COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BUILDING CONNECTIVITY
IN THE LOCKYER VALLEY REGION

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INTRODUCTION

Uneven growth and a decline in non-metropolitan Australia is cause for ongoing concern (Simpson, 2005) as currently, Queensland has Australia's highest level of disparity (Premier's Department 2003). To address this concern, the Queensland Government realise the need to develop closer communities if Queensland is to grow and remain sustainable (Premier's Department 2003). The north-eastern sector of the Lockyer Valley (LV) is one of Queensland's disparate and disconnected communities. Lying close to the Brisbane-Ipswich conurbation, and seen by some as dormitory suburbs or satellite towns of the Brisbane-Ipswich conurbation (Department of Communities 2005), the LV's north-eastern sector residents are experiencing feelings of disconnection. Disconnection refers to residents experiencing feelings of a separate self-schema and feeling separate or distinct from other residents (Babin and Harris 2011). The feelings of disconnection are of concern because for a community to grow and be sustainable, the residents should have a shared sense of belonging, a shared vision, and social connections with each other (Mathwick, Wiertz and Ruyter 2008). The connections within and between social networks, as well as among individuals, are important as they are drivers of community growth (Grillo, Teixeira and Wilson 2010).

When community members fail to connect, they cannot engage or contribute to the future of the community, the state government's vision, health, education, childcare and other community services (Department of Communities 2005; Premier's Department 2003)—all of which are important to the viability of a community and to people's satisfaction with that community (Grillo et al. 2010). For this reason, the Premier's Department (2003) believed that an important agenda item for the viability and future sustainability of Queensland was to build closer communities. Building community engagement is important because the knowledge and expertise of community residents can contribute to the shared vision and future of the community, as well contributing to the social connections, belongingness and social capital that community members share (Taylor 2007). Community engagement is the key for the wellbeing of citizens in any geographical location (Rose 2000). When residents are confused about their identity, do not connect, or fail to experience a shared vision and a shared purpose then the future for this area maybe uncertain. This is the current situation among community members in the north-eastern sector of the Lockyer Valley.

Realising the importance of building closer communities, the Queensland Government developed a working Community-Engagement-Model for use in each of its regions (Department of Communities, 2005; Premier's Department, 2003; Transport Main Roads, 2010). The premise of the model is to involve residents of geographical areas or community groups in government planning and decision-making. The Queensland Government believe that developing and engaging communities is crucial to the legitimacy and responsiveness of government, the quality of public policies and programs, and the effectiveness of services to those regions (Department of Communities, 2005; Premier's Department, 2003; Transport Main Roads, 2010). The issue for the residents of the Lockyer Valley is that the model does not fit their needs. Because of the disconnection being experienced by residents of the

north-eastern sector of the LV, the current community engagement model is very limited and not particularly useful because the current model assumes that there is already some degree of connectivity occurring among people.

APPROACH

The purpose of this paper is to find a community engagement model that fits the needs of the LV by conducting secondary research and investigating the government, health, education, law and other community engagement literature. To do this, various government and academic database searches were undertaken looking for words such as community engagement, community partnerships, citizen partnerships and community connectivity. Models and terms were evaluated and compared. The purpose was to find a model suitable for the LV situation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

The Lockyer Valley Regional Council (LVRC) recognises the need to build community engagement. According to the LVRC, community engagement is important because it reduces social isolation, improves health and wellbeing of community members, increases volunteerism in the community, further develops community and cultural events in the region, acknowledges diversity and promotes inclusiveness of its people and addresses barriers to participation (Lockyer Valley, our valley our vision, 2011). Because engagement underpins relationships between people, groups and communities, it has become a research priority to understand and develop (Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek, 2011).

The community engagement literature suggests that engagement is cognitive, affective and behavioural (Boxelaar, Paine and Beilin 2006; Hill 2006; Lavery, Tinadana, Scott, Harrington, Ramsey, Ytuarte-Nunez and James, 2010). That is, residents should have a positive state of mind characterized by high energy, commitment and loyalty toward a geographical area (e.g., the Lockyer Valley) and they should experience positive feelings or emotions about people living in the same area, as well as the geographical location itself (Ryan, Agnitsch, Zhao and Mullick, 2005). The behavioural component of engagement reflects community members' willingness to participate and cooperate with others in a way that creates value for themselves and for others. Essentially, a community that is connected and engaged should be 'like-minded' in as much that they have a shared consciousness and a shared sense of belonging, as well as a sense of shared identity, tradition and moral obligation to help individual members, and the community as a whole.

Most of the current models of community engagement (e.g., Boxelaar et al 2006; Chaskin 2001; Department of Communities 2005; Froding, Elander and Eriksson 2012; Lavery et al 2010; Transport Main Roads, 2010) focus on communication in their models, which begin with one-way communication where the government tells (or informs) its citizens of what to do or what is going on. The next phase is collaborative and involves two-way communication. Two-way communication involves the community in the planning and implementation stages of government action. The third communication phase is the building of empowered social networks where various community groups, education, health, religious, sporting, legal and government groups work together to find solutions, develop skills, build ongoing resources, share information, and make community-based decisions. Underpinning these and many other CE models is a hierarchy where the government is the initiator, communicator and decider regarding what sort of CE is necessary for the region (e.g.,

Boxelaar et al 2005; Department of Communities 2005; Douglas 2005; Lavery et al 2010; Transport Main Roads, 2010; Verity 2007). The issue with these types of CE models is that they can work well with a stable and long-term government, but when there are changes in government, these types of models can quickly become unstuck if there is not a long-term commitment from both sides of government. Another issue with these models is that they assume there is already a connection between its residents and that these social connections are well developed.

When looking at which community engagement models work best, research shows that the most effective community engagement models are not those in which the government drives and champions, but those driven and championed by a social network of community members themselves (Foster, Fisherman, Cantillon, Pierce and Van Egeren 2007; Taylor 2007). Research also shows that the more satisfied a resident is with the community, the more likely they will participate in community engagement (Grillo et al, 2010). However, Grillo et al's (2010) research also shows that for a resident to be satisfied, social offerings, educational offerings and basic needs should already be available. This presents a catch-22 situation where the LV is concerned.

Much of the community engagement literature, whether from the government, health, education, law or child protection view, is from a utilitarian perspective—where the focus is communication and task-orientation and the value of social networks and people's emotional commitment to an area are not featured in the application of the CE model. The current CE models are underdeveloped and limited because they do not focus on connectivity, building social connections among people or to a place, therefore, to address this gap in the CE literature, the authors searched the marketing literature.

Within the marketing and branding domain, the experiential marketing and relationship marketing paradigms underpin engagement. Engagement has an association with awareness, participation, involvement and attachment and the notion of engagement is a co-creative process involving all of the stakeholders in a complex set of interactive experiences and social relationships (Brodie et al, 2011). Some researchers (e.g. Provan, Veazie, Staten and Teufel-Shone 2005) are starting to recognise the value of social networks to strengthen community partnerships. Andreasen (2002) argues that community engagement research should find ways to complement, rather than to compete so that the community can be mobilised and barriers to change overcome. Andreasen (2002) argues that urging community opinion leaders to motivate others and to create awareness and concern for the area is the way forward for structural social change in regional communities.

To address the disconnection in the LV, a change is necessary. A change for the region of the NE sector of the LV would require residents to change their thinking, feelings and behaviours about where they live and for the residents to play an active role in co-creating social networks and developing connections in the area. A change in overall attitude would see the LV residents change their thinking, feelings and behaviours about the LV and to feel part of, and connected to, the LV. Abdul-Ghani, Hyde and Marshall (2011) refers to this type of engagement as a synergistic activity whereby the residents exchange information, experience relationships and pleasures of human contact, and rewards participants intrinsically through pride in oneself; and extrinsically by way of social approval.

The marketing literature is full of attitude change models capable of being applied to the residents of the LV as a way of facilitating a change in overall attitude. These models include

the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), Hierarchy of Effects (Barry 1987), Balance (or Consistency) Theory (Heider, 1958; Woodside, 2004), Social Judgement Theory (Doherty and Kurz 1996), Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing (Chaiken, Liberman and Eagly 1989) and Compliance, Identification and Internalisation (Kolman 1938). After careful consideration of both attitude change models and community engagement models and the issues in the LV, the authors incorporated these disparate theories into a single practical model, believing the model to be suitable for use for the LV (refer to figure 1).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Figure 1 addresses the community engagement research priority (Brodie et al 2011) and adds to the CE knowledge by updating current community engagement models (e.g., Boxelaar et al 2005; Chaskin 2001; Department of Communities 2005; Douglas 2005; Froding et al. 2012; Lavery et al 2010; Transport Main Roads, 2010; Verity 2007). What makes Figure 1 different to other CE models is that it takes into account that sometimes people are disinterested or disengaged and, as such, are disconnected from their community. Figure 1 is novel because it addresses the issue of social change by including multiple pathways to address disconnection and people's various levels of disengagement on an engagement continuum. Figure 1 revises the current thinking about CE and potentially provides a more useable and practical framework because often those whose job it is to implement CE models are also given the task of finding ways to develop awareness and/or address disconnection in the implementation. When implementing Figure 1, identifying a person's involvement, willingness and motivation to change, and what community or government resources are available to help facilitate the change are important factors to consider (Andreasen 2002; Chaskin 2001).

Value (intrinsic and extrinsic) is the cornerstone of Figure 1 and, therefore, a driver of change. For people to change there must be benefits. Intrinsic value is likely to be personal and for idiosyncratic reasons the LV should matter, and these reasons will drive a person's need to build social networks and participate actively in the social development and sustainability of the LV. More than likely, most LV residents, particularly those in the north-eastern sector experiencing disconnection, extrinsic rewards will be necessary to drive the disconnected, disinterested and disengaged LV residents. Extrinsic rewards include a sense of belonging and the building of social networks (Lavery et al 2010; Taylor 2007), status, tangible gifts and prizes. Extrinsic rewards also rely on structures and processes in place to enact the change, opinion leaders to champion the change, and support and procedures to encourage change (Andreasen 2002; Chaskin 2001). Figure 1 shows that fostering extrinsic rewards would incorporate heuristic processing and developing awareness through compliance, operant conditioning, authority and social proof, identification, liking, classical conditioning and reciprocity (Chaiken et al., 1989; Kolman, 1938; Petty, Cacioppo & Schuman, 1983; Woodside, 2004). This is because the disconnected and disengaged community member is unlikely to process new information willingly and is likely to disregard any new incoming information. The disengaged and disinterested are likely to forget new information easily, and will continually need to be reminded through repetitious messages and links to lifestyle choices and goals through the use of 'liking' and 'classical conditioning'. Where there is 'like', there is a higher likelihood of the disinterested or disconnected community member taking notice and developing an overall attitude change through the affective component of attitude (Chaiken et al 1989; Heider, 1958; Woodside, 2004).

The belief pathway is where we are likely to find the LV champions of change. According to Rose (2000,) our champions help other citizens pilot their way (through change), assert a mutual responsibility and drive a common purpose, and self-manage the people's collective destiny in the interests of social stability, economic advancement, justice and happiness for all residents. According to attitude change researchers (e.g. Heider, 1958; Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Woodside, 2004), those people that take the belief pathway to change are likely to experience an enduring and sustainable change.

Figure 1 is appropriate for use by community members, government, business, law, education, health, childcare, sporting, and other not-for-profit community groups with a stake in developing community engagement models. When applying the model, careful consideration is necessary, which involves a full understanding of the purpose of the conveyed message as the purpose of the message will drive the decision about which attitude change path in Figure 1 to take. Generally, the message's purpose will involve one of the five levels of community engagement (inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower). The message's purpose will also drive the way in which the message is constructed, which influences the persuasiveness of the message and rate of change (Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994). Because classical conditioning, liking and heuristic processing are the easiest and most likely ways to create awareness and address disconnection, the message will require two parts: 1) old information, which is fun and likeable, and 2) new information. Using classical conditioning, the process is to link the two pieces of information in the communication and then, through repetition, the information becomes linked in the targeted LV residents' head, and this process influences the affective component of attitude change (Chaiken et al 1989; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Placing the new information first and keeping the message simple should increase the primacy affect, reduce cognitive effort and aid in heuristic processing and message comprehension, thus influencing message persuasiveness and attitude change (Li, 2009).

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CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the developed framework is new, takes a fresh approach to CE by including multiple pathways to facilitate attitude change, and is expected to be a better fit for stakeholders of the LV as it provides various ways to address disconnection. Because relationships between people, groups and communities are important and underpin CE, the development of Figure 1 has addressed the CE research priority (Brodie et al 2011). The framework takes into account that individuals are different, with some being more easily motivated and willing to change, while others will resist change.

The main limitation of Figure 1 is that it was developed specifically for the LV case. Yet, despite this, there is potential use for the developed framework elsewhere—possibly for research or practical application to other isolated/rural communities; fly in/fly out communities; or major new residential developments in which connectivity is either not developed or missing. As already stated, Queensland has Australia's highest level of disparate communities so it is likely that other communities experiencing similarities to the LV case will find a better fit with the proposed framework than with current CE models.

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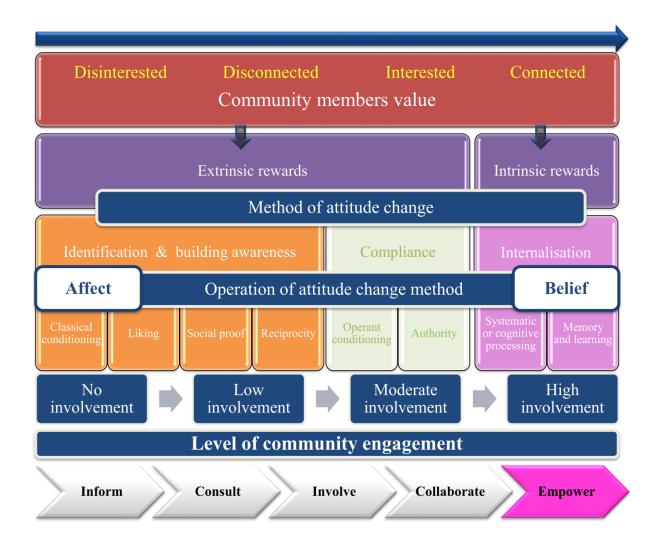
Figure 1: A framework for facilitating behavioural change to build connectivity and develop community engagement