

# DILEMMA DISCUSSED: MIXED LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE

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 [mosaiclab.com.au/news-all-posts/2017/11/28/subscriber-dilemma-discussed-mixed-level-of-knowledge](https://mosaiclab.com.au/news-all-posts/2017/11/28/subscriber-dilemma-discussed-mixed-level-of-knowledge)



We're committed to sharing our learnings, contributing to the practice of quality engagement and supporting others to improve their engagement skills wherever we can.

As part of this commitment, today we're responding to an engagement challenge put forward by one of the subscribers to our e-newsletter *The Discussion*. The issue this subscriber is facing is:

*'Engaging with people when there is a mixed level of knowledge about a subject.'*

This is something we often face when we're engaging - and we're sure there's others out there struggling with the same problem. So, we've put together a few tips and ideas on how to address and (hopefully) overcome it.

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## Good engagement = informed engagement

Firstly, it's important to understand that getting beyond reactive answers and pure opinion is critical if you want quality, useful outputs from your engagement activities. To achieve this, people need to be informed before you ask them what they think.

It's far more valuable to find out what people think once they know the context, the constraints and the implications of each course of action.

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## Practical ways to address this problem:

What should we do we do when people have a mixed level of knowledge about a subject? Here are a few thoughts and tips:

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## Information needs to be digested

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Even if you give people information before they meet, don't assume they will arrive having done the reading. Always run an activity that helps people to become better informed. There's lots of different facilitation techniques that help people to digest and discuss information in interactive, engaging ways that avoid boring presentations or 'talking at' a group.

## Time is key

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It's always preferable to build a process that's long enough to incorporate in-depth information sharing. Time needs to be allowed for processing and discussing information inputs and ideas. That's why two-hour workshops, intercept interviews, surveys and short focus groups aren't adequate on their own, especially for complex issues.

## Surveys generally aren't useful on their own

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Surveys should be integrated into a wider engagement approach and need to be designed carefully. It can be challenging trying to get people to read or consider information before completing one, and often answers provided can lack depth. If you are developing a survey, consider questions that get to the values or beliefs sitting behind opinion, rather than simply eliciting the 'yes' or 'no' opinion itself.

## Cross-fertilise ideas and share insights

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Every participant will have picked up on different parts of the information – everyone doesn't need to read everything. Even if they did it's unlikely they would all take away the same knowledge and insights from that material. If people are allowed a genuine opportunity to come together and discuss and cross-fertilise insights and ideas, you can rely on those who have read everything to inform the conversation (balancing out and informing those in the room that have skimmed over it). A room full of diverse people and opinions will only enhance this approach.

## Consider your choice of engagement methods

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If you're using techniques like surveys or intercept interviews that tend to elicit reactive opinions rather than informed answers, consider first whether these opinions are valuable and useful in the context of the project or issue at hand.

## Provide information in digestible, visual 'chunks'

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Exhibitions, different presentation styles (such as [pecha kucha](#)), etc. help to break down information in a digestible way.

## IN CONCLUSION

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So there you have it - different levels of knowledge in a process or session isn't such a big deal. If you provide the opportunity for people to come together and have meaningful conversations, you'll see quality conversations and outputs as a result.

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## Over to you

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*What tips and ideas do you have for addressing mixed levels of knowledge in an engagement process?*

Share your thoughts in the comments below.

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