

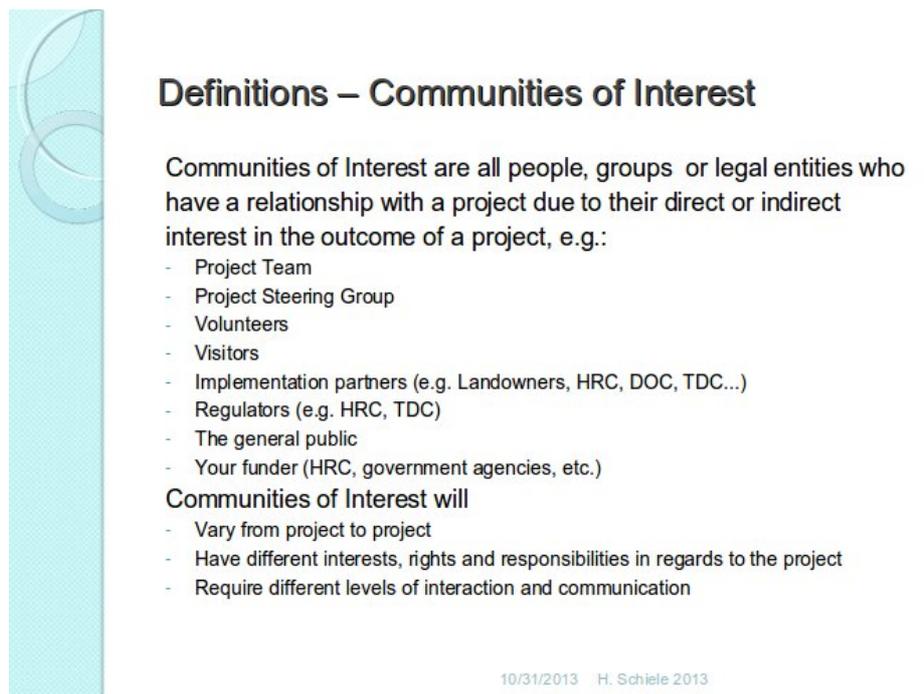
The Communities of Interest Approach to Project Communications

— based on a presentation by Heike Schiele to the Environment Network Manawatu¹

The Collective Impact Framework presented by Kania and Kramer² calls on project organisers to communicate continuously and to work across organisations and sectors to supportively reinforce one another's activities.

These project communications first require determining who needs to be included in them, and what types of communication are appropriate for which audiences. One tool for thinking systematically about what is required is the “communities of interest” approach to project communications, which PhD student and ENM board member Heike Schiele presented to the Environment Network Manawatu's February 2014 Workshop on Collaboration and Biodiversity.

The communities of interest approach asks project leaders to consider how best to communicate with a wider network than their own organisation and a broader public than their own project core group. While it has now become commonplace to think about how to work with project “stakeholders,” Schiele advocates for putting aside the term “stakeholder,” as the term is often defined in overly narrow ways (for example, in terms of landowners, investors, public entities, and/or well-established organisations). She gives preference to the broader term “communities of interest,” which is open to any identified group with a particular connection to the project (See Fig. 1). This more open term encourages an inclusive approach to project development.



Definitions – Communities of Interest

Communities of Interest are all people, groups or legal entities who have a relationship with a project due to their direct or indirect interest in the outcome of a project, e.g.:

- Project Team
- Project Steering Group
- Volunteers
- Visitors
- Implementation partners (e.g. Landowners, HRC, DOC, TDC...)
- Regulators (e.g. HRC, TDC)
- The general public
- Your funder (HRC, government agencies, etc.)

Communities of Interest will

- Vary from project to project
- Have different interests, rights and responsibilities in regards to the project
- Require different levels of interaction and communication

10/31/2013 H. Schiele 2013

Figure 1: Defining Communities of Interest, H. Schiele

- 1 This article is based on Heike Schiele's presentation to the Environment Network Manawatu Workshop on Collaboration and Biodiversity, held 15 February 2014 at the Ashhurst Village Valley Centre. Written summary of the presentation is by Sharon Stevens, Environment Network Manawatu, with slides provided by Schiele. It is available on the Environment Network Manawatu web site (<http://enm.org.nz>) under the menu item “resources” for “collaboration.”
- 2 Please see separately downloadable documents available from the Environment Network Manawatu web site “resources” page.

Schiele asks project planners to consider:

- Who are the communities of interest, and how do they relate to each other and to your collaborative project? (See Fig. 1, above)
- How do you communicate with these communities? Who needs to know what, and when?
- How does a project core group express itself toward ever-widening circles (e.g. regional communities, a general public) as progress is made toward shared goals? (See Fig. 2)
- How do you engage each community of interest, reaching out to likely opponents as much as likely supporters? What can you expect from each community? Who can help you make connections? (See Fig. 3)

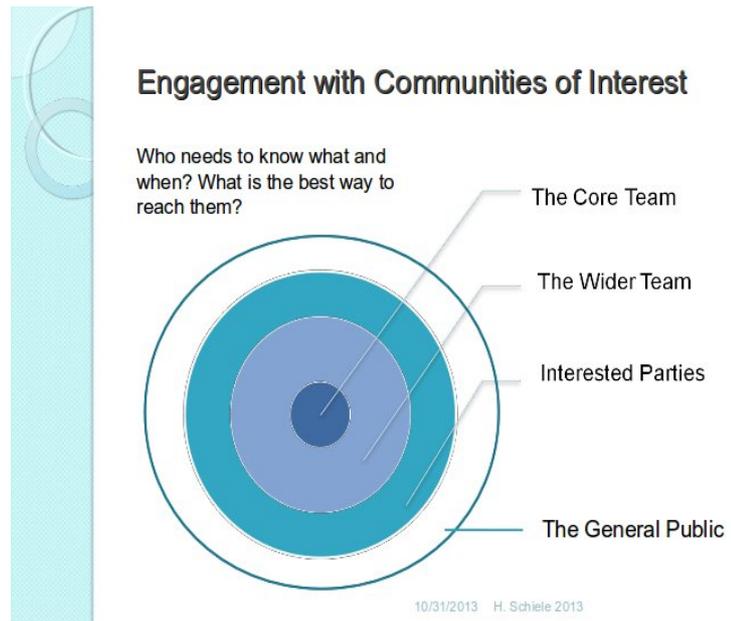


Figure 2. Widening circles of interest. H. Schiele.

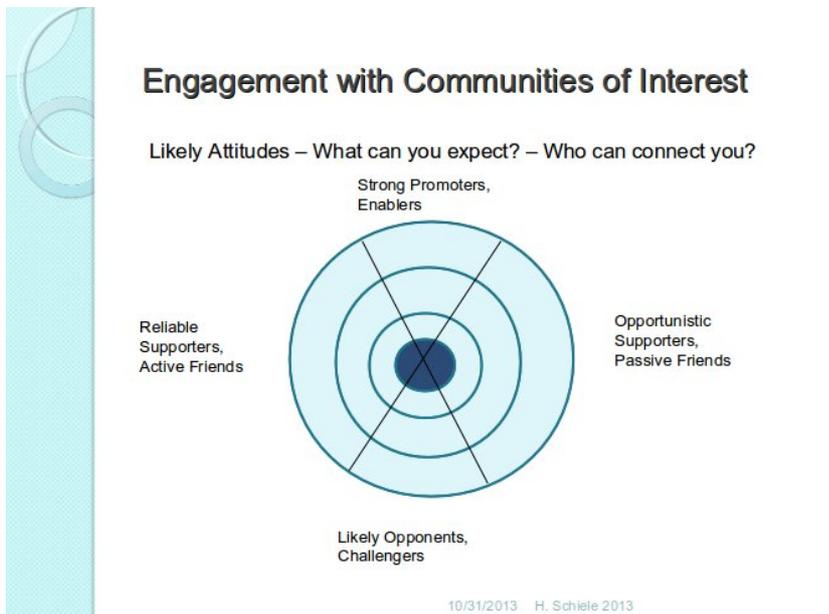


Figure 3. Engaging diversity within communities of interest. H. Schiele.

The Manawatu Gorge Project is an example of diverse communities of interest working together, and working in various ways. For example, community groups are included in the project, perhaps working within a single-activity niche. Iwi and hapū are providing holistic kaitiakitanga. Funders, landowners, local and regional council and agencies and others all have roles. The activities of each group contribute to a whole and reinforce an overall vision that is being held by a core group.