

ChoiceWork Dialogues

*Fostering Public Engagement on Growth
in Orange County*

Viewpoint Learning, Inc.
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Two Topics

- I. A new conception of public learning
- II. Top-line results of dialogues with Orange County residents

Part I: Public Learning

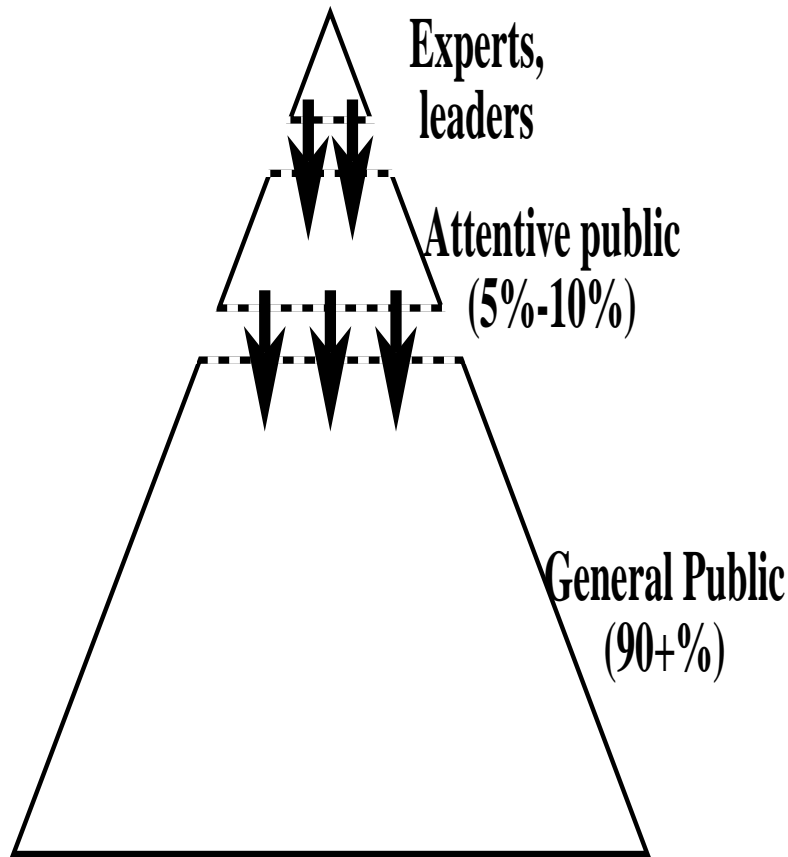
The traditional conception:

Give people the information they need, and they will make up their minds.

The new conception:

Absorbing information is only a small part of public learning. Three other kinds of learning must also take place before people form considered judgments

The Traditional Information-Based Model of Public Learning



- Favored by experts, the government and the press
- Top-down and one-way
- The public is expected to learn, not contribute
- Focuses on information rather than values
- Focuses on creating public awareness
- Assumes that public awareness and facts lead to resolution
- Assumes that a *well-informed* public is the “Holy Grail” of democracy

A Nest of Flawed Assumptions

The traditional model falsely assumes that...

- Information is the main form of public learning
- People make up their minds as soon as they receive relevant information
- The public interprets information in the same way that experts do
- Experts know what information the public needs and how to convey it
- Experts who debate their opposing views help the public to make up its mind
- There is no need to base the model on how people actually make up their minds

Conclusion

The traditional model works only when there are no clashes of values or hard choices.

When values conflict and people are obliged to make hard choices, a very different model of public learning is needed.

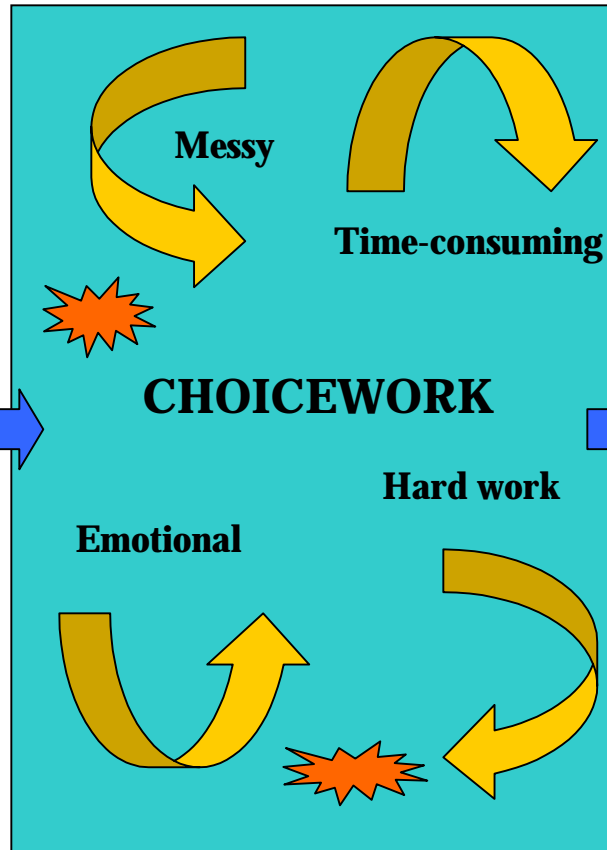
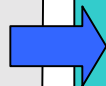
The New “Public Learning” Model

II. Working Through

I: Creating Awareness

RAW OPINION

- Unstable
- Inconsistent
- Consequences unclear



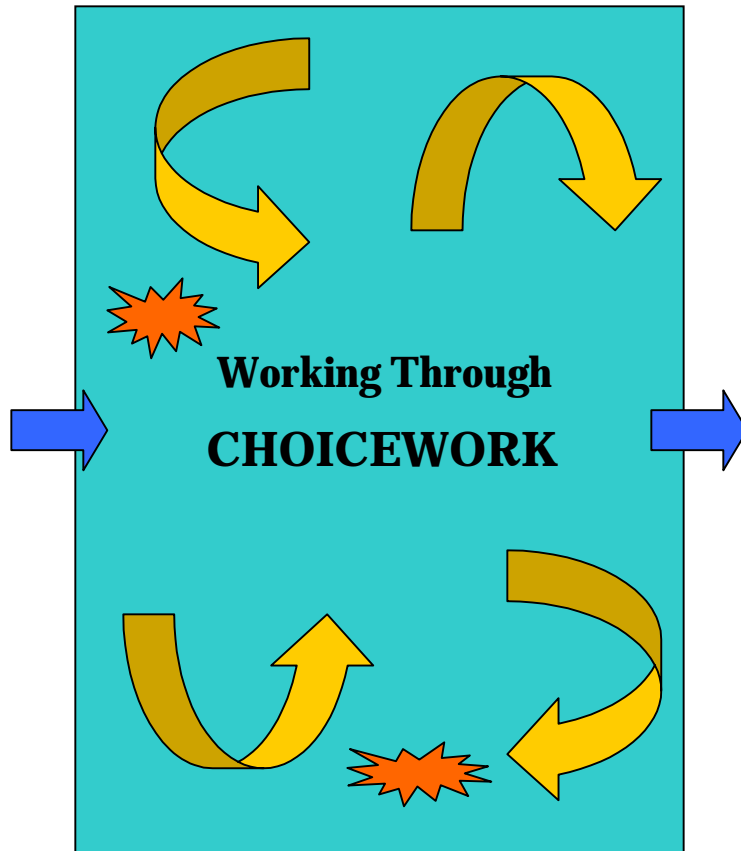
III. Resolution

CONSIDERED JUDGEMENT

- Firm
- Consistent
- Consequences taken into account



The Critical “Working Through” Stage Consists of Four Steps



1. Taking in the facts
2. Connecting the dots
3. Facing up to conflicting values
4. Shifting from an individual to a community-based point of view

**A new research tool
-- ChoiceWork Dialogues --
is designed to accelerate the process of
working through.**

ChoiceWork Dialogues permit the public
to engage in all four forms of learning in a
compressed period of time.

Debate vs. Dialogue

Debate	Dialogue
Assuming that there is one right answer (and that you have it)	Assuming that others have pieces of the answer
Combative: attempting to prove the other side wrong	Collaborative: attempting to find common understanding
About winning	About finding common ground
Listening to find flaws	Listening to understand
Defending your assumptions	Bringing up your assumptions for inspection and discussion
Criticizing the other side's point of view	Re-examining all points of view
Defending one's views against others	Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own
Searching for weaknesses and flaws in the other position	Searching for strengths and value in the other position
Seeking an outcome that agrees with your position	Discovering new possibilities and opportunities

Format of ChoiceWork Dialogues

- A series of dialogues **with small cross-sections of the public**
- **30-40 participants in each session**
- **Three or more sessions (when quantification is needed)**
- **Eight-hour sessions allow intense social learning**
- **Dialogue organized around 3-4 alternative scenarios developed in advance**
- **Special workbook sets agenda, gives background on issues, lays out pros and cons grounded in research**
- **Facilitation keeps people on track and in dialogue mode**
- **Before and after measures quantify shifts in preferences, coupled with qualitative analysis**

Strengths of ChoiceWork Dialogues

- Reveal insights critically important to public policy
- Demonstrate how to break through the crust of citizen mistrust and isolation
- Show leaders where they can (and can't) lead the public
- Open the door to new methods of public engagement and learning
- Create community and social capital

Part II:

Findings of ChoiceWork Dialogues on Growth in San Diego and Orange County

A Project in 5 Steps

1. OCBC and Cal State Fullerton conducted a **poll** among a representative cross-section of 800 Orange County residents during January 2001.
2. Based on the poll results and interviews with experts, OCBC and Viewpoint Learning jointly prepared a **workbook** setting forth four choices on Orange County's future growth and spelling out the pros and cons of each choice.
3. These organizations then conducted three all-day "**ChoiceWork Dialogues**" on these choices and tradeoffs during February 2002.
4. This **briefing** on the results of this work is now being conducted with political and community leaders in Orange County, with a briefing scheduled for policymakers in Sacramento in May.
5. A **report** on the results of the poll and the dialogues, and the responses of community and political leaders, will be published and widely circulated.

The Four Choices

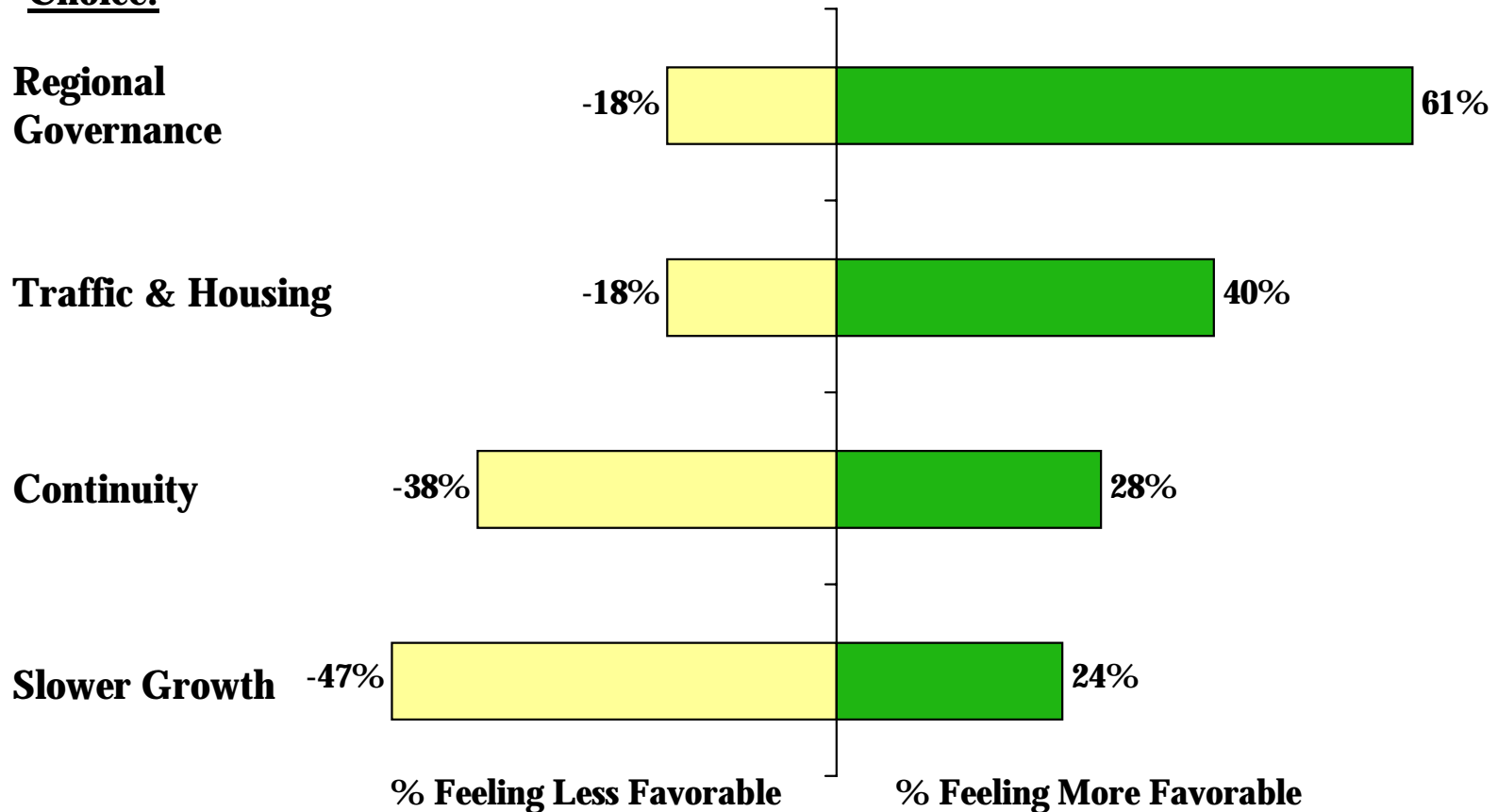
- 1. Continuity.** Stay on our present course: absorb the added growth without making any radical changes that will require us to pay higher taxes, change our institutions, or transform our habits and lifestyles.
- 2. Slower Growth.** Protect quality of life by slowing growth to 2/3 or even half of the projected numbers; at the same time acquire a large amount of land dedicated to open space and habitat preservation.
- 3. Focus on Traffic, Housing and Infrastructure.** Concentrate on preparing for the anticipated growth by fixing the most urgent growth problems such as housing, traffic congestion, and inadequate infrastructure.
- 4. Focus on Regional Governance.** Make our system of local and regional governance more responsive to the public, and give it the power and resources to deal more effectively with growth and quality of life issues like the environment, land use, and transportation.

San Diegans' Choices Before and After Dialogue (10 point scale)

<u>Choice</u>	<u>“Before” Means</u>	<u>“After” Means</u>
Traffic and Housing	8.0	9.2
Regional Governance	6.2	8.4
Slower Growth	5.2	4.6
Continuity	3.8	3.8

Shifts in San Diegans' Attitudes after Dialogue

Choice:

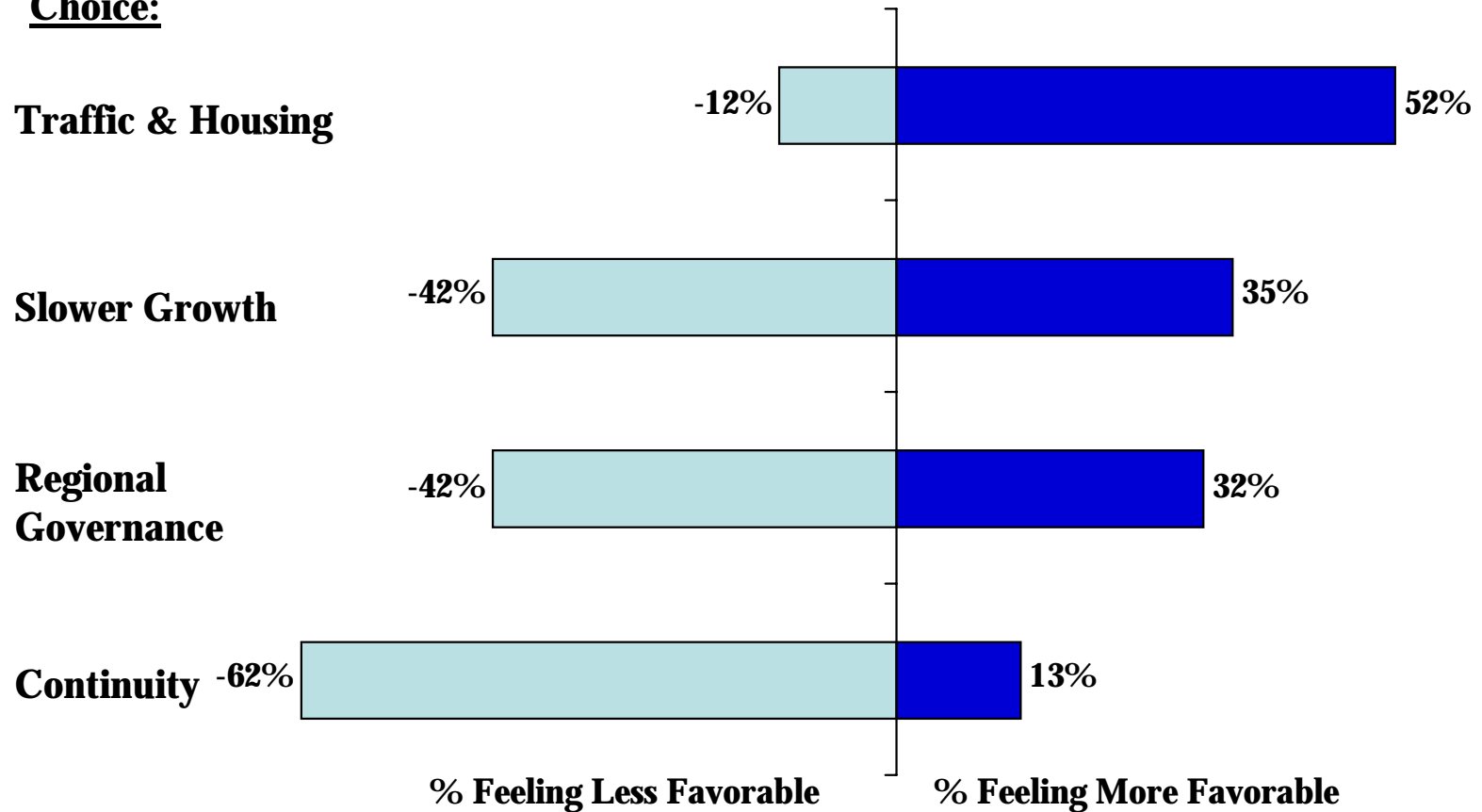


Orange County Choices Before and After Dialogue

<u>Choice</u>	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
Traffic and Housing	8.2	9.0
Regional Governance	7.2	6.9
Slower Growth	6.4	6.0
Continuity	3.3	2.2

Shifts in Orange County Attitudes after Dialogue

Choice:



Summary: Attitudes Before and After Dialogues

<u>Choice</u>	<u>San Diego</u>			<u>Orange County</u>		
	Before	After	Difference	Before	After	Difference
Traffic / Housing	8.0	9.2	+15%	8.2	9.0	+10%
Regional Governance	6.2	8.4	+35%	7.2	6.9	-4%
Slower Growth	5.2	4.6	-12%	6.4	6.0	-7%
Continuity	3.8	3.8	0%	3.3	2.2	-33%

Orange County/San Diego Comparisons

	“After” means	
	SD	OC
• Traffic, housing and infrastructure priority is the clear winner for both.	9.2	9.0
• After dialogue, San Diegans are more enthusiastic about regional governance; Orange County residents do not shift their views appreciably.	8.4	6.9
• Slower growth has less appeal in San Diego than in Orange County.	4.6	6.0
• Maintaining the status quo is not popular in San Diego. In Orange County, it is rejected with even greater force.	3.8	2.2

Summary:

The New Research Tool Is Designed to Reveal Six Insights About the Public

1. How firm or mushy the public's views on growth are
2. How views change when people are better informed
3. How views change when people connect the dots and confront tradeoffs that pit cherished values against one another
4. What leadership can do to counter wishful thinking and denial
5. How good the chances are for finding consensus or common ground
6. How to optimize public engagement