

# Dinosaur DAD and Enlightened EDD – engaging people earlier is better

*In this article, Penny Walker compares DAD and EDD – a much better way of reaching decisions, which is being promoted in the public sector and can help companies and voluntary organisations too.*

**T**he quicker we can come to a decision, the quicker we can get on and solve the problem, right?

Actually, wrong.

For many of the complex (or ‘wicked’) problems which we are trying to sort out, time spent in engaging a wide range of people and enabling them to deliberate together, leads to smoother, more widely supported and – yes – faster implementation.

How can that be?

## Dinosaur DAD

DAD is the Decide-Announce-Defend approach, sometimes ending up as DADA (Decide-Announce-Defend-Abandon).

It seems quicker and simpler at first sight, as:

- fewer people are involved;
- they can use their expertise to come up with clever solutions; and
- the hierarchy and power structures they work within ensure decisions get made,

and orders are followed, even if not everyone agrees with them.

It is a good method for emergencies where speed is essential.

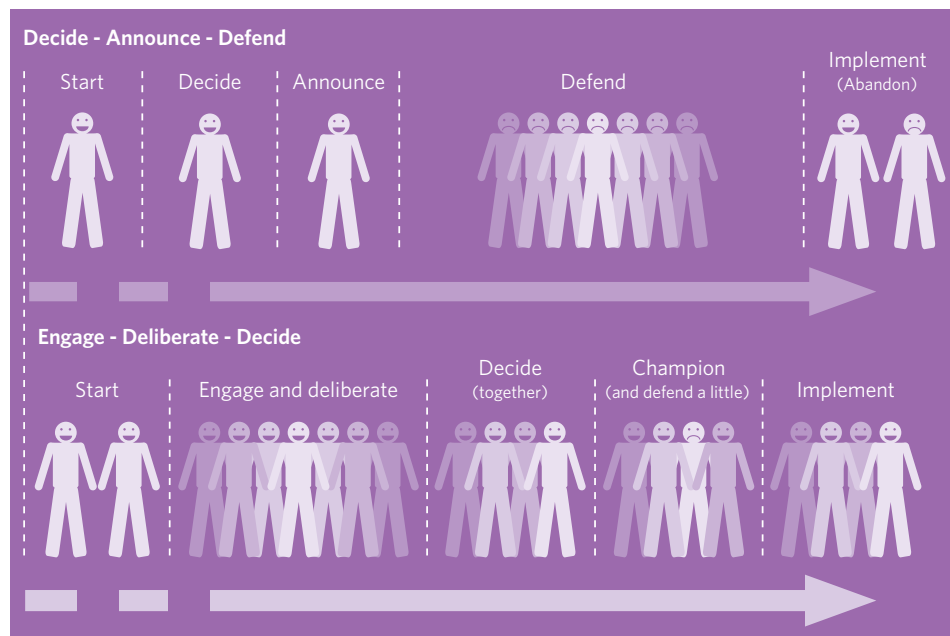
The DAD method is not well suited to situations where:

- a wide range of technical, social, cultural and economic factors are influencing the current situation and the various possible alternatives to it;
- successful implementation involves a lot of people; and
- these people are not in an obvious command structure, but can choose whether to cooperate.

Think about traffic congestion, water supply, domestic energy use, waste reduction, renewable generation, flood risk management... Public servants need to make recommendations and decisions about these things, and they need the active support of the public and stakeholders if successful, sustainable strategies are to be found.

In these kinds of contexts – which are the norm in the environmental sphere – the DAD approach is guaranteed to generate resistance to even the best ideas. Resistance eats up time and resources because it needs a response. So the time spent overcoming resistance and defending the solutions against opponents delays implementation and can lead to the plans being abandoned. If they are implemented, it is by a small and defensive group who may feel rather friendless.

**‘a process which engages people in deliberation can produce a large group of ready-made champions willing to advocate the solutions to their peers.’**



## Enlightened EDD

The alternative – being promoted by the Sustainable Development Commission, the Environment Agency (as part of its Building Trust with Communities) and the Ministry of Justice amongst others – is EDD.

EDD stands for Engage-Deliberate-Decide. This approach positively engages with people’s concerns and needs, inviting them in to the conversation at an early stage to share the job of understanding the complexity and to create innovative and robust solutions. Rather than blocking or stifling objections and doubts, they are teased out and explored through deliberative conversations:

- What is it about this proposal which concerns you?

- What would need to change, for you to be happy with it?
- What else do you need to know, to help you to form a view?
- What do the decision-makers need to take account of, to come to a good decision?

Better solutions are more likely to result from careful consideration by a diverse set of stakeholders and people from different parts of the general public.

As well as saving time in the long-run, a process which engages people in deliberation can produce a large group of ready-made champions willing to advocate the solutions to their peers. They may even be enthusiastic enough about the solutions to contribute their own resources to implementing them.

**Take action now!**

Think of a situation where you are about to try to persuade people to accept a change. This could be within your own organisation, in a client organisation or neighbourhood – whatever context you choose.

Rather than jumping in with a ready-made ‘solution’, and risking generating resistance, consider how you could engage people and deliberate the problems and potential solutions with them, before the decision is made. ■

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**Find out more**

*Sustainable Development Commission*

[www.iema.net/env/71/9](http://www.iema.net/env/71/9)

*Environment Agency*

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

*Ministry of Justice, [www.iema.net/env/71/10](http://www.iema.net/env/71/10)*

*3KQ, [www.3kq.co.uk](http://www.3kq.co.uk)*

*Opinion Leader, [www.opinionleader.co.uk](http://www.opinionleader.co.uk)*

**EDD for domestic energy**



The Supplier Obligation is an innovative policy instrument being developed by Defra (now by DECC), which aims to transform the domestic energy market by giving suppliers and consumers a shared incentive to reduce carbon emissions. This is no small task, as companies traditionally want to sell more, and their relationship with consumers is one of low trust.

Before beginning formal consultation, Defra funded the Sustainable Development Commission to manage an engagement process, to explore the kinds of propositions which might be marketed to consumers, which would be viable commercially and lead to reduced carbon emissions.

Independent facilitators 3KQ brought together a group of stakeholders (including those representing suppliers, fuel poverty groups, environmental groups, local authorities and finance companies). In meetings and

using a web-based wiki, the stakeholder group came up with over a dozen propositions, which it narrowed down for the next stage of the process. These were then presented to focus groups of the general public (run by Opinion Leader), who discussed the options that the stakeholder group had created.

The stakeholder group included people who might be expected to oppose each other and the Government. However, the way the process was run meant that conversations took place – rather than arguments!

The independent evaluator’s report said: “It enabled a different, less combative style of communication than often occurs when different sectors meet around these issues”.

Commitment to a successful outcome was so high, that some of the stakeholder organisations dipped into their pockets to fund additional focus groups, so that the findings would be more robust.

The decisions will ultimately be taken by the Government, but they will be much better informed as a result of this process. The evaluation report says: “Feedback from Defra suggested that the propositions are having a ‘massive influence’, especially in developing the detail of the policy work.”

The team who ran this project acknowledge that it wasn’t a full-scale deliberative process, and that more time and resources would have enabled face-to-face conversations between consumers and stakeholders, with the potential to refine and understand the options in more depth. Nonetheless, it gave everyone involved a taste of what engagement can deliver which traditional consultation cannot, and has helped Defra/DECC to understand how to frame the supplier obligation so that it delivers for sustainable development.

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