



Covid and public participation: challenges and opportunities (Aarhus Convention)

Quintin Oliver
Chair, The Consultation Institute

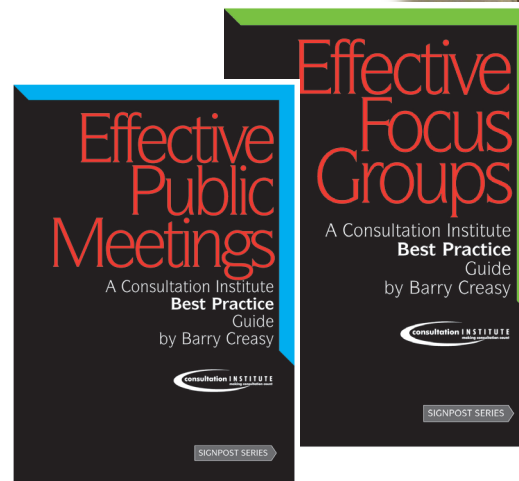
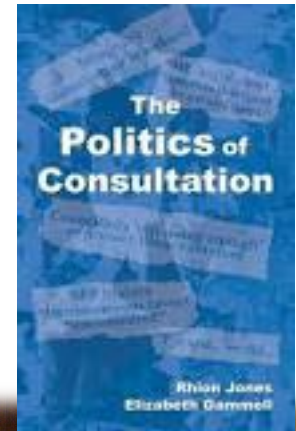


Worldwide trends

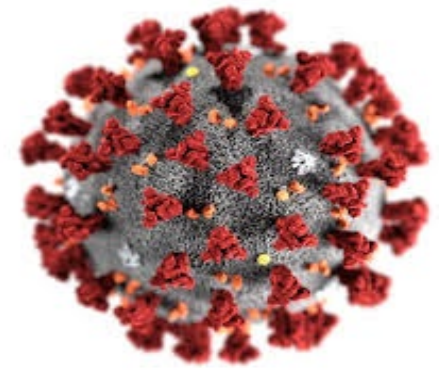
- Greater use of formal consultation
- Social media rapidly increasing access
- Environmental issues highlighted
(e.g. COPs 26 and 27, Aarhus, Ukraine)
- Unhappy *consultees* go to law, the media, or politicians
- Covid created a wholly new dynamic...

What does the Consultation Institute do?

- Supports *best practice*
- **Quality Assurance**
- Training (+online)
- Publications
- Leadership



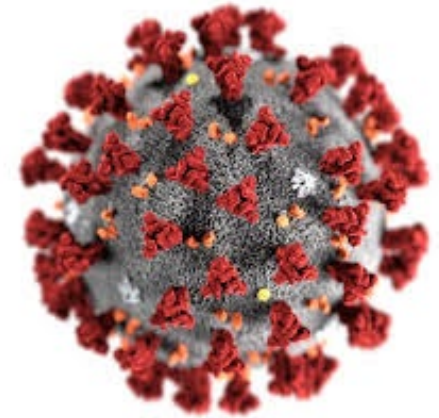
Covid Lessons 1



- 1. Rapid acceleration online** – new engagement techniques
- 2. Rise in participation** across most categories
- 3. Democratisation** of access – each is equal
- 4. Equality duties** undiminished; third sector key
- 5. New demographics observed** – working age
- 6. Spread of geographies**



Covid Lessons 2



7. **Some people with disabilities** empowered (the tech-enabled)

8. **Access to bosses, decision-makers and VIPs** enhanced

9. **Young people** with smartphones felt *'at home'*

10. **Efficiencies for Consultors**

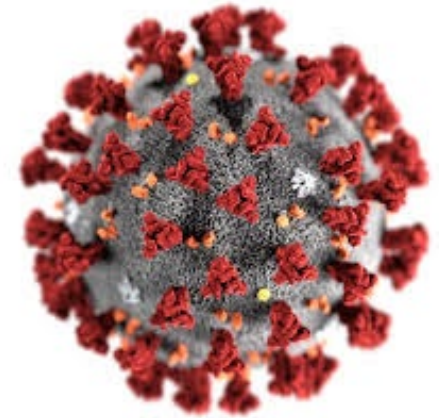
11. **Innovative use of channels**

12. **Useful 'new' data** gathered



The
Consultation
Institute

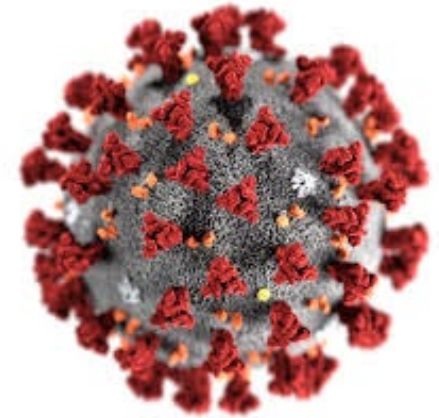
Covid Lessons 3



However:

1. Remains challenge to **engage ‘*seldom heard*’**
2. and now the **‘*seldom online*’...**
3. hardware, software, broadband and **data**
4. **skills and confidence** of consultees
5. **embarrassment and distractions**, confidence, typing, spelling, housing...
6. **control of dissent** from centre

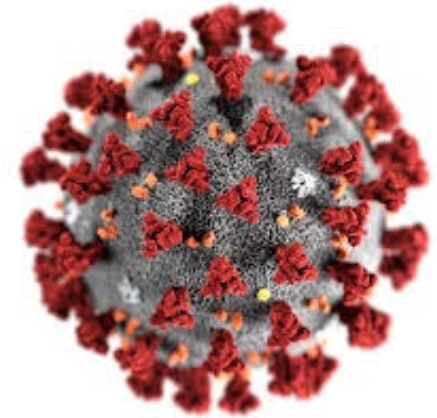
Covid Lessons 5



So, what next:

- 1. Over-reliance** by Consultors (cost, control, centralisation)
- 2. Exclusion of some minorities and dissenters**
- 3. New ways to solve old problems, only if...**
- 4. Standards and protocols required**
- 5. Rounded, systemic and holistic approaches.**

Covid Lessons 4



7. **Atomisation of participants** – new dynamic
8. Minutes and **learning less detailed** (*‘watch again’*)
9. **Gender exclusion** and marginalisation;
patronisation
10. ***‘Citizen-washing’***

