

Community collaboration is good business (good for communities and good for the industries working within them...)

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Abstract

Industry, especially extractive industry, must now give serious attention to the impact its operations have on the natural environment and on the economic, social, and cultural context within which it operates.

While this obligation is statutorily managed, there has been a recent shift towards a culture of self responsibility. Industry is now talking about earning its “social licence to operate” and the importance of maintaining the “triple bottom line”, thus adding environmental and social performance to the usual financial criteria used to measure organisational performance. The social context within which companies operate has also become more sensitive with industry responding to a growing public expectation that it conduct itself in a way that strives for sustainability by operating and developing in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

There are glowing accounts of industries engaging and collaborating with the communities within which they are based. In amongst these are also some disasters which result from cultural assumptions, industry created dependencies and the failure to attain community buy-in despite significant investment by the industry involved.

There are also remarkable stories of communities, and action groups within communities, being a significant catalyst for positive change of their natural, cultural and social environment. In amongst these stories there are also accounts of long and drawn out battles; adversarial situations where no one wins; a litany of mistrust, tricks and tactics, with the better resourced party ultimately achieving its primary objectives at the cost of the other (and at the cost of any potential fruitful, mutual relationships).

So what makes the difference in achieving the positive rather than negative outcomes? The answer lies in the way the outcomes are achieved. Building relationships based on good communication, respect for divergent views, mutual understanding, and the development of trust and empathy, makes it possible to identify shared goals and objectives that best meet the needs of all parties.

Research indicates the mining industry is making good progress in developing policy and commitment to community development and engagement but that,

“translating commitments into improved practices at the site level remains one of the industry’s toughest challenges”. (Australian Government - *Community Engagement and Development Handbook* October 2006 @ page 49.)

This paper considers the merits of a process of community collaboration and what it has to offer in terms of meeting that challenge.

Keywords: Collaboration, community, facilitation, Waihi, Clarke, Stewart.

What is Community Collaboration?

The word community in this context is often used to define the inhabitants of a geographical area surrounding an industry's zone of activity. We believe it is accurate and helpful to broaden this definition and acknowledge that the industry itself, other stakeholders and interested parties, and local and central government, are also part of the relevant community. Collaboration entails working together to achieve shared, but not necessarily the same, goals and objectives.

Achieving true community collaboration therefore involves the various interested parties that comprise community working together to achieve shared goals and objectives. The important shift in perspective implicit in this definition is that the collaboration is undertaken by the industry along *with* the others involved, as opposed to something it organises and does for, or to, the other parties.

Achieving this level of collaboration requires:

- Establishing an agreed purpose for collaboration;
- Agreeing on shared goals;
- Good process including;
 - Creating opportunities for quality communication;
 - Developing understanding; and,
 - Progressive building of trust.

Implementing this process will not be free of challenges. There are obvious tensions between company obligations and community expectations; focussed project management and an educational inclusive approach; sharing potentially sensitive information outside the company, and trusting a group outside your company walls to respect that trust and maintain confidence. The required level of trust and buy-in is a significant challenge for companies embarking on this approach and for stakeholders as they decide whether to work with, and to trust, the company.

Examples

It might assist to refer to some practical examples of community situations in which the collaborative approach has been employed.

The 1080 Consultation

A small New Zealand rural town borders a national park. The agency responsible for the native wildlife in the park wanted to undertake an opossum eradication programme. Their intention was to use aerial application of 1080 (sodium monoflouroacetate). This gave rise to significant community concern.

The agency employed its usual community relations strategy sending pamphlets and conducting information days. The more the agency promoted the scientific merits and cost/benefit arguments of its case, the more opposition it received. An intense dispute developed, and with a backdrop of illegal action (including threats with a firearm) being taken elsewhere in the country to draw attention to the issue of 1080 poisoning. The parties seemed to be at a standoff.

At face value the issues were focussed on the rights and wrongs of the use of bio-toxins and the effects they have on the environment. The arguments featured stories of increased calf mortality in surrounding farmland; the possible effect on humans, especially unborn children; the proximity of the drop zone to the town's water collection area; the half life of the residual toxins; and divergent scientific research that both supported and contra-indicated the use of such measures.

The parties had become very entrenched with all focussed on the underlying principle of environmental preservation but disagreeing on how that should be achieved. It did not seem as though a resolution was going to be possible.

Through the use of a facilitated process, a discussion was developed that demonstrated and preserved the integrity of the differing views not only on each “side” of the dispute but, as it turned out, the integrity of those with differing views *within* the groups representing each side as well.

When asked to name the most important underlying principle they would apply to a future “consultation” process to avoid the type of confrontation they had experienced over this issue, the parties generated a list of principles including: ‘respect’, ‘consultation’, ‘acknowledgement of us as people’, ‘being treated as individuals’, ‘acknowledgement of alternative points of view’, and ‘respect, regardless of disagreement with others’ values’.

After discussion around the meaning and significance of the identified principles, an agreement was reached that the principles would be adopted as fundamental to the working relationship and would be applied to the ongoing discussions. From this point the technical details of the operation were very quickly negotiated and an agreement was reached regarding specific strategies to maximise the safety of the 1080 application operation.

The agency later asked participants in this process if they could use the principles, developed by the group, in other “consultation” situations around New Zealand to improve communication with interest groups and to avoid the stand-off that occurred in this situation.

Industry effects and resource consent compliance

Two agriculture based processing industries were positioned side by side on the outskirts of a rural New Zealand town. Discharges from these industries had a significant effect on the immediate neighbours. The neighbours’ response to the effects from the businesses varied. Some responded by approaching the industries directly and some responded by making a series of complaints to the District and Regional Councils.

It was not disputed by the businesses or by the councils that breaches of their resource consent conditions in relation to discharges to air and to water were occurring on an intermittent basis. The councils accepted the businesses explanation that the breaches resulted from system malfunctions as opposed to systems not being in place at all. In light of the contribution these businesses made to the local economy, the Councils did not want to take enforcement measures that would place the businesses’ ongoing viability in jeopardy without first exploring other means to achieve compliance. The neighbours and the Councils needed the businesses to mitigate the problems until an economically viable long term solution could be found

Through a facilitated process, which entailed individual meetings, followed by a joint meeting between the industry representatives and the group of affected neighbours, followed in turn by individual meetings between representatives of the two businesses and each neighbour, terms of mitigation were negotiated with all but one of the neighbours. This negotiation was repeated (much more easily) the following year and, in the intervening two year period, the systems were improved to reduce effects to an acceptable level.

The immediate needs of (all but one of) the affected neighbours were addressed, the processing industries were able to continue with their business, and the councils were able to step back from enforcement while a long term remedy was found.

Waihi Community Vision

The third example relates to the Waihi Community Vision (WCV) process, as presented to the AusIMM conference in 2006. (A helpful background to the Waihi situation can be gained by reading the 3 papers in last year’s AusIMM proceedings prepared by Mark Samson, Eddie Morrow and the writers. An introduction to the process being applied in Waihi was presented by Linda Willoughby of Newmont Waihi Gold Limited at the AusIMM conference in 2004.)

After closing as an underground mine in 1951 the Martha Mine reopened in 1987 as an open pit operation. The pit is located, literally, in the centre of Waihi.

In this challenging environment, NWG developed and ran a positive community relations programme. The programme included a communications strategy, an active sponsorship programme and the establishment of the Golden Legacy Centre, providing education and tours of the mine and surrounds.

From a company perspective, this process was working reasonably well until 13 December 2001 when subsidence over historic mine workings caused the ground under a residential home to sink and the house to collapse into the hole. While central government, local government and NWG worked hard to resolve the immediate situation, general community concern, and the activities of those opposed to mining, increased.

Despite progress with resolving immediate issues for the affected land owners, there was significant general community unrest. On 28 November 2002, in response to the ongoing ripples, Hauraki District Council resolved to request that,

“NWG establish a community consultation group, without delay, to examine any issues, plans and proposals for the Golden Legacy, and to make recommendations to Council and NWG, and to make information available to the public”.

This resolution was endorsed by the people of Waihi at a public meeting on 3 December 2002. The writers were appointed as independent facilitators and convened the first public meeting on 19 May 2003. This meeting was attended by 65 members of the public, including representatives from a large number of interest groups in Waihi.

At this meeting, the Waihi Community Consultation Committee (WCCC), later named Waihi Community Vision (WCV), was formed and tasked to:

“Liaise with and make recommendations to the mining company and the district and regional councils on historic and current issues and future planning to ensure;

- *A healthy future for Waihi.*
- *The gaining and maintaining of positive relationships community wide.*
- *The environmental, cultural, economic and social viability and stability of the area;*
and
- *The preservation and enhancement of the heritage of Waihi.”*

The process was originally envisaged to be limited in timeframe and focussed on the closure of the Martha Pit. Given the established objectives of the WCV however, and with the encouragement of the facilitators, the focus of the process developed into formulating and executing a 2020 vision for the town of Waihi. Four years later, the process is still going strong. A Trust has been formed with the primary object of *“promoting, facilitating and supporting the provision of projects or programmes for the benefit of the wider Waihi community”*. Several groups have developed as offshoots of the parent WCV group. These subgroups have set up as legal entities in their own right and they also are producing fantastic outcomes.

Newmont Waihi Gold (NWG) continues to operate the Martha Mine and is undertaking further exploration within and outside the town boundaries, NWG also operates the Favona underground mine nearby.

The examples in general

Each of the fact situations in these three examples differs from the others, but the same principles and the same collaborative approach have been applied. The type of forum and process required to achieve the goals, and the desired outcomes will vary from community to community but the principles remain the same.

The underlying principles and approach work because applying the process identifies and enhances the existing capacity of the host community.

How does this collaborative approach work?

In many contexts the relationship between industry and the communities within which they work, is oppositional. People can deny the existence or validity of others' issues; diminish the standing of those holding the other view; or, attribute questionable motives to them. Collaboration provides an opportunity to work together, pool resources and knowledge and truly make a difference.

The building blocks of a collaborative process are, creating opportunities for quality communication, the development of understanding and a progressive building of trust.

Many industry based organisations have been able to engage with their communities to some degree. Our view, based on our experience, is that companies can further enhance their collaborative interaction by using a systemic approach based on:

- 1) a particular philosophy;
- 2) applying specific principles to the process design and execution; and,
- 3) a particular skills set that provides for the implementation of the philosophy and process.

The key to successfully applying this approach is working together *with* those that are affected to design and develop a process around your situation based on the philosophy and principles which create the foundation for successful outcomes. Then, again working together with those affected, carry out the agreed process using a reflective approach to refine and adapt the process as it proceeds.

The very act of engaging with your community in a joint process design is what helps to ensure the right "fit" for your environment; ownership of the process and its outcomes by those involved; and, ongoing commitment and capacity building, as opposed to a growing dependency.

1) The philosophy

Each person's view of the world is constructed on the basis of their first hand relational, historical and socio-cultural experience. For example, those who appreciate the inherent qualities of our natural environment may value the world differently from those who see the 'rewards' that the earth can provide in terms of scientific development and economic return. Different perspectives such as these are often cast in terms of rights and wrongs with people taking a polarised stance at whichever end of the spectrum they believe to be right.

If we start with the premise that the views held by each person are based on their own experience of the world, then that allows us to make two more assumptions:

- Those views must be accepted as legitimate and respected in the context of that person's knowledge and experience; and,
- If the views were created by that person's experience then the views can also be shifted, or reinforced, by new aspects of that person's experience.

Therefore, the opportunity for individuals to discuss issues such as the use of 1080; the effects of local agricultural industry; or, living alongside a mining operation in a safe and constructive way; creates an opportunity for each person to examine their views in a new light on the basis of a new set of knowledge and experience.

If that exploration of meaning and value occurs in a community setting then the community involved gets the chance to consider and adjust its collective view and build its capacity to do so on an ongoing basis.

2) The principles

The principles give effect to the philosophy. There are some key principles that apply to this work; principles that make genuine collaboration possible. These are:

a) Inclusiveness

The process needs to be as open and inclusive as possible. This entails encouraging buy-in and participation from those that are strongly against the proposed activity and those who are ambivalent, as well as those who are supportive and positive.

The principal of inclusiveness is not limited to attendance, it is important that each person has the opportunity to contribute to the process from their perspective. An inclusive process entails actively seeking input from all parties. Some groups and individuals will need assistance to be able to participate.

b) Joint leadership

One of the biggest challenges for all involved is working *with* others in the collaborative process, in particular in relation to the form and direction that any collaborative initiative will take. It is important that a collaborative approach involves the input of a range of industry *and* community representatives in the decision making process. It is also important that those representatives have the capacity, authority and links either within the company or the wider community for their role to be effective.

Industry participants have strong need for clear direction and control of their role and expected outcomes. To let go of that degree of certainty in terms of their external relations initiatives is a big challenge. Likewise, individuals and community organisations (especially those opposed to the industry activities) can find 'working with' rather than 'fighting against' the industry and the effects it causes to be a significant psychological shift.

Negotiating this relationship between participants in the process is a significant part of developing a successful ongoing dynamic. Independent facilitation can be useful in maintaining safety and direction while sharing the leadership and process design role.

c) Genuine participation

Genuine participation in the process is measured in two ways, who represents each participant and how those participants engage.

From the community perspective, engaging appropriate individual participants, selecting representatives of groups, and ensuring that the relationship between representatives and the groups is well managed, is an important feature of a successful process.

From the company's perspective the attendance of senior management is important. A divisional head or CEO being present, and engaging in the process first hand, has three advantages. It means that someone in authority is present in the room to both hear first hand and respond to matters raised in the forum and it conveys a message to other participants that the company is taking the process seriously. It also establishes an internal benchmark for the level of importance the company is assigning the collaborative process.

Likewise, from a council perspective the involvement of staff with portfolios in relevant areas is important, as is the council supporting the process by way of participation and input of senior council officers and elected members.

It is important that participants engage in the process in a genuine way. Especially in a context where negative relationships have been built up over time, establishing a culture of positive and genuine participation can be a challenging process and one where the role of independent facilitation is particularly effective.

d) Respectful open communication

Respectful and open communication is an important feature of the working culture established within the collaborative forum. If parties are encouraged to participate with honesty,

transparency and integrity, the effect of individuals working together in this way helps build trust in a group sense. Trust is a dynamic, as opposed to static, state. It is developed and strengthened by the very things that test it.

Participants offering information not necessarily in their interest to offer, open discussion of the strengths *and* weaknesses of any given point of view, the ability to listen to alternative perspectives, and making and keeping promises, all contribute to the quality of the communication and consequently the progress the group is able to achieve.

e) Progress through consensus

Consensus as opposed to a democratic or autocratic decision making process is an important principle of collaboration. If the purpose of the process that you are engaged in is to build relationships, and if (as we suggest) the objective in a collaborative process is to include as broad a range of participants as possible, then the danger inherent in a democratic process is that with successive majority decisions, the minority are repetitively excluded. The consequence is that they step away from the process and either withdraw entirely or adopt alternative methods of expressing their view outside the collaborative forum.

While it can be easier to disregard or overlook the minority views, there is significant advantage in respecting and treasuring them as a valuable contribution to the overall process.

3) The skills set

*“Community engagement has often been described as a blend of social science and art. The science comes from sociology, political science, cultural anthropology, organisational development, psychology and other related disciplines. The equally important artistic element necessary to the process, however, involves using understanding, **skill**, and sensitivity to apply and adapt the science in ways that fit the community and purposes of the specific engagement effort.”*
(<http://www.cdc.govt/phppo/pce/part1.htm>)

The principles of community collaboration are enabled by a set of skills that we apply to developing collaborative processes. Whether the forum is a series of structured meetings or less formal contact with the various parties involved, the key elements of the skill set are:

a) Contextual analysis of the dynamics

Regardless of the specifics of the situation, it is important to carefully identify all relevant parties and analyse the context. In many situations there are obvious players; those who are not so obvious; and those who you would not consider at all but for a formal review of who may have an interest in what is happening.

Understanding the dynamics also requires identification of the significant historical, cultural, environmental, economic, spiritual and technical aspects of the situation, coupled with a sense of each party’s reasons for being involved. Sometimes this is best achieved through talking to individuals, sometimes to groups, and often to both. It is worth noting that this analysis is not just a matter of asking parties what they know because people themselves often don’t actively consider their role in a situation or the reasons they are involved.

b) Respectful Curiosity

Much public discussion is in reality a debate, with people looking for opportunities to promote their own view point regardless of whether they are making statements or asking questions. Often people focus on mentally forming the next question rather than listening and responding to what is being said. Stepping away from this propensity can be difficult but doing so is a significant investment in establishing a culture where people are able to ask and answer questions in an open and non-defensive way.

Approaching the collaborative forum with “respectful curiosity” is a primary skill that is central to the overall process. This “not knowing” approach follows from the philosophy outlined above; namely that people perceive their world on the basis of their own experience.

Therefore to know what they really think, and why, we need to ask them. Acknowledging people as the expert of their own perspective and offering the respect which doing so entails is integral to developing a truly collaborative working environment.

c) Transparency

There are benefits for participants in a collaborative forum when they are able to develop a consistent practice of transparent communication. This means being as open as possible with information about perspectives, plans, or operational features, whether the information is favourable or not.

At both the corporate and the personal level, transparency has a second layer of meaning that entails disclosing motivation, intention and meaning, as well as facts. When information can't be disclosed for legitimate reason, then transparency means responding honestly to questions about the existence of the information and explaining why it can't be talked about.

The practice of transparency also means that when you don't know, you say you don't know. The simplicity of this statement belies the fact that so many agencies and people in public positions just don't do it. In a collaborative forum, acknowledging gaps in information, or being open about not having considered a particular perspective, can provide opportunities for working together on what to do about the gap.

d) Listening skills

The act and skill of listening is an integral part of the process. The particular listening skills that contribute include the generally recognised features of active listening such as; body language (yours and theirs); minimal encouragers; paraphrasing; summarising and reframing. In a collaborative forum it is also important to listen for the meaning behind what is said in addition to listening to the words. This is sometimes referred to as double listening.

e) Questioning skills

The skill of asking questions is a cornerstone of a collaborative process for the people involved as parties and for the facilitators. A combination of open questions, closed questions and questioning sequences can be used to elicit information, clarify perspectives and assist people to actively participate. Open questions in particular help by inviting people to provide information in a non-threatening way, alleviating the risk of people acting on unspoken assumptions and clarifying the assumptions that do influence parties' role in collaborative participation.

f) Advanced Questioning Skills

In addition to the core questioning skills outlined above there is a set of questioning techniques that facilitates the exploration of the meaning and significance of participants' perspectives in a non-threatening and elicitive way. These are:

- Externalising:

Externalising is a structured approach to defining subject matter in a way that provides for more productive discussion of issues by separating the 'person' from the 'issue'. More open discussion is possible because the externalising process removes the element of personal attachment or criticism.

- Relative influence questions

Relative influence questions elicit information from people about the effect of issues on them, and then identify people's capacity and personal agency in relation to their response to those effects.

With insight into the effects of a situation on them, people become more motivated to make constructive change. Given an understanding of their capacity and personal agency, people gain a sense of how those changes might be made.

- Deconstruction:
Deconstruction is a method of questioning which explores the link between what people give value to and their actions. Questions to deconstruct explore the contextual meaning behind people's statements and positions in a way that identifies for them and for everyone present, their thoughts, and the social, historical and cultural factors that have shaped their current perspective.
The process of deconstruction helps to draw information from people in a way that identifies their beliefs and then makes explicit the connection between their beliefs, their thoughts and their consequent actions.
Questioning that clarifies what people (and organisations) do, and why they do, is useful because it helps them (and others) understand the position in which they put themselves. This understanding allows them to reassess that position and identify different ways to more easily achieve their desired outcomes.

- g) Facilitation skills
There is a set of skills that relates to developing a collaborative process and to the art of good facilitation in general. These include; thorough preparation; raising constructive expectations; setting process agreements; establishing a productive tone; agenda setting and working through the agenda; maintaining group buy-in; managing difficult dynamics; dealing effectively with issues raised; reaching agreements; summarising and clarifying outcomes; identifying and planning the next steps; and, maintaining a record or minutes.

Why choose to participate in collaborative community engagement

The purpose for being involved in a collaborative approach, and the perceived benefits of doing so, depends on the perspective of each party. The discussion around parties and composition is potentially complex but, for the purposes of this paper, it is helpful to identify three broad categories of participants: interest groups and individuals from the immediate and broader community, the local authority and the company.

Community participation

From a community perspective the negatives include the time and commitment required to be involved; concern about reputation and standing through being seen to collude with the company; and, giving away the moral high ground. This can be more difficult where there is a history of critiquing and pointing out the faults of the other side. It is a big psychological shift to move from scoring points *against* the other side towards making progress *with* them.

Despite the reasons why communities might choose not to be involved in a collaborative process, many do in fact choose to engage. The reasons for engagement will vary and may include; the opportunity to have a voice; to have questions answered; to have needs understood and met; and to monitor and influence the activities of the company and council. The primary motivation however, is that collaboration offers a better chance of achieving desired outcomes than the alternative approaches of doing nothing, protesting and eliciting public support or, engaging with legal processes. In general participants appreciate the opportunity of working together with the other parties to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Although not immediately apparent the other long term advantage for the community in being involved in a collaborative process is that the skills, principles and philosophy once learned, are self perpetuating. People learn to adopt a collaborative approach and future situations are more likely to be carried out in a constructive and collaborative manner.

Council participation

If Council is involved in the process, there are potentially a number of advantages and disadvantages. One of the challenges for council is the sometimes uneasy tension between an independent community forum making plans and contributing to the progress of their community and statutorily recognised council processes.

Our experience is that council may have concerns about raised community expectations, not only in terms of supporting the initiation of ideas but also in terms of ongoing infrastructure needs and increased pressure on stretched resources.

Another issue faced by council is its need to be, and to be seen to be, independent and unbiased in both its support and its decision making roles. Council needs to be wary of being proactive in its support for one particular initiative over another if there is a risk of appearing to give preference to one sector of their constituency at the expense of others.

Council staff and elected members also have significant demands on their time and active participation in the process may mean being involved in, sometimes difficult, meetings outside work hours.

In contrast to the challenges that councils face, there are also clear benefits. Councils are, in one sense, the intermediary between industry and the communities for which they are responsible. They have a role in supporting the economic and social contribution industry can make while ensuring minimal negative impact. A collaborative forum can assist in resolving potential balancing issues by providing an opportunity for industry and communities to interact directly.

If discussions about the intended progress of the industry are held in an open forum as opposed to (or as well as) directly with council, then individuals and community groups that are interested gain an appreciation of the council's role and the need to balance development with effects, and the interests of all members of the community.

A collaborative approach can make a significant contribution to council's statutory obligation to consult by helping to define the communities of interest with whom to consult and providing a context for the consultation process.

Company participation

Companies have a choice whether or not to work collaboratively with their community. Some simply meet the minimum legal compliance; pay lip service to a consultation process; or take a strategic approach and work with their community on selected issues. In many instances despite the good work being done, there is a clear sense of companies applying their external relations practices to the community rather than with the community. While many larger corporates, especially those in the extractive industries, are working to develop good understanding and practice around consultation and community development, it is the next level of collaborative engagement that presents the new frontier.

From a company perspective, the challenges of being involved in a collaborative process include the demands of additional staff time, production delays, costs of resourcing the process, and concern about creating a community dependence. Companies are also concerned about embarking on an exercise that is not their core business; they question the appropriateness of being involved with their community in this way.

Despite those concerns companies have found that the benefits of being involved in a collaborative process are significant and include; addressing ardent opposition and providing a forum where public and private opprobrium can be dealt with constructively and well; building a constructive relationship with the local regulatory authority based on collaboration and support; actively contributing to the social and environmental qualities of the community in which they work and receiving credit from others including staff, community, NGO's local and central government and the international community who see the valuable contribution they are making to the community in which they operate.

A collaborative forum also provides an opportunity for proactive communication with the community and a chance to respond to the communities' concerns before they become serious. It can be a mechanism for identifying emerging issues; establishing a foundation for future consenting processes; and, addressing closure issues and the potential impact they might have on both the local environment and economy.

Another advantage of the collaborative process is that it focuses on building capacity. Through collaboration, the company has the opportunity to work alongside the community in developing skills and sustainable opportunities rather than creating dependence by fostering reliance solely on financial or capital contribution.

Participation in general

For all parties, the first impressions of being involved in a collaborative process are of a significant investment of time in return for an uncertain outcome. Getting people together in a collaborative forum and discussing things in a way that increases understanding provides an opportunity for all contributing parties to work together to communicate and plan for their future. Meeting and making progress in this way builds capacity through developing skills, energy and focus, and a momentum that ensures the sustainability of the process.

So why is Community Collaboration Good Business?

We have described a philosophy; principles and a skill set that are the foundation of a collaborative process. While the outcome of that process will depend on the context in which it operates, these features and their relevance to good collaborative process remain.

So why would communities, councils and companies want to establish and participate in a collaborative process? Why are we saying that community collaboration is good business?

Communities have a growing sense that they must take a more active role in protecting their social and natural environment; councils are faced with managing increasingly complex and sensitive situations; and, the need for industry to be more socially, environmentally, and economically responsible is now a matter of commercial survival, legal imperative and reputation.

For communities, councils and companies, a collaborative forum provides the opportunity to work together to minimise negative impacts and maximise the potential that can be achieved for all parties through good planning and through working together to achieve the agreed objectives. The benefits of this can include a well supported community, a company that maximises its business opportunity and minimises its impact on its community in a sound and interactive manner, and a community that supports the presence of the industry in its midst.

Community Collaboration means that, rather than spending huge resources working in opposition to each other, parties have the opportunity to make progress together. What's more, the process is self perpetuating in that being involved in a collaborative forum builds participants' skills and understanding of the nature and value of collaboration. The merits of the approach become obvious to other people and the process takes on a life of its own as it is adopted in other environments.

Company development, agreed conditions in resource consents and incorporated into council planning instruments, constructive support for communities from the companies working within them, and, communities, council and companies working together on local development issues, are all possible.

If all this is possible, then Community collaboration is good business. *(Good for communities and good for the industries working within them.....)*

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About Sharon Stewart and Tim Clarke

With a background in the health industry, **Sharon Stewart** has been mediating for 11 years. Sharon has also lectured in dispute resolution in Waikato University's School of Law, held governance positions with Victim Support, Consumer Action Network Trust (an organisation for consumers of mental health services), and a school board of trustees. She has helped to establish two restorative justice provider groups and was an inaugural board member of Restorative Justice Aotearoa.

Tim Clarke has been practicing mediation, facilitation and training over the last 21 years. He began when he was working as a probation officer. Tim's has also worked as a Disputes Tribunal Referee, taught Dispute Resolution at Waikato University's School of Law, and trained for LEADR. Tim is a LEADR Advanced mediator, and a LEADR NZ Board member. He is also the Chairperson 'Restorative Justice Aotearoa', the national association of restorative justice providers.

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