How much engagement?

Our work with organisations has shown that a key question is for an organisation is how much and of what type of engagement might be appropriate in different situations. It is not simply a matter of 'just doing more' engagement.

When considering what type of engagement is required to support a particular piece of work, decision or policy, it is vital to take into account the **context** in which the decision (policy, project, regulation) is being made as this will determine how much engagement will be appropriate, of what type and when.

This framework describes three decision contexts, each of which requires a different amount of and approach to engagement. These types represent an indicative spectrum rather than three discrete types[1], and each is associated with a different cost profile over time (see overleaf). This is a summary, 'taster' version of the tool.

Type A decisions: Requiring a focus on 'transmit' engagement

Characteristics: In Type A situations/decisions, there tends to be low conflict, controversy or uncertainty about the decision or situation. OR there may be few or no options due to the decision being constrained by time, procedure, legislation, resources or crisis. The focus of engagement should be on ensuring appropriate reach, understanding and buy in through appropriate forms of 'transmit' engagement. 'Receive' forms of engagement such as consultation, and 'collaborate' forms may also be required, but these are likely to be limited.

Type B decisions: Requiring a focus on targeted 'collaborate' engagement

*Characteristics***:** In type B situations/decisions, there may not be huge controversy but there is a need for buy in/understanding/action from particular stakeholders (individuals, organisations and/or communities) to ensure the decision is well informed AND to reduce risk of non-delivery through resistance or opposition by individuals, communities, partners or other stakeholders. The situation/decision may also require that tradeoffs and compromises be made. The focus of engagement should be on 'collaboration' with particular stakeholders, enabling them to understand and influence decisions, and ultimately to be part of the solution(s). 'Receive' (eg consultation) and 'transmit' (eg communication, capacity building) forms of engagement may also be required to support the collaboration focus.

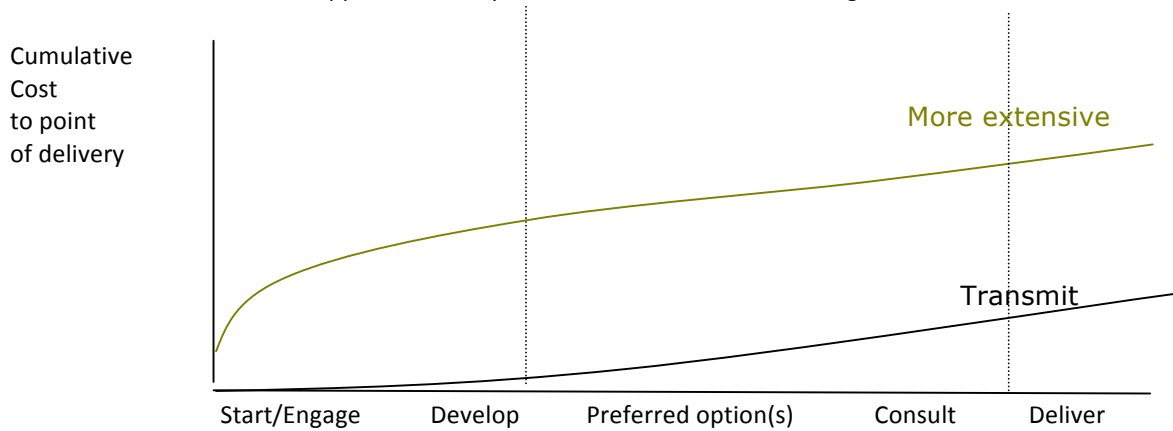### Type C decisions: Requiring a focus on 'receive' engagement

Characteristics: In Type C situations, there is – or could be - high conflict, controversy and uncertainty about the decision. The decision is likely to affect many – rather than a discrete number of - stakeholders (individuals, organisations and/or communities). It may be that some stakeholders will be disproportionately affected, or that one set of stakeholders may gain out while others lose out. There may be a need for shared ownership of the solution by multiple actors in order that they will play their full role in delivering it (eg working in partnership to fund or deliver or maintain a service). There may be significant risk of strong enough opposition to derail any scheme unless people are part of finding the solution. The focus of engagement should be a comprehensive programme using 'transmit', 'receive' and 'collaborate' methods throughout decision-making and implementation. It is likely, that due to the scale of the impact of C type decisions, that wide reaching 'receive' methods (consultation, ongoing online feedback and suggestions) will predominate.

---

[1] This tool was developed by Lindsey Colbourne for Defra/Environment Agency, SD6. For the theoretical underpinning of this tool – and the cost analysis on the next page - see http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/SCHO0509BQBR-E-E.pdf. All use of this tool should include credit to Lindsey Colbourne Associates and the Environment Agency, 2008. who share joint copyright.
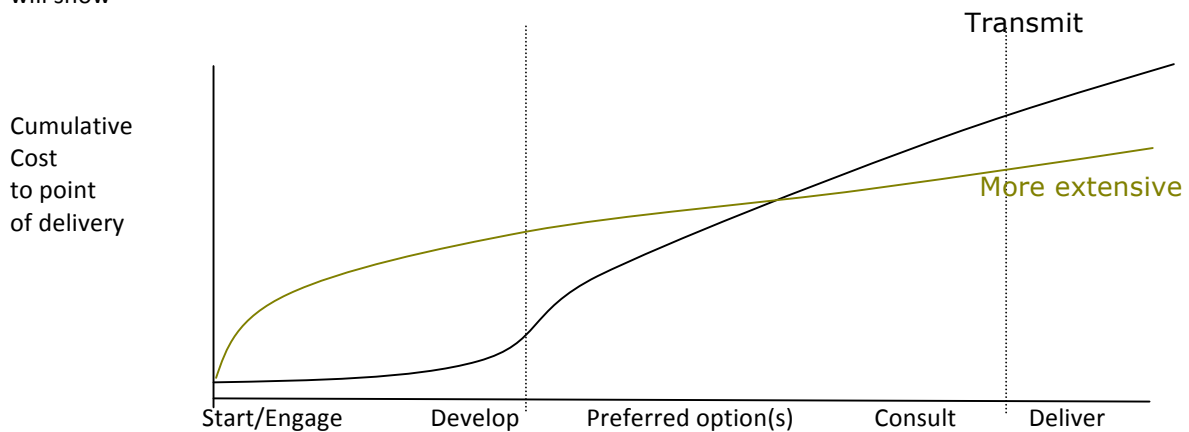
The costs of different types of engagement over time

Classic Type A costs over time for transmit-only engagement compared to more extensive engagement (which includes receiving and collaboration)
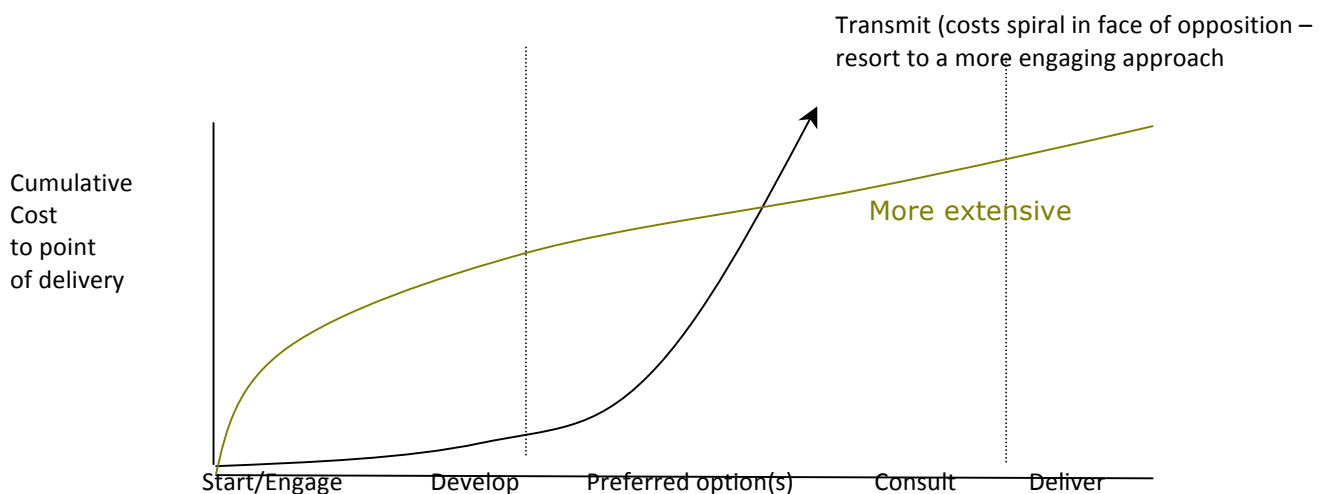Costs show that the narrow approach is likely to be more cost effective throughout.

Cumulative
Cost
to point
of delivery

More extensive

Transmit

Start/Engage   Develop   Preferred option(s)   Consult   Deliver

Classic Type B costs over time for transmit-only engagement compared to more extensive
Costs show that a narrow approach may initially cost less, but over time benefits of a more extensive approach will show

Transmit

Cumulative
Cost
to point
of delivery

More extensive

Start/Engage   Develop   Preferred option(s)   Consult   Deliver

Classic Type C costs over time for transmit-only engagement compared to more extensive
Costs show that a narrow approach may result in spiraling costs (to get it on track, or abandoned), so a more extensive approach is likely to be more cost effective over time

Transmit (costs spiral in face of opposition – resort to a more engaging approach

Cumulative
Cost
to point
of delivery

More extensive

Start/Engage   Develop   Preferred option(s)   Consult   Deliver

Fill in the blank by circling the most applicable words:

Decision Factors	Engagement Approach		
	A: Light touch/transmit	**B: Moderate/ collaborate**	**C: Extensive/receive**
1: How affected will others be by the outcome of this work?			
It is likely to have ____ effect directly/indirectly (eg via the government response to our advice)	Very little	Some	Far reaching
on_____	Few stakeholders	Some stakeholders	Many stakeholders
2: How many perspectives/politics might there be?			
There are likely to be _____ perspectives on the issue and _____ politics	No significantly different	A number of	A wide range of
	No/containable	Some	Significant
3: How much support or ownership of the result of the work or implementation by others is required?			
The 'best' decision is _____	Known (by us)	Open to influence, but limited options	Unknown
And we can achieve it _____	Alone (with or without support)	More easily if others work with us	Only with sufficient support, or only with others
4: How much uncertainty and complexity is there?			
Uncertainty and complexity around the project is ____	Low	Medium	High
5: What timescales are being worked to?			
The work needs to be done _____	Immediately/very quickly	Over months	Over years
6: What potential resources are there for engagement?			
There is ____ amount of money available (directly/indirectly)	Little or a very limited	a moderate	a significant

Analysing the results

If mostly 'narrow' is circled - characterise **Type A engagement**
If mostly 'moderate' is circled - characterise **Type B engagement**
If mostly 'extensive is circled - characterise **Type C engagement**