RESEARCH NETWORK *for*
BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

KNOWLEDGE PROJECT SERIES
VOL. 1 ISSUE 1

Engaging the Community:
A Systematic Review

ISSUE DATE: SEPTEMBER 2008

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BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

Engaging the Community:
A Systematic Review

A synthesis of academic and practitioner knowledge
on Best Practices in Community Engagement

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Executive Summary

Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. For firms, engaging the community offers an opportunity to gain legitimacy, manage social risk, and even co-develop innovative solutions to social problems with community members. For communities, firms offer access to charitable dollars, employee volunteers, training, capacity building, and a non-governmental avenue for substantive improvement to social problems.

However, such benefits are not always experienced by either firms or their community partners. It is still not clear when different community engagement processes are appropriate, how to implement them or what measures and methods of measurement are appropriate, accurate or legitimate. In this report, we shed light on these questions by collating the extant academic and practitioner knowledge on best practices in community engagement.

Our report contains an explanatory synthesis of the literature based on over 200 knowledge sources. We present descriptive statistics on extant knowledge on community engagement, highlighting publication outlets, geographic, methodological and disciplinary scope of the literature. Recognizing that the definitions of "community" and "engagement" vary across this literature, we cluster the sources into three main approaches to engagement: transactional, transitional and transformational.

We find that the most studied form of engagement is transactional, followed by transitional and then transformational engagement. Despite the potential for learning and community empowerment inherent in the most involved forms of engagement, most of the sources address one-way communication and limited two-way dialogue and consultation. We derive community engagement best practices through three primary methods: an ABC (antecedents, behaviours and consequences) analysis; critical analysis of methods and metrics; and the integration of five lists of best practice principles.

A central paradox of this literature is that while there is a very large number of suggestions as to what organizations should do, there is very little empirical evidence of what works and when. The specific best practice processes we identified were primarily derived from the cutting edge of practice, rather than from published academic literature.

We draw four main lessons from academic research on best practices in community engagement. First, best practice in community engagement involves fit between the engagement context and process in order to achieve the best outcomes for both the firm and the community. Second, the payoffs from engagement are largely longer-term enhanced firm legitimacy, rather than immediate cost-benefit improvements. Third, more value is likely to be created through engagement which is relational rather than transactional, since purely transactional interactions can be duplicated by other firms and thus offer little potential of gaining unique competitive advantage. Finally, firms which desire a genuine shared ownership of problems and solutions, shared accountability, and richer relationships must follow a transformational approach to engagement.

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

As organizations are held more accountable by society for their social and environmental impacts, community engagement is becoming an important strategic concern for both firms and non-profit organizations (Westley and Vredenburg 1997; Crane 2000). Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people to address issues affecting the well-being of those people (Fawcett, Paine-Andrews et al. 1995; Scantlebury 2003). Identifying a "community" is not straightforward; "communities" may be defined by geography, economics or social situation, and may be sets of individual citizens or groups of citizens organized to represent a community's shared interests. Furthermore, community expectations of firms are broadening, deepening and evolving. This presents challenges for decision-makers as they grapple with the processes of, and pay-offs from, successful community engagement.

In this document, we aim to collate extant academic and practitioner knowledge on community engagement best practices. It is the primary output for researchers arising from our "Engaging the Community" Knowledge Project commissioned by the Leadership Council of the Research Network for Business Sustainability. The project was conducted at the International Institute for Resource Industries and Sustainability Studies (IRIS) at the Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary from September 2007 to May 2008. Other outputs include an executive briefing, a presentation and report for practitioners summarizing these results, and a teaching resource package aimed at enhancing classroom explorations of these issues (see www.sustainabilityresearch.org).

We begin by outlining trends from both the practice and research of community engagement, and use these to generate a system of research questions to guide our knowledge synthesis. We then explain our process of knowledge synthesis, anchored on an explanatory systematic review methodology (Cook et al. 1997; Rousseau et al. forthcoming; Tranfield et al. 2003). Our first results section provides descriptive statistics on academic knowledge on community engagement, highlighting publication outlets, geographic, methodological and disciplinary scope of the extant literature. We then assess the definitions of "community" used in the academic literature, and synthesize the primary engagement methods into three broad types. We follow this with a more detailed explanatory analysis of community engagement processes, anchored on the continuum of community engagement, and best practices principles in community engagement. Our concluding section outlines the current state of knowledge on community engagement, and highlights areas for future research.

1.1 CURRENT TRENDS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our knowledge synthesis is motivated by both current trends in the practice of engaging communities, and by the recent dramatic expansion of the academic literature on cross-sector social partnerships (Austin 2000); social partnerships (Waddock 1991); inter-sectoral partnership (Waddell and Brown 1997); issues management alliances (Austrom and Lad 1989); and collaborative governance (Zadek and Radovich 2006). Communities are expecting firms to broaden, deepen and evolve their community engagement practices. However, there has been little systematic evidence on which community engagement processes are successful and why.

Firms are being expected to broaden their concept of community. An initial focus on a firm's financial community, employees and regulators has expanded to include a wide range of stakeholders who affect or are affected by the firm (Freeman 1984). Managers have been encouraged to "fan out" to include fringe stakeholders in their processes (Hart and Sharma 2004) and to move beyond managing dyadic

relationships to understanding the structure of stakeholder networks (Rowley 1997). Organizations are also increasingly expected to move beyond engagement with specific community groups, such as neighborhood community associations or NGOs, to engagement with the broader public (Roulier 2000; Unerman and Bennett 2004). Broadening community engagement increases strategic complexity as managers decide with whom to engage, how, and with what likely result.

At the most basic level, firms may engage in their community by providing information, time in the form of employee volunteering, or philanthropic donations of resources (Saiia, Carroll et al. 2003; van den Berg, Braun et al. 2004; Gabriel 2006). However, some firms' engagement in community is deepening to include richer cross-sector social partnerships and the participation of community in business decision making (Boehm 2005). Dealing with social problems, such as those related to poverty, environmental degradation and social injustice, often exceeds the scope of any single organization (Westley and Vredenburg 1991). Similarly, richer community engagement involves deeper engagement within the firm, far exceeding the public affairs department or standalone philanthropic corporate foundations (Mattingly 2004), to include multiple boundary spanners deep within the firm (Brammer and Millington 2003).

Community engagement is evolving from managing stakeholder responses to particular issues, to co-creating solutions to social challenges. Contemporary approaches to engaging communities emphasize inter-dependence and the integrated nature of partnership (Kanter 1998; Austin 2000). Ongoing community engagement involves repeated interactions which eventually builds a common culture of identity between its members. Successful engagement is built on a shared culture (Selsky and Parker 2005) and values (Horwitz, Kamoche et al. 2002). It is also built on an explicit appreciation of power in relationships

(Hardy and Phillips 1998). Our knowledge synthesis will therefore address community engagement not only as a strategic challenge but also as a human and organizational process.

Case-based evidence shows that it is possible for all participants to gain from successful community engagement. For-profit firms can improve their reputation and trust in the communities in which they operate, and can acquire knowledge about social and stakeholder management issues and other competitively valuable capabilities (Rondinelli and London 2003). They can also build an innovative culture necessary to deal with complex social problems (Prahalad and Bettis 2002). Non-profit community organizations can gain access to capital resources, improve efficiencies and accountability, and can exploit economies of scale and distribution networks (O'Regan and Oster 2000).

However, such benefits are not always experienced by either firms or their community partners. It is still not clear when different community engagement processes are appropriate, how to implement them or what measures and methods of measurement are appropriate, accurate or legitimate. Therefore, the core research questions driving our knowledge synthesis were:

- What are best practices in community engagement?
- What processes lead to successful community engagement?
- How can success be measured?

In an attempt to be as comprehensive as possible in our knowledge synthesis, we deployed a multi-disciplinary perspective to answer these research questions. We approached community engagement from four main disciplinary perspectives: strategy, accounting (performance management), human resources and public policy. The following system of research questions guided our literature research and analysis.

The strategy perspective

- Can competitive advantage be derived from good community engagement?
- What organizational capabilities developed through community engagement offer a competitive advantage? *
- How can resources be allocated to optimize the outcomes for the organization and the community? *

- What is the influence of strategic context on community engagement (differences between industrial sectors, regions, constituencies, age of project etc.)? *

The performance management perspective

- How can the costs and benefits of community engagement be assessed (both qualitatively and quantitatively)? *
- What is the business case for different types of community engagement? *
- How do companies articulate externally the business case for best practices in community engagement? *

The human resources perspective

- How can the cultural capacity of firms (and their community partners) for community engagement be evaluated and enhanced?
- How can community engagement processes be best integrated into the core activities of the firm?
- How do companies articulate internally the business case for best practices in community engagement? *

The public policy perspective

- How do regulations and policies contribute to differences in community engagement practices in different strategic contexts?
- How are government stakeholders, officials and agencies most effectively included in a broadly defined community engagement strategy?

* Indicates sub-question posed in Research Network for Business Sustainability Call for Proposals

2. Methodology: A Systematic Review

Our aim in conducting a systematic review of the community engagement literature was to map and assess the existing intellectual territory, and provide an evidence-based answer to our research questions based on existing knowledge (Tranfield et al. 2003). Although they are common in the medical and social policy arenas (Cook, Mulrow et al. 1997; Dixon-Woods, Agarwal et al. 2005), systematic reviews are becoming increasingly popular in the management literature (Pittaway, Robertson et al. 2004; Doldor 2007), particularly in the UK. The primary advantage of systematic reviews is that they move beyond a traditional narrative review to adopt a replicable and transparent process by providing an audit trail of the reviewers' decisions, procedures and conclusions.

Given our desire to provide evidence-based conclusions on best practices in community engagement, we would have ideally liked to conduct an aggregative synthesis (Rousseau, Manning et al. forthcoming). Using meta-analytic techniques to cumulate similar quantitative studies could have increased the effective sample size of studies on the relationships between community engagement processes and performance (Hunter and Schmidt 1995). However, given the wide range of multidisciplinary questions of interest, and a lack of sufficiently similar quantitative effect sizes in this literature, an aggregative synthesis was not possible.

Instead, we aimed for an explanatory synthesis, adopting a critical realist approach to explain how community engagement occurs, and under what circumstances (Rousseau, Manning et al. forthcoming). A critical realist approach allows us to accept that there is an objectively knowable set of best practices associated with community engagement, but that both researchers' and practitioners' understandings of community engagement are subjective and socially constructed. This applies to both the research sources we examined and to our own review. Thus our

intention in this review was to look across the community engagement literature to discern common patterns of perception which might get us close to understanding the underlying best practices. While it is impossible to eradicate selection and interpretation bias using this approach, we attempted to be transparent in our literature gathering and analysis, adopting a systematic process. One of the challenges of this approach is that accepted methodology is currently under-developed. However, this approach did enable us to gather data from fragmented and methodologically diverse fields on the range of research questions listed above.

Our literature search and evaluation process is illustrated in Figure 1. In Step 1 (see "1" in Figure 1), we searched the academic literature databases ABI Inform, Academic Search Premier and Business Source Premier using the following keywords (and variants): community groups; NGOs; stakeholders; community engagement; domain-based governance; cross-sector partnership; social partnership; inter-sectoral partnership; collaborative governance; sustainable HR management; cross-sector management; sustainable communities; community embeddedness; community enterprise; citizen engagement; social capital; community investment; community involvement. Our search included all years available in these databases, which in many cases included from the first published issue of a journal. As our findings below will show, the earliest article we found was published in 1984. After eliminating duplicates, we were left with 586 citations.

Figure 1

LITERATURE SEARCH AND EVALUATION PROCESS
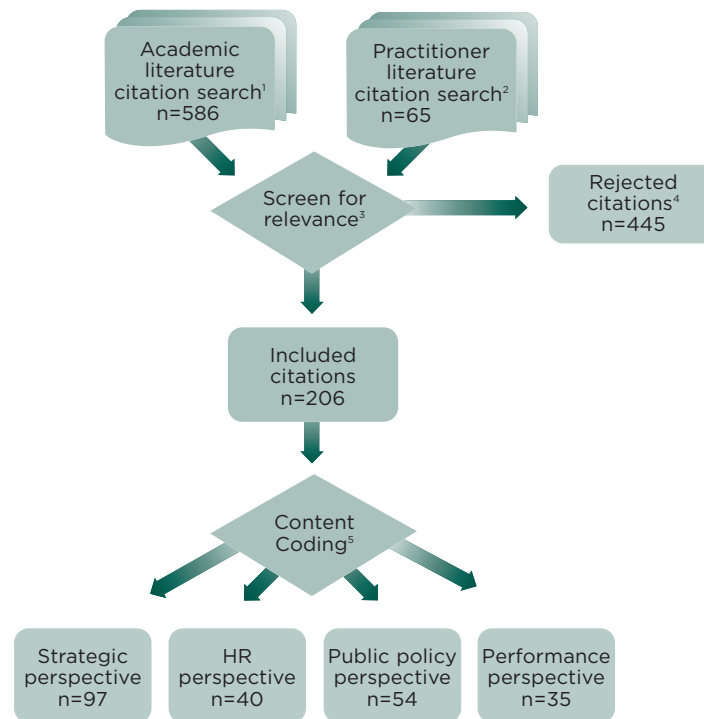
In order to identify relevant practitioner literature (Step 2), we (a) searched for teaching cases in the European Case Clearing House database using the same keywords as for the academic literature (includes Harvard, Ivey, IMD, ICFAI, Case Research Journal etc. teaching cases); (b) identified sources found through attendance at practitioner-targeted events, September 2007-March 2008; (c) hand searched the top 50 Google hits on "community engagement" for relevant reports; and (d) included other literature recommended to the research team. The search procedures for the practitioner sources likely lead to a somewhat idiosyncratic, and potentially biased, set of practitioner sources. Compared with the academic review, for example, our practitioner sources tended to favour more recent materials and those with content closest to the exact search text "community engagement". However, we judged that the added value to our database of including these sources outweighed the negative effects of a not completely replicable source identification process. We identified 65 sources in this process, mostly in the form of teaching cases, community engagement toolkits, and government reports.

At Step 3, we screened for inclusion. We would have liked to screen for source quality at this stage so that only sources containing sound evidence-based findings on community engagement would have been included. Given our diversity of research questions and disciplinary perspectives, and the preponderance of

conceptual or anecdotal "case studies" on community engagement, it was not feasible to screen for evidence-based studies. Instead, we screened on relevance for our system of research questions. Our criterion for inclusion was: "Citation apparently contains insights on one or more of our project's research questions on community engagement" (see questions listed by disciplinary perspective on pp. 7-8).

Due to the very large number of sources, the relevance screen was conducted based on the title and the abstract of the citation only. The inclusion or exclusion decision was double-coded by two evaluators, with a final round inter-rater reliability for academic sources of 0.94. Discrepancies were resolved by negotiation, and often led to the refinement of our understanding of the research questions. During this process we realized that the disciplinary perspectives were far from mutually exclusive, and that in fact similar questions were being asked in quite different literatures. For example, "how can community engagement processes best be integrated into the core activities of the firm?" has both human resources and strategy connotations. Similarly, regulations and policies form a crucial element of the strategic context, and so were addressed in both public policy and strategy journals.

- The 445 rejected citations (see "4" in Figure 1) consisted of citations matching the keywords and criteria used in our literature searches, but were not directly related with community engagement. Examples include literature on: general partnerships and inter-organizational relationships; virtue ethics and/or moral philosophy theory; sources addressing primary stakeholders only (employees and/or customers); general corporate social responsibility (CSR); stakeholders as drivers or pressures predicting another dependent variable (e.g. environmental performance); NGO governance models; employee engagement; and stakeholder capitalism.

We proceeded to code the 206 included sources for content. Content coding was conducted by one evaluator based on the full source (i.e. paper, report, chapter, case etc.). Each academic source was coded for the following content:

- primary disciplinary perspective (strategy, HR, accounting/performance management, public policy);
- publication outlet and originator (written by academic, consultant, government etc.);
- methodological approach (conceptual, case study, large sample survey, mixed);
- geographic region or country discussed;
- industry sector;
- implied definition of community (individual citizens, community groups);
- engagement methods (philanthropy, employee volunteering, dialogue, joint decision-making etc.);
- metrics or measurements used (if any);
- keywords; and
- other research notes (free text).

The next section provides descriptive statistics about the shape of our extant knowledge on community engagement, highlighting publication outlets, geographic, methodological and disciplinary scope of the extant literature

3. The Shape of Extant Knowledge on Community Engagement

Our literature search uncovered sources on community engagement published by nearly 100 different outlets and publications. Over 170 of the 206 sources were written by academics. As Table 1 indicates, most of the sources were identified from academic journal articles. The two leading outlets were the Journal of Business Ethics and Business and Society, which together published around one quarter of all of the sources included in this review. Knowledge on community engagement is also shared in general business journals (such as Organization Science), especially those aimed primarily at practitioners (such as Long Range Planning and European Management Journal). Our search also identified sources from the broader community development (Journal of Health & Human Services Administration) and nonprofit management (Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly) journals.

Table 1

MOST POPULAR PUBLICATION OUTLETS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH

PUBLICATION OUTLET	NUMBER OF INCLUDED CITATIONS
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS	33
BUSINESS AND SOCIETY	20
LONG RANGE PLANNING	7
BUSINESS ETHICS QUARTERLY	6
ORGANIZATION SCIENCE	6
EUROPEAN MANAGEMENT JOURNAL	5
ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT JOURNAL	4
BUSINESS ETHICS: A EUROPEAN REVIEW	4
JOURNAL OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES ADMINISTRATION	4
NONPROFIT AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR QUARTERLY	4

Note: Contains all outlets which published more than 4 sources.

Figure 2 demonstrates the explosive growth in community engagement knowledge dissemination over the last few years. There has been significant scholarly and practitioner attention on community engagement issues since about 2000. More interesting is the distribution of this literature by primary geographic region (see Table 2), and by methodology over time (see Table 3). From an early focus in North America, community engagement knowledge has been derived from an increasing diversity of national contexts. Most recently, researchers have begun to examine the potential for community engagement in the poorest countries in the world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, and in the Asian emerging economies. Also of note is the large number of sources originating from the UK (26) and Australia (11) in the 2003-2007 time period, reflecting government policy changes mandating, or at least encouraging, community involvement and participation in these jurisdictions.

Figure 2

NUMBER OF SOURCES PUBLISHED IN EACH YEAR
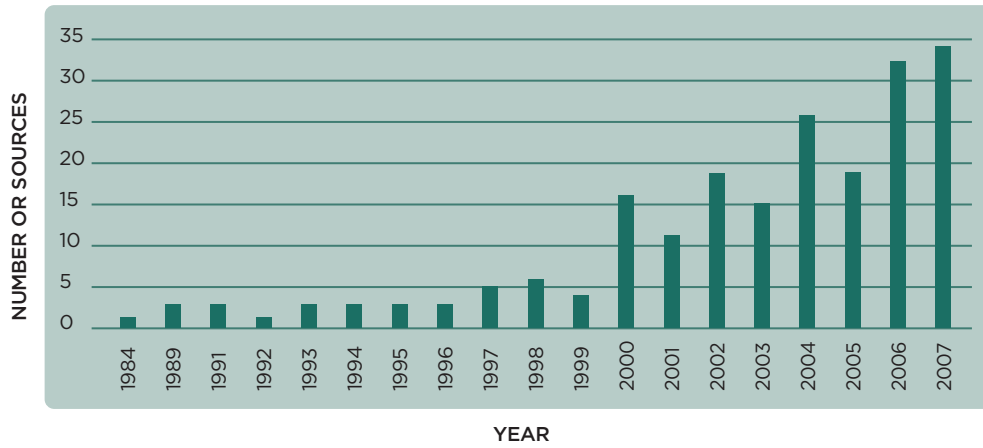
Table 2

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH OVER TIME

TIME PERIOD	NORTH AMERICA	EUROPEAN UNION	LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES	EMERGING ECONOMIES	TOTAL
PRE 1992	4 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	4 100%
1993-1997	4 67%	2 33%	0 0%	0 0%	6 100%
1998-2002	24 62%	11 28%	4 10%	0 0%	39 100%
2003-2007	31 37%	38 46%	11 13%	3 4%	83 100%
TOTAL	63 48%	51 39%	15 11%	3 2%	132 100%

Note: Not all sources could be coded with clear geographical boundaries, and the geographic region categories are not exhaustive. "Least Developed Countries" (LDCs) were defined by the United Nations' list. "Emerging Economies" are defined by the BRIC Countries of Brazil, Russia, India and China.

Table 3

METHODOLOGIES USED TO EXAMINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME

TIME PERIOD	CONCEPTUAL PAPERS	CASE STUDIES AND SMALL SAMPLE	LARGE SAMPLES	MIXED METHODS	TOTAL
PRE 1992	3 75%	1 25%	0 0%	0 0%	**4** **100%**
1993-1997	9 82%	1 9%	1 9%	0 0%	**11** **100%**
1998-2002	22 42%	20 38%	9 17%	1 2%	**52** **100%**
2003-2007	51 43%	41 35%	25 21%	1 1%	**118** **100%**
TOTAL	**85** **46%**	**63** **34%**	**35** **19%**	**2** **1%**	**185** **100%**

Note: "Large samples" include both surveys and studies based on secondary data.

Almost half of all the sources identified were conceptual papers based on theory, argument or the author's experience. Of the case studies and small sample sources, most were unsystematic or anecdotally based. Very few would meet the standards imposed by Yin (1994), Miles and Huberman (1994) or Eisenhardt (1989) on how to draw methodologically sound conclusions from case study research (but see Huxham and Vangen (2000), Voss et al. (2000) or Harvey and Schaefer (2001) as illustrative exceptions). There has been a recent upswing in the number of large sample studies of community engagement since 2003. These large sample surveys tend to be empirical studies on the antecedents and consequences of corporate philanthropy (Buchholtz, Amason et al. 1999; Brammer and Millington 2003; Brammer and Millington 2005), and not studies of the deeper forms of engagement. Thus, while it might have been possible to undertake an aggregative review of the philanthropy dimension of community engagement, the methodological diversity and immaturity of the community engagement literature supports our decision to undertake an explanatory, rather than an aggregative synthesis. Furthermore, there is comparatively little methodologically sound case-based or survey-based evidence upon which to base best practice recommendations.

Having examined the descriptive evidence on the rise of community engagement literature over time, and its geographical spread and methodological evolution, we will now go on to address our substantive findings on processes of community engagement.

4. Types of "Community" and "Engagement"

4.1 WHAT IS "COMMUNITY"?

The first issue for both managers and academics in approaching community engagement is to understand what "community" is. This is not straightforward, since "communities" may consist of individual citizens or of groups of citizens organized to represent a community's shared interests (Crane, Matten et al. 2004). In developing their definitions of community, most scholars have generally agreed that communities can be characterized by three factors: geography, interaction, and identity (Lee and Newby 1983). Communities primarily characterized by geography represent people residing within the same geographic region but with no reference to the interaction among them. Communities primarily identified by regular interaction represent a set of social relationships that may or may not be place based. Communities characterized primarily by identity represent a group who share a sense of belonging, generally built upon a shared set of beliefs, values or experiences; however, the individuals need not live within the same physical locality. Given these different conceptions of community, it can be difficult to identify a community to engage with. Furthermore, different communities may interact with each other (Unerman and Bennett 2004; Neville and Menguc 2006), or it may be unclear who in the community has formal or informal authority or the resources to engage in particular processes (Hardy and Phillips 1998; Hall and Vredenburg 2005).

Dunham, Freeman and Liedtka (2006) provide a particularly focused analysis of "The Problem of Community", and how this affects the nature and success of community engagement. They argue that companies that see themselves as "in community with stakeholders" have the most potential to lend insight into what actually is good practice. The practical implication of their work is that stakeholder theorists and practitioners must move toward a "names and faces" orientation, seeking a highly specific understanding of and communication with each stakeholder. Of note to theorists is Dunham et al.'s (2006) identification of the emergence of two fairly new forms of community: the virtual advocacy group, and the community of practice. These contemporary notions of community have strikingly different implications for stakeholder theory and practice, and hold the potential to move research in new directions.

For the purposes of our knowledge synthesis, we took as inclusive as possible an approach to community. Rather than defining ex ante whether to focus on an individual citizen-based notion of community, or whether to focus on community groups, we coded our sources for the implied definition of community used ex post (see Table 4). These counts are based on implied definitions because comparatively few authors actually defined what they meant by community. More common was to focus on a particular phenomenon such as philanthropy, employee volunteering in community projects, or collaboration with NGOs, and later to label this as engagement with community.

As indicated in Table 4, the sources were roughly evenly split between those conceptualizing "community" as consisting of individual citizens or the public generally, and those conceptualizing community as a community group (such as NGO, school or community association). This roughly even split between individual and group definitions of community is also manifested in sources primarily based on a human resources or a performance management disciplinary perspective. In contrast, public policy approaches emphasize communities of individual citizens, whereas strategy sources are weighted towards community groups. The public policy tendency to treat community as geographically or socio-politically defined sets of independent citizens reflects the participatory citizenship emphasis of this literature (see for example the review introduced by Gates (2001)).

Table 4

IMPLIED DEFINITIONS OF "COMMUNITY" EMPLOYED BY ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

PRIMARY DISCIPLINE	INDIVIDUAL	GROUP	BOTH (OR UNCLEAR)	TOTAL
STRATEGY	17 18%	60 64%	16 17%	**94** **99%**
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT	8 35%	10 43%	5 22%	**23** **100%**
HUMAN RESOURCES	14 40%	14 40%	7 20%	**35** **100%**
PUBLIC POLICY	37 70%	8 15%	8 15%	**53** **100%**
TOTAL	**76** **37%**	**92** **45%**	**36** **17%**	**206** **100%**

More surprising is the strategy literature's heavy emphasis on a group-based definition of community. Despite the strategy literature's identification of compelling reasons to embrace citizen-based participative systems (McCaffrey, Faerman et al. 1995; Crane, Matten et al. 2004), most of the cases and research address firms' interactions with specific social or community organizations (see for example, Austin 2000; Argenti 2004). Clearly, there may be benefits to be gained by engaging with community groups, but this is not the public engagement or truly broad-based social engagement often discussed in theory in this literature (McCaffrey, Faerman et al. 1995). There are two implications of this which will be discussed further below. First, there is relatively little literature from which to draw best practice on resource allocation and strategic pay-offs from individual-based community engagement. Second, the strategy literature may have much to learn from best practice in individual-based community engagement as it has been developed by governments and international regulatory bodies.

4.2 ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOURS

Engagement in community encompasses a wide range of behaviours conducted by firms, governments, community groups and individual citizens. As with the definition of community above, we took an inclusive approach to understanding the nature of engagement, and preferred to allow the sources to define engagement rather than determining engagement types ex ante. We free coded the engagement behaviours in each source, and later clustered these into broad categories as outlined below.

A powerful concept underlying much of the literature is a "continuum of community engagement". Engagement behaviours can be ordered along a continuum ranging from least to most involved. Labels for points along this continuum vary. For example, Austin (2000) terms these stages as "philanthropic", "transactional" and "integrative" engagement; Hardy and Philips (1998) identify "collaboration", "compliance", "contention" and "contestation"; Alberic and van Lierop (2006) distinguish "inside-out" transmission of information from firms to communities from "outside-in" approaches which draw in community perspectives; and Morsing and Schultz (2006) encourage moving from "informing" and "responding" to "involving" stakeholders in the process of engagement communications.

Figure 3 contains illustrative versions of the community engagement continuum from government (Ministry of Social Development 2007), an international training organization (International Associate for Public Participation 2007), the voluntary sector (Wilcox 1994), a corporate toolkit (Altria Corporate Services Inc. 2004), the community development literature (Barr and Haskagan 2000; Tamarack 2007), and non-profit corporate alliances (Rondinelli and London 2003).

Despite the wide variety of perspectives from which community engagement is approached across these sources, there are striking commonalities across the different versions of the continuum. All note increasing levels of community engagement from one-way information sharing, through two-way dialogue and collaboration, to community leadership or empowerment.

We have borrowed from the leadership and governance literature, and labeled these three stages on the continuum "transactional", "transitional" and "transformational"[†] (see Table 5). The emphasis of transactional approaches to engagement is to provide information or resources to communities through arm's length transactions. As Figure 3 indicates, Altria's corporate toolkit provides a range of tactics included within this transactional approach ranging from pushing communications through education to lobbying. Other examples include Scottish Power's "School to Work Programme" which equips low academic achievers of high school age an opportunity to assess their own employability and to gain skills that will be useful to them in the future; or Alcan's "Cans for Habitat" scheme which encourages Habitat for Humanity local affiliates to recycle used beverage cans by providing dollar-for-dollar matching grants based on the value of cans recycled. The community engagement literature identifies the donation of company financial resources (philanthropy), time (employee volunteering), and skills (training of community members) as further forms of transactional engagement.

[†] This language was used by Jocelyn Daw, Vice-President of Marketing and Social Engagement at Imagine Canada, in her presentation entitled "The New Model: Corporate-Cause Collaborations" at the Research Network for Business Sustainability's Knowledge Forum on Engaging the Community, Toronto, February 2008.

Figure 3

THE CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

INCREASING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GOVERNMENT (MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, NEW ZEALAND)	Information provision	One-off consultation		Collaborative processes	Community decision making
TRAINING ORGANIZATION (INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (IAP2))	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
VOLUNTARY SECTOR (THE ROWNTREE FOUNDATION, 1994)	Information	Consultation	Deciding together / Acting together	Supporting	
COMMUNITY STANCE (HASHAGAN (2002))	Passive	Reactive	Participative	Empowerment	Leadership
CORPORATE (ALTRIA INC)	Monitor / Push Communications / Educate	Lobby	Engage	Collaborate	
NON-PROFIT CORPORATE ALLIANCES (RONDINELLI & LONDON, 2003)	Arm's length	Interactive collaborations	Intensive alliances		

TRANSACTIONAL ENGAGEMENT
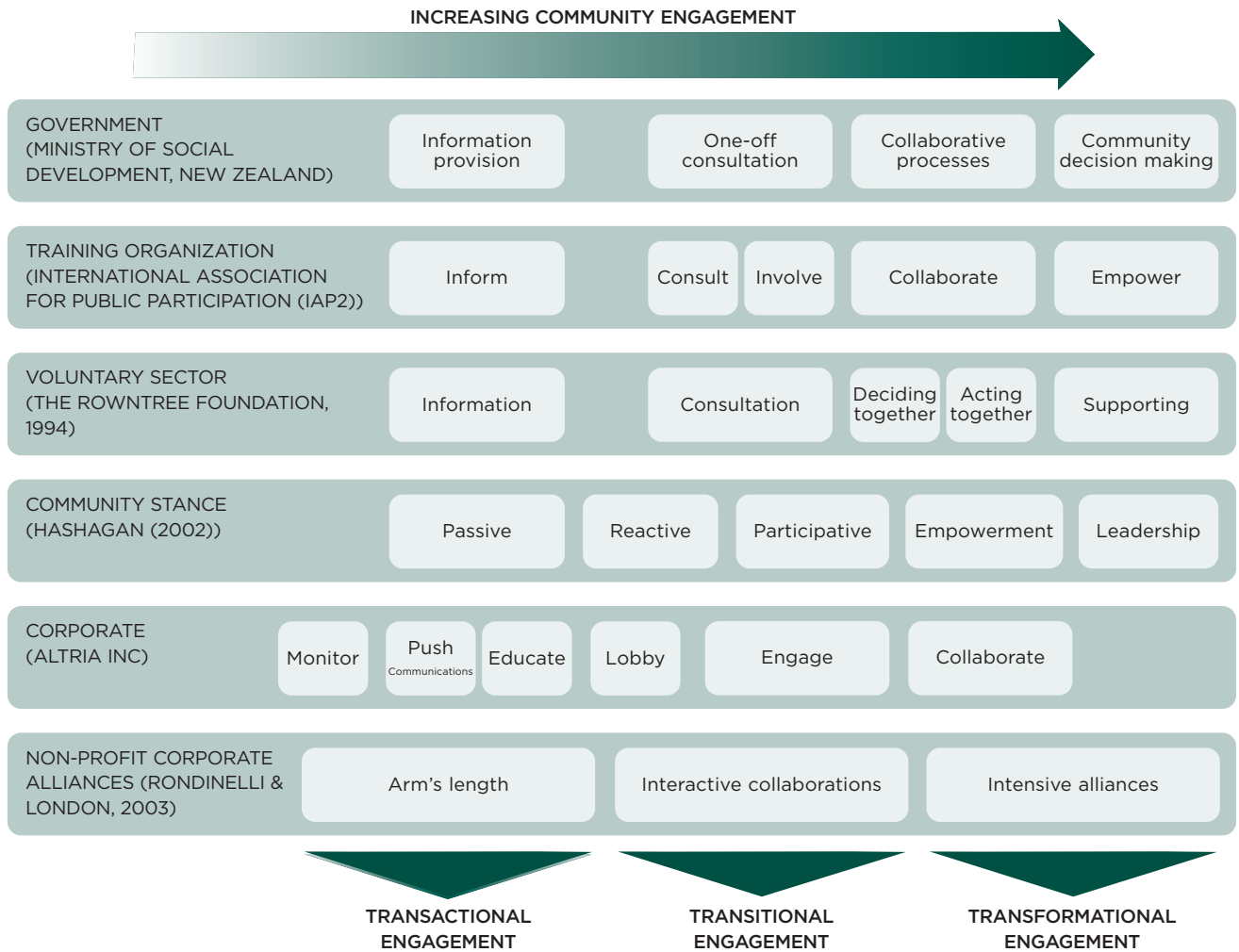
TRANSITIONAL ENGAGEMENT

TRANSFORMATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Table 5

THREE TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOURS

DIMENSION	TRANSACTIONAL ENGAGEMENT	TRANSITIONAL ENGAGEMENT	TRANSFORMATIONAL ENGAGEMENT
CORPORATE STANCE	"Giving Back" Community Investment	"Building Bridges" Community Involvement	"Changing Society" Community Integration
COMMUNICATION	One-way	Two-way	Two-way
NUMBER OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS	Many	Many	Few
FREQUENCY OF INTERACTION	Occasional	Repeated	Frequent
NATURE OF TRUST	Limited	Evolutionary	Relational
LEARNING	Transferred from firm	Transferred to firm	Jointly generated
CONTROL OVER PROCESS	Firm	Firm	Shared
BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES	Distinct	Distinct	Joint

Indeed one of the significant differences between the public policy-focused and the strategy-focused knowledge sources is the latter's inclusion of non-informational forms of community transactions. While public participation literature focuses on information transmission and sharing, the strategy literature expands this to address the transmission and sharing of money, time and skills. As Table 5 indicates, transactional engagement is based on a "Giving Back" mentality and is usually framed as community investment (e.g. Alcan's "Community Investment Program"). These forms of engagement are based on occasional interaction with a large number of partners. Most communication and learning is a one-way transfer from the firm, and the firm retains overall control of the engagement process. Benefits from the engagement can accrue to both firms and communities, but these benefits are separately accrued by both parties.

On the opposite end of the continuum lies "transformational engagement". This form of engagement is characterized by joint learning and sense-making (Hart and Sharma 2004; Payne and Gallon 2004), the joint management of projects with communities (David and Clifford 2002; Newman, Barnes et al. 2004; Paul Tracey, Nelson Phillips et al. 2005; Keith and Martin 2006), and community leadership in decision-making (Amnon 2005; Rasche and Esser 2006; James and Gittins 2007). The distinguishing features of transformational engagement are (1) organizations may achieve outcomes which were unimagined and unattainable without the engagement of the community; and (2) the community takes a supported leadership role in framing the problem and managing the solutions. Thus, control over the engagement process is shared, and both process learning and benefits jointly emerge to both parties through the engagement process.

Transformational engagement moves beyond symbolic engagement activities (Bindu and Salk 2006), and relies on authentic dialogue (Roulier 2000) and critical reflectivity (Balmer, Fukukawa et al. 2007). Transformational engagement requires the competency to engage participants through listening and understanding, the creation of a shared organizational language so that engagement makes sense to members of the organization, and a strong connection

with moving beyond talk into action (Schouten and Remm 2006). Frequent interaction with a small number of partners leads to the development of trust based on personal relationships and mutual understanding. Community needs and resources are fully integrated with the firm's decision-making processes.

An example of transformational engagement is Shell's "strategic institutional relationship" with Living Earth, an environmental education and community development NGO. The two parties had formally been in partnership for 16 years before deliberately reframing their relationship so as to allow more transformational outcomes. Shell recognized that this involved shifting their people's thinking and culture "from viewing an organization in a traditional contractual arrangement, to formulating an equal and enduring partnership" (www.shell.com). As Roger Hammond, Living Earth Foundation's development director put it, "With Shell we are working with a company that is willing to share risks and work with us to build solutions in real-life situations. We are not dealing with PR platitudes but are engaged in work that neither entity could achieve on its own. This is what we call a partnership."

The intermediate, or "transitional", engagement behaviours are characterized by two-way communication, consultation and collaboration. These types of engagement are "transitional" in the sense that they move beyond the one-way communication of transactional approaches to engage in dialogue with communities, but do not yet reach the shared sense-making and problem framing of transformational approaches. Similarly, there is a genuine attempt to move beyond one-way transfer of learning and knowledge from the firm to include learning from the community in the process. However, control of the resources and process remains with the firm rather than being fully shared (as with transformational engagement).

Some forms of collaboration and partnership are intended to be transformational, but end up being transitional in their implementation (Googins and

Rochlin 2000). Indeed, distinguishing between transformational and merely symbolic or transitional forms of engagement is a significant research challenge as researchers get beneath the surface of community partnerships to identify the extent to which authentic learning, leadership and empowerment have occurred within the process (Hardy and Phillips 1998; Payne and Gallon 2004).

Our analysis suggests that at least three criteria might be used in distinguishing transitional from transformational engagement. First, transformational engagement is only realistic with very few partners. Engaging with many community partners may indicate that the process is more transitional than transformational. Second, the nature of trust differs between transitional and transformational approaches. Trust in transformational engagement is based on personal relationships, whereas trust in transitional engagement evolves based on repeated interactions between the parties. Thus, trust in transitional engagement is more fragile as either party may be managing interactions based on a tit-for-tat or similar strategy (see Axelrod (1984) for a more complete explanation of the evolution of cooperation). Third, transformational engagement has the possibility of not only symmetrical, independent benefits to firms and communities from engagement, but also of conjoined benefits accruing to both parties. This aspect of the difference between transitional and transformational approaches will be discussed further below.

As Table 6 indicates, the most studied form of engagement is transactional, followed by transitional and then transformational engagement. Despite the potential for learning and community empowerment inherent in the most proactive forms of engagement, most of the sources address one-way communication (26 sources), and two-way dialogue and consultation (38). Distinguishing between "collaboration and partnership" and truly transformational engagement was often difficult, reflecting the challenge of recognizing deep as opposed to superficial or symbolic partnerships.

Table 6

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOURS ADDRESSED IN THE SOURCES

TRANSACTIONAL ENGAGEMENT	NUMBER OF SOURCES
ONE WAY COMMUNICATION	26
PHILANTHROPY	16
COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING & TRAINING	12
VOLUNTEERING	5
GATHERING INPUT	4
TOTAL	**63**

TRANSITIONAL ENGAGEMENT	
DIALOGUE AND CONSULTATION	38
COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP	22
TOTAL	**60**

TRANSFORMATIONAL ENGAGEMENT	
JOINT PROBLEM-SOLVING	17
JOINT MANAGEMENT & PROJECTS	8
JOINT DECISION-MAKING	7
LEARNING & JOINT SENSE-MAKING	4
TOTAL	**36**

Note: Not all sources could be identified as addressing single engagement behaviours. Some were allocated to more than one category. Others explicitly addressed a range of engagement behaviours as outlined in the community engagement continuum above.

We expected that the relatively low number of studies on transformational engagement was due to academic knowledge lagging practitioner experience over time. As we noted earlier, community engagement is evolving from managing stakeholder responses to particular issues, to co-creating solutions to social challenges. We expected that the knowledge on transformational engagement had a later start than the earlier interest in transactional and transitional approaches, and that the lower count of transformational sources merely reflected this late start.

Table 7 suggests that this is not the case. Indeed, of the 11 sources with identifiable types of engagement behaviours published before 1997, ten papers deal with the more proactive forms of engagement. Early conceptual (Waddock 1991; Hood, Logsdon et al. 1993; Logsdon and Yuthas 1997) and case-based (Westley and Vredenburg 1991; Westley and Vredenburg 1997) academic studies addressed deep engagement with community groups and individuals. However, by the 2003-2007 time period, studies of transformational engagement are far outweighed by transactional approaches. This may reflect a shift in the academic literature over time as conceptual calls-to-arms on engaging community in corporate decisions have gradually been surpassed by empirical studies focusing on the easiest forms of engagement to identify in

practice and to measure. The availability of data might be the easiest explanation of the counterintuitive shift of knowledge generation efforts from transformational towards transactional engagement over time. As noted above, many of the latest empirical papers are large-scale surveys of the most visible forms of community engagement (philanthropy, employee volunteering and training provision). Thus this distribution of sources over time does not necessarily mean that interest in transformational approaches is waning, merely that it is more difficult to access, interpret and publish transformational engagement studies.

Table 7

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE SOURCES OVER TIME

TIME PERIOD	TRANSACTIONAL ENGAGEMENT	TRANSITIONAL ENGAGEMENT	TRANSFORMATIONAL ENGAGEMENT	TOTAL
PRE 1992	0 0%	1 33%	2 67%	3 100%
1993-1997	1 12%	4 50%	3 38%	8 100%
1998-2002	15 35%	20 47%	8 18%	43 100%
2003-2007	47 45%	35 33%	23 22%	105 100%
TOTAL	63 39%	60 38%	36 23%	157 100%

5. Best Practices in Community Engagement

Given the diversity and immaturity of community engagement knowledge, identifying best practices is a significant challenge. Indeed, a central paradox in this literature is that while there many suggestions as to what organizations should do, there is very little empirical evidence of what works and when. For example, one of our aims was to identify best practices by sector. However, this was not possible due to the small number of empirically robust studies and the unsystematic way in which incomparable studies have been conducted in different contexts.

In this section, we present three ways of identifying best practices in community engagement. First, we take a critical realist approach in our explanatory review to collate evidence on the drivers and pay-offs from the three main types of engagement processes. This is summarized in an ABC (Antecedents, Behaviours, Consequences) analysis. Second, we examine the measures and metrics used to assess community engagement practices, and use these to point to examples of best practice. Third, we draw best practice principles from among the most comprehensive best practice principle sources.

5.1 ANTECEDENTS, BEHAVIOURS AND CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In the spirit of an explanatory synthesis, we coded all the knowledge sources for the predictors of the various community engagement behaviours outlined above, and for the outcomes of each engagement process. Our intention was to distill which processes are most appropriate in which situation, and the likely benefits of undertaking the different engagement behaviours. Our findings are represented in the ABC (Antecedents, Behaviours, Consequences) analysis presented in Figure 4.

Antecedents of community engagement

Figure 4 identifies three primary sets of interrelated antecedents to community engagement: institutional context, community context and organizational context. These are perceived through the moderating filter of managerial perceptions, and are the primary drivers of the types of community engagement behaviours selected in different contexts.

Appropriate forms of community engagement activities are shaped by the broad institutional context, as outlined in regulations or public policy (Albareda, Lozano et al. 2007). These institutions affect the structure of social and political organization (McCaffrey, Faerman et al. 1995) within a given national culture (Veser 2004). Public policy might influence not only the process of community engagement (Boxelaar, Paine et al. 2006), but also identify substantive priority areas for including community concerns in organizational processes (Blake 2007).

The institutional context interacts with the community context. For example, some institutional environments are more or less conducive to advanced community preparedness to engage in dialogue (Barr and Haskagan 2000). Other relevant contextual elements of community for undertaking engagement include the structure of community groups (Abzug and Webb 1999), host community expectations (Gabriel 2006; Eltham, Harrison et al. 2008), and constituents' stances and attitudes (Harvey and Schaefer 2001; Hays 2007). Of particular importance here is the possibility of varying attitudes among communities towards engaging with corporations (den Hond and de Bakker 2007), and the extent to which communities' priorities are similar (Wolfe and Putler 2002) or divergent (Hardy, Lawrence et al. 2006; Vilanova 2007). Recognizing the interdependence and interactions between community groups may be a significant challenge in designing appropriate engagement processes (Neville and Menguc 2006; den Hond and de Bakker 2007).

Other salient dimensions of the community context include the shared identity of community actors (Fiol and O'Connor 2002), resources available to the community (Williams 2003), the structure of community groups (Abzug and Webb 1999), and the nature of the social issue being addressed (McCaffrey, Faerman et al. 1995).

Figure 4

ANTECEDENTS, BEHAVIOURS AND CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
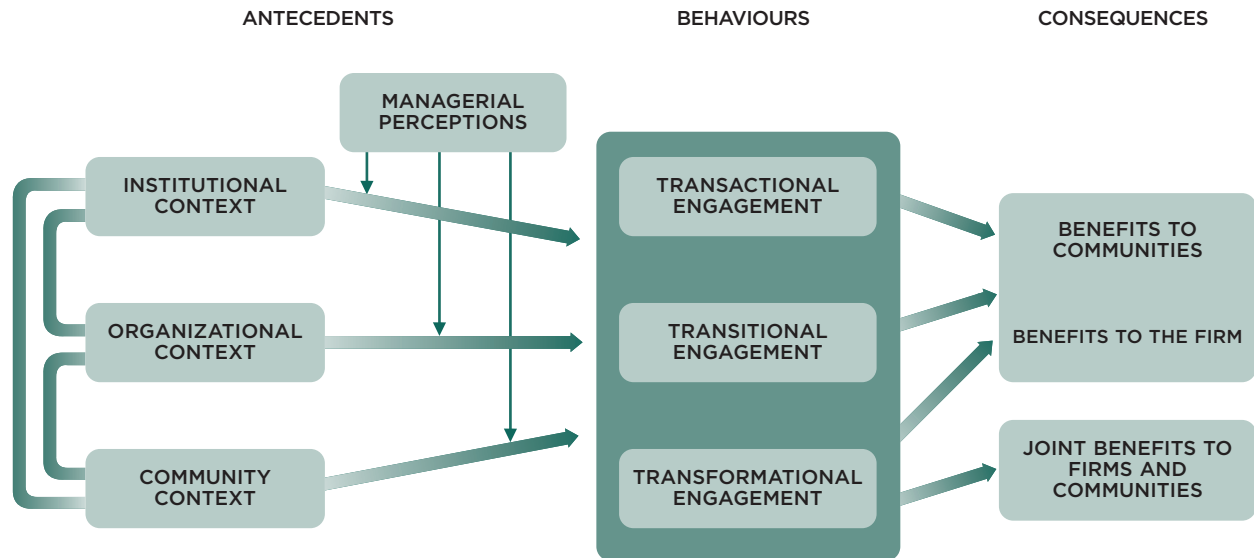
The organizational context is itself located within the institutional environment, and may be framed by previous interactions with community (Barnett 2007). Community engagement behaviours are intended to fit with a firm's strategic position (Knox and Gruar 2007), and be consonant with an organization's identity (Balmer, Fukukawa et al. 2007). More strategic approaches emphasize fit with a firm's resources (Buchholtz, Amason et al. 1999; Wagenet and Pfeffer 2007), capabilities (Schouten and Remm 2006), organizational structure (Brammer and Millington 2003), and budgeting and strategic planning processes (O'Donnell 2002). Other typical organizational characteristics addressed within the community engagement literature, and often included as control variables, include organizational performance, age and size (Wicks and Berman 2004; Shropshire and Hillman 2007).

In our ABC analysis outlined in Table 4, the institutional, organizational and community context are moderated by managerial perceptions on community engagement. While this is not often made explicit in the extant literature, we argue that managerial perceptions form an important filter through which signals from the broader context are received. For example, Fiol (2002) argues for the importance of understanding the filters of "hot" emotional and "cold" cognitive managerial interpretations in processes of community engagement. Managerial intuition (Harvey and Schaefer 2001) and values (Voss, Cable et al. 2000; Choi and Wang 2007) can make some managers connect emotionally with engagement. Managerial cognition reflecting experience, aspirations and risk perception can also impact engagement behaviours (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2001; Schwarzkopf 2006; Shropshire and Hillman 2007). The extent to which managerial perceptions moderate the

other antecedents of community engagement depends on the extent to which managers have discretion to act on engagement issues (Buchholtz, Amason et al. 1999).

Consequences of Community Engagement

Our coding suggested three main categories of consequences of community engagement: benefits accruing primarily to the community, benefits accruing to the firm, and benefits shared jointly by both the firm and community. Our analysis suggests that transactional and transitional approaches to community engagement lead only to separate benefits to each side of the transaction. Transformational approaches, however, can lead to shared or conjoint benefits.

The primary intended benefit to community of firm engagement is substantive social improvement. The nature of this improvement varied widely according to the substantive focus of the knowledge sources, including provision of housing (Kolleeny 2006), improved public health (Ray and Hatcher 2000), ecosystem management (Muhweezi, Sikoyo et al. 2007) or emergency relief (Fernando 2007). Specific transactional forms of engagement can lead to communities gaining information and knowledge through training (Stern 2001), professional or technical upgrading (Jones 2001), or developing local capacity (Evans 2004). However, not all consequences for the community are necessarily positive, as it can be difficult to ensure that transactional benefits are sustainable (Jones 2001), and there is a danger of developing dependency on the firm for resources (L'Etang 1995).

The primary benefit to the firm of community engagement is the development and enhancement of societal legitimacy (Heugens, Van Den Bosch et al. 2002; Wei-Skillern 2004; Morsing 2006). Engagement allows firms to demonstrate social responsibility (Wood 2002), and awareness of community impacts and issues (Myers 2007). Several authors argue that increased legitimacy can lead to improved credibility and trust with stakeholders (Choi and Wang 2007), and ultimately to enhanced employer attractiveness (Backhaus, Stone et al. 2002). In addition to legitimacy-based benefits, firms might gain competitiveness benefits, such as improved risk management (Carey, Beilin et al. 2007), more effective promotion of their services to the community (Atakan and Eker 2007; Buys and Bursnall 2007; Manson 2007), or innovation (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2001).

More proactive forms of engagement might yield learning benefits to firms through a more reflective practice of corporate citizenship (Payne and Gallon 2004), and the institutionalization of social concerns in the firm (Litz 1996; Epstein and Roy 2001; Bindu and Salk 2006). The very act of gathering data and reporting on the engagement so as learn from it improves employee awareness of community and social issues (Wei-Skillern 2004).

A consistent feature in the knowledge on transformational engagement is the possibility of not only symmetrical, independent benefits to firms and communities from engagement as described above, but also of conjoined benefits accruing to both parties. Both firms and communities benefit from the richer community-business exchanges developed through a transformational approach (Okubo and Weidman 2000; Payne and Gallon 2004; Balmer, Fukukawa et al. 2007; Fernando 2007). Similarly, transformational approaches can lead to mutual understanding and agreement about firms' responsibilities in addressing social problems (Unerman and Bennett 2004; Alberic and Van Lierop 2006), and even to the transformation of the problem domain itself (Westley and Vredenburg 1997).

The most powerful outcomes from a transformational engagement process may be a shared ownership of the problem and a shared vision of solutions (Lowndes, Pratchett et al. 2001; Morrison-Saunders 2007). If communities are sufficiently involved in the goal-setting and measurement processes, shared accountability for the engagement process may also be achieved (Barnett 2002; Natcher and Hickey 2002; Rasche and Esser 2006).

Implications of the ABC Analysis

An ideal-type explanatory knowledge synthesis would have been able to identify the precise causal mechanisms leading from specific antecedents and processes to the likelihood of achieving particular benefits. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, our

extant knowledge on community engagement is not sufficiently developed, systematic or sophisticated to achieve these precise linkages. Our answers to when and how community engagement pays off remain rather general. However, there are a few key lessons for the business case for community engagement to be drawn from our ABC analysis of extant knowledge.

First, the payoffs from engagement, particularly of the transactional and transitional types, are largely in the form of enhanced firm legitimacy. As Mattingly's (2004) empirical analysis shows, community engagement has little effect on financial performance, but has a positive effect on social performance. Second, value is more likely to be created through engagement which is relational rather than transactional since purely transactional interactions can be duplicated and thus offer little potential for gaining competitive advantage (Hillman and Keim 2001). A

corollary of this is that firms that breed trust-based co-operative ties with communities may gain a competitive advantage over those that do not (Heugens, Van Den Bosch et al. 2002; Choi and Wang 2007). Third, firms which desire the outcomes of shared ownership to problems and solutions, shared accountability and richer relationships must follow a transformational approach to engagement. These outcomes are unlikely to be achieved through transactional or symbolic approaches. Finally, best practice in community engagement involves fit between the engagement context and process in order to achieve the best outcomes for both the firm and the community.

5.2 BEST PRACTICES IN METHODS AND METRICS USED

As noted above, very few of the sources included in our knowledge synthesis contained direct or indirect measures of the effectiveness of engagement processes. Indeed, as Hall and Vredenburg (2005) argue, traditional evaluation techniques such as discounted cash-flow or cost-benefit analysis can misrepresent the community engagement process because of ambiguity about the parties involved, their roles and appropriate timescales. Adaptations to some other traditional measures have been suggested in the community engagement context. An adapted balanced scorecard, for example, can provide insight into the success or otherwise of the implementation of engagement initiatives (Epstein and Roy 2001), and help to explicitly link engagement activities to firm objectives (Smith and Wallace 1995). We also found specific participative evaluation methodologies which have been proposed in the forestry industry (Kanel and Varughese 2000; Natcher and Hickey 2002).

Two key lessons can be drawn from these methods and metrics. The first applies to all types of community engagement, from the least to the most proactive. Evaluation tools should consist of a balanced mix of

quantitative and qualitative indicators capturing the input, output and outcome dimensions of engagement (Governmental Accounting Standards Board 1990). As outlined in Strike and Herremans (2007), inputs are the resources used during the engagement, whether donations, staff time or other corporate investments. Outputs measure the efficiency or the volume of activity, regardless of the quality of the result (e.g. number of people trained; number of schools visited). Outcomes move beyond outputs to measure the effectiveness or the quality of the engagement, including the ultimate social impact.

The most well cited of the frameworks exhibiting these criteria is that of the London Benchmarking Group (2004). This group of over 100 companies has gathered together to improve the measurement and benchmarking of corporate community involvement. Central to the approach is gathering evidence on the inputs (cash, time, in-kind) and outputs (leverage, community benefits, business benefits) of community involvement, and assessing the overall social and economic outcomes.

The second key lesson applies to the most proactive, transformational forms of community engagement. Shared accountability is achieved through shared development of engagement goals and indicators (Natcher and Hickey 2002; Rasche and Esser 2006). An example of good practice here is dual assurance of corporate reporting to communities, which involves using a multi-stakeholder group to assess the acceptability of the firm's social performance (Herremans and Nazari 2007). Auditing on a traditional sustainability report provides information as to the accuracy of a given performance indicator, but says nothing about the level of performance of the company and whether that performance is in line with community expectations. Dual assurance involves convening a multi-stakeholder committee with the objective of evaluating the quality of the report, and

the extent to which firms are meeting community expectations on sustainability performance.

While some of the academic literature has attempted to measure whether engagement pays-off, most of this knowledge is based only on transactional approaches to engagement (Buchholtz, Amason et al. 1999; Brammer and Millington 2005). Evidence on causal connections between community engagement and firm performance measures such as return on assets or market value added are indeterminate, and may even be spurious (Choi and Wang 2007). Thus, the best suggestions from our knowledge sources on evaluating performance impacts of community engagement are to ensure that outputs of engagement are measured as well as the inputs, and that transformational approaches incorporate participative evaluation techniques.

5.3 COLLATION OF BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Best practice techniques in community engagement are contextually dependent. The choice of appropriate techniques or processes depends on a wide variety of the antecedents of community engagement identified above. Therefore, it is impossible to prescribe best practice techniques in all situations. Instead, best practices in community engagement should be driven by a set of principles to build trust, goodwill and respect, rather than shaped by particular techniques. While the choice of particular processes is an important element within community engagement, the key question becomes: what are the key principles underlying best practice in community engagement?

We have noted throughout this report the relative paucity of empirical evidence evaluating pay-offs from community engagement. We have also noted that it is the public policy literature, rather than the strategy literature, which emphasizes community engagement as an individual-based process. It is therefore unsurprising that we found several examples of best practice principles published by government agencies and quasi-non-governmental organizations for individual-based engagement processes. We began with these lists of best practice principles, and then

expanded our search for best practice among business associations and specific firms.

In order to identify best practice principles for community engagement, we conducted a synthesis of five of the most accessible lists of best practices. The five included sources were:

1) "Leading Practice Principles of Community Engagement", New South Wales Government, Australia
2) "National Standards for Community Engagement", Minister for Communities, The Scottish Executive, UK
3) "Principles for Stakeholder Engagement", Business for Social Responsibility, San Francisco, Ca, USA
4) "Community Impact Core Principles", Business in the Community, London, UK
5) "Good Practice Principles for Stakeholder Engagement", International Finance Corporation, Washington, DC, USA

We began by listing all of the principles, tips, and best practices mentioned in each of these sources. We then mapped them across the different sources, noting which best practices were duplicated in more than one source. The intention here was to identify common

meaning, even though the language might have been different. For example, "be clear about who to engage with" (New South Wales Government 2003), "identify and involve people and organizations who have an interest in the engagement" (The Scottish Executive 2003), "do your research to find the right partners" (Business in the Community 2007), and "invest time in identifying and prioritizing stakeholders" (International Finance Corporation 2007) were all coded as "identify and prioritize who to engage with".

Of the 65 different best practice principles contained in these five documents, 17 best practices were mentioned by more than three of the sources. We organized these 17 core best practice principles by engagement process stage, and clustered them into seven steps for successful community engagement as outlined in Figure 5.

Pre-engagement planning consists of setting goals, identifying participants, prioritizing issues, allocating resources and leveraging the experience of others. During the engagement process, organizations should select "fit for purpose" engagement techniques, aim to be inclusive and aim for mutual benefit. During this phase, it is vital to communicate the purpose and boundaries of the engagement early, communicate openly and to share evidence-based knowledge and information. The engagement process should be recorded and documented, so as to provide and encourage feedback from participants and continually monitor and evaluate progress. After the engagement process has concluded, organizations should be sure to follow up on suggestions received during the

engagement process. They should report outcomes to both stakeholders who participated and those which did not. Firms should also report to their own organizations and to their peers so as to ensure post-engagement learning.
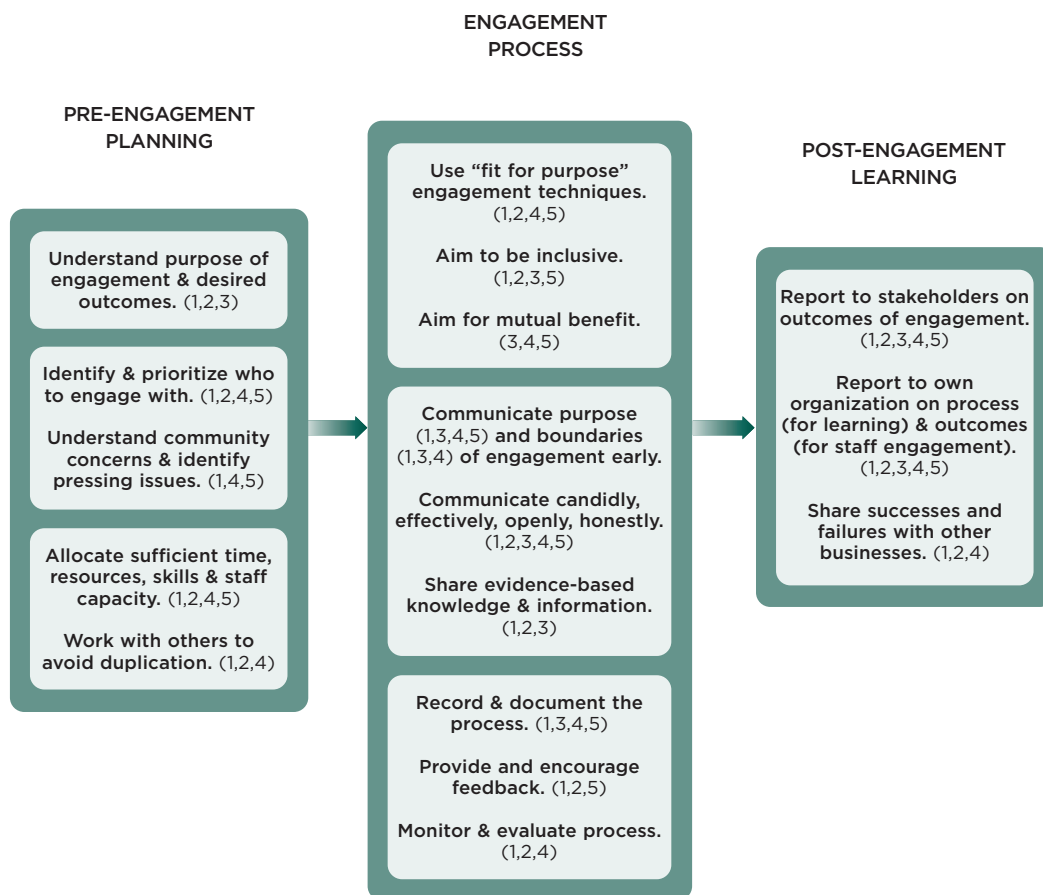
A further cross-cutting theme running through the list of best practices was the importance of time and timing. Engagement processes should be timely – communities should be engaged when the learning can influence decisions and actions (Business for Social Responsibility 2003); participants should receive information in enough time to make effective contributions (New South Wales Government 2003); and any issues should be resolved quickly from either side (Business in the Community 2007).

The most exhaustive list of best practices was provided by the New South Wales Government. While the "Leading Practice Principles" identified by this agency sometimes slipped into a tactical tip list (e.g. "ensure that engagement team is well informed", "ensure that dominant special interest groups are not the only ones heard"), this list also contains some good advice on what organizations should avoid (e.g. "avoid jargon and technical language", "avoid creating false expectations about what can be achieved"). Indeed, of the 17 best practice principles identified in Figure 5, all but one of them appears on the New South Wales Government's list.

Figure 5

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Note: Numbers in parentheses refer to the sources as listed in the text above.

ENGAGEMENT
PROCESS

PRE-ENGAGEMENT
PLANNING

POST-ENGAGEMENT
LEARNING

Use "fit for purpose"
engagement techniques.
(1,2,4,5)

Aim to be inclusive.
(1,2,3,5)

Aim for mutual benefit.
(3,4,5)

Understand purpose of
engagement & desired
outcomes. (1,2,3)

Identify & prioritize who
to engage with. (1,2,4,5)

Understand community
concerns & identify
pressing issues. (1,4,5)

Allocate sufficient time,
resources, skills & staff
capacity. (1,2,4,5)

Work with others to
avoid duplication. (1,2,4)

Communicate purpose
(1,3,4,5) and boundaries
(1,3,4) of engagement early.

Communicate candidly,
effectively, openly, honestly.
(1,2,3,4,5)

Share evidence-based
knowledge & information.
(1,2,3)

Report to stakeholders on
outcomes of engagement.
(1,2,3,4,5)

Report to own
organization on process
(for learning) & outcomes
(for staff engagement).
(1,2,3,4,5)

Share successes and
failures with other
businesses. (1,2,4)

Record & document the
process. (1,3,4,5)

Provide and encourage
feedback. (1,2,5)

Monitor & evaluate process.
(1,2,4)

6. Implications for Future Research

The primary implication of our systematic review of the knowledge on community engagement is a call to arms for academic researchers to be far more specific in their treatment of this broad issue. It is difficult to draw best practices from a knowledge base which includes divergent definitions of community (whether individual or group-based), and a wide range of engagement behaviours (ranging from transactional to transformational approaches). While we were able to discern groups of antecedents (institutional, organizational, community and managerial contexts) and consequences (for the firm, for the community, for both) of community engagement, the precise causal mechanisms linking contexts to engagement processes to success is still unclear. The best practice processes we identified were primarily derived from the cutting edge of practice, from groups such as the London Benchmarking Group and the New South Wales Government, rather than from the academic literature.

Our analysis suggests several specific extensions to the academic literature which are urgently needed. First, researchers should renew efforts to measure the costs and benefits of community engagement activities. Most of the studies which have attempted this have studied transactional engagement in large-scale surveys. However, it is just as important for us to know whether and how transitional and transformational engagement pays off. We would encourage rigorous case-based studies getting beneath the surface of engagement activities to evaluate the pay-offs to these approaches. The London Benchmarking Group's measurement method may be useful to researchers attempting to evaluate these richer forms of engagement.

Second, more research effort is required on distinguishing between transitional and transformational approaches to engagement. While both of these can be identified as "collaboration" or "partnership", there is a substantive difference in the processes employed by the two types and in the nature of benefits expected from them. Specifically, transitional engagement can give rise to joint benefits both to firms and communities, rather than merely

symmetrical ones. This is a particularly important challenge given the tendency for firms to try to package transitional engagement as truly transformational. We would encourage further knowledge generation on the difference between symbolic and substantive community engagement processes.

Third, the continuum of community engagement we presented in Figure 3 is largely framed in terms of positive engagement with community (with the possible exception of Altria's "monitor" strategy). However, we found several studies which examined more negative forms of engagement such as stakeholder retaliation (Collins 1989), neglect (Kolk and Pinkse 2006), or the negative consequences of NGO activism (Unerman and O'Dwyer 2006). Episodes of negative interactions with communities in practice are often well-publicized, so it is surprising that there is very little academic knowledge on these negative engagements.

Fourth, the dominant perspective in this knowledge synthesis has been on firms' responsibilities to society. There has been very little discussion of communities' responsibilities to firms and to other stakeholders (but see Goodstein and Wicks 2007 as an exception). This is an area ripe for future study, especially given the current government rhetoric in countries such as the UK and Australia on the potential of community empowerment. While communities may gain new rights through these public policy changes, they will also incur expanded responsibilities.

Fifth, our analysis suggests that the primary pay-off to firms from engaging with community is in terms of enhanced legitimacy and reputation management, rather than direct competitiveness benefits. One implication of this is that there may not be an obvious net financial benefit to the firm from an engagement process. Transitional and transformational engagement may in practice cost money which is not easily recouped in the form of competitive advantage. Further research is required on whether community engagement is merely a costly threshold capability required for legitimate entry into communities, or

whether firms can gain competitive advantage from these activities.

Finally, the biggest research opportunity in the community engagement arena is for strategy researchers to move beyond a group-based definition of community to an individual citizen-based notion of community. Firms may receive strategic benefits from engaging with specific NGOs or community leaders (Rondinelli and London 2003), but this group-based approach runs the risk of excluding community members who may later have a strategic impact on the firm (Hall and Vredenburg 2005). The New South Wales Government's Leading Practice Principles included the advice to ensure that dominant special interest groups are not the only ones heard. There is a significant potential here for strategy researchers to draw insight from the extensive public policy literature on participatory citizen engagement.

7. Conclusion

Our knowledge project aimed at understanding best practices in community engagement. A central paradox of this literature is that while there is a very large number of suggestions as to what organizations should do, there is very little empirical evidence of what works and when. The specific best practice processes we identified were primarily derived from the cutting edge of practice, rather than from published academic literature.

The evidence we collated suggests that corporate engagement stances vary from "giving back", through "building bridges", to "changing society". We labeled these three main approaches to community engagement transactional, transitional and transformational, respectively. We find that the most studied form of engagement is transactional, followed by transitional and then transformational engagement.

Despite the potential for learning and community empowerment inherent in the most involved forms of engagement, most of the sources address one-way communication and limited two-way dialogue and consultation.

Successful community engagement is achieved by matching the institutional, organizational and community context with the overall engagement approach. Selecting specific processes within these approaches is a challenging managerial task. We hope that our collation of best practice principles into seven steps for successful community engagement will help frame managerial conversations. Finally, we encourage other researchers to build on our work and extend community engagement research in the directions suggested here.

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Appendix A: About the Research Network for Business Sustainability

MISSION   The Research Network for Business Sustainability uses knowledge to bridge the communities of research and practice to enable business sustainability.

OBJECTIVES   The Network aims to:

- Build a **community** of people working on business sustainability.

- Increase capacity within the community to develop **knowledge.**

- Create **tools** based on that knowledge that can impact practice.

ACTIVITIES   The Network funds projects to move knowledge between the communities of research and practice, organizes events that bring the members of those communities together, and enables ongoing interaction and knowledge exchange through online tools.

FUNDING   The Network is funded with generous contributions from the Leadership Council members and three major funders. In March 2008, the Network received $2.4 million from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

For more information on the Research Network for Business Sustainability, please visit **www.SustainabilityResearch.org**

Appendix B: Research Network for Business Sustainability Leadership Council Members††

The Network was created with generous funding from the Richard Ivey School of Business, the Leadership Council members, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the University of Western Ontario.

†† The Leadership Council members do not necessarily endorse the findings of this report.

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