

Delivery of Council and Community Facilities: Implementing a Stakeholder Process Model

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Abstract

In this Melbourne local government area the proposed library-community centre was the largest construction project ever attempted by the Council (A\$8 million). This project incorporated innovative briefing methods through the use of a performance brief, which was developed and agreed with a range of stakeholders. This work focuses on the interactions, activities and processes following the initial development of the performance brief.

The study examines the processes used by the Council managers as a provider and developer (client) of the facility on behalf of its rate paying public. Recording and analysis of the processes captured the organisational learning that occurred during delivery of the project. The learning outcome is a model for future practice to guide this Council and other similar community based projects.

Research data gathering has included review workshops, interviews with project team members, attendance at consultations with community facility user groups, analysis of Council project documents and other Council documents. Analysis has been by means of a qualitative methodology analysing the textual materials with coding and time-event mapping techniques to identify key events and themes.

The project has provided sound lessons in strategic connectivity with organisational and Council strategies, the inclusion of a range of stakeholder interactions and consultations of real benefit to the value of the project, the use of innovative performance briefing methods and identifying the characteristics of an informed and engaged client. The study synthesises the key aspects of the project into a normative community based project model that represents the lessons learnt in the delivery of this library- community centre.

Keywords: design management, community interaction, project processes.

1. Introduction

The importance of including stakeholders in project processes is being increasingly recognized as important in delivering satisfactory project outcomes (Gray, et al, 1994; Kamara and Anumba, 2001). This is despite Walker's (2002) observation about 'unreliability' in stakeholder assessments across project lives. It is possible that part of this unreliability arises from not adequately engaging with and binding stakeholders into project processes from early stages.

This paper builds on earlier work by one of the authors into processes at project inception (Smith 2002) by examining the implementation of a stakeholder approach throughout pre-construction processes. The project examined is an *Urban Village Library-Community Centre* and originated from an external review by one of the authors of the processes designed and implemented by Council in delivering this important project. The Library-Community Centre is the largest construction project undertaken by this municipality (a middle suburban local government in Melbourne) with construction expected to be completed in mid-2005.

This paper is divided into three major parts as follows:

1. an identification of the most significant processes used in delivering the project including strategic connectivity;
2. an examination of the role of clients in construction projects and how the municipality has acted as a client in this project. This includes consideration of the interactions (including, but not exclusively, consultation) involved in delivery of the project; and
3. the 'Glen Eira Model' of project delivery processes is presented as a model process consolidating the lessons from this project as a guide for future local government facility projects.

2. Data collection and analysis

A variety of data collection methods have been used in the course of these reviews. These include:

- Review Workshop with Council stakeholders in March 2004;
- Interviews with project team members;
- Attendance at consultations with community facility user groups;
- Analysis of Council's project documents;
- Analysis of other Council documents such as Council meeting minutes, and municipal newsletters; and
- Analysis of local newspaper articles.

These data collection methods are in addition to those used by project team members during the project. Analysis has been by means of a qualitative methodology analysing the textual materials using coding techniques to identify key events and themes. Green (1996) describes this methodology as a Naturalistic Enquiry and notes it is overlooked in, yet is of importance to, research in the management of the built environment (in Green's case – construction management, but equally applicable here).

3. Processes to date

The four key processes identified in this review are:

1. **Strategic development** consisting of five strategies – two organisational and three municipal¹.
 - a. Organisational – Service delivery (primarily Library, elderly citizens, and child care) and a Corporate Real Estate (CRE) strategy that matches the property portfolio better with organisational strategic aims; and
 - b. Municipal:
 - i. Local business development through support of threatened sub-regional strip shopping centres (Urban Villages strategy); and
 - ii. Strategic Land-use planning (Urban Villages Strategy).
 - iii. Community development through renewal of several community support assets.

The development of the Council's Urban Villages Strategy was conducted in parallel to the development of its Library Strategy.

2. Council stakeholder **Strategic Needs Analysis Workshops** (Smith and Jackson 2000, Smith et al. 2004) in May and August 2000 has had several consequences:
 - a. Strategic alignment between facility objectives and Council strategy;
 - b. Council stakeholder 'buy-in'; and
 - c. The generation of a *Performance Brief* used, in conjunction with an *Indicative Functional Brief*² to guide the project and in selection of the project consultant team.

¹ Municipality is taken as the administrative area and its population, whereas the Organisation is the Council with its governing, administrative, managerial and service delivery functions.

² Performance-based briefs are thought to encourage innovative solutions to meet client needs and objectives and are framed as statements of required performance against project outcomes. Performance-based briefs may not contain, for building projects, definitive statements of functions and their requisite areas that are to be included in the building. Such definitiveness is more the domain of Functional Briefs. The use of an indicative functional brief established latitude that required negotiation within the stipulated performance parameters.

The client representatives commend the approach for its ability to negotiate the removal of sectional and political interests and any preoccupation with project minutiae by concentrating on the 'big' picture

3. **Project's consultant team selection and appointment** consisting of consultant team Registration of Interest (ROI), short-listing and interview, and inspection of nominated architectural projects prior to final selection. The capacity to conduct community consultations was a key selection criterion.
4. **Consultation** has been a feature of this Library-Community Centre project with several consultative processes, both in the project itself and in the preceding Urban Villages Strategy which provided the siting rationale. Consultation is discussed further, below, in Interaction Processes.

4. Linking to strategy & strategic outcomes

Strategic planning and connection to organisational and municipal strategies are important features of this process. Of particular relevance are the Urban Village strategy and the planning amendments that followed these early stage developments. Community Consultative Committees for each of the Urban Villages made up of Councillors and community representatives were used during preparation of the Urban Villages strategy, commencing in 1997 (City of Glen Eira 1999) up until the adoption of the Urban Village Structure Plan in July 1999. Subsequently, amendments were made to the municipal Planning Scheme to incorporate the Urban Villages concept into the Planning Scheme requiring further consultation required by State Government legislation. The Library-Community Centre project specific consultations starting in late 2001 benefited from the previous consultation processes as they followed soon after these Planning activities in a roughly contiguous process spanning 4 to 5 years.

Assessments to date show that the proposed Library-Community Centre plan meets the five Council strategies identified earlier. It is both a supporter of community support policy (*a heart of the village*) and as a driver of change (catalysing behaviour change) and land use commensurate with the Urban Village concept. There are indications of anticipated positive behaviour change by municipal residents that is expected from and intended to be gained from the project.

5. Role of Council as a client

It is not unusual for construction projects to have several sub-clients each with an interest in the project outcomes (Walker 2002, p87-89). These sub-clients may, variously, have formal decision-making and governance roles, or roles as nominated client project representative, or champion, or as users. In this project, as for all local government projects, there are five sub-client groups, or clusters of groups (also called stakeholders). However, it should be noted that where an external funding authority exists, such as state or federal (central) governments, a sixth group would be added to the list.

1. Council (as Councillors). The group with formal legislative authority as decision-makers and holders of governance responsibility.

2. Council (as Council officers). The cluster of groups with a role as client representatives responsible for the project's day-to-day management and administration. This cluster includes a nominated project representative (Manager Corporate Assets in this project) as well as Council officers from stakeholder groups within Council. Such groups with a service delivery interest in the completed facility are the recipients of 'Internality effects' from the facility, being the effect the facility has on their operations³.
3. Facility users from the community (as part of the municipality). Members of this cluster are also recipients of 'Internality effects' from the facility as a direct consequence of their use of the facility.
4. Neighbours (as part of the municipality). This group are the recipients of 'Externality effects' that are the impacts that flow outwards from a facility as a consequence of siting in a particular location.
5. Municipality (as a whole). Frequently styled as 'community', municipality is the preferred terminology as community is a contended term (Gibson and Cameron 2001)⁴. Also the recipient of 'Externality effects,' which are more diffuse in impact when considered at this level of generality.

The project's Council officer managers have been aware of these client groups and have incorporated interactions with them in the course of the project, particularly levels 2, 3 and 4 above.

6. An informed client

One of the key features of this project's delivery is how the Council has acted as an *informed* client in the project delivery process. In this project, Council, as client, has been highly motivated through awareness of the project's importance to Council and the municipality⁵. In addition to being informed about Council's client role, discussed above, the Council officers demonstrated informedness about:

- Their individual service;
- The combined overall Library-Community Centre facility;
- The synergies derived from the combination of services onto a single site;
- The Urban Design and Urban Planning context; and
- Site constraints and opportunities.

³ Facilities, for the purpose of this discussion, are a conflation of the physical entity (building) and service delivery from that physical entity (Building + service) as defined by Brackertz & Pontikis (2000) + site + context, be that physical context (neighbourhood), and political, social and psychological contexts.

⁴ There are two main categories of community. Firstly, there is a 'community of place' that assumes a consensual harmonious view where differences are ignored through an emphasis on common territorial or spatial interests (Saunders (1979); Martin (1998); and Lowndes et al. (2001)). The second is a 'community of interest' where a common stake creates a specific grouping (Martin (1998); Lowndes, et al. (2001)).

⁵ The metaphor 'Jewel in the Crown' was invoked more than once.

Being informed may derive from being an *experienced constructor* ((Walker 2002) citing (Masterman and Gameson 1994)). Local government, while experienced in construction, builds each type of facility infrequently which erodes assumed experience levels. To increase that experience level requires research and other informing processes during the project processes.

Research and informing is infrequently or poorly done by clients, drawing instead on their stock of 'lived' experience of the built environment (and in particular – facilities in this instance). This is risky as that the experience may be flawed being based on exposure to poor facilities (which may be the reason for them being replaced), or on facility and building types unlike those that constitute the project. In this project research at service delivery level occurred through review of work practices, consultant advisors on occupational health and safety, and inspection of exemplars.

The exposure key client groups – Council officers and Councillors – to exemplar projects, both positive and negative has had important consequences in attaining levels of informedness. The exemplars have been at the levels of the constituent facilities, such as Library, Child care, Community centre, and urban development projects where Council properties were key constituents in contributing to and leveraging urban development projects providing Council's desired outcomes. The latter investigations occurred at an early stage with Councillors and Council executives (decision-makers and influencers of decisions) participating. Exemplars were also used in interactions with facility users as part of an educative, expectation adjusting process.

A subtle, but important, part of this examination of exemplars is not using them as a model that may be copied directly to the project, but through suggestions that the new Library-Community Centre 'May be like this,' or 'This is similar to an outcome that this project may produce,' or enquiring 'How does this work?' The exemplars acted an 'inspiration' – in a mind opening sense, as there were positive and negative ones.

The use of exemplars in this way has, at least, two effects. Firstly, it focuses on outcomes from facility delivery processes rather than purely the physical product or environment. Outcomes may be service delivery, social, community support and development, urban development or similar. Secondly, it evokes affective type evaluations⁶ which at the most global level are of the form 'We/I like/do not like' Or, 'We wouldn't want that.' Comments of this ilk certainly emerged from the data relating to exemplars.

Overall, this 'informedness' has contributed to an exemplary process that may act as a model for future project processes. This process is summarized later in the paper.

⁶ Affect is a general class of psychological processes (Affect, Cognition and Behaviour) that include feelings, emotions, moods and similar aspect of beliefs, values and attitudes (Amedeo, D. (1993)).

7. Interaction processes

The Urban Village Library-Community Centre project can be characterised by the high level of consultation that has occurred in the project's Planning and Design phases. Review of the literature during the course of this research revealed a range of possible ways of engaging with project stakeholder and community groups.

The term 'Interactions' was preferred to 'Consultations' as the authors consider interactions in management consist of more than consultation, including a range of possible management activities used in achieving project ends which may include meetings, data gathering and decision-making interactions. Unfortunately, limitations of space prevent a detailed discussion of the types of interactions, but (Heywood et al. 2002) propose a typology of interaction practices in a local government context.

The municipality's CEO noted at a Community Forum in May 2001 that this Council used at least 15 consultation (interactions) methods in its activities. Some of these are legislated in Planning or Best Value requirements, and some are not applicable to project delivery. For example, elections, and the focus groups and telephone survey interviews operate only in a more general sense as part of setting and confirming organisational priorities and agendas through research.

8. Types of interactions

It was important to have appropriate interactions occurring at times of maximum advantage to the project's delivery. The project benefited from its links with the Urban Villages strategy and their Urban Planning interactions. Within the project there have been several timely types of interactions, including:

- The use of Strategic Needs Analysis Workshop leading to the preparation and agreement of the content of a *Performance Brief*;
- Research by Council officers into the constituent facilities (use of exemplars), and review of current work practices, and the like (as noted above).
- Data gathering and brief building interviews (individual and group) by the project consultant team at the commencement of the Design phase. This provided necessary, specific information from the project's sub-client groups;
- Project Control Group meetings continuously (approximately fortnightly) throughout the Design phase made up of design team members and Council stakeholders;
- First Community Review and Input Consultation with responses from the round of interviews evident;
- Subsequent rounds of Community Review and Input Consultation at the end of stages and precluding subsequent stages;

- Linking with Public Relations releases by Council at the commencement of project stages;
- Important, in terms of project governance, are approval interactions at stage ends both with Councillors and PCG; and
- While it is still to occur, a review approximately 6 months following occupation would be another possible interaction.

The content of consultations was important. Initially the design team relied on ‘Asking’ and ‘Listening’ type interactions in the data gathering and brief building; that is listening without having explicit, concrete requirements already set⁷. Consultations of this form were a requirement of the project’s performance briefing approach as definitive functional statements were not provided initially but which required negotiation achieved in this project through:

- The early use of design drawings to respond to the briefing information provided; and
- The Project Control Group (PCG) meetings noted above.

In this process data gathering was not on the basis of ‘Tell us how much space you need,’⁸ but rather on the basis of, ‘Tell us what you do in your spaces.’ The dimensions of existing spaces were ascertained from facilities’ existing conditions drawings. This approach had several benefits for the project as it utilised:

- The workplace activity and service delivery knowledge from Council officers;
- The activity basis knowledge of users; and
- Architect’s integrative capacity and expertise in spatial matters in ‘design’.

Several benefits flowed from this approach. Firstly, it avoided the premature fixing of space demands acting as a ‘circuit-breaker’ between existing space occupied and that to be provided in the new facility. Secondly, in capturing the activity knowledge of facility users and service providers the spatial consequences of those could be ascertained by experts in building spatial matters (architects and the like). And, thirdly, this listening data gathering process utilised the integrative capacity of architects in ‘design’ to translate the received information into design solutions that responded to the *Performance Brief*, information received in consultation⁹.

Evidence of this ‘listening’ approach was apparent in the presentations by the design team to the Community Review and Input Consultations. It was noted that they always referred to the points that the particular group had mentioned as important to them in previous interactions. Major benefits of this approach have been stakeholder buy-in (a psychological commitment and ownership of the project) from the earliest phases of the project and the achievement of high

⁷ It should be noted that Council officers had conceptualised where the project might go as a result of the Strategic Needs Analysis and performance briefing, without necessarily pre-empting input from consultees and project consultants.

⁸ This approach is often used to construct functional briefs.

⁹ Which were considerable, being an elongated rectangular site located between and interfacing with both a residential area and a sub-regional strip shopping centre.

satisfaction levels now noted as being expressed by community groups and have been so from the earliest parts of the Design phase.

9. Project reviews

Project reviews have consisted of Schematic and Design Development reports from the design team for sign-off by the Council before proceeding to further project stages. Formal review meetings were not conducted to assess achievement of the Briefs (Performance and Indicative Functional)¹⁰. Rather, continuous review through the Project Control Group meetings and the Schematic and Design Development reports sign-off achieved much the same effect.

At the completion of Schematics Stage and before Design Development commenced a series of one-on-one internal review meetings between the Manager Corporate Assets and Council client groups assessed design and brief status.

Finally, the Review Workshop that examined processes used in delivery of the project to encapsulated the organisational learning to date and acted as a transmission of project history and learning following staff turnover during the project.

10. Project overview

10.1 Satisfaction with project processes

A high degree of satisfaction has been expressed with the project and project delivery processes to date. 'Happiness' and 'pleased' are frequently reported responses from individuals and groups participating in project interactions.

The satisfaction of project participants is based more on the fact that they were consulted, rather than what they saw as important was being included in the project; and seen as important by the project team; certainly in the emphasis given to these important items in reporting back to project participants.

10.2 Criticisms with the project processes

Given the satisfactions noted above and the positive reporting of project processes in this paper, it would be anticipated that there were few criticisms to date. This is the case. Criticisms coalesce around two points. The most minor of these is some of the arrangements for

¹⁰ Note that the term, *achievement* is preferable to *compliance*, which does not fit the concepts of performance in the performance briefing approach used in this project.

consultations could have been better. The more important point that received more criticism was related to project delays.

From the elderly citizens came a telling and poignant critique of the project delays. Having contributed to making the project processes successful, thus far, there were speculations whether they would live long enough to have their efforts rewarded in seeing the new Library-Community Centre open.

Project delays could be attributed to three causes. Firstly, ‘political’ reasons which would be linked, in the main, to matching organisational funding requirements. Secondly, the compulsory acquisition of adjoining properties, which took time to resolve. Thirdly, that all of the project’s Urban Planning requirements were not made clear enough early in the project enabling all the project requirements to be dealt with in a single planning application process. It should be noted that this criticism is one that is frequently made by many sponsors of development projects in both private and public sectors.

11. The ‘Glen Eira Model’

To date, the project delivery process for the Urban Village Library-Community Centre has been exemplary through the strategic connectivity achieved, the inclusion of a range of interactions of real benefit to the project, the use of innovative performance briefing methods, and an informed, engaged client across the levels of sub-client. These characteristics have all contributed to the derivation of positive project outcomes.

Given the success thus far, it is possible to condense out key aspects of the project delivery into a normative community based model – ‘The Glen Eira Model.’ The Model is a representation of the lessons learnt in the delivery of this Library-Community Centre, and as a model process may be used to guide other local government facility projects. The important first part of the process the strategic management component of the model is summarised in Figure 1, below. However, in its entirety the model and process contains three connected streams as follows with the significant features noted:

Stream 1 – Strategic

- Strategic connectivity;
- Service delivery strategies with requirements for a built environment;
- *Strategic Needs Analysis* Workshop and creation of a *Performance Brief*;
- All possible Council stakeholders invited and present, and
- Output – Performance brief and indicative functional brief.

Stream 2 – Informing

- Informing via exemplars;

- Types of questions asked of exemplars, and
- Building knowledge as a basis for detailed briefing.

Stream 3 – Design management

- Use of performance brief;
- Consultant selection that was responsive and with a consultative track-record;
- Project Control Group with all possible Council stakeholders participating;
- Brief building through:
 - interviews with all possible stakeholders, and
 - Community groups' interviews
- Consideration and inclusion of recipients of 'Externality' and 'Internality' effects from the new facility in project processes;
- Early use of drawings, particularly 3-dimensional ones in consultation;
- Use of tactical Public Relations;
- Iterative/feedback reviews/consultations with stakeholder Community groups, and
- Review to confirm achievement of Performance Brief objectives.

12. Conclusion

The project delivery processes for this Urban Village Library-Community Centre has been an exemplary implementation of a stakeholder approach to project delivery. Lessons that may be taken from this study include:

- High levels of strategic connectivity showing relevance to and of Council stakeholder strategies;
- Client (as project delivery manager) awareness and engagement with client sub-groups identified (stakeholders);
- Development of client informedness through research and access to exemplars by client sub-groups;
- Deep and contiguous¹¹ interactions with stakeholders throughout project processes;
- Content of interactions is important, particularly the form of questions asked; and
- Development of a normative model encapsulating organizational learning from this project.

¹¹ Contiguity is suggested as a form of connecting content from one interaction to the next.

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Appendix

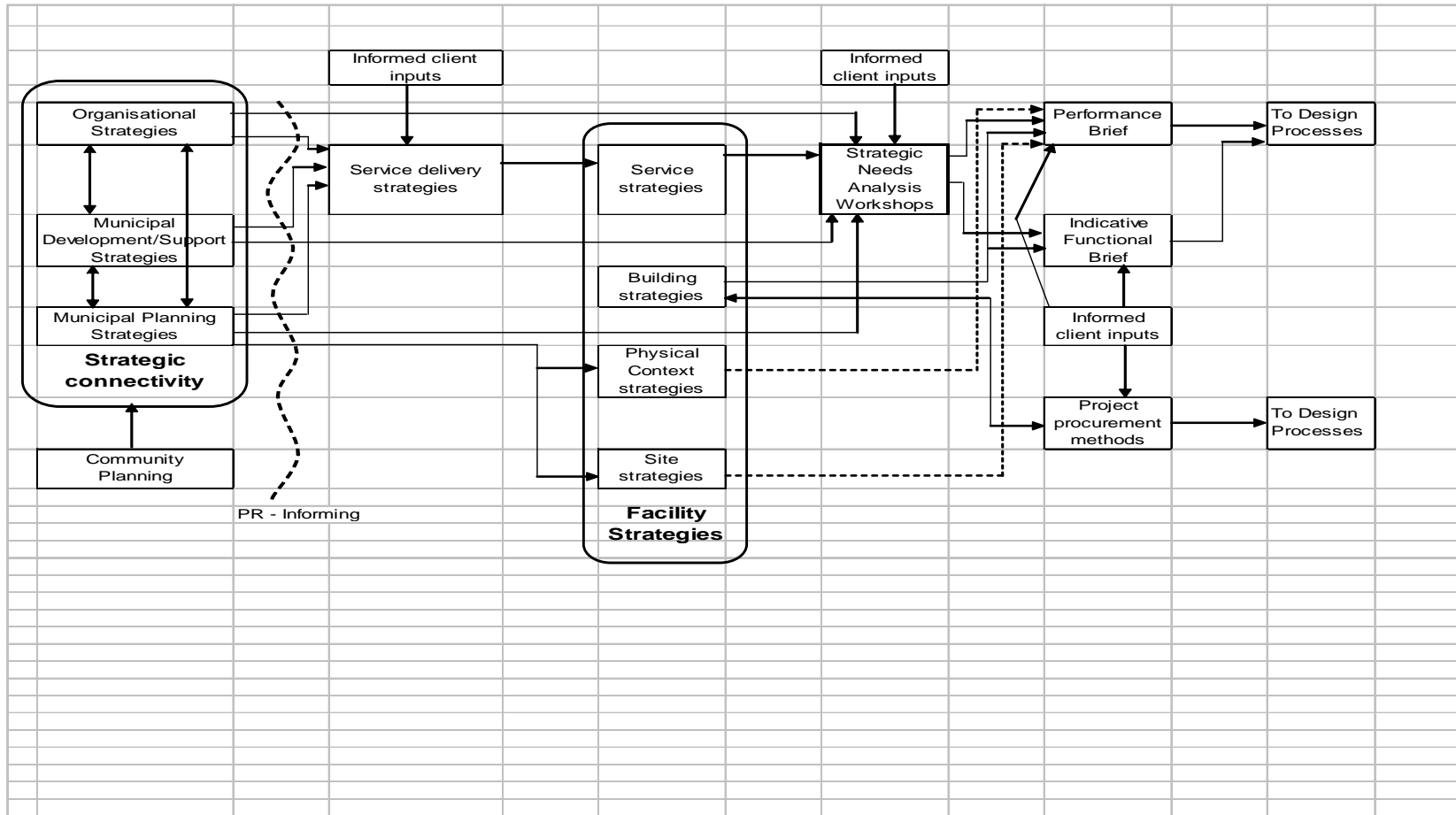


Figure 1 Strategy Stream

