

ENGAGE TEAM OPEN SPACE DATA ANALYSIS – APRIL 2016

Introduction

In April 2015, the Dartington Engage team (made up entirely of volunteer members from staff across the organisation) were privileged to receive data analysis training, using a methodology based on complexity theory, from Professor Eve Mitleton-Kelly of the Complexity Research programme, LSE. The training lasted two days, but the impact on the team was profound and empowering. Suddenly, no problem seemed insurmountable – provided that genuine understanding was gained as to the “*underlying and inter-acting causes, to enable informed decisions and actions to be taken*”. (*Guidelines for Analysis, Prof. Eve Mitleton-Kelly*)

Fast-forward twelve months. The Open Space dialogue that had taken place in late 2015/early 2016 had generated a valuable range of data which had been faithfully recorded – but what should happen next? The Engage team were delighted to be asked by Rhodri Samuels and Karen Williams to use the Open Space data to conduct a complexity-style analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of what the participants had *really* wanted Dartington to hear – and to make sure that this message was communicated further to inform potential future strategy.

The analyst team did have two additional ulterior motives. We wanted to refresh our analysis skills and we wanted to increase our team numbers by demonstrating to new participants what was involved in a group analysis session.

We were given two days and Studio 45 to see what we could come up with.

Who attended

Sharon McAvoy (The Shops at Dartington), Sarah White (Dartington Hall), Valerie Lancaster (Schumacher College), Elizabeth Webber (Schumacher College), Harriet Bell (Property department), Dave Carter (IT), Claire Booth (HR), Lisa Leonard (HR), Sonja Hughes (Volunteer Manager), Anne Platt (Finance), Karen Williams (COO)

Process

Pre-analysis

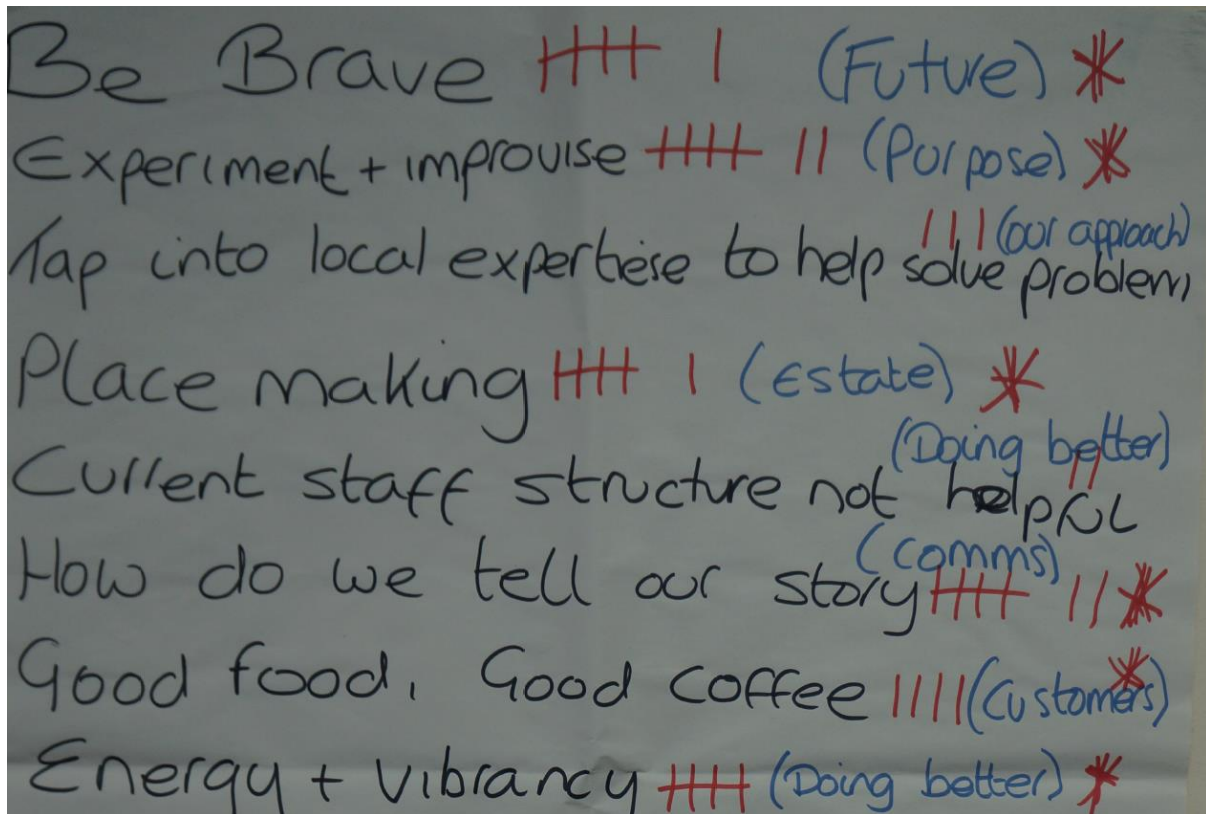
Each team member was allocated a range of transcripts to read. From these, their task was to identify common themes – i.e. those that many contributors mention – and encapsulate each of them into a single phrase, quote or sentence, while also noting and referencing the original sources for use later in the process. Each transcript was read by more than one person to eliminate individual bias as much as possible.

Day 1

We began with a round-robin of recording key themes, without any discussion, until all unique themes had been identified. Each theme was allocated to a single “dimension” and recorded on a flipchart. Typical dimensions for an analysis based on Professor Mitleton-Kelly’s method would include divisions of “Social”, “Cultural”, “Physical” and “Political”. While these are universally useful, for this analysis we decided to try something a little more bespoke – and our *initial* dimensions were garnered from Rhodri’s “tree-rings” diagram that he had recently presented to Trustees. However, this was not intended to be a forelock-tugging validation exercise; it was an attempt to objectively test the appropriateness of our proposed new strategic direction in the light of Open Space communication.

Day 2

The agreed first output of the two days was to be a team presentation to DMT of the group's findings on 20th April 2016. Each team member was therefore asked to review the most highly clustered areas and identify their top five choices for presentation. There was then a tally of the most popular choices, and the top six topics were chosen for further work (see * below).



Interestingly, each came from a different initial dimension!

There were also a number of clusters that just missed out in the democratic process, even though they were worthy of further examination: -

- Anger and frustration (Customers)
- Tap into local experience to help solve problems (Approach)
- Managing property (Estate)
- Centre of excellence for the Arts (Arts)

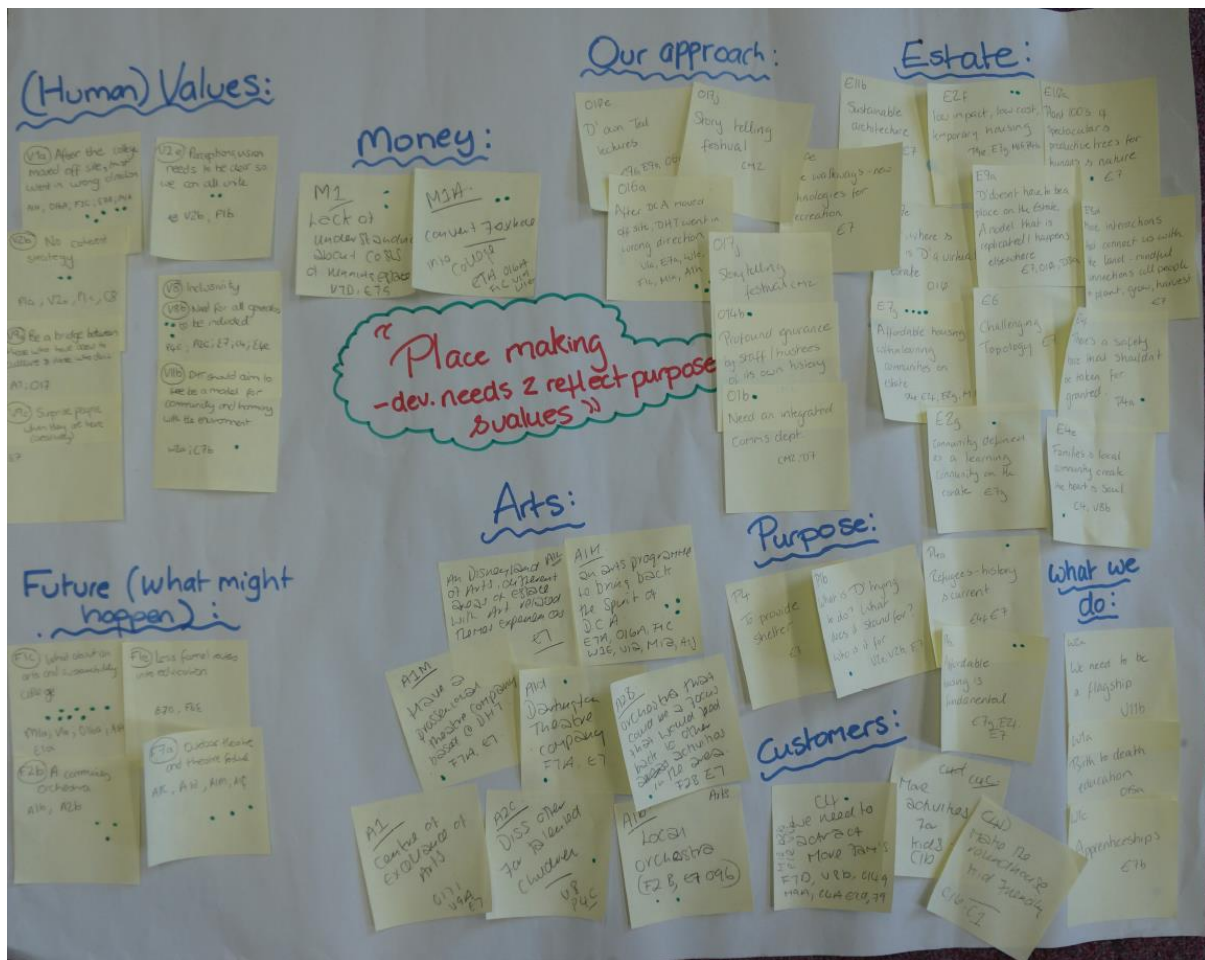
The top six clustered areas were then divided amongst three sub-teams for mind-mapping and for developing a presentation of 2-3 minutes to be delivered to DMT. (A mind map can take many forms, but is an attempt to illustrate pictorially the inter-related dimensional dependencies that must be considered when attempting to formulate a likely solution to the perceived problem – (see .pdfs for finalised versions.)

(Some of our) Learning

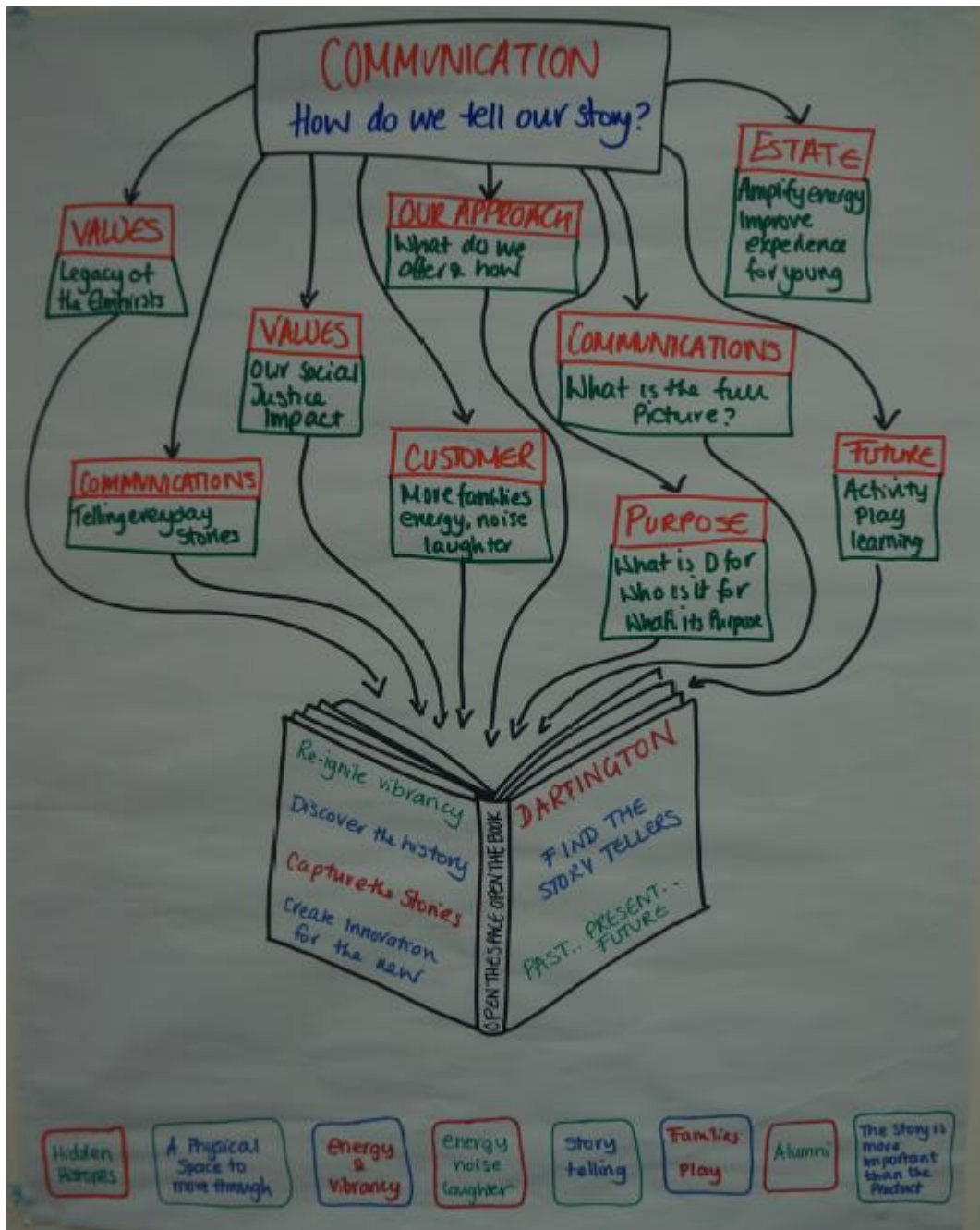
Our preconceptions were challenged. For example, under the theme of “Good Food and Good Coffee”, it was about so much *more* than what the Origin coffee we serve now actually tastes like or the level of service that is currently delivered.

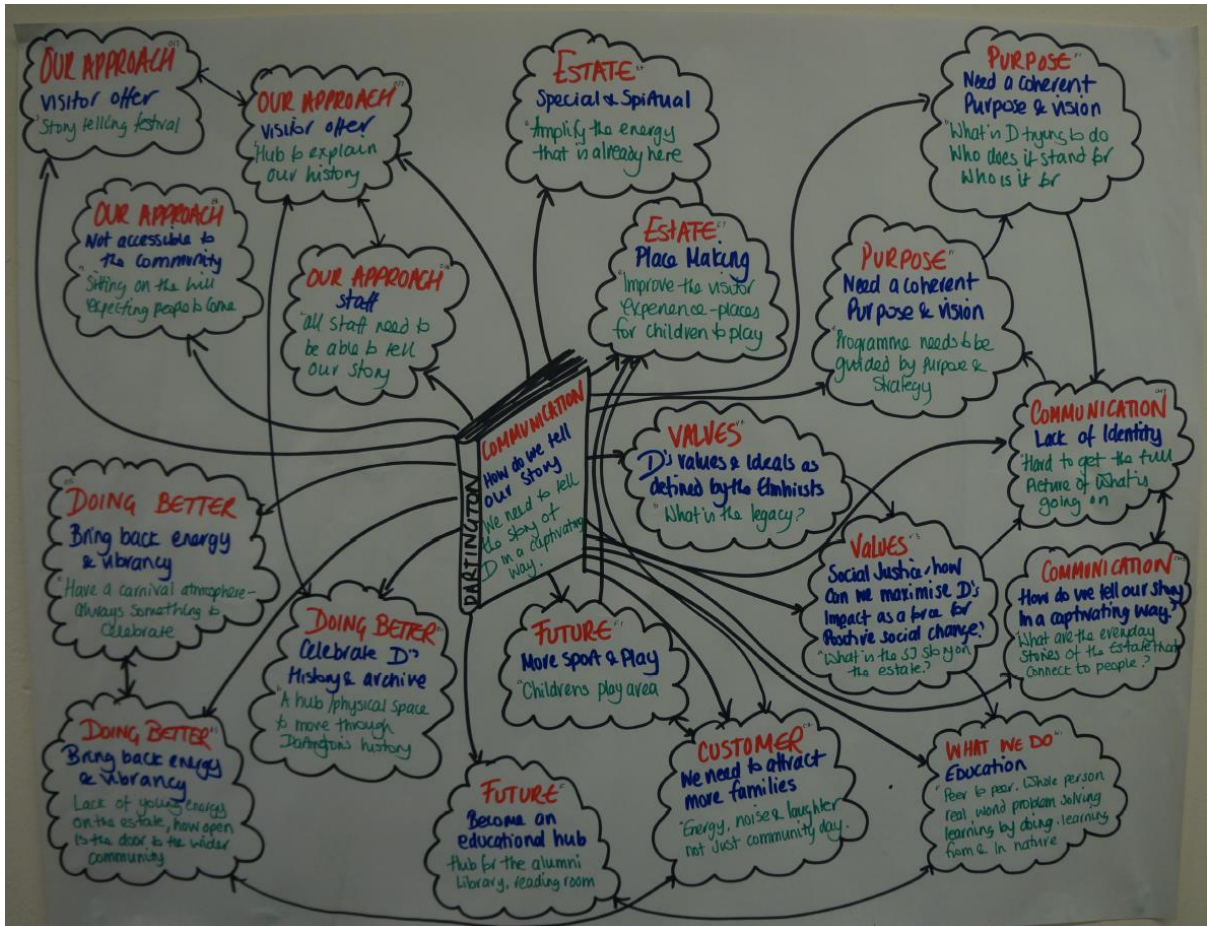


Similarly, despite our current internal focus on residential property development on the Estate, it was apparent that this is not the main preoccupation of many participants in Open Space: -



But there was such a strong yearning for Dartington to tell its story!





Recommendations and next steps

These are the recommendations of the group as presented to DMT on 20th April 2016: -

- The Open Space dialogue should continue
- The Engage analyst group would like to remain involved with this process
- There should be both a physical and virtual space available for the Open Space dialogue to continue
- Let's involve others – Arts, Social Justice, the community, tenants, Dartington members, volunteers – (although involvement includes an expectation to commit)
- What about a Dartington Open Space tent at events?
- Let's Engagebomb these findings to staff
- Should there be a resource for Open Space and Engage combined going forward?

In the meantime?

The Engage group have taken up the theme of "telling the story" and have been facilitating some staff Engagebomb sessions around the strategic projects that are currently being developed in an effort to improve Dartington as a destination (e.g. Gallery Café, Play, Estate Framework).

Professor Mitleton-Kelly is due back at Dartington on 24th June 2016, after having interviewed DMT about their perception of Engage. We await her findings, which of course could completely change how Engage functions going forward.

