Neighbourhood Governance Game

Presenting the Scenario 1

Presenting the Scenario 2

Serious Policy debate

Community Scenario

As part of a seminar organised by Local Level for the Community Development Foundation in west London in November2005, David Wilcox and Drew Mackie ran a game that simulated the opportunities and pitfalls of neighbourhood governance at both local and policy levels. Some 28 people took part drawn from:

- residents from several neighbourhoods in west London
- local authorities and public agencies
- community development practitioners and consultants
- policy think tanks including Demos and the Young Foundation, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Following a series of short outlines of what was happening locally and nationally, Drew and David introduced the game which had the following structure:

- The audience split into three groups representing policy and two local situations.
- Each local group developed a scenario based on their own experience and passed this to the other group to address.
- Each local group then split into Community and Agency groups and attempted to work in partnership to address issues of neighbourhood governance contained in the scenario. Actions and agreements were posted on a 3 year "timeline".
- The policy group wrestled with producing policy guidelines.
- In a final session individuals discussed lessons from the game and posted insights gained.

During the sessions the local groups worked with flip charts and sticky notes to chart ideas about projects, fundraising, organisational development and community engagement.

Comments on game play

- The "style" of the two local groups was quite different. One group decided to bring the Agency and Community together and to work as one team. This arrangement lasted for a year of simulated time until the Agencies felt that their priorities and procedures were too different and required them to retire to their own table. The Community became increasingly distrustful of the Agencies and accused them of taking initiatives without consultation. The wall chart showed a preponderance of Community initiatives addressed by slow Agency responses.
- The other Scenario group separated the Agency and Community work. Gradually the communication between these groups increased until the final year was spent mostly working together.
- Participants commented on the fragmentation of Community views and how this held them back from achieving the most possible from the partnership situation. Agencies commented on the lack of imaginative and demanding requests from the community compared to the more grandiose proposals that they wished to achieve.

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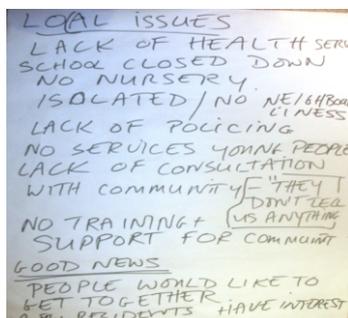
Timeline actions and initiatives
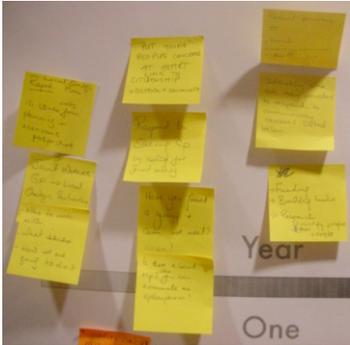
- The policy group had a difficult time agreeing on task and content. This was partly attributable to the (deliberately) vague instructions they were given at the start of the game. Increasingly, however, the group became involved in arcane debates about detail and eventually produced a series of policy guidelines that satisfied nobody. The experience was so frustrating that several members effectively withdrew from the group. One participant honestly reported at the end: "we found it so difficult managing internal stakeholders we never got round to talking to external ones; we started consulting people at the end of the process as a way to generate consensus, not the beginning as a way to frame the task. Personally I was appalled by own behaviour - I started off accusing my colleagues of slipping into policybabble rather than plain english, and yet happily charged through to the end of the process without once asking anyone in the other room what they thought".

Community Debate

Overall, several people commented that a major problem at local level was going to be that Agencies generally are finding it difficult enough to work together and may not have the time and energy left to include communities. There is also the matter of the style of Agencies, and how this works with communities in what should be a new co-operative environment. Comments on 'insights' sheets at the end included:

From policy participants:

- It wasn't until year three that we all got around the same table!

- From discussion with community/providers it was clear that their needs for policy input were relatively straightforward: what rules/constraints affect their ideas; what processes to move forward; can intermediaries/experts help?

- Policy group should meet with other reps before bashing out a policy.

From agency participants:

- Good, simple consultation and decision-making processes exist, but they are not well-known, or confidence is low.

- Conversations and interactions cost time, cost money ... who will pay and what is the Return On Investment?

From community participants:

- Need to organise community into formal structure such as neighbourhood forum or development trust with paid staff and local premises

- Need to avoid partners running roughshod over community

In conclusion it was noted that the key ingredients for neighbourhood governance are Power, Support, and Listening.

Links:

The Neighbourhoods Weblog - http://neighbourhoods.typepad.com/neighbourhoods/
Games at - www.partnershipsonline.org.uk
Neighbourhoods policy: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137850