

Community Engagement: The Path to Better Local Decisions

Presentation to the Alberta School Boards Association

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Presentation overview

- Keynote: Concepts
 - The New Policy Environment
 - Collaboration and the Public Engagement Framework
- Workshop: Applying the Concepts

Note on terms

- “Government” = public policy decision-makers (School Boards)
- “The public” = communities of various sorts and sizes
- “Public servants” = superintendents

New Policy Environment



Understanding the new policy environment

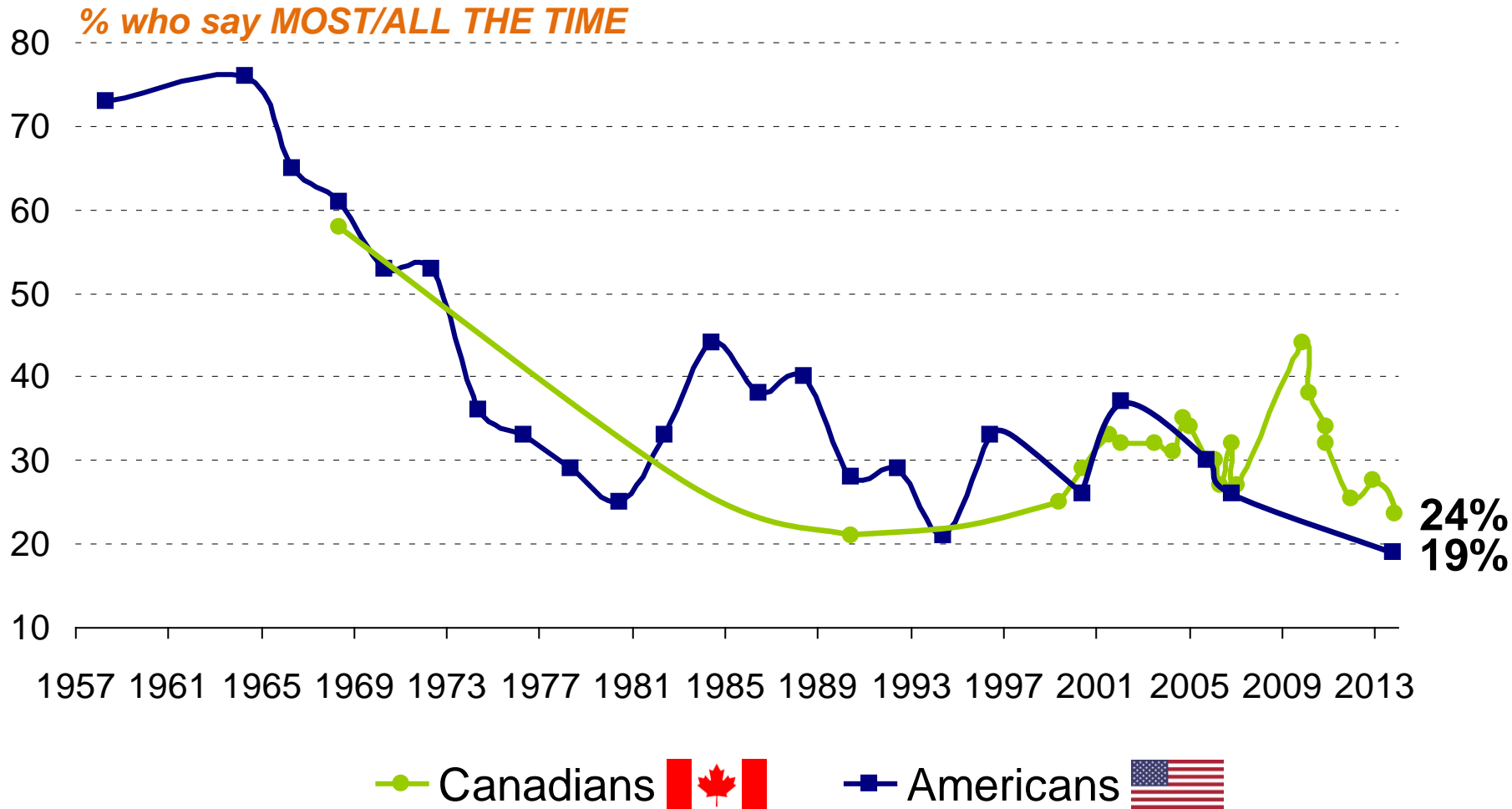
- Changes are:
 - Global
 - Systemic
 - Impact decision-making at all levels
- Two key aspects of the new environment:
 - Decline of deference
 - Rise of complexity:
 - Organizational complexity
 - Policy complexity

Decline of deference

- 1996 book by Neil Nevitte
- Education and urbanization changing the political culture
- Today we're reaching a tipping point:
 - Often contemptuous of leaders
 - Expect a say on issues we care about
 - Demand higher levels of transparency and accountability

Trust in government

Q. How much do you trust the government in Ottawa/Washington to do what is right?



Organizational Complexity



What is organizational complexity?

- Organizational speed – Financial crisis of 2007-08
- Organizational complexity – Global supply chains
- Organizational interdependence – Municipal zoning, provincial approach to immigration, Canada Job Grant

Policy Complexity

The background of the slide is a complex, abstract composition of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes. The colors used include vibrant red, bright yellow, deep green, royal blue, and off-white. The shapes are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and movement, with some shapes appearing to be layered on top of others. The overall effect is a busy, multi-colored field that contrasts with the clean, white text of the title.

Holistic thinking in education

- Old View:
 - Education is a stage in life
 - Learning as passive acquisition of knowledge and skills
 - Success conditions: hiring and training teachers, building schools

Holistic thinking in education

- New View:
 - Life-long learning
 - Learning as active enterprise to develop life-skills (planning, communicating, evaluating, etc.)
 - Success conditions: social skills, cultural differences, gender awareness, mental health, family support, training opportunities, and so on...

The message for policymakers

- Q: What do these trends mean for policymakers?
- A: Public policy goals are often bigger than the organizations under them. Achieving “societal” or “community” goals requires resources and effort from the community as a whole.
- The Governance Question of our Times:
 - How do we achieve this?



From command-and-control to collaboration...



Shared goals required a shared plan

Why public engagement?

Effectiveness

Legitimacy



Public Engagement

What is public engagement?

- Public engagement is a methodology for collaboration...

Traditional Policy Process

OPTIONS/ADVICE

DELIBERATION/DECISION

IMPLEMENTATION



OFFICIALS

ELECTED DECISION-MAKERS

OFFICIALS

Consultation

Views → **Deliberation** → **Action**



PUBLIC



GOVERNMENT

Deliberation

Views → **Deliberation** → **Action**

PUBLIC

GOVERNMENT

Collaboration

Views  **Deliberation**  **Action**

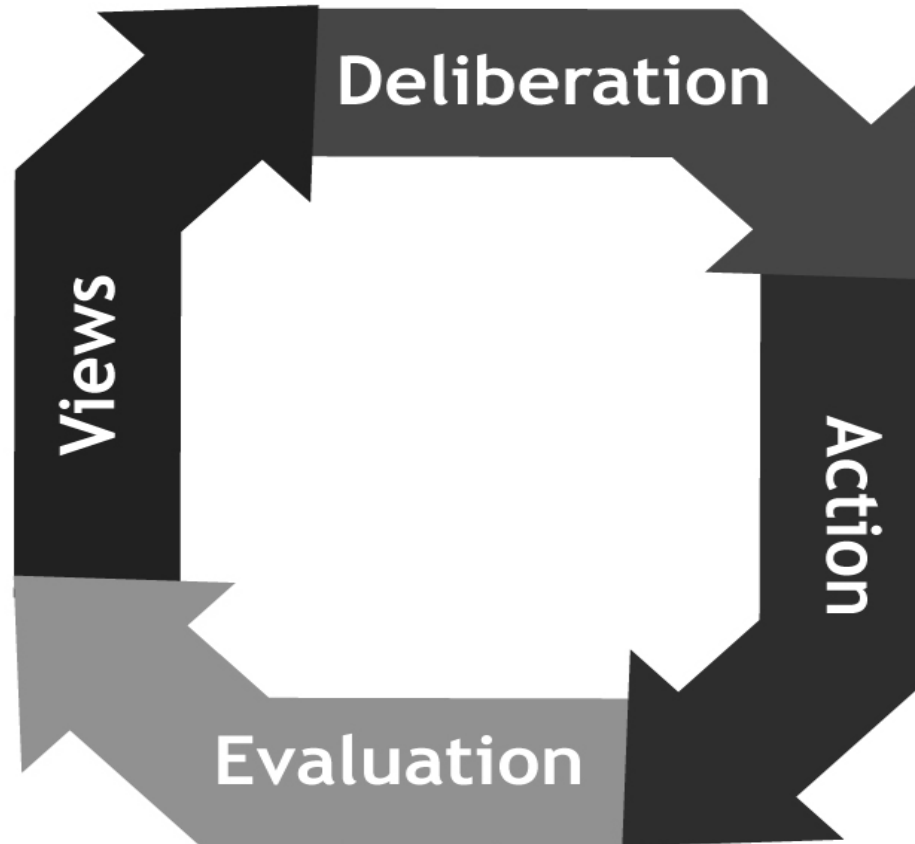
PUBLIC / GOVERNMENT



Evaluation: The fourth stage



Engagement as a Learning Cycle



Decision Rule

- Two questions determine what process to use:
 - Can the decision-makers define and assess the options without help?
 - Can the solutions be delivered by the decision-makers?

Summary of consultation lessons

- Competitive process
- Polarizes views
- Rewards games, exaggeration and intransigence
- Erodes government legitimacy
- Makes government solely responsible for solving complex issues

Summary of deliberation lessons

- Sometimes deliberation is enough, but be careful of things hiding in the bushes

Summary of engagement lessons

- About taking ownership, not transferring power
- Makes stakeholders/citizens accountable for what they say/do
- Clarifies roles and responsibilities
- Increases legitimacy AND effectiveness
- Transforms communications process

Engagement lessons (con't)

- Big issues should be tackled in bite-sized pieces
- The approach requires trust, but also builds trust
- Demonstration projects are a good way to introduce change
- Must have the time and resources needed