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Hack:
The Deliberative Corporation

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Summary

The Deliberative Corporation is a technology-supported process for sustainable decision-making. It allows any organization or governing group to consult its population. The process builds trust and knowledge so that the implementers can find out what the people would think if they were thinking. It builds political capital and informed consent so leaders can make the right decision even when this involves significant complexity and difficult tradeoffs.

This process integrates a proven methodology for obtaining representative, informed opinions from a scientific sample with a patented technology that empowers an entire population offer their views. We call this combination of techniques the Deliberative Corporation process.

This process can enhance decision-making for almost any group, including global multi-national companies -- geographically dispersed and multi-lingual -- as well as companies with more regionally concentrated workforces. It works even when there are deeply divided cultures, and challenges for which the group has not thought through the complexities before the process begins. Because considered judgments of populations are more likely to be sustained than top-of-the-head opinion, the process can create a deeper form of stakeholder buy-in. It allows resilient solutions to be identified, accepted and sustained over time. It can engage the collective intelligence of the workers or the clients of a corporation and provide decision makers with a data driven basis for choices that might otherwise be dominated by anecdotes and impressions.

Deliberation creates "political capital" and is the basis for making decisions that can be successfully implemented with the support of those who are affected by them. When leaders can show that what stakeholders think under good conditions, this can create legitimacy for a decision and political cover to do the right thing. This can apply equally for leaders of companies, governments and unions.

Moonshot(s)

- Make direction-setting bottom-up and outside-in
- Embed the ethos of community and citizenship
- Reinvent the means of control

Problem

There are many reasons why a corporation might need to consult a population -- whether its employees, its customers, its clients, or some other stakeholder group. It might need to draw on the collective intelligence of that population, or it might need to get their informed buy-in for implementing difficult choices. Or it might need to engage a community about effects of some of its policies. In all these cases, there are a number of impediments to getting feedback that is accurate and actionable.

 * Self-selection is unrepresentative.

 * Self-guided learning is biased.

 * Crowd-sourcing and open forums can be overrun with highly mobilized special interests.

* Top of the head opinion is uninformed on most policy issues.

* Pressures for consensus lead to false consensus.

* Informal feedback channels are skewed.

* Even when leaders know what to do, forcing consensus backfires.

However, the Deliberative Corporation process outlined here surmounts all the familiar impediments to meaningful consultation. Most importantly it provides representative data about informed opinion while also giving all members of the relevant population an opportunity for substantive involvement. We believe this combination to be unique. It can provide informed buy-in from a population facilitating decisions that are perceived to be more legitimate and sustainable.

Solution

Issue	Solution
1. When people are surveyed on a specific topic with conventional polls, they're willing to give an answer regardless of whether or not they know anything about the topic or actually have an opinion. Respondents rarely like to admit that they don't know. Hence the notorious survey by George Bishop and colleagues about the Public Affairs Act of 1975. 44% of Americans said they were either for it or against it even though this Act was fictional. Of course many polls represent actual opinions but they may be very much top of the head opinion, based on little more than a casual impression of sound bites or headlines. It is easy for managers to invoke survey results in making decisions, but they must be wary of non attitudes, phantom opinions or responses about complex subjects based on little thought or information.	1. Create a deliberative process that includes the ability for participants to learn about opposing viewpoints and adjust their opinions accordingly. Measure these changes and effects.
2. If managers use informal feedback channels to get information, they are typically receiving feedback disproportionate to the actual affected population, skewed by their social network and trusted relationships.	2. Use scientific random sampling to ensure that all points of view are represented
3. When individuals are left on their own to inform themselves about a topic about which they are being asked questions, they tend to learn information that supports what they already think (ref: Sunstein, Cass, Republic.com 2.0 (Princeton University Press 2007))	3. Create briefing materials with a diverse group of experts who disagree with one another to ensure that arguments for and against each alternative are sincerely expressed.
4. When traditional methods of deliberation are conducted, they're often dominated by a sub-community based on rank, gender, education, or other factors, and not representative of the diversity of the organization	4. Ensure that in-person discussions are moderated so that all individuals in each small group can participate roughly equally and fairly together. In the European Union Deliberative Poll, a random sample of the entire EU community (all 27 countries) was convened in Brussels overcoming language differences (requiring simultaneous translation and small group dialogue in 22 languages).
5. Deliberative Polls alone, while highly effective, do not actually consult the entire population, just a random sample. Deliberative Polls actually provide informed and representative opinion and allow people to engage with competing points of view. But they only involve the microcosm that deliberates.	5. Offer the ability for the entire population to participate in the discussion.
6. In an online crowd-sourced forum, when everyone is invited to rate comments, the results are often manipulated by a highly mobilized, marginal group. An example: when the GOP sought to consult Americans about their suggestions for policies nationally, one of the top rated suggestions in America Speaking Out was that the United States should replace the military with the Monty Python Knights of the Holy Grail. Obviously the process was gamed by pranksters. A process that can be manipulated just with mobilized voting is not one that can be trusted.	6. Provide a mechanism during online discussion that prevents highly mobilized groups from skewing the discussion, for example by having the random sample from the Deliberative Poll rate the comments.

7.Open meetings, like public comment processes, are easily swamped by unrepresentative groups who bring up unreleated issues in a way that leads to a distorted picture of public opinion	7. Ensure that all comments are moderated and relevant to guarantee that the discussion take place within the broad parameters established at the beginning of the process.
8. Consensus seeking advisory groups produce distortions of polarization and false consensus due to social pressure to reach an agreement.	8. Gather opinions in confidential questionnaires to insulate the collection of data from the pressure for consensus.
9. Leaders may know of an approach that would be effective, but a lack of understanding among staff results in a lack of political capital to make these decisions. In such cases the organization is incapacitated pending the need for informed consent of the staff for a successful implementation of the solution.	9. Enable sufficient discussion from a variety of perspectives to that ensure major concerns are aired; insert expert information where there is confusion, and build a robust understanding of tradeoffs involved. Wide consultation on the substance can provide a collective sense of informed buy-in to the results. Analysis and modeling of change of opinion can provide a sense of which arguments are key to gaining acceptance of the results.
10. In some situations, such as post-acquisition across cultures, there is a deep cultural divide that must be bridged first by building understanding of the opposing group's points of view.	10. For serious cultural divisions, Deliberative Polling has proven effective--even regarding the division between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland and policies regarding the Roma in Eastern Europe. It creates mutual understanding even when the divide is deep or even intractable. Divisions within a corporation should be more manageable by contrast.

Updated August 19th 2011:

The Reframe It platform allows thousands of people to add comments on specific parts of a document. These comments can be rated, and they are displayed prioritized by either raw ratings or, more typically, by weighted ratings that allow those who have already attended the Deliberative Poll event to represent the population as a whole, minimizing the effects of mobilized groups.

The timeline for the overall process varies, depending on the availability of the Briefing Committee of experts and the desired length of time for the Online component. However, the process is typically three-six months.

1. Briefing Committee of diverse experts to create briefing materials which identify the arguments for and against each alternative approach.
2. Convening a random sample of the population in an in-person Deliberative Poll.
3. Analysis of in-person event, followed by revision of documents for Online Deliberation
4. Online Deliberation with the entire population invited to participate
5. Analysis of online event, and revision of documents for Second in-person Deliberative Poll by briefing committee
6. Convening of second random sample of population for Second Deliberative Poll in-person event
7. Analysis of Second Deliberative Poll
8. Final report of recommendations that achieve informed consent

The resources required for the process fall into the following category:

People
- Briefing Committee members to review and create Briefing documents throughout the process
- Continued participation by leadership to define scope and ensure realism in proposals suggested
- One moderator for every 15 people for the Deliberative Poll; each Deliberative Poll typically has 150-400 participants
- Deliberative Poll experts to answer questions
- Online moderators to ensure that questions are responded to by online experts
- Online experts to answer questions raised by the commenters
- Deliberative Corporation knowledgeable staff on technology, training, analysis, and project design
- Participants (typically compensated) 150-400 people
- People who can undertake the logistics of identifying the random sample of the population

Online Implementation
- Hosting (SaaS or in house hosted solution) - depends on size of effort
- Technical support, if desired
- Training as required, particularly of online moderators and experts
- Incentives for online participation, as appropriate

Deliberative Poll Logistics
- Coordinative quality control from the Center for Deliberative Democracy
- A plenary room that can fit all partipants (150-400)
- One small-group discussion room for every 12-18 participants
- Optional videography
- Food and refreshments, typically
- Incentives to participate, as appropriate
- Travel expenses, as appropriate

Promotion
- Communications to random sample participants
- Promotion of the project, as desired

Deliberative Corporation Background to the Process

The Deliberative Corporation process combines insights from multiple disciplines. One component of it, Deliberative Polling® in its modern form was invented by Professor James Fishkin, now director of Stanford's Center for Deliberative Democracy and on the Board of Directors of Reframe It. The process builds on the ancient democratic process that was used to govern the city-state of Athens more than two millenia ago. Another component of the Deliberative Corporation process is Reframe It's annotation platform. Bobby Fishkin founded Reframe It based on four years of research into what Tolstoy, George Eliot, CS Lewis, Herman Melville, ee cummings, Thomas Hardy and other authors scribbled, crossed out and underlined in their copies of Shakespeare. This rich history of hundreds of years of marginalia caused Bobby Fishkin to create the comany and technology of Reframe It to bring the positional meaning of conversation to life through digital annotation. These two traditions of histrocial marginalia and ancient Athenian democratic practice have been brought together in a 21st century approach to reinventing decision-making for corporations called the Deliberative Corporation process.

Practical Impact

Deliberative Polling has been used in many areas with a history of conflict, in order to make decisions about how processes can be changed to reach mutually shared values from both cultures. Because changes in process can affect lives in fundamental ways, and because the implications of the changes can be complex, it's important to get the informed consent of the groups that are involved in these changes.

Deliberative Polling has been used in Northern Ireland to have parents consider issues of educational integration. There was a substantial shift in favor of various forms of cooperation between Protestant and Catholic schools. Further, there was a large increase in each group's perception that the other group was "trustworthy" and "open to reason." This DP was used to give guidance to political decision makers on issues involving education.

In a corporate example, in a merger situation, systems for employee development might follow two different models to which employees have adapted. A Deliberate Poll is held to discuss several alternatives offered by those within the firm who have ideas about the issues (the Briefing Committee). Not only does the Deliberative Poll show "what the employees would think if they were thinking," it also teaches the employees about the tradeoffs, and the Poll itself expresses the concern and seriousness that executives have regarding sensitive issues.

After the Deliberative Poll, the Briefing Materials are put online so that the entire company has the opportunity to comment on the issues, not just the random sample that attended the Poll. The analysis of the Poll and the online documents allow everyone to share their ideas and insights that reflect their own interpretation about what would be culturally viable and successful in the post-merger environment. This dialogue produces revised and hopefully improved policy options. The final Deliberative Poll on the new options allows for a statistically representative sample to make an informed decision based on balanced arguments for and against each of the alternatives.

Updated August 19th

A Deliberative Corporation process can be used any time there are tradeoffs that a population needs to consider in order to provide informed consent for a resilient solutions.

Examples:

- Products and Markets: Prioritizing among different product or go-to-market strategies
- Sustainability: Choosing among approaches to achieve sustainability objectives
- Finance: Allocating investment capital and determining among risk management strategies
- Strategy and Accounting: Choosing among budgetary and cost reduction alternatives and mechanisms
- Human Resources: Determining appropriate mechanisms for motivation and incentivization

- Operations: Allocating excess capacity (people, facilities, manufacturing capacity, etc.)

Updated August 23rd

Deliberative Polls can also reveal surprising conclusions. In Italy, there was a Deliberative Poll about reform of the medical system. For many years, the region that surrounds Rome has had many more hospital beds and hospital wings than doctors to support them. There had been strong, entrenched public resistance to closing hospital wings based on the visceral sense that people had that they wanted to ensure there would be a hospital bed available to them. When participated in the Deliberative Poll however they realized that their empirical assumption was likely mistaken. The number of hospital beds was less relevant to their core objective of having medical services available to them if and when they needed them than whether there was a medical bed with a doctor to treat them.

The Deliberative Poll revealed a significant opinion change of individuals who were willing to support a shift in resources from the maintenance of empty wings to providing more doctors by closing down those facilities that were deserted. Corporations often have the challenge that employees are aware of problems, but are not necessarily well enough informed about the potential solutions to these problems that they can make a thoughtful decision or provide their informed consent. The Deliberative Corporation process lets them do this by asking questions about empirical assumptions, facts and opinions in a coherent framework of analysis that allows implications to be drawn from the results that can create a legitimate basis for decision-making.

Italy's Health Care Delivery: (http://cdd.stanford.edu/Polls/italy/)

First Steps

Updated August 22nd

1. Convene executives and management to identify the initial issue. For example, a company might want to investigate how best to attain sustainability targets without compromising product quality and profitability.

2. Create an advisory committee. In our example, this might include those internal experts who are responsible for the company meeting sustainability targets, in addition to those who know what programs have been tried historically and what is upcoming. It would also include representatives from product, manufacturing and operations, and possibly accounting and Corporate Social Responsibility functions. The committee would also include experts from local Universities on energy efficiency programs, supply chain management, sustainable materials.

3. Create a briefing document with executives and management to discuss relevant issues. The briefing materials contain 20 potential approaches for how to cost-effectively achieve sustainability objectives. The briefing materials present each option, the arguments for and against each option, and the assumptions relevant to each option, and any factual information that is uncontroversial and necessary to the dicussion.

4. Identify the entire population for which the issue is relevant. In the case above, this would include everyone at the company, and might include those along the supply chain depending on the scope.

5. Scientifically select a random sample that is representative of the entire population. The human resources department would work in conjunction with Reframe It & CDD personnel to select a random sample among the entire population. The random sample must be a microcosm of the entire population, and reflect its demographic components.

6. Administer the questionnaire to the random sample. The questionnaire measures three things: the degree of support, the degree to which people accurately understand the facts involved, and their feedback on what would be the result if certain policies were followed. The questionnaire is sent via email (or other means) to the random sample and to the control group, with instructions to complete it at least one week before the Deliberative Poll.

7. Conduct training for in-person and online moderators. The day before the Deliberative Poll, a class convenes to train the moderators, first giving instruction and then allowing for practice moderating sessions.

8. Convene the random sample for a Deliberative Poll with moderated discussions interspersed with experts in plenary sessions available to answer questions developed in the small group discussions. After completing the questionnaire, the random sample group is invited to attend the in-person Deliberative Poll. Their participation is incentivized, and encouraged by the highest level company champions of the project. The event is held in a pleasant venue, with refreshments available, and is often filmed for internal communications efforts and for additional analysis.

9. Train the random sample on the Reframe It online technology in order to continue the discussion for the entire population, with ratings and comments of the now-educated random sample providing a safeguard against manipulation by highly mobilized marginal groups. At the end of the in-person event, a demo encourages the participants to add their takeaways in the online comments, and to rate each others' comments.

10. Post the briefing documents online and invite the entire population (note: additional documents may be posted, for example video clips of the Deliberative Poll event should they be relevant.)

11. Have experts available to answer questions that arise online and moderators available to moderate comments based on criteria selected by the company leadership

12. Evaluate the results of the Deliberative Poll to identify learning as well as changes in underlying assumptions. Evaluate and code transcripts of the Deliberative Poll's small group discussions to suggest ways of reframing the issues for the final DP. The point of all this deliberation is to indentify those risks that had been hidden and what approaches to these problems might mitigate or overcome these risks, whether that means revisions to existing proposed solutions or entirely new approaches.

13. Reconvene the briefing committee to establish changes to the briefing document and policy options. This includes reality-checking new proposals and eliminating proposals whose support has crumbled after the Deliberative Poll microcosm had evaluated them. They then reconfigure the questionnaire: in addition to testing new proposals and revised policy options, the questionnaire asks questions about empirical assumptions that were revealed to be important in the course of the analysis of the first Deliberative Poll and online deliberation.

14. Convene a second Deliberative Poll, using the revised policy options, a second (new) random sample, the new questionnaire, and new briefing documents; convene the event, administer a post-event questionnaire and analyze the changes.

15. The results of the Deliberative Corporation process will indicate four things: the change in the support for the policy options, the degree of change, the factual learning that occured during the process, and the shifts in the assumptions people have about what the results of any given policy option would be. For example, if two original policy options were to install solar panels on the roof of the building or to "green" the building by conforming to high Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design ("LEED") standards, originally the solar panels might have seemed a simple and unobtrusive solution. However after discussing all the details -- for example the particular location of the company buildings -- as well as the reality of

the long term cost savings, the building improvement might emerge as the more supported option. The results could show that the empirical assumptions people had about the hassle of implementing these change to their physical infrastructure were overly fearful compared to the reality revealed by discussion. Additionally, knowledge gains about the cost-effectiveness of such an approach could be demonstrated across the population.

16. Create a report of the process for executives and management to use as an identification of stable and secure support for decision-making.

Credits

Alice Siu, Jessica Margolin, Ben Taitelbaum

Tags

decision-making, deliberative polling, community, citizenship, James Fishkin, Bobby Fishkin, deliberative community

Helpful Materials

Demo of latest Reframe It software technology (version 3):

http://v3.reframeit.com/documents/london-homeless-law?locale=en
Reframe It's Deliberative Corporation is intended to work in conjunction with Deliberative Polling®.

For an in-depth discussion of the Deliberative Polling process, please see James S. Fishkin *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Deliberative Poll® Examples:

The UK Deliberative Poll, "Power 2010"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VSfwBFnnsk

China Deliberative Poll on Budgets

http://cdd.stanford.edu/Polls/china/

United States energy policy choices:

http://cdd.stanford.edu/Polls/energy/

Northern Ireland's deep division:

http://cdd.stanford.edu/Polls/nireland/

Local transportation policy in 'Argentina:

http://cdd.stanford.edu/Polls/argentina/

Italy's Health Care Delivery:

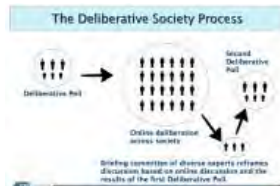http://cdd.stanford.edu/Polls/italy/

One of our joint venture projects is bringing Deliberative capacity to India at www.reframeitindia.com.

Documents:

RFI_Deliberative-Society-8-2011-deck.pdf