



Meeting 5

Deliberation techniques and community engagement

This week, we will talk about techniques for engaging the community and developing forums for public participation. I will focus on the technique of deliberation. Deliberation can be a good way to handle community dilemmas, as **many issues related to public perception of technology come in the form of so-called "wicked problems."**

In short, **wicked problems relate to conflicts of values. They cannot be "solved" but only negotiated in better or worse ways.** There is no one good solution to these problems, as they are based on one's moral system. Wicked problems result from the **inherent tensions between key values** (for example equality, justice, safety, and freedom).

Martín Carcasson listed most important characteristics of wicked problems, which are as follows:

- Solutions to a wicked problem tend to create new problems. That is, a technical solution to one aspect of the problem may and often does lead to other problems and dilemmas.
- The ends to the wicked problem are not clear, and the more different people study wicked problems, the more divergent their opinions on the best solution become.
- Wicked problems involve dilemmas based on competing values and tradeoffs that can be informed but not resolved by science.
- And very importantly, **wicked problems often require adaptive changes rather than technical answers.** Solutions cannot be handed down from experts

Deliberative techniques at the Internet:

EuroPolis - www.europolis-project.eu

Public Agenda - www.publicagenda.org

National Issues Forum - www.nifi.org

The Center for Deliberative Democracy - www.cdd.stanford.edu

and authorities but often **must be developed by individuals and communities.**

We described the specificity of moral and wicked problems. Now, let's focus on the question of what the concept of deliberative democracy means. Based on the works by **Janusz Reykowski** and **Shawn Rosenberg**, we can describe characteristics and tenets of deliberation that are similar for different authors. That is, the concept of deliberative democracy rests on the assumption that wicked problems or moral disagreements are not to be handled by forcing one solution because this solution might be good for and accepted by only some of the citizens impacted by those disagreements.

Basic to the deliberative technique is an inclusive conversation that is structured and informed. The deliberative conversation should be based on mutual respect, freedom of expression, and openness to the perspectives of others. The main differences between deliberation conversation and conventional debate are as follows:

- In debate, participants are focused on winning and on finding the weak spots of their opponents. During deliberation, **people focus on positive parts of opposite propositions** and on the problems themselves.
- The zero-sum nature of debate has a negative influence on the quality of arguments and makes it difficult to have in-depth reflection on complicated issues. During deliberation, participants **consider possible solutions and outcomes that are beneficial for a wide range of stockholders and serve multiple interests.**
- Debate concentrates on highlighting differences and on defending one's already-established opinion. It encourages selective listening and strengthens naturally occurring cognitive biases. Deliberation concentrates on building habits like **active listening and thoughtful consideration** and on **re-evaluation of one's already established opinions and beliefs. It encourages more complex consideration of a given problem.**

Carcasson stated that the ultimate goal of deliberative practices is **to improve a community's capacity to solve problems**. Other goals could be classified as short-term and long-term.

First-order goals include learning about issues, improving democratic attitudes, and improving democratic

**Sample booklets for
deliberation forums:**

- National Issues Forum Guides
- The Energy Problem**
- Energy Future**
- Sustaining Ourselves**
- The New Science of Food**
- Health Care**
- The Changing World of Work**
- Youth and Violence**

skills. Second-order goals, which are more long-term, are improving institutional decision-making and individual/community action. Finally, the third-order goal is to improve community problem-solving.

In conclusion, we should note that political and social communication is focused on divergent opinions and debate-like, emotional verbal clashes, providing little support for working toward the integration of the different ideas from opposite sites. **When it comes to the disagreements related to the technology that affects community members, there is rarely an opportunity for real learning about the issue or community engagement. When a zero-sum approach is taken in the decision-making process, the solution may be reached prematurely, and community members may perceive it as illegitimate.**

Recommended future readings:

Boyko, J. A., Lavisa, J. N., Abelsona, J., Dobbins, M., & Carter, N. (2012). Deliberative dialogues as a mechanism for knowledge translation and exchange in health systems decision-making. *Social Science & Medicine*, 75, 1938-1945. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2012.06.016

Macnaghten, P., Kearnes, M., & Wynne, B. (2005). Nanotechnology, governance, and public deliberation: what role for the social sciences? *Science Communication* 27(2): 268-91.

Reykowski, J. (2006). Deliberative democracy and "human nature": an empirical approach. *Political Psychology*, 27(3), 323-346.

Rosenberg, S. W. (2007). Rethinking democratic deliberation: the limits and potential of citizen participation. *Polity*, 39, 335-360. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.polity.2300073

Wade, S. O. (2004). Using intentional, values-based dialogue to engage complex public policy conflicts. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 21, 361e379.