

# Letting the public in: dialectic tensions when local governments move beyond e-government to e-democracy

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## Abstract

Among the raft of information systems (IS) applications developed for use by local governments are those that attempt to introduce more open community engagement (CE) and facilitate e-democracy. In this paper, we report on a longitudinal study that reveals how the open nature of e-democracy challenges the practices of government bureaucracies. In 2012, we partnered with the Community Engagement Team of a Local Government Council in Australia, to study their planning for, and use of, IS for CE. Our study involved an action research intervention to gain a rich understanding of the contradictory demands of the bureaucratic imperative of the Council and the informal activities of the community. This was the first step of a longitudinal qualitative study of the Council's e-democracy efforts over the ensuing seven years. Our analysis has been conducted through a dialectic lens, informed by the Cynefin sense-making framework. Our theoretical contribution is an e-Democracy Framework that incorporates the dialectic between the ordered environment of government and the community view that is ill-defined and unordered. As a practical contribution, government organisations can use the Framework to assess the current status of their CE and design a CE strategy to make interactions with civil society more meaningful.

**Keywords:** Open Government, Community Engagement, e-democracy, Action research

## 1 Introduction

This paper addresses the tensions that are created when bureaucratic local government organisations attempt to introduce more open community engagement (CE) using contemporary information systems (IS). Governments have been enthusiastic early adopters of the Internet, setting up websites to inform citizens and implementing systems to enable citizens to conduct transactions with government online. This heralded the advent of e-government (Medaglia 2012, Carter & Bélanger 2005). In our study, such e-government systems have always been controlled by the local council and usually for one-way information dissemination. Any infrequent two-way interaction with citizens was undertaken at face-to-face community forums which were usually only attended by the same few people. The motivation for the Council CE project, in which we were invited to participate, was to ascertain if online CE systems could enable more open interactions between the local council and a wider range of citizens. The intent of such open interaction was to give citizens a stronger voice in council decision making.

When our research was being planned in 2011, a search of Australian local government websites found many which provided a feedback form for citizens to provide comments on issues that concerned them. However, we found no instances of genuine interactive online engagement, in the form of a 2-way dialogue, between local governments and the community.

At the time, the Australian Government 2.0 Taskforce (Gruen 2010, pp iii) suggested that “...the existing public service culture of hierarchical control and direction must change sufficiently to encourage and reward engagement [and that] to encourage citizen feedback, consultation and engagement processes should be adaptable and diverse”.

With the increasing use of social media among citizens in their work, as well as public and private lives, government interest in appropriating this technology for more open community engagement has grown. In an extensive review of the literature, published at the time of the first stage of our study, Magro (2012) reported an explosion of research on social media and e-democracy. This had implications not only for participation in the democratic process by citizens but also for a reassessment of the basic culture and organising principles of government, in particular, local or municipal government. However, such e-democracy initiatives have generally had limited acceptance by citizens (Tambouris et al., 2012) and, for a variety of reasons, have failed to deliver on their promise of transforming the political system and empowering civil society (OECD 2003, Toots 2019, Mahrer & Krimmer 2005). We thus posed the following research question:

*How does the open nature of online exchanges within communities challenge the practices and culture of government bureaucracies?*

To answer this question, we conducted an investigation into the planning for, and use of, IS for CE by one local government council (referred to as ‘Council’) in Australia. Of the three tiers of democratic government in Australia, Federal, State and Local, Local Government is closest to the citizen and has traditionally been most active in organising and managing CE activities. For this reason, our study focusses on Local Government, but we would argue that our findings provide insights that are relevant to other levels of government and to public sector organisations in general.

The researchers were approached by the local Council and asked to assist their CE Team in developing the Council’s online CE program. In the discussions that followed it became apparent that our IS research expertise could make a practical contribution to the design of the IS to support the CE program. It also became evident that the problem confronting the Council presented an interesting opportunity to develop a theoretical understanding of e-democracy. On the basis of our mutual interests, the Council agreed that our partnership should begin with an action research (AR) approach (Baskerville & Wood-Harper 1996) that would create a “solution” to the Council’s practical problem while at the same time supporting our research agenda to develop theoretical knowledge of value to a research community (Mathiassen, et al 2012; McKay & Marshal 2001). Our initial intervention produced both insightful research findings and useful practical outcomes. However, tensions remained between the open nature of digital media used to engage citizens and the Council’s imperative for closed, secure IS systems.

After the initial AR intervention stage of our study, we continued the research as a longitudinal qualitative study of the Council’s ongoing efforts to use IS to engage citizens using observations and interviews. This temporal perspective provides a “...sufficiently long history that would permit following the system’s evolution over time” (Toots 2019, p550) in order to understand the ongoing processes and tensions in the Council’s CE efforts.

We analysed the data collected from all stages of the study through a dialectical lens informed by the Cynefin sense-making framework (Snowden 2002). Cynefin distinguishes *ordered*

problems which may be simple or complicated but have a “solution” that is knowable, from *unordered* problems which are inherently complex, or even chaotic, and hence potential “solutions” emerge from action taken to cope with the problem. Most substantial real-world challenges, such as local government community engagement, have elements of *order* and *unordered* where the *order-unorder* relationship displays tensions (Nalbandian et al. 2013) that can be characterised as dialectic. We base our understanding and application of dialectics on the Hegelian triad (Mueller 1958). The basis of this triad is that truth, understanding and resolution of complex issues are found neither in the *thesis* nor the *antithesis*, but in an emergent *synthesis* which reconciles the two. In particular, we suggest that issues confronting government community engagement cannot be resolved exclusively through an *ordered* or *unordered* paradigm but need to be approached as a dialectic synthesis of both.

Nalbandian et al. (2013) frame this dialectical tension as the bureaucratic drive for standardisation and efficiency, an *ordered* approach to administrative modernisation that is challenged by the need to accommodate *unordered* variations that reflects the diversity of the community. Significantly, to resolve this tension, the authors set the ability to engage the community as one of the major challenges facing local government. We document our theoretical approach, supported by the study findings, to develop a framework to guide those who conduct research and practice in this area or who address similar complex problems.

## 2 Background

In this paper, we frame our discussion around the construct of e-democracy (OECD 2003) to capture the transformation of the political system (Grönlund 2002) with a focus on more active citizen engagement in government processes and decision making. The term e-participation is another term used in the literature to cover similar ideas (Porwol et al 2013) and is referred to as “...socio- technical information systems [acting] as instruments for democratic dialogue between citizens and governments.” (Toots, 2019 p547). Our paper seeks to understand, from the perspective of the government organisation, how socio-technical systems support democratic dialogue and adapt to meet the external demands for direct political representation thereby transforming the political system (Freeman and Quirke 2013). Our focus therefore is on “government technology”, rather than “civic technology”, and how internal bureaucratic norms and processes affect the adoption of new technological forms.

The starting point for our study is acknowledging and recognising the tensions between open forms of organising afforded by open digital technologies such as social media and the traditional closed nature of bureaucratic public organisations. We note that, while there is abundant extant literature on e-government, there are few studies that investigate the successful use of online IS for e-democracy where citizens can have input to government decision making on issues that are of concern to them (see for example Toots 2019 for a discussion about the *failure* of such IS system).

The tensions in public sector institutions between open and closed forms of organising, free and controlled flows of information, as well as exploration and exploitation of knowledge, are not new (see for example Deem 2004). It is well accepted that bureaucracy “...affords a level of efficiency that modern society cannot do without, but it achieves this efficiency only at the terrible price of alienation” (Adler 2012 p 246, quoting Weber 1958). However, the contemporary impact of IS in bureaucratic organisations brings new dimensions to this problem. Using government organisations as an example, Allen et al. (2001) undertook a case

study of effectively harnessing IS as an enabling force to meet the present and emerging challenges of the digital age. They found that the necessary transformation in public sector governance and accountability is likely to be blocked by an antiquated administrative culture that may be ill suited for a digital world.

The advent of Web 2.0 as our study began, prompted much debate about the role of the citizen and the affordance of social and digital technologies to enable new, more influential roles for citizens (Macintosh 2014, Linders 2012, Magro 2012). Most of this literature is focused on the idea of the citizen as a potential partner in the co-production of services and a participant in inclusive dialogues (Chadwick 2011, 2008). Appropriating IS to include citizens in decision-making is viewed as strengthening the democratic system by empowering the citizen (Coleman 2001, Ciborra 2002) and is firmly grounded in oppositional social movements like those witnessed during the “Arab Spring” (Oh et al. 2015).

But these optimistic (or at times pessimistic) positions are focused on the ability of citizens to use digital technologies to express themselves and modify their relationship with government, with the idealistic intent to transform government (Habermas 1989). This position is also grounded in a particular understanding of the affordances of digital technologies (Froomkin 2004). Such normative ideals are generally expressed from the “user perspective” and lose sight of government as an organisation concerned with, and accountable for, the delivery of legislated policy and services. Moreover, those normative ideals ignore the reluctance of public sector officials to introduce citizen participation in their routine operations as is evidenced in our study. One explanation for this reluctance stems from an entrenched internal culture of command and control that is diametrically opposed to open co-operative relationships with external entities. What is more relevant to this paper is that the dominant control culture of public sector organisations is reflected in the design of the IS artefact (Lee et al. 2015) used by the bureaucracy to achieve its mandated “efficiencies”.

With few exceptions, the literature on online CE in public sector organisations covers government direct service organisations such as health, transport, police, or disaster management (see for example Bunker & Smith 2009). By contrast, there is little literature on online CE, initiated or supported by governments themselves, which addresses government decision making. Local or regional governments are closest to the community and our research was motivated by two reports (Chadwick 2011, Hull et al 2011), published at the time we began our study, highlighting the limited achievements in government attempts at e-democracy. Both these studies found that internal ways of organising were the specific institutional impediments of e-democracy in government settings.

Summaries of work in the area, published during the conduct of our study, have been used to produce (1) an open government maturity model (Lee & Kwak 2012) and (2) a model of factors involved in social media adoption by governments (Sharif et al. 2015). We draw on these models as a starting point for the development of theory in the form of an integrated e-Democracy Framework. A recent overview of the topic (Oni & Okunoye 2018) concluded that success in e-democracy implementation is a complex mix of technological, economic, political, legal and cultural issues and that the barriers to greater online citizen engagement are not technological but cultural, institutional and constitutional.

### 3 Methodology

The methodology for this study has a firm theoretical basis in dialectic relationships informed by the Cynefin sense-making framework. We conducted a longitudinal study in 2 stages: (1) an initial action research (AR) study that established the Council's CE program involving their use of IS to fulfil their legislated CE obligations and (2) subsequent tracking and evaluations of the Council's efforts in adopting online tools for CE. In this second stage our data collection was limited to observations and interviews. Data collected during both stages of the study were qualitative and analysed and interpreted by the research team. This analysis was supplemented by content analysis of the AR data using the Leximancer tool. In the AR stage, the data was also analysed and interpreted by the Council's CE Team, in collaboration with the researchers, to address their practical problem.

The project was conducted with University ethics approval that covered all interactions and data collection processes. Council and their CE Team were all aware of the research aspects of the interventions and evaluations.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Basis of the Research

Underpinning this research is the dialectic and holistic Cynefin sense-making framework of knowledge management (Snowden 2002; Snowden and Boon 2010). Cynefin contrasts two domains of *order*: the known or simple domain and the knowable or complicated domain, with two domains of *unorder*; the complex and chaotic. Cynefin posits the *order-unorder* dialectic as a way of understanding the contradictory demands of exploiting knowledge through *ordered* "scientific" processes and the complexity of socio-technical systems that constitute the exploratory and *unordered* aspects of the problem space. In particular, Cynefin depicts how "order" is fundamentally different from "unorder" (Snowden 2002; Kim and Kaplan 2006) in terms of actors' behaviour, leadership style and the different tools, practices and conceptual understanding they bring to the problem space.

Following the canonical action research approach of Davison et al. (2012), we use the Cynefin framework as an instrumental theory (Angeles 1992) to design our interventions and evaluations and as a theoretical lens to explain the tensions in the phenomenon we are investigating. Specifically, we challenged the Council to consider their online community engagement in terms of a dialectic synthesis of the informal *unordered* perspective of the community with the Council's usual *ordered* bureaucratic approach to new initiatives.

#### 3.2 The Setting

The setting of the study is a town in regional Australia where the City Council and the University are leading civic organizations with long standing links and a history of joint endeavours. In 2011, the researchers were approached by members of the Council for assistance in planning their strategy for online community engagement. We later ascertained that the Council's approach was in response to new statutory requirements to broaden CE, following changes by the New South Wales (NSW) State Government to the Local Government Act (NSW DLG, 2009). This change in the Act required all local government councils to develop and implement their own 10-year Community Strategic Policy (CSP). One aim of the Act was to ensure that all citizens had appropriate opportunities to participate in local government planning and decision-making. The need for community engagement was brought home to the Council during an episode when they introduced parking meters to the CBD. This Council initiative faced great resistance from the community who felt that they had

not been consulted whereas the Council believed that consultation had been undertaken at a previous town meeting.

The practical problem enunciated by the CE Team was the challenge of using online systems to develop creative, cost effective, reliable methods to engage greater numbers and diversity of members of the community in Council planning and decision-making. Their stated objective was to capture community needs and aspirations for the future, although the underlying motivation was compliance with the new State legislation. Our research involvement began with an action research intervention in 2012, followed by evaluations which were undertaken over the subsequent seven years to ascertain how successful the Council had been in their use of IS for CE over this time and what impact, if any, this had on the Council.

### **3.3 Action Research in the Context of CE**

Collaboration with the Council was based on the separate but related agendas of the CE Team and our imperatives as university researchers. This made it an ideal project for action research (AR), a recognised research method in a number of fields (e.g. Van Eynde & Bledsoe 1990), as it deliberately sets out to solve a practical problem and at the same time to advance the body of disciplinary knowledge on a topic represented by the problem. AR allows action to be framed and informed by a conceptual framework derived from theory (Baskerville & Wood-Harper 1996) and for that action to be relevant by providing practical solutions to a recognised problem.

AR involves several phases, namely diagnosis, planning, action, evaluation and learning (Mathiassen et al 2012). This cycle is considered an idealised template to be adjusted to the problem situation (Baskerville and Wood-Harper 1996). However, recurrent criticism of AR is that it is essentially a consultancy with little research rigor. For this reason, McKay and Marshall (2001) argue that AR requires both a problem-solving cycle and an explicit research cycle that establishes and articulates the research agenda of the intervention. The explicit adoption of this dual agenda requires the design of the intervention to both solve the practical problem but also to provide opportunities for collecting data as an evidence base for the research contribution.

In our case, the problem-solving agenda of the CE Team is better community engagement and more participation of citizens in Council's decision-making. This paper focuses on our research agenda to better understand e-democracy by exploring the dialectic tensions between the Council's *ordered*, bureaucratic adoption of new IS for CE, and the *unordered*, informal community members' response to Council initiatives and decision making.

### **3.4 Stage 1: The Action Research Intervention**

Following the phases of AR, in the *diagnosis* phase we identified the Council's problems and motivations. At the time all CE activities involved face-to-face community forums which were attended by those few citizens who had the time and interest to attend. The new Act required broader CE involvement by citizens particularly those too busy or otherwise unable to attend such forums. The immediate problem for the CE Team was to provide a draft CSP to Council that would include a credible description of the means, preferably involving new technologies, by which they could engage the wider community

In the AR *planning* phase, the CE Team and researchers discussed the suitability of groupware systems for community engagement. The action research approach lent itself to the use of IS groupware because our intervention would demonstrate how such a system could be used for

CE. Our intervention involved the CE Team using groupware in face-to-face mode to understand the potential of the system to support CE when used by citizens in online mode. The CE Team had heard about the Zing groupware system<sup>1</sup>, developed by a research student at the University, and we suggested that Zing be trialled in face-to-face mode in a workshop. This class of technology has several advantages for practice and research. Typically, in open “town hall” style meetings it is often only the loudest voices that are heard. With groupware everyone has equal status and can write and submit their ideas in their own words. Moreover, because a groupware system captures participants’ contributions as text, it automates research data collection replacing the need for recording, transcribing and notetaking by researchers.

The workshop was held outside Council premises at a neutral site. The motivation behind this decision was to remove both the CE Team and researchers from their usual work environment and to encourage Council staff to be open and forthright in their participation. As most of the CE Team and the researchers resided in the local area, their participation in the workshop would have a dual agenda. On one hand all participants could act as citizens, expressing their personal views on issues that the Council raised. On the other hand, participants would act as professionals, reflecting on their engagement as citizens. By playing dual roles, participants were able to examine issues from both points of view and recognise and appreciate the inherent tension between a normative organisational imperative and the diversity of individual views of the issues. The inherent duality of roles was discussed and explored extensively during the planning and design of the workshop.

Preparatory discussions were conducted between the two leaders of the CE Team and the two lead researchers to create a set of questions to guide the workshop discussion. This meeting produced the set of questions listed in Appendix 1 that would be pre-loaded into the Zing system for the workshop. This was done so that, in the *evaluation* phase of AR, the analysis of the data collected in Zing would help in the development of a practical solution; in this case to articulate the Council’s CE strategy in the mandatory CSP.

The *action* phase of the AR cycle was the conduct of the workshop. This was considered an intervention as it provided a hands-on experience of the interface and functionality of a class of technologies suitable for community engagement, exemplified by Zing. Moreover, the intervention provided the CE Team with an opportunity to reflect on what is possible to do with the technology based on their practical experience. The workshop was also an opportunity to collect a variety of views from Council staff on their past experiences, current attitudes and possible future adaptation of the Council’s processes for community engagement. Participation in the workshop gave Council staff, including the CE Team, an insight into the affordances and capabilities of the technology to support effective citizen engagement with local government.

This workshop also addressed the research agenda of AR. The Zing sessions were designed to demonstrate how IS impacts online engagement and provide insight into how it might influence CE. Data collected during the *action* phase helped to identify the implications of undertaking such a technology strategy for community engagement and provided the empirical basis for theorising e-democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://zingthing.com/>

The half-day workshop involved 11 participants including the CE Team, other Council staff and four researchers. After introductions and a briefing, a Zing session was held to brainstorm answers to the prepared questions to explore the perceptions and ideas of community engagement of all participants. This was followed by a debriefing and reflection session, recorded in Zing (Q14 in Appendix 1), on the participants' experience of using the Zing system and their views on the use of such technologies in CE.

The *evaluation* phase was conducted shortly after the workshop and involved review of the raw data from the Zing sessions by both the CE Team and the researchers. The data was presented as lists of responses entered by all participants in answer to each of the questions posed during the Zing session. The CE Team were asked to summarise their impression of the responses and its contribution to the development of CSP. The researchers categorised the responses through the lens of the Cynefin *order-unorder* dialectic, taking into account the CE Team's perceptions of the data, to draw theoretical insights into the use of IS to engage citizens. The evaluation phase was then continued into a second stage of the research.

### **3.5 Stage 2: Tracking and Evaluating CE**

Our longitudinal study evaluated the long-term impact of the practical outcomes of AR on the Council's CE activities. This was conducted over a period of seven years from 2012 to 2018. The researchers collected data from CE documents produced by Council during that time and observed their attempts at implementing IS for CE. In addition, we also conducted two semi-structured interviews with Council officers in 2015 and 2018. The interviews during the evaluation stage were limited as our "formal" engagement with Council ended with the release of the CSP document. Moreover, the interviews were conducted at critical points in the development of the Council's ongoing CE program as the technology environment evolved over time. Our evaluations, discussed in detail in section 4, included:

- content analysis of the 10-year CSP document released in 2012
- an assessment of the online CE website set up in 2014 as a response to the 2012 strategy
- an assessment of the use of social media by the Council since 2015
- content analysis of a draft CE Council Policy document released in 2018
- opportunistic semi-structured interviews conducted in 2015 and 2018 with the manager of the CE Team

Analysis of this data led to a better understanding of what the Council's CE Team had learnt from our intervention and provided us with a clearer view of the dialectic tensions that hindered the full implementation of the Council's CE strategy.

## **4 Research Findings**

Analysis of the detailed data collected from Stage 1 AR provided immediate practical application to the Council's policy development. Moreover, we discovered that our intervention would have long-term consequences, so we continued the *evaluation* phase in Stage 2 over a period of seven years.



The Cynefin lens enabled us to tease out the dialectic tensions between the perceived *ordered* and *unordered* aspects of the CE problem. The results of our evaluation of both stages, reported here, contributed to the development of our e-Democracy Framework.

#### 4.1 Stage 1: Collection of data from the Workshop

A substantial amount of data was collected at the workshop reflecting the strong engagement of the participants with the topic. At the workshop, the user interface and functionality of the Zing system rapidly became ubiquitous and participants concentrated on what they wanted to say and what others were saying in response to each question. This prompted lively discussions and many ideas were entered into the Zing system, giving the CE Team a real world understanding of the dynamics of computer mediated interactive conversation and diversity of citizen views.

The richness of the data highlights the range of dialectic tensions that exists. An example is participants' views of their city, shown in their responses to Questions 1 and 2 (Table 1). All participants, who lived locally, gave very positive views about the City, showing their devotion to the City and pride that they all have both as citizens and Council workers. However, participants also recognised the problems that the City faces as shown by their answers to the second question. A synthesis of both sets of views represents the reality of the situation, highlighting the dialectic tension between positive and negative aspects of the community and its environment. This complexity frames the community as essentially *unordered* in contrast to the essentially *ordered* nature of a government organisation revealed in the following section of the paper.

Q1 What are the really good things about living in our city	Q2 What are some of the problems facing our community?
beaches, bush and restaurant lifestyle it's a city without being too big and busy location, climate surf sun people the innovation campus, proximity to Sydney, cheaper real estate influences of different cultures – food relaxed environment	rising crime rates youth unemployment lack of infrastructure dying inner city centre ageing community- changing needs for housing and infrastructure working poor- level of increasing disadvantage in pockets around the city city shopping precinct is uninteresting poor council and government image

Table 1: Responses to Questions 1 and 2

#### 4.2 Stage 1: Manual Inspection of Zing Data by the CE Team

Following the workshop, all the raw data collected from the Zing system was sent to the CE Team and a week later they had identified three core themes in the data expressed in the following statements:

- (a) Building learning and knowledge exchange networks for CE
- (b) Educating the community for CE
- (c) Developing Council staff capability for CE

It should be noted that regarding statement (a) the term “learning and knowledge exchange networks” was frequently used by the researchers in meetings with the CE Team prior to the

workshop and seemed to have become part of their terminology as it resonated with what they wanted to express.

Statements (b) and (c) appear to reflect the traditional view of the relationship between Council and citizens. Statement (b) implies that Council knows best, and it therefore has the knowledge, power and responsibility to educate the citizens on how to use appropriate channels to provide feedback to Council on topics identified by Council. Statement (c) gives the impression of a bureaucratic approach to determining the Council’s way of doing CE and developing the capability for that.

These three broad themes essentially incorporate ideas that align with the Council’s internal *ordered* way of thinking and organising. This contrasted to the multiple perspectives evident in the discussion at the workshop. Many of the more innovative ideas that emerged in the *unordered* enthusiasm of the workshop seemed to get lost once the participants were back at work. We postulate that this was due to the fact that a week had passed, and the culture of the work environment dominated the attention of the Council CE Team. We formed the view that future approaches to CE would in essence stay the same even if new technologies are introduced.

### 4.3 Stage 1: Manual Inspection of Zing Data by the Researchers

A manual inspection was made by the researchers of the Zing data (the text as typed anonymously by workshop participants) using the lens of Cynefin to categorise responses as *ordered* or *unordered* (Ali 2014). Consensus on the categorisation of each statement in the Zing data was based on discussion between the researchers. The most meaningful and insightful findings came from questions 5, 6, 10 and 11 (Appendix 1). Question 5 is “From Council’s point of view what should CE involve?” The CE Team could speak with authority on this and the results in Table 2 inform us of participants’ perspectives on organisational practices.

Ordered	Unordered
[Council must] be quite clear on the level of influence the community will have on the decision - is it inform Or collaborate Or empower [Council must] inform community how the final decision will be made [We need] a clear understanding of what the input from the community will be [We need] compliance with government regulations [We need] clear process, clear guidelines, purpose [We need] a whole of organisation approach	sourcing knowledge from community members open and transparent opportunity to give feedback all stakeholders not just the squeaky wheels with a barrow to push process is as important as the outcome- relationships and collaboration keeping the momentum going listening to the community and not going in with fixed ideas connecting with hard to reach groups developing community representative groups abilities to engage ns understand CE getting community ownership of issues from the beginning internal Council engagement using different approaches creative methods- exciting and interesting opportunities to have your say- both at a pre-planning phase (i.e. at the very beginning before an idea has been informed) and on things that are more progressed technology, blogs, Facebook, interactive tools - fast feedback

Table 2 Responses to Question 5

Question 6 is “What should CE involve when viewed from the Community’s standpoint?” This question required workshop participants to consider CE issues as citizens, from the local

community perspective, was not difficult and all participants agreed that this was quite authentic as most of them lived in the local community. Responses were predominantly *unordered* as shown in Table 3.

<b>Unordered (predominately)</b>
transparency and honesty feedback on ideas and what happened to the information provided convenience needs to cross boundaries within the community being listened to accommodate different perspectives and interests Council needs to work together and not be separate parts take into consideration the different cultures, languages, etc. changing from community viewpoint that council will do what suits them anyway too much political interference from bully-boys groups genuine attitude- open to my opinion- don't play the expert card ALL the time technology, email, internet

Table 3 Responses to Question 6

Questions 10 and 11 provide an opportunity to reflect on issues associated with the communication between Council and the community. Question 10 is “What barriers to CE exist now (within the Council and within the Community)?” Question 11 is “How would you propose these barriers be overcome?” These questions provided opportunities for Council workers to be creative and innovative in the way they saw Council engaging with the community.

<b>Ordered</b>	<b>Unordered</b>
time, money, resources, bureaucracy	council culture, attitude- internal take up and commitment internal beliefs perceived agendas, different factions, historical events, fear- of change lack of control

Table 4 Responses to Question 10

<b>Ordered</b>	<b>Unordered</b>
more money, more staff, budget and resources when community sees results from the implementation of integrated planning reporting educate the community - specific targeted groups so as to bring them into the CE fold engagement team values as an expert in the process early on- the ideas and strategies are listened and responded to early CE reference group development of greater internal capacity to conduct comm. engagement	trial and assess new structures for CE and research alternate methods from elsewhere - other councils etc it is better if initiatives come from the people find ways to engage with the whole community, i.e.; technology, social media openness to social media as a forum and method of ongoing engagement

Table 5 Responses to Question 11

This collection of responses informed the researchers of the significant elements that should be included in our focal theory, an e-Democracy Framework. The responses provide a rich picture of what CE could be in a more democratic, open and participatory environment in accord with the affordances of digital group technologies such as Zing.

#### 4.4 Stage 1: Automated Analysis of Zing Data

The data from the workshop was also analysed using the content analysis tool Leximancer and the results are shown in the maps of Appendix 2. Leximancer maps arrange concepts in patterns that represent significant themes and the influence between them. This analysis revealed a different and richer picture of the participants' view of CE to that of the manual inspection.

The large central themes are *CE*, *Community* and *Groups*. Viewing the map as a whole through the Cynefin lens, the smaller outlying themes on the left-hand side of the map are more *ordered* particularly those of *Public Works*, *Barriers*, *Online*, *City* and *Stakeholders* while those on the right-hand side, particularly that of *Individual*, are more *unordered*. Looking at these more closely, we present the following interpretation of the patterns of concepts.

The *CE* Theme links together many of the concepts related to traditional top-down ways of working such a *leadership*, *technology*, *strategy*, *development activities* linking through to *bureaucracy* in the *Barrier* Theme. Together with the close-by Themes of *Public Works*, *City* and *Stakeholders*, it speaks to an *ordered* view of government. Table 6 lists the main concept in these Themes. We found it interesting that the concept *online* is located in this *ordered* pattern, pointing to a bureaucratic attitude to digital interaction.

Theme	Concept
Public Works	Neighbourhood, Forums, Spaces, Accessibility
Barriers	Bureaucracy
Online	Relationship, Attitude
Stakeholders	Compliance
City	Citizens, Authority

Table 6: Themes and Concepts on the Ordered Side of the Maps

The *Group* theme contains concept of *connecting*, *people*, *change*, *initiatives*, *projects*, *decision*, and *momentum*, linking through to the *Individual* Theme. This is a set of concepts reflecting a more progressive, *unordered* view that would be open to the increased involvement in government processes of individuals and a broader range of community groups.

The *Community* Theme is central with a large set of concepts overlapping with adjacent Themes. On the side closest to the *Groups* Theme are the concepts *issues*, *diverse* and *different* which are associated with an *unordered* view of doing things. On the other hand, concepts of *results*, *accessed* and *external* are linked to the ordered aspect of this Theme. Central to the *Community* Theme are the concepts of *consultation*, *collaboration* and *engagement* which imply a progression towards a more open orientation of CE. This is reflected in the Open Government Maturity Model (Lee & Kwak 2012) depicted in Figure 2.

These patterns exemplify dialectic relationships between local government and community ways of working. Many of the workshop participants both worked for Council and lived locally so were members of the community. At the workshop, held outside Council premises, they expressed many views from the community perspective, such as "we want Council to listen", "it is better if initiatives come from the people". However, their feedback a week later when they were back at the office reflected the Council perspective that conformed to formal Council structures, processes, and one-way communication from Council. Six months after the workshop a formal CSP was submitted, as required by legislation, with little sign of any

innovative use of technology for cooperative exchanges between Council and the community. It appears that, despite an expressed willingness to explore new ways of working, there was little appreciation of the potential of technologies as they were still seen as risky and a challenge for the entrenched, *ordered*, organising principles of Council.

#### 4.5 Stage 1 Outcomes – Towards the Council’s CE Policy of 2012

The immediate concern of the CE Team after the Zing workshop was to complete their 10-year CSP. Figure 1 shows the statements on the Council’s intentions for online CE which were included by the CE Team in the CSP. These statements show that the overall objective of the Council’s CE strategy is to enable residents to “take an active role in decisions”. Of particular interest to our research question, is that Council has in place a strategy (4.1.2) to use technology and social media in their effort to meet this objective. The two Community Indicators send conflicting messages on this. The first focuses on the importance on how people feel, which could be construed as an *unordered* aspect. The second focusses on “formal engagement activities” which certainly reveals an *ordered* orientation and a dialectic tension with the first indicator.

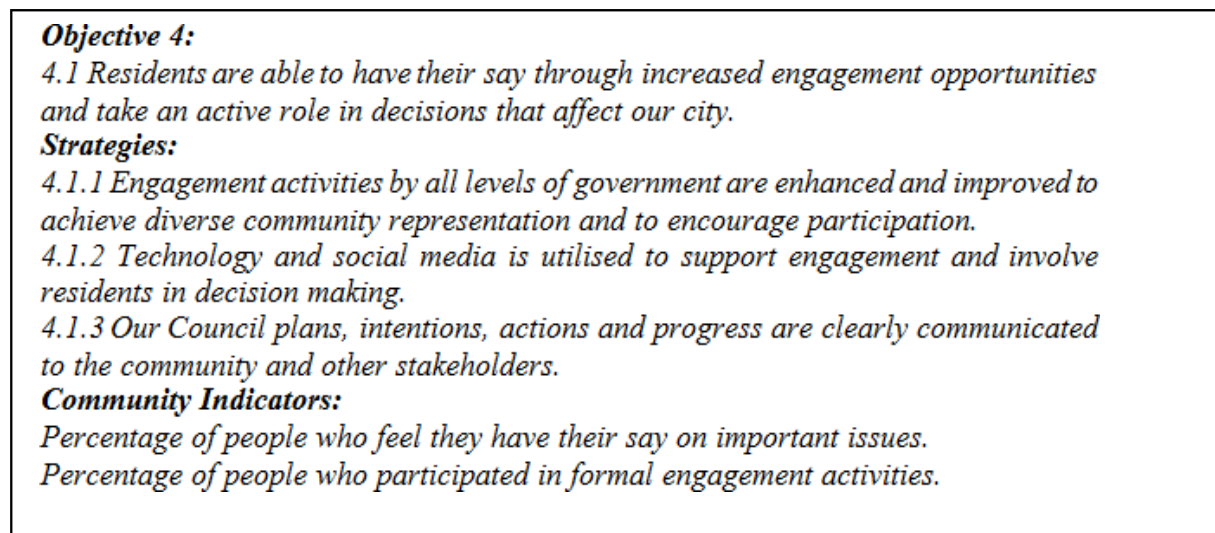


Figure 1 Statements concerning the use of technology in the CE Strategic Policy of 2012

Appendix 3a shows the CE page on the Council’s website in early 2012. The emphasis is on the provision of information from Council to citizens. The “Have Your Say” page only mentions community Forums and Kiosks, with no online CE facility.

#### 4.6 Stage 2 Findings from Ongoing Assessment of the Council’s Online CE

Following the completion of Stage 1 of the research in 2012, we continued to observe and record online CE initiatives of the Council from our perspective as citizens. In order to get the Council’s perspective on these initiatives, interviews were conducted in 2015 and 2018 with the manager of the CE Team. The results are summarised in Table 7

Years	Initiative	Citizen Perspective	Council Perspective
2014- now	Councils CE website “Our Place, Our Voice, Our Future” set up in 2014 using the “Bang the Table” (BTT) Platform See Appendix 3b Also adopted by several other Councils	About 300 citizens are registered from a population of 200,000. There are strict usage policies, users are blocked for non-compliance. With occasional exceptions, Council only allows discussion on topics nominated by them, which does not inspire many posts and discourages any vigorous debate. Only Council can post documents or videos	Council uses the site to publicise new programs, promptly respond to any posts by citizens. Polls are used by Council runs citizen surveys on proposed projects. These are widely publicised with good online responses (1000-2000). Council believes that it has broadened its CE reach
2015 now	Council use of Twitter @Wollongong_City	Currently 6,411 followers some retweet council posts. Council also retweets posts they find interesting and serves their purpose	The twitter posts for the week are planned in advance while sometimes additional ones are sent out ad hoc if there are new local developments
2015 now-	Council Official Facebook page @cityofwollongong: aims to inform citizens and promote the city	Page has 30,00 likes. In 2015 posting by citizens was moderated Appendix 3c shows its Facebook policy in 2015 with the rules for posting on the right-hand side. In 2018 these rules disappeared, and citizens can no longer post on the page.	One of the CE Team is responsible for posting on behalf of Council and in 2015 for moderating posts by citizens.

Table 7 - Summary of Stage 2 Results

In the 2015 phone interview, the Council CE manager said that her team had applied what they had learnt from the AR Stage of our research when writing the 10-year CE Strategy in 2012. When it came to implementing the strategy, the CE Team had spent most of 2013 changing the Council’s branding which was reflected in the look and feel of the whole Council website. The CE team also began to incorporate some Web 2.0 functionality and found our research findings extremely valuable. This led to the adoption of the BTT software shown in Appendix 3b and described in Table 7 providing evidence that it is not a tool that suits the *unordered* nature of the community but does suit the *ordered* imperatives of Council.

It was mentioned in the interview that individual citizens now contact the Council by email and these emails are answered by a personal return email. Sometimes a concern raised by a citizen in an email leads to a posting on the BTT site if the CE Team thinks that other citizens might benefit.

The overall message we received from the 2015 interview was that there was progress on Council’s use of IS for CE and that the CE manager believed that changes would continue as their confidence and understanding grew. Later in 2015, Council had begun to use social media as shown in Table 7

In 2018 we interviewed a new CE Team manager who wanted to make more use of social media but expressed frustration with the way the two main online CE platforms, BTT and Facebook, were controlled by Council policy in a structured and bureaucratic manner. Neither platform promotes any real discussion, discouraging dissenting opinions. She commented that the potential that social media once had for citizen engagement in local government has been

negated by its misuse world-wide. There are now many Twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts set up by groups and individuals that promote discussion and advocacy on many local issues involving Council but with no official Council posts.

#### 4.7 Stage 2 The 2018 Council CE Policy Document

In 2018 the Council released a new draft Community Engagement Policy calling for comment from its citizens. This new document is inspired by the approach taken by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community and stakeholder engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world<sup>2</sup>. The IAP2 Australasia Strategic Plan was ratified as a Quality Assurance Standard in November 2017 with the intention to implement it in local governments across Australia.

Our intention in the following section of the paper is to develop a framework, based on our research findings, that can guide those councils currently adopting IAP2 in a way that accommodates a synthesis of their need for bureaucratic *order* with the *unorder* of diverse community expectations.

### 5 Theorising Community Engagement: An e-Democracy Framework

In action research, a focal theory is used to provide the intellectual basis for problem solving (Davison et al., 2012). In our case, this takes the form of a framework to theorise e-democracy as both a research contribution and as a device for solving practical CE problems. The framework is developed from the extant literature and augmented by our findings.

#### 5.1 The Foundations of the Framework

As foreshadowed in the Background Section of the paper, our theorising of e-democracy builds on the two published models depicted in Figures 2 and 3. The first of these models, Figure 2, is Lee and Kwak's Open Government Maturity Model (Lee & Kwak 2012) published not long after we began the first stage of our research. Viewed through the dialectic lens of Cynefin we argue that the bottom right section of the model, citing Technical/Managerial complexity and Challenges/Risks, reflects the *ordered* concerns of Council. It must be noted that the use of the term *complexity* in the model is used in a way that does not concur with Snowden's use of the term. In the context of the model, it reflects concerns about fitting such "complexity" into the bureaucratic structures and processes aligned with Snowden's use of the *ordered* phrase "complicated but knowable". The top left section, Open Government maturity, Public engagement and Public value, reflects the *unordered* concerns of the community. We would interpret the model as a synthesis of the *ordered-unorder* dialectic and the five ascending phases in this maturity model would logically form one dimension of our proposed e-democracy framework.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iap2.org.au/About-Us/About-IAP2-Australasia->

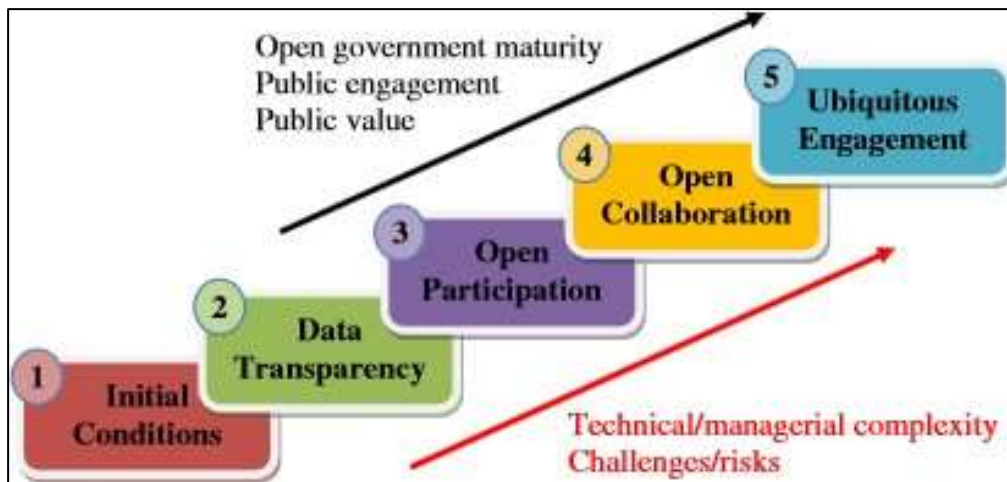


Figure 2. Open Government Maturity Model (OGMM) (from Lee & Kwak 2012)

In the light of our study, the maturity phases are interpreted as follows:

- *Data Transparency*: an *ordered* push strategy with government distributing information but little or no opportunities for any engagement
- *Open Participation*: government dictating where, how and when input from citizens is required. This is still *ordered* but some *unorder* is introduced as government does not control citizen input
- *Open Collaboration*: invites citizen engagement but with the agenda strictly controlled by government. Here there is recognition of *unorder* by government but with attempts to impose order by controlling the agenda
- *Ubiquitous Engagement* is where there is a synthesis of the *ordered* bureaucratic needs of government systems and the *unordered* diversity of views held by local residents, where government and citizens share ownership and responsibility for cooperative decision-making.

The elements in Lee & Kwak's (2012) model can be interpreted, outside the confines of a maturity model, as the general nature of the community engagement and the outcomes of this engagement. In this broader interpretation, these elements are aligned with the concepts identified in the workshop and represent the social behaviour of (local) government. In this context, our understanding of online CE follows Oni and Okunoye (2018) who use the terms *e-engagement* for IS that supports government consultation and participation with citizens and *e-consultation* as exchanges between government and citizens using the Internet. They suggest that successful e-democracy implementation goes further and should be based on ubiquitous technology where social and cultural considerations are the focus.

Sharif et al (2015) published their model of social media adoption, as shown in Figure 3. When viewed through the dialectic lens of Cynefin, we see the *ordered* concerns of Council management (risk, policy etc) on the right-hand side and on the left, the *unordered* (faddish) community demands and perceived benefit concerns of the community. In Sharif et al.'s (2015) model the three over-riding factors are *Technology*, *Organisation* and *Environment*. These factors represent areas that are impacted, or themselves have an impact, on the use of social media. However, based on the findings of our study we judged these factors as necessary, but not



sufficient, to represent the dialectic tensions between the *ordered* bureaucracy of government and the *unordered* diversity of community.

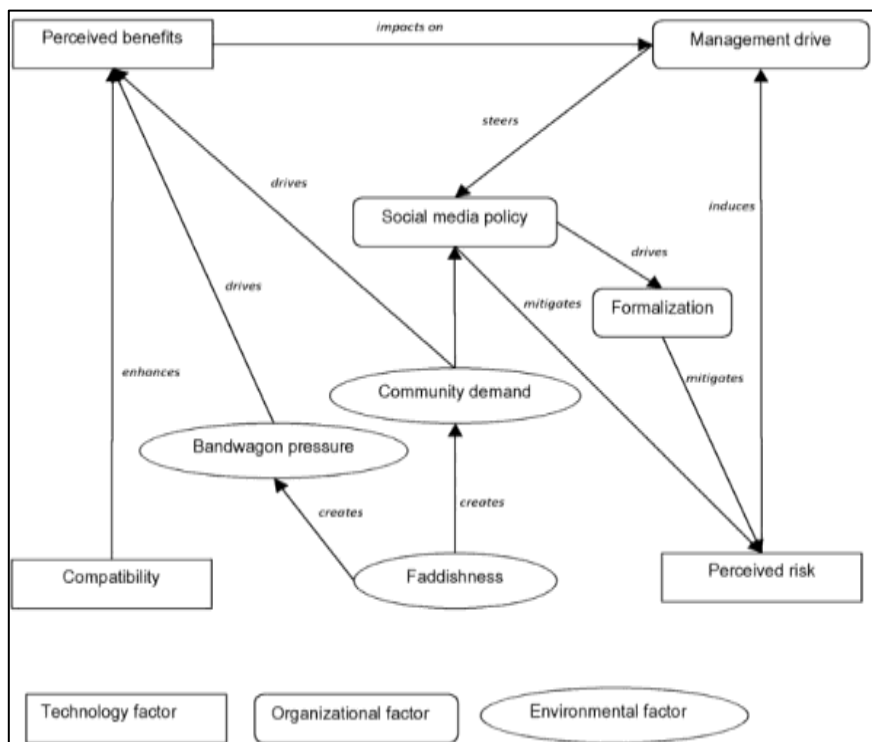


Figure 3 Interaction of factors impacting social media adoption (from Sharif et al 2015)

We interpret Sharif et al.'s (2015) model as a synthesis of the *ordered-unorder* dialectic perspectives and adopt the three factors of technology, organisation and environment as a second dimension of our proposed e democracy framework. However, in light of our research findings, we propose to distinguish between the organisational environment and the community environment and also include the communication between these two environments giving us five factors:

- *Technology*: from the Zing experience discussed under Question 14 and the evaluation of post workshop online CE efforts over seven years
- *Organisational Practice*: from the analysis of responses to Question 5 in Table 2 and feedback from the CE Team
- *Organisational Environment*: from the analysis of the Leximancer concept map and post workshop Interview
- *Community Environment*: from the analysis of responses to Questions 1, 2 and 5 in Tables 1 and 3
- *Communication*: from the analysis of responses to Questions 10 and 11 in Tables 4 and 5

## 5.2 Development of our Framework

In developing our framework, we have adopted Hirschheim et al.'s (1996) nomenclature, used in their framework for the Intellectual Structures of IS Development, drawing on the social

action theories of Habermas (1987) and Etzioni (1968). On the one hand, we use the concept of *Orientation* in terms of the intention and behaviours on the part of the government organisation towards CE. In this sense, we have adapted Lee and Kwak's elements for the orientation dimension of the framework as a continuum of *order-unorder* as discussed in the previous section.

On the other hand, Hirschheim et al.'s *Domains of Change* identifies what aspects are transformed as a result of CE activity. The five factors adapted from the Sharif et al (2015) model and listed above, form the second dimension of the framework. The resulting e-democracy framework, depicted in Figure 4, correlates these two dimensions as a matrix to create different views of CE activity and possibilities for changes as one moves around the matrix. In Figure 4 we have populated this matrix with typical CE activities as an illustration of how CE can be understood in terms of the *order-unorder* dialectic. In our study we have observed CE in the Data Transparency, Open Participation and Open Collaboration *Orientations* but have not observed a genuine Ubiquitous Engagement *Orientation*. In the continuum of each *Domain of Change*, CE moves from more *order* towards a synthesis of *order* and *unorder* as CE progresses across the *Orientations* from left to right.

Orientation Domains of Change	Data Transparency	Open Participation	Open Collaboration	Ubiquitous Engagement
<b>Technology</b>	Web 1.0 Closed	Use of Web 2.0 CE systems such as BTT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New discussion systems in use but moderated by government</li> <li>• increased use of Social Media</li> </ul>	Integrated, open and ubiquitous as needed and appropriate
<b>Organisational Practices</b>	Mitigate Risk with Control	Strict Usage Policy and rules for use of online CE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimentation in online CE</li> <li>• Limited benefits realisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open CE</li> <li>• Balance risk and benefits</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational Culture</b>	Closed bureaucratic	Hybrid but more closed	Hybrid but more open	Policy for openness wherever possible
<b>Communication</b>	F2F Forums involve only a small section of the community	Online Discussion of issues. Pushed by government who controlled pull	Interactive and multi-channel communication more responsive to citizen issues but still driven by government but more balanced	Citizen and government driven open, balanced and inclusive
<b>Community Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government tendency to hide negatives</li> <li>• Community dissatisfaction</li> </ul>	Recognition of positive and negative aspects	Working together for improvements	Community expectation of completely open government

Figure 4: The e-Democracy Framework

It is important to note that the e-Democracy Framework depicted in Figure 4 results from our study's Research Agenda articulated in the action research of stage 1, with examples from the study inserted in relevant cells of the table

### 5.3 Implication of the e-Democracy Framework for CE Practice

Our research began by adopting an action research design with a dual agenda: (1) to solve the practical problem of implementing online CE to enhance e-democracy, and (2) to provide opportunities for collecting data as an evidence base for an e-democracy framework as the research contribution. The research agenda has dominated the paper to this point with its outcomes depicted in Figure 4 above. We now return to the practical CE agenda and consider how our research outcomes can be used to influence current practice.

Our study began almost 10 years ago, when the Council had to respond to the NSW State Government Act requiring all local councils to develop and implement their own 10-year CE Strategy. Ten years later the Council was required by the State to develop a new CE policy, this time based on the IAP2 Framework, depicted in Appendix 4.

Based on our longitudinal evaluation of Council's implementation of CE, we believe that even after 10 years, dialectic tensions remain a challenge for CE. The dialectic tension concerns the Council's need for bureaucratic *order* and the *unordered* nature of diverse community expectations. We suggested that our e-Democracy Framework (Figure 4) could be used as a guide for those local government councils currently adopting IAP2, thereby allowing them to design a CE strategy which incorporates a synthesis of *order* and *unorder*.

When we first saw IAP2, we were surprised that it proposed that collaboration is the ultimate *Level of Engagement* and is only used for long term planning. Our Framework follows Lee and Kwak's lead in recognising *Ubiquitous Engagement* as the most mature level of CE where the community takes open government as the norm and is supported by open technology. In contrast to IAP2, our Framework can be used as a maturity model where councils can identify where each *Domains of Change* in their CE strategy lies along the *Orientation* continuum. Guided by the examples described in Figure 4, councils can populate the cells of the Framework with their own initiatives and strategies to assess how these plans impact the level of maturity of each *Domain of Change*.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

The findings of our investigation indicate that the traditional way of organising by governments continues to be predominantly *ordered*, bureaucratic, hierarchical and closed in the sense that there is a clear boundary between the Council and the community. Council's public websites are designed to provide information to external constituents, announce what Council is doing and more recently provide structured opportunities for feedback on issues determined by Council. This is typical of what is commonly called e-government and which we characterise as *ordered*.

The research we have reported indicates a movement towards the more complex concept of e-democracy where knowledge flows both ways across the boundary between the formal structures and ways of working of governments and the informal activities of the community.

We posed the research question: "How does the open nature of online *exchanges within communities* challenge the practices and culture of government bureaucracies?" In answering this question, we introduced a theoretical approach, based on the Cynefin sense-making

framework melded with the Hegalian dialectic triad, to encompass the complexities of e-democracy. This approach leads to an understanding and resolution of complex issues where opposing views (*thesis* and *antithesis*), are replaced by an emergent *synthesis* which reconciles the two. In particular, our findings suggest that issues confronting government-community engagement cannot be resolved exclusively through an *ordered* or *unordered* paradigm but needs to be approached as a dialectical synthesis of both.

Genuine e-democracy represents a radical *unordered* departure from the current *ordered* practices of e-government that are comfortable for the bureaucracy because they conform to the traditional way of doing business, albeit with different technology. e-Democracy thus represents a departure from the “comfort zone” of the pre-digital era and creates contradictions. The dialectical challenge facing government is the need to deliver mandated efficiencies while also providing opportunities for diverse constituents in civil society to be involved in decision making and co-production of services (Nalbandian et al. 2013).

Our research has demonstrated that digital technologies have the capability and affordance to enable open interaction between government and citizens. There is little doubt that IS, in particular social media, has the potential to enable more open interaction between government and citizens that is at the core of e-democracy.

Such technology, when deployed appropriately within an IS artefact, allows governments to build the capability for working with the *unordered* networked and informal cultures of civil society. However, the technologies that facilitate e-democracy challenge the government’s traditional ways of organising. Tensions between the openness of IS driven CE and the everyday working of Council were evident in our findings. On the other hand, our long-term view of the Council’s progress in implementing their CE strategy shows that they are aware of the expectation of civil society and the desire of citizens to be involved. And they have shown their willingness to implement technology to meet those expectations. What is also apparent is that the real issue confronting Council is resolving the dialectic between their *ordered* operational imperatives and the demands for *unordered* citizen participation. In our study, a complete synthesis to resolve this contradiction has not yet been found. However, we speculate that the evolving appropriation of newer IS platforms can underpin the emergence of authentic e-democracy in the form of citizen journalism and use of social media by politicians and government leaders.

In exploring these issues, we have used our study to theorise e-democracy in a way that accounts for the contradictory demands on government. In this framework we have captured the behavioural and structural elements that define e-democracy. This opens the possibility of identifying new hybrid forms of organising that accommodate the dialectic between *ordered* and *unordered* actions that constitute CE. This suggests a research agenda to explore and theorise CE strategies in order to populate the cells within the matrix and establish a broader theoretical basis for CE. But at a practical level the framework can also be used to map the current status of CE of an organisation or to design a CE strategy to make interactions with civil society more meaningful.

It must be noted that as an action research study, we have interacted and examined only one Council. However, our e-Democracy Framework provides a theoretical and empirically driven construct to study the broad landscape of e-democracy to identify good community engagement practices and even set an agenda for meaningful e-democracy at all levels of government.

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## **Appendix 1: Zing questions**

The questions determined by the pre-workshop meeting

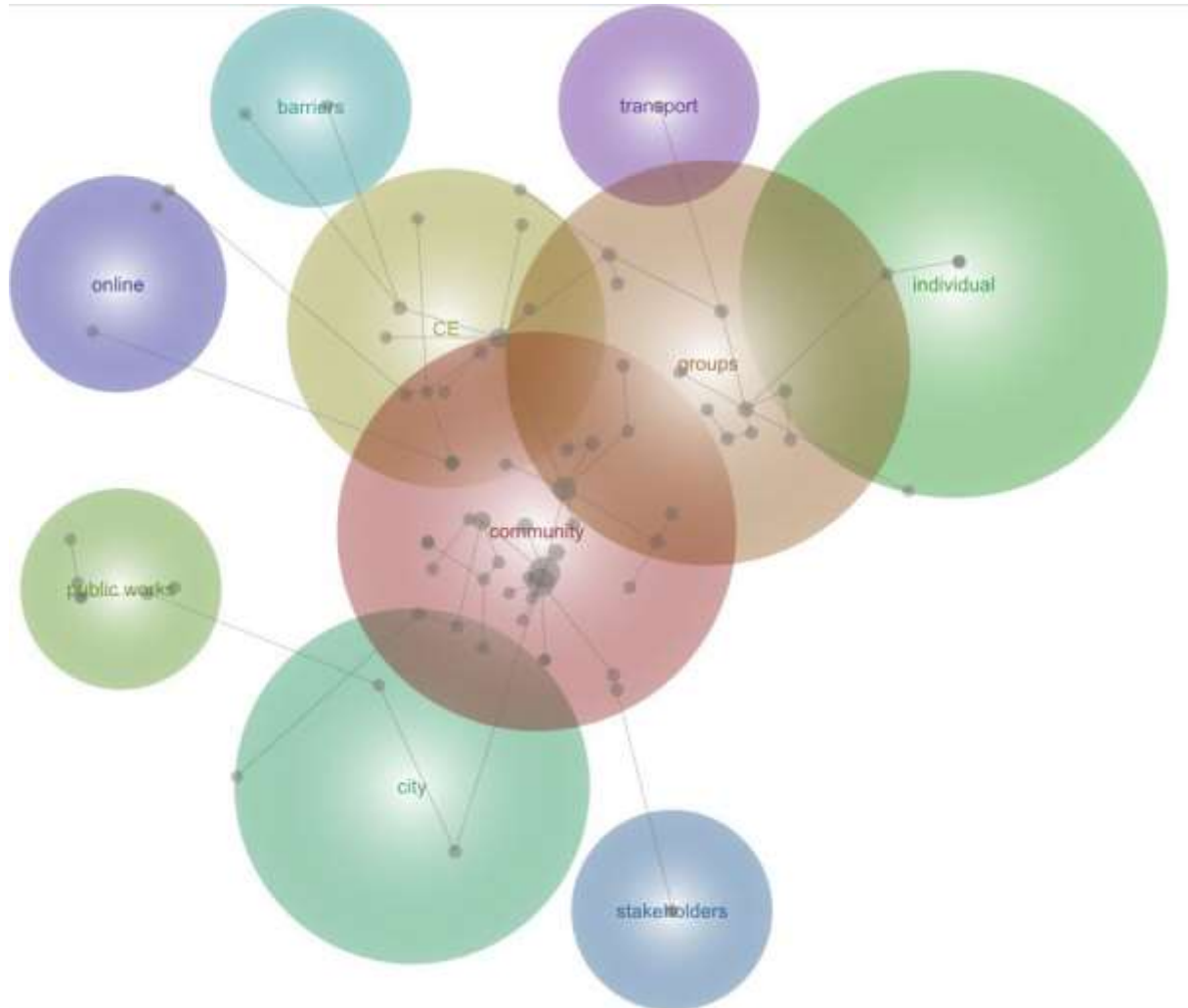
- (1) What are the really good things about living in our region?
- (2) What are some of the problems facing the community?
- (3) What/Who is the Community?
- (4) What CE activities are currently performed by Council?
- (5) From Council's point of view what should community engagement involve?
- (6) What should CE involve when viewed from the Community's standpoint?
- (7) Does Council have a mainly business orientation to CE?
- (8) Should Council also demonstrate a stronger social development orientation to CE? Why and how?
- (9) What groups are or should be the target of Council CE?
- (10) What barriers to CE exist now (within Council and within the Community)?
- (11) How would you propose these barriers be overcome?
- (12) What current council policies encourage, restrict or in some way affect CE?
- (13) Describe your longer term vision/goal for community engagement by Council
- (14) Any ideas/suggestions for new ways to pursue CE (e.g. technology supported CE approaches)



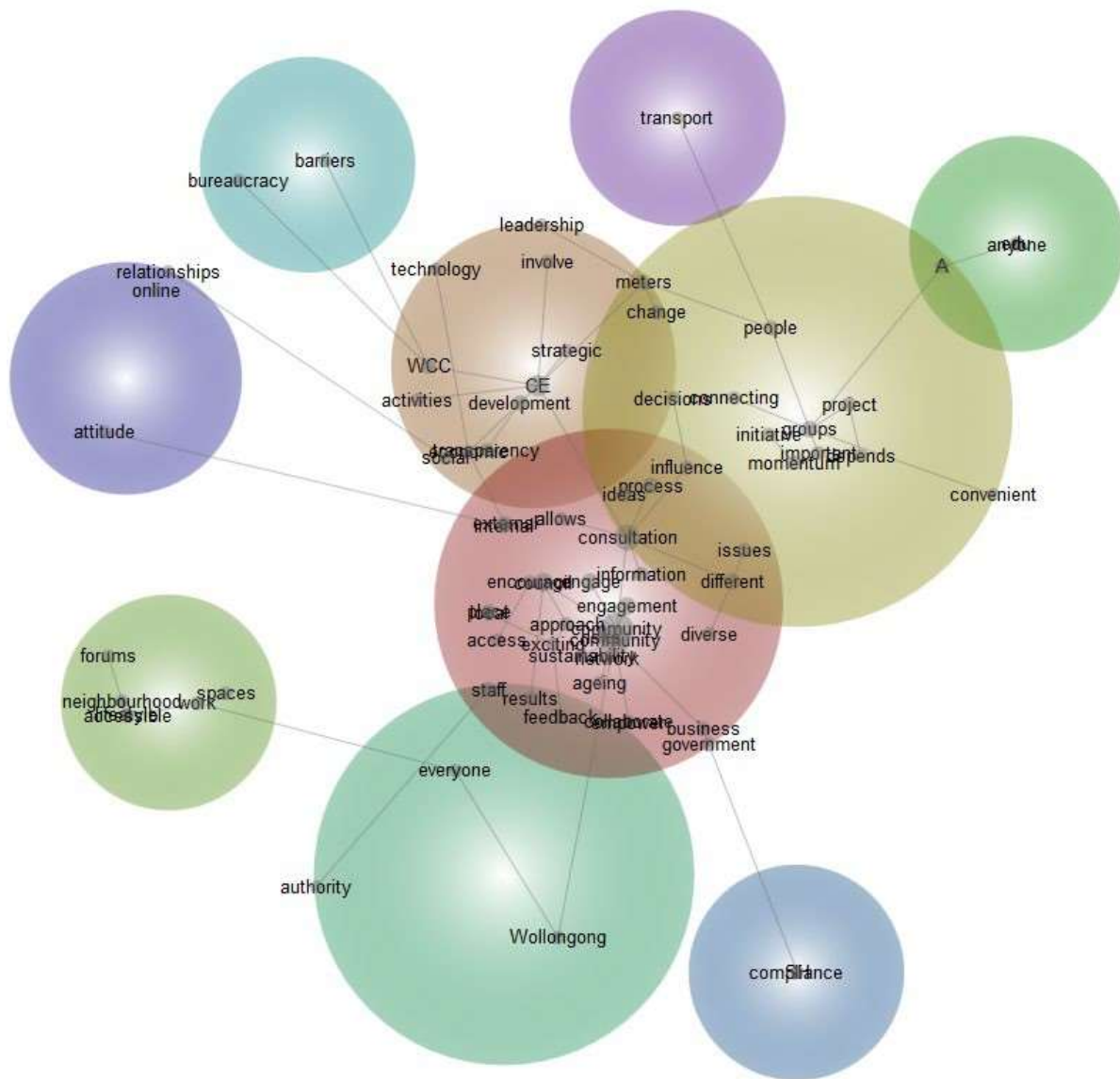
## Appendix 2: Leximancer Output

For clarity, Appendix 2a only shows theme labels and Appendix 2b only shows the Concepts within these Themes.

### Appendix 2a: The Leximancer Concept Map of Themes in the Zing data.



Appendix 2b: The Leximancer Map of Concepts in the Zing data



## Appendix 3: CE Online Presence

### Appendix 3a: The CE Page of the Council Website in 2012

Page Sections: [What is Community Consultation?](#) | [How You Can Have Your Say?](#) | [Kiosks](#) | [Community Forums](#) | [Neighbourhood Forums](#) | [Councillor's Meetings](#) | [Background Information](#)

#### Exhibitions

- [View Current Exhibitions](#)
- [View Recent Exhibitions](#)
- [View a Development Application \(DA\) on Exhibition](#)

#### Community Engagement

Community consultation describes the ways we interact with the community and the processes and practices we use to:

- notify the community about Council's services, facilities, and plans
- listen to the community about their concerns and aspirations
- seek feedback from the community about existing and future Council business
- inform decisions that are in tune with the best interests of the community

As the community contribute funds to Council's services and facilities, we need to be responsive to the needs of the community we serve.

Through consultation the community can:

- learn about what the Council does or plans to do
- express views on decisions that affect them
- suggest how the Council may improve the way it plans for and provides services and facilities
- make Wollongong a better place to live

You can also view and comment on current development applications on exhibition.

#### How You Can Have Your Say?

Important city strategy plans and studies are placed on public exhibition.

In addition to the below consultation activities, our community engagement team attends community events like markets and festivals so you can have your say.

#### Kiosks


You're invited to drop by an interactive 'stall' and register your comments and views. You can raise any topic we're responsible for and the information will be relayed back to the relevant part of the organisation. Information and staff will be on hand about a variety of Council services and projects.

Upcoming Kiosks: [Community Engagement Calendar](#)

#### Community Forums

A community forum is an interactive session where you can speak to Council staff and provide feedback on proposed plans.

Upcoming Forums: [Community Engagement Calendar](#)



**See Also**

- [Development Applications on Exhibition](#)
- [Ward Maps](#)
- [Contact Community Engagement](#)

### Appendix 3b: The CE Website in 2015 using the BTT application

**OUR PLACE**  
**our voice**  
**OUR FUTURE**

Home HASAN +

Our place our voice our future Search Search

## Our place our voice our future

Welcome to City Council's engagement hub.  
Get involved in decisions affecting your future!

On these pages you will find information about a variety of projects Council is talking with the community about. You will find photos, surveys, discussion forums and polls. To get started please click on the register button on the right. This way we can send you updates on the projects. Then click on the project you are interested in, read the information provided and get involved in the discussions. We look forward to interacting with you here. Often we run face to face meetings or set up kiosks at local events so remember to check the key dates section.

We will update these pages so you can see how your input helped us make decisions. Please keep checking back in, there's always something new to be involved in.

What's on Quick Poll

Imagine a city for people...  
by Jess Lytle-van Dyk, 18 days ago

**Current Consultations**

Live Projects

- Love Lock Sculpture for Flagstaff Hill
- A City For People
- Western Suburbs Pool - Disability Access
- Craft Wharftons Creek Entrance Management Plan
- Road Naming for West Dapto
- Public Spaces Public Life 2014

**Archived Projects**

Archived Projects

- Stuart Park Elevated Boardwalk and Footpath
- Proposed JP Garvin Park Upgrades
- Share your thoughts about markets in City Centre
- Policy Review: Payment of Expenses and Provision of Facilities for Lord Mayor and Councilors
- Craft Public Art Strategy

### Appendix 3c: Instructions on the Council Facebook Page in 2015

Liked Following Share ... Contact Us Message

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#### About Suggest Edits

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##### BUSINESS INFO

- Edit business types**
- Mission**

From the mountains to the sea, we value and protect our natural environment and we will be leaders in building an educated, creative and connected community.

##### CONTACT INFO

- Call (02) 4227 7111**
- @cityofwollongong** Send Message
- council@wollongong.nsw.gov.au**
- <http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au>**

##### MORE INFO

- About**

Welcome to Wollongong City Council's official Facebook page.
- General Information**

Located on the picturesque south coast of New South Wales, Australia, the Wollongong local government area is home to more than 180,000 people.

For information on Wollongong City Council's services and activities, please visit our website [www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au)
- Government Organization**

##### STORY

This page will be moderated by Council staff during business hours (9am – 5pm AEST Monday to Friday excluding public holidays), and to a limited extent outside those times.

If you have an urgent request please phone our Customer Service Team on 02 4227 7111.

While we strongly encourage user participation, we ask that your comments not be defamatory, offensive, disrespectful, abusive or disparaging. Such comments will be deleted, and offenders may be blocked.





All personal complaints or grievances about Wollongong City Council and its services should be formally reported to Wollongong City Council's Customer Service Division on 02 4227 7111 or emailed to [council@wollongong.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@wollongong.nsw.gov.au).

We retain the right to remove content that does not adhere to these conditions. If you see any online behaviour or content that does not adhere to these terms and conditions, please report it to our online administrators via [socialmedia@wollongong.nsw.gov.au](mailto:socialmedia@wollongong.nsw.gov.au).

Access to and use of Council's online sites constitutes your acceptance of these terms and conditions.

Please note: Wollongong City Council does not endorse or take responsibility for content posted by third parties.

## Appendix 4 Summary of the CE Policy in the 2018 draft document using the IAP2 approach

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT* adopted from IAP2				
	INFORM 	CONSULT 	INVOLVE 	COLLABORATE 
	A DECISION HAS BEEN MADE	MID LEVEL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE A DECISION ON A PREFERRED SOLUTION
GOALS	Clear communication from Council to the community to assist their understanding of decisions that have been made.	Council seeks feedback from the community on draft plans, services, projects or policies. The community has an opportunity to have their say before a decision is made.	Council works with the community to understand issues and involves community members in designing possible solutions.	Council will offer opportunities for members of the community to work with us to understand issues and develop a range of solutions. We will work together to make a decision on a preferred solution.
PROMISE	<p>We will use a variety of communication methods to keep the community informed.</p> <p>We will strive to ensure that information about Council services and plans is accessible and readily available.</p> <p>Council will provide community updates and information on decisions.</p> <p>Council acknowledges that sometimes it has to inform the community on decisions the community cannot change.</p>	<p>We will provide opportunities for the community to provide feedback on plans and projects that will be considered in decision making.</p> <p>We are committed to providing clear information about how and when the community can have their say and how feedback will be used.</p>	<p>We will provide opportunities for the community to work directly with Council to ensure we understand aspirations, opportunities, and concerns and that these are incorporated as often as possible into plans.</p> <p>We will provide feedback on how community input influenced decisions.</p>	Council will partner with the community on the development of alternatives and solutions.
TECHNIQUES	<p>Council's website and online media channels</p> <p>Council's newsletters</p> <p>Letters and emails</p> <p>Fact sheets</p> <p>Customer Service</p> <p>Events and functions</p> <p>Kiosks and information sessions</p>	<p>Public Access Forum</p> <p>Ward meetings</p> <p>Community Forums</p> <p>Kiosks</p> <p>Surveys and submissions</p> <p>Online engagement</p> <p>Communication channels</p> <p>Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel</p>	<p>Ward meetings</p> <p>Community forums</p> <p>Kiosks</p> <p>Reference and Advisory groups</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Online engagement</p> <p>Communication channels</p>	<p>Focus groups</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Reference and Advisory groups</p> <p>Online engagement</p> <p>Communication channels</p>
	AWARENESS BUILDING	IDEAS GENERATION	DISCUSS AND COLLATE	OUR COMMUNITY VISION

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v24i0.1897>

