

Oliver Escobar

Public Dialogue and Deliberation

A communication perspective for public engagement practitioners



About Edinburgh Beltane



The Edinburgh Beltane – Beacon for Public Engagement is a four year programme delivered by a partnership of nineteen organisations, led by the University of Edinburgh. We are one of six UK Beacons for Public Engagement funded by RCUK, established in 2008 to bridge the gap between researchers working at the cutting edge and the people their research will affect.

Inspired by the proximity of Holyrood, the Edinburgh Beltane has adopted the theme of enabling access to research relevant to public policy. With a Scottish Parliament which prides itself on accessibility, we are well placed to support people when they engage with the research which affects devolved issues.

This handbook is based on a training programme on Dialogue in PE developed through Edinburgh Beltane. It aims to enable researchers to communicate with other groups in ways which genuinely enhance mutual understanding around their work and around any policy issues it may pertain to.

We welcome feedback on any of the material in this Handbook. Please email any comments to:

info@edinburghbeltane.net.

This handbook was prepared and written by:
Oliver Escobar
Edinburgh Beltane Fellow,
Principal's Career Development PhD Scholar,
School of Social and Political Science,
University of Edinburgh, and
Project Officer, Public Policy Network

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I am deeply indebted to Magda Pieczka and Emma Wood for their trust, mentorship, and support during my time working at the Centre for Dialogue (Queen Margaret University). Alongside many other colleagues at QMU, they created an outstanding environment for researching and developing ideas about dialogic communication.

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This booklet was developed in multi-sited conversations with theory, practice, and practitioners. I am grateful to all the participants in the diverse processes, forums, networks, and courses in which I was fortunate to be involved over the past years. The initial materials for this compilation were gathered during 2008-2009 at QMU, for the first Edinburgh Beltane course on dialogue theory and practice. My understanding of the subject owes much to the generosity and experience of the researchers and practitioners that attended both that course, and the ones that followed. In many ways, this booklet aims to continue that ongoing conversation.

I am thankful to Jehane Barbour for helping with revisions of the manuscript. I want to specially thank photographer Emilio Pérez, for sharing his art in these pages, as well as for two decades of friendship. Indeed, it was with friends and family that I first learned to appreciate the challenge and true value of dialogue. Finally, as ever, my utmost gratitude goes to Paula Jezierska, for making it all possible with her love and support.

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Dialogue and deliberation are not new, they are deeply embedded in a cultural tradition which goes back to Plato and the Athenian democracy. And yet, there is something immensely exciting about the more recent revival of interest in these practices and the ideas that stand behind them.

The story of the reawakening of the academic interest in dialogue and deliberation has already been told by both communication scholars and political scientists. Many of the key thinkers who inspired this movement appear in this booklet: American philosopher and democratic reformer, John Dewey; Jewish philosopher Martin Buber; Brazilian educator and theorist of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire; and American physicist and philosopher, David Bohm. The great relearning started at the turn of the twentieth century but took several decades to bear fruit. This booklet shows the collective achievement of the work carried out by innumerable academics and communication practitioners in the fields of community development, policy making, and education, as well as applied communication, for example in organizational or science communication.

As communication is my academic field, I am bound to comment on the centrality of communication to the way in which we now think about science and politics, as well as social institutions and practices. Much academic work now acknowledges the importance of framing and of discursive practices for substantive outcomes of expert work; we can now also add dialogue and deliberation to the list of such important communication concepts. Learning about dialogue and deliberation, but more importantly practicing dialogue and deliberation in the way in which we now understand and handle them is intellectually and emotionally invigorating. Being involved in public engagement as designers of such activities connects us as academics with the worlds outside our institutions in ways that can be transformative: to us as experts, citizens, and human beings; to people we talk to, or to use a more apt, American phrase, talk with; and finally, to institutions and communities that we bring into the room with us during such engagement encounters. It can be great fun; it is always hard work, but it is also never dull.

This booklet is an excellent introduction to these practices and their underpinning ideas. It is accessible, yet thorough; it is explicit about the principles and ways of putting them into practice. And last but not least, Oliver manages to convey in these pages his own passion for the subject and thus gives the reader an insight that goes beyond textbook exposition. I know I shall certainly keep this booklet to hand on my desk.

Dr Magda Pieczka

Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

There is a lot of talk about 'dialogue'. It is one of those terms which, like 'community' or 'partnership', are often associated with positive feelings. The overuse of the term, however, has produced bewilderment amongst public engagement (hereafter PE) practitioners. For instance, in UK policy documents we often find dialogue as a synonym of conversation, consultation, participation, dissemination, deliberation, collaboration, and so on¹. If dialogue continues to be used with so many different meanings, there is a risk that it may end up meaning nothing at all. In this booklet I join a growing cohort of scholars and practitioners² that reserve the term dialogue for a more specific type of communication.

My aim is to introduce a summarised, communication-focussed view of various approaches to public dialogue and deliberation. I intend to bring together ideas from various disciplines and fields of practice, and to explore how we can put them to work towards meaningful public engagement.

I will focus on face-to-face interaction. I appreciate the importance of Internet-based communication, but that is not my concern here, although some ideas may apply to that context too³. In general, I have chosen to pay more attention to those questions that have come up repeatedly as I engaged in conversations about theory and practice with practitioners. My aim is not to provide a comprehensive take on these issues, but to outline some basic approaches that I have found useful, and to signpost the reader to a variety of resources (websites, handbooks, case studies, articles) from diverse disciplines – hence the exhaustive referencing. I have tried to provide the sort of 'map to the field' that I wish was available when I began to do research on the topic.

This is not intended to be a how-to guide, but a theoretical companion to *Dialogue in*

*Public Engagement: A Handbook*⁴, written by Wendy Faulkner and published by Edinburgh Beltane in the same collection as this booklet. The Handbook was developed as a hands-on resource for participants in the Edinburgh Beltane *Dialogue Techniques for Public Engagement* courses which Wendy Faulkner developed, in collaboration with Heather Rea and myself. You can access it online at: <http://edinburghbeltane.net/content/dialoguehandbook>.

Technique and skill are, no doubt, critical in our work, and networks such as the UK Beacons for Public Engagement have done a lot to develop and share best practice. However, despite all the talk about dialogue, or perhaps because of it, there is much confusion amongst practitioners in the field.⁵ I hope that it will be useful to propose a communication framework, and to some extent a mindset, to encourage thinking about fostering, facilitating, and engaging in dialogue and deliberation. Accordingly, I will introduce key tenets of communication theory that underpin dialogic approaches, so that you can then adapt or develop formats to suit your context.

The rhetoric of dialogue is sometimes adopted rather uncritically in academic and policy circles. Too often that rhetoric is deployed with little understanding of the variety of principles and practices enacted in dialogic communication. How can dialogue be conceptualized and distinguished from other forms of communication? On what assumptions is it based? How is communication understood? What does it take to facilitate it? What kinds of processes make it possible? What ideas about democracy underpin it? What kind of changes in academic and policy-making cultures does it call for?

These are fundamental questions. Unfortunately, lack of clarity in this area

affects not only participants, but also PE practitioners who find themselves in the predicament of having to translate vague ideas into meaningful practices. This booklet aims to suggest a mindset and a framework for thinking through these challenges. To be sure, there are many approaches to dialogue and deliberation; I will not represent them all here. Instead, I present a combination of ideas that hopefully help to make sense of the field.

I have so far referred to 'public engagement practitioners' as if they formed a clearly defined group. Of course, that is not the case. In UK academia, for example, there is a range of people involved in PE practice, e.g.: from senior academics to junior researchers and students across various disciplines, and from communication officers to knowledge exchange practitioners in a variety of departments, centres, and research groups. Public engagement practice in the UK, however, has a longer history in areas such as local government, urban planning, or the National Health Service, where a range of professionals specialise in 'community engagement' or 'public involvement'. In other words, engagement work is becoming an established field of practice in multiple contexts.

This booklet seeks to speak to those practitioners, whatever their context, whose work entails creating public forums for meaningful conversations. In particular, I have taken as imaginary readers those practitioners and students that I have had the fortune to work with. If, with pragmatist and deliberative thinkers, we agree that communication is the very fabric of democratic life, then pondering over the quality of communication in public engagement becomes critical. Thinking about dialogic communication encourages us to interrogate our public engagement work, the role our research institutions should play in society, and the ways in which we can develop collective capacity to deal with complex issues.

¹ See for instance POST (2001) *Open channels. Public dialogue in science and technology*. London: Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. For an analysis of policy statements on dialogue in the context of science see Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) *Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. 60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*. Edinburgh.

² Scholars and practitioners who distinguish dialogue from other types of interaction are not only found in philosophy (Gadamer; Buber) and communication studies (Bakhtin, Pearce & Pearce, Anderson & Cissna, Deetz & Simpson), but also in participatory and deliberative theory (Levine, Gastil & Fung, Roberts, Spano), conflict mediation (Herzig & Chasin, Littlejohn & Domenici), policy analysis (Forester; Innes & Booher), management and organizational studies (Isaacs, Schein, Dixon, Yankelovich), education theory (Freire, Burbules), and even humanism inspired by quantum physics (Bohm). See bibliography for works from these authors and practitioners.

³ See for instance Evans, K. G. (2002) *Virtual dialogue and democratic community*. In: ROBERTS, N. C. (ed.) *The transformative power of dialogue*. Amsterdam ; London: JAI.

⁴ Faulkner, W. (2011) *Dialogue in public engagement: A handbook*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Beltane (UK Beacons for Public Engagement).

⁵ See Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) *Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. 60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*. Edinburgh. AND Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010c) *The engagers: The professionalisation of science public engagement in Scotland*. 5th Science and the Public Conference. Imperial College and Science Museum, London.



Box I – Discovering dialogue and deliberation: A personal story

My interest in public dialogue and deliberation began in the winter of 2001 at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Galicia, Spain). It was the final year of my degree in politics, and little did I know, I was about to learn more in the next three months than in the previous five years.

The Spanish government at the time was preparing a new legal framework for our universities (the *Ley Orgánica de Universidades*, or LOU). The LOU was controversial. Most student organisations saw it as a threat to our public education system, as well as to our capacity - as students - to contribute to university policies. This set in motion one of the largest ever student mobilizations in our young democracy. The interesting part, however, was how this took place.

The diverse landscape of the student union movement in Santiago was the result of a long history of acrimony amongst various factions across the ideological spectrum. Accordingly, student organisations acted as homogeneous blocks with entrenched ideas and ways of working. Adversarial show-offs and deprecating routines were commonplace. This put many students off from getting involved at all.

When the LOU protests began, many non-affiliated students wanted to get involved. In Santiago this meant that, from the very first forums, a different spirit started to settle in. Unconcerned with the internal dramas of the student unions' world, these non-partisan participants brought with them alternative ideas and communication patterns. Soon a tacit consensus sank in: this was not going to be simply a series of strikes spearheaded by various student unions, this was to become a student assembly movement, including a broad range of participants.

Accordingly, assemblies were formed in each Faculty and there was also a general assembly. They typically included a diversity of non-affiliated students as well as student representatives who were not used to sit together and discuss issues of common concern. One of the first collective decisions was for the unions to put down their respective flags and banners. Everyone accepted that the assemblies would make the decisions and lead the mobilizations collectively.

The assembly movement became a truly creative operation in which thousands of participants became involved. Firstly, we discussed how to organise ourselves. Soon we decided that we might as well take advantage of our disciplinary structures. Accordingly, the Faculty of Law's assembly would be in charge of proposing amendments to the LOU, as well as coming up with an alternative law altogether. The assembly at the Faculty of Politics would lead on political strategy. The one in Journalism would coordinate anything to do with the media. The one in History would lead on daily activities and keep records. And so on and so forth. These assemblies were open to everyone. We met early in the morning, and then reported to everyone during the evening's general assembly.

You may begin to gather that this gave place to something beyond the typical string of demonstrations. One of the initiatives, for instance, was to take academic activities to the streets of Santiago. Accordingly, many of our lectures and forums were taken to public squares and corners. To do this, we forged an alliance with teachers, researchers and staff. During those three months the university was not simply brought to a halt, but actually transformed into the kind of alternative university that the assembly was building as a vision.

Santiago is a quintessential students' city, and thus, we soon gathered substantial public support, from small businesses to various organizations (including local media), as well as individual citizens. Daily public activities (e.g. street art, symbolic events), alternative university sessions, and ongoing assemblies became the signature of the process. Therefore, alongside the demonstrations, myriad parallel processes of public dialogue and deliberation took place.

This multiplication of civic conversations across spaces became, in my mind, the closest thing I had witnessed to the vibrant *public sphere* advocated by some democratic theorists. This public sphere materialised in multiple conversations from street corners to classrooms, from shops to offices, from media outlets to living rooms across Santiago. For many of us, those were three months of 14-hour working days characterised by constant communicative action.

For the assemblies to work, we had to get beyond the usual communication rituals and transform previous patterns of confrontational interaction. In other words, we had to find new ways of talking to each other; ways which would allow us to understand issues and positions, and to foster collective intelligence, in order to engage in collaborative decision-making.

To be sure, this was not an easy process, and the idealist tone of my account should not obscure the fact that these became extremely difficult conversations about many complex issues beyond the LOU itself. The assemblies were dissolved after Christmas 2001-2002, as the process of amendments to the law proceeded. Much disappointment followed. Despite similarly strong mobilisations in other Spanish cities, the LOU was minimally changed as a result.

You may be left wondering, 'well, in the end nothing ended differently from politics as usual'. I disagree. Firstly, many of these processes became schools of direct democracy: spaces where we developed our capacity to engage democratically with those we usually opposed. Secondly, it changed relationships between individuals and organisations that previously had not found ways of working together. Thirdly, these deliberative dialogues enabled patterns of communication that are crucial for building community resilience and social capital. Arguably, it was processes like this that prepared the ground for more recent assembly movements such as the one that emerged in Spain in the spring of 2011. Finally, the Santiago assemblies showed that 'uninvited' participatory processes can have impact on parliamentary business (e.g. many of our amendments were taken by opposition parties to Parliamentary sessions), and that they can be as effective as traditional *political party machines* in creating agreements about strategies, actions, and alternative proposals.

Ever since that time I have wanted to understand the quality of communication which enabled those assemblies to become genuine sites for democratic talk oriented to problem-solving. How can we create spaces where passionate engagement can be put to productive ends? How can we use tensions, conflicts, and difference as catalysts for collective inquiry and action?

3 Communication: The making of social worlds⁶

In this section I will outline key tenets of the communication theory which underpins most approaches to dialogue. The purpose is to introduce the basic ideas and vocabularies that I will use throughout the remainder of the booklet.

3.1 Reality is made of language

Language is not a neutral medium. It does not simply reflect a reality that is 'out there'. From birth, the social worlds we inhabit are structured through language. For that reason, we see the world and understand our experiences through the symbols, meanings, and social categories that we have learned and developed. They are our lenses: we have no way of understanding things other than through the meaning structures built through language in our environments.

Think of a time when you encountered a strange object: you didn't know its name and purpose; you didn't have a way of classifying it. That object, as far as you were concerned, didn't have a place in your scheme of things. It wasn't part of your social world. That is the power of words: things are only brought into life when we name them and give them meaning. However, the meaning is not implicit

in the thing: we may well stare at that object for hours without ever figuring out what it is. For example, we can see a wooden chair laying amongst a pile of wood planks only if the concept 'chair' is already known to us. Otherwise, we will only see a pile of wood planks. This is to say that we create our social worlds as we collectively name them and try to make sense of them. From this perspective, language constitutes the world as we know it⁷.

People often think of communication merely as a tool for transmitting information, a means to an end. In contrast, dialogic approaches invite us to see communication as the very medium through which we construct our realities⁸. In this view, reality is made through communication, rather than merely expressed by it⁹. Therefore, reality is seen as neither objective nor subjective, but inter-subjective: the product of communication, something

that we make together through the many interactions that shape our everyday lives. Accordingly, taking this communication perspective implies the understanding that meanings, actions, personalities, relationships, organisations and institutions are made or 'constituted in communication.'¹⁰

Table 1 reflects the distinction between two different ways of understanding communication: the transmission model and the dialogic model. You will recognise that many traditional public engagement activities correspond to the transmission model, for instance, public talks or media interventions. The dialogic model remains the preserve of a minority of public engagement processes which experiment with new formats for dialogue and deliberation.



⁶ In this section I draw heavily on the work of Pearce, W. B. (2007) *Making social worlds*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

⁷ See pp. 215-217 in Hyde, B. & Bineham, J. L. (2000) From debate to dialogue: toward a pedagogy of nonpolarized public discourse. *Southern Communication Journal*, 65, 208-223.

⁸ Most dialogic approaches are underpinned by theories of *social constructionism*, stemming from the seminal work of Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1971) *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

⁹ Penman, R. (2000) *Reconstructing communicating: looking to a future*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

¹⁰ Pearce, W. & Pearce, K. (2004) Taking a communication perspective on dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. A. & CISSNA, K. N. (eds.) *Dialogue: theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.



Table 1 – Contrasting models of communication. Adapted from Pearce (2002, p. 10)

Transmission Model	Dialogic Model
<p>Communication is a tool that we use to exchange information. 'Good communication' is about conveying and receiving messages accurately.</p>	<p>The way we communicate, as well as the message, shapes how we feel about others and ourselves. The way we talk creates, sustains and/or destroys relationships, organisations, and communities.</p>
<p><i>Key questions:</i> What gets said? What message is transmitted?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How clear is the information? • How accurately is it heard? • How completely is it expressed? • Was the 'channel' effective? 	<p><i>Key questions:</i> What is brought out by what is said or done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What contexts are created for those involved? (e.g. adversarial, collaborative) • What language, forms of speech, and tones of voice are elicited? • Who is invited to speak and who is not? • Who is addressed and who is not?
<p><i>Focus:</i> What gets done?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the uncertainty reduced? • Is the question answered? • Is the issue clarified? • Is the problem resolved? 	<p><i>Focus:</i> What gets made?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of speech acts? (e.g. deprecating, appreciating, exploring) • What sort of relationships? (e.g. trust, respect, indifference) • What sort of episodes? (e.g. collaboration, conflict) • What sort of identities? (e.g. shrill voices, caring persons) • What cultures/worldviews? (e.g. strong democracy, weak democracy, no democracy)
<p><i>The role of facilitators:</i></p> <p>Since communication works best when it is invisible, the facilitator's role is to create a context in which there is no 'noise' or interference in the exchange of messages.</p>	<p><i>The role of facilitators:</i></p> <p>Since communication works best when it creates certain kinds of social worlds, the facilitator's role is to shape emerging patterns of communication so that multiple voices and perspectives are honoured and the tensions among them are explored.</p>

We often think that conversations are a merely a background to the activities which really matter; and forget that it is precisely through those conversations that our activities become meaningful. Moreover, in the rush to *get things done*, we often forget the importance of how things *get made*. In the next section I outline a concept developed by dialogue practitioners, namely, 'patterns of communication'. This can be a powerful heuristic tool (a tool for discovery and practice-oriented analysis) to think about dialogic public engagement.

3.2 Communication patterns

From a dialogic perspective, society can be seen as a web of communication patterns. Each conversation emerges from, and is linked to, innumerable others. We can conceive of the world as a tapestry of ongoing conversations. In this sense, communication constitutes 'the very environment in which all human action takes place.'¹¹ As conflict mediation practitioners often put it, when we communicate, 'we are constructing our realities, and those very realities in turn shape the kind of communication we do. This makes a circle, and sometimes it is a vicious circle.'¹² Think, for instance, of how confrontational exchanges often end up causing further polarisation.

I will illustrate this with an example, but first it is important to understand that those 'vicious circles' are made of self-reinforcing

patterns of communication. Patterns of communication can be defined as 'emergent functions that, once developed, maintain their boundaries and resist change by actively attracting episodes that share their central characteristics and repelling those that differ or would change them.'¹³ In other words, communication patterns are change-averse, and they tend to repeat themselves over time.

Taking this communication perspective implies that we approach the 'events and objects of the social world' as co-created by 'the coordinated actions of ... persons-in-conversation.'¹⁴ Patterns of communication are not only characteristic of small group dynamics. They can also be seen as the building blocks of many individual and collective phenomena. Accordingly, values, beliefs, social and economical structures,

and power relations can be understood as constituted in 'patterns of reciprocated communicative action.'¹⁵ In other words, our worldviews and social structures are created, maintained, and changed through specific patterns of interpersonal communication.

It is important to appreciate that the properties of communication have consequences. As practitioners, we must pay attention not only to what is done through communication (what results are achieved), but also to what is *made by* it (what contexts and relationships are created), and what is that *made of* (what communication patterns are enacted). In other words, we should consider not only what communication achieves, but also what communication creates in the process. Let's look at an example.

3.2.1 Communication patterns and the making of communities: a case study

To clarify these ideas it is useful to differentiate between the *results* and the *consequences* of communication processes. As an illustration, let me share a story about one of our case studies at QMU's Centre for Dialogue¹⁶. The process began with a local plan to build a new secondary school in a district of Edinburgh (Scotland). There were strong polemics around several aspects of the plan from the beginning, although the location of the building soon became the most contentious issue. The community quickly split into two entrenched camps, and two local campaigns were set in motion.

It had all begun with the local authorities using the traditional DAD model of decision-making: Decide-Announce-Defend. In this

top-down approach, the authorities decide the options for discussion, instead of involving the community in setting the agenda for the process. In this sense, the authorities involved in our case contributed to igniting the polarising dynamics of the reactive process that followed. Soon they found themselves in the midst of acrimonious disputes that permeated the community. For several years they tried to minimise the social and political cost of their previous decisions, and initiated various rounds of consultations that often turned into arenas for gladiatorial performance. Indeed, many town hall meetings became stages with very little room for anything but verbal wrestling.

In the meantime, many noticed the paradox of the situation. There was one thing on which everyone in both camps could agree upon: the community really needed a new secondary school. As things stand now, it is supposed to be built by 2014. The whole process had begun in 2005. One might wonder how is it possible that something that was agreed upon by the whole community (and for which there was a budget) could take almost a decade to accomplish. In my view, it has a lot to do with caring about the quality of communication in democratic processes, and specifically, with paying attention to the type of communication patterns that are invited and engaged in.

¹¹ P.15 in Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ P. 158 in Pearce, W. B. (2007) *Making social worlds*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

¹⁴ P. 408 in Pearce, W. B. & Pearce, K. A. (2000b) Extending the Theory of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) through a community dialogue process. *Communication Theory*, 10, 405–23.

¹⁵ P. 42 in Pearce, W. & Pearce, K. (2004) Taking a communication perspective on dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. A. & CISSNA, K. N. (eds.) *Dialogue: theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

¹⁶ The case is the object of an ongoing investigation directed by Emma Wood at Queen Margaret University, Working paper: Wood, E. & Escobar, O. (2011) Using dialogue to reduce the turbulence: Focussing on building social capital to encourage more sustainable PR goals and outcomes. *EUPRERA Annual Congress*. 8-10 September; Leeds Metropolitan University.



Box 2 – The failure of traditional participation. Excerpt from Innes and Booher (2000)¹⁷

The traditional methods of public participation in government decision making simply do not work. They do not achieve genuine participation in planning or decisions; they do not provide significant information to public officials that makes a difference to their actions; they do not satisfy members of the public that they are being heard; they do not improve the decisions that agencies and public officials make; and they don't represent a broad spectrum of the public. Worse yet, they often antagonize the members of the public who do try to work through these methods. Moreover, they pit members of the public against each other as they each feel compelled to speak of the issues in polarizing terms to get their points across, making it even more difficult for decision makers to sort through what they hear, much less to make a choice. More often these methods discourage busy and thoughtful individuals from wasting their time in going through what appear to be nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements.

As a conclusion, and for the purpose of this example, it suffices to point out that one of the bitterly opposed camps won the battle. The process was characterised by dynamics of confrontational communication, following the traditional steps of adversarial public relations' campaigns. Eventually, the *winning* camp celebrated their triumph, while the *losers* remain active, concentrating now their efforts and resources in slowing down the construction process through legal action that might yet cause further delay.

The authorities missed a clear opportunity to foster a bottom-up community process, with spaces for patterns of communication oriented towards collective problem solving. They failed to harness the energy of passionate participants and put it to work in constructive ways. Moreover, they did little to avoid a win-lose scenario. In the end, even participants whose option triumphed have acknowledged being satisfied with the *result*, but not with its *consequences*¹⁸. The spiral of confrontational communication has left a legacy of division and resentment in some parts of the community. Moreover, it has also given primacy to a particular set of communication patterns that may damage the community's ability to engage collaboratively around other public issues.

Communication understood as a mere instrument produces *results* that may satisfy, or not, the citizens involved. In contrast, communication understood as a relational

process has *consequences* in terms of interpersonal relationships and social capital. That is, it has a direct impact on the 'communicative capacity'¹⁹ that underpins the development of communities of place, interest, and practice. In participatory policy-making, as Fischer reminds us, the goal is not only to arrive at a workable decision, but also to find a workable decision that holds the community together. Furthermore, in the context of our emphasis on the relational dimension of communication, 'the effective ... decision is the one that preserves or even improves the capacity to make future decisions.'²⁰

There are numerous arguments to criticise the instrumental 'transmission model' of communication that is so pervasive in our public sphere. By focussing on the individual, says Penman, it disregards the notion of community; by focussing on the end effect, it ignores the means; and by presuming the possibility of one-sided certainty, it prevents the 'open-ended creativity of communication.'²¹

Understanding the patterns of communication at play in a particular context can be a powerful tool for public engagement practitioners. It provides opportunities to intervene: for instance, in our case study, when the local authorities decided to go ahead with a traditional top-down method of consultation, they provided a stage for the performance of a specific set of communication patterns. Had they

understood the patterns that were invited and reinforced by this early decision, they could have tried to alter them by creating genuine participatory spaces where new patterns could be fostered.

There are few such critical moments in any policy-related public engagement process, but as we have noted before, once formed, patterns of communication 'invite others like them and resist those that differ'²². They create a context that narrows the scope for other forms of interaction. To put it bluntly, a pattern of communication that consists of 'shouting and name-calling is very effective in producing polarised conflict'²³, but not for enabling a deeper understanding of the issues at stake, let alone building relationships or community resilience.

Communication patterns can create, maintain, or destroy. They shape selves and social worlds. The concept can be useful because it helps us to see social problems as *made*, not *found*. Many problematic situations are constructed and maintained through certain patterns of communication, and thus they can be seen as fluid and evolving, rather than fixed and static. This means that we can try to change them by altering unproductive patterns and experimenting with new ones²⁴. Accordingly, patterns of communication are not simply given, but made, and are thus changeable.

¹⁷ Innes, J. E. & Booher, D. E. (2000) *Public participation in planning. New strategies for the 21st century*, Berkeley, CA: University of California, Institute of Urban and Regional Development.

¹⁸ Remarks made during one of the focus groups held at QMU's Dialogue Forum in June 2009.

¹⁹ Bartels, K.P.R. (2012 forthcoming) *Communicative Capacity: How Public Encounters Affect the Quality of Participatory Democracy*. PhD Thesis. Glasgow: University of Glasgow.

²⁰ P. 160 in Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹ P.5 in Penman, R. (2000) *Reconstructing communicating: looking to a future*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

²² P. 159 in Pearce, W. B. (2007) *Making social worlds*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

²³ P. 48 in Spano, S. J. (2001) *Public dialogue and participatory democracy*. The Cupertino Community Project, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

²⁴ For an in-depth case study of this approach to communication see: *Ibid*.

3.3 Communication rituals: the quality of public conversations

I hardly ever meet a public engagement practitioner who is not concerned about the poor quality of discussions in some public forums. Their work is often challenged by environments characterised by communication rituals that leave little room for new ways of interacting. It is not only a matter of difficult contexts. Often,

they work for organisations whose use of public engagement actually reinforces the poor quality of public debate. In sum, these practitioners find themselves in the predicament of trying to foster meaningful engagement against a tide of deeply rooted communication patterns and rituals.

Communication is so central to our lives that we take it for granted. Some assume that if we manage to get the 'right people' in the room, meaningful dialogue will simply happen. Obviously, that is not necessarily the case, especially when a process is truly inclusive and brings together a range of perspectives. I outline some of the usual rituals and pitfalls in Table 2.

Table 2 – Communication rituals and pitfalls in public forums

<i>Exchanging monologues</i>	Sometimes discussions are characterised by one-way communication: participants talk at each other, rather than with each other. Each participant makes points that no one really engages with. They may have had a meeting, but arguably, they have not really met. In these conversations there are plenty of speakers, but very few listeners. As a result, there is very little mutual learning involved, although participants may actually improve their skill at performing monologues.
<i>Pre-packaged arguments</i>	Monologues are usually full of pre-packaged arguments. They are repetitions of already known and well-rehearsed points. Pre-packaged arguments are often sharpened for rhetorical impact, and thus leave little room to explore uncertainty, complexity, or grey areas. This narrows down the scope of the conversation. As a result, participants find themselves listening to familiar arguments that invite them to enact familiar responses. In other words, pre-packaged arguments call for other pre-packaged arguments, and thus prevent the opening of spaces for new perspectives and ideas. This sort of hyper-rehearsed communication causes conversations to frequently become predictable, frustrating, patronising, simplistic, or superficial.
<i>Dominant voices</i>	Interpersonal communication involves various dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Even if a process is highly inclusive, even if there are a range of perspectives in the room, exclusion can be enacted by means of certain communication dynamics. This is particularly clear in the case of individuals whose voices become dominant. They are often good at performing monologues, they are articulate and confident, they command a particular authority, etc. As they take over the conversation, alternative voices and forms of expression are excluded.
<i>Posturing</i>	The possibility of a meaningful meeting is sometimes hindered by our need to forcefully present our positions, our perspectives, and ourselves ²⁵ . Surely, to engage in meaningful conversations we must make our 'selves' known to others. But there is a fine line between presenting ourselves and showing off. Perhaps the balance is in making ourselves known to others in ways that don't prevent others from wanting to become known to us. Unfortunately, 'peacocking' dynamics often invite subsequent monologues and the exchange of pre-packaged messages. This is perhaps because once we put so much emphasis on our 'selves', we have little choice but to enact them forcefully.
<i>Specialised jargon</i>	We are so immersed in our social worlds (organisations, disciplines, professions) that we often don't realise our use of highly specialised language. At best, we use jargon unwittingly. At worst, we use it as an instrument of power. It becomes a marker of our status, expertise, or authority. It helps us to establish zones of exclusion (untouchable areas) in the conversation, and to justify our monologues, pre-packaged messages, and dominant voices.
<i>Avoidance</i>	It is difficult to create spaces where participants feel safe to share, not only arguments and convictions, but also feelings and uncertainties. In general, we find it hard to publicly explore sensitive issues and differences. Too often, talking about these differences is felt to be 'so fraught with danger and so personally threatening that people simply avoid talking about them at all.' ²⁶

²⁵ See the seminal work by Goffman, E. (1971) *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Middlesex: Pelican Books.

²⁶ P.48 in Spano, S.J. (2001) *Public dialogue and participatory democracy*. The Cupertino Community Project, New Jersey: Hampton Press.



<p><i>Polarisation and oversimplification</i></p>	<p>The cliché that there are 'two sides' to every issue is not only simplistic, but also potentially dangerous. As soon as we take it as a given, we forget about the spectrum of colours that lie between the poles. Those who approach every issue with a bipolar frame of mind tend to press others to readily take positions. This is not necessarily the best way to collectively make sense of a complex issue. Absolute certainty and oversimplification seldom help in seeking to understand complex problems.</p>
<p><i>Confrontational exchanges</i></p>	<p>Let us make a distinction between conflict, and confrontation (in the context of public forums). Conflict is a critical component of our democracies. If conflict and differences are silenced, democracy cannot thrive. However, confrontational communication is a different matter. Somewhat paradoxically, confrontational exchanges prevent us from collectively exploring and understanding conflict and difference.</p>
<p><i>Tokenism</i></p>	<p>Citizens often see participatory processes, especially in policy arenas, as tokenistic. Lack of clarity about the purpose of the process often increases cynicism, or consultation fatigue. Moreover, the frustration of feeling that the engagement is tokenistic invites the kind of ritualised communication illustrated in this table. Very often, these spaces become ideal for symbolic public venting. That is, of course, legitimate and often necessary, but when this is repeated over time it hinders in-depth exploration and collective learning. All in all, tokenistic uses of public forums create a vicious circle. They frustrate participants and encourage ritualised communication, which eventually puts people off from participating.</p>

Sometimes we are sceptical about public forums. It's 'just talk', some say. They forget that most of what we do is done by talking. Forgetting that social reality is built through interaction distracts us from paying attention to the quality of communication, and certain habits and rituals can become invisible to us. When we take those rituals as given, rather than made, we may come to see them as unchangeable.

In some occasions, the first task of a dialogic facilitator is to assist participants in making those rituals visible by naming them. Naming and exploring a communication ritual that has hindered past encounters invites participants to consider new ways of engaging. This makes the group aware that the quality of the meeting is a shared responsibility, and that they will have to work together to make it meaningful.

Communication in public forums can become ritualised and shallow, not only because certain communication patterns are repeated, but also because only like-minded participants engage. We often avoid engaging in dialogue and deliberation with those who think too differently from us, mostly because we dread the possibility of confrontation²⁷. Thus, many of us are happy to join a group, charity or NGO where we can meet like-minded people, but avoid participating in a public forum where the same issues are discussed from discrepant perspectives. This reduces opportunities to meet *the other*, and instead of listening to others in their own terms, we create images of them based on our own projections of *otherness*.

This relates to the point on *avoidance* made in Table 2. There are many reasons why people with different or opposed views do not often attend the same public forums, or

participate at all. A key factor is that public forums can become rhetorical battlefields, and interaction may actually further alienate and polarise participants. The *purpose of participation* (what gets done) really matters, and most people agree on this. But we often overlook that the *experience of participating* (what gets made) is also critical, especially if we are concerned with developing cultures of public engagement.

Of all the ritualised pitfalls outlined in this section, I have chosen to dedicate a section to confrontational patterns of communication for three reasons. First, this is one of the key challenges faced by PE practitioners. Second, confrontational communication prevents us from exploring issues deeply, meaningfully, and in new ways. Finally, it puts many people off from participating, which leads to the detriment of inclusivity, collective learning, and collaborative problem solving.

²⁷ Mutz, D. C. (2006) *Hearing the other side: deliberative versus participatory democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3 Communication: The making of social worlds

3.3.1 Confrontational communication in the public sphere

Some time ago, a colleague rejected the idea that confrontational communication is as common as suggested in much of the dialogue literature. I suggested that he should attend town hall meetings, planning consultations, or plenary sessions at the Scottish or Westminster Parliaments. I encouraged him to speak, for example, to those Scottish community councillors who love to engage with local issues, but dread the confrontational dynamics that so often unfold. I suggested that he talk to PE practitioners who work on issues of controversial science and technology and fear the repetition of previous public battles.

PE practitioners know very well that the processes they organise do not only hinge

on being genuine (rather than tokenistic), but also on the quality of communication that dominates the contexts where they take place. Sometimes, as Hajer argues, 'it is not so much participation itself that is the problem but the very conditions under which the exchange of ideas has to take place.'²⁸

Here I find it useful to differentiate between conflict and confrontation in the context of public forums. In my view, while conflict is an indispensable part of democratic life, confrontation is not, or at least not always. Confrontational communication prevents conversations from developing, and therefore hinders mutual learning, fosters shallow exchanges, accentuates polarisation, and leaves the issues underexplored.

However, avoiding confrontational dynamics does not mean overlooking conflict. Instead, it means taking conflict not as a point of arrival, but as a point of departure. This means that in dialogue practice, as we will later see, we try to frame conflictive issues not as stumbling blocks or no-go zones, but as areas that require further exploration through collaborative investigation. This is what differentiates meaningful dialogue from rehearsed monologues and ritualised exchanges.

In Table 3, PE practitioners Chasin and Herzig identify some of the typical dynamics in situations of entrenched conflict.

Table 3 – Behaviour patterns in chronic conflict. Source: Chasin and Herzig (1994)²⁹

1. People on one side do not listen to those on the other side.
2. Questions posed by one side to the other side tend to be rhetorical and often are designed to reveal suspected inconsistencies or ulterior motives on the part of the side being questioned.
3. Members of an opposing alliance are seen as being all alike. The most extreme leaders of the opposition are assumed to be representative of the entire group.
4. Within each alliance, members de-emphasize differences among themselves, especially in the presence of an adversary. This behaviour tends to reinforce the other side's perception that their opponents are all alike.
5. Those who join neither side are viewed as suspect by both sides.
6. Blaming the adversary is common. Taking responsibility for problems is uncommon.
7. Mind reading of the other side is common; genuine curiosity about what they really believe is rare.
8. Fixed opinions about the other side are common. Open-mindedness is uncommon.
9. Statements made by the other side that indicate openness to conciliation are seen as propaganda ploys or as revealing logical inconsistency.
10. Fixed and simple convictions are openly displayed. Complexity, ambivalence, confusion, and inner conflict are concealed.
11. Adversarial parties to a stalemated controversy tend to think that it is valuable to persist in the struggle, even though people who are outside the controversy may tell them that the persistence of the deadlock may well be more destructive than almost any alternative outcome.

²⁸ P. 625 in Hajer, M. A. (2005) Setting the stage - A dramaturgy of policy deliberation. *Administration & Society*, 36(6), 624–647.

²⁹ Chasin, R. & Herzig, M. (1994) Creating systemic interventions for the sociopolitical arena. In: BERGER-GOULD, B. & DEMUTH, D. (eds.) *The global family therapist: Integrating the personal, professional, and political*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, Access online: www.publicconversations.org/resources/creating-systemic-interventions-sociopolitical-arena.



Tannen argues that a considerable part of communication in public forums is characterised by what she calls 'the argument culture', which 'urges us to approach the world – and the people in it – in an adversarial frame of mind. It rests on the assumption that opposition is the best way to get anything done: The best way to discuss an idea is to set up a debate; the best way to cover news is to find spokespeople who express the most extreme, polarized views and present them as both sides; the best way to settle disputes is litigation that pits one party against the other; the best way to begin an essay is to attack someone; and the best way to show you're really thinking is to criticize.'³⁰

Her criticism does not deny that social reality is conflictive. Instead, it suggests that confrontational communication can be counterproductive and self-perpetuating. It does not allow deep engagement with the issues concerned, and it stimulates ritualised opposition that reinforces antagonism, thus preventing the collective exploration of underlying complexities. Indeed, confrontational exchanges tend to escalate, polarising participants, and relegating to oblivion the key issues under scrutiny. In other words, the argument culture impedes dialogic conversations, and creates the perfect stage for the performance of entrenched monologues.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that adversarial debate has always played a critical role in our societies. The best example is perhaps that of social movements and struggles for social justice. Furthermore, some consider agonistic politics to be at the heart of any truly democratic system³¹. What some communication scholars and practitioners criticise, however, is the notion that polarised debate – based on confrontational patterns of communication – is the best way to engage with every organisational, social, and political issue. Such dynamics, they argue,

seem ill suited in a social world shaped by competing voices, discourses, worldviews, and truths in constant renegotiation³².

Accordingly, there is a contradiction between the existence of a diversity of voices in our societies, and the bipolar frame of mind in which we readily take a position around certain emerging issues. There is a long list of public issues where adversarial debate does not enable us to engage in meaningful conversations, e.g.: abortion, euthanasia, security and civic liberties, gay and lesbian rights, biotechnology, and multiculturalism, to name but a few obvious examples. In most situations there are multiple legitimate perspectives, although multiple voices are rarely heard or even articulated, and collective learning across divides seldom happens.

All in all, what I am criticising here is not debate and argumentation per se, but the context of 'blind opposition' where they often take place³³. Or, as Tannen puts it, the problem is using opposition 'to accomplish every goal', even those which might be accomplished by 'other means, such as exploring, expanding, discussing, investigating, and the exchanging of ideas suggested by the word "dialogue"'. I am questioning the assumption that *everything* is a matter of polarized opposites, the proverbial "two sides to every question" that we think embodies open-mindedness and expansive thinking³⁴. Criticism, difference, and conflict, as we will see, are at the heart of genuine dialogue. The difference, however, is that they are engaged in the context of a safe space where participants strive towards reciprocal exploration, instead of ritualised communication.

Some communication rituals, and in particular confrontational interaction, seem to serve well the purposes of those media outlets that foster the 'society of the spectacle'³⁵. Dialogue philosopher Buber argued that the quality of contact needed for dialogic communication

was unlikely in *mediatised* contexts.³⁶ When political, financial, or media elites participate in conversations in front of an audience, communication is usually rendered to its dramatic functions. Indeed, it is not as much about talking as it is about performing certain rituals (posturing, persuading, scoring). In those situations we usually find that:

- positions are strategically closed,
- interaction is highly rehearsed,
- contents and messages are pre-packaged, and targeted to specific audiences,
- and instrumental certainty excludes hesitation (grey areas), genuine curiosity, and reciprocal exploration.

In the face of these dynamics, the possibility of engaging in dialogue fades away, giving place to a succession of more or less interrelated monologues. A monologue, according to Freire, is 'an oppressive pronouncement about what is True and Right that does not invite, or even tolerate, response.'³⁷ In monologic communication³⁸, people, ideas, arguments and differences never really meet. They float in separate spaces without being put to work towards engaging with the situation at hand. The possibility of a meeting space, the *in-between* that characterises dialogue³⁹, is not realised. In that sense, confrontational communication is a way of avoiding dealing with conflict, and thus it reinforces and perpetuates it.

Despite the prevalence of certain communication rituals, this booklet is premised on the belief that we can foster alternative ways of engaging in public forums. Accordingly, in the forthcoming sections, I draw on dialogue and deliberation practitioners and scholars to propose a framework to understand and foster dialogic communication.

³⁰ P.5 in Tannen, D. (1998) *The argument culture. Changing the way we argue and debate*, London:Virago Press.

³¹ Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001) *Hegemony and socialist strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics*, London and New York:Verso.

³² Hyde, B. & Bineham, J. L. (2000) From debate to dialogue: toward a pedagogy of nonpolarized public discourse. *Southern Communication Journal*, 65, 208–223.

³³ P.211 in *Ibid*.

³⁴ P. 10 in Tannen, D. (1998) *The argument culture. Changing the way we argue and debate*, London:Virago Press.

³⁵ Debord, G. (1994) *The society of the spectacle*, New York: Zone Books.

³⁶ P. 108–109 in Cissna, K. & Anderson, R. (2002) *Moments of meeting. Buber, Rogers, and the potential for public dialogue*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

³⁷ P.93 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

³⁸ For remarks on the monologic character of persuasion see p. 37 in Heidlebaugh, N. J. (2008) Invention and public dialogue: lessons from rhetorical theories. *Communication Theory*, 18, 27–50.

³⁹ Buber, M. (2002/1947) *Dialogue. In: BUBER, M. (ed.) Between man and man*. London; New York: Routledge.

Many use the term 'dialogue' to refer to any kind of spoken interaction. Others argue that we should call that 'conversation', and preserve the term 'dialogue' for situations in which it does more interesting work.

Dialogue, from the perspective taken here, is a special kind of communicative relationship; the kind of relationship which broadens worldviews, reshapes perspectives, and speaks to both our cognitive and emotional capacities for mutual engagement. Penman defines communication as 'the observable part of a relationship'⁴⁰. In this sense, dialogue entails certain communication patterns that, as we will see, require considerable relational work.

Box 3 – Quotes on dialogue

'Dialogue implies more than a simple back-and-forthness of messages in interaction; it points to a particular process and quality of communication in which the participants "meet", which allows for changing and being changed. In dialogue, we do not know exactly what we are going to say, and we can surprise not only the other but even ourselves.' (Anderson *et al.* 1994, p. 10)

'In dialogue... a person may prefer a certain position but does not hold it non-negotiably. He or she is ready to listen to others with sufficient sympathy and interest to understand the meaning of the other's position properly and is also ready to change his or her own point of view if there is good reason to do so ... The spirit of dialogue is, in short, the ability to hold many points of view in suspension, along with a primary interest in the creation of common meaning.' (Bohm and Peat 1991, quoted in Burbules 1993, p. 19)

'There is genuine dialogue ... where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others ... and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation ... There is technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding. And there is monologue disguised as dialogue, in which two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources.' (Buber 2002/1947, p. 22)

'Dialogue is a dimension of communication quality that keeps communicators more focussed on mutuality and relationship than on self-interest, more concerned with discovering than disclosing, more interested in access than in domination.' (Anderson *et al.* 1994, p. 2)

'(a) Dialogue is a form of communication with specific 'rules' that distinguish it from other forms. (b) Among the effects of these rules are communication patterns that enable people to speak so that others can and will listen, and to listen so that others can and will speak. (c) Participating in this form of communication requires a set of abilities, the most important of which is remaining in the tension between holding your own perspective, being profoundly open to others who are unlike you, and enabling others to act similarly. (d) These abilities are learnable, teachable, and contagious. ... (f) Skilled facilitators can construct contexts ... so that participants are enabled to engage in dialogue.' (Pearce and Pearce 2000a, p. 162)

⁴⁰ P. 1 in Penman, R. (2000) *Reconstructing communicating: looking to a future*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁴¹ Buber, M. (2004) *I and thou*, London: Continuum.

⁴² Gadamer, H.-G. (1982) *Truth and method*, London: Sheed & Ward.

⁴³ Bakhtin, M. M. & Holquist, M. (1981) *The dialogic imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

⁴⁴ Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, London: Penguin Books.

⁴⁵ Buber, M., Rogers, C. R., Anderson, R. & Cissna, K. N. (1997) *The Martin Buber-Carl Rogers dialogue: a new transcript with commentary*, Albany: State University of New York Press. AND Cissna, K. & Anderson, R. (2002) *Moments of meeting: Buber, Rogers, and the potential for public dialogue*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

⁴⁶ Bohm, D. (2004) *On dialogue*, London and New York: Routledge Classics.



Table 4 – Key thinkers and ideas

Most dialogue scholars and practitioners build on the work of philosophers Martin Buber⁴¹ and Hans-Georg Gadamer⁴², Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin⁴³, South-American educator Paulo Freire⁴⁴, American psychologist Carl Rogers⁴⁵, and quantum physicist David Bohm⁴⁶

Bakhtin: The nature of human life is dialogic (relational). Our selves and social worlds are made up of multiple voices that constantly shape each other.

Buber: Dialogue is a special type of human relationship that requires high quality contact.

Gadamer: Knowledge is co-created in conversation. In dialogue, the exchange of ideas is mutually transformative and enhances understanding of selves and others.

Freire: Dialogue is an educational process that involves transformational learning oriented towards socio-political empowerment.

Bohm: Collective intelligence is the antidote to social fragmentation. Dialogue helps participants to become aware of implicit knowledge and ways of thinking, and enables the co-creation of shared meaning.

Rogers: Dialogue requires unconditional positive regard of the other.



4.1 Dialogue traditions: a format, a process, or a philosophy?

Dialogue is often used in ordinary language as a synonym of conversation, and the concept is usually overstretched and abused in public and organisational contexts. In 2009, the Centre for Dialogue at Queen Margaret University held a Dialogue Forum in which communication practitioners, academics, and organisational leaders met to talk about dialogue in Scotland⁴⁷. At that forum, various participants posed a very useful question. Is dialogue a philosophy, a process, or an event? Depending on what tradition we follow, communication scholarship tells us that dialogue can be all of them. I will examine each of these in turn.

For some, dialogue is a particular type of episodic event that is facilitated through a series of systematic steps, following a specific set of rules⁴⁸. In this view, dialogue refers to a format (or 'safe space') where people usually sit in a circle and engage in structured dynamics of mutual inquiry assisted by a facilitator. For these practitioners, 'doing dialogue' is characterised by the avoidance of confrontational speech, the suspension of taken-for-granted assumptions, and the search for common ground.

For others, dialogue is a process that may involve a variety of formats (including the one in the previous paragraph). For example, the Cupertino Community Project⁴⁹ was a multiyear process where citizens were trained as facilitators. A diverse range of

participatory activities took place in schools, universities, and local venues, enabling a multi-sited process of collective reflection on the challenges faced by this multicultural community. Accordingly, these practitioners talk about 'fostering dialogic communication' through various means and spaces, rather than 'doing dialogue' according to a particular format. For them, the defining characteristic of dialogic communication is the ability to navigate the tension 'between standing your own ground and being profoundly open to the other'⁵⁰.

We can also understand dialogue in philosophical terms. Two classic authors from the early 20th century have had a major influence here: Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin⁵¹ and Jewish philosopher Martin Buber⁵². Bakhtin understood dialogue as a defining quality of humanity, and thus 'dialogic' refers to 'the irreducibly social, relational, or interactional character of all human meaning-making'⁵³.

Bakhtin saw human life as intrinsically dialogic, that is, as shaped by the many language-mediated relationships that constitute our social worlds. He taught us to pay attention to the many voices implicit in texts, and to see how every text, in turn, responds to previous texts and their multiple voices⁵⁴. His teachings have transcended literary theory, inspiring the interpretation of other social phenomena (e.g. organisations) as textual

constructions made of multiple voices. Communication, from this perspective, is a collective process in which we endlessly re-describe the world. He expressed this beautifully when he wrote that, 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.'⁵⁵

In contrast, for Buber, dialogue refers to a special kind of contact. He understood human interaction as characterised by two primary types of relationships. The first one, *I-It*, is instrumental and strategic: 'many interpersonal relations are really characterised by one person's treating the other as an object to be known and used'⁵⁶. The second, *I-Thou*, is a state of mutual recognition, openness and responsiveness. Here, dialogic communication unfolds in moments of high quality contact between persons who recognize and accept each other's uniqueness. It involves forging a partnership of authenticity beyond the realm of appearances: 'people must communicate themselves to others as they really are.'⁵⁷ Buber thought that it was not legitimate for him to intend to change 'the other' unless he was opened to be changed by the other as well. Political thinkers such as Arendt have built on the *I-It / I-Thou* distinction to emphasise the importance of citizens speaking to one another as 'who' and not 'what' they are, and therefore to create an 'in-between' amongst themselves.⁵⁸

⁴⁷ Escobar, O. (2010a) *Dialogue in Scotland? A conversation with communication practitioners*. QMU Centre for Dialogue, Working Paper 2. Edinburgh: Queen Margaret University.

⁴⁸ See for instance Yankelovich, D. (1999) *The magic of dialogue: transforming conflict into cooperation*, London: Nicholas Brealey, AND Ellinor, L. & Gerard, G. (1998) *Dialogue: Rediscover the transforming power of conversation*, New York: John Wiley & Sons. AND Dixon, N. M. (1998) *Dialogue at work*, London: Lemos & Crane.

⁴⁹ Spano, S. J. (2001) *Public dialogue and participatory democracy. The Cupertino Community Project*, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

⁵⁰ P. 46 in Pearce, W. & Pearce, K. (2004) Taking a communication perspective on dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. A. & CISSNA, K. N. (eds.) *Dialogue: theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

⁵¹ Bakhtin, M. M. & Holquist, M. (1981) *The dialogic imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

⁵² Buber, M. (2004) *I and thou*, London: Continuum. AND Buber, M., Rogers, C. R., Anderson, R. & Cissna, K. N. (1997) *The Martin Buber-Carl Rogers dialogue: a new transcript with commentary*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

⁵³ P. 225 Stewart, J. & Zediker, K. E. (2000) Dialogue as tensional, ethical practice. *Southern Communication Journal*, 65, 224–242.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁵⁵ P. 293 in Bakhtin, M. M. & Holquist, M. (1981) *The dialogic imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

⁵⁶ M.S. Friedman quoted in p. 50 in Cissna, K. & Anderson, R. (2002) *Moments of meeting: Buber, Rogers, and the potential for public dialogue*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

⁵⁷ P. 53 in Ibid.

⁵⁸ P. 182 in Arendt, H. (1958) *The human condition*, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.



The work of these philosophers has inspired two different approaches to dialogue in communication studies⁵⁹. One is descriptive; it tells us how the world is (focus on epistemology). The other is prescriptive; it tells us how the world should be (focus on ethics). As we have seen above, for Bakhtin, the term 'dialogic' is descriptive of the relational nature of the world. In contrast, for Buber, dialogue is prescribed as a communicative ideal achieved through principled practices that foster a special kind of contact.⁶⁰

All in all, the categorisation made in this section (format, process, philosophy) does not do justice to the vast terrain of dialogue scholarship and practice. An example of a practitioner whose influential work has cut across these three categories is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire⁶¹. For him, dialogue entails egalitarian engagement oriented towards the pursuit of social justice through transformational learning. In that sense,

it is a process of empowerment of the disenfranchised, through dynamics that subvert traditional hierarchies of knowledge and social class. Freire saw dialogue as the educational process of collectively 'naming the world'⁶². He shared the pragmatists' emphasis on critical inquiry, collective sense-making, and problem-solving⁶³, and put them to work towards the creation of community pathways towards emancipation.

Table 5 – Roots and meanings⁶⁴

DEBATE	DE = 'down', 'completely' BATRE = 'to beat' DEBATE = 'to fight'; 'to resolve by beating down' ⁶⁵
DISCUSSION	DIS = 'apart' QUATERE = 'to shake' DISCUSSION = 'to shake apart'; 'to break apart' ⁶⁶ Same roots as 'concussion' and 'percussion'. ⁶⁷
CONVERSATION	COM = 'with' VERTARE = 'to turn' CONVERSATIO = 'turn about with', 'keep company with', 'act of living with'; 'having dealings with others'; 'manner of conducting oneself in the world.'
DIALOGUE	DIA = 'through', 'between', 'across' LOGOS = 'word', 'speech', 'meaning', 'reason', 'to gather together' ⁶⁸ DIALOGUE = 'flow of meaning' ⁶⁹ ; 'meaning flowing through'; 'relationship' ⁷⁰
DELIBERATION	DE = 'entirely', 'completely' LIBRARE = 'to balance, weigh' (from libra: 'scale') DELIBERARE = 'weigh, consider well'

⁵⁹ Stewart, J., Zediker, K. E. & Black, L. (2004) Relationships among philosophies of dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. A. & CISSNA, K. N. (eds.) *Dialogue. Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁶⁰ P.227 in Deetz, S. & Simpson, J. (2004) Critical organizational dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. & CISSNA, K. (eds.) *Dialogue. Theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

⁶¹ Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, London: Penguin Books.

⁶² P.70 Ibid.

⁶³ See pp. 234–236 in Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁴ Based on entries from <http://www.etymonline.com> [Accessed in July 2011] unless stated otherwise.

⁶⁵ P.41 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

⁶⁶ P.3 in Buber, M. (2002/1947) *Dialogue*. In: BUBER, M. (ed.) *Between man and man*. London; New York: Routledge.

⁶⁷ P.6–7 in Bohm, D. (2004) *On dialogue*, London and New York: Routledge Classics.

⁶⁸ P.19 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

⁶⁹ See Bohm, D. (2004) *On dialogue*, London and New York: Routledge Classics. AND Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

⁷⁰ P.19 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

4.2 Defining dialogue

Dialogue studies have proliferated over the last half-century, with a remarkable boom in the 1990s. The discipline is rich in internal debates, offering a wide range of different – sometimes opposing – approaches. For the purpose of this booklet, I have chosen to bypass the complexity of those debates, and instead will draw on various perspectives to propose a working definition.

Accordingly, *dialogue* is a form of communication oriented towards building understanding and relationships. As a process, it is often facilitated through specific formats and norms of engagement that seek to create safe spaces for collaborative inquiry. In the same vein, *dialogic communication* refers to interpersonal communication that is mutually responsive, free flowing, open-ended, and oriented to the exploration and co-creation of meanings.

Whereas dialogue formats aim to create spaces that enable dialogic communication, the latter does not necessarily require the former. That is to state the obvious: dialogic communication is not exclusive to dialogue formats. For instance, it can unfold in an intimate conversation, or in the midst of a difficult decision-making process. That is why sometimes it is better to think of dialogue as a temporary accomplishment: an interpersonal connection nurtured by 'dialogic moments.'⁷¹

Dialogue implies a quality of meeting that seems difficult to achieve in public forums. However, dialogue is not an unfamiliar practice in the context of human evolution⁷². Furthermore, we all have experienced conversations that on some level (intellectual, personal, moral, emotional) have changed the way we see things by broadening our perspectives, or even shifting our viewpoints.

As a form of communication that focuses on the quality of contact amongst participants, dialogue emphasizes collaborative engagement. However, dialogue also embraces difference and conflict, as long as it is mediated by communication patterns which allow shared investigation of their nature and implications.

It is common amongst dialogue practitioners to offer comparisons between dialogue and debate in order to highlight the different dynamics and mindsets involved. Despite the stereotypical tone of these comparisons, they do help us to grasp the different orientation that both forms of communication demand from facilitators and participants. Table 6 summarises some of the contrasts that are usually emphasised.

Table 6 – Dialogue versus Debate

Adapted from the Public Conversations Project⁷³, the Co-intelligence Institute⁷⁴, Yankelovich (1999)⁷⁵, Littlejohn & Domenici (2001)⁷⁶, Isaacs (1999)⁷⁷, and Ellinor & Gerard (1998)⁷⁸

DIALOGUE	DEBATE
Dialogue is collaborative: participants work together towards shared understanding of issues and perspectives	Debate is oppositional: various sides oppose each other and try to prove each other wrong
Participants speak to each other	Participants speak to their own constituencies and the undecided middle
The atmosphere is one of safety: facilitators implement ground rules agreed by the participants in order to enhance safe and respectful exchange	The atmosphere is threatening: attacks and interruptions are expected and usually permitted
The goal is exploring common ground and differences	The goal is winning by beating down
Participants listen to understand and gain insight into the beliefs and concerns of the others. They try to find strengths, rather than only weaknesses	Participants listen in order to refute, to find flaws, and to counter arguments

⁷¹ Cissna, K. & Anderson, R. (2002) *Moments of meeting. Buber, Rogers, and the potential for public dialogue*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

⁷² See for instance Banathy, B. H. (2002) Dialogue and human cultural evolution. In: ROBERTS, N. C. (ed.) *The transformative power of dialogue*. London: JAI, Elsevier Science.

⁷³ Pp. 139–140 in Herzig, M. & Chasin, L. 2006. *Fostering dialogue across divides. A nuts and bolts guide from the Public Conversations Project*. Watertown: Public Conversations Project. Available: <http://www.publicconversations.org/resources/guides> [Accessed 1 September 2008].

⁷⁴ <http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-dialogue.html>

⁷⁵ Yankelovich, D. (1999) *The magic of dialogue: transforming conflict into cooperation*, London: Nicholas Brealey.

⁷⁶ Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

⁷⁷ Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

⁷⁸ Ellinor, L. & Gerard, G. (1998) *Dialogue: Rediscover the transforming power of conversation*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.



Questions are asked from a position of genuine curiosity that serves the purpose of shared inquiry	Questions are asked from a position of certainty. They are often rhetorical challenges or disguised statements
Participants reveal and investigate their own and others' underlying assumptions	Participants defend their own assumptions as truth
Participants aim to learn through inquiry and disclosure	Participants aim to convince through advocacy and persuasion
Dialogue fosters an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change	Debate fosters a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right
Participants express uncertainties, as well as deeply held beliefs	Participants express unwavering commitment to a point of view, approach, or idea
Differences amongst participants on the same 'side' are revealed, as individual and personal beliefs and values are explored	Differences within 'sides' are denied or minimised
Participants share their ideas knowing that other people's reflections will help improve them rather than destroy them	Participants share their ideas and defend them against challenges in order to show that they are right
Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs	Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs
Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to avoid alienating or offending	Debate ignores feelings or relationships, and often allows belittling or deprecating
Participants are encouraged to question the dominant public discourse, to express needs that may not often be reflected in that discourse, and to explore various options for problem definition and resolution. Participants may discover inadequacies in the usual language and concepts used in public debate	Debates operate within the constraints of the dominant public discourse. That discourse defines the problem and the options for resolution. It assumes that fundamental needs and values are already clearly understood
Participants strive to overcome ritualised exchanges, allowing new information to surface	Participants' statements are predictable and offer little new information
Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view	Debate entrenches a participant's own point of view
Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can make them into a workable solution	Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it
Success requires exploration of the complexities of the issue	Success requires simple impassioned statements
Dialogue remains open-ended	Debate seeks a conclusion

4.3 Key dynamics in dialogue

Most scholars and practitioners would agree that dialogue involves certain dynamics. They are compiled in Box 4, and this section elaborates on each.

Box 4 – Key dynamics in dialogue

- Building a safe space
- Openness
- Respect
- Storytelling
- Listening
- Suspending automatic response, judgement, and certainty
- Collaborative inquiry
- Finding common ground and exploring differences
- Balancing advocacy and inquiry

Building a safe space

A safe space is one where people can speak openly, and on their own terms, about what is meaningful to them. In other words, it is an environment in which participants 'feel secure in expressing their views and hearing those of others'⁷⁹. On the one hand, a safe space allows the free flow of ideas. On the other, it helps to build trust in order to engage in critical inquiry.

A safe space is characterised by relationships that enable participants to remain engaged despite the difficulty or painfulness of the conversation. Indeed, a safe space should be able to hold participants together even through the exploration of the most divisive issues. In those cases, facilitators have a great deal to do in terms of facilitating relational and emotional work both prior to and during the dialogue process. Sometimes, agreements on confidentiality are critical to enable such a level of trust and openness.

Needless to say, there is no single recipe for creating a safe space. It obviously depends on the context of your public engagement area, including its history and dominant patterns of communication. The one thing that is common in all cases is that a safe space can only be built through the joined effort of all participants. In some occasions, this can take considerable preparation, as we will see in the chapter on facilitation.

Openness

In dialogue, participants are asked to be open to multiple voices, styles of communication, and perspectives. This is not something that comes naturally to many of us. However, in my experience, most participants in public forums are often willing to participate with an open mind as long as they are enabled to do so by others doing likewise. Hence, sometimes the role of a facilitator becomes critical. A facilitator can help participants to create a safe space where people can be open without feeling threatened.

One of the most important jobs of a facilitator is to know how to frame an invitation to dialogue. For instance, in groups with a history of animosity, the facilitator may begin by saying something like: 'We are here not to rehearse the statements that divide us, we already know them very well. Instead, we are here to see if we can learn something new about the topic and each other; something that may help us to explore the issues that we all care about in a different light.' Very often, tired of predictable exchanges, participants will welcome the invitation to participate in something that might be different.

⁷⁹ P. 61 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.



Box 5 – Reasons for being open to participate in dialogue. Excerpt from Littlejohn & Domenici (2001, pp. 47-48)⁸⁰

In the discussions on abortion sponsored by the Public Conversations Project ... participants rarely, if ever, changed their positions on this issue. But they almost universally reported that they were different as a result of the dialogue. How is this possible? What can change when you have a true dialogue with people different from yourself?

- We may learn more about our own experience and why we believe as we do.
- We may understand the position and experience of others better than we did before.
- We may discover important differences among people who take the same side on the issue.
- We may discover shared concerns and common ground among those with whom we disagree.
- We may come to respect our adversaries.
- We may come to realize that the issue is far more complex than we thought.
- We may become a little better able to live with ambiguity and fuzziness.
- We may learn new ways to frame the issue.
- We may discover new ways to talk productively about the issue.
- We may discover that old animosities and hostilities are reduced.
- We may find ways of working together despite our differences.

Respect

Sometimes respect is equated with indifference. For instance, you say something that I disagree with or don't understand, and yet I remain silent or speak without engaging your point. In dialogue, unresponsiveness and withdrawal are major pitfalls. They hinder the creation of the in-between space necessary to build understanding and relationships. Moreover, they often invite an exchange of monologues that prevent the speakers (and their worldviews) from actually meeting.

To honour the premise of *treating people like people*, as in Buber's *I-Thou* relationship mentioned earlier, is such an obvious principle, yet such a challenging practice. For instance, in public forums where strong hierarchies of knowledge are enacted, experts or scientists may find it hard to engage with points raised by non-experts. They may see them as irrelevant. They may find it difficult to engage with people whose style of communication differs from theirs. They may not accept that emotions, storytelling, and experience-based knowledge can bring equally valuable

contributions to the conversation. They may not see that scientific reasoning, cultural reasoning, and practical reasoning are all legitimate ways of knowing and talking⁸¹.

As a consequence, many PE practitioners struggle to create spaces where experts/scientists and non-experts can meet on an equal footing. Often, they end up seeing participants as obstacles to be bypassed, or as mere targets for persuasion, rather than as collaborators in a shared exploration of the issues concerned. Indeed, recent research suggests that most scientists still see public engagement according to the 'deficit model' of science communication.⁸² I will come back to this in the final chapter:

It also works the other way around. For instance, scientists are sometimes seen by laypersons as uncaring, to put it mildly. A study comparing the use of focus groups and dialogue groups in a public engagement process on human biotechnology suggested that whereas the former increased negative attitudes towards scientists, the latter increased both empathy and positive attitudes

towards them⁸³. This research concurs with what dialogue practitioners have been demonstrating for some time, namely, that dialogue processes can be very effective in overcoming stereotypes and building mutual respect.

This is not magic. Put simply: It is easy to despise a faceless stereotype, and to project that feeling onto anyone that we believe falls into that category. Once we meet 'the other' face-to-face in a dialogue format which enables listening to personal experiences and concerns, it is more difficult to ignore the feeling that the world is more complex than we initially thought. In dialogue, respect means to approach the other with genuine curiosity, and to be ready to question the taken-for-granted stereotypes that prevent us from engaging meaningfully.

Respect, therefore, is a dimension of the dialogic relationship that demands active engagement with the views and feelings of others, rather than passive open-mindedness.

⁸⁰ Pp. 47–48 in Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

⁸¹ Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁸² See for instance Besley, J. C. & Nisbet, M. (2011) How scientists view the public, the media and the political process. *Public Understanding of Science*, Published online, 30 September 2011. AND Wardlaw, J. M., O'Connell, G., Shuler, K., DeWilde, J., Haley, J., Escobar, O., Murray, S., Rae, R., Jarvie, D., Sandercock, P. & Schafer, B. (2011) Can it read my mind? What do the public and experts think of the current (mis)uses of neuroimaging? *Public Library of Science, PLoS One*, 6(10), e25829.

⁸³ P. 12 in Zorn, T. E., Roper, J., Weaver, C. K. & Rigby, C. (2010) Influence in science dialogue: Individual attitude changes as a result of dialogue between laypersons and scientists. *Public Understanding of Science*, published online 23 Nov 2010.

Storytelling

Sharing stories is at the heart of dialogue. We spend our lives telling stories, and most people have an innate ability for it. The *storytelling animals* that sat in circles around tribal fires live on, now gathering in kitchens, staff rooms, street corners, offices, cinemas, community centres, public squares, and living rooms. Storytelling has been so central to human evolution that some have argued that 'narration created humanity.'⁸⁴

We grow up learning from stories in which others bring their worlds to us. Our identities are inscribed in the myriad stories that we tell to ourselves about the world and its relation to us, and we then show our world to others by re-telling those stories. Anecdotes, examples, events, happenings, are commonplace in our daily routines. Memories,

family sagas, professional tales, neighbourhood fables, tragedies, romances, and work place stories populate the landscape of our social interaction.

Storytelling is one of the most egalitarian means of communication. Not everyone feels articulate enough to make a reasoned argument. Not everyone excels in the arts of logic and rhetoric. But most people can share what's important to them by sharing testimonies or telling stories. That is why dialogue formats prioritise narratives and storytelling over other forms of communication. Stories allow speakers to share how their values, views, and feelings are connected to their personal experiences. Stories can encapsulate complex ideas and emotions and turn them into something meaningful that can be shared.

Listening

One of the reasons dialogue can be challenging is because in many of the contexts where we live and work, ideas about good communication often emphasise speaking rather than listening. What would happen if we turned things around? We often think of a discussion as a form of engagement in which people take turns at speaking. In contrast, we can think of dialogue as a conversation in which participants take turns at listening⁸⁵. Box 6 outlines the kinds of things that good communicators listen for.

Listening in ways which empower others to speak takes a great deal of practice and discipline. To listen thoughtfully and attentively we often have to fight instincts and habits. In the next section I outline some ways of thinking about these struggles.

Box 6 – Good communicators listen for... Adapted from Littlejohn & Domenici (2001, pp. 37-38)⁸⁶

- **Lived experiences**

What life experiences is the speaker sharing? What was it like to be involved in those situations?

- **Stories told**

We are storytelling animals; sharing stories is one of our primary means of communication and sense-making⁸⁷. Stories often integrate events, happenings, characters, and morals into coherent plots. What do the stories we are hearing tell us about the perspective of the speaker?

- **Story connections**

Stories are often connected to other stories. Plot lines often merge and branch off from one another. We always understand stories in reference to other stories that we have heard. We invariably compare them: they are similar; they differ; or they are unique. What can we learn by listening for these story connections?

- **Values**

What is important to the speaker? A speaker may express an opinion or attitude, but what is the underlying value or worldview?

- **Frames**

What is the frame of reference of the speaker? What is the lens through which they see the world? What frame gives meaning to their statements? What remains out of frame?

- **Punctuation**

As we talk, we organise our experiences. For that purpose, we use commas, periods, question marks, and exclamation points. As we listen, we can learn how others organise their experiences.

⁸⁴ Janet, P. (1928) quoted in p. 115 in Certeau, M. d. (1988) *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press.

⁸⁵ P. 35 in Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See for instance Forester, J. (1999) *The Deliberative Practitioner. Encouraging participatory planning processes*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.



- **Meanings⁸⁸**

Our lives are the intersection of multiple webs of meaning. Meaning-making and interpretation is what makes us distinctively human⁸⁹. Dialogue puts a premium on sharing, exploring, and co-creating meanings. As we listen, we ask: What do certain things mean to this person? How do they understand various words and actions? How do these meanings relate to their values and worldviews?

- **Differences and levels of difference**

As you listen to others talk, what true differences emerge? When and under what circumstances are these differences important? What happens to these differences when the context shifts?

- **Common ground and levels of common ground**

What do various speakers have in common? Where do they agree? Is there any common ground even when they disagree? When and under what circumstances does this common ground occur? If you shift to another context, what happens to the common ground?

Suspending automatic response, judgement, and certainty

Dialogue scholars and practitioners often suggest that, in order to foster dialogic communication, participants must strive towards a series of temporary suspensions. Here I highlight three of these internal struggles.

Because dialogue emphasises learning, rather than persuading or resolving, it sometimes seems to work against our immediate instincts. Often, especially when we care profoundly about an issue, it becomes difficult to listen fully to a different perspective. In such cases, soon after we begin to listen, we withdraw and start to load a reflex response. For instance, when we hear something that we don't like, one of our first instincts is to listen only for those things that will become instrumental to our counterargument. It is really difficult to try to suspend or control this sort of *automatic response*. A typical exercise for those of us who struggle with this is to try to listen to our way of listening. What do I pay attention to? What immediate judgements or assumptions emerge? Are they preventing me from seeing the issue more broadly?

The second move is the *temporary suspension of judgement*. As humans, we are constantly immersed in meaning-making processes. The downside is that we can fall victim to the 'rush to interpretation'⁹⁰. This is especially

problematic if we are trying to engage in dialogue. The rush to judgement can 'threaten the fabric of a dialogical relation', turning it into interaction that is competitive instead of cooperative, and suspicious instead of trusting and respectful⁹¹. Although it can be extremely hard, we can try to suspend judgement at least until we feel we have 'grasped the point being made from the other's point of view'.⁹²

The third move is of an even higher order: *the suspension of certainty*. It entails re-examining our taken-for-granted assumptions, and loosening the grip that the feeling of certainty has on our way of engaging with those who differ from us. This move, no doubt, can make us feel really uncomfortable: we are actually trying to suspend our fundamental beliefs. Bringing assumptions into the open means exposing our own presuppositions, alongside those of others, to shared investigation. It requires us 'to become less dogmatic about the belief that the way the world appears to us is necessarily the way the world is'.⁹³ This is not an easy move.

Typically, as we hear a particular word or argument, we assign to them our own socially charged meanings. We see the world through our personal and cultural lenses. In other words, reality is not something that is simply out there, but the projection of our own way of seeing. Things are important to us not because of what they are, but because of

what they mean. And we attribute meaning to things by projecting our own learned categories onto them. Our way of seeing is open to change, often incrementally. However, because we usually equate our way of seeing with our identity, sometimes we find it hard to entertain alternative ways of seeing. Furthermore, we may come to feel that they are direct threats to our identity, to who we are, to what matters to us.

In dialogue, the focus is on understanding, and thus participants ask questions to draw out each other's thinking without worrying about whether they agree with it. Yankelovich has pointed out that 'the most striking difference between discussion and dialogue is this process of bringing assumptions into the open while simultaneously suspending judgement'.⁹⁴

Pearce has nicely summarised what's at the heart of these *suspension moves* when he wrote that our capacity to engage in dialogue hinges on 'the ability to see around the corners of one's own beliefs, to hold contradictory thoughts in awareness simultaneously without stress, to differentiate between understanding another's point of view and agreeing with it, and to acknowledge that there is something more beyond the limits of one's own ability to perceive and know'.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ For an excellent introduction to 'meaning' in the context of policy analysis see Wagenaar, H. (2011) *Meaning in action: Interpretation and dialogue in policy analysis*, New York; London: M.E. Sharpe.

⁸⁹ See Chapter 1 in Geertz, C. (1973) *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, New York: Basic Books.

⁹⁰ P.55 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹¹ P.88 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

⁹² P.40 in Ibid.

⁹³ P.42 in Ibid.

⁹⁴ P.45 in Yankelovich, D. (1999) *The magic of dialogue: transforming conflict into cooperation*, London: Nicholas Brealey.

⁹⁵ Pp. 181–182 in Pearce, W. B. (2007) *Making social worlds*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Collaborative inquiry

In dialogue, co-inquiry refers to the shared investigation of the issues that participants care about. In short, it is about mapping meanings and feelings in a joint effort towards collective learning and sense-making.

Co-inquiry thrives when a strong relationship is developed amongst participants: A relationship which is strong enough to allow them to bring ideas, values, and assumptions into the open for critical exploration. At the heart of that relationship lies the willingness of the participants to place themselves at risk by sharing uncertainty and thus becoming somewhat vulnerable.

In that sense, as Gadamer argued, dialogic inquiry involves a certain 'selflessness of the partners, that is, a freedom from purely rhetorical intentions of persuasion, a mutual readiness to place at risk the fundamental prejudices of taken-for-granted truths'. Accordingly, dialogue entails 'a movement

toward a fusion of horizons between reciprocally self-effacing participants who "risk" inherited prejudices within a common interrogative orientation toward the truth.⁹⁶

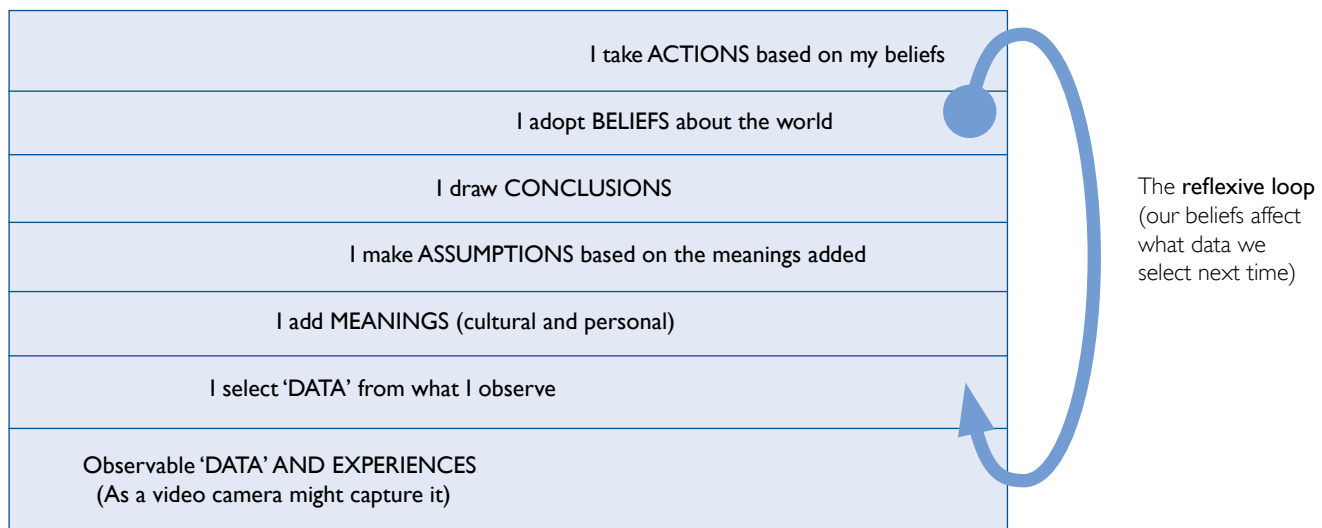
In co-inquiry, participants share ideas, concerns and stories that help them to examine experiences which underpin their worldviews. This shared investigation 'allows communicators to become aware of the different ways in which individuals interpret and give meaning to similar experiences.'⁹⁷ The work of Argyris may help us to illustrate this point. He investigated how action-oriented meaning-making processes take place. For this purpose, he proposed a heuristic tool called the 'Ladder of Inference'⁹⁸ (see Table 7).

The ladder is a metaphor which breaks down brain processes that in reality are extremely fast. Indeed, we are geared to move swiftly from observing an event to interpreting it. This serves us well in our daily lives, as our cognitive and emotional systems

work in synergy⁹⁹ to save us the endless repetition of certain mental processes when we face similar situations¹⁰⁰. The downside is that climbing the ladder too fast can be counterproductive in a dialogue process. As we hear someone making a point, we quickly integrate what we are hearing within our pre-existing categories, which may prevent new categories (or perspectives) from capturing our imagination.

The tool offers a way of imagining how we might go back down the ladder in order to understand what experiences, meanings and assumptions underpin our beliefs and actions. The ladder is a tool for self-reflection and shared investigation, and can be especially useful to explore ways in which conflicts take shape and escalate, how stereotypes are formed, and how similar experiences can produce completely different interpretations. We may be surprised when we try to follow the trail of how we arrived at a particular way of thinking.

Table 7 – Chris Argyris' Ladder of Inference. Source: Senge (1994, p. 243)¹⁰¹



⁹⁶ Commentary on Gadamer by Crowell (1990), quoted in pp. 37-38 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

⁹⁷ Broome, B. J. 2009. 'Dialogue theories', in *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Sage Publications. Available: <http://www.sage-ereference.com/abstract/communicationtheory/n111.xml> [Accessed 12 April 2010].

⁹⁸ Argyris, C. (1982) *Reasoning, learning, and action*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁹⁹ P. 110 in Escobar, O. (2011b) Suspending disbelief: Obama and the role of emotions in political communication. In: ENGELKEN-JORGE, M., IBARRA GÜELL, P. & MORENO DEL RÍO, C. (eds.) *Politics and Emotions: The Obama Phenomenon*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

¹⁰⁰ P. 105 in Marcus, G. E. (2002) *The sentimental citizen: Emotion in democratic politics*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

¹⁰¹ Senge, P. M., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B. & Smith, B. J. (1994) *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organisation*, London: N. Brealey.



One of the biggest challenges in co-inquiry is to create a shared language between participants. Without it, conversations can go astray and become frustrating. This is why the initial phase of a dialogue process is sometimes dedicated to co-creating a shared language. This is not easy. As we saw before, language is not a neutral instrument, and thus the meanings we attach to words, concepts and arguments are closely related to our identities and worldviews. Crafting a shared language is a slow process in which participants share the difficult task of finding a working vocabulary that makes everyone feel included.

At the very start of a forum I facilitated, a participant asked a critical question: are we here to talk about 'citizen participation' or 'user involvement'? We spent the following hour unpicking the implications of each choice of words. You may think that this was a waste of time. In my view, this exploration of meanings is necessary when important social and political considerations are at stake. For instance, the term 'citizen participation' is steeped in certain traditions (i.e. republicanism, participatory democracy), and so is 'user involvement' (i.e. consumerism, management). Both imply different assumptions about levels of rights and responsibilities.¹⁰² Usually, 'citizen participation' connotes strong ideas about direct democracy and the power of citizens to make or shape decisions on public matters. In contrast, 'user involvement' often connotes a more limited role, a lesser degree

of influence, and a more managerial take on engagement.

The point is that words, concepts, and jargon all carry baggage with them. Remember Bakhtin's insight that 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.'¹⁰³ Participants in collaborative inquiry usually spend time exploring that baggage to try to agree on a working vocabulary that will allow them to move forward. This requires a clear effort to overcome the challenges posed by the specialised jargon that is often so central to our professional roles.

Co-inquiry depends on the participants' ability to pose and answer genuine questions. As Pearce puts it, in dialogue 'individuals are called to listen, inquire, understand, explain, and find ways of moving forward together. Disagreements and differences are seen as sites for mutual learning, not intellectual pugilism. The art of posing questions is valued at least as highly as that of expressing one's own opinions. The narrative forms of self-disclosure and inquiry are more highly prized than that of advocacy.'¹⁰⁴

Advocacy dynamics are typical of the decision-making stage of participatory processes. You may have noticed that so far I haven't spoken about making decisions or reaching conclusions. That is because I do not see that as the purpose of dialogue. From this perspective, decision-making is better accomplished through a process of deliberation, as we will see in the next

chapter. The purpose of dialogue is learning, exploring, and building relationships.

It is critical that dialogic inquiry is not oriented towards resolution. The word 'inquiry' comes from the Latin *inquarere*, which means to 'seek within'¹⁰⁵. As Isaacs explains, dialogic inquiry can be hindered by the dynamics that are set in motion by a decision-making mandate¹⁰⁶. In order to make a decision, participants shift the emphasis from inquiry to advocacy in order to support their preferred option. The word 'decision' comes from the Latin *decidere*, which means to 'murder the alternative.'¹⁰⁷ The need to make a decision, therefore, changes the nature of the conversation, stops the exploration of alternatives, and hinders the flow of inquiry.

That is why I join those who find it useful to distinguish between dialogue and deliberation.¹⁰⁸ Deliberation is about weighing alternatives, making informed choices, and reaching decisions or conclusions. In contrast, dialogue is about collaborative inquiry into the nature of those alternatives and choices. Therefore, dialogue does not seek completion; instead, it seeks the mapping and understanding of issues, ideas and feelings. This is more likely to be achieved when participants are not hard-pressed to choose, defend, persuade, or resolve. In Isaacs' words, dialogue is about 'evoking insight, which is a way of reordering our knowledge – particularly the taken for granted assumptions that people bring to the table.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² See Chapter 2 in Barnes, M., Newman, J. & Sullivan, H. (2007) *Power, participation and political renewal: case studies in public participation*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

¹⁰³ P. 293 in Bakhtin, M. M. & Holquist, M. (1981) *The dialogic imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

¹⁰⁴ P. 216 in Pearce, W. B. (2007) *Making social worlds*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.etymonline.com> [Accessed on July 2011]

¹⁰⁶ P. 45 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ See for example Levine, P., Fung, A. & Gastil, J. (2005) Future directions for public deliberation. In: GASTIL, J. & LEVINE, P. (eds.) *The deliberative democracy handbook: Strategies for effective civic engagement in the twenty-first century*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. AND Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁹ P. 45 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

Collaborative inquiry has a long tradition, stretching from ancient Greece¹¹⁰ to Native American societies¹¹¹, and across many other cultures. Contemporary formulations, however, stem from the work of pragmatist thinkers in the early 20th century.¹¹² For instance, Dewey wrote about the need to mobilise the collective intelligence of citizens and communities in order to deal with the social problems of our time.¹¹³

Collective intelligence, enabled through shared inquiry, seeks to transcend 'any specialised claim to expertise and is grounded in a diversity of experience' and local knowledge.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, a dialogue process can enable the formation of a 'community

of inquiry.'¹¹⁵ A community of inquiry brings together 'professional knowledge and lived experience' to form an 'interpretive community'¹¹⁶ of citizens and experts that seek a shared understanding of the issues on the basis of various forms of knowledge.

The case for collaborative inquiry is well illustrated by the Jain and Buddhist story of the blind men and the elephant (see Box 7). The story argues for collective intelligence as the means to make sense of complex and wicked social issues. In my view, it exemplifies two points that are the heart of dialogue. On the one hand, one of the premises of dialogic inquiry is the idea that all perspectives have something to offer in the search for *truth*.

In other words, all the angles are needed as everyone holds a piece of the puzzle, and that piece cannot make a difference until it is shared. I think of *truth* here, and in the rest of the booklet, as a temporary agreement in an ongoing conversation.

On the other hand, the story illustrates the importance of building a relationship amongst participants which may enable them to have a better understanding of both each other and the issues. An ethics of care and collaboration, and a safe space created through constructive patterns of communication, are thus central to dialogic inquiry.

Box 7 – The tale of the blind men and the elephant.¹¹⁷ Adapted from www.jainworld.com/education/stories25.asp

Once upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the neighbours told them, "Hey, there is an elephant in the village today."

They had no idea what an elephant was. They decided: "Even though we will not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway." Every one of them went and touched the elephant.

"Hey, the elephant is a pillar," said the first man who touched the elephant's leg.

"Oh, no! It is like a rope," said the second man who touched the tail.

"Oh, no! It is like a thick branch of a tree," said the third man who touched the trunk.

"It is like a big fan," said the fourth man who touched the ear.

"It is like a huge wall," said the fifth man who touched the belly.

"It is like a solid pipe," said the sixth man who touched the tusk.

They began to argue agitatedly about the elephant. And every one of them insisted that he was right.

¹¹⁰ See for instance Plato (2002) *Five dialogues*, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

¹¹¹ P.28–32 in Ellinor, L. & Gerard, G. (1998) *Dialogue: Rediscover the transforming power of conversation*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.

¹¹² See for instance Thayer, H. S. (ed.) (1982) *Pragmatism. The classic writings*, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

¹¹³ Dewey, J. (1927) *The public and its problems*, Denver: A. Swallow.

¹¹⁴ P.63 in Linder, S. H. (2002) Roots of dialogue. In: ROBERTS, N. C. (ed.) *The transformative power of dialogue*. Amsterdam; London: JAI.

¹¹⁵ Shields, P.M. (2003) The community of inquiry - Classical pragmatism and public administration. *Administration & Society*, 35(5), 510–538. AND Escobar, O. (2011a) Science, deliberation and policy making: The Brain Imaging Dialogue as upstream engagement. *6th Conference of the European Consortium of Political Research*. 25–27 August, University of Iceland, Reykjavik.

¹¹⁶ P.222 in Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing public policy: discursive politics and deliberative practices*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹¹⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant [Accessed on July 2011]



Finding common ground and exploring differences

These are key interrelated dynamics in dialogue processes:

- Finding common ground enables participants to build relationships and overcome stereotypes.
- Exploring, rather than overlooking differences, invites participants to

recognise and respect each other's unique perspective.

Both dynamics can create substantial learning opportunities. In sum, collaborative patterns of communication, which enable participants to navigate commonalities and differences, can bring about dialogic moments that open new understandings and possibilities. This is well known to mediation practitioners.¹¹⁸

In contrast, adversarial processes characterised by confrontational patterns of communication often fail to both find common ground and create true understanding about differences. As a consequence, participants are caught in the 'negotiator dilemma' (see Box 8), and they end up acting defensively which prevents them from inventing options that may satisfy broader shared interests.¹¹⁹

Box 8 – The negotiator's dilemma. Excerpt from Forester (2009, p. 84)¹²⁰

*I'm afraid that you will exploit me (if I disclose my interests truthfully to you), and unsurprisingly you're afraid that I'll exploit you (if you disclose your interests truthfully to me). So our righteous 'realism' and defensiveness – leading us both to withhold our real concerns – make it difficult for us to explore options to satisfy those real concerns instead of those we have just been willing to trot out. Both afraid of being exploited, we fail to make simple trades, for example, that would make us *both* better off, and so rather than finding ways to 'give in order to get' (mutual gain options), we generate only 'mutually lousy,' lose-lose compromises, if we get past the impasse at all.*

A well-known mediation practice is to look beyond positions and focus instead on interests. That means shifting the initial emphasis from pre-determined solutions to the less articulated, but crucial, dimension of needs, wishes, aspirations, concerns, obligations, and fears that actually underpin the entrenchment of positions around particular options.¹²¹

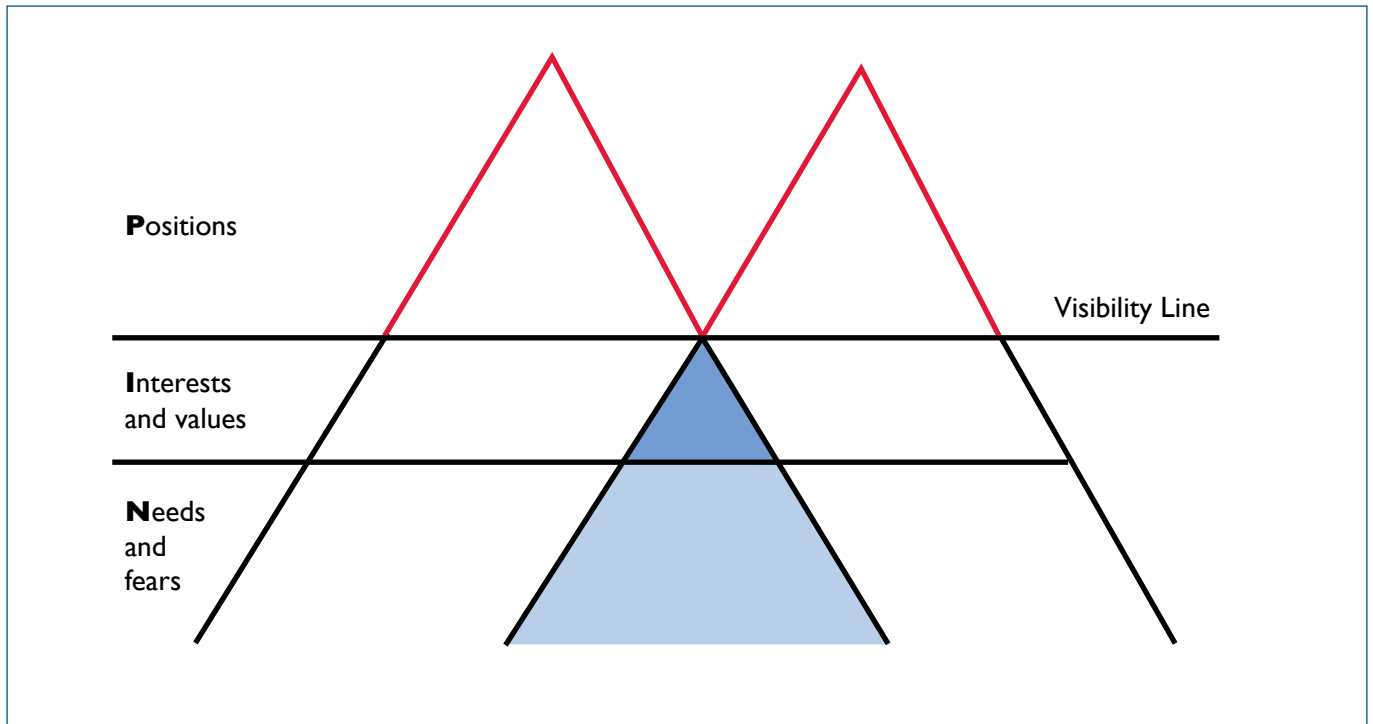


¹¹⁸ See for instance Susskind, L. & Cruikshank, J. L. (1987) *Breaking the impasse : consensual approaches to resolving public disputes*, [New York]: Basic Books. AND Susskind, L., McKernan, S. & Thomas-Larmer, J. (1999) *The consensus building handbook: a comprehensive guide to reaching agreement*, Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage Publications.

¹¹⁹ P. 124 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ p. 146 in Ibid.

Figure 1 – The PIN Iceberg Diagram (created by Andrew Acland)¹²²

I read the PIN diagram as an illustration of the following points:

- The two large **icebergs** represent the typical context of two participants (individuals or groups) communicating in a situation of disagreement.
- The **visibility line** illustrates the separation between the observable and the hidden communicative dimensions at play. The line can move up or down depending on the patterns of communication that the participants develop.
- **Positions** are the only thing that participants see and express when they don't manage to escape some of the traps of ritualised communication (see Section 3.3). The result is often a downward spiral that frustrates participants and entrenches their positions even further.
- **Interests, values, needs and fears** are often more difficult to articulate and share, particularly in adversarial situations that push participants to oversimplify complex issues and feelings, defend themselves, and persuade others. Understanding these different experiential dimensions helps participants to better understand each other's positions. It also creates the possibility of a process shift, because it is often easier to expand common ground than it is to narrow the distance between positions (Andrew Acland, personal conversation).
- The **coloured areas** beneath the visibility line represent the possibility of hidden common ground, that is, shared interests, values, needs and fears that may enable the invention of unforeseen options.
- Finally, the diagram as a whole illustrates the case for developing **patterns of communication** that enable participants to explore deeper levels of meaning in order to build understanding and unleash creative thinking.

¹²² The PIN diagram originated in the work of Andrew Acland for the Environment Council's facilitation trainings in the early 1990s. I have drawn this basic version following Andrew's kind advice in a personal conversation. For more information on Andrew's work please visit the websites of Dialogue by Design www.dialoguebydesign.net, or Sciencewise www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk. There are other versions of the diagram, see for instance Diana Pound's adaptation of the Environmental Council's 1998 version in page 12 of Eurosite. 2003. Natura 2000, conflict management and resolution. Parc Interregional du Marais Poitevin, France. 2-5 April. Available: www.eurosite-nature.org [Accessed 1 December 2007].



Positions, interests, values, needs and fears are shaped by personal and cultural factors stemming from the participants' cognitive and emotional engagement with their social worlds. To be sure, the diagram is not intended to be an unshakeable statement about how individuals behave or how the world works. On the contrary, it is simply a heuristic tool that helps mediation practitioners to think through certain situations in the context of public disputes. In dialogue processes, we can use it to make sense of what we are trying to achieve through collaborative patterns of communication.

Before concluding, two caveats are necessary with regard to this double dynamic of finding common ground and exploring differences. If we focus too much on common ground, we may risk excluding valuable contributions by forcing those who think differently to conceal their unique perspective. Moreover, emphasising common ground can become a smokescreen for the protection of the status quo by a dominant majority. For instance, by focussing on what most participants in a public forum share in common, we may be unwittingly excluding alternative or minority perspectives and voices. On the other hand,

if we focus too much on differences, we risk not being able to build the common ground and trust needed to enable participants to learn about their differences.

In controversial cases, dialogue practitioners study the context and history of the process they want to facilitate, and decide collaboratively with the participants on what may be the best approach. Sometimes only focussing on common ground is desirable or possible, as the story of the environmentalists and the ranchers (Box 9) illustrates. Navigating these tensions is at the heart of dialogue practice.

Box 9 – A story of environmentalists and ranchers. Excerpt from Littlejohn & Domenici (2001, p. 15)¹²⁴

Dan Dagget, an activist for collaborative decision making, tells the story of a group called 6-6. It began in 1989 when Dagget and other environmentalists were campaigning in Arizona to repeal a law permitting ranchers to shoot cougars and bears. The battle had become stalemated. In an unusual move, someone suggested that the two sides actually meet and talk. And they did! The meeting was arranged; a skilled facilitator was brought in, and 12 people showed up – 6 environmentalists and 6 ranchers. The meeting began, not by discussing mountain lions and bears, but by listing what each participant wanted for the land. To their amazement, they found that the two groups wanted many of the same things. They made an agreement not to talk about their differences, but to stick with common interests and explore ways that they could all get what they wanted. The 6-6 has grown to far more than 12 people, and they no longer meet in living rooms. Instead, they form collaborative ranching teams that meet on the land, look at the situation there, and make management decisions on how to proceed.

Balancing advocacy and inquiry

Building understanding and building relationships are, as I have emphasised, the key goals of dialogue. In order to understand each other, and the issues under investigation, participants work hard on creating a safe space and a trusting environment. To achieve this, participants need not only to understand (inquire), but also to make themselves understood (advocate). Although I have insisted that inquiry is the defining dynamic in dialogue, it is time to recognise the indispensable role that advocacy dynamics also play.

Advocacy dynamics include expressing one's position clearly, emphasising its strengths and value, and presenting a rationale for it. Inquiry dynamics entail the exchange

of questions that help to understand the thinking behind each other's views. When advocacy dynamics become the dominant pattern, as Burbules argues, it 'ceases to be an intersubjective exploration of a problem or question, and instead becomes a struggle over whose voice and perspective will be the dominant one'. Moreover, 'once damaged, the very nature and purpose of the dialogical relation comes to be doubted, and because this relation is the very fabric of dialogue, any communicative outcome that may be achieved is compromised.'¹²⁵

In practice, the challenge is to facilitate communication patterns which balance advocacy and inquiry. From this perspective, dialogic communication can be fostered, to some extent, in most types of participatory

formats and processes.¹²⁶ This is where the stark line that I have traced – for pedagogic purposes – between dialogue and debate becomes blurred. In many public forums, especially those that are one-off events rather than processes, often the most we can aspire to is to make debates more dialogic. As practitioners Pearce & Pearce put it, when communicating dialogically 'one can listen, ask direct questions, present one's ideas, argue, debate, and so forth. The defining characteristic of dialogic communication is that all of these speech acts are done in ways that hold one's own position but allow others the space to hold theirs, and are profoundly open to hearing others' positions without needing to oppose or assimilate them.'¹²⁷

¹²³ For excellent introductions to the world of public mediation practitioners see Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. AND Laws, D. & Forester, J. (2007) Learning in practice: Public policy mediation. *Critical Policy Studies*, 1(4), 342–370. AND Forester, J. (1999) *The Deliberative Practitioner. Encouraging participatory planning processes*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

¹²⁴ Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

¹²⁵ P. 145 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

¹²⁶ For examples of participatory formats and processes see www.participedia.net.

¹²⁷ P. 45 in Pearce, W. & Pearce, K. (2004) Taking a communication perspective on dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. A. & CISSNA, K. N. (eds.) *Dialogue: theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

4.4 A countercultural process? Promises and perils of dialogue

Creating spaces for dialogic communication requires commitment, resources, and time. It calls for participants to be reflexive about their communication habits and power relationships, as well as to be open to experience alternative ways of relating to each other. People do not engage in dialogic approaches because they are guaranteed to succeed, but because they are drawn 'to the spirit of equality, mutuality, and cooperation that animates them'¹²⁸.

Considering the many incentives that we have created for certain patterns of communication, it is surprising that dialogue ever happens at all. As Schein pointed out, it has almost become a countercultural practice¹²⁹. Firstly, it takes time; it probably takes longer than any other method of public engagement. However, remember the 10-year long example of the community clash

over the construction of a new school that I outlined in section 3.2.1. In that case, arguably, a process of dialogue and deliberation might have been faster, cheaper, and considerably better for the community.

Secondly, its impact is not immediate or always measurable – at least not in the ways we seem to want to measure everything nowadays. Bamboozled by the magic of numbers¹³⁰, we often forget that 'not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted'.¹³¹ Let me extend this point with an example.

The use of dialogue in diplomacy intensified after the Second World War. Indeed, the early days of the Cold War was a time in which international adversaries could not expect to sit together to do anything else but talk without agendas or the slightest intention to

persuade each other.¹³² Perhaps the fact that in the end there was no nuclear war can be considered an indication that those diplomatic practices had some sort of impact. I am only half-joking here; my point is that we cannot expect dialogue to be measured as if it was an off-the-shelf technique (although some have presented it as such¹³³).

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened at key historical junctures if the protagonists were subjected to some of our current standards. Imagine that a target-focussed supervisor approached Nelson Mandela or John Hume a couple of years into their long-term peace-building dialogues, and said: It is time to evaluate, so, what has been the impact of what you have been doing and how can you demonstrate it? (See Box 10).

Box 10 – Peace-building dialogues. Excerpt from Isaacs (1999, p. 21)¹³⁴

In South Africa, President Klerk met privately with Nelson Mandela while he was still in prison in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were not merely negotiating issues but engaged in dialogue about a totally new context for their country. These talks set the stage for the dramatic changes that subsequently took place.

John Hume, the Nobel Prize-winning Ulster politician, spent many years in behind-the-scenes conversations with Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army. The recent peaceful developments in that conflict resulted, according to Hume, from years of talking together privately, out from under the eye of public scrutiny and free from formal terms of engagement. Both had agreed that the most critical problem facing Ireland was learning to stop the violence, and they spoke in depth about this. Says Hume: "Twenty-five years we've been fighting violence. Five governments have failed to stop it. Twenty thousand troops and fifteen thousand policemen failed to stop it. So I thought it was time to try something else. Dialogue."

¹²⁸ P. 143 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

¹²⁹ Schein, E. H. (2003) *On dialogue, culture, and organizational learning*. Reflections, 4, 27–38.

¹³⁰ See Chapter 7 in Stone, D. (1997) *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. New York: W W Norton & Co Inc.

¹³¹ For a discussion of the authorship of this quote see <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/05/26/everything-counts-einstein> [Accessed in August 2011].

¹³² P. 679 in Wierzbicka, A. (2006) *The concept of dialogue in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective*. Discourse Studies, 8, 675–703.

¹³³ For an analysis of dialogue as a management fashion see Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010a) The dialogic turn and management fashions. *Annual meeting of the International Communication Association*. Suntec City, Singapore.

¹³⁴ P. 21 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.



Thirdly, dialogue requires a degree of vulnerability that not everyone is comfortable with. One of the key dynamics in developing trust is 'initiating certain sensitive or personal disclosures ourselves, demonstrating trust before we ask for trust ourselves.'¹³⁵ Such moments of disclosure and shared vulnerability can be read as open invitations to engage in dialogue. But they also expose us to various risks, especially in the context of public forums.

Finally, the most challenging barrier to genuine dialogue has to do with power and inequalities. Authentic dialogue requires egalitarian participation. Engaging in

dialogic inquiry entails an open orientation towards others that implies questioning the privileges afforded by socio-economical status, knowledge, ethnicity, or gender. Inequalities are not left at the door of a dialogue process. However, facilitators and participants work hard to avoid reproducing them in the communication patterns that they develop. Inside the room, there are no untouchable areas, and the status quo can become the very object of co-inquiry. Issues of power are critical not only in dialogue, but also in deliberation, and in general in any participatory process. This is why I will return to them later.

Despite these barriers and challenges, dialogue processes do occur even under the direst circumstances. Indeed, practitioners often report important outcomes in conflict situations, for instance: learning, building respect, defusing polarisation, and building contexts for collaboration.¹³⁶ As Stone points out, there is 'a world of difference between a political process in which people honestly try to understand how the world looks from different vantage points, and one in which people claim from the start that their vantage point is the right one.'¹³⁷ In dialogue, our task is to enable participants to take the risk of looking at the world from different vantage points.

Box 11 – The potential of dialogue

- Learning: enhanced understanding of a range of views, values, feelings, and positions.
- Building a common language: bridging the gap between specialised jargons. This is critical in public engagement as we face the paradox of a world that is increasingly interconnected, and yet, ever more fragmented in terms of specialised languages.
- Co-creating meaning: working towards shared interpretations that foster collective intelligence to deal with complex issues.
- Building relationships that enable collaborative platforms and critical co-inquiry.
- Defusing polarisation, overcoming stereotypes, and building trust.
- Discovery: finding alternative pathways that are not the product of mere negotiation or bargaining, but the result of broadening and deepening perspectives through learning, exploration, and creative thinking.



¹³⁵ P. 37 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

¹³⁶ See for instance pp. 48–50 in Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage. AND Pearce, W. B. & Littlejohn, S.W. (1997) *Moral conflict: when social worlds collide*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage. AND Herzig, M. & Chasin, L. 2006. *Fostering dialogue across divides. A nuts and bolts guide from the Public Conversations Project*. Watertown: Public Conversations Project. Available: <http://www.publicconversations.org/resources/guides> [Accessed 1 September 2008].

¹³⁷ P. 380 in Stone, D. (1997) *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, New York: WW Norton & Co Inc.

5.1 Defining public deliberation

Public deliberation is the 'process of exchanging reasons for the purpose of resolving problematic situations' that require interpersonal coordination and cooperation.¹³⁸ The goal of deliberation is to make informed and reasoned decisions. In the context of public engagement activities, such decision-making may materialise in a

range of activities, from reaching conclusions and producing a report, to making recommendations, shaping policy, or deciding how to spend a budget.

Ideally, deliberation aims to build consensus through a progressive communicative process that entails seeking information, evaluating

alternatives, and making decisions after a substantial exchange of reasons. During this process, participants are 'challenged to justify their decisions and opinions by appealing to common interests or by arguing in terms of reasons that "all could accept" in public debate.'¹³⁹

Box 12 – Defining qualities of public deliberation

- Seeking information and evidence
- Evaluating alternatives
- Giving (and taking) public reasons
- Re-examining and (perhaps) changing preferences
- Seeking agreement or consensus
- Making informed and reasoned decisions

In terms of communication dynamics, ideally participants in deliberative processes will engage in combined dynamics of advocacy (making oneself understood, persuading) and inquiry (understanding others, exploring). During the process, participants share

views, information, evidence and reasons, as they listen, contribute, and change their preferences or return to their positions. Deliberation is intended to stimulate 'fresh thinking on an issue, rather than people repeating what they have heard or been

led to believe.'¹⁴⁰ As Cornwall points out, it requires that 'participants are provided with information and access to expertise to inform their deliberations, and encouraged to form positions during the discussions rather than to bring pre-prepared positions and agendas with them.'¹⁴¹

Box 13 – The Ideal of Deliberative Democracy. Excerpt from Parkinson (2006, pp. 3-4)¹⁴²

Deliberative democracy is based on two principles:

- it insists on **reasoning** between people as the guiding political procedure, rather than bargaining between competing interests or the aggregation of private preferences;
- and the essential political act –the giving, weighing, acceptance, or rejection of reasons - is a **public act**, as opposed to the purely private act of voting.

Thus democracy is conceived

- less as a market for the exchange of private preferences,
- more as a forum for the creation of public agreements ... a forum in which, ideally, 'no force except that of the better argument is exercised' (Habermas 1975: 108).

To ensure that **public reason and not private power** dominates public discussion, deliberative democracy requires equality between participants.

Democratic deliberation is therefore about **making binding collective decisions**, covering all the stages of the decision-making process from problem definition and agenda-setting, discussion of solutions, decision-making, and implementation...

Under such conditions, people's **arguments** for and against certain views must be made in public if they are to persuade others, and so can be examined and challenged by those others; **preferences** which may be more or less vague, unreflective, ill-informed, and private, are transformed into more firm, reflective, informed, and other-regarding ones through the deliberative encounter ...

¹³⁸ P. 27 in Bohman, J. (1996) *Public deliberation: Pluralism, complexity, and democracy*, Cambridge; London: MIT Press.

¹³⁹ P. 5 in *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ P. 76 in Cornwall, A. (2008a) *Democratising engagement. What the UK can learn from international experience*. London: DEMOS.

¹⁴¹ P. 76 in *Ibid.*

¹⁴² I have modified the outline and highlighted key terms. Pp. 3–4 in Parkinson, J. (2006) *Deliberating in the real world: Problems of legitimacy in deliberative democracy*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.



5.2 The case for public deliberation

The Theory and practice of deliberative democracy has become popular in the last two decades.¹⁴³ It has inspired the work of political theorists, policy analysts, communication scholars, policy makers, public bodies, civic and voluntary organisations, and public engagement practitioners all around the globe.¹⁴⁴ Much of this activity has been motivated by the public cynicism that surrounds traditional party politics and representative democracy, as well as by the changes that have transformed traditional top-down government into the networked arrangements suggested by the concept of 'governance.'¹⁴⁵

Therefore, the tidal movement around deliberative democracy has rekindled the demands for meaningful citizen participation which have gained momentum since the 1960s.¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, deliberative democracy builds on the grounds of participatory democracy. The novelty is that, as spaces for citizen participation have steadily become a reality, the emphasis has shifted towards the communicative dimension in those spaces.

Public deliberation is now seen by many as the ideal means to find solutions to social problems and make public decisions.

Moreover, it is seen as being capable of regenerating politics by creating a more engaged citizenry and thus a more vibrant public sphere. Much of the appeal comes from its critique of traditional representative (partisan) politics. As Parkinson notes, deliberative democracy is 'a way of thinking about politics which emphasizes the give and take of public reasoning between citizens rather than the counting of votes or the authority of representatives.'¹⁴⁷

Box 14 – The case for public deliberation in policy contexts. Excerpt from Siriani (2009, p. 50)¹⁴⁸

Public deliberation can:

1. Produce better policy outcomes by generating sources of evidence and insight that might otherwise be unavailable to elected representatives or public administrators deliberating on their own, even using extensive poll data.
2. By directly engaging citizens in public reasoning with one another, and perhaps with various organized stakeholders and agency officials, they are more likely to appreciate varied interests and perspectives, as well as hard choices about costs and trade-offs, and thereby to attribute higher levels of legitimacy to decisions, even when their own preferences are not met as fully as they might wish. Enhanced legitimacy increases the likelihood of more-effective policy implementation by reducing potential obstruction and eliciting coproduction and community asset mobilization.
3. Engaging citizens in active deliberation signals civic respect and mutuality as well as the recognition of citizens as autonomous agents rather than mere objects of legislation and administration. This expressive function can enhance public spiritedness and generate trust that carries over to other forms of civic collaboration.

¹⁴³ See Dryzek, J. S. (2010) *Foundations and frontiers of deliberative democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴⁴ For a short intro see Escobar, O. (2010b) Public engagement in global context. Understanding the UK shift towards dialogue and deliberation. *QMU Centre for Dialogue, Working Paper 1*, 1–18.

¹⁴⁵ On governance see Fung, A. & Wright, E. O. (2003) *Deepening democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance*, London ; New York: Verso. AND Hajer, M. A. & Wagenaar, H. (eds.) (2003) *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴⁶ See for instance Pateman, C. (1970) *Participation and democratic theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. AND Barber, B. R. (2003) *Strong democracy. Participatory politics for a new age*, London: University of California Press.

¹⁴⁷ P. I in Parkinson, J. (2006) *Deliberating in the real world: Problems of legitimacy in deliberative democracy*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴⁸ Sirianni, C. (2009) *Investing in democracy: engaging citizens in collaborative governance*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Deliberative democrats argue for a stronger democracy where citizens are empowered in relation to politicians, public officials, and experts. Accordingly, deliberative processes are intended to 'open knowledge previously restricted to specific scientific or other communities to lay scrutiny, as well as to open up political arenas to more direct processes of citizen involvement'.¹⁴⁹ Much of deliberative theory stems from the work of German social theorist Habermas, who shifted the focus towards the role of communication in the public sphere. Based on his ideas about 'communicative rationality', many have argued for a democratic system sustained by processes of rational debate among equals.¹⁵⁰

Parallel ideas have also been developed in the world of policy analysis and policy making.¹⁵¹ Here, inclusive deliberative engagement is increasingly seen as the means towards collective problem-solving, and as a departure from traditional views of the policy process as the monopoly of policy experts. In this new context, the 'essence of judgement and decision becomes not the automatic application of rules or algorithms but a process of deliberation which weights beliefs, principles, and actions under conditions of multiple frames for the interpretation and evaluation of the world'.¹⁵²

Deliberation thus becomes a tool for democratising policy processes which

used to be left to elites tasked with finding technocratic solutions to policy problems.¹⁵³ The search for (allegedly apolitical) technocratic solutions was based in the now disputed idea that socio-political issues could be simply sorted out through management and technique. In contrast, deliberative approaches recognise that 'not only are social values central to the policy process, but that the process of policy making itself needs to be understood as a dialogic process in which it is less a question of reviewing evidence than negotiating meanings, seeking control over meanings and constructing policies on the basis of this'.¹⁵⁴

Box 15 – Taking public deliberation seriously: The UK referendum versus the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly + referendum

A lesson in how to maintain the status quo

Do you remember the referendum on electoral reform that took place in the UK in 2011? I don't blame you if you don't. It was a truly unremarkable event that few would consider an example of democratic engagement.

Firstly, for many it became a referendum on the Liberal Democrat party (the main proposer), by then extremely unpopular because of their coalition with the Conservatives. Secondly, the quality of public deliberation was, to put it mildly, incredibly poor: Opportunities for learning about the issues involved were scarce. The alternatives to be voted on were decided by political parties as part of their coalition deal, although even Lib-Dem proposers admitted to not being happy with the choices. Finally, bickering, parading, defaming, and the rest of the paraphernalia that often accompanies political party campaigns dominated what in theory was supposed to be an exercise in direct democracy.

As a consequence we learned little from the process. If we weren't sure that government politicians could insult each other on a Friday, and then sit harmoniously at the coalition table on Monday, that doubt was surely dispelled. Little more emerged from this democratic fiasco. This sort of process confirms that political spectacle often triumphs over substantial public deliberation. As a result, important constitutional issues went unexplored, opportunities for meaningful public engagement were squandered, and political elites were left alone to play their game in their own terms.

This all seems rather unsurprising. At the end of the day, we left it to political parties to battle and decide over an issue in which they had a clear vested interest. Indeed, different electoral systems favour or prejudice different political parties. How could we expect that they would do anything but put on their usual gladiatorial show?

¹⁴⁹ P.36 in Barnes, M., Newman, J. & Sullivan, H. (2007) *Power, participation and political renewal: case studies in public participation*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

¹⁵⁰ See for instance Nino, C. S. (1996) *The Constitution of deliberative democracy*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. AND Elster, J. (1998) *Deliberative democracy*, Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press. AND Macedo, S. (ed.) (1999) *Deliberative politics: Essays on democracy and disagreement*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵¹ See for instance Fischer, F. & Forester, J. (eds.) (1993) *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*, Durham; London: Duke University Press. AND Wagenaar, H. (2011) *Meaning in action: Interpretation and dialogue in policy analysis*, New York; London: M.E. Sharpe.

¹⁵² P.214 in Dryzek, J. (1993) Policy analysis and planning: from science to argument. In: FISCHER, F. & FORESTER, J. (eds.) *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

¹⁵³ See Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing public policy: discursive politics and deliberative practices*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. AND Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵⁴ P.40 in Barnes, M., Newman, J. & Sullivan, H. (2007) *Power, participation and political renewal: case studies in public participation*, Bristol: The Policy Press.



A lesson in democratic innovation¹⁵⁵

Let's look at an example of one of the boldest experiments in public deliberation and participatory democracy ever done. When the issue of electoral reform gained momentum in the province of British Columbia (Canada), the authorities decided to deal with it in an unusual way. Instead of leaving it to political parties, they decided to delegate that power directly to citizens.

Accordingly, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was formed, including 160 randomly selected members of the population. There were one man and one woman for each of the 79 electoral districts, plus two Aboriginal members. The sample was balanced not only for gender or ethnicity, but also for age and geographical distribution. The process involved a number of weekend sessions across 10 months, and the participants were paid for their work.

The Assembly went through a series of stages, including a 'learning phase' in which participants got to learn about the issues from a range of sources. They also interrogated experts from various perspectives, in a process similar to a citizen jury. After the learning phase, the deliberative process moved towards the decision-making stage, which ended with a final report and recommendation to the British Columbia legislature. The proposal was then put to the citizenry through a referendum. In the end, the proposal got wide support but missed by a small margin the referendum threshold for legislative change.

Interestingly, both referendums (UK and British Columbia) produced similar results: the proposed alternatives were defeated. That is the only commonality between both cases. For in the UK, the process has become another episode of 'politics as usual', whereas in British Columbia it has become an exemplar of democratic innovation. The BC Citizens' Assembly was premised on a simple idea: when citizens are given time and resources to deliberate, they can engage with each other to investigate complex issues, and make collaborative decisions.

Comparing both cases illustrates the importance of process and communication quality. In the UK the referendum was a poor exercise with no legacy besides increased cynicism. Little care went into a process that was supposed to be an institution of direct democracy. In contrast, the referendum in British Columbia was the final stage of an innovative public deliberation process within the Assembly and beyond. A lot of care went into fostering deliberative dynamics and finding new ways of making collective decisions. No wonder the case is capturing the imagination of many.



¹⁵⁵ You can find information about the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly in www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public. For case studies see the book edited by Warren, M. E. & Pearse, H. (eds.) (2008) *Designing deliberative democracy. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5.3 The dialogic turn in deliberation: developing a relational approach

As we have seen, classic definitions of deliberation have a very formal tone: they insist on 'rational deliberation' and 'the force of the best reason.' However, the idea that the clash of arguments will produce the triumph of the best reason has been criticised on various grounds.¹⁵⁶ For instance, the idea of the existence of 'one best reason' can be linked to questionable ideas about universal 'truth' and 'knowledge' which may cover up power and control agendas.¹⁵⁷ Anyhow, this approach seems to fall short when it comes to dealing with the complex dilemmas faced by our societies, particularly when there are 'as many different forms of "reason" as there are cultural perspectives and ways of speaking.'¹⁵⁸

In the light of these and other critiques, some have begun to propose a more dialogic (relational) concept of deliberation.¹⁵⁹ For instance, Gastil and colleagues have developed a practical concept of face-to-face deliberation that accommodates elements from dialogue theory. In essence, the concept adds a new nuance to the basic tasks of practical deliberation:

- Creating a solid information basis, which includes the acceptance of multiple forms of knowledge (e.g. expert, experiential, emotional).
- Prioritising the key values at stake, after self-reflection and mutual exploration.

- Identifying a range of alternatives by fostering co-inquiry.
- Evaluating pros, cons, and trade-offs of each alternative.
- Making the best possible decision, after updating positions in the light of the learning process.¹⁶⁰

The concept emphasises inclusion and equality, gives prominence to quality listening, and asks participants to value each other's experiences and perspectives. In sum, many scholars and practitioners are paying increasing attention to the relational dimension of deliberative processes. This can be seen as a dialogic turn in public deliberation theory and practice.¹⁶¹

Many postulate that deliberation must be rational, and thus operate in a judicial-like modus operandi, including claims, counter-claims, and so on. The alternative (relational) view highlights the emotional dimension of deliberative engagement, and denounces 'the sexism inherent to many models of rational argumentation,'¹⁶² as well as the imposition of such formalised procedures that seem to act as deterrents to participation by ordinary citizens.¹⁶³

The relational approach to deliberation clearly resonates with dialogue theory,

especially regarding the creation of spaces for personal narratives and storytelling. As Ryfe explains, narratives foster 'a relational form of deliberation in which participants appeal to common values and experiences through telling stories.' Accordingly, the use of narrative in public engagement supports 'a form of deliberation that stresses equality, respect for difference, participation and community.'¹⁶⁴

Many have argued for the need to neutralise emotions, passions and identities in the name of rational reasoning and the logic of the better argument. However, the overly formalised exchange of reasons that is so central to the traditional notion of rational deliberation can be seen as a way of excluding those who do not master the method of logical debate. Furthermore, enforcing the principle that only reasoned exchanges can constitute legitimate deliberation excludes the important role that emotions play in public engagement.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the engagement of citizens with public issues depends on emotional dispositions and affective states. In other words, why would we engage if we don't care? Besides, the distinction between reasons and emotions has turned out to be more a conceptual cliché than an actual reflection of how our brains work. That is, emotions are actually an indispensable part of our capacity to reason.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁶ See Pellizzoni, L. (2001) The myth of the best argument: power, deliberation and reason. *British Journal of Sociology*, 52(1), 59–86.

¹⁵⁷ Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972–77*, Brighton: Harvester Press. AND Foucault, M. (2000) *Power. Essential works of Foucault 1954–1984*, London: Penguin.

¹⁵⁸ P. 408 in Burkhalter, S., Gastil, J. & Kelshaw, T. (2002) A conceptual definition and theoretical model of public deliberation in small face-to-face groups. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 398–422.

¹⁵⁹ See for instance Gastil, J. & Black, L.W. (2008) Public deliberation as the organizing principle of political communication research. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 4(1), 1–47. AND Mansbridge, J., Hartz-Karp, J., Amengual, M. & Gastil, J. (2006) Norms of deliberation: An inductive study. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 2(1), 1–47. AND Kim, J. & Kim, E. J. (2008) Theorizing dialogic deliberation: Everyday political talk as communicative action and dialogue. *Communication Theory*, 18, 51–70.

¹⁶⁰ P. 20 in Gastil, J. (2008) *Political communication and deliberation*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

¹⁶¹ Escobar, O. (2009b) The dialogic turn: dialogue for deliberation. *In-Spire Journal of Law, Politics and Societies*, 4(2), 42–70.

¹⁶² P. 360 in Ryfe, D. M. (2002) The practice of deliberative democracy: a study of 16 deliberative organizations. *Political Communication*, 19, 359–377.

¹⁶³ Ryfe, D. M. (2006) Narrative and deliberation in small group forums. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34(1), 72–93.

¹⁶⁴ P. 360 in Ryfe, D. M. (2002) The practice of deliberative democracy: a study of 16 deliberative organizations. *Political Communication*, 19, 359–377.

¹⁶⁵ For a brief exploration of the role of emotions in political engagement see for example Escobar, O. (2011b) Suspending disbelief: Obama and the role of emotions in political communication. In: ENGELKEN-JORGE, M., IBARRA GÜELL, P. & MORENO DEL RÍO, C. (eds.) *Politics and Emotions: The Obama Phenomenon*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

¹⁶⁶ For an intro see pp. 276–281 in Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



These reflections call our attention to the emotional dimension of the engaged citizen. As individuals, we do not generally think in simply logical or rational ways.¹⁶⁷ How can we understand communication in public forums, therefore, without considering the emotional dimension at the heart of social interaction? Rosenberg puts it this way: 'exchanging narratives about personally significant life episodes, sharing meals together and participating in activities designed to create a sense of group identity may be necessary to creating the emotional connection needed to motivate the kind of argument desired. The key here is to recognize that deliberation also requires conditions that foster emotional engagement, mutual nurturing and an affective tie to one's community.'¹⁶⁸

This is also why storytelling has become so central to the new public engagement agenda. Critics of deliberation have argued that narrative forms of communication can infuse more egalitarian and relational dynamics into public forums.¹⁶⁹ Personal storytelling, as Ryfe shows, contributes to 'lower the structural, psychological, and social barriers to deliberation' in small groups. Stories enable collective sense-making around complex issues, as participants are invited to imagine how these play out in the real world. Finally, storytelling helps with the relational aspects of deliberative engagement, because it enables individuals to save face and 'manage politeness issues' even in contexts that privilege disagreement.¹⁷⁰

In practice, public deliberation is often equated with public debate. Thus, the playing field has been traditionally dominated by the vocabulary and dynamics of confrontational communication.¹⁷¹ Debate seems appropriate when participants share a formulation of *the problem* (e.g. alcohol abuse is a social problem characterised by...), and agree on the criteria for choosing between alternatives (e.g. fairness, feasibility). However, debate can be a precarious form of communication when participants disagree profoundly about fundamental values, and thus lack a shared formulation of the problem (e.g. abortion, euthanasia).

In other words, debate can be counterproductive in situations where participants hold polarised views, incommensurable perspectives, or intractable articulations of interests.¹⁷² Moreover, in these situations, participants seldom share a common language to talk about the issues. The existence of different vocabularies, jargons, forms of expression, and styles of communication strengthens the point that debate is not always fit for purpose in public forums. As experienced practitioners warn us: 'the rebuttal mode of debate can at times do more harm than good – promising clarity but delivering escalation, promising an elusively 'neutral' moderation but producing little substantive learning, less capacity, and still less in terms of strengthened relationships.'¹⁷³

Deliberative processes can progress through systematic stages (information, evaluation, decision) insofar as participants agree on a shared formulation of the problem. The difficulty is that public problems rarely present themselves in a neat, homogeneous fashion. Instead, they are a complex amalgam of assumptions about social realities, ideas on fairness and justice, and constraints about what is acceptable and feasible.

For that reason, Burkhalter and others argue that 'when participants bring with them divergent ways of speaking and knowing, public deliberation must include some measure of dialogue,'¹⁷⁴ so that, at least provisionally, participants bypass the clash between their competing worldviews, and try to reflect on them collaboratively. To sum up, a dialogic twist to deliberation can serve various purposes:¹⁷⁵

- It can help to create shared vocabularies and meanings.
- It can enable participants to develop dialogic patterns of communication to explore issues, positions, and differences.
- It can make the conversation more democratic. Processes can become more inclusive by allowing a range of forms of communication (e.g. storytelling, testimony) and styles of expression (e.g. passionate, confessional).
- Finally, it can foster collaborative learning and inquiry in a safe space which enables participants to challenge the status quo.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ P. 344 in Rosenberg, S.W. (2007) Rethinking democratic deliberation: The limits and potential of citizens participation. *Polity*, 39(3), 335–360.

¹⁶⁸ Pp. 348–349 in *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ See for instance Young, I. M. (2002) *Inclusion and democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. AND Sanders, L. M. (1997) Against deliberation. *Political Theory*, 25(3), 347–376.

¹⁷⁰ P. 80 in Ryfe, D. M. (2006) Narrative and deliberation in small group forums. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34(1), 72–93.

¹⁷¹ P. 166 in Barge, J. K. (2002) Enlarging the meaning of group deliberation. In: FREY, L. R. (ed.) *New directions in group communication*. Thousand Oaks/London: Sage Publications.

¹⁷² On intractability and deliberation see pp. 75–80 in Bohman, J. (1996) *Public deliberation: Pluralism, complexity, and democracy*, Cambridge: London: MIT Press.

¹⁷³ P. 74 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷⁴ P. 408 in Burkhalter, S., Gastil, J. & Kelshaw, T. (2002) A conceptual definition and theoretical model of public deliberation in small face-to-face groups. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 398–422.

¹⁷⁵ Based on pp. 410–411 in *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ P. 46 in Innes, J. E. & Booher, D. E. (2003) Collaborative policymaking: governance through dialogue. In: HAJER, M. A. & WAGENAAR, H. (eds.) *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6.1 Dialogue and Deliberation

Studies of dialogue and deliberation pertain to different disciplines that have evolved in parallel as a response to similar social, political and organisational challenges. I join those who believe that there is great potential for cross-fertilization between both. Therefore, in this section I outline a framework that structures dialogue and deliberation into an episodic process that creates spaces for a range of communication patterns.¹⁷⁷ The framework is intended to be a simple heuristic tool. Its purpose is to suggest ways of thinking about communication-related choices that we make when we design public engagement processes.

Bohman said that deliberation is 'dialogue with a particular goal'.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, as we have seen, dialogic patterns of communication are often difficult to develop in deliberative processes where debate becomes the main form of interaction. In those cases, advocacy dynamics become dominant and thus hinder co-inquiry.

The aspiration that participants may change preferences due to reasoned deliberation is central to deliberative practice.¹⁷⁹ The downside is that this can stimulate more advocacy than inquiry as participants may focus only on persuading each other. Advocacy dynamics seek resolution, whereas inquiry seeks exploration. If they are not balanced, learning is prevented, polarisation may increase, oversimplification kicks in, shallow exchanges proliferate, and the engagement process as a whole can become meaningless, or worse, divisive and counterproductive.

Dialogue is open-ended, whereas deliberation seeks closure – albeit it may be provisional. Consequently, deliberation involves *choice work* in order to reach a conclusion or make a decision. The word 'decision' comes from the Latin *decidere*, which literally means 'to murder the alternative'.¹⁸⁰ When participants engage in deliberation, their goal is to weight alternatives and make a choice. Dialogue, on the other hand, is about exploring the nature of multiple choices.

In that sense, the flow of communication varies substantially from dialogue to deliberation. Dialogue stimulates a *divergent flow of communication*: there is no need for immediate resolution, and thus the conversation can go in many directions, and conclude with a representation of a variety of voices, issues, and perspectives. In contrast, deliberation stimulates a *convergent flow of communication*: participants aim to converge towards a decision or conclusion. The conversation is oriented to resolution, and it concludes with a representation of some sort of consensus.

Different flows (convergent/divergent) and patterns of communication (advocacy/inquiry) create different engagement dynamics. They all play an important role in fostering meaningful communication in public forums, especially when they are combined in ways that are fit for purpose. In Table 8 I propose a framework to differentiate ideal types. In practice, of course, we often develop all sorts of hybrid forms.

Table 8 – Communication patterns and process

		COMMUNICATION PATTERNS	
		Advocacy	Inquiry
PROCESS	Oriented to decision-making (convergent)	Deliberation	Deliberative dialogue
	Not oriented to decision-making (divergent)	Debate	Dialogue

¹⁷⁷ Escobar, O. (2009b) The dialogic turn: dialogue for deliberation. *In-Spire Journal of Law, Politics and Societies*, 4(2), 42–70.

¹⁷⁸ P.57 in Bohman, J. (1996) *Public deliberation: Pluralism, complexity, and democracy*, Cambridge; London: MIT Press.

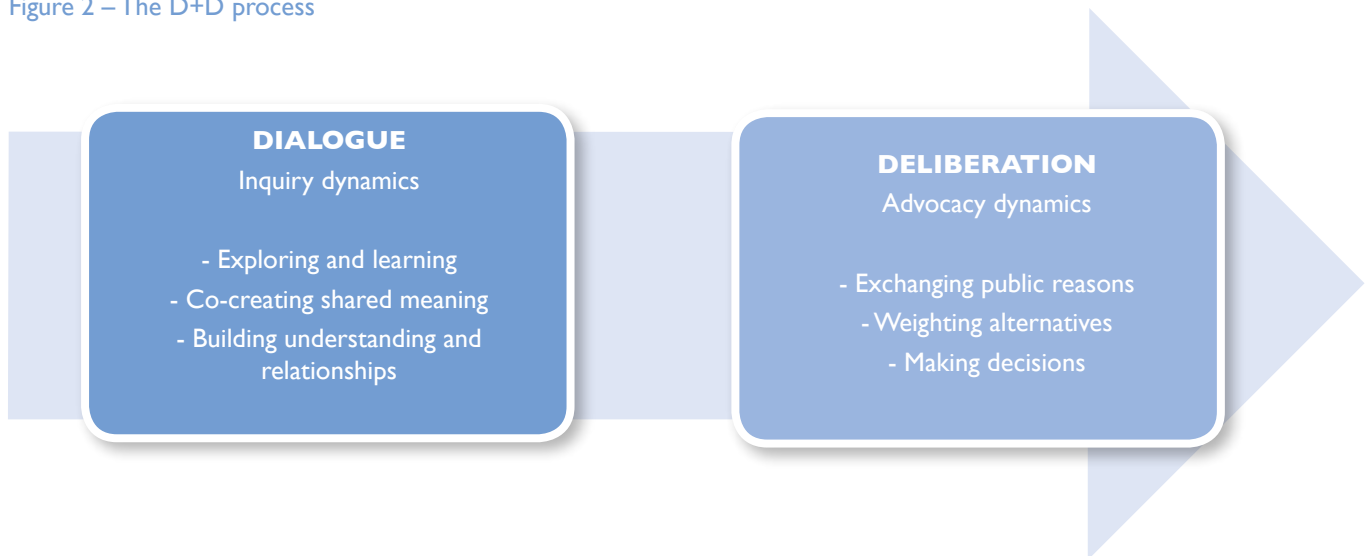
¹⁷⁹ Fishkin, J. S. & Laslett, P. (2003) *Debating deliberative democracy*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

¹⁸⁰ P.45 in Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*, New York: Currency.

6.2 The D+D process

The D+D process is premised on the basic idea that dialogue can open up space for more meaningful deliberation. I dedicate this section to propose a rationale for it that builds on what I have said so far.

Figure 2 – The D+D process



The idea is to infuse real world deliberative processes with spaces for a range of communication patterns. It can be done, for instance, by including a preparatory phase where participants share personal stories and map the landscape of perspectives and feelings. The goal here is to allow participants to learn about diverse understandings and experiences of the issue in a context that warrants the suspension of automatic judgement. This constitutes an 'expressive stage' in which participants can convey their feelings and explore their social identities in a safe space.¹⁸¹

Some critics doubt that dialogue should be part of deliberative processes at all.¹⁸² They fear that too much emphasis on dialogue diminishes the role that classic advocacy can play in challenging dominant cultural

vocabularies and meanings. In other words, they fear that dialogue may focus so much on common ground that it leaves the status quo unscathed. This is an important point. It highlights not only the impossibility, but also the inappropriateness, of dialogue in situations of blatant injustice or huge power inequalities. As ever, the scope for dialogue depends on context.

However, what's been proposed here pertains to more pluralistic public engagement processes. Many of them can benefit from a combination of formats that foster different patterns of communication. To avoid the risk of *too much dialogue* (that is, too little room to challenge perspectives), we can conceive processes where these two forms of communication coexist without becoming dominant. Therefore, it can be

useful to separate methodologically and temporarily the stages for dialogue and deliberation.

On the one hand, it is crucial that dialogue is oriented towards discovery and not to decision-making.¹⁸³ Not being pressed to 'murder the alternative' is what makes it possible to engage in open-ended patterns of communication that enable reciprocal exploration, active listening, honesty, and disclosure. On the other hand, it is critical that deliberation encompasses trying to persuade each other to converge towards a particular conclusion or decision. Being able to give and take reasons in order to change preferences is what makes it possible to challenge assumptions and views, and make collective decisions.

¹⁸¹ P. 290 in Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁸² For instance Tonn & Welsh (2005, 2002) quoted in pp. 27-34 in Heidlebaugh, N. J. (2008) Invention and public dialogue: lessons from rhetorical theories. *Communication Theory*, 18, 27-50.

¹⁸³ Yankelovich, D. (1999) *The magic of dialogue: transforming conflict into cooperation*, London: Nicholas Brealey.

In the D+D framework, dialogue constitutes more than a programmatic complement to deliberation. If deliberation is the art of analysing alternatives in order to make decisions, prior dialogue enhances that process through the open exploration of languages, worldviews, values, and experiences that underpin the alternatives. Furthermore, because dialogue formats strive to enable safe spaces for dissent and difference, they can foster the creation of shared meaning on the basis of disparate forms of knowing and experiencing. When they achieve such, dialogue processes can stimulate unexpected collective creativity.¹⁸⁴

Dryzek wrote that deliberation 'is different from adversarial debate. The initial aim is not to win, but to understand. Deliberation allows that people are open to changing their minds.'¹⁸⁵ However, the question is: can public debate, as we find it on the ground, perform such an exploratory function? The confrontational communication that is often at the heart of polarised debate does not seem to enable such dynamics. Instead, that

function may be better served by the spirit of inquiry that guides public dialogue.¹⁸⁶

Heidlebaugh has concluded that 'neither dialogic models' nor 'rival advocacy models can stand alone, either to account for or to lead to enriched public discourse.'¹⁸⁷ This strengthens the argument to enlarge deliberative processes so that they are understood and designed as a communication continuum, including a range of communication patterns. Between the ideal types of dialogue and deliberation, public engagement practitioners can experiment with a variety of hybrid forums and processes (e.g. deliberative dialogue, in which participants engage in co-inquiry in order to reach a conclusion).

In this framework, public deliberation is understood not only in terms of exchanging public reasons and making collective decisions, 'but also as a process of producing public reasons and reaching mutual understanding.'¹⁸⁸ Consequently, following Kim & Kim, deliberative public engagement entails two dimensions. On the one hand,

instrumental deliberation characterised by mechanisms for negotiation and decision; and *dialogic deliberation*, in which 'identity and difference, sense of community, and public reason are constructed.'¹⁸⁹

This requires the creation of communication spaces for dialogically generative dynamics. In practice, deliberation often entails 'the pervasive advancement of a priori opinions', and hence it is 'rhetorical rather than dialogically generative.'¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, deliberative processes may first require a period of dialogue, understood as an open-ended conversation in which participants strive to understand their experiences, languages, and ways of thinking. This kind of process can bring up previously unrealised common ground within the group. In addition, leaving decision making for a later stage frees the participants from the urgency of selling or defending their positions, and thus it allows them to bring different ways of knowing 'to bear on a common problem, and that can result in a more sophisticated analysis of any public issue.'¹⁹¹



¹⁸⁴ Isaacs, W. (2001) Toward an action theory of dialogue. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 24, 709–748.

¹⁸⁵ P. 3 in Dryzek, J. S. (2009) The Australian Citizens' Parliament: a world first. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 5(1), 1–7.

¹⁸⁶ For a good example of a large dialogue process see Spano, S. J. (2001) *Public dialogue and participatory democracy: The Cupertino Community Project*, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

¹⁸⁷ P. 34 in Heidlebaugh, N. J. (2008) Invention and public dialogue: lessons from rhetorical theories. *Communication Theory*, 18, 27–50.

¹⁸⁸ P. 51 in Kim, J. & Kim, E. J. Ibid. Theorizing dialogic deliberation: Everyday political talk as communicative action and dialogue. 51–70.

¹⁸⁹ P. 66 in Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ P. 408 in Burkhalter, S., Gastil, J. & Kelshaw, T. (2002) A conceptual definition and theoretical model of public deliberation in small face-to-face groups. Ibid. 12(4), 398–422.

¹⁹¹ P. 411 in Ibid.



Box 16 – Creating D+D rituals. Excerpt from Forester (2009, p. 33)¹⁹²

[D+D practitioners]...create these processes not to erase conflict, not to make friends of historical enemies, not to deny deep differences - but to enable more than the talk, talk, talk of business as usual, to enable a new exploration of strategies to address materially the pressing interests at stake. By bringing participants together across lines of interests, class, ethnicity, and gender; these deliberative conversations can begin practically and substantively to *bridge* differences of experience, stereotype, established relationships, and conventional expectations.

By evoking deeply felt concerns and senses of possibility, interests, and emotions, these processes of dealing with difference, these deliberative rituals, can cultivate a partially shared political imagination, or ... 'collaborative learning' rather than legalistic argumentation – a cogenerated practical judgement instead of doctrinal persuasion... These processes often encourage more dialogue, less debate, more learning, less pontificating, more practical negotiating, less grandstanding.

A D+D process, therefore, includes dialogue formats geared towards the exploration of public reasons, and deliberative formats in which those public reasons are put to work towards making decisions. In addition, dialogue before deliberation can help to construct a safe space that may hold the participants together through the posterior decision-making process. Decision-making processes are rarely about the data per se, but rather, they are about underlying values and interpretations. Therefore, it is important to recognise that before alternatives and recommendations can be considered, the very determination of what 'the problem' is depends on interpersonal communication.¹⁹³

This requires a safe space where participants feel free to explore and question each other's assumptions.

The early stage of a D+D process is crucial because it provides opportunities for collective learning. To talk about collective learning, it is useful to borrow the concept of *single and double loop* learning from Argyris & Schon.¹⁹⁴ In a D+D context, single loop learning entails understanding *what* others think (views, positions), whereas double loop learning involves understanding *how* others think, (taken-for-granted assumptions, underpinning values, frames of reference).

Moving from single to double loop learning entails moving down through the Ladder of Inference that we saw earlier on. This level of learning broadens the perspectives of participants. When dialogic dynamics succeed, some kind of double loop learning is likely to occur.

One final argument in favour of the D+D framework is that it takes seriously the role of emotions in citizen participation. In Box 17, Fischer illustrates the importance of attending to emotions and communication dynamics in order to understand how citizens' experience of participation influences their engagement.

Box 17 – The importance of emotions in public engagement. Excerpt from Fischer (2009, p. 287)¹⁹⁵

We need to carefully consider the ways in which deeply felt concerns and beliefs are related to basic social identities, whether those of a community or the specific individuals who live in it. The point is particularly important for organizing deliberative forums ... When it comes to heated deliberation, more comes into play than just the topics under discussion; the very protection of the individual's self is at stake.

In the process of expressing their preferences and interests, as Blaug (1999:153) explains, participants often take challenges to their ideas as a criticism of themselves and, in the process, assess the views of other participants in just the same way. The hurt feelings that easily result ... can make 'deliberative fora...dangerous places' for some people, 'and if they become too dangerous, they will, quite rationally, be avoided by participants'. Not everyone will be comfortable with such clashes. Many participants will exclude themselves from the exchanges; others will be excluded by the group, the result of which undercuts the legitimacy of the deliberative process. For this reason, how to manage emotional issues becomes an essential question.

¹⁹² Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁹³ Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁹⁴ Argyris, C. & Schon, D.A. (1976) *Theory in Practice. Increasing Professional Effectiveness*, London: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

¹⁹⁵ Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

It is often assumed that more public engagement spaces will enable more dialogue and deliberation to take place. However, this overlooks the importance of the citizen experience of engaging with others in those spaces. In participatory processes participants are exposed to diverse points of view that may put into question their perspectives and values. Mutz has shown that this type of exposure to conflicting perspectives discourages participation.¹⁹⁶ In other words, citizens are keener to participate in initiatives that involve like-minded individuals, and therefore the prospect of engaging in

confrontational deliberation with people who think differently may deter them from wanting to participate at all. This does little to foster democratic spaces where citizens learn about their differences and work out conflicts. Moreover, it diminishes opportunities to value pluralism and diversity.

If one of the factors that keep citizens from engaging is the perception that the process may be threatening, then caring about communication patterns becomes fundamental for public engagement practitioners. It is important to note that Mutz's research refers to deliberative

processes where debate and polarised argument often prevail. In contrast, dialogue practitioners strive to craft spaces where participants can welcome dissent and difference as part of the learning experience. Indeed, much of the time invested in preparations goes into encouraging certain mindsets and framing the encounter as a meeting of minds, rather than as a contest of opposites.

To sum up, D+D processes aim to enable a rich mix of communication patterns that build on, rather than clash with, each other.

Box 18 – The case for D+D. Excerpt from Levine, Gastil and Fung (2005, p. 282-283)¹⁹⁷

Public deliberation can be defined as a problem-solving form of discourse that involves problem analysis, establishing evaluative criteria, and identifying and weighing alternative solutions. Through respectful, egalitarian, and conscientious process, a deliberative body aims for a reasoned consensus but often settles, at least provisionally, for a judicious result based on a more humble decision rule, such as simple or two-thirds majority rule.

When a group seeks to deliberate on a public issue, however, it may be necessary to first engage in dialogue. This form of speech is not as concerned with solving a problem as with bridging linguistic, social, and epistemological chasms between different subgroups of the potentially deliberative body ...

Whereas deliberation focuses on policy choices, dialogue seeks accommodation, reconciliation, mutual understanding, or at the very least, informed tolerance ... The general method is to create a group environment that is conducive to honest self-expression, careful self-reflection, and thoughtful probing and perspective taking. Dialogue generally aims to help different subgroups learn about one another through a series of mutual questioning and reflection sessions. It can take many hours or days for a group to move through a series of stages and arrive at the point where participants truly understand one another's standpoints and appreciate the history and conviction of one another's views.

Once each subgroup understands how the others think, talk, and reason, it is easier to avoid conceptual confusions, symbolic battles, and epistemological thickets that could otherwise derail a deliberative process. This dialogic phase does not resolve moral disputes or advance policy goals; rather, it prepares group members for the necessary but challenging process of making common decisions together despite deep underlying differences.

¹⁹⁶ P. 114 in Mutz, D. C. (2006) *Hearing the other side: deliberative versus participatory democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁹⁷ Levine, P., Fung, A. & Gastil, J. (2005) Future directions for public deliberation. In: GASTIL, J. & LEVINE, P. (eds.) *The deliberative democracy handbook: Strategies for effective civic engagement in the twenty-first century*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



There are excellent toolkits and handbooks offering facilitation tips as well as practical advice on how to design, organise, and host

participatory processes (see Appendix 1). A good example is Faulkner's *Dialogue in Public Engagement*, the handbook to which this

booklet is a theoretical companion. That is why here I will only focus on communication dynamics and micro-practices that relate mostly to small-group facilitation.

7.1 The facilitator as a reflective practitioner

Developing facilitation skills is a matter of practice. There are techniques that can be learned, of course, and there are hands-on training courses like the ones we do at Edinburgh Beltane. In my opinion, however, the best way is to learn by doing. In this sense, facilitation is more an art or a craft than a science. There is a good reason for this: every person, group and context is different.

Your main tool in facilitation work is not an object or a technique. You are the main tool: your presence, body language, speech, and ability to engage with individuals and groups. Facilitating is not unlike playing football or grafting a tree. You may have done it a hundred times, and yet you know that every time will be different. Every time will require ongoing engagement and on-the-spot readings of various conditions. You may try to anticipate: 'I could try this or that. This might be useful.' And then evaluate: 'I see what I did there. That worked well. That didn't.' However, facilitating is an in-the-moment practice; you cannot plan or anticipate every move, turn, or contingency. A facilitator at work, like any reflective practitioner, is engaged in an ongoing conversation with the situation at hand.¹⁹⁸

The most experienced facilitators I have met, despite their different working contexts, often shared the same advice: follow your gut instincts. At the end of the day, many of the skills we use as facilitators are social skills that we use in our everyday lives as members or families, teams, communities, and so on. As

social animals, we are generally pretty good at reading others and acting accordingly during social interaction.¹⁹⁹ The first step, then, is to build on what you are already good at based on your life experiences. The second step is to take any opportunity that you can get to learn by doing: practice, practice, and practice.

Your observations, feelings and interpretations guide your actions as a facilitator. Facilitation, therefore, requires reflective practice. You must be aware of the powerful position that you momentarily occupy. This may sound obvious, but I have seen processes ruined by reckless facilitators who either became dominant speakers, or unashamedly disrespected participants' views.

Every time you organize and facilitate a public engagement process you are making political choices all the way. Efforts to carefully engineer participatory spaces are not uncommon, especially in the area of controversial science and technology. For instance, I studied a deliberative dialogue in which the organisers put a lot of care in forming a broad and diverse community of inquiry, but it was only by invitation.²⁰⁰ In their view, this would allow better quality of engagement. Arguably, this can be necessary around topics that may cause media *furor* or miss-representation. Sometimes that is what it takes to create a safe space where complex issues can begin to be explored.

Other times, however, people are excluded by the characteristics of the process itself: for instance, time (who can attend in the

morning, evening or weekend?); and space (is it a university venue, a pub, a community centre?). Yet, other times we may simply forget about certain participants who should be there for a D+D process to be substantial. And sometimes that forgetfulness reproduces the privileges or injustices of the context in which we operate.

The key goal of a facilitator is to help participants to move the conversation along by avoiding obstructions to the flow of communication. The facilitator must serve simultaneously the needs of each participant and the group. Both, the flow of communication and the needs of participants, vary from dialogue to deliberation. In moments of dialogue, explains Forester, we seek understanding of meanings, sentiments, and perspectives ('where they're coming from'). Accordingly, we need 'skilfully attentive and probing facilitators to help us clarify meaning rather than have hot-button words lead us astray.' In contrast, to foster debate and deliberation 'we encourage parties to sharpen their arguments, and we need skilful work not so much of facilitating but of moderating an adversarial series of claims and refutations, counterclaims and counterrefutations.'²⁰¹

In my view, facilitators should be focussed on process, rather than content, as well as be nonpartisan, rather than neutral. They are there to care about participants and process, rather than to remain neutral in the face of unproductive communication patterns.

¹⁹⁸ Schon, D.A. (1983) *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

¹⁹⁹ Goffman, E. (1966) *Behavior in public places: Notes on the social organization of gatherings*, New York: The Free Press.

²⁰⁰ Escobar, O. (2011a) Science, deliberation and policy making: The Brain Imaging Dialogue as upstream engagement. *6th Conference of the European Consortium of Political Research*, 25–27 August, University of Iceland, Reykjavik.

²⁰¹ P. 184 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



7.2 Facilitation dynamics and resources

The defining job of a dialogic facilitator is: to distribute opportunities for participating; to keep the flow of communication going; to map communication patterns; and to enable participants to change them when unproductive dynamics block the flow of conversation.

7.2.1 First steps

The first step is to clarify the purpose of the encounter. This is a good opportunity for facilitators to propose to participants a particular frame of mind for interaction. Depending on whether it is a single encounter, a dialogue or deliberation format, or part of a broader D+D process, there may be a range of purposes, for instance:

- Learning
- Overcoming stereotypes
- Understanding (issues; perspectives)
- Building relationships
- Finding a common language
- Investigating
- Co-creating; co-producing
- Forming a consensus
- Making recommendations
- Deciding

It is important to have a round of quick introductions. Here you have some choices. For instance, you may ask for typical information: name, place, profession, organisation, etc. Sometimes, however, you may ask for something more atypical; e.g.: can you say your name and something that you like but that has nothing to do with your work? By inviting people to share something beyond their official position, you hint at the human dimension of every participant. Sometimes this small action can be the first step to work on overcoming stereotypes. This can be useful in groups that include experts and non-experts, or participants from two opposed camps (e.g. pro-life and pro-choice).

The Public Conversations Project has used variations of this introductory move in their dialogues on abortion. For example, they often allow participants to mingle over coffee prior to the session, without letting them reveal their militancy. That small exchange of personal details and chit-chat begins to lay the ground for the re-humanisation of 'the other' that is involved in overcoming stereotypes.

In the context of scientists working on a controversial technology, and lay-citizens, or indeed any situation involving experts and non-experts, asking participants to present themselves in more than just their professional capacity invites them to begin to contextualise their perspectives. Often, conversations in this type of group are not only about the technical aspects of an issue, but about the ethics that surround it. Accordingly, scientists or experts often give input beyond the realm of 'the technical', and thus it is important that their personal perspective is brought up openly (as opposed to it being hidden behind the smokescreen of expertise). This kind of facilitation work can begin with one or more rounds of introductions that forces participants to introduce themselves as multi-dimensional people, rather than being confined to the stereotypical roles that come with their positions, jobs, or perspectives.

In other occasions, however, some participants will seem uncomfortable until they can identify themselves and their expertise or perspective. Indeed, some people feel uneasy about not knowing *who* (a rival?) is sitting at the table. Others like their status to precede them, and won't feel comfortable until they let us be aware of *who* they are. Therefore, in some occasions it may be counterproductive to delay formal introductions. In this case, it is best to let the *peacocking ritual* take place, and then try to get the group to work.

Facilitation is a practice made of myriad micro-practices. It is easy to feel tempted to over-engineer the session. My first instinct is to avoid over-facilitating. Not every situation requires the kind of facilitation described in this chapter. In most cases, it will be enough to work with a few simple rules of engagement. Sometimes those rules don't even need to be stated, they are already shared by participants. That is the case, for instance, in forums attended by like-minded people. In contexts where participants have a history of animosity, however, the needs will be different. This generally applies to situations where participants hold substantially different values and positions. As ever, context will be the prime matter for your craft.

To facilitate D+D on a controversial issue, it often helps to do some preparatory work well before the session. For instance, you may want to begin by mapping:

- the issue and its contexts: history, perspectives, narratives, stories;
- stakeholders (or communities of meaning, interest, practice, or place);
- and patterns of communication which characterised previous encounters.

Although facilitators should focus on process, more than content, in situations of heated controversy they do well in getting acquainted with the key lines of division and *hot-button words*. This knowledge will allow them to read the unfolding conversation (including innuendos), and thus intervene when necessary.

In addition, conflict-resolution practitioners often co-design the session in collaboration with the participants. The motto 'people support what they create' captures the rationale for this. The point is to foster the shared ownership of the process by the participants, and let them co-define:

- expectations and/or objectives;
- formats (time, space, structure);
- communication agreements;
- the facilitator's role.

The question of how much a facilitator should intervene is an important one. Some situations call for strong facilitation, others for a lighter approach. The rules of thumb are once again to be alert, flexible, and responsive. The result of misreading the unfolding situation can be that the conversation becomes stifled or goes astray. Some facilitators intervene more strongly at the beginning in order to model interventions (e.g. regarding sharing air-time), or foster certain communication patterns (e.g. asking open questions: how do you see this issue? as opposed to loaded questions: do you really believe that?)

Box 19 – Good facilitators...

- Find their own style through reflective practice
- Are flexible, responsive, and open (rather than mechanistic, imperceptive, or unforthcoming)
- Work collaboratively: they do facilitation with the group, not to the group
- Are able to 'read' people and situations (when in doubt, they ask instead of second-guess)
- Invest time in preparation (especially if there is a history of unproductive engagement)
- Manage time-sharing: equal opportunities to speak
- Motivate participants to listen carefully
- Check that participants understand what they hear
- Identify patterns of communication
- Help participants to alter patterns of communication when needed
- Service the needs of each individual and the group
- Minimise intervention
- Aim to be dispensable

7.2.2 Facilitation resources

Communication agreements

Many argue that in order to foster 'new ways to think and talk together', D+D requires 'collaboratively adopted ground rules.'²⁰² These rules of engagement should be applied flexibly. As Burbules explains, 'rules in communication are pragmatic, and following them in conversation entails interpretation, judgement, and the sensitive application of general guidelines to particular cases, including knowing when to break a rule for the sake of some more general communicative purpose.'²⁰³

In general, the D+D game requires that participants agree to a set of *rules*.²⁰⁴ The functions of such communication agreements are varied:

- By talking about the proposed rules, participants are prompted to think about their communication habits, as well as about the communication patterns that they find frustrating.
- The rules provide standards that may help the group to recognise shortcomings.
- Those standards are there to serve the process and can be changed accordingly as needed by the group.
- Rules are particularly useful during 'dialogue breakdowns.'²⁰⁵ In that case the facilitator can refer to them ('we agreed that...' or 'do we want to re-visit the agreements?'), and use them as a heat-breaker; that is, a distraction which stops the escalation or diffuses the heat.

Often we may feel it is unnecessary to state any rules at all. As I said, that is the most common option in public engagement activities where participants are like-minded. But we should not assume that that is always the case. Usually, the more internally diverse the group is the more relational work it will need. In any case, communication agreements are a good tool for reflection. They prompt us to think about conversational habits, and about our expectations for the session at hand.

You may see examples of such agreements in the following tables. Table 30 reproduces the communication agreement set collaboratively for an inquiry group (including practitioners and researchers) that I facilitated. Table 31 offers an example of the sort of brief I have shared with volunteers facilitating sessions on controversial issues.

²⁰² P. 100 in Innes, J. E. & Booher, D. E. (2010) *Planning with complexity: an introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy*, Abingdon ; New York: Routledge.

²⁰³ P. 67 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

²⁰⁴ Here I follow pp. 83-84 in *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ P. 84 in *Ibid.*



Box 20 – Example of communication agreements in a group of inquiry

1. Confidentiality (e.g. 'Chatham House Rules')
2. Listening actively - suspend automatic response and rushed judgement
3. Speaking dialogically
 - a. Speaking to be understood, rather than to prevail
 - b. If possible, connect what you say to your own experience (storytelling is encouraged)
 - c. Avoid *hostalysis*: let's agree to disagree
 - d. Recognise many points of view, rather than polarizing two
 - e. Express doubts and uncertainties
 - f. Acknowledge complexity, avoid oversimplifying
4. Identify common ground
5. Take difference and conflict as invitations for further/deeper exploration
6. Right to pass

Box 21 – Example of a facilitator's brief

I. MINDSET FOR FACILITATION

- Your goal as a facilitator is to focus on the communication process, rather than putting your views across, or steering the conversation towards your personal interests. You need to assist the groups to have productive conversations on their own terms.
- Focus on servicing the needs of
 - o The group. For instance: use open questions to move the conversation along when it dries up; re-frame issues in ways that open the conversation instead of blocking it; intervene to stop the escalation of blame-games.
 - o Each participant. For instance: make sure everyone gets a fair chance to participate (use structured go-rounds, manage time); make sure no one is silenced or personally attacked (if you must intervene refer to the communication agreements).

2. INTRODUCING THE SESSION

The purpose of dialogue is to explore and understand a range of views. Accordingly, we are not here to rehearse slogans or seek consensus, but to:

- see if we can learn something new,
- and to explore the topic from a range of perspectives.

[Conflict is a central element in dialogue, but confrontation is not. Confrontational communication prevents conversations from moving forward, and thus hinders mutual learning, fosters shallow exchanges, and leaves the issues underexplored. Avoiding confrontational dynamics does not mean overlooking conflict. It means taking it as a point of departure, rather than an unavoidable final destination. This means treating conflictive issues as areas which require collaborative investigation by all the participants. This is what differentiates meaningful dialogue from rehearsed monologues.]

To enable this kind of dialogue, it sometimes helps to agree a set of ground rules. My job as a facilitator is to ensure that everyone honors them during the session. I propose the following:

- Everyone has something to contribute: listen actively and carefully to what everyone has to say.
- Give everyone space to speak; 'one voice at a time'.
- Make your points concisely, and don't let yourself dominate the conversation.
- Share common ground, and treat differences as opportunities for further exploration.
- Respect different views; try to understand them better, instead of trying to impose your views automatically.
- Chatham House rule applies (interventions are non-attributable) so that we can have a safe space for honest dialogue.

Do these rules seem reasonable? If so, let's get started, we've got a lot of critical issues to explore. [If there's no agreement, invite the group to add or remove rules accordingly]

There are many examples of these types of ground rules for a variety of contexts (see links to downloadable resources in Appendix 1). Recently I facilitated a series of table sessions as part of a world-café event on community-owned renewable energy assets. I assumed that we didn't need to make ground rules explicit. This worked well for the two first groups. The third one, in contrast, could have used them. Suddenly, I found myself trying to propose rules half way through the conversation, as one of the participants became a target for the rest (he was a consultant).

The conversation never got back on track. I tried to reframe the situation: 'It seems that many of you had bad experiences with some consultants. This forum aims to provide a space where those experiences can be shared. But we also want provide opportunities for people who often don't talk to each other to do so. It seems that we could do that here. We could try to get beyond stereotypes and actually try to understand each other's perspective in order to learn more about these issues.' In the end, we did have a set of monologues about the role played by consultants in that field, but it never became a process of co-inquiry. Clear ground rules from the beginning could have fostered different patterns of communication.

Work appreciatively

This means avoiding 'deficit language', being appreciative of people's contributions, and maintaining a positive attitude throughout. For instance, instead of naming infractions, you may deal with them indirectly by suggesting alternatives, e.g.: if someone dominates, ask others who have not spoken if they want a chance. Your tone of voice and body language are your tools here.

Working appreciatively has become a popular idea spearheaded by those who proposed the participatory format Appreciative Inquiry.²⁰⁶ They argue that 'deficit language' holds us down, and that much can be gained by orienting participants towards thinking about positive actions. Thinking about what makes a difference and what works, they argue, produces energy to change what doesn't.

Keeping the time and focus

Get the group to appreciate that air-time is a precious resource and that sharing it is a

key sign of respect for everyone in the group. Sometimes I say to participants: 'Time is probably our most scarce resource here, so please help me to make sure everyone gets a fair share of time, don't let yourself dominate the conversation; if you have a pressing thought jot it down for later so that now you can focus on listening to others.'

Time and focus go hand in hand. Sometimes participants get anxious when interventions become too long, and they find it hard to keep the focus. You must read the signs, and try to move the conversation accordingly. Another difficult issue is the role of silence. Constructive conversations often require thoughtful pauses. They encourage reflection, help to avoid reflex reactions, and promote better listening. But making everyone feel comfortable with silence can be challenging.

Listening, go-round structures, and time-outs

There are various ways in which you may help participants to concentrate on listening.

- *Structuring* the conversation. For instance, using go-rounds can be effective because, following lessons from the Public Conversations Project, they 'provide a tight structure and clear expectations, which reduces anxiety. The structure clearly separates the acts of speaking and listening, which makes it easier to listen with full attention and to speak knowing that you will not be interrupted. The format also creates a "level playing field" in which everyone has equal access to the "group ear." This can be important in groups where the presence of one or two outspoken and expansive members usually results in some people speaking first or longer.'²⁰⁷
- Using a *talking stick*. This Native American ritual ensures that only one person (whoever holds it) speaks at the time. Using any object that may act as a talking stick can be a fun way to work with a group where participants struggle with turn-taking.
- Invite *note-taking*. As I said above, this helps some participants to park unrelated ideas for later, and concentrate on listening.
- Use *summarisation exercises*. When it's extremely hard for participants to listen to each other without interrupting, the facilitator may ask each speaker to summarise what the previous speaker has said before they can make their point. They must summarise accurately and without judging, before they can actually share their opinions.
- Limit responses to *questions of true curiosity*, which must 'be addressed to specific others, must be limited to things that person actually said, cannot be rhetorical, and must be motivated by a sincere desire to know more.'²⁰⁸ This can be useful when a group is finding it hard to engage in inquiry, rather than advocacy, dynamics.

All of these moves can stiffen the communication process, so we should use them only when they are really necessary – for instance, for exploring controversial issues and difficult relationships. There is also always the possibility of calling a *time-out*, especially when communication agreements have been seriously breached, or when a situation becomes extremely emotional.

Discursive resources

There are a series of discursive resources at the disposal of any facilitator. For example:

- *Paraphrasing*. If we repeat what we have heard in our own words, we can check that we understood correctly and show that we are listening carefully.
- *Summarizing* provides ways for the facilitator to
 - o recap on what has been said, making sure that everyone is up to speed,
 - o bring out connections that may have emerged,
 - o and give participants the opportunity to qualify or add points.
- *Questioning*.²⁰⁹ Gadamer regarded questions as the heart of dialogic communication. He said that it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them.²¹⁰ The more interesting questions are usually open-ended because they are often more generative (can evoke new insight) and less rhetorical (questions that are not questions but disguised points or attacks).

As ever, there is no formula. What may seem a perfectly reasonable or genuine question in one situation could be taken as an offense

²⁰⁶ See Srivastva, S. & Cooperrider, D. L. (1990) *Appreciative management and leadership: the power of positive thought and action in organizations*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. AND Cooperrider, D. L. & Whitney, D. K. (2005) *Appreciative inquiry: a positive revolution in change*, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

²⁰⁷ Pp. 8–9 in Public-Conversations-Project. 2011. *Constructive conversations about challenging times. A guide to community dialogue*. Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project. Available: www.publicconversations.org/resources/guides [Accessed 9 September 2011].

²⁰⁸ P. 36 in Littlejohn, S. W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage.

²⁰⁹ For advice on questioning see pp. 38–44 in *Ibid*.

²¹⁰ P. 326 in Gadamer, H.-G. (1982) *Truth and method*, New York: Crossroad.



elsewhere. Open questions often begin with *what* and *how* (How do you feel about this?) and leave a broad margin of manoeuvre for the speaker. In contrast, closed questions narrow the scope of the answer and tend to corner the speaker (Do you feel ashamed about this?), although in deliberation this can be a legitimate challenge. As a facilitator you'll do well to have a few questions up your sleeve just in case the conversation is drying up and your mind goes blank.

In extremely acrimonious groups you may begin with a session that sees every participant answering, in turn, the same set of questions, without being allowed to interrupt or respond to each other. The point is to achieve 2 simple things: that they sit around the same table, and that they begin to make an effort to listen to each other. Sometimes, motivated by the desire to explore each other's points, and after they have seen that it can be done in a safe way, they may want to move towards more meaningful dialogic inquiry.

- *Reframing*²¹¹ is helpful on 2 levels.
 - *Reframing interventions during the conversation.* A facilitator can reframe phrases in order to foster certain patterns of communication. For instance, if a participant says: 'These meetings are a waste of time', a facilitator may ask: 'What would have to happen for this meeting to be worthwhile to you?' In this case, the facilitator turns a critical comment into an invitation to explore what matters to participants. You may see other examples of reframing in Box 22.
 - *Reframing the process as a whole.* In situations where participants have a history of unproductive debates and gladiatorial show-offs, we may want to begin by reframing the engagement process as a whole. That means looking at it in a different light, and presenting it as such. This will take considerable

work prior to the session: Work which is focussed on building support from participants for an alternative way of engaging; work which reframes previous unproductive engagement as a problem in itself; and finally, work which fosters a collaborative ethos, a 'We' that may sustain the project.

During the session we can insist on using the language of *co-inquiry*, e.g.: 'we are not here to repeat slogans, but to see if we can *learn* something that we didn't actually *know*. Some ground rules may help *us*. Let's *work out* if we can agree on them'. Good facilitators are able to motivate participants to take the experimental and challenging nature of a dialogue session as a learning experience. As *co-inquiry* begins to unfold, facilitators can work on the process of reframing from individual interests to shared needs and vulnerabilities.²¹²

Box 22 - Reframing a contentious or disruptive contribution. Excerpt from Faulkner (2011)²¹³ and examples from Ackland (1997)²¹⁴

The point of re-framing is to regain a positive focus for the discussion. Done well, it can be a powerful technique for moving people from a negative stance to seeing a positive way forward. There are three basic steps:

- Acknowledge what has been said.
- Ask an open question that seeks to get at the heart of the problem.
- Involve other members of the group in solving the problem.

The following examples illustrate the kinds of shifts one can make in order to move from a negative statement to a positive question.

- You are so negative about this proposal -> How might we evaluate proposals?
(*shift from you/me to we*)
- I object to landfill sites -> How might we deal with community waste?
(*shift from closed to open*)
- The project officer has not been keeping us informed -> How might we improve communication?
(*shift from personalised to depersonalised*)
- Last time I went to a workshop it was a complete waste of time! -> What in particular made it a waste of time? How might we overcome this here?
(*shift from past problems to future opportunities*)
- This is the responsibility of government! -> What could happen at a local level (here) to help improve things here?
(*shift from general to specific*)
- We should go to the press about this failure! -> What would you like to have seen happen?
(*shift from threat to affirmation*)

²¹¹ On framing see Schon, D. & Rein, M. (1994) *Frame Reflection. Toward the resolution of intractable policy controversies*, New York: Basic Books. AND Tannen, D. (1993) *Framing in discourse*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹² P. 142 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹³ P. 18 in Faulkner, W. (2011) *Dialogue in public engagement: A handbook*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Beltane (Beacons for Public Engagement).

²¹⁴ Ackland, A. (1997) *Working with your Stakeholders: Resolving Conflict and Building Consensus on Environmental Issues*. An Environmental Workbook, London: Environmental Council.

- *Connecting ideas.* As we paraphrase, summarise, and reframe, we often propose connections between what's been said. Another way of suggesting connections is by *scoping in and out*.²¹⁵ This is inspired by systems thinking. We can *scope in* and focus on subsystems (the smaller parts that make up an issue), as if we were zooming-in to find nuance. For example, if we are discussing policy against poverty, we may want to zoom-in on the definition of poverty or the analysis of causes implicit in that policy. Or we can *scope out*, and look at a larger system that includes the issue and its connections. For instance, we may want to explore poverty not only in terms of the economy, but also in terms of the political system.

Space and objects

Most facilitators agree that the circle is a key symbol of dialogue. Accordingly, many prefer circular layouts in which every participant can see each other, and no one occupies a spatially prominent position. In large deliberative processes this spirit can be preserved by using concentric circles.²¹⁶

In D+D small details can make big a difference. For instance, I have seen participants that felt uncomfortable sitting in a bare circle of chairs, with no tables offering some sort of protective barrier. Some people feel exposed in such situations. On the other hand, removing that 'protective barrier' may help in orienting participants towards each other in terms of body language, e.g.: they may lean towards the speaker as they listen or make more eye contact (instead of staring at the table or their notes). The absence of such protective barriers can force participants

to do more relational work with their bodies. Depending on other factors, this may be a good idea, or actually too much to ask.

Sometimes, the facilitator may want to reproduce the conventions of the spaces that are familiar to the participants, so that they can begin difficult conversations in settings where they feel comfortable. Yet other times, those familiar spaces may stimulate the replication of unwanted communication patterns, and the facilitator may want to change the nature of the setting in order to create a sense of novelty that may dislocate assumptions about the process.

Communication practitioners often recall Austin's observation that 'people do things with words'; we looked at this earlier. What we tend to forget, however, is that 'settings do things with people too'.²¹⁷ Therefore, in setting the stage for D+D, facilitators would do well to consider a range of physical factors, including the venue, the layout, and the size and composition of the groups. As Davies notes, 'anything from the venue public engagement activities are held in – a bar or a school? – to the way that participants are introduced creates dynamics which shape the content of discussion; it is worth, then, being mindful of the minutiae of dialogue in all its forms'.²¹⁸

Depending on the situation, materials such as flipcharts, wall maps, or sticky notes can be indispensable, or actually a distraction. For example, a flipchart or wall paper can be useful as part of a strategy to defuse confrontational or polarising dynamics. By asking participants to occasionally direct their attention to the flipchart, the facilitator can create thoughtful impasses in the interaction.

In this manner, energy can be channelled towards the task at hand, creating a certain alignment of purpose in the group. Projecting ideas onto the wall also allows participants to put to the group sensitive issues without needing to single out a particular respondent. In general, flipcharting can help to keep the focus of the conversation, to visualise arguments and connections, and to leave an accurate trail.

Sticky notes can also be helpful as a parallel channel for communication. They provide another way of contributing points for those who are silent, feel silenced, or feel inhibited. For instance, they can be added anonymously to a *parking space* somewhere in the room. The facilitator can then collect those contributions and bring them to the group.

There are many materials available to help facilitate D+D processes.²¹⁹ As ever, practical judgment, and contextual constraints, guide facilitators in making the call of what may be needed. In any case, the key message here is that even the simplest objects influence the scene. Indeed, materials and practices are inextricable. In the next section I will give an example to illustrate this point in relation to the challenges of writing up or recording contributions during D+D sessions (see Box 25).

For now, let me close this chapter on *facilitation moves* by drawing your attention to examples of dynamics of facilitation-in-action and also self-help tools for participants reproduced from toolkits by the Public Conversations Project (see Box 23 and 24).

²¹⁵ Littlejohn, S.W. & Domenici, K. (2001) *Engaging communication in conflict: Systemic practice*, Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

²¹⁶ See for instance the venues at the innovative Wosk Centre for Dialogue www.sfu.ca/dialog [Accessed 1 September 2011].

²¹⁷ P. 628 in Hajer, M.A. (2005) Setting the stage – A dramaturgy of policy deliberation. *Administration & Society*, 36(6), 624–647.

²¹⁸ P. 12 in Davies, S.R. (2011) The rules of engagement: power and interaction in dialogue events. *Public Understanding of Science*, published online 14 March 2011.

²¹⁹ See for instance KETSO, a participatory tool developed by a scholar-practitioner www.ketso.com [Accessed 3 August 2011].



Box 23 – Facilitation moves. Excerpts from Public Conversations Project (2011, pp. 14-15)²²⁰

Suppose Susan's comments in two go-rounds strongly suggest (in your mind) that anyone who doesn't agree with her is immoral or dangerously unrealistic. Susan hasn't directly criticized another participant or what people said; nonetheless her tone and some of her language makes you feel uncertain about whether she is implicitly insulting the intelligence and morality of those who have expressed different views.

Rather than saying, "Susan, you're violating an agreement," you can express curiosity about the needs of the group by saying, "Susan, it sounds like you have really strong feelings about this. How are those of you who have different views hearing what Susan is saying? Are you feeling criticized or shut down or are you still able to listen? How is your resilience holding up?" By taking this approach, you remain squarely in the role of servant to the group. You give the speaker indirect feedback and a chance to reflect. You also give others a chance to give him or her direct feedback. Finally, you are "walking the talk" by resisting the impulse to assume knowledge of others' intentions or impact on others and modelling genuine inquiry.

You can also serve the group by helping people stay focused. For example, if Joan responds to a question in a way that seems unrelated to the question, don't assume it is unrelated. Ask. For example, "Joan, I'm having trouble connecting what you're saying with the question. Can you help me make the connection?"

If you're noticing a pattern in the group that may be problematic, you can comment on what you are noticing and see what people think. For example, "We're about half way through our discussion time and I notice that we've stayed focused on Dan's question about x. That may be fine with everyone, but I want to check to see if any of you were hoping to ask another question." Or you might address a subgroup, e.g., "The conversation has been going at a really fast pace among you three and I wonder if you (other) three are having a hard time getting a word in or are just choosing to listen right now."

Box 24 – Self-help tools for participants. Source: Public Conversations Project (1999, p. 12)²²¹

1. **If you feel cut off**, say so or override the interruption. ("I'd like to finish...")
2. **If you feel misunderstood**, clarify what you mean. ("Let me put this another way...")
3. **If you feel misheard**, ask the listener to repeat what she heard you say, then affirm or correct her statement.
4. **If you feel hurt or disrespected**, say so. If possible, describe exactly what you heard or saw that evoked hurt feelings. ("When you said x, I felt y...") If it is hard to think of what to say, try to find a way to flag your reaction.
5. **If you feel angry**, express the anger directly (e.g., "I felt angry when I heard you say x...") rather than expressing it or acting it out indirectly (e.g., by trashing another person's statement or asking a sarcastic or rhetorical question.)
6. **If you feel confused**, frame a question that seeks clarification or more information. You may prefer to paraphrase what you have heard. ("Are you saying that...?")
7. **If you feel uncomfortable** with the process, state your discomfort and check in with the group to see how others are experiencing what is happening. ("I'm not comfortable with the tension I'm feeling in the room right now and I'm wondering how others are feeling.") If others share your concerns and you have an idea about what would help, offer that idea. ("How about taking a one-minute Time Out to reflect on what we are trying to do together?")
8. **If you feel the conversation is going off track**, share your perception, and check in with others. ("I thought we were going to discuss x before moving to y, but it seems that we bypassed x and are focussing on y. Is that right?") If so ("I'd like to get back to x and hear from more people about it!")

These self-help tools were derived from discussions with participants about difficult moments and what they might do in the future in similar situations.

²²⁰ Public-Conversations-Project. 2011. *Constructive conversations about challenging times. A guide to community dialogue*. Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project. Available: www.publicconversations.org/resources/guides [Accessed 9 September 2011].

²²¹ Public-Conversations-Project. 1999. *PCP dialogue tool box*. Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project. Available: <http://www.publicconversations.org/resources/pcp-dialogue-tool-box> [Accessed 7 September 2008].

7.3 Common facilitation pitfalls in public engagement

7.3.1 The challenge of creating communication dynamics where criticism can be taken as an invitation, rather than as an attack

The arguments I have made for preventing confrontational dynamics should not be taken as arguments against critical interventions. On the contrary, critical engagement is fundamental for meaningful D+D. Otherwise, processes can become dominated by a focus on common ground that may disrespect difference, overlook conflict, and reinforce the status quo.

What distinguishes dialogic communication is that difference and conflict are treated as sites for further exploration. When someone raises a critical issue, or initiates what could be seen by others as an attack, the facilitator and the group must work hard to take it as an open invitation. An invitation to explore something which is of profound concern for that participant. Such *invitations* become critical junctures.

There are several ways of responding to them, and those responses will invite subsequent patterns of communication. So, for example, when in the midst of a session someone says something that other participants feel is direct attack to their values or positions, they have several choices. One is to respond with a defence/rebuttal that often contains a counter-attack. This is likely to invite a back and forth of (pre-packaged) well-rehearsed arguments that everyone will probably be familiar with. Nothing new is likely to be learned. The exchange will probably evolve into a predictable scoring contest between participants focussed on winning the argument.

A different response is likely to elicit different dynamics. So instead of reacting automatically, the participants and/or facilitator can work on suspending reflex responses, and seek to explore the critique/attack. They may begin by asking: Can you tell us a little bit more about what makes you think that? How does that relate to the topic? What experiences have made you think/feel that way? Can you give an example that will help us to understand your concern? Sometimes this kind of question/answer comes as a surprise to the critical speaker. That element of surprise, that invitation to dialogue, can be a game-changer:

Often, when we're making a critical point we get physically and mentally ready for the ensuing battle. If instead of a counterattack we face further questioning that shows genuine curiosity, a spirit of co-inquiry can begin to develop. In those situations, our gladiatorial dispositions are rendered unfit for purpose. Knowing that others have a genuine interest in understanding our frustration, and the stories behind our feelings and thoughts, invites us to respond differently. It becomes an invitation to explain where we are coming from, and it is likely to invite further co-inquiry.

Sometimes the facilitator may help this process by reframing critical contributions in ways that turn them into something that the group can work on. Here again, we may draw lessons from mediation practice. As Forester explains, 'mediators know and teach us how critical the turn from escalating

"blame games" to generating proposals can be. Blaming quickly becomes personal, fuelling defensiveness, justification and counterargument; asking for proposals opens up possibilities of crafting agreements. So mediators know the risks of accusatory "you" language, and they try to create space for participants to ask and explore variants of the essential What if...? questions.'²²²

To sum up the challenge: conversations become more difficult precisely when we need them most. Neuroscience is helping us to shine a light on some of these issues. Apparently, the human animal is 'hardwired for conflict'. As Becker explains: 'When there is a lot at stake and we feel under attack, the brain and central nervous system release hormones designed to keep us hyper-vigilant, with physiological (a racing heart rate, cold, sweaty palms) and psychological effects. Our capacity to think and reflect shuts down as we prepare for fight, flight, or freeze.' In that state, she continues, 'we are unable to listen and learn. Our higher brain shuts down and we are not receptive to new information. This affects our capacity for a constructive exchange!'²²³

There is no intention here to suggest that we should take on the task of changing human nature. More humbly, facilitators can try to foster spaces that invite constructive communication patterns.

²²² P. 185 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²²³ <http://www.publicconversations.org/blog/enemy-within-hardwired-conflict> [Accessed on 13 September 2011].



7.3.2 The challenge of recording

My preference is to separate the jobs of the facilitator and the recorder (or scribe), so that the former can focus on process, and the latter on creating a trail of the conversation. However, sometimes both activities can work well together. Recording can be used as a facilitation tool that forces participants to explain points clearly, pause and think, and explore underlying assumptions.

The recorder's job is to leave a trail of points, questions, and arguments that do justice to the conversation. To achieve this, the recorder must check with participants that they are getting it right. It is important to aim to capture vocabularies, ways of phrasing, and meanings. If we must summarise or paraphrase, then we must check: Is this what you meant? Is this a good summary of your argument? Does this make justice to what you said? A good record is one that participants agree upon as reflecting

their respective interventions and their engagement as a group.

Recorders must be as reflective as facilitators. They are at the centre of what I call the *micro-politics of filtering and distilling*. That is, the political activity of selecting, ignoring, and tweaking that is involved in recording. For an illustration of this point please see Figure 35. Recorders, therefore, are not only faced with the challenge of creating an accurate trail, but also of navigating reflectively the micro-politics of that creation.

Furthermore, sometimes there may not be simple ways of representing participants' contributions. Smith-Merry has documented the way in which some contributions never make it to final reports in consultation processes because they are not easy to codify (i.e. practitioners' knowledge shared through stories). There are profound questions about

the challenge of *processing* various forms of knowledge so that they can be incorporated into reports and decision-making processes.²²⁴

There are also problems around the ways in which the parameters set by the organisers may determine what sorts of things will be perceived by participants as legitimate, feasible, or acceptable in the eye of the 'sponsors'. The danger here is that this perception may structure the participants' answers and proposals. Mosse illustrates this with the case of a participatory process in which local people chose a particular type of tree to be planted, not because they knew it was the best option, but because they knew that that was the type of tree that could be funded by the sponsor.²²⁵ Organisers, facilitators, and recorders must work together to avoid such self-defeating dynamics.

Box 25 – Materials and practices: The power of ink and paper

Sometimes I ask students of facilitation: what do you think can be one of the most powerful tools in a participatory process? One of the most critical instruments in D+D is often the smallest object in the room. Namely, a marker.

Who is in charge of using it to record input from participants? How accurately are they recording? Are they checking with participants if what's recorded corresponds with what was meant? What goes unrecorded? Why? Who will transcribe, translate, or transform what's been recorded into a report? How will the recorder decide how to interpret the points? Where will the report go?

These processes of recording, ignoring, interpreting and translating constitute a *micro-politics of filtering and distilling* that matters profoundly in D+D processes. As an illustration, I'll share an example from a consultation event on EU Research & Development that I attended in Brussels some time ago.²²⁶

The program for the day included various talks and panels, followed by some break out discussions. During those small group sessions the facilitators adopted a remarkably strong 'steering' role. Marker in hand, they went the extra mile to try and fit – often force – the participants' contributions into pre-determined boxes and headings. Comments that did not fall neatly into such categories went unrecorded. Unsurprisingly, those comments often included critical observations about the assumptions behind those very headings and categories.

As a consequence of combining a strong facilitation style and a loosely licensed marker, the oral summary given by the facilitators at the plenary included a great deal of unchecked interpretations. In other words, the facilitators 'translated'²²⁷ what was said in the break-out sessions so that nuanced and diverse contents were turned into coherent narratives that served as a surprisingly neat response to the consultation questions.

Unfortunately, many points were not recorded simply because they did not fit the preconceived framing of the issue. The report from the consultation may tell a coherent story, but is that the story told by the participants?

This kind of facilitation and recording (these micro-politics of filtering and distilling) makes the work of facilitators easier, but can bring into question the authenticity of the engagement process.

²²⁴ See Smith-Merry, J. (2011) *Experiential knowledge in action: consulting practitioners for policy. Unpublished paper (under review) from the Know&Pol European Research Project*

²²⁵ See pp. 19–22 in Mosse, D. (2001) 'People's knowledge', participation and patronage: Operations and representations in rural development. In: COOKE, B. & KOTHARI, U. (eds.) *Participation. The new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.

²²⁶ Escobar, O. (2009a) A consultation in Brussels – EU Research & Development: Share today to win tomorrow. 3 December 2009, Scotland House, Brussels: Interim report for Edinburgh Beltane (BFPE).

²²⁷ On 'translation' see Freeman, R. (2009) What is 'translation'? *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 5, 429–447.

7.3.3 The Chairperson model vs. the Facilitator model

D+D entails small choices with critical impact. I will use here the example of a process I took part in. This was a long deliberative dialogue with a series of stages and sessions on a controversial scientific topic. It was an ambitious and well organised process, but in my view there was an important flaw. The organisers choose a Chairperson model of facilitation, which is familiar to many, but is not necessarily the best choice in D+D.

The choice of the Chairperson – rather than the Facilitator – model had important consequences for the communication dynamics during small table discussions. In the two first sessions that I attended there were two very outspoken Chairmen who dominated the exchange. They were academic experts with a lot to say, and so they paid little attention to facilitating a conversation that would include everyone. This accentuated problems of exclusion, with a few expert voices (3 out of 7) dominating both of these table sessions.

The Chairmen made no effort to ensure everyone had opportunities to speak. In any case, many participants may have had little to say given the specialised nature of the issues that the Chairmen emphasised for discussion. They never checked that everyone could understand the exchange, which accentuated

the problems caused by specialist jargon, and did very little in bridging the language gap between the experts and non-experts. This, in addition to the lack of proper facilitation, created a sense of frustration in most participants. Everyone around the table could read the body language, apart from the Chairman, who was too busy entertaining his concerns. In addition, there were problems around the feedback from our table to the plenary, as the reports were strongly filtered by the Chairmen's focus.

The Chairperson model is generally a bad choice for D+D processes. We are all familiar with the model and its rationale. Someone, on the back of her/his expertise and reputation, is appointed to facilitate a discussion. But, why would you put someone who surely has a lot to contribute to the conversation in charge of moving it along?

This is a point often made by deliberative scholar-practitioners. The Chairperson approach, as Kadlec and Friedman argue, can 'constrain the quality of deliberation' to the point that it may exacerbate the cynicism and disengagement of participants. Often, Chairpersons 'consider themselves experts on the subject, they "love to talk," they have strong feelings about how the problem needs to be addressed ... [This]

can be so counterproductive to the process of deliberation that they can have a lethal effect on its quality ... Once these individuals are given practical control of small-group deliberation, the groups tend to reproduce the inequalities and silences that characterize our larger society ... The significance of design comes to the fore when we realize that potentially self-defeating dynamics such as these can be easily circumvented. Even minor guidelines to groups about selecting moderators and the moderator's function can make a major difference here, and an even stronger remedy ... is in-depth moderator training prior to a deliberative process.²²⁸

In hindsight, some of the table discussions in the deliberative dialogue of my example suffered from this malaise. Sometimes the hard work that PE practitioners put into a process can be tainted by apparently small details. Many of the Chairs that they chose decided not to wear a facilitative hat. But why would they? They had a lot to say. Instead, the organisers could have trained facilitators who attend 'solely to group process, rather than combining facilitation with content expertise.'²²⁹ Separating these roles is considered to be a basic tenet of good facilitation.

²²⁸ P. 12–13 in Kadlec, A. & Friedman, W. (2007) Deliberative Democracy and the Problem of Power; *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 3(1), Article 8.

²²⁹ P. 234 in Krantz, R. S. (2003) Cycles of reform in Porto Alegre and Madison. In: FUNG, A. & WRIGHT, E. O. (eds.) *Deepening democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance*. London and New York: Verso.



7.3.4 The science communicator dilemma: advocating or facilitating?

A lot of public engagement in the UK happens in the world of science and technology. Science communicators have become an important professional group, and many scientists have seen their roles expanded to include science communication.²³⁰ However, the *Public Understanding of Science* era, with its emphasis in 'communicating the science' is seen by many as obsolete. In that sense, and especially in controversial science, that traditional model of scientific literacy (educating publics) has – in theory – given way to the Public Engagement model, which includes dialogue and deliberation.

In the last decade, therefore, many *science communicators* have become *public engagement professionals*. And with this new role have come new dilemmas. I want to highlight one in particular. It has to do with

the mindset required to develop their new role. The traditional task of science communicators is to disseminate, discuss and advocate science and technology. They roll out large school outreach programs, mount large operations such as science festivals, and participate in the media.

In contrast, one of their new tasks as *public engagement practitioners* is to facilitate spaces for dialogue and deliberation. The focus then turns to process, rather than content. Arguably, they cannot wear a facilitative and an advocate hat at the same time. Therefore, many PE practitioners see themselves juggling the demands of contradictory roles. Today they write a press release praising new research by their organisation, and tomorrow they organise a D+D process where participants must appraise the technology involved.

As Rogers-Hayden and Pidgeon have argued: 'All of this sets a dilemma for the design and conduct of upstream engagement processes, since it is hard to see how the goals of opening up the research agenda to more public scrutiny on the one hand can be reconciled with a push to use engagement to shape public discourses on the other.'²³¹

The science communicator dilemma is, therefore, a dilemma of identity in situated practice. It presents itself at the crossroads of job descriptions, professional loyalties, personal skills, and normative orientations. So, can PE practitioners be advocates and facilitators at the same time? Some research suggests that there is confusion around this issue amongst professionals in the field.²³² This can affect the quality of PE processes. Facilitating D+D requires a clear mindset.



²³⁰ Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. *60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*. Edinburgh. AND Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010c) The engagers: The professionalisation of science public engagement in Scotland. *5th Science and the Public Conference*. Imperial College and Science Museum, London.

²³¹ P. 355 in Rogers-Hayden, T. & Pidgeon, N. (2007) Moving engagement "upstream"? Nanotechnologies and the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering's inquiry. *Public Understanding of Science*, 16(3), 345–364.

²³² Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. *60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*. Edinburgh.

I have made reference to power-related issues throughout. Here I will return briefly to some of them. There are various ways of understanding power. A traditional approach would suggest that power has to do with the capacity to coerce others. A more current interpretation would also emphasise the connection between power and

knowledge. Some see power as emanating from a specific centre. Others see it as diffused, as a sort of a matrix in which power is seen in terms of relationships.

I will combine basic ideas from various approaches to outline key power dynamics in D+D. My focus remains on communication

and the micro-politics of D+D. Accordingly, Fairclough provides a good point of departure: 'power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants.'²³³

8.1 Two critiques of dialogue: manipulation and status quo

Let's begin by looking at two important critiques of dialogue. I focus here on dialogue because I have outlined critiques of deliberation in an earlier section. Dialogue is a term with positive connotations. As a result, it is often used to label processes that bear little resemblance to the type of engagement that most would consider dialogic. As Wierzbicka has warned, the transformative potential of the concept is at risk, and may end up meaning 'manipulation, propaganda or pseudo-communication.'²³⁴

For instance, there has been substantial criticism about how dialogue has been used in some organisational settings. In this context, dialogue can be even seen as part of a management fashion.²³⁵ As Bokeno and Gantt put it: 'The terms *dialogue* and *dialogic* have recently become rather abused in organizational practice, particularly in the way they are used to market more or less conventional episodic communication events, encounters, and experiences. Ideally, the terms represent open and freely negotiated interaction ... At their practical best, they solicit employee or other involvement in decisions, strategy, and innovation already in

the works by senior management. At their practical worst, they are simply different labels for committee meetings. At their most insidious, they represent the collective forums for manufactured consent... concertive control... or team tyranny.'²³⁶

The second critique is about dynamics during dialogue sessions. In particular, it highlights ways in which certain widespread assumptions about dialogue practice may work to protect the status quo. In this line, Deetz and Simpson have made a compelling argument about the micro-politics of communication patterns: 'Dialogic models that favour a quest for common ground inherently favour the already-dominant position of institutional privilege... People at the margins must learn not only to navigate their own cultural terrain, but must also be fluent in the workings of the dominant culture... Calls for "coming together" and "finding common ground" de facto reproduce the status quo because the ground that is common between participants is that of the dominant culture. This inhibits, rather than supports, the radical disruption of self that is central to our productive understanding of dialogue.'²³⁷

Here again, PE practitioners must read the context in which they work. There are situations in which there is so much difference and conflict that searching for common ground becomes an indispensable first step. This enables participants to build relationships that may sustain subsequent co-inquiry.

That is the rationale I have made earlier for an episodic process of D+D. The latter deliberative phase provides the stage for critically evaluating arguments and positions, as well as for generating new articulations of an issue and challenging 'the vocabularies of dominant ideologies.'²³⁸

Yet there may still be situations in which injustice is so blatant that there is no scope for dialogue or deliberation. In those situations other forms of social action will probably be more appropriate and fair. As Forester argues: 'It is unrealistic and unfair to ask groups already put upon to take on also the burden of trying to understand, and making themselves understood by, those who harm them or benefit from their deprivation.'²³⁹

²³³ P. 46 in Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and power*, Harlow: Longman.

²³⁴ Wierzbicka, A. (2006) The concept of dialogue in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective. *Discourse Studies*, 8, 675–703.

²³⁵ Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010a) The dialogic turn and management fashions. *Annual meeting of the International Communication Association*, Suntec City, Singapore.

²³⁶ P. 249 in Bokeno, R. M. & Gantt, V. W. (2000) Dialogic mentoring. Core relationships for organizational learning. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 14(2), 237–270.

²³⁷ P. 145 in Deetz, S. & Simpson, J. (2004) Critical organizational dialogue. In: ANDERSON, R., BAXTER, L. & CISSNA, K. (eds.) *Dialogue. Theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

²³⁸ P. 47 in Heidebaugh, N. J. (2008) Invention and public dialogue: lessons from rhetorical theories. *Communication Theory*, 18, 27–50.

²³⁹ P. 156 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

8.2 Making, shaping and taking participatory spaces

Cornwall and her colleagues have provided useful tools for critically analysing the many spaces for participation that have mushroomed globally in the last two decades. One of the simplest distinctions she makes is that between invited and invented spaces. The former are spaces that are created top-down by an institution or organisation, and to which participants are invited. The latter refers to participatory spaces that are co-created bottom-up by participants.

The contrast between *invited* and *invented* spaces²⁴⁰ reminds us of the limits that can

be imposed on participatory processes by powerful agents, in opposition to more open initiatives developed collaboratively by the grassroots. Some have argued that much of the failure of some PE processes in the UK stems from their top-down nature. The proliferation of invited spaces has created the suspicion that some of them are disguised public relations exercises, instead of genuine opportunities for citizen participation.²⁴¹

However, neither invited top-down spaces, nor invented bottom-up spaces are static or

fixed entities. On the contrary, they can evolve into spaces that are different from the original blueprint. Indeed, spaces are not only made, but they can also be shaped and taken over. Communication patterns play a central role in the making, shaping, and taking of participatory spaces. In the words of Cornwall: 'New ways in old spaces can transform their possibilities, just as old ways in new spaces can perpetuate the status quo.'²⁴² This begins to shift our attention to the role of communication in power dynamics.

8.3 Communication and power in D+D

8.3.1 A communication perspective

PE practitioners often worry about how to create D+D processes that reduce to a minimum the socio-economic barriers that can hinder inclusive participation. Therefore, broad societal factors are often important in their analysis. However, from a communication perspective, it is also critical to consider what happens during the process. That means thinking about the micro-politics of communication implicit in certain patterns. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, we must pay attention to what forms of expression are privileged and which ones are excluded.

This concern with communication dynamics becomes central when we understand that dynamics of exclusion can still take place even when we have managed to get every stakeholder (and even every

stakeholder²⁴³) in the room. This is what Young calls 'internal exclusion.'²⁴⁴ For example, an emphasis on logical argument will privilege the interventions of those who are more articulated. In the same vein, an emphasis on rational rhetoric will dismiss the contribution of those who are unable to conform to such standard, and who may resort, for instance, to experience-based storytelling or emotional testimony. In many cases, less articulated participants may be unwittingly silenced; or even worse, they may recur to self-censorship in order to avoid frustration, embarrassment, or dismissal by the group.

Throughout the booklet I have outlined ways to avoid these kinds of dynamics in D+D. For instance, I have mentioned the importance of narrative forms of communication such as

storytelling. I have also insisted on the way in which dialogic deliberation²⁴⁵ creates space for emotionality and alternative forms of knowledge (i.e. experiential, local). To be clear, I am not arguing that public dialogue and deliberation can do without logical reason and articulated argument. Indeed, we all know that narratives and emotions can be deceiving. But let us not forget that arguments can be deceiving as well.²⁴⁵ What I have stressed is that articulate arguments must co-exist with other modes of expression, and that a safe space for D+D should foster various forms of engagement, so that everyone's views can be heard in spite of the manner in which they are expressed. Searching for a common language in order to co-create meaning that informs decisions is for the latter stages of D+D.

8.3.2 The role of expertise

D+D practice is especially challenging in policy areas that involve a range of participants (with different power and knowledge) trying to deal with complex issues. PE practitioners are often concerned about the difficulties that emerge in the interaction between policy makers, experts

and lay citizens. D+D scholar-practitioners have long pondered over how to counter the dominance of expert knowledge in policy deliberation. Accordingly, there has been substantial experimentation with formats which seek to alter traditional hierarchies of knowledge.

For instance, *citizen juries*²⁴⁶ are a good example of a deliberative format designed to give participants control over the process. The expert's role here is to answer questions and challenges, to present evidence, and to provide advice when it is required by the members of the jury. The underlying principle is that

²⁴⁰ Cornwall, A. (2002) Making spaces, changing spaces: situating participation in development. *IDS Working Paper*, 170, 43. AND Cornwall, A. (2008b) Unpacking 'participation': models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269-283. AND Cornwall, A. (2008a) Democratizing engagement. What the UK can learn from international experience. London: DEMOS.

²⁴¹ Cornwall, A. (2008a) Democratizing engagement. What the UK can learn from international experience. London: DEMOS.

²⁴² P. 7 in Cornwall, A. (2002) Making spaces, changing spaces: situating participation in development. *IDS Working Paper*, 170, 43.

²⁴³ Holzer, B. (2008) Turning stakeseekers into stakeholders. A political coalition perspective on the politics of stakeholder influence. *Business & Society*, 47(1), 50-67.

²⁴⁴ Young, I. M. (2000) *Inclusion and democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁴⁵ Pp. 77-80 in *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ The Jefferson Center (2004) *Citizens Jury handbook*. The Jefferson Center: Available at www.jefferson-center.org [Accessed on 2 September 2011].

taking only the knowledge of the experts into account 'is inadequate to the resolution of policy problems, since the issues such problems raise are also political and ethical.'²⁴⁷

The tension between professional expertise and democratic participation is a crucial dimension of our time.²⁴⁸ D+D facilitators strive to create scenarios where citizens' voices are not neutralised by asymmetric relations with experts. Privileging expertise, as Fischer argues, prevents the inclusion of other forms of knowledge (i.e. local, experience-based) and alternative interpretations in the process.

In contrast, opening spaces where professional knowledge and lived experience are combined²⁴⁹ helps to form an interpretive community which seeks 'a persuasive understanding of the issues under investigation.'²⁵⁰ For this to be possible in

policy-related arenas, policy-making culture must relinquish its 'elaborately constructed aura of expertise' and 'the reluctance to include lay citizens in technical policy deliberations.'²⁵¹

This change in the role played by experts suggests not only a change of values, attitudes, and practices, but also the abandonment of some of the privileges afforded by traditional hierarchies of knowledge. Conventional public debate, where the voice of experts is often dominant, can prevent a more socially informed take on public issues. In contrast, D+D processes aim to bring to the decision-making table a diverse range of data, values, interpretations, and local and personal experiences. In the words of Yankelovich: 'The methods of science and professional expertise are excellent for generating factually based knowledge; the methods of dialogue

are excellent for dealing with this knowledge wisely.'²⁵²

D+D facilitators spend considerable time trying to help participants to discover common ground, overcome language barriers (i.e. specialised jargon, style, articulation), and co-create shared meanings. In D+D, skilful facilitation can help experts to get beyond the closed vocabularies of their usual networks. When this happens, experts can become key collaborators in the process of inquiry, assisting other experts and non-experts in the 'problematization and exploration of their own concerns and interests.'²⁵³

In reality, it is extremely challenging to foster these dynamics. Fortunately, some agenda-setters in the public engagement world are beginning to emphasise that we must pay careful consideration to the use of experts in public dialogue.²⁵⁴

8.3.3 Relational power in D+D

Earlier I mentioned Cornwall's analysis of how participatory spaces can be made, shaped, and taken over. To add to this, in a study of dialogue as a *technology of government*, Karlsen and Villadsen, remind us of the 'tactical polyvalence of discourse.'²⁵⁵ That is to say that D+D cannot only be manipulated by the powerful. Indeed, it can also be used tactically, by those who were to be manipulated, to

unsettle the status quo. In this sense, the discourse of dialogue and deliberation can be used to 'dislocate or open up relations of power.'²⁵⁶ This reminds us that even when the intentions behind a D+D initiative aren't genuine, that process opens a new space which – despite its constraints – can become a site for the contestation and renegotiation of boundaries.

One of the strongest claims about dialogic communication is that it may enhance our capacity to engage in conversations that can change the status quo. Some psychologists have found arguments to support this claim. See Box 26.

Box 26 – A study of power in intergroup dynamics. Excerpt from Saguy, Dovidio and Pratto (2008)²⁵⁷

As predicted, across both studies, the desire to talk about power was greater among members of disadvantaged than of advantaged groups. This difference was mediated by motivation for change in group-based power: Study 2 further demonstrated that more highly identified members of disadvantaged groups wanted to talk about power more. Members of advantaged groups generally preferred to talk about commonalities between the groups more than about group-based power; and this desire was greater with higher levels of identification. However, perceiving that their group's advantage was illegitimate increased the desire of advantaged group members to address power in intergroup interactions.

One way that disadvantaged groups can promote social change to improve their group position is to alter public discourse to bring injustice and the illegitimacy of power differences into people's conscious awareness. For example, a major tool used by the civil rights movement in the United States was to explicitly challenge the legitimacy of racial oppression (King, 1964). Similar forms of nonviolent resistance, such as India's struggle for independence and South Africa's struggle to throw off apartheid, were aimed at raising public awareness and attention to the illegitimacy of the status quo. Thus, changes in power throughout the world illustrate that explicitly addressing the illegitimate aspect of group based power has served the disadvantaged group members' interest in social change.

²⁴⁷ P.36 in Barnes, M., Newman, J. & Sullivan, H. (2007) *Power, participation and political renewal: case studies in public participation*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

²⁴⁸ Fischer, F. (2000) *Citizens, experts, and the environment: the politics of local knowledge*, Durham [N.C.]: London: Duke University Press.

²⁴⁹ For a good example see Fischer, F. (2006) Participatory governance as deliberative empowerment - The cultural politics of discursive space. *American Review of Public Administration*, 36(1), 19-40.

²⁵⁰ P.222 in Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing public policy: discursive politics and deliberative practices*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁵¹ De Leon (1995) quoted in p. 5 of Clarke, R. (2002) *New democratic processes. Better decisions, stronger democracy*, London: Institute for Public Policy Research / EMPHASIS.

²⁵² P.191 in Yankelovich, D. (1999) *The magic of dialogue: transforming conflict into cooperation*, London: Nicholas Brealey.

²⁵³ P.216 in Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing public policy: discursive politics and deliberative practices*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁵⁴ See Lansdell, S. 2009. *The use of experts in public dialogue*. London: Sciencewise. Available: www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk [Accessed 1 August 2011].

²⁵⁵ P.360 in Karlsen, M. P. & Villadsen, K. (2008) Who should do the talking? The proliferation of dialogue as governmental technology. *Culture and Organization*, 14, 345–363.

²⁵⁶ P.360 in Ibid.

²⁵⁷ P.432–433 in Saguy, T., Dovidio, J. F. & Pratto, F. (2008) Beyond contact: Intergroup contact in the context of power relations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(2), 432–445.



We further note that members of disadvantaged groups may not want to avoid addressing commonalities altogether when interacting with members of advantaged groups. Drawing attention to commonalities can be beneficial for disadvantaged groups because it fosters positive connections with those of higher status and greater power in society. In addition, members of disadvantaged groups can sensitize members of advantaged groups to issues of social injustice by emphasizing common connections between the groups while simultaneously making group disparities salient.

By now we have left behind the notion of power as a simple matter of force or coercion. Power is instead depicted here as a relational concept. Our everyday language is rather revealing in this respect. The word 'power' is often accompanied by other descriptive words. Gaventa explains: 'Power "over" refers to the ability of the powerful to affect the actions and thought of the powerless. The power "to" is important for the capacity to act, to exercise agency and to realise the potential of rights, citizenship or voice. Power

"within" often refers to gaining the sense of self-identity, confidence and awareness that is a precondition for action. Power "with" refers to the synergy which can emerge through partnerships and collaboration with others, or through processes of collective action and alliance building.'²⁵⁸

I observed earlier that sometimes D+D might not be the best course of action. I have met PE practitioners who dread the possibility of being seen as not taking sides

on an issue where they feel they should. There is no way around this. In my view PE practitioners face the choice of being either advocates or facilitators. I cannot imagine how they might wear both hats at the same time during the same process. Personally, I agree with Lederach's take on this dilemma: 'Advocacy chooses to stand by one side for justice's sake. Mediation chooses to stand in connection to all sides for justice's sake.'²⁵⁹ As ever, context and reflective practice are the names of the game.

8.4 Egalitarian reciprocity: the cornerstone in D+D

A lot of thinking about D+D is focussed on ensuring that the process is just, while assuming that a just process produces just results. That is why political theorists like Benhabib argue that respect is more important than equality in forging and maintaining a dialogic relationship. As Burbules puts it, 'people will not know the same things, or the same amount; they will not always agree with one another; or always understand one another. If exact similarity or compatibility were necessary for dialogue, it would rarely happen. But in place of these, respect for one another can sustain the relation even in the face of sharp differences in knowledge, value, or belief.'²⁶⁰

Therefore, continues Burbules, 'equality per se is not necessary for dialogue to exist'. Moreover, the fact that participants 'are unequal in knowledge, experience or intelligence is not a detriment to the

possibilities of dialogue – on the contrary, it often helps explain why partners are drawn into relation with one another'. And he concludes: 'Two other characteristics are more important than equality for this dialogical relation to succeed. There must be some level of reciprocity that binds the partners together in a mutual relation of concern and respect (a relation that is fully cognizant of their differences); and there must be a real chance for everyone concerned to participate in, contribute to, or withdraw from the discussion.'²⁶¹

Summing up, *egalitarian reciprocity* can be seen as the cornerstone of D+D processes. The essence of this principle is summarised by Benhabib as follows:

- 'Each participant must have an equal chance to initiate and to continue communication.

- Each must have an equal chance to make assertions, recommendations, and explanations.
- All must have equal chances to explain their wishes, desires, and feelings.
- And finally, within the situation of dialogue speakers must feel free to thematize those power relations which in ordinary contexts would constrain the wholly free articulation of opinions and positions.
- Together these conditions specify a norm of communication that can be named one of egalitarian reciprocity.'²⁶²

All in all, power issues are at the very centre of policy-related D+D practice, and dialogic public engagement in general. Here, experienced practitioners often follow on the steps of classic pragmatism: 'Dealing with our differences means, then, to recognize power differences but not to resign ourselves to them, so we can come to see difference as ineradicable and yet not paralyzing.'²⁶³

²⁵⁸ P. 24 in Gaventa, J. (2006) Finding the spaces for change: A power analysis. *Ids Bulletin-Institute of Development Studies*, 37(6), 23–33.

²⁵⁹ Lederach quoted in p. 187 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁶⁰ P. 38 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

²⁶¹ P. 27 in *Ibid.*

²⁶² P. 150 in Benhabib, S. (1989) Liberal dialogue versus a critical theory of discursive legitimation. In: ROSENBLUM, N. L. (ed.) *Liberalism and the moral life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

²⁶³ P. 186 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

9.1 Spaces for D+D in research and policy contexts

If we understand communication as 'the observable part of a relationship,'²⁶⁴ then it is imperative to think about the kinds of relationships fostered by the current public engagement (PE) agenda in UK universities and research organisations. There are obvious differences between approaches in which academia talks down to the *world*, and others in which it tries to create *worldly* spaces for collaborative inquiry. Both have different political implications for our work as researchers and PE practitioners, as well as for the role that our organisations play in democracy.

Public dialogue and deliberation remain relatively marginal activities within the mainstream PE agenda,²⁶⁵ but their prominence is increasing. There are many initiatives opening pathways in that direction, as you can see in Appendix 1. Some of them

are academic/public interfaces (e.g. Edinburgh University's Public Policy Network www.publicpolicynetwork.ed.ac.uk) whose work is premised on the idea of recasting universities as public spaces for informed talk. That is, of course, not only academically-informed talk, but also conversations that bring together multiple forms of knowledge based on personal and professional experiences, stories, testimonies, and emotions.

Nudging academia to take a more active role in fostering civic participation is not an easy task. Most of our institutions work comfortably within technocratic cultures that privilege elite-led policy-making. Moreover, they are often hard-pressed by the demands of the latest managerial turn (e.g. *Impact*), which often contributes to further conflate different – sometimes contradictory –

agendas (i.e. Public Engagement, Knowledge Exchange, Commercialisation). For these and other reasons, facilitating civic participation is nowhere near the top of the agenda.

Furthermore, some even argue that academic settings are not necessarily safe havens for dialogic communication: 'academic culture often rewards an aggressive style of communication, epitomized by an "adversary method" which assumes that the best way to evaluate another's ideas is to attack them.'²⁶⁷ That has not been, however, my own experience. On the contrary, I often witness how researchers and PE practitioners strive to create the sort of spaces for dialogic inquiry that would very much benefit other contexts in our public sphere. Nonetheless, many of them swim against a tide of conventions, prejudices, and misunderstandings that can make dialogic engagement an uphill struggle.

Box 27 – Academia, politics, and music. Excerpt from Forester (2009, p. 76)²⁶⁸

Our political and academic institutions train us to treat disputes as fuel for debate. We need to resist that training and instead encourage, model, and experiment with dialogical and negotiated alternatives that might produce real mutual gains for adversarial stakeholders.

We might think more here about how musicians settle disputes in a performing trio or quartet – and less about how poker players play their hands. With no shortage of strong and deep feelings, when musicians differ about the almost inexpressible, they seem to debate less and listen more: 'Let's try this way,' 'What if we played it like this?' They might teach us about dealing with deep differences: sketch and suggest, probe and explore more, rationalize and argue less.



²⁶⁴ P. 1 in Penman, R. (2000) *Reconstructing communicating: looking to a future*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

²⁶⁵ Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. *60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*, Edinburgh.

²⁶⁶ P. 13 in *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ P. 153 in Burbules, N. C. (1993) *Dialogue in teaching: theory and practice*, New York: Teachers College Press.

²⁶⁸ Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



In thinking about how we can make public engagement more dialogic, we are setting ourselves a difficult task. Many of us work in organisations that do not necessarily see citizens, stakeholders, communities, or publics as partners in a collaborative relationship. Instead, they are often seen as targets for our work, or as mere bystanders. This may seem appropriate in some areas, but that may not be the case in many others (see an example in Box 38). Indeed, much of our research has ethical and political dimensions that should be publicly discussed. Instead, research is too

often handed down from the pedestal of our privileged positions.

An alternative vision, however, has already been articulated in the social sciences. A dialogic social science 'incorporates and, if successful, is itself incorporated into a polyphony of voices, with no one voice, including that of the researcher, claiming final authority.'²⁶⁹ These ideas stem from Nietzsche's take on objectivity and co-inquiry: 'the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use

to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity", be'. From this perspective, objectivity is not the 'contemplation without interest' implied in some uses of the term, but the employment of 'a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge.'²⁷⁰ This is the idea of objectivity that underpins co-inquiry, and that stakes out the case for collective intelligence epitomised in the Jain/Buddhist story of the blind men and the elephant that we saw earlier (Box 7).

Box 28 – Building a community of inquiry to deal with the ethics and politics of technology: The Brain Imaging Deliberative Dialogue²⁷¹

The Brain Imaging Deliberative Dialogue (BIDD) took place in Scotland during 2010. It brought together national and international scientists, health practitioners, sociologists, philosophers, ethicists, religious representatives, political scientists, citizens, policy makers, and legal experts in a series of deliberative events about new, non-medical uses of Brain Imaging Technologies around the world (e.g. neuro-marketing, neuro-security, lie detection, etc).

The BIDD represented an effort to create a community of inquiry to explore the ethical and political implications of current and future uses of the technology, in order to contribute to policy deliberation in Scotland. Accordingly, the BIDD offers an example of a scientific community reaching beyond their comfort zone in order to:

- explore the societal implications of their research
- be open to public scrutiny
- foster interdisciplinary deliberation
- gather intelligence from diverse, sometimes opposed, perspectives
- provide the groundwork for further public and policy deliberation.

²⁶⁹ Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) A perestroikan straw man answers back. David Laitin and phronetic social science. In: SCHRAM, S. F. & CATERINO, B. (eds.) *Making political science matter. Debating knowledge, research, and method*. New York and London: New York University Press. AND Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making social science matter. Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁷⁰ Italics used in the original, p. 79 in Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) A perestroikan straw man answers back. David Laitin and phronetic social science. In: SCHRAM, S. F. & CATERINO, B. (eds.) *Making political science matter. Debating knowledge, research, and method*. New York and London: New York University Press.

²⁷¹ See SINAPSE, Edinburgh-Neuroscience, SCRIPT, Joseph-Bell-Centre & Scotland's-Futures-Forum. 2010. *What are you thinking? Who has the right to know? Brain Imaging and its impact on society*. Glasgow: Scottish Universities Insight Institute. Available: <http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Pastprogrammes/BrainImaging/Documents.aspx> [Accessed 15 January 2011]. AND Wardlaw, J. M., O'Connell, G., Shuler, K., DeWilde, J., Haley, J., Escobar, O., Murray, S., Rae, R., Jarvie, D., Sandercock, P. & Schafer, B. (2011) Can it read my mind? What do the public and experts think of the current (mis)uses of neuroimaging? *Public Library of Science, PLoS One*, 6(10), e25829. AND Escobar, O. (2011a) Science, deliberation and policy making: The Brain Imaging Dialogue as upstream engagement. *6th Conference of the European Consortium of Political Research*. 25-27 August, University of Iceland, Reykjavik.

Our organisations do not operate in a vacuum. Ultimately, their PE activity depends on broader contexts, including policy-making cultures. The PE agenda itself is not an isolated phenomenon. It is connected to broader social and political changes from traditional models of technocratic government to new arrangements of participatory and networked governance. These changes have reshaped the landscape of entire policy areas such as local governance, health, science and technology, planning, or the environment. Although there is a well-rehearsed, self-referential narrative in the academic world about the move from the model of Public Understanding of Science (public education, one-way communication) to that of Public Engagement (public participation, two-way communication), the PE academic agenda cannot be understood without considering those broader changes that have been in the making for the past half-century. In other words, it is inseparable from the processes of steady renegotiation of democratic practices in a variety of contexts.²⁷²

To be clear, I am not arguing here that there has been some sort of clear-cut transition between clear-cut models. Instead, they coexist, collide, and evolve as they reciprocally shape each other through myriad practices on the ground. For instance, the PE agenda has not supplanted PUS but, arguably, has added a layer of sophistication to what still seems a mainstream quest for improved scientific public literacy.²⁷³

Similarly – in terms of dynamics between idealised models – the relationship between traditional representative democracy (i.e.

party politics, elected representatives, technocratic and elitist policy making) and new arrangements of participatory democracy (collaborative policy-making, D+D processes, citizen empowerment) is not an easy one. The practical frictions between both models are beginning to be well documented.²⁷⁴

In my view, PE practitioners tasked with creating spaces for D+D are at the forefront of the processes where those frictions are negotiated on a daily basis. For instance, even when they manage to set in motion substantial D+D, it is seldom clear how it is then connected to ongoing policy and decision making. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges that they face stems from the lack of capacity in many policy-making arenas to uptake the results of D+D processes.²⁷⁵

To be sure, I am not suggesting that decision-makers must always, and under any circumstance, follow the recommendations produced in a D+D process. In fact, as Kadlec and Friedman put it, 'given the horrendous conditions for public deliberation that typically prevail and the resulting incoherent, inarticulate and confused state of public opinion and discourse, it would be irresponsible of leaders not to look long and critically at anything that passes across their desk bearing the imprint "the public's will." We do think, however, that leaders and experts are well served, and in a very real sense obligated – as leaders, citizens and beneficiaries of a democratic society – to take seriously sincere and carefully constructed deliberations by citizens and to respond to them in authentic ways that move the policy process and debate forward.'²⁷⁶

Some argue that D+D does not suit policy-making contexts because they are characterised by short-term cycles. Depending on a range of factors (nature of the issues, scale of participation, etc), D+D can take longer than standard consultation, expert committees, or unilateral decision-making. However, some traditional forms of policy making can produce or accentuate conflicts, which anyway may considerably extend the length of the process (see the example in section 3.2.1). Even worse, they may result in blockage and, ultimately, inaction.

One of the reasons I wanted to write this booklet is because calling for more opportunities for citizen participation is no longer enough. There are a lot of opportunities out there. But there are also some worrying dynamics at play, as we begin to question the quality of communication and process that characterises those opportunities. Forester puts it this way: 'Citizens... have been "civically dulled." There's a way in which representative democracy has invented ways for citizen participation that are antithetical to that participation. They turn people off, they make it so "peanuts" for people to engage in civic life that most people won't do it because they think it's going to be a meeting like those meetings that they once participated in and hated.'²⁷⁷

In sum, as PE practitioners, we must focus not only on fostering genuine (purposeful) participatory processes, but also on *how* public engagement takes place: the experiential and communicative dimension that has been the focus of this booklet.

²⁷² On various points made in this paragraph see Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. *60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*, Edinburgh. AND Escobar, O. (2010b) Public engagement in global context. Understanding the UK shift towards dialogue and deliberation. *QMU Centre for Dialogue, Working Paper 1*, 1-18. AND Escobar, O. (2011c) The work of participation: local deliberative policy making as mediated by public engagement practitioners. *Political Studies Association Annual Conference*. London.

²⁷³ Pieczka, M. & Escobar, O. (2010b) Dialogue: Innovation in policy making and the discourse of engagement. *60th Conference of the Political Studies Association*, Edinburgh.

²⁷⁴ See for instance Hoppe, R. (2011b) Institutional constraints and practical problems in deliberative and participatory policy making. *Policy & Politics*, 39(2), 163-183. AND Hoppe, R. (2011a) *The governance of problems: Puzzling, powering and participation*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

²⁷⁵ Pp. 25-30 in Escobar, O. (2011a) Science, deliberation and policy making: The Brain Imaging Dialogue as upstream engagement. *6th Conference of the European Consortium of Political Research*. 25-27 August, University of Iceland, Reykjavik.

²⁷⁶ P. 21 in Kadlec, A. & Friedman, W. (2007) Deliberative Democracy and the Problem of Power. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 3(1), Article 8.

²⁷⁷ PE practitioner quoted in p. 120 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



9.2 Our role as D+D facilitators

Academics, researchers, and knowledge exchange and PE practitioners can play an important role as organisers and facilitators of D+D processes. This is nothing really new. The idea of the university as a beacon for meaningful talk is a centuries-old project. Our universities and research organisations can provide much needed mediated spaces in the policy contexts where we do research, knowledge exchange, and public engagement.

Fostering spaces for D+D in academic and policy contexts requires a particular type of leadership. At organisational level, it calls for relational leadership, where the defining task is to develop collaborative 'webs of relationships with others rather than handing down visions, strategies, and plans.'²⁷⁸ This is increasingly common as our organisations adapt to the networked nature of the fields where they operate. Similarly, fostering D+D processes requires facilitative leadership.²⁷⁹ This means that, when we take on the role of D+D facilitators we try to relinquish our privileges as experts and become curators of

a process of inquiry that seeks to summon a 'polyphony of voices.'²⁸⁰

As researchers, we develop projects that have an impact on a range of fields of practice. In some areas, our traditional standing as experts still *cuts it*. The researcher's goal is to illuminate those areas and contribute to discussions within communities of place, practice, or interest. However, in many other areas, our understanding of the intertwinement between power and knowledge has eroded the traditional aura of expertise. For instance, policy decisions that are presented as taken on technical or scientific grounds are often shown to be full of political choices and value-laden implications.²⁸¹ We cannot get away from the role of values in public policy: There is no such thing as purely technical solutions to social problems, nor value-neutral scientific endeavours or technological advances.²⁸² Insofar as we are human, we are social. Insofar as we live in society, we are political, and thus value-laden.²⁸³

Once we accept the political and argumentative dimension of the policy-related areas where we work, our roles as researchers and PE practitioners can be seen in a different light.²⁸⁴ The complexity of many social problems, and the impossibility of purely technical solutions or expert fixes, has carved up a space for citizen participation in policy making.²⁸⁵ That is to say, once we move to a scenario where we understand that values (and not only 'evidence') are intrinsic to all policy action, then democratic deliberation becomes central. It is difficult to justify that only experts and decision makers should have a say on issues which are not purely technical, but value-laden, and which have profound societal implications. This is perhaps one of the most powerful arguments for public D+D. From this perspective, and following on the steps of pragmatism, the development of collective capacity for democratic problem-solving becomes central (see Box 29).

Box 29 - Three strategies to deal with wicked issues. Excerpt from Roberts (2002, p. 10)²⁸⁶

How does one cope with wicked situations? Three strategies are possible: competitive, authoritative, and collaborative ... A competitive strategy pits one party against another until one is declared the winner and the other the loser. Winners then claim their 'right' to define the problem and to impose their preferred solution on to everyone else. An authoritative strategy attempts to 'tame' wicked problems by turning them over to an authority or to experts who have the power to frame the problem and chose their preferred solution. Others then defer to the ruling of the authorities and experts on what the problem is and how it will be resolved. A collaborative strategy seeks to bring all stakeholders or their representatives together to jointly define a problem and select a preferred way of dealing with it. Since wicked situations are socially defined, it stands to reason that their analysis and treatment requires the collective intelligence and sense making capability of all concerned rather than just winners or powerholders and experts.

²⁷⁸ P. 13 in Yankelovich, D. (1999) *The magic of dialogue: transforming conflict into cooperation*, London: Nicholas Brealey.

²⁷⁹ On facilitative leadership see Chapter 6 in Forester, J. (2009) *Dealing with differences: dramas of mediating public disputes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁸⁰ P.78 in Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) A perestroika straw man answers back. David Laitin and phronetic social science. In: SCHRAM, S. F. & CATERINO, B. (eds.) *Making political science matter. Debating knowledge, research, and method*. New York and London: New York University Press.

²⁸¹ See for instance Fischer, F. (1990) *Technocracy and the politics of expertise*, Newbury Park ; London: Sage. AND Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing public policy: discursive politics and deliberative practices*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁸² Fischer, F. (2009) *Democracy and expertise: reorienting policy inquiry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁸³ On the irreducibly socio-political nature of the human animal see for instance the sociological theory of Allones, C. (1999) *Familia y capitalismo*, Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela.

²⁸⁴ On the argumentative turn in policy analysis see Fischer, F. & Forester, J. (eds.) (1993) *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning*, Durham: London: Duke University Press.

²⁸⁵ See good examples in Briggs, X. d. S. (2008) *Democracy as problem solving. Civic capacity in communities across the globe*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.

²⁸⁶ P. 10 in Roberts, N. C. (2002) Calls for dialogue. In: ROBERTS, N. C. (ed.) *The transformative power of dialogue*. Amsterdam ; London: JAI.

An interesting alternative role for researchers and PE practitioners is, therefore, to act as facilitators of dialogic inquiry. The idea is to become, 'engaged change agents'²⁸⁷ who work on creating collaborative interfaces. Our job here is not to provide a recipe or expert solution, but to foster D+D processes where communities of inquiry can be built in order to co-create meaning that enables further action. In sum, it is about becoming curators of participatory processes oriented towards dialogic meaning-making. Following Wagenaar:

'Dialogical meaning is about the joint creation of meaning, and the genuine attempt to overcome failures of communication between societal groups.'²⁸⁸

In sum, we can contribute to D+D processes in three important ways. Firstly, we can participate in communities of inquiry and share the insight and implications that derive from our research (or, depending on the context, lobby for our preferred policy option). We have been generally good at these activities for some time. Secondly,

there is another option emerging from the challenges we face in our fields of practice: We can choose to become facilitators that create D+D spaces, and thus focus not on presenting our preferred alternative, but on crafting a participatory process that explores a range of alternatives collaboratively. A third, interesting option is to combine both our roles as researchers and facilitators in what is often called action research or participatory research.²⁸⁹ In whatever role we undertake, a communication perspective on D+D should be helpful.



²⁸⁷ P. 39 in Wagenaar, H. (2011) *Meaning in action. Interpretation and dialogue in policy analysis*. Armonk; London: M.E.Sharpe.

²⁸⁸ P. 38 in Ibid.

²⁸⁹ See for instance Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2001) *Handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice*, London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage. AND McIntyre, A. (2008) *Participatory action research*, Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications.

9.3 Coda

Where there is more participation, there is more dialogue and deliberation, more chances to develop bonds of personal trust and loyalty, and greater capacity to work out conflicts with maximal consideration of conflicting interests. (Stone 1997, p. 363)

There are many different varieties, forms, and patterns of communication. It is our belief that participatory democracy works best when there is a complex array of communication patterns available, each intersecting with the others to create a robust and vibrant public sphere. (Spano 2001, p. 27)

The belief in dialogue and deliberation is politically rooted in ideas about participatory democracy and social justice. It implies caring about the social fabric of communities and recognizing our collective problem-solving capacity as citizens. Or as Dewey put it, it implies accepting that we lay 'in the lap of an immense intelligence', and that often 'that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium.'²⁹²

There are many projects that work with this premise in mind. For example, citizens' assembly initiatives constitute a relatively new but promising phenomenon.²⁹³ The initiatives vary. There are assemblies that work in invited spaces like in British Columbia (see Box 15). There are others that grow from invented (uninvited) spaces like the students' assemblies in Santiago (see Box 1) or more recently in Spain.²⁹⁴ And there are those that defy this classification, originating in invented spaces that then develop into official initiatives as in Iceland.²⁹⁵ The defining characteristics of these assemblies are their non-partisanship, their diverse membership, and their use of D+D processes. These and many other projects are rekindling the century-old pragmatist vision of deepening democracy through communication in public forums.

In this booklet, I have focussed on interpersonal communication, and on bringing together ideas about dialogue and deliberation that may help us to understand and enhance interaction in public engagement processes. My focus has been motivated by personal and professional experiences. There is a sizeable body of literature on citizen engagement, but it often ignores that which is at the heart of participatory processes, namely, face-to-face communication.

We are not short of techniques and formats for PE and participatory policy-making. What I have tried to highlight is that we must also pay careful attention to the quality of communication that unfolds in those formats and processes. I have differentiated dialogue, which is focused on building understanding and relationships, from deliberation, which is focused on evaluating alternatives and decision-making, in order to emphasise that they entail different patterns of communication. I have also suggested that they can be combined for constructive participation.

Appendix 1 provides a list of resources (websites, handbooks, toolkits, case studies, networks, pamphlets) which, in addition to the bibliography, present a range of perspectives and approaches to dialogue,

deliberation, and citizen participation. Follow them to find techniques, methods, and case studies of various processes around the world. In this booklet, I have tried to provide an overview of the communication patterns which bring those formats and processes to life.

Of course, much of what I have said presupposes that there is clarity about what our universities, governments, and public and third sector organisations, seek to achieve through public engagement. Unfortunately, we still lack that sort of clarity in many of the contexts where PE practitioners work.

PE practitioners rely on their knowledge (local, political, professional, experiential, emotional) in order to strive in complex and politically charged environments. Their approach to D+D often echoes pragmatist philosophy: they engage with practice, learn how practice shapes and is shaped by context, and navigate the tensions involved. This booklet has hopefully provided a map of those tensions, and some ideas on how to negotiate alternative routes.

Edinburgh and Wrocław, October 2011

²⁹⁰ P. 363 in Stone, D. (1997) *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, New York: WW Norton & Co Inc.

²⁹¹ P. 27 in Spano, S. J. (2001) *Public dialogue and participatory democracy. The Cupertino Community Project*, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

²⁹² The first quote is from Emerson; both quotes are from p. 219 in Dewey, J. (1927) *The public and its problems*, Denver: A. Swallow.

²⁹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27_assembly

²⁹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Spanish_protests

²⁹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_%28Iceland%29

ONLINE RESOURCES AND NETWORKS

- Beacons for Public Engagement (UK) www.publicengagement.ac.uk
- Café Scientifique (UK) www.cafescientifique.org
- Dana Centre (UK) www.danacentre.org.uk
- Democs (UK) www.neweconomics.org/projects/democs
- Dialogue Youth (Scotland) www.dialogueyouth.org
- Gengage (Scotland) www.gengage.org.uk
- Genomics Forum (Scotland) www.genomicsnetwork.ac.uk/forum
- Involve (UK) www.involve.org.uk
- International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org
- KETSO (UK) www.ketso.com
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (USA) <http://ncdd.org>
- Participedia www.participedia.net
- People and Participation Network (UK) www.peopleandparticipation.net
- Planning Aid (Scotland) www.planningaidscotland.org.uk
- Public Conversations Project (USA) www.publicconversations.org
- Public Dialogue Consortium (USA) <http://publicdialogue.org>
- Public Policy Network (Scotland) www.publicpolicynetwork.ed.ac.uk
- Sciencewise –Expert Resource Centre on Dialogue (UK) <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk>
- Scottish Health Council www.scottishhealthcouncil.org/home.aspx
- The World Café (USA) www.theworldcafe.com
- Wosk Centre for Dialogue (Canada) www.sfu.ca/dialog
- Water Forum (Canada) <http://www.waterforum.org/about.cfm>

HANDBOOKS AND TOOLKITS

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Oliver Escobar is the Project Officer of the Public Policy Network, and a Principal's Career Development PhD Scholar at the School of Social and Political Science (University of Edinburgh). His main areas of research are citizen participation, communication, and policy practice. Oliver has experience in acting as a facilitator in a variety of contexts. He is a Public Engagement Fellow of Edinburgh Beltane (one of the UK Beacons for Public Engagement), where he is involved in developing courses, forums, and activities in the areas of dialogue, policy, and public engagement. He is also a former researcher and now honorary member of the Centre for Dialogue at Queen Margaret University. Oliver was born in Galicia (Spain) and educated at the University of Santiago de Compostela, where he obtained degrees in politics, policy, and public management. Besides academia, he has worked as a labourer in harbours, warehouses and building sites. He has also been a retail team manager, published 3 poetry books, and contributed to various radio shows. He loves travelling, playing football, and watching Northern Exposure.

More: www.oliversdialogue.wordpress.com

Interact: oliver.escobar@ed.ac.uk

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Edinburgh Beltane
Beacon for Public Engagement
Darwin Building, The Kings Buildings
Edinburgh EH9 3JR

Tel: 0131 650 4874
Email: info@edinburghbeltane.net
Twitter: twitter.com/edbeltane

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