CELEBRATING THE 11TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY COLUMN

In this May/June 2020 issue of Right of Way Magazine, we celebrate the 11th anniversary of the Social Ecology column. We're often asked how such a column ended up in the magazine and how it is still going strong 11 years later. In truth, it's all thanks to the passionate and dedicated Social Ecology team who continues to recognize and push the importance of this concept. In total, 39 columns have been published which address major community issues, as well as the Anthology titled, "Social Ecology: A Special Collection of Articles on the Art and Science of Social Ecology." In 2013, IRWA Course 225: Social Ecology: Listening to Community was developed and the Association has seen the success of 16 class offerings at the national and international Chapter level. In addition, eight Social Ecology sessions have been held at IRWA Annual International Education Conferences throughout the years. These sessions have been progressive in that each year, new details and experiences learned from IRWA members were folded into the presentation. The sessions have been well-attended and remain popular.

In honor of this momentous anniversary, we asked Jim Kent, creator of the Social Ecology columns, to give us the back story of how this all came into existence.

BY JAMES A. KENT

In 2009, Barbara Billitzer, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of Right of Way Magazine, invited me to contribute a bi-monthly column to the magazine using my insight as a Social Ecologist, President of the JKA Group and Senior Analyst for the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy (I give credit to Glenn Winfree, SR/WA, for bringing IRWA and the JKA Group together when he brought me to the 2009 IRWA conference where I met Barbara). The column was to address a vital and increasingly important concept: the critical need to focus on working effectively with informal networks in a community when proposed site and corridor projects impact them. It was decided that the column would be written and published under the banner of Social Ecology. As Barbara described, "Attaining community buy-in on newly planned infrastructure projects is no longer a luxury proposition. When local residents are embraced during the introductory stages, miraculous results follow. From faster approval to accelerated project schedules, the strategy of managing community issues works." When Barbara left the IRWA, the capable Ethel Navales took over as Editor of the Right of Way Magazine and requested that the Social Ecology column be continued.

New Ways of Doing Business

Through these columns, my colleagues and I provide IRWA members with insights into new ways of doing business with communities—ways that are often more effective and rewarding than most current practices. Social Ecology (the science of community) provides processes to identify, listen to and involve the community on the front end and throughout the project. When this happens, positive results are obtained, opening the door for a healthier community and better society by having successful projects. Social Ecology assists in fulfilling IRWA's purpose of improving people's quality of life through infrastructure development. Identifying and connecting with the informal networks in communities are key to a successful citizen engagement process. Most of us understand the value of "networking" as a verb. However, the idea of a "network" as a noun is foreign to the experience of many. As we have learned, if the issues of informal networks and their implications are not well-understood in a project-development approval process, the project team becomes a sitting duck when you walk into a formal public meeting where "group-think" prevails.

In the past 11 years, we have told stories that show how informal networks operate in a community setting and how they influence project approval. When these horizontal systems are understood and engaged, opportunity is created for new projects to optimize social, economic and ecological benefits in a local area, building upon a community's heart and soul. Citizens become your partners and collaborators with the project because their issues of survival and attachment to geographic place are being addressed. When individuals have an increased ability to predict, participate in and control their environment in a manner which improves their well-being and the well-being of their neighbors, the stability of project planning occurs and emotional rhetoric is reduced. That is called Social Ecology: The Science of Community.

Barbara Billitzer, James Kent, Kevin Preister and Glenn Winfree, SR/WA, presenting a Social Ecology Program at the 2013 IRWA Annual International Education Conference.

IRWA Course

At the request of IRWA leaders, my team and I designed the highly successful **Course 225, Social Ecology: Listening to Community**. It was decided that a hands-on learning experience was needed for the IRWA Chapter Membership to experience Social Ecology and its applications. Course 225 was piloted in 2003 on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Pablo, Montana held at Mission Valley Power's training facility. At that pilot course were two future presidents of IRWA: Mary Anne Marr, SR/WA, and Lee Hamre, SR/WA. Also in attendance were leaders David Whitlock, SR/WA, and Janet Walker, SR/WA. The curriculum that emerged from this pilot group was the well-recognized Course 225. Since its introduction, the course has been taught in 16 Chapters and over 400 IRWA professionals have experienced Social Ecology: Listening to Community.

A Look Back

Those who have followed the science of Social Ecology over the last several years recognize a new world of citizen awareness emerging. The columns provide the professional world with a systematic process that does not have to rely on guesswork and assumptions when approaching communities of impact. In the 39 Social Ecology columns, the Course 225 Learning Guide and the eight workshops at the IRWA Annual International Education Conference, the science and technical applications for working with the community have been discussed in detail with case studies that, when followed, produce successful projects. ✪

In honor of the Social Ecology anniversary, we have selected several columns from the past 11 years to summarize and republish. The following showcase highlights the contribution that has been made to our professionals.

THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF CORRIDOR EXPANSION

A proven method for avoiding self-inflicted project opposition

BY JAMES A. KENT

This article was originally published in the January/February 2012 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

In the coming decade, we will see corridor right of way issues expand at an exponential rate. This will be driven by the alternative energy movement to supplement fossil fuels with renewable energy, and the need to improve reliability and upgrade aging infrastructure. To say that new corridors are needed would be an understatement.

OLD STRATEGIES NO LONGER WORK

The means through which transmission corridor development occurs is often a contentious one. That's because it's based on the old top-down approach, where decisions are made at the upper management level without any input from those in the field who will be tasked with executing the plan.This top-down approach no longer works because it's a linear process that starts with the design phase and ignores any potential impact to the local community. The people in the community are kept in the dark until someone shows up at their door or they read in the newspaper that a new transmission line or pipeline is going to be built. Their typical reaction is to organize against the corridor, which in turn, forces the project proponents to defend their original plan.

A STRATEGY THAT DOES WORK

There is an alternative approach, and it has proven effective time and time again on a variety of corridor projects. Instead of managing from the top down, the process is reversed so that those in the field–living and working in and around the impacted area–are invited to participate in the planning process. This bottom-up strategy is not particularly difficult to implement. It merely adds some time to the front end of the project so that research can be done to avoid any major social or cultural concerns within the potentially impacted area. The extra time is well worth it, as when the public knows their issues and concerns are being heard in the planning stage, there is much less fear and anxiety.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

A recent case illustrates the pitfalls of using the old top-down approach in project management. The new TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline is anticipated to carry crude oil from the tar sands of northern Alberta to Steele City, Nebraska, and then south to Houston, Texas, a distance of roughly 1,700 miles. The original Keystone 1 pipeline

comes almost straight down the 100th meridian from the North Dakota border to Steele City and terminates at Cushing, Oklahoma, where many pipelines converge. Between the 98th and 100th meridians is where the low moist lands of the prairie end and the high dry lands of the Great Plains begin. It is a natural geographic dividing line of the United States not only in biological and physical terms, but in terms of social and cultural settlement.

CULTURAL VIOLATION

There was little opposition to Keystone 1 when it was originally built because it followed a natural geographic boundary between the two ecosystems. Boundaries are areas of marginal interest. However, as Natural Border's research and experience shows, when a company bifurcates geographic social units, as the straight line in Keystone XL does, and drives a pipeline right through the geographic middle of the community's cultural connectivity, the people will fight fiercely to protect against this intrusion into their living environment.

A major cultural violation of the Keystone XL project was in not recognizing that the Ogallala Aquifer, over which a substantial part of the pipeline would have run, is held sacred to the people of Nebraska. After all, it provides 80% of the water used in the state and supports the production of 30% of our nation's foodstuffs. The public's response to this project has led to something akin to an emotional tsunami.

A PARALLEL COMMITMENT NEEDED

The increased need for transmission corridors will hopefully inspire a parallel commitment to rebuild the public/private partnership that has been lost. To rebuild this partnership, it's essential that we, as companies, learn more about the individuals and communities who will face the greatest impact from our projects. ✪

THE SOCIAL RISK

When citizens organize to fight a project

BY JAMES A. KENT

This article was originally published in the January/February 2013 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

Those who are responsible for permitting site specific or linear facilities are well aware that, in today's environment of regulatory requirements, polarized politics and litigation, citizen opposition to proposed projects can be daunting. Determined citizens have successful track records of delaying projects, driving up costs, and blocking projects that are technically sound and necessary. To relegate the causes of citizen opposition to a few selfish people who do not want the project in their backyards is to miss the crux of grassroots citizen activism, as China has just recognized with a major policy announcement.

At China's 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the State Council ordered that all major industrial projects must complete a "social risk assessment with stated project impact mitigation schedules" before any project can begin. This move at the highest levels of government is aimed at addressing large, increasingly violent and geographically dispersed environmental protests of the last several years.

The announcement was made because of the concern that, if the underlying causes of these protests are not addressed, they have the potential to bring the government down. Zhou Shengxian, the Environmental Minister, said at the news conference, "No major projects can be launched without social risk evaluations. By doing so, I hope we can reduce the number of mass incidents in the future."

Just in the last two weeks of October 2012, violent protests forced the suspension of plans to expand a chemical plant, and protests occurred in every region of China against industrial projects that have been at the core of its economic boom. The promise of jobs and rising incomes is being checkmated by the rising tide of young and middle-class Chinese who are fearful that new factories, power line corridors and pipelines are causing environmental damage. Environmental concerns trump the promise of jobs for the first time in China's march to industrialization at all costs.

The Missing Link

At the World Gas Conference in Kuala Lumpur in June 2012, CEOs from ExxonMobil, Shell and Total all addressed the importance of public acceptance in their speeches. Christophe de Margerie, CEO of Total said, "I believe stakeholders will be the main drivers of change. Our business is not sustainable if we are not responsible operators, accepted by all stakeholders, including civil society."

In his keynote address to the conference, ExxonMobil's Rex Tillerson said that his company learned in North America about "the importance of open communication with government leaders at all levels as well as local communities." This announcement is quite a cultural shift for a company like ExxonMobil, and reflects a growing concern nationally that the old ways of centralized project development of plan, design, and build—absent community engagement—is a surefire way of generating citizen opposition and project disaster.

A crucial step that the United States took to avoid the situation that China is now addressing was passing the National Environmental Policy and Environment Act of 1969 (NEPA). NEPA is our national law designed to address anticipated citizen resistance to projects that intrude into people's physical, social and cultural environments. Companies are often surprised to learn that NEPA requires a thorough social impact assessment and mitigation program along with the physical environmental studies. However, this social requirement has all but been lost in NEPA studies. Yet, it is exactly this neglected requirement where a company can actually learn what the real community issues are, and what they can do to address them from the very beginning of a project and throughout the project's life.

However, with or without adequate NEPA implementation, it is time for companies to protect their investment by developing and staffing their own independent team of professionals skilled in the science of community. The social risk has become too great to not formally recognize and systematically act upon the underlying causes of how and why citizens go from potential healthy participation to organizing to fight a project. Regardless of whether the project is on public or private land, today's projects require and deserve this level of attention. ✪

THE PEOPLE FACTOR

IRWA's Social Ecology Course shows how community engagement works to get new projects built

BY JAMES A. KENT AND KEVIN PREISTER

This article was originally published in the January/February 2014 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

The evolution of IRWA's Social Ecology program shows a truly adaptive organization at work. For years, right of way professionals have recognized the need for new approaches to community engagement that would build project understanding and support in local communities, while expediting project implementation. Now that need has become a reality.

In November of last year, IRWA's Course 225, Social Ecology: Listening to Community was launched as a pilot program in Pablo, Montana. Developed as a collaborative effort between IRWA and the JKA Group, the course is designed to be an experiential hands-on learning experience. The best way to learn how to engage the community during the right of way acquisition process is to meet local residents and speak with them in informal settings. As such, this is the first course to integrate community fieldwork as a major component of an IRWA class.

Treat People with Dignity and Respect

Social ecology is based on practical approaches to understanding the "people factor" in project planning. It requires that project developers understand the traditions, routine practices and lifestyles of a local area, and work to identify issues and opportunities from a citizen's perspective. If emerging issues can be resolved before a project is finalized, the community's support for the project will grow. Guided by simple, common sense principles, the underlying theme of social ecology applies not only to the right of way profession, but to everyday life as well. Get to know people. Treat them with dignity and respect.

Establishing the Goals

Teaching the basic components of collaboration required that the JKA Group and IRWA formalize the techniques for creating positive community engagement. The goals of the course were therefore defined as follows:

- Create harmony between people and the project to foster mutual benefits
- Discover and understand human patterns that already exist in the community
- Actively listen to the issues and opportunities expressed by local residents. They understand their community best and know whether or not the project creates a benefit
- Visit local gathering places to get a firsthand glimpse of the impact your project may have on the community
- Develop proven solutions to help you mitigate potential issues

The Classroom Experience

With 20 participants in the class, the first day was devoted to conceptual development, specifically what to look for when going out into the local community. This includes identifying the informal networks and establishing how issues can arise and take form. The first step is to find these informal networks and describe their daily routines.

Within the local community, participants were asked to look for the following:

Communication Patterns – see who communicates with who, how communication occurs, who are the network archetypes, such as communicator and gatekeeper, and who has respect and trust within their networks.

Gathering Places – identify where people meet, routinely move information in the community and develop public positions about projects that impact the community.

Range of Citizen Issues – identify what issues may arise in the community regarding both community life and the project in question. Determine what stages the issues have already progressed through. Are the issues just emerging? Did they already exist? Have they become disruptive?

Opportunities for Responsive Management – ascertain whether the emerging issues can be resolved early and whether there are any win-win opportunities that integrate community interests with the interests of the project planners. ✪

This article was originally published as the cover story in the November/December 2016 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

BEYOND THE PERMITTING

The Standing Rock Sioux bring community engagement to the forefront

BY JAMES A. KENT AND KEVIN PREISTER

A recent protest event involving the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation will impact how the right of way and infrastructure profession deals with community engagement. The $3.8 billion Dakota Access Pipe Line (DAPL), which is proposed to stretch for 1,170 miles across four states and is already underway, was ordered to halt construction on September 9, 2016 pending further federal review. This action was unprecedented since the permitting agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, had already issued a permit for the project to proceed.

The Story Unfolds

A federal judge rejected an appeal by the Standing Rock Sioux to halt the project after tribal researchers found burial and cultural sites eventually destroyed by construction crews on private land near the Missouri River. A few hours later, however, the Departments of Justice, Army and Interior temporarily blocked construction of portions of the project, calling for reform of the government's approach to tribes around large-scale infrastructure projects.

A Mounting Series of Events

There were at least four unfortunate missteps by regulators and the pipeline company that set this confrontation in motion. The first was the use of a flawed permitting process that was designed by the federal government to fast-track smaller projects. In this instance, the Army Corps of Engineers used what is known as the Nation Wide Permits process designed for fast tracking smaller projects. That meant that a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was never done and therefore, the issues that would have surfaced such as the importance of ancestral lands, were never discussed or mitigated.

The second misstep was to move the pipeline route from private lands north of Bismarck, North Dakota to cross the sacred Ancestral Tribal lands of the Standing Rock Indian Nation. This move began the protest, much of whose justification rests on the perceived risk of a pipeline rupture polluting the tribe's drinking water. Religious and cultural sites are situated along the route of the pipeline, including burial sites of ancestors.

The third misstep was not identifying tribal lands or the people of the tribe—including the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation—on the original project maps.

The Final Straw

Finally, DAPL elected to undertake earthmoving in precisely the location that the Standing Rock Sioux had identified in court documents as a particularly sensitive cultural area. And this was done on a weekend in the presence of many protestors and the international media. Moreover, the company deployed security personnel and guard dogs to try to prevent the protesters from their efforts to stop the work. This single act nationalized the issue—and literally overnight brought in over 200 tribes in support from North America and beyond.

An Alternative Approach

One can only imagine what might have transpired if a different approach had been used. If a traditional EIS had been properly undertaken, tribal consultations would have occurred under the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, which recognizes the sovereign status of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation. There would have likely been discussions about sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, ancestral lands and cultural attachment outside of the reservation boundaries. Those discussions may have also given the Tribes an opportunity to work through any previous issues, including their unresolved issues from past projects. And while those discussions might not have led to an agreement on a course of action, at least there would have been the chance for meetings of the mind to develop, and the legal status of the Corps' permits would be less subject to debate.

A New Indicator of Success

In the past, a company's success could be measured by its ability to get a project approved and completed. Today, there is a paradigm shift underway toward geographic democracy, where citizens are taking over what happens in their physical space. As a result, the new indicator of a company's success will be measured by the goodwill it builds and maintains within the communities it impacts. ✪

MANAGING PROJECT COMPLEXITY

The importance of the right of way professional

This article was originally published in the March/April 2018 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

BY JAMES A. KENT AND GLENN WINFREE

Projects today are increasingly facing disruption from factors that create complexity. This type of complexity is an unintended by-product that diverts corporate energy and resources from construction and implementation in order to address unplanned complications in delivering a project.

Right of way professionals face increasing complexity from the communities that their projects impact. The social risk has become too great to not formally recognize and systematically act upon the underlying causes of how and why citizens go from potentially healthy participation to actively fighting a project.

The Right of Way Agent

Here are some actions that the right of way professional can take and feed back to management to ensure that the project does not lead to management complexity. The following selected social risk factors are discussed as an example of what the agent can do within the community:

1. Verify that the project corridor or site development is not near play grounds, schools, senior centers, day care facilities, churches and cemeteries. These areas are held as special places to communities. Any perceived threat to them will create reaction and disruption. The general rule of thumb is that if you are at least 1500 feet away from such vulnerable areas, local people will have a perception of safety. If you are within 500 feet or less, there will be a battle.

2. Are there past project conflicts? If there have been conflicts, are they still ongoing? If resolved, how were they resolved and when? Past conflicts are a reliable indicator of trouble for a new project.

3. As part of their community routine in setting up the project, right of way agents can find the informal gathering places, such as coffee shops, restaurants, barber shops, beauty parlors and bars. Find out if there is talk about your project. If there is none, then there is an opportunity to introduce the project via these valuable word-of-mouth networks, which can eliminate surprise.

4. Bulletin boards provide an eye into the heart of the community. These bulletin boards offer insight into what is going on, civic events, contact names, key people, economic stresses and caretaking activities.

5. An important warning system is to review the local newspapers and local information sheets to see how controversies are handled or reported. What kinds of controversies have been covered and have they been covered impartially? Your Public Affairs department will need to know how to fit the project information into the language of the local area, so technical and company language is replaced to insure understanding.

6. Be conscious of the viewshed (the lines of sight from homes and community pathways) from the corridor location. People value their viewshed and an early indication of this is important, especially if real estate agents have marketed it as part of property value.

A Seat at the Table

To optimize the integration of the above knowledge into the decision-making system, the right of way agent will need to be ensured a position in the design and development phases of the project. The benefit of this early involvement integrates community interests with management decisions—right from the beginning of the project.

The right of way agent brings to the table essential knowledge on how the world is changing with respect to how landowners and communities process information about infrastructure projects. Rethinking the position of the right of way professional as the first line of community engagement and complexity prevention will be a new idea for many. However, when companies have the right people in place with authority to function internally in the decision-making process, complexity created by community reaction and disruption will become a thing of the past. ✪

SOCIAL RISK SCORING

Evaluating the risk of proposed projects

BY JAMES A. KENT AND KEVIN PREISTER

This article was originally published in the November/December 2018 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

Citizen opposition to projects of just about any kind has reached costly proportions with billions of dollars lost each year through project delays or denials. It is time to assess why companies continue to react to project opposition by spending money on conflict rather than on preventing it from occurring in the first place.

When managing the social risk of right of way projects, there is no shortcut for the value of direct, personal citizen contact. We have written many times in this column about the value of entering the world of citizens to understand how a community functions, how informal networks operate for survival and caretaking, how communication occurs, and how to locate and develop relationships with those individuals held in high esteem by their peers. Working in this fashion provides operating space, increasing the level of authority and resources available to a professional change agent to accomplish their objective. In doing so, the right of way professional can respond to emerging citizen issues early, reduce the emotional rhetoric that often dominates public venues and find practical solutions to project impacts.

Below, we present a summary of the 15 indicators that can reveal social risk before a project is announced. For the full Social Risk Scoring Card, please see the November/December 2018 issue of Right of Way Magazine.

1. Check to see where the project footprint/corridor is in relation to playgrounds, schools, senior centers, cemeteries and other vulnerable areas.

2. Check the location of minority populations and their proximity to the project. If the project has been placed in a minority area deliberately to avoid battles elsewhere, the potential for an environmental issue is high.

3. Public lands are highly prized by citizens. Make sure that you avoid public lands if at all possible, especially federal lands because national interest groups will attach their formal anti-development positions to your project.

4. Farmers and ranchers describe higher costs and higher value for irrigated lands compared with non-irrigated land.

5. Talk to people about past or existing project conflicts. If there have been conflicts, are they still ongoing? If resolved, how were they resolved and when?

6. Visit the gathering places along the route or at the project site, such as coffee shops. What is the talk about in these places?

7. Check bulletin boards in the communities to see what is posted.

8. Review the local newspapers to see how controversy is reported.

9. Be conscious of the viewshed (the lines of sight from homes and communities) from the project site or corridor location.

10. What is the general approach to land owners in the project area?

11. What is the approach when staging a public meeting?

12. How does the team engage individuals in the community?

13. How does the team communicate with individuals in the community?

14. When you discover a community issue that materially affects the project but is beyond your control, how do you respond?

15. The right of way agent is the indispensable professional on the ground that can influence project success. The right of way agent should understand that the job is to engage with landowners, stakeholders and citizens impacted by the project.

If social risk indicators work, they offer the beginnings of a preventive framework for the right of way industry. Some companies and agencies have already recognized the paradigm change in how citizens are responding to infrastructure projects and are re-tooling to be effective in citizen engagement. This type of preventive approach is working for others and it can work for you and your project. ✪

THE OATMEAL CIRCUIT

Using gathering places to foster project success

BY KEVIN PREISTER

This article was originally published in the January/February 2019 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

The use of gathering places and working with informal networking are key components of a social ecology approach to infrastructure projects. In order to make these concepts more visible, we decided to share a story about an infrastructure approval process that delivered the vote for the Denver International Airport (DIA) to be built at its present location. The project involved a formal campaign that was being waged to secure voter approval for obtaining the land upon which to build the airport. At the 11th hour, with only five weeks to go before the election, the pro-annexation campaign was trailing in the polls by five percentage points. If nothing changed, there would be no new airport.

Unexpected Opposition

Denver needed over 40 acres of Adam's County land in order to have the qualified land base to build the new Denver International Airport. Opposition to this annexation from Adam County citizens and politicians was completely unexpected.

Bringing in JKA

Late in the process—with the land annexation vote looking like it would lose—the airport committee asked then-Governor of Colorado, Roy Romer, to intervene and take charge of the campaign. His mission was to persuade Adams County citizens and businesses to support the annexation effort.

This is why five weeks before the vote in November of 1988, Jim Kent found himself answering a phone call from Governor Romer and staff member, Judy Harrington. The governor explained that the formal campaign was not going well. He asked if JKA's informal networking approach "could assist in turning this election." This was no small order when there was only five weeks left to get into the field!

JKA evaluated the situation to determine what was going on. By doing a social scan of the area and by dropping into several gathering places, the JKA team discovered an "embedded issue." Apparently, there existed a common belief that "there would be no jobs or business opportunities at DIA for Adams County people." This was not true, but it had the characteristics of an embedded issue—one that is reinforced daily through trusted word of-mouth communication.

New Course of Action

The Governor was informed that for the next five weeks, he would be needed every morning from 6:30 am to 8:00 am to visit every coffee shop in Adams County to listen to the people, find the real issues and respond to them.

In addition, every Saturday the Governor would attend the flea markets to visit the booths and talk to the vendors about their issues and observations. Finally, the Governor's Mansion was to be made available every Sunday between 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm for all of the barbers, beauticians and bartenders in Adams County to come in and talk over what they were hearing, and to get factual information into their hands through face-to-face communication.

The Results

Very quickly, the social ecology approach began helping to clarify the issues in these word-of-mouth networks. Kent's team would go back into the gathering places after the governor's visits to answer questions, provide details and see if the dialogue had changed. This closing of the communication loop was a key part for the success of the citizen engagement process. In five short weeks, this informal network and gathering place campaign turned the election from a sure five-point defeat into a four-point win.

Governor Romer had attended 165 breakfast sessions during that five weeks. In honor of these efforts, this social ecology process is known as the "Oatmeal Circuit" to this day and it was talked about in the political circles of Colorado for some time. ✪

CITIZENS AWAKENING

The Paradigm Shift

BY JAMES A. KENT AND GLENN WINFREE

This article was originally published in the March/April 2019 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

In August 2018, the Global Energy Institute of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (USCC) published a report called, "Infrastructure Lost: Why America Cannot Afford to 'Keep it in the Ground,'" which is a well-designed study of one statewide ban on fracking and 15 energy infrastructure projects. These are projects that have been stopped, delayed, or canceled by a movement called Keep It in The Ground (KIITG). The report studied 15 of the hundreds of infrastructure and development projects that are under assault by well-organized and coordinated national opposition groups.

While the losses reported are staggering, a serious and unexpected development was uncovered. In reading the study, it is now clear that the methods historically used for gaining project approval have not been working over the last 10 years. This is obviously a serious concern for infrastructure project owners and investors, and not just for today but for the future as well.

A Dated Method

Infrastructure and development projects have been relying on old paradigm methods to secure project approval in an environment that is changing to a citizen-empowered world. In the old paradigm, governments, courts and legislatures could be expected to favor resource development decisions simply as default decisions. This is an expectation that is embedded in the thinking and structure of most corporate approaches, despite its failings.

Shifting to Prevention

Infrastructure companies must operate in a manner that maintains the project issues at the local level. Focus and activity need to be shifted from the national scene to local arenas. If people are locally engaged to produce benefits or to manage impacts to their benefit, it is very difficult for outside groups to get a foothold. It is when there is no local empowerment of individuals and their communities that outsiders can capture the issues, take them national and control the discourse. The reverse is true as well—issues kept at the local level through local engagement do not become disruptive, thereby saving time, money and the project itself. The new paradigm for infrastructure companies is to think "issue prevention." Social Ecology is fundamentally an issue prevention process that is available to anyone that wants to work with people up front in their environment to produce positive results for both the project and the local citizens.

Valuable Right of Way Agents

The right of way agent's function, if strategically organized in a more open and creative manner, can have startling effects on the bottom line for investors and companies via empowered community engagement. In addition to the potential for important cost savings, there is another significant benefit of the preventative or Social Ecology approach. It is effective in helping to avoid the multi- year delays that are project killers in many situations.

The True Stakeholders

If projects are to survive, the seemingly radical way of preventive thinking will have to rise within corporations to the level of new policy to address essential changes in management strategy and operations.

Fortunately, some corporations are now recognizing and accepting that citizens and communities are true stakeholders with a critical role to play. From the perspective of land agents, their understanding of the new paradigm has been rapidly developing in recent years. Over a decade ago, IRWA took its first steps on the path to recognizing Social Ecology as an important tool for members to utilize and further the Association's mission to improve people's quality of life through infrastructure development. That initial step began the transition into the preventive paradigm for project development and management. An important aspect of the transition is that IRWA's individual members are becoming, through their experience and training, the world's largest Social Ecology resource. ✪

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AVOIDING THE GREAT DIVIDE: PART 2

BY LESLEY T. CUSICK

A project's outreach goal should be to avoid the divide that can separate the formal and informal networks in order to achieve project success. Unfortunately, sometimes the people sent out to engage with the community seem nervous, stiff or unreachable – anything but relaxed. After all, the project comes with schedules, charts and talking points. The community network comes with people who have a stake in the proposed changes. They may be angry and fearful because they feel threatened by your project. It is your job to talk about the project's benefits to the community. Most importantly, you must patiently listen to what they fear, need or want, and clearly explain what you know. Perhaps your project can alleviate the fear and address some needs or wants? You don't know that unless you listen.

An optimal way to understand citizen networks is to understand "Network Archetypes." Behavioral characteristics and attributes aggregate to form archetypes. Network archetypes are those characters in the information networks of society that sustain them in healthy ways. Network archetypes define the ongoing jobs within the networks that keep it functioning. Here are key characters you will encounter:

Caretakers *are the sage individuals that hold cultures/communities together. They are routinely accessible to people in their networks, and are selfless, calm, trusted and respected. These are key individuals to know and engage with.*

Communicators *move information throughout the networks, ensuring that "need to know" information is transmitted accurately and in a timely manner. They circulate within the community and can often be found in the gathering places.*

Storytellers *carry the culture of the community through their stories. They can benchmark important community events over time that impart context, flavor and temperament. You can find storytellers in the gathering places (often with many people gathered around them).*

Gatekeepers *function as a type of protective device for the informal networks, screening out and in some cases deflecting outsiders, in particular the ones from the formal networks (i.e. project sponsors). They may point you to others that you need to reach, but they want to control the circumstances and will likely reach out to the person you need to talk with before you get there.*

Authenticators *serve as types of interpreters of a project's technical information to the community. They will ask questions to gain understanding, check for consistency and put information into a cultural context for the community. They are trusted by the community so it is extremely important that they trust you and your information.*

Bridgers *bring people together, often with one foot in the formal network and one in the informal. They strive to understand both sides of situations. They are keen listeners and valuable for you to identify and work with.*

Opportunists *are self-promoters. They speak in generalities and are known to be disingenuous as to their role and standing in a community. They draw attention to themselves, often speak the loudest and longest and are a magnet for outsiders since they appear to be knowledgeable and trustworthy. While they may have some knowledge to share, it is parsed for purposes of control.*

Historians *know the history of their geographic place from its beginning. They know the key individuals that have shaped the community over time, along with the key events and decisions made that contribute to the community today. They also know when and why things in the community were in harmony and disharmony.*

The Value of Understanding the Networks

Learning the informal networks and the key participants in them are invaluable to your project and its ability to learn and communicate. By seeking information and sharing knowledge, you have in turn learned that you can be attuned to changing public attitudes, dispel rumors, keep the public informed of current and future plans, and most crucially – identify and evaluate citizen issues and discuss opportunities that are available to address the issues. ✪

RESTRUCTURE YOUR ORGANIZATION

Successful projects require support for ROW agents

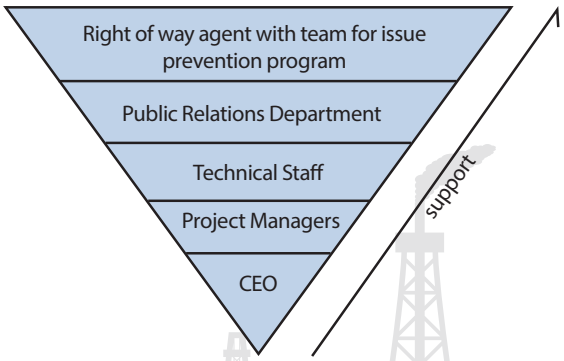
BY JAMES A. KENT

This article was originally published in the March/April 2020 issue of Right of Way Magazine. To read the full story, please visit our online archives found on the IRWA website.

One of the problems in addressing project resistance is the vertical organization of the companies that have had a management culture for over 50 years focused solely on producing shareholder profit. This profit was often earned to the exclusion of "community, suppliers, customers and employees," as pointed out in a new Business Roundtable mission statement in an August 2019 report. The single focus on shareholder profit has to change for companies who wish to be part of a business world, where new stakeholders have a growing influence on the operations and profitability of a company. The prevailing vertical organization is poorly prepared to develop strategies and tactics that fit the new citizen power dynamic.

For instance, the first instinct of a company when trouble arises from citizens challenging projects is not recognizing and expanding the resources that they already have available to them. Instead, they create a new department to handle citizen engagement, such as Community Relations, Media Relations, Stakeholder Outreach, Engagement Department, etc. This only complicates the current structure of working through the right of way agent to address citizen concerns. These new departments begin to compete with project managers and right of way agents as "the authority" on how to work with communities. Bureaucracy takes over and there is now another costly department competing with already existing right of way personnel on the ground. Frustration and confusion can set in for the public as they try to discern who is in charge, breeding conflict for the project.

A New Structure



New thinking is needed to address the current situation that is stopping and blocking needed right of way projects. Suggestions based on the previous examples are to invert the company's organization chart and to re-examine the right of way agent as a broader change agent instead of working only with land owners.

The Figure on the left shows this new corporate structure. In the new focus, the right of way agent needs to function beyond the land owner to the broader community interests, which are affected by the project development. The right of way agent requires additional staff to build out a successful issue prevention program. The staff includes a professional that knows how communities work at the informal and formal level (Social Ecologist preferred). In addition, two community archetypes (discussed in detail in the January/February 2020 issue of Right of Way Magazine by Lesley Cusick) would be hired from the informal networks. The two archetypes to start with from the community are the Caretaker (trusted individuals that hold cultures/communities together) and Communicator (those who move information efficiently and accurately throughout the community's networks on a routine basis). They can function well as issue identifiers and resolvers on a daily basis.

By investing in and building up the right of way agent's extension into the community, which in many cases is already taking place, the company is using on-the-ground personnel in a new and effective process to keep projects from being trapped in the citizen reaction mode. This is very efficient. It bureaucratically replaces the old management solution of creating separate departments to handle citizen issues, which often competes with the right of way agent.

In Summary

A Social License to operate exists at the local project level where the impacted citizens can see through their participation that their existing issues are being heard and addressed. In addition, the issues created by the project are addressed in a manner where the citizen and the project both win and project disruptions are prevented.

This is the new era with a new paradigm emerging. Project developers need to ask, "What will it look like, how will it operate and will we be leaders, followers or victims in this new era?" ✪

CONCLUSION

Course 225, Social Ecology: Listening to Community was conducted with 16 IRWA Chapters between 2013 and 2020:

Pablo, Montana, 2013
Caro, Michigan, 2014
Los Angeles, California, 2015
Oakland, California, 2017
Niagara Falls, Ontario, 2017
Phoenix, Arizona, 2017
Concord, New Hampshire, 2017
Denver, Colorado, 2018
Hunt Valley, Maryland, 2018
Lethbridge, Alberta, 2018
Sacramento, California, 2018
San Antonio, Texas, 2018
Portland, Oregon, 2019
Los Angeles, California, 2019
Fairbanks, Alaska, 2019
Houston, Texas, 2020

Readers familiar with Social Ecology, as presented in 39 columns in Right of Way Magazine, will recognize the importance of intentional efforts on the part of the right of way agent to enter community routines. Their mission is to understand:

- **How impacted communities function**
- **The type of communication that people use to manage their everyday issues**
- **How the project will affect the community**
- **How the company should organize to insure that the impacted community benefits from the project**

Concepts central to Social Ecology are: the power and influence of informal networks, the use of gatherings and gathering places as the core venue for effective communication, and addressing citizen issues at the emerging stage (issue prevention stage) of development. Responsive and timely issue management is a way to build a "moderate middle" of project support that reduces the influence of extreme voices and forestalls the development of opposition groups.

As Course 225 instructors engaged with participants in these courses, we began to understand the repeating patterns of how infrastructure work is conceived and carried out, leading to a series of "Lessons Learned" which we present as follows:

1) Citizen resistance to ROW projects has become routine and expensive.
("Citizens Awakening," March/April 2019).

2) There is broad and strong recognition "in the ranks." For the right of way agent to be successful in today's environment, agents must go beyond working with individual landowners to work with the larger community dynamics that affect project outcomes. Therefore, agents need to know how communities function and how to identify citizen issues at their emerging stage of development, when it is easiest and less expensive to address successful resolution.
("Overcoming Community Roadblocks," March/April 2010)

3) The contracting processes within which ROW agents operate do not lend themselves to responsive and effective Issue Management programs. Most project RFPs (Request for Proposals) do not contain provisions for a citizen engagement program. Companies feel that they would be at a competitive disadvantage if they deviate from RFPs to propose alternative strategies that add to the cost of the project. Thus the contracting process is not the best place to propose effective strategies for citizen engagement. The upshot is that feedback loops to project managers, CEOs and investors do not appear to be in place which would incorporate learning from field projects.
("Surging Industries in Global Energy," July/August 2013)

4) Right of way agents are often not contacted until the design process is complete, bypassing the local knowledge they may have acquired (or could acquire) about design and implementation considerations communicated by impacted citizens. Moreover, they are given short and unrealistic schedules when longer-term community relationships are needed. These structural limitations contribute greatly to Social Risk for the project.
("Preventing a Chain Reaction: Understanding Social Risk as it Relates to Infrastructure Projects," January/February 2015).

5) At least two or three individuals stood out in each class in terms of the experiences they described in resolving citizen issues related to infrastructure projects. The successful stories they told contained the theme of "developing a network of people who get things done." In other words, these individuals learned over time how to work within their organization, within sister subcontracting companies, and with regulators and local governments to figure out responses to citizens voicing issues about projects or ideas for their improvement. The methods they described were informal approaches of practical strategies for success. There were no formal programs that fostered these successes—they learned from each other. These are individuals with the intuition and the skills necessary to institutionalize in themselves, their companies and IRWA the learning from and application of Social Ecology practices.
(The People Factor: IRWA's Social Ecology Course)

6) Innovations in team management are occurring, with some major companies investing in "citizen engagement" programs and some efforts at re-designing teams to be more effective. Many of the larger efforts are hopelessly bureaucratic. However, some of the team re-designs show promise of reducing the dominance of the engineering technology by incorporating citizen learning earlier in the process and developing more nimble, timely responses.
("Restructure Your Organization," March/April 2020)

It is clear that dramatic shifts in "business as usual" in the world of infrastructure development are occurring and are providing pathways for changes in the industry. Over its 11-year history, Social Ecology has found a place in the present and future of IRWA. Just the process of avoiding the more serious minefields affecting projects today has been of enormous value. The direction of developing true community partnerships for success is now a definite possibility as the industry seeks to deliver much-needed infrastructure projects to their nations. ✪

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John Ryan is a Regional Economist with expertise in developing procedures that help mitigate potentially negative social and economic impacts associated with major development projects.