

Introduction to participatory processes and facilitation for Pitcairn¹

Planning, community relations and meetings can run smoother and more productively if good participatory processes are designed and facilitated. The following brief introduction are notes from a presentation and discussion with participants to help give guidance for future process design and selection of training. More details and examples are provided in the LMMA 2008 Guidebook.

The first point which was also the theme of the discussion is that participation and indeed “consultation” actually come in various forms and it is important to distinguish this across a spectrum as each form has different costs and benefits but must be chosen depending on the ultimate objectives with a particular stakeholder group.

A major conclusion was that regardless of the ultimate aims and even given the multiple means available in Pitcairn for communication it was important that all inhabitants be aware of the formal and regular channels of communication on the different processes and projects ongoing. This might need some thinking and be made explicit. In addition, information or even consultation is not enough when seeking to work collaboratively – people will need to feel they are part of decision-making for collaborative work to be expected. “Consultation” is frequently required by law but often consists only of a sampling of opinion rather than a sharing of decision-making responsibility and working towards consensus as would be needed for collaborative work.

Levels or spectrum of participation

Level	Description	Implication
5. Collaboration / Acting together	People take decisions in partnership but also are committed to acting together	Requires full commitment to partnership and sharing broad objectives and power
4. Deciding together	People empowered and facilitated in order to determine options and take decisions	People “own” the solution although may not be involved in implementing it
3. Consultation	People are given a restricted choice and role in solutions	External agents still make decisions and not under obligation to take on board views
2. Information seeking (extraction)	People are surveyed and results are analysed externally	Some desire to gain local information but people still do not really influence proceedings
1. Informing (passive)	People are informed of the situation or process	Situations where there is no room for manoeuvre (legal or other constraints)

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Participatory processes and indeed many types of meetings or workshops work better if facilitated. The choice of, attitude and skills of a facilitator require consideration as outlined below. A challenge where there are relatively few trained or willing people will be to ensure the neutrality required for participants to trust the process.

The importance of facilitation

What is a facilitator

- A facilitator is neither a content expert nor a lecturer/teacher.
- A facilitator is not the same as the chairperson/chairman.
- A facilitator 'facilitates', or helps to move along a process whereby participants interact with each other, gain new information, and build upon their experience.
- The facilitator may at times present new information, but his or her key role is to help the group experience and learn together.
- This should be explained to the group at the outset.

A good facilitator...

1. Listens more than talks even if they know the answer to the question raised
2. Keeps the group focused on task and process
3. Remains objective
4. Is an informed guide helping the group to chart its course and accomplish its goals
5. Adapts to various learning styles
6. Encourages everyone to participate while remembering that individuals participate in different ways. Some may talk only in small groups, but are still participating. Others may wish to talk constantly and may be contributing little
7. Protects members of the group from attack by the others
8. Is gender and culture sensitive
9. Helps keep the group within time constraints
10. Energizes a group or slows it down as needed
11. Recaps, occasionally, what has happened in the workshop and helps the group to make connections between the sessions

Additional Hints

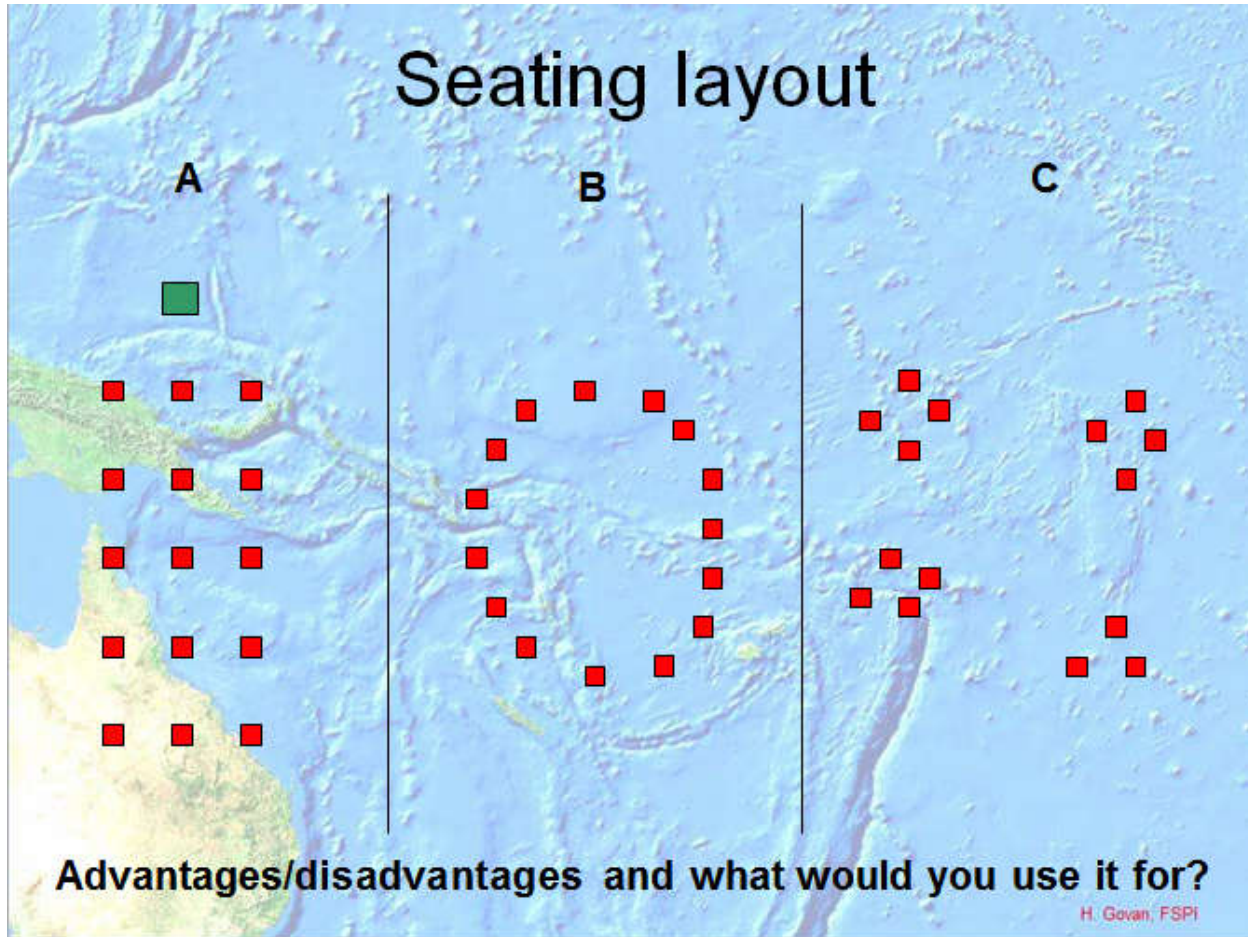
- Are alert to signs of confusion (asking neighbors questions, puzzled or frustrated looks, resistance etc)
- Don't do the group's work. Learning is more effective and lasting if the individuals and small groups discover on their own (learning by doing)
- Circulate, but don't become part of any one group because you may all too easily influence the group
- Spend sufficient time with each group during small group work to be certain that they have grasped the tasks and concepts supporting them
- Review portions of the workshop that are causing confusion if several individuals or groups are having trouble
- Ask frequently if there are questions
- When YOU ask a question, give groups and individuals time to think before answering. Better, ask people to discuss a question in pairs if it is more complex, so that they all participate and have time to respond constructively
- Remind the group that they have as much expertise and experience (and possibly more collectively) as the 'expert'
- Bounce ideas back to groups and ask them what THEY think – let them know that they have something valuable to say and that you are interested
- Be flexible!

- Make it FUN

Designing good meetings and reading the signs



Considerations on layout



Following an exercise in which participants assessed some sample photos of meetings it was concluded that many things that favour good participatory processes were essentially common sense and that most participants would be able to improve design of events or processes with a little thought. Factors to consider included:

- **Setting:** How to make the best use of the spaces available, avoiding lecture or school room settings unless the purpose was simply to provide information.
- **Timing:** Ensure meetings are not too long, that lunch or breaks for refreshment are considered, the time of day or week may be important in that some may have conflicting activities as part of their day to day lives.
- **Composition (stakeholders):** Ensure that people are engaged, if they do not turn up to meetings then consider going to them, maybe they will feel more involved and chose to turn up to some future meetings. Forming small groups is a very useful way of ensuring all share their points of view and dominant people dominate less. Groups can be formed according to need, sometimes these may b groups that share a common interest or expertise but other times the aim may be for people to share different views in which case the can be random or sorted.
- **Body language:** read the body language of the participants as a facilitator. Also as a facilitator remember to ensure that one does not take up a dominant position, that one “hands over the pen”.

3 key steps to better participation

1. Define and clarify objectives. Should be clear to all.

- Who are we trying to work with, staekholders, etc?

- How or at what level of participation should we engage each group or person?
- What are the desired outcomes

2. Design a participatory process

3. Choose appropriate tools to achieve objectives