



Democracy

A multi-dimensional, multi-perspective approach to civic decision-making that is **D**evelopmentally **D**esigned and **D**eliberative

Background

Public decisions often become contentious because they do not take into account the full context of the issue or the diverse values and perspectives held by members of the public. The many complexities, history, values and trade offs associated with public issues need more time and attention than our typical decision-making processes allow. Most political processes are adversarial and 2 dimensional i.e. yes/no, for/against, either/or choices. Neither opinionated debates nor endless talking circles can lead to decisions that address the complexity of issues facing our local or global communities.

Decision-making processes that support the voicing of multiple perspectives and the consideration of multiple options and implications, can result in decisions and actions that are well informed and collectively supported.

The **3D Democracy** process is designed to support citizens and elected officials grapple with challenging issues. It is:

Designed: to create clear steps to allow the best of public thinking and good intentions to come forward.

Developmental: to provide a progression of steps (based on current research in adult learning and development) to deal with the full complexity of issues.

Deliberative: to support deep consideration of options including weighing out pros and cons, anticipating reactions and trade offs, and arriving at decisions that participants are committed to and prepared to live with.

The 3D Democracy process has 4 progressive steps:

1. Analyzing and mapping the area of concern

- understand it in the context of other related issues
- identify its multiple causes including individual and collective behaviours and attitudes that create and sustain the issue
- agree upon the best starting place after considering this whole systemic map

2. Developing new options

- identify new actions to replace the current dysfunctional ones (some of these will involve policy changes and others will simply require individual voluntary action)
- anticipate the common but diverse responses/reactions to these proposed actions
- create an "issue booklet" consisting of 3 -4 common perspectives on the issue to guide a Public Deliberation

3. Deliberating the diverse responses, consequences and trade offs

- gather general public, including all stakeholders, to meet and deliberate in small facilitated groups.
- consider the adequacy of each of these responses separately and in combination, anticipating the cost consequences and trade offs which could incur.
- arrive at collective decisions re multiple actions to be taken by multiple actors

4. Implementing actions, coordinating follow up and evaluating results

- individuals or organizations take immediate voluntary actions
- sub committees form to work on longer action plans and policies
- steering committees develop and publicize reports regarding the issue background and the outcomes of the deliberation. This provides a record of 'what' and 'why' certain decisions about actions were taken
- participants inquire, give feedback and make adjustments to ensure effectiveness and ongoing learning

Underlying Assumptions

- We need to understand an issue before we can solve it.
- People can become opinionated or even adversarial when we talk together publicly so we need well designed processes and trained facilitators
- We need to involve all those impacted by the issue or who can impact the issue (stakeholders)
- These people all have valid perspectives of what could be done
- and understandably won't be involved unless their view is included
- We can make bad choices that upset people or that create more hardship if we do not consider the cost and consequences of our choices
- We need to set priorities, not vague wish lists and decide what trade offs we are willing to live with
- Complex issues require more time, attention and consideration than simple ones do. Most of our social issues are complex.
- Having clear decision-making steps helps us not become overwhelmed with the complexity and actually get to taking actions.

3D Democracy has been developed by Jan Inglis of the Integrative Learning Institute and combines the fields of adult development, behavioural sciences, complexity theory, action inquiry and deliberative democracy. It incorporates theory and research of Sara Ross, Bill Torbert, Michael Commons, Paul Yankelovich and others.
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