aware of and responsive to community needs and, thus, better targeted policy, and a transparent government.

However, the focus on outcomes and the achievement of an alignment of public service provision with need turns on the effectiveness of the means for expressing those needs. Of particular interest to policy makers is the notion of social exclusion, or “the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life”\(^\text{12}\) through lack of opportunity or access. Governments across Australia are aware that some groups in society have greater difficulty in participating in the policy process than others and may be more disempowered, for example, indigenous people and people living in socially disadvantaged, remote or rural communities.

Recognition by the Queensland Government of the social exclusion experienced by some groups in Queensland, and the desire to remove the barriers to inclusion, has led to the development of four key social justice principles that underpin the activities of all government agencies:

a) Rights – the state has a role to protect and advance individual rights and educate individuals about their social obligations;

b) Equity – groups and individuals with an interest in a policy topic or administrative decision should be identified and their ability to participate fully advanced;

c) Participation – opportunity to participate fully in society, including in government decision making, is an important part of social justice; and

d) Access – individuals should be given every opportunity to access social services.

2 Government community engagement: A Queensland agenda for inclusive government

In 1993, the Queensland Office of Cabinet released a consultation resource document for whole of government, which stated that consultation is one strategy for achieving in practice the social justice principles of rights, equity, participation and access.\(^\text{13}\) The concept of social justice continues to describe the current Government’s approach to community involvement. At a state level, the Queensland Government has


\(^{13}\) Office of the Cabinet, Queensland (1993), Consultation: A Resource Document for the Queensland Public Sector.
developed five priorities for Queensland that have been endorsed by cabinet and to which all agencies must clearly demonstrate that they contribute to. One of these is *Community Engagement and a Better Quality of Life*, the vision of which is to bring government and community together to enhance decision-making that ensures tangible benefits for Queensland’s many communities, promotes diversity and creates equality of opportunity.¹⁴

The Queensland Government has provided an *institutional basis* for engagement and the principles of social justice through the following:

- **A vision** of “involved communities – engaged government” that sees government and community learning and working together to achieve better policy making, solutions for a sustainable future, enhanced trust in government and active citizenship;
- **A concept** of engagement that refers to the “arrangements for citizens and communities to participate in the processes used to make good policy and to deliver on programs and services. Making the engagement mutual means finding new ways for communities to have a working dialogue with government”;¹⁵ and
- **A set of principles** for engagement that include: Inclusiveness or connecting with those who are hardest to reach; Reaching out, that is, changing the ways government and community work together for the better; Mutual respect through listening, understanding and acting on experiences different from one’s own; Integrity in the democratic processes of government achieved through engagement; and Affirming diversity so that the processes of government incorporate diverse values and interest.

Along with an institutional basis for engagement has been the development of a legislatively-based Charter of Social and Fiscal Responsibility, which outlines the government’s commitments to communities through whole of government outcomes. A Managing for Outcomes (MFO) framework supports this commitment and is the centrepiece in a raft of governance components in Queensland. MFO is intended to provide an organisational and accountability framework for public management. Within the framework, community outcomes are considered “to focus effort across the public sector in delivering services and appropriate results”. Just as government-community engagement gives effect to that focus, so too does cross agency collaboration enable government to manage the complexity of an outcome focus. As Tony Blair coins ‘joined-up problems need joined-up solutions’ and ‘holistic governance’.¹⁶ Cross-agency collaboration is a management imperative as problems are not confined to any one agency and solutions involve more than one traditional sector of government activity. As a result, there is a greater need to find new and more horizontal ways of studying

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¹⁴ Department of the Premier and Cabinet (2001), *Community Engagement Division Directions Statement.*
¹⁵ Ibid.
problems and finding solutions. Thus, community engagement and cross-agency collaboration enable public managers to manage ‘networks’ of knowledge that need to be amassed and applied to the complex field of problem solving around policy and service delivery.

I would argue that the engagement agenda (as mirrored in an engaged governance framework and pursued through practice) equates to a change agenda that could be described as a reorientation, that is, a fundamental redefinition of the way government undertakes policy management for outcomes. It is a change process that has an institutional basis (identity, vision, values) and implications for institutional and organisational frameworks for behaviour (structures, systems, processes, skills etc).

3 Capacity building for community engagement

Capacity building is a means to an end and refers to the ability to achieve specific development goals and objectives. Objectives need to be specified clearly before (a) interventions to build the necessary capacity can be determined and (b) the impact of capacity building interventions can be assessed.

The Queensland Government has spelled out its vision and principles for community engagement and identified a number of ways in which it expects departments to seek to innovate. Combined with these ‘process’ goals, the Government has also established Community Engagement and a Better Quality of Life as one of the five outcomes against which departments and Government must report its performance. In this latter respect, the Government has established Community Engagement as an instrumental goal, that is, an end to be achieved.

However, a recent survey by the Premier’s Community Engagement Division indicates that there are some ‘areas’ in the public sector “unfamiliar with or uncertain about the Government’s commitments and expectations in relations to community engagement”. While policy statements are important, they only become levers for behaviour when linked to an institutional basis for values and behaviour and an institutional framework that requires, supports and reinforces new ways of behaving. In effect, public managers will value community engagement as a preferred managerial strategy to the extent that they accept the core business of government is to achieve community outcomes, departmental objectives are a means to that end and certain principles of governance (such as inclusiveness) must be safeguarded. Unless community engagement capacity building programs address these institutional and organisational systems in the broadest sense, they

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19 Community Engagement Division (2002), draft report Improving Community Engagement across the Queensland Public Sector, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.
have little potential to develop, I would argue, the complex understanding that is necessary for managing the changing relationships between government and civil society.

In response to the ‘unevenness’ in understanding and pursuit of engagement practice across the public sector, Queensland Government is embarking on an institution-wide capacity building program to ensure the public sector has the knowledge, skills, policy environment, systems and processes to ensure facilitation of its vision and principles in action. While it is early days yet for this whole of government program, much can be learned from organisations that have already trodden the capacity building path and can be regarded as leaders in community engagement practice. The effectiveness of the roll-out of the whole of government improvement strategy may actually be enhanced by the stage of development already reached in individual departments. Any evaluation of the effectiveness of the whole of government strategy would require a sense of where individual departments are at now. Examination of one such department, that has invested considerable resources over the years in engagement capacity building, is a step in providing a benchmark for measuring development increments and input into other department’s change programs.

4 A case study in engagement capacity building: Queensland’s Department of Main Roads

The Transport Portfolio in Queensland includes oversight of land, sea and air transport and is currently managed by a number of agencies in collaboration, namely, Queensland Transport supported by Queensland Rail and Port Authorities, and the Department of Main Roads. In providing for transport infrastructure, the portfolio works in partnership with 125 local government bodies. While Queensland Transport has responsibility for “developing and ensuring the implementation of a strategic transport policy agenda, transport planning and stewardship of the entire transport system in Queensland”, Main Roads is responsible for the stewardship of the state-controlled road system, the corridors that comprise this system, the system’s operation and the delivery of projects for enhancement and maintenance.”\(^\text{20}\) This section focuses primarily on the Department of Main Roads and its engagement capacity building efforts.

There are around 177,000 kilometres of roads in Queensland. The state has a more dispersed road network at 19.8 persons/km than the Australian average of 23.6 persons/km. Of interest, the state-controlled road network, for which Main Roads has responsibility, consists of more than 34,000 kilometres of road network and includes national highways. It constitutes 20% of the state’s network, but carries 80% of the State’s traffic. The state-controlled road network has a replacement value of Aus$25billion.\(^\text{21}\) The remaining 144,000 kilometres fall under local government control. Roads as well as rail have always connected settlements in Queensland which, in turn, have tended to occur around traditional industry bases such as cattle farming,

\(^{20}\) Queensland Government, Department of Main Roads (2002), Roads Connecting Queenslanders, (p. 9).
\(^{21}\) Ibid. (p. 9).
agriculture (food and fibre) and mining in the rural and remote areas of the state and manufacturing in the more urbanised, densely populated south-east corner of the state.

The south-east corner of the state is Australia’s fastest growing region and is centred on Brisbane, which is the country’s fastest growing capital city with 9% growth registered between 1996-2001. The exploding population base in the south-east corner presents particular challenges for the Transport Portfolio in planning and enhancing road and rail corridors, given a legacy of many decades of unplanned growth and development patterns by local governments leading to poor integration between transport and land use planning. In the metropolitan and larger regional centres, the portfolio agencies often find themselves constrained by existing transport corridors sandwiched in settlement patterns. Planning for transport often involves retrofitting existing constrained transport options with solutions for managing the current system network demands. Added to this challenge is new urban development on the rural/urban fringe that requires supporting infrastructure, high private vehicle ownership due to restricted travel options and lifestyle choices, and involves people travelling long distances in a geographically vast state.

It would be fair to say that, historically, the provision of roads infrastructure has focused on supporting regional and rural communities, the state’s geographically dispersed industries and the burgeoning population in the south-east corner. In rural and regional areas, transport infrastructure is generally regarded as a key factor in supporting social and economic development.22

4.1 The changing nature of the transport task

Similar to governments in many other countries, the Queensland Government recognises the need to address triple bottom line (social, economic and environmental issues) and deliver outcomes for communities in the long term. In a transport context, changes to relevant legislation indicate the shifts in how the core business of road planning and delivery now need to account for external (that is, community and community organisations’) input. The Transport Infrastructure Act (1994) and the Integrated Planning Act (1997) both mandate consultation as a critical element in planning activities.

Traditionally, the department has worked primarily with local governments and representative groups (mainly industry and peak community service organisations) to address the needs of stakeholders and communities of interest. However, these patterns of engagement have been challenged over the past two decades as communities react to more roads being built or upgraded to meet population growth and economic development goals only. Concerns have been voiced around diminished quality of life, public health issues, loss of property and property value and the environmental impacts of roads.

In addressing issues of equity and socio-economic disadvantage, Main Roads pays many small rural and isolated communities special attention to ensure fair treatment and reasonable access to roads and other transport services for people. The large majority of the state’s Indigenous population is concentrated in the very remote north, which is subject to high rainfalls for long periods of time and impassable roads. In many of these areas, as in other remote areas of the state, the road network is the only way to link people to essential community services, as well as social, cultural and recreational facilities.

Disadvantaged communities, as characterised by high levels of unemployed people with relatively low skills, are found in many parts of regional and urban Queensland. Road projects, particularly labour intensive maintenance works, are often targeted to such areas, particularly in indigenous communities, to provide local people with meaningful work and training to raise skill levels. In addition, Main Roads continues to support small rural and isolated local councils through the granting of sole invitee status. This arrangement ensures that local governments continue to undertake road works and are guaranteed road maintenance works, provided that performance and productivity targets are met. One of the flow-on effects of continuing work for these councils is the maintenance of a workforce which, however small, has significant social and economic infrastructure impacts in small rural/remote communities.

The Queensland Government’s agenda continues to change to be more responsive to community attitudes and shifts and in recognition of diverse stakeholder interests and the call for transparency and transparency. Main Roads recently released its overarching policy framework, Roads Connecting Queenslanders, for the next 25 years. The document pays significant attention to the department’s contribution to the Government’s social policy agenda and includes “fair access and amenity to support livable communities” as one of its primary outcomes to contribute to the Government’s priorities. It is a document that seeks to connect social and economic policy within an infrastructure context and relies on integrated land use and transport planning and service delivery.

The following discussion is centred on the years since 1990, since the time the portfolio embarked on its first formal and planned community engagement process. This process related to planning for capacity upgrades and road safety improvements on a large-scale urban corridor in Brisbane. The project was particularly sensitive due to the concentration of residential settlement along the corridor and a substantial community resistance to any capacity upgrades.

4.2 The learning journey

From a meta-perspective, Main Roads journey in engagement capacity building could be described as a substantive, not always integrated but always forward-looking, action learning programme. In fact, it is the learning by doing, almost ‘feet first’ approach, that is the defining characteristic of the department’s capacity building journey. Through various interventions at the level of policy, systems, processes and individual skills,
the department has created what is, arguably, a critical level of individual and organisational capacity to work innovatively with diverse communities and collaboratively with other agencies on complex, multifaceted problems.

While each capacity building initiative may not have been individually evaluated, there are a range of formal and informal reviews, undertaken both in-house and through external consultancies, that can provide some level of comment on the department’s engagement performance. Some of this information has been intentionally incorporated by the department into the steady stream of capacity building initiatives and ongoing refinement of existing systems and processes. The following discussion presents an overview of some of the department’s key capacity building activities but is by no means a definitive survey.

4.2.1 1990-1995 – Managing external pressures and first order change

Main Roads initial foray into formally planned engagement exercises was driven, arguably, by concerns to address issues around risk (political and financial) management on highly sensitive urban transport planning projects. There was a recognition by the department that the 1970s and 1980s produced a ‘maturing’ of community and the emergence of many action groups with a vigilant interest in infrastructure planning and general amenity issues. Notwithstanding the primacy of risk management concerns, the objectives of engagement were to achieve as broad a community involvement as possible in the decision-making process. However, the extent to which risk management concerns weighed more heavily for staff than did process quality would certainly affect the enactment of the ‘values’ of engagement.

4.2.1.1 Capacity building activities and innovations

Early capacity building interventions were focused primarily on structural (i.e. mechanism for engagement) and behavioural (e.g. training) subsystems of the organisation. For example:

- Trial of the *Local Area Community Consultation* model\(^{23}\) that included the constitution of (a) a community representative group to act as conduit between the department and the broader communities of interest and (b) a Strategic Liaison Committee, whose members consisted of nongovernment ‘experts’ from a range of disciplinary fields, to provide both the department and the community representative group with a more ‘global’ perspective.

- A series of *Effective Community Consultation* training workshops (1992-1993) targeting small groups of executives and senior managers (approximately 50 in total) within the portfolio. This audience was targeted primarily to seed an organisational culture change that would see decision-makers as accepting of new ways of doing business and providing the championing needed to take the change forward. The

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three-day program focused on providing participants with a strategic, business and managerial context for incorporating engagement activities into the road planning, design and construction process.

- In 1993, the portfolio released its first Community Consultation policy framework that included, among other elements: a set of principles that would guide its interactions with communities of interest; a list of methods for interacting with communities; a list of relevant target groups to be consulted; and an outline of the community’s right of access to government documents and decision-making processes. Of interest, this policy document preceded the release of central agency’s whole of government policy resource document.

4.2.1.2 Reviews/evaluations and next steps

Unfortunately, no formal evaluation of the senior management training program was undertaken. However, indirect reflections on management performance could be derived from some of the process evaluations and case study reviews commissioned by the department during this period, and undertaken by the author. For example:

- A series of process evaluations of the department’s consultation performance on four very sensitive, metropolitan road planning projects. Issues of interest included opportunities for participation and exchange of views, quality of information provided, clarity of roles and purpose, transparency of decision-making processes, and cost effectiveness of consultation methods including the consultation model being trialed, to name a few.

- A process evaluation of the role of the Strategic Liaison Committee.

A fair assessment would be that staff learned through hard experience that working with communities could be resource (time and financially) intensive and conflictual and that communities are characterised by both activists and silent majorities and that the opinions of the latter should never be assumed. These early large-scale engagement exercises occurred at a time when communities were angry at, and suspicious of, the portfolio’s intentions and in, some cases, were deeply divided along lines of interest such as conservation versus ‘technical progress’ (as a survey of newspaper clippings at the time would attest). It is worth noting that, in the 1995 state government elections, the incumbent Government was considered to have lost the election through loss of four seats along a road corridor through Brisbane’s and south-east Queensland suburbs that was the subject of a contentious planning process during the early 1990s.

Experience from a number of these large scale, controversial corridor planning and enhancement studies indicated to the department that engagement did not always ensure decision stability, which was increasingly

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being regarded as an elusive goal. Communities did not always agree with ‘technically superior’ decisions, which some staff members viewed as a ‘win-lose’ situation for the department. The general consensus among many operational staff involved in these exercises was that engagement was an ‘unnecessary over-complication’ of a transport decision-making process. It would be fair to say that many staff did not embrace the ‘values or logic’ of engagement, continuing to subscribe to traditional public management values supporting the primacy of government expertise, control over decision making and efficiency.26

Staff were experiencing a tension between what they recognised as a move towards a consultation mandate, a growing expectation within the community and community service organisations to be consulted and frustration that they did not have the required skills to manage these expectations or the process itself. It is worth noting that the management training programs conducted during this period, occurred either during or after the first couple of controversial large-scale planning projects had been initiated, which did not allow for the lag time generally needed for learning to have an effect. What is significant is that a number of these early workshop participants are now in key leadership positions within the organisation and driving strategic innovations generally and engagement in particular. Thus, while the full effects of the training program and its intent would not necessarily impact on performance at the time, they may be having their greatest impact currently.

The effects of the capacity building interventions during this period can be likened to first order change, in that, staff were attempting to apply a policy direction and training without altering (or being required to alter) their understandings of the problem. Transport problems were cast as road solutions whereas many ‘activist’ community members at the time were advocating demand management solutions or solutions that combined social, environmental and transport outcomes.

Thus, to that point, one of the critical conditions for change was not in place, that is, a perceived deficiency in existing ways of solving problems. Thus, resistance to mandates to change the rules of how a problem was to be approached were not countered by positive experiences that demonstrated engagement was a better way to approach the problem. The lack of a values base on the ground and no demonstrable business rationale for engagement activities was compounded by a lack of process skills and contributed to this less than positive experience. If anything, engagement was generally seen as creating unnecessary risk to a ‘tried and tested’ departmental process for solving problems and a resource hungry, often political, risk at that.

A review undertaken by the department in 1994 established high staff awareness levels of the policy exhorting engagement but a general lack of understanding of the who, what when and why of consultation.27 This feedback became a catalyst for the portfolio embarking in late 1994 through 1995 on a redevelopment of its

27 Ibid.
policy framework and a brief to the author to develop a consultation guide for “how to do consultation”. The brief also required the author to undertake a review of a number of projects involving consultation with a view to developing a consultation case studies database as a tool to support staff in planning and managing consultation processes. Staff were looking for process skills and systems (aka recipes) for planning and managing engagement, which would provide them with certainty that was then eluding them in their experience of an extremely uncertain field.

4.2.2 1996-2002 – Understanding and getting it ‘right’ and second order change.

This period saw an interesting transition in capacity. Many of the initial efforts during this period focused on ‘packaged solutions where knowledge is information’ and valued to the extent that it facilitated control, productivity, efficiency, hierarchy. However, by the end of the 1990s, some of the department’s efforts were more akin to seeking ‘tailored solutions where knowledge is about understanding’ and valued to the extent that it facilitates quality, listening, congruence and corporate stewardship. This orientation is said to describe the learning organization. This transition between the two stages of development could be described as capacity building that brought about second order change. Capacity had enabled staff and the organisation to modify the prevailing approach to the problem/solutions and involved a change in how a situation could be framed.

For example, roads could be viewed as facilitating economic development, quality of life aspirations and amenity and environmental values and an employment problem could be understood as a transport issue.

4.2.2.1 Capacity building efforts and innovations

This period saw something akin to an explosion of capacity building activity to bring the department not just up to speed with the engagement task but to be a leader among government agencies. Initial thinking was that engagement risks could be managed through better systems and interventions focused on a range of organisational subsystems including structural (e.g. compliance with standards), technological (e.g. requirement to use consultation planning protocols) and behavioural (e.g. skills, recognition) subsystems. The transition in capacity building focus noted above can be observed when the department embarked on a number of initiatives that explored more deeply its role as an infrastructure provider vis-à-vis delivery on broader community outcomes. Examples of capacity building efforts during this period include:

- The launch of the Public Consultation Policy framework accompanied by a suite of consultation guidelines and standards, and consultation planning tools, the latter also web based.

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29 Ibid.
• In house publication of the existing Case Studies Review Project and expansion of the number of case studies to 16 cases and inclusion of the reviews on the web as a support tool for staff in planning consultations.

• A raft of place-based Community Profiles and associated Stakeholder Information Directory to assist staff to identify the broad range of stakeholders in their jurisdiction, their demographic characteristics and potential communication and participation needs. For example, these profiles contain population and trend statistics related to age, sex ethnicity, language, education, income, labour force, industry, family and household type, motor vehicle ownership, building approvals, to name a few.

• A two-day Public Consultation Training course to address the micro-skills many of the operational staff had been seeking. Content was related to, among other things, stakeholder analysis, methods for engagement, basic social science research methods and conflict resolution. From 1997-1998, over 352 staff members, predominantly from Main Roads, completed the course. The training program was voluntary, funded through local business units, targeted operational staff, marketed internally and linked to a public sector training program, which provided for accreditation. The latter was expected to have incentive value for staff who may wish to articulate the course with other professional studies.

• Two tiers of Leadership Courses, a whole of government course for executives and senior managers and a departmental course for operational and mid-management staff. Both courses focus on managing behavioural and cultural change and developing relational skills, among other things, and employ action learning processes.

While the following initiatives were not directly aimed at capacity building, they represent significant exploratory efforts by the department to increase its collective understanding of community needs and better align its practice and outputs.

• 4seeable Futures Project\textsuperscript{31}, which aimed to explore the range of potential future contexts for transport in Queensland and display these in the form of scenarios extending to the year 2025. In principle, the project would build staff capacity to appreciate the complexity of issues to be considered by them and their stakeholders and communities of interest. Through these scenarios, various options for the transport task could be explored and infrastructure built that best accommodates the possibility of a number of future scenarios that can enhance the state’s standard of living and, by implication, economic strength and competitiveness into the next 20 years.

\textsuperscript{31} 4seeable Futures. Transport Portfolio Scenario-Based Planning for the Queensland Department of Transport and Queensland Department of Main Roads 2000-2025.
• In the context of the Government's policy priority of reducing unemployment, the portfolio undertook to explore its social obligations through the Roads and Transport Employment Project (RTEP). The project aim was to "increase the contribution that Main Roads and Queensland Transport can make to closing the unemployment gap and delivering the Government's employment targets". 32 An output from the project was the development of two labour market analytic tools for use in government-community dialogue around the evaluation of potential social benefits of different project scenarios.

• Knowledge gained through the RTEP project was taken the next step and applied in the 12 Families Project (2001). Through this project, the portfolio could examine at a very local level the relationship between transport infrastructure and employment outcomes. The project was nested within a whole of government place-based community renewal program in an identified socially disadvantaged area. The 12 Families Project pursued a community development approach, a first for the department, to investigate the relationship between infrastructure solutions and employment outcomes.

• The Remote Communities Services Unit, based in the far north of the State, expanded its activities to include training in road maintenance and construction skills for Aboriginal and Islander communities. The training aims to increase local communities’ self-sufficiency in maintaining infrastructure, improves residents’ employment prospects and provides a local source of skilled labour for future transport infrastructure projects. Other parts of the state are pursuing similar strategies. For example, works by the department in central west Queensland, in collaboration with agency partners, resulted in the protection of a significant indigenous cultural heritage site, created training opportunities for indigenous people and developed a long term tourist attraction for the area. In effect, the roads investment created primary employment during construction, secondary employment in the tourism industry for the local area and tertiary employment as other providers in the region began to support the increased economic activity generated by the project. 33

4.2.2.2 Reviews/evaluation and next steps

➢ Evaluation of the Public Consultation Training course was undertaken in an indirect way by reference to level of compliance with the use of specific consultation tools by those who participated in the training program (e.g. the Public Consultation Planner, Public Consultation Checklist and Public Consultation/Communication Plan). In general, findings indicated staff did not find the tools useful in their current form although found their intent acceptable. A number of staff indicated that tools had been modified at the local level to suit local needs.

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To assess the long-term impacts of the training, it was intended that competency checks would be undertaken at a follow up point some months later when staff had completed the accreditation component of the course. However, contrary to expectations, staff were not generally interested in pursuing the accreditation option and thus impact evaluations are not available. Also worthy of note is that not all staff members want to participate in training or, for that matter, be involved in engagement processes as might be indicated by the relative staff numbers enrolling in the course. The department has always taken the view that, while all staff are not suited to be directly involved in engagement with communities of interest, it is incumbent upon all staff to understand the role and function of engagement in the department's activities.

➢ To the author’s knowledge, no strategy to promote the Case Studies Data Base as a learning tool has occurred and no evaluation of their utility has been undertaken.

➢ Short-cycle evaluation of the 12 Families Project and indeed experience from the Remote Area Services Unit indicate substantial fine-grained learning for those associated with the projects in terms of understanding of community dynamics and characteristics, the dynamics of socio-economic disadvantage and the complex and the complex integrated solutions required to address disadvantage. While results appear promising in the short term, longer term monitoring of impacts will provide the necessary comment on the capacity of the department to engage with such projects.

➢ The Project Tracking Database initiative was intended to ultimately link to the Case Studies Data Base and provide a benchmark of resource implications of various scale engagement processes and their outcomes. However, staff were either unable to provide accurate estimates of resources invested in engagement processes, the boundaries of which are inordinately difficult to separate from other project activities, or they were reticent to provide central office with estimates of their expenditure on such exercises. The project, to the author’s knowledge, has not progressed in any substantive way.

➢ The aim of the Stakeholder relationship surveys, initiated about three years ago and undertaken quarterly, is to provide the department with the capacity to improve its corporate image and understand community expectations of its performance. Survey items include questions around community awareness of, positivity towards and confidence in the department’s engagement processes and community ratings of ratings of road amenity and safety, focus of departmental works, environmental impact of works, mobility of people and goods, overall satisfaction with the road system and departmental performance. Responses are available for sectors (e.g. residents, businesses and stakeholders that is community and private sector peak bodies) and across the department’s District and Regional levels. While the surveys are meeting their intended purpose, it is not clear how the department will use the data to inform its capacity building programs.
The Current-Future State Assessment is intended to provide a situational analysis of the department’s strengths and areas for improvement in its engagement activities and chart ‘where it wants to go’ and ‘how to get there’. The author has been involved with the department in defining the Future State. The project is ongoing and intended to provide a people and skills audit and strategic direction for the department.

This period can be characterised as involving significant amount of knowledge generation across various fronts in the department. The many sources of feedback from a vast array of communities of interest across a range of projects would indicate the department’s capacity for effective engagement is positive and incremental.

Much of the capacity building activity that occurred during this phase could be said to have laid the foundations for the complex understanding that is now required by government departments to engage with diverse communities of interest around highly integrated issues. It is clear the department has made this transformation, at least strategically, as evidenced by the newly released Roads Connecting Queenslanders policy framework, which sets the department’s strategic agenda and infrastructure provision within a broader whole of government social agenda.

The challenges for the next stage of engagement capacity building are to: determine the ‘evenness’ of staff members’ understanding, knowledge and skills of the intent of this strategic document, its implications for engagement practice and departmental performance; develop sustainable evaluation frameworks that are capable of tracing pathways between capacity building efforts and key performance indicators in the short and longer term; and to align the department’s capacity building efforts with the broader government agenda, such as the Community Engagement Division’s whole of government improvement strategy and performance reporting framework development by Treasury for managing for outcomes.

4.2.3 2003….Repositioning and third order change?

As the full impact of integrated planning and service delivery is realised, the department’s current and planned capacity building efforts could be described as seeking “Partnering cooperation where knowledge is regarded as wisdom” and valued to the extent that it facilitates sustainability, collaboration, accountability and ethics, synergy and interdependence. This orientation describes a collaborative partnering organisation. Third order changes give organisational members the capacity to change their understanding of the situation and think about the organisation in a totally new way, with a strong focus on outcomes, process and relationship building, accountability and community development. The big challenge for the department is in ‘networking’

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its technical expertise with that of other portfolios and community knowledge to deliver on social outcomes as much as economic and environmental outcomes.

While a number of capacity building initiatives are currently under review both within the department and across government (e.g. engagement training programs), other capacity building assessments are underway (e.g. Current State – Future State). One large-scale capacity building project, in which the department is involved, is worth noting as follows:

- The Engaged Government Project is an upcoming demonstration project to be undertaken over three sites as a collaboration between the departments of Main Roads, Natural Resources and Mines and Primary Industries and the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc, the peak body for the Local Governments. The project aims to implement, and monitor and evaluate the impacts of, a number of institutional and organisational reforms aimed at enhancing greater agency collaboration in engagement around regional outcomes. The program of reform has been developed on the basis of action research commissioned by the partner agencies and undertaken by the author and benchmarked with findings from other jurisdictions, nationally and internationally. The demonstration site will provide valuable capacity building experiences as well as outputs related to an assessment of: the conditions under which collaboration (government and community) enhances policy management for outcomes, the costs, benefits and trade-offs associated with collaboration; the capacities required by government and community in regional partnerships; and how monitoring and evaluation frameworks can serve as “learning” tools and programs for those sectors involved. The project has been linked strategically to the whole of government community engagement improvement strategy so that its findings will be disseminated as broadly as possible throughout government.

5 Final comments

It is worth identifying some of the conditions that in the author’s view provided the external and organisational conditions necessary for the capacity building efforts of Main Roads to have taken hold, be sustained and actually contribute, in large part, to the strategic transformation the department is currently undertaking to better align with Government priorities and deliver on community outcomes. Some of these conditions include:

- The department’s capacity to read the external environment, that is, signs of a ‘maturing’ society which is seeking to engage with government and is concerned with governance and a sufficient level of openness within the leadership across the years to respond constructively;

- The stimulus provided by a Government that is committed to the ethos and values of ‘engaged government’ and is supporting that commitment with resources in the form of a Community...
Engagement Division within Premier’s, a performance reporting framework across government to facilitate the achievement of its vision and a whole of government engagement improvement strategy;

- Within the department, a business unit with responsibility for driving the engagement policy agenda;

- A professional (e.g. predominantly engineering) culture that strives to improve systems that align with the problem solving task;

- A critical number of ‘early adopters’ and ‘champions’ distributed throughout the organisation and a sustained attention to developing leadership capacity across the organisation;

- A strongly decentralised organisation that has existing close working relationships with local communities that can serve as a solid foundation for new ways of working together;

- Throughout most of the development of the capacity building initiatives, the use of staff reference groups and the conduct of field consultations with both government and community aimed at achieving shared ‘ownership’ of the engagement agenda; and

- A ‘learning’ culture that is sufficiently willing to innovate and ‘start afresh’ cultivated no doubt through a decade of major change processes involving organisational restructuring and down-sizing and the commitment by the previous and incumbent Director’s-General to internal change programs to keep the department remains ‘focused’ and ‘learning’.

By good fortune or planning, some of the above conditions are comparable to those conditions recommended for dealing with resistance to change. However, the journey has not been without periods of frustration, stagnation and cynicism. Some of the impediments experienced during capacity building activities include:

- Prevailing pockets of ‘traditional’ public management values and ways of working that regard government as expert and community as risk;

- Pockets of the ‘still to be convinced’ who adopt a ‘wait and see what the next fad is’ attitude;

- Lack of sustained strategic dialogue across the organisation on: the values underpinning ‘engaged government’; the implications of a managing for outcomes orientation for public management strategies; and the shape and nature of innovation in government-community engagement that is possible for an infrastructure provider;

- The readiness to explain unwillingness/failure to engage in terms of lack of guidance or a failure to be provided with ‘tools’ but, when offered, very little take up of learning supports, learning opportunities and engagement tools;
The lack of appropriate, user-friendly, supportive systems for monitoring and evaluating engagement efforts such that the task is not onerous and threatening and the results are able to be shared; and

A less than systematic and programmatic approach to capturing the knowledge from the capacity building activities across the various organisational subsystems in such a way that it can (a) be transformed into widely shared and recognised organisational capability, (b) provide benchmarks for the organisation’s learning journey and (c) inform diagnoses of new directions.

5.1.1 A comment on training programs

A parting comment on training programs is felt necessary given training figures so commonly in capacity building programs as distinct from, say, action learning on ‘real time’ projects. Training programs tend to present engagement as a package of disassembled micro-skills that are generic in nature and amenable to competency-based training approaches. However, many engagement tasks require complex processes that are not easily translatable into discrete competencies and able to be rendered into standard training formats. The skills to undertake these complex processes include meta-level skills such as: systems thinking, strategic management; the ability to integrate qualitatively different data sets; the experience and knowledge to assess costs, benefits, and trade-offs involved in community engagement; a deep understanding of community dynamics and how communities learn; and ability to match managerial style to engagement strategy. Many of these skills and associated knowledge can only be developed on the ground following robust, action learning processes.

Further, many training programs tend to be supply-side driven and based on very little systematic conceptualisation and empirical research developed in the field. Capacity building needs a context through reference to values, goals, the business task at hand and demonstrable business rationales. Few training programs actually address the multi-functional nature of engagement across the stages of the policy cycle and the developmental nature of engagement in an enduring local/regional governance system. While the training programs employed by Main Roads to date have been developed in response to accumulating feedback from the field, the Engaged Government project mentioned earlier will be a substantive first in Queensland to systematically ground the development of capacities in a demonstration site context.