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## InTransition Episode 97 - Amelia Loye

David Pembroke: Hello ladies and gentleman, and welcome once again to InTransition, the podcast that examines the practise of content communication in government and the public sector. My name's David Pembroke, and thank you once again for joining me this week. Today, we'll venture into the area of social science and just exactly how we can use that to create better engagement with citizens and stakeholders around the particular projects that we are involved in, and a very talented social scientist will join us in just a moment, but as we do each week, we start with the definition of content communication, as it relates to government and the public sector.

Content communication is a strategic measurable and accountable business process that relies on the creation, curation, and distribution of useful, relevant, and consistent content. The purpose is to engage and inform a specific audience in order to achieve a desired citizen and/or stakeholder action. To today's guest, Amelia Loye, is a social scientist who specialises in consultation and engagement for government. Over the past 12 years, she has designed and managed online and offline engagement for government across Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. In particular, her two most recent accomplishments are helping Australia's Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and New Zealand's State Services Commission, engage stakeholders in the development of their National Action Plans for open government; and preparing the New Zealand Government's Online Engagement Guidance.

Her company, engage2, provides strategic support for organisations who are wanting to improve the way they engage with stakeholders and how they consider social issues. engage2 designs enterprise wide digital architecture for engagement, input management, and the analysis of social data. They also help clients to procure and set up tools for online engagement, relationships, and the analysis of big data and data collected from citizens. Amelia Loye, thanks very much for joining us InTransition.

Amelia Loye: Thank you, David. What a great introduction. Thank you.

David Pembroke: No problem at all. Now, listen, we caught up towards the end of last year at the Global Open Government Summit in France, in Paris, and it was an action packed three or four days. What did you take out of that particular conference as it relates to this aspiration of government becoming more transparent, more accountable, more authentic, and opening up government for participatory democracy?

Amelia Loye: Well, there's lots of people around the world who are working towards the same agenda, and working pretty hard inside their governments to make

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government more transparent, democratic, and accessible I would say, and that there's a lot of resources available as a result of that. People who are working towards it, but also resources that they've developed. Similar to the New Zealand Guidance that you mentioned previously, that kind of material is being shared across government around the world and is actually creating kind of a snowball effect of open government. Yeah, I'd say that the agenda's getting momentum and that the people who are working within those organisations are getting traction and that the materials and resources that are available to all of us are now extremely relevant and useful, and that putting some time into connecting to that initiative and those resources is actually really good practise for anyone who's inside of government these days.

David Pembroke: Just to that broader contextual challenge that you alluded to there, the vote in the UK to separate from the European Union, the election of a president in the United States who is talking about perhaps focusing much more internally rather than looking out to the world, but certainly focusing on domestic issues much more, how do you see that that context is going to change or impact on this movement to more greater openness, greater transparency, greater collaboration, cooperation, and openness?

Amelia Loye: I think legitimacy and people looking at their government with a bigger magnifying glass is happening domestically, and I think there's a greater expectation on transparency. In the past, when we talked about open government, we talked a lot about open data and the usefulness of open data to different sections of the population. I think if you have a look at what's happening in the US with Trump just straight after the inauguration, people are actually looking for open information as well as just data, because people are ... I think citizens are looking to be more informed. That idea of referendum as the way we do democracy and the way we participate in our government is not as relevant and citizens are looking for more useful ways of actually participating.

David Pembroke: What's your advice to people as to how they can best serve that need? If you're working in government, how can you become a better servant of the people by providing appropriate data or information or other resources?

Amelia Loye: Yeah. I mentioned the word accessibility before. I think accessibility's been around for a little while now, and I think the next step for people who are trying to increase transparency of government and trying to raise the bar in terms of participation, I think the next step is actually making that information understandable, relevant, and digestible, so it's in a format that people can access not just from a pure accessibility perspective but it makes it easy for them to comprehend, understand, process, and then participate in an informed way.

David Pembroke: What's the best way to do that given say you're sitting in the communications area and one of your colleagues from policy has just arrived with a consultation document that's about 150 pages of text, how do you then go about turning

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that into an asset or an artefact that is in fact going to achieve that ambition of greater engagement, better understanding?

Amelia Loye: Yeah, I think you still need the 100 page document for those super keen people who are going to read it, and I think making that document accessible is important. It shows the rationale and thinking of the experts inside of government who have been looking at these challenging problems that government have to address all the time to the public, so they can comprehend it, but I think we have to also find a way to get people's attention and get them engaged, and the easiest way to do that is still ... You can easily call it clickbait, but that's just a way of drawing people's attention back to information. I like to say you're driving traffic, or you're fishing where the fish are, but you're bringing them back to the aquarium.

You give them something to bite, something that gets their interest, and then you give them a little bit more information that makes it ... It's presented in a way that's understandable, so the language is simple, it's presented in an entertaining way, not just a reader accessible way, and also there's an opportunity to reflect on what you're reading or watching if it's a video form of content. I think it's about getting creative with the presentation of the content and it's also engaging people within the body of the content as well, and reaching people where they are I think is really, really important. Some of that's digital and some of that's offline.

David Pembroke: Okay, so take me through that. What do you mean by reaching people where they are?

Amelia Loye: I think people are already talking about current affairs and politics and complex social problems that are facing ... Problems facing our community. I think it's up to us to figure out where people are talking about those things and to actually understand a language that they're using when they talk about those issues, how information might be distributed among networks within our community and to tap into those networks in an effective way, to try and participate in community as opposed to always expecting community to find the information that we're just releasing up online on a website, for example.

David Pembroke: In terms of the sorts of skills that people require to execute on creating and distributing an accessible piece of information that citizens or stakeholders are looking for, what sort of skills do people need to have to be successful in achieving those better outcomes?

Amelia Loye: I think it starts with actually listening and as I said before, understanding where people are having those conversations, so there's a bit of a data analytics skill required for that at the moment. I think that some of that's looking at big data, some of that's looking at social data, understanding social networks, but also understanding social networks offline as well, so how are people engaging with each in community. Understanding the ways communities develop and organise

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themselves is really critical. Second to that is how we're shaping up and presenting content through the channels that we know those people are using to communicate about these kinds of things.

That's looking at channels, evaluating channels, but it's also curating content in a create way to reach those audiences. Some of that's a new form of advertising, some of it's about creative presentation of information, it could be video production, and it could be just creative direction in general with like infographics and presenting data and information in ways that are easily palatable for people, but I think we can't just pick a horse and go with a single way. We've actually got to look at the different ways people learn, so we've got a lot to learn about comprehension and the way people relate to information as well.

David Pembroke: In terms of you mentioned visuals, just how important are they in terms of telling your story?

Amelia Loye: Personally I really relate to visuals and I mentioned before about you can call it clickbait, call it whatever you want, but we all need something to draw our attention, where we're flooded with all of this information. I think presenting information in a creative way, visually, quickly, for people to comprehend, is an amazing art form and I think we have to look at that more closely.

David Pembroke: How well do you think government is, and I know this is a broad and a general question, but how well do you think government is doing at the moment in terms of taking on this opportunity to be a media company on behalf of the particular programme or service or regulation or whatever it is, the policy that they may be seeking to represent and capture the views of the community?

Amelia Loye: I think it's a bit mixed. I work largely across Australia and New Zealand at all levels of government and work pretty closely with some people who are in government over in Canada. I think it's pretty mixed. I think we can see some people are thinking still in terms of PR and journalism, one way communication, so they're getting creative at the way they present information. We're getting some good campaigns, but I still don't think of that as engagement, and I think that it'll only retain people's attention for a short period of time. I think what we need to do is actually listen as well, as I said, and part of that is listening before you shape your content for different audiences, but it's actually also about listening afterwards.

How are people responding to that information? I don't think that's just about quantitative data metrics like how many people clicked on your article or went to your website as a result of seeing something. I think it's actually about how many people actually responded to and what is their response? Are they comprehending it? Are they understanding it? If you're not getting that right, it's about tailoring that message. I see mixed levels at all levels of governments. There's some really creative people in government who are doing some amazing

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things, both in the engagement area and also in the straight communications/marketing. When those two types of people team up, it can be magical.

David Pembroke: How do you build support with senior executives who may see this as perhaps not central to the mission that they may have and not as convinced that they need to be in the media business as such?

Amelia Loye: There's two ways. There's the carrot and the stick, I guess, and the carrot is you're going to get valuable feedback, valuable information that's going to actually deliver better outcomes for the community and then they'll be happier with the results. I think it's up to anybody who's working in engagement or policy to actually demonstrate that they value data from the community and from stakeholders, and where it's made a difference, a good difference to the design of a policy, a programme, or a service. Then, I think on the flip side of that is fear. If your credibility as an elected official rests on how people receive the decisions that you make, but you still stand in a position of, "We've been elected and we have the authority to continue to make those hard decisions," it's risky business.

David Pembroke: What about those? I suppose it's the nexus between the elected officials and senior bureaucrats who may in fact control the budgets and may not be prepared to invest sufficiently in an adequate benchmark survey or enabling research with adequate sample sizes which are going to give you the sort of insights that you need to make these judgements about whether or not your information is making the required impact. What about reaching in and influencing those people?

Amelia Loye: Yeah, look we all have our hot buttons, the things that we care about, the things we want to see delivered. I think if you don't have support and endorsement from your stakeholders for your programme, the announceable, it might go well but it's not going to have longevity. Those executives usually are the ones that are responsible for delivering the programmes and showcasing the results, so it's about looking at the metrics for your engagement. What does success look like? Why are we investing on this? What's the return on the investment of the engagement and how does that marry up to the agenda and objectives of the agency, longer term, beyond the announceable?

If you're able to speak to that with your executive and show that it actually does add value and will help them with their overall agenda, then I think it's a worthwhile investment for them and also for the stakeholders, quite frankly.

David Pembroke: Okay. Now, you mentioned data and it's obviously an area of expertise that Engage2 has, led by yourself. Where is the data debate at and how can people working in communications and engagement understand data and how it in fact may help them to be more effective in their roles?

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Amelia Loye: Yeah, thanks for asking that question, David. I think we've come a long way at discussing open data, data from community and how we can use that to make people more informed or make it more accessible and demonstrate transparency. We've still got, I believe, a long way to go when it comes to valuing data from citizens, and I'd like to see more systems in place to actually do that. I think of it quite simply. There's data about community and some of that data comes from government, some of it comes from things like census, it might come from big data, data about community. But then there's also data from community and I think that data has a lot more value than what we typically recognise and as I said, I think we need better systems and processes inside government to share that data around so that we've got a strong understanding of how a certain proposed change might affect a community, and also how we're involving citizens in a meaningful way within the design and refinement of programme services and policies.

David Pembroke: Just on that, that's an interesting distinction you create there about data, talking about data about community and data from community. Can you give me some examples perhaps of ... You mentioned the census. That's obviously about community, but what are some examples of data from community that people working in communication/engagement could use to enrich their programmes?

Amelia Loye: Yeah, we're asking, as governments, we're asking citizens for data all the time and typically through consultation is probably the most obvious one. We might be doing the urban plan for a major city of Australia, and so we'll ask citizens, "What do you think about the proposed changes?" In that urban planning discussion, things will come up about planning, about transport, about infrastructure, about the environment, and that's data from citizens and it comes through submissions, it comes through online engagement platforms, it comes at meetings, stakeholder meetings and also larger, more town hall style meetings, or charrette, which might be an engagement method to engage with people face to face, and also just through public inquiries.

When people call up your organisational hotline, that's all data from community, and it's all data that's got relevance not just to the urban plan that you're designing at that point in time, but also to those other agencies I mentioned, infrastructure, transport, planning, environment. Getting better at sharing and valuing that data from community will actually help us not just for that single point in time, but also ongoing.

David Pembroke: Who's responsibility is it then do you see to understand and to think more strategically as to how that data could be distributed to areas that could in fact use it?

Amelia Loye: It's always a hard one, David. I think as I said, it's quite new. You asked me about how mature agencies are in the industry, it's quite new for people to be thinking this way. I think each agency's responsible for organising itself so that that data gets shared around the agency, and remember it's data about general topic

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areas that are relevant to them, not just at that point in time but ongoing, but also it's data about the stakeholders and by valuing that data as an organisation, you can actually have a continued dialogue with that stakeholder. I think an organisation has that responsibility, but as I said, it's also relevant usually to other agencies so typically you need a central agency within each government level to have a look at how that data is shared across government, who's got access to it is a big thing.

We've obviously got to value privacy, but we've also got to enable that data sharing across agencies so we can generate those insights and make sure that that data has as much value as I think it does. Valuing currency, as a citizen if I'm talking to government I don't usually differentiate between agencies so I do think there is a need for a central agency at each level of government to coordinate that sharing of that data, especially so some of those other more complex issues that I mentioned, privacy for example, and security, are addressed.

David Pembroke: Yeah. Well, I'd be interested in your views in the state of the current debate, just as it relates to both of those issues of privacy and security. Here in Australia, and I know it's a debate globally about government knowing that if they can get better access to data from community, perhaps with the same permissions that people provide to local shopping centres in return for coupons or other things, that government can design better services, better programmes, better outputs for the community, but it's building that trust between government and citizen so that there is that enablement between both government, citizens, and stakeholders, in order for that transfer of data to take place. What's your view on what needs to happen so government can get that permission? How do they build trust and respect?

Amelia Loye: Yeah look I think I really liked your question and where you went with it. I think you started to get to a point where you started talking about the legitimacy of government as well as the improvement of programmes and services. I think we need to demonstrate that these processes are increasing the representativeness of government. They're not about replacing the role of an elected official, it's actually about increasing representation throughout these processes, and I think typically it's easy to look at these processes as only the vocal will participate, but the only way we can build trust and increase the value of participation in these processes is to demonstrate that we're A, valuing the information, and B, that we look at it as a way of increasing representation of government.

In answer to your question, we need to help create an agenda around representative government. We need to change the conversation a little bit from consultation to participation in a representative government. I also think we need to build trust by showing that we're listening on an iterative basis so reflecting back to the community what we are hearing and demonstrating that we do have those systems and processes in place so it is worth their time

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coming to the meeting or providing the submission, and then secondly, I think that will give us a little bit more credibility in terms of the way we're managing those processes and systems. We have to demonstrate that there is some rigour around the way that we do that, that we're adhering to things like privacy requirements and that security has been taken into account.

David Pembroke: Do people want to hear from government?

Amelia Loye: This is a funny one because I think some people do and some people don't. I think people want to know what's going on. I think it takes a little bit of time to get their attention. There's a lot of people who are cynical out there, and it's kind of, in some cases it's fair enough. I do think it's a matter of building trust and I think before where we started this conversation about understanding how information is distributed in a community, where people are talking about current affairs and social issues is really important here. It's about, I think we have to build the trust of people who do want to hear what's going on in government because they're the people who are going to bring it up at the dinner party. They might not be the most popular person at the dinner party, but eventually they'll find somebody who wants to listen to them.

Yeah, I think there are people who do want to hear. I think there are a lot of people who are frustrated. I think it's still a responsibility of government to be an authoritative voice, as in provide accurate, timely information to people so that they can participate and I think people do expect that.

David Pembroke: It's interesting. I think that point you raised there around attention and given that we do live in a world where there is so much choice, trying to shape government stories in such a way that will grab people's attention, you mention taking on the challenge of clickbait in an environment where perhaps the more risk averse areas are going to be saying, "Oh, hang on. We're not going to say that because that's not true," or, "There's another meaning behind that that we don't want to put our name behind as such," so this notion of attention is really fascinating and I do take your point also about fishing where the fish are, and drawing them back to the aquarium so as you can make sure that they are swimming around in your information and hopefully presenting it to them in a way that they can take on-board and then distribute out into their particular communities, but I suppose my question around that challenge of attention is how do you do it consistently and in such a way that can have an impact?

You might be able to do it once, you might be able to do it twice, but how do you gain that attention on a consistent basis that is required in order for people to gain understanding of what it is that you want to do?

Amelia Loye: Yeah I would say consistency to me means the same thing every time and for everyone. I think that's actually we need to do the opposite of that, which is actually understanding the audience and tailoring the messages to the audience so it does get their attention, and going to the right channels for different



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audiences. Then, the second thing I would also say is if you're showing that you're listening to those audiences, you're much more likely to get their attention, so reflecting back what you're hearing is a really important part of this process.

David Pembroke: Okay, just a couple of quick ones before we go because we're coming up against time here. Just in terms of the online engagement guide that was put together for the New Zealand government that you put together, what are probably say, give me three or four of the top pieces of advice that you would give to a communications team or to an engagement team as they're setting about, trying to improve their particular processes?

Amelia Loye: Yeah. I think be really wary of saying you need to do engagement or consultation if there's no room for influence whatsoever over the outcomes. It's just communication. It's one way, it's PR, it's marketing. Engagement has to be two way or three way. Two engagement is, "I'm sharing information with you and I'm asking you for information as well," three way engagement is you're participating in a conversation, so you're one person sharing information and you're also inviting other people to talk to each other. That's probably the first thing, think about your purpose and whether or not it's one way, two way, or three way engagement.

Secondly, I'd say consider how you're going to manage the information that you're collecting. Probably the worst scenario that I've ever seen in engagement is a process that was highly successful, 106,000 people participated and shared their ideas on a policy area, but there was no way of analysing that data for the organisation fast enough to reflect back what they were hearing, or to show to the community that they valued what was coming in, and considerate it in the way that they did the next stage of the process. Be really smart about that, how you're going to manage the data, and probably just lastly I have to add this, that you need to think about what are you actually asking the community. That goes back to where's the room for influence? What's the scope over the decisions that have to be made to achieve an outcome that the community could actually add value to or provide input into?

David Pembroke: Fantastic. Well, Amelia Loye, thank you so much. How might people get engaged with you, make contact with you? Where can they learn a bit more, not only about yourself and Engage2, too, but perhaps make contact with you to further the conversation and discussion about communication and engagement?

Amelia Loye: Our website is [engage2.com.au](http://engage2.com.au). You can also find us on LinkedIn, Engage2, or on Twitter, Engage2Govern.

David Pembroke: Engage2Govern, fantastic. Well Amelia, thank you very much for giving us a small part of your week, but an important part of your week because I know this is a massive issue for many people working in government communication and

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engagement is how do we continue to improve? How do we continue to get insights from people such as yourself so as we can all get better, so we can all improve? Because heaven knows we need, as I say often on this programme, it is such a big challenge that government communicate effectively with citizens and stakeholders so as we can strengthen communities and we can improve the wellbeing of citizens.

I think with so much going on the world at the moment, that broader context we've got, the more effective that we can be as individual government communicators and engagement specialists, then hopefully we are making a small difference in the communities that we are working in. Thank you so much, Amelia, for joining us today, and thank you listeners for joining me once again, and I'll be back at the same time again next week. Bye for now.