



BRING IN THE BIG GUNS

Want your consultation process to be successful and authentic? Put your real decision-makers on the case.

"Chief-to-chief communication is critical in authentic engagement, and this is where most of the corporate sector really falls down," says Adine Mees, president and CEO of Canadian Business for Social Responsibility. "Communities want to see the CEO sitting down with their leaders. They want to hear from the decision-makers. Instead, corporations send other people – their experts, their lawyers." Often, with instructions of "You're allowed to say that. You're not encouraged to say this."

"That doesn't work," says Mees. "People can smell authenticity" – or lack thereof. "It's a visceral reaction." – *Marzena Czarnecka*

and people have an opportunity to be heard and to affect your decision."

UNFORTUNATELY, SOMETIMES THAT JUST doesn't work.

"The challenge in some projects, particularly in the oilsands, is that a number of stakeholders are stepping away from the existing process," says Adine Mees, president and CEO of Canadian Business for Social Responsibility. CBSR energy sector members include Enbridge, EnCana, Nexen, Petro-Canada, Syncrude, Talisman Energy, Total E&P and TransCanada Corporation. "NGOs are step-

ping away from the process because they don't feel the engagement that's happened to date has resulted in change quickly enough. First Nations are stepping away because they don't feel they have been heard."

Most acute perhaps in the oilsands, stakeholder disengagement isn't limited to those projects. Canada's pipeline companies have been engaged in extensive public consultation with stakeholders for, in some cases, decades. TransCanada has been involved in "ongoing discussions with key stakeholders – including producers, governments and communities in the Yukon and B.C." on the

Alaska Pipeline since the 1980s. The Mackenzie Valley pipeline project, in the works since the 1970s, has seen its 21st century review and consultation budget triple – not to mention the timeline for the process stretch from 10 months to five years and counting – and First Nations and Inuit opposition continues to flare up, despite the presence of the Aboriginal Pipeline Group as a financial stakeholder in the success of the project.

That traditional public consultation is not a panacea is perhaps best illustrated by the ongoing tribulations of Enbridge's Northern Gateway Pipelines project, intended to connect Edmonton with a marine terminal at Kitimat, B.C. On paper, Enbridge has "an open and extensive public consultation process" in which "the results of the consultation will be considered as project design and routing is finalized." In practice, the project has been mired in protests and stalled by legal challenges First Nations groups have directed at the Government of Canada over failure to consult.

In May 2009, the Ethical Funds Company, entered the fray, getting support from 32% of Enbridge shareholders to pressure the company to release information vital to First Nations groups deciding whether to pledge their support. The scrutiny came despite what Bob Walker, vice-president, sustainability, for the Ethical Funds Company, called Enbridge's "strong aboriginal relations policy." Strong as it may have been, as Walker and Ethical Funds saw it, it may not have been enough "to negotiate this project successfully."

Ouch. So what are Enbridge's – and other companies' – options going forward?

No magic formula, just real interaction with stakeholders that gives them a chance to affect project design and outcome. "If you want to build anything in North America, you have to be respectful of those stakeholders and have open and honest dialogue with them," says Carpenter.

"The engagement has to be authentic," echoes Mees. "That means engaging in dialogue without a timeline. If you're saying our project will go ahead on Dec. 31, and we will engage with stakeholders between now and Dec. 15, you're doomed to failure.

"It's about engaging for as long as it takes to succeed."

This is a huge paradigm shift for companies mired in a tradition of giving stakeholders