IF...Interactivity Foundation

**Public Discussion
As the Exploration and Development
of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities**

First Edition

By Adolf G. Gundersen

Edited by Julius Stern

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Foreword

Citizen discussion is increasingly seen as vital to democracy. But just what *is* citizen discussion? And why might it be *useful*? The essays in this volume conceptually explore an innovative, even unique, way of answering these questions. They build directly on the Discussion Process developed and used by Interactivity Foundation (IF) for producing Citizen Staff Work Reports for small group citizen discussions.

Citizen discussion is often thought of and practiced as advocacy or debate, sometimes as a calm or disinterested exchange of reasons. These essays describe citizen discussion rather differently: as an interactive process of exploring, developing, and testing contrasting conceptual possibilities for democratic governance in selected areas of concern. The term used throughout this volume to describe this novel possibility is "public discussion."

Similarly, citizen discussion is often thought to be useful to the extent it results in consensus, compromise, recommendations, problem-solving, or actual decisions. These essays describe the uses of citizen discussion (understood as "public discussion") rather differently as well: as a means of improving the clarity and range of citizens' *choices* as a prelude to actual policy-making in the short term and enhancing the *quality* of public policy itself in the long term.

Using this Volume: Multiple Possibilities—and Some Guidance

The entries in this volume can be used in any or all of the following ways:

- as "stand alone" essays

- in various combinations (suggested combinations are given in a box at the end of each essay)

- as a coherent—though still developing—whole.

Readers are likely to enhance their understanding of individual essays by consulting cross-references or other essays in the same section, but are encouraged to navigate them in whatever way they judge most useful.

At the same time, most readers are likely to find it useful to "begin at the beginning"—that is, with the essays in the first section. These essays should prove a useful starting point because they:

- provide a brief overview of the IF Discussion Process that was the principal inspiration of the concepts described in the volume

- describe how IF has used the Citizen Staff Work Reports resulting from that Process in public discussion

- contrast IF public discussions with other forms of democratic discussion.

A Special Note on Interactivity

Interactivity is at the very heart of the purposes, process, and content of public discussion. This is reflected in several ways in this volume. A separate essay is devoted to describing the general concept. Numerous essays explicitly address particular aspects or forms of interactivity. Cross-references at the end of each essay suggest still others. And the penultimate essay on "Interactivity" presents a current summary of the most salient aspects of all of these forms of interactivity.

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The <u>IF</u> Discussion Process, Public Discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports, and Other Forms of Democratic Discussion

Section IF

The essays in this section describe the Interactivity Foundation (IF) Discussion Process, IF's concept of—and experience with—public discussions of the Citizen Staff Work Reports that result from its Discussion Process, and contrast these public discussions with a number of other familiar forms of democratic discussion.

Overview of the Interactivity Foundation Discussion Process
IF-1

Introduction

This series of essays describes an innovative approach to democratic discussion that builds directly on Interactivity Foundation's accumulating experience with and development of its own Discussion Process. Indeed, virtually all of the concepts that together make up this approach have been inspired by or borrowed from the Interactivity Foundation (IF) Discussion Process—and all have been "tested" by it as well. Hence the real conceptual "beginning" of these essays is properly the IF Discussion Process. What follows is first a broad description of the Process as a whole, then a description of some of the key concepts that underlie the Process.

A. An Abbreviated Description of the IF Discussion Process

The IF Discussion Process has been under active development for nearly two decades. It has been used in three multi-year projects; three other such projects are nearing completion. Although under continuous development and in some ways complex, the key aspects of the Process can be encapsulated in a few lines, its flow in a few pages.

(1) Capsule description of the IF Discussion Process

The IF Discussion Process relies on two small panels of diverse citizens meeting in sanctuary and with careful facilitation to explore and develop through interactive discussion an area of concern, multiple contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it, and their possible practical consequences for publication as a Citizen Staff Work Report for use by democratic citizens in public discussion.

(2) Compact description of the IF Discussion Process

An IF Fellow acts as project manager. The project manager's responsibilities include: selecting participants; developing an initial description of the project's area of concern as a starting point for participant discussion; facilitating exploratory and developmental discussion and editing participants discussion materials between sessions; and writing up for participants' review the final Citizen Staff Work Report in which the results of the participants' discussions will be made available for use by democratic citizens.

The IF Discussion Process begins with the careful selection of panelists for each of two panels, which initially meet separately and then, near the end of the Process, jointly. Participants for one panel are chosen because they have particular technical expertise, professional knowledge, and/or analytical skills that

are likely to prove useful to exploratory and developmental discussion of the area of concern. Participants for the second panel are chosen for their wider life experience and/or ability to think broadly about the area of concern. The two panels—one of "specialists," the other of "generalists"—are thus intended to complement one another. Diversity of background and skills—rather than demographic or political representativeness—is sought on both panels because they are often useful in a process of exploratory and developmental discussion. And all prospective panelists must impress the project manager as capable of working interactively and creatively with their fellow panelists.

Exploratory and developmental discussion is encouraged in the IF Discussion Process by holding all discussion sessions in "sanctuary." A shelter for free, open, and collaborative discussion is provided by guaranteeing that neither panelists nor their individual contributions will be identified and by ensuring ample time for discussion to unfold.

The actual starting point for participant discussion is a quite general description of an area of concern and several conceptual questions that the project manger will have prepared in discussion with colleagues at IF and with prospective panelists. Participants' first task is to first explore and then develop this initial list of questions. The goal at this point of the Process is to multiply and elaborate the starting questions. Once panelists are satisfied with their work, they exclude and select those questions they find most useful. The project manager maintains an ongoing written record of the panelists' questions, which s/he then translates into the panel's full description of the area of concern.

Having explored and developed the area of concern, the participants turn to the task of multiplying and elaborating possible answers to the questions that resulted from the exploration and development of the area of concern. Later participants work with the project director to exclude and select from among these possible answers and translate those that remain into contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing the area of concern. Any conceptual possibility that even one panelist wants to carry forward at this stage is retained.

The contrasting conceptual possibilities are kept brief—about one page—in keeping with their end use as useful "staff work" for public discussion and individual choice. But the next task panelists undertake—testing them for possible practical consequences—requires that they be translated into a still shorter form, one that is also careful to avoid (to the extent possible) ambiguities and any "special" language the panelists have used in what up to this point has been a conceptual discussion. Once this process of translation has been completed (with project manager/editor guidance and panelist review) these abbreviated versions of the conceptual possibilities are subject to testing for possible practical consequences. Panelists first converge on a number of more specific policies that are consistent with the conceptual policy consequences of the possibility. They then go on to ask what might result from them: what might

be the consequences to individuals, groups, institutions, culture, politics, and economics? The results of this testing, which is illustrative rather than definitive or exhaustive, is also included in the final Citizen Staff Work Report.

Once practical testing is complete and any resulting revisions in the conceptual possibilities made, the two separate panels come together. They present their work to each other and work toward convergence, first on the conceptual possibilities they wish to bring forward as staff work and their possible practical consequences, and then on a description of the area of concern. IF's experience has been that there is a great deal of overlap between the conceptual possibilities generated by the separate panels. Their work at this stage tends therefore to focus on combining similar conceptual possibilities, though individual panelists can still preserve particular possibilities for inclusion in the final Citizen Staff Work Report simply by saying so.

The final step in the IF Discussion Process is the production—by the project manager/editor with careful participant review—of the Citizen Staff Work Report based on the results of the joint panel discussions. The format and length of the Report is left to the project editor, though all IF Citizen Staff Work Reports contain descriptions of the area of concern, at least four conceptual possibilities, and illustrative possible practical consequences. The Reports are then made available for public discussion and individual choice.

B. Key Concepts

The IF Discussion Process has no single "essence." It is more useful to think of the Process as embodying a number of key aspects that *interactively* make the Process what it is and distinguish it from other sorts of democratic discussion. These are identified and described here in the briefest of terms so that they may be grasped as a whole. All are fleshed out in later essays.

(1) Interactivity

Interactivity is central to the IF Discussion Process in two ways. First, interactivity of many types—too many to describe or even catalogue in this short introduction—exists between all of the other key concepts in this list. Second, the IF Discussion Process is characterized by numerous forms of interactivity, including interactivity between:

- the panelists during (and often between) discussion sessions

- the panelists and their project manager, who acts as facilitator and editor

- the panelists, the project manager, and the material they are discussing (the area of concern, conceptual possibilities for addressing it, and their possible practical consequences)

- exploration, development, and selection and exclusion

- the Citizen Staff Work Report and those citizens who later use it for public discussion.

(2) **Objective: stimulate and enhance public discussion**

The aim of the IF Discussion Process is to produce a Citizen Staff Work Report for public discussion. The term "Staff Work" underlines the nature and objective of the document and the Process as a whole: to stimulate and enhance public discussion by providing material that might prove useful as background to citizens engaged in public discussion of conceptual possibilities for addressing an area of concern.

(3) **Sanctuary**

One indispensable means of encouraging interactivity in the IF Discussion Process is sanctuary, the principal characteristics of which are an unhurried pace largely freed from external constraints and a guarantee that panelists' names and individual contributions will remain confidential. This sheltered setting frees panelists to be bold, encourages them to work collaboratively, and allows them to explore and develop insights in a way that suits the needs of the discussion rather than a linear agenda or timeline.

(4) **Small groups**

A second important way that interactivity is promoted in the IF Discussion Process is by relying on small groups (separate panels are usually made up of from six to eight participants). Small groups are not unique to the IF Discussion Process, but they are crucial because they contribute and may even be essential to truly interactive, collaborative discussion.

(5) **Diverse rather than representative citizens**

No attempt is made at the outset of the IF Discussion Process to assemble representative panelists, only panelists capable of thinking *as citizens* imaginatively and collaboratively to explore and develop an area of concern, contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it, and their possible practical consequences. Diverse backgrounds and skills are helpful to the Process, hence the initial reliance on two panels, one of "expert-specialists," the other of "citizen-generalists." But diversity is distinct from representativeness, which would in any case be impossible given the small size of IF panels. Nor is representativeness

likely to prove useful; participants chosen because they were in some sense "representative" would probably end up feeling obliged to represent an interest or other category rather than openly and collaboratively engaging in the work of exploration and development.

(6) **Flow: exploration, development, exclusion/selection**

The IF Discussion Process is not linear; it has no set pattern or strict sequence of "steps." But neither is it aimless. It is exploratory and developmental throughout, and involves a series of informal and formal choices or what IF refers to as "exclusion and selection." Exploration is largely a matter of expanding possibilities; development largely a matter of elaborating them. In the IF Discussion Process, panelists first explore and develop the area of concern, then conceptual possibilities for addressing it. They conclude by exploring and developing the possible practical consequences of the conceptual possibilities they have developed and subjected to exclusion and selection. Thus the Process can be described as a form of discursive inquiry or learning. As such, it requires careful but neutral facilitation to maintain its flow rather than procedures or rules designed to ensure a fair decision or equal opportunity for all to express their views.

(7) **Citizen Staff Work Reports containing multiple contrasting conceptual possibilities**

Citizen Staff Work Reports typically contain a well-explored description of the area of concern, at least four contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it; and a description of the panels' exploration of their possible practical consequences. Each of these elements can be useful to citizens as "staff work" for public discussion. The description of the area of concern can help citizens better understand its possible dimensions. That the possibilities contained in the Reports are conceptual rather than problem-centered, quantitative or technical may be especially useful in that such possibilities tend to be conspicuously absent from media, scholarly, and governmental reports. The contrasting conceptual possibilities are themselves statements neither about "what is" nor about "what should be" but rather descriptions of "what might be." In addition to encouraging citizens in public discussion to engage in their own exploration and development (and choice) rather than advocacy, the contrasts among the conceptual possibilities help clarify citizens' choices—both about the possibilities contained in the Reports and about others that might result from their further democratic discussion. Finally, the exploration of possible practical consequences may prove useful as it is the sort of imaginative yet practical thinking that is either avoided or discouraged in other forms of organized inquiry such as the social sciences.

See also:

Public Discussion of Interactivity Foundation
Citizen Staff Work Reports
IF-2

Introduction

Interactivity Foundation (IF) Citizen Staff Work Reports are intended for use in public discussion. This essay describes IF's concept of and experience with public discussion of its own Citizen Staff Work Reports. Because there is significant interactivity between concept and experience and because IF's actual experience with public discussion has only recently begun to unfold, this description should be regarded as preliminary.

Since the intent of the essays in this first section is principally to set the stage for those that follow, what follows is confined to a brief description of IF's experience with public discussion and the key concepts that inform them. (Later IF publications will describe the actual conduct of public discussions in much fuller detail and offer guidance on facilitating them so that they produce useful results.)

A. IF's Experience with Public Discussions: Failures and Successes

IF is self-consciously developmental in its approach to public discussion. The Foundation is continually assimilating through reflection its unfolding experiences—i.e., to "learning by doing." Not all of IF's experiences with public discussion to date have been unqualified successes, but all have made useful contributions to the process of learning by doing, the main lessons of which are described in Section B.

(1) Failures

Among the public discussions either conducted or attempted by IF Fellows, two might be considered "failures"—though for different reasons. One of these involved what might be described as a series of set speeches in which about twenty participants merely reacted to a one-page summary of an IF Citizen Staff Work Report. There was little in the way of discussion facilitation. The discussion was not interactive—nor did it incorporate the exploration and development IF seeks in public discussions. The other "failure" was a possibility that fell through partly for lack of citizen interest, but also because IF sensed that prospective participants might be too bent on problem-solving and/or advocacy.

(2) Successes

All three of IF's "successes" featured some or all of the aspects missing from the cases just described. At the first, a group of about a dozen foreign citizens discussed the IF Report "Privacy and Privacy Rights." The discussion was both interactive as well as exploratory and developmental—but probably not to the

extent it would have been had an IF Fellow actually conducted the discussions. The second success involved two simulated IF-style discussions on different areas of concern, both facilitated by IF Fellows, as well as additional training, all as preparation for later use of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports and the IF Discussion Process itself in college classrooms. The actual results of this training will not be known for some time, but both faculty and IF participants indicated that it was quite useful. Certainly it can be said that the two simulations were highly interactive, exploratory, and developmental.

B. Key Aspects of Public Discussions of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports

The lessons that IF has drawn from the experiences just described are twofold: (1) four aspects are critical to useful public discussion of its Citizen Staff Work Reports; and (2) even more significantly, these aspects are highly interactive, as noted in the descriptions that follow.

- *IF facilitation* is critical in initial public discussions of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports. There is nothing "magical" about IF facilitators. They are, however, trained and experienced in the IF Discussion Process, which is both highly interactive and centrally concerned with exploration and development.

- *Small groups* are likewise crucial. Truly interactive discussion cannot take place once a group grows beyond a certain number of participants. (In our experience the optimal number ranges from five to seven, though may go as high as a dozen.) Additionally, while small groups operating in public cannot fully replicate a sanctuary setting, they can encourage creative and collaborative thinking by minimizing some participants' feelings that they must "play to a crowd."

- IF public discussions will be useful to the extent they feature *interactive discussion*. One measure of the usefulness of public discussion of IF's Citizen Staff Work Reports is the extent to which citizens engage in truly interactive discussion. Small groups and IF facilitators cannot guarantee active, open, and collaborative discussion—but they can do much to foster and encourage it. Emphasis on exploration and development also tends to promote interactivity in discussion.

- IF public discussions will also be useful to the extent they feature *exploratory and developmental discussion*. Both of the "failures" described above highlighted IF's concern that citizens discussing its Reports might not truly explore and develop their contents. In some cases exploration and development can be thwarted by a lack of focus, in others by advocacy or a felt need to come to a practical decision. Here, too, starting with small groups and having an IF facilitator present help prevent these problems and ensure that discussion remains exploratory and developmental. And just as an

emphasis on exploration and development tends to promote interactivity, discussion marked by real interactivity will tend to be more exploratory and developmental.

As IF's experience with small group public discussion of its Citizen Staff Work Reports continues to accumulate, this list will be further developed: the items already on it will be further refined and elaborated, perhaps other items not already on it will be added. IF has also begun to consider the possibility of later discussion of its Reports by larger groups of citizens, perhaps involving participants in previous small group discussions.

See also:

S-1, "Sanctuary Discussion" (pp. 17-20)
S-2, "Staff Work Reports for Public Discussion" (pp. 21-24)
A-4, "Experts and Citizens in Public Discussion" (pp. 43-47)
U-3, "The Objective of Public Discussion" (pp. 101-06)
B-5, "Interactivity" (pp. 135-38)

Interactivity Foundation Public Discussion
Contrasted with Other Forms of Democratic Discussion
IF-3

Introduction

The previous essay described public discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports in terms of but four (if highly interactive) key aspects. The goal of this essay is to elaborate on this description and bring it into sharper relief by contrasting IF public discussion with several other well-known forms of democratic discussion.

A. Key Aspects of the IF Discussion Process: Reprise

As noted in IF-2 and reiterated in the four bullets below, the four key aspects of public discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports are:

- active facilitation of the sort that can be provided by an IF facilitator

- small groups of diverse citizens

- interactivity, i.e. discussion that is both active and collaborative rather than focused on advocacy

- exploration and development.

B. Public Discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports Contrasted with Eleven Other Forms of Democratic Discussion

The distinctiveness of public discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports is brought into sharper relief by comparing it with eleven other familiar forms of democratic discussion. Table IF-3.1. on pages 12-13 lists these other forms. Each row of the table represents a different form of democratic discussion. (The rows are divided into two broad categories: those, like IF public discussion, that are intended to inform, educate, or broaden the public's policy thinking and those that, alternatively, are intended to yield some form of decision or action.). Table IF-3.1.'s column headings indicate the four key aspects of IF public discussion. Check marks indicate where other forms of democratic discussion appear to incorporate a particular aspect of IF public discussion; X's indicate where they do not. And question marks indicate where no clear judgment appears possible either way. Below each mark is a brief explanatory clarification.

Table IF-3.1. Contrasts between IF Public Discussion and Selected Forms of Democratic Discussion

Form of Discussion	Key Aspects of Public Discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports			
	Interactivity	**Exploration & Development of Conceptual Possibilities**	**Small Groups of Diverse Citizens**	**Trained Facilitators**
Aimed at Decision Making or Action				
Parliamentary Bodies	X • decision making • advocacy	X • decisions • procedures, rules	X • usually > 20 members • elected	X • trained in rules
Town Hall Meetings	? • may or may not be collaborative	X • decisions • procedures, rules	X • usually > 20 persons	? • may lack training
Direct Democracy (Small Groups)	? • may or may not be collaborative	X • decisions (often by consensus)	? • may or may not be diverse	? • may lack training
"Bureaucratic Networks" (see note at bottom of Table, p. 13)	? • may or may not be collaborative	? • most often problem-solving • often technical	X • may or may not be diverse • officials	? • may lack training
Expert Commissions	? • may or may not be collaborative	X • decisions (positive recommendations) • often technical	X • experts, authorities, specialists	X • trained in producing answers
Supreme Court Deliberations	? • may or may not be collaborative	X • decisions (rulings of law) • formal legal rules	X • legal specialists	? • trained in legal processes
Juries	√	X • decisions (verdicts) • facts	? • representative, neutral	? • may lack training

Table IF-3.1. Contrasts between IF Public Discussion and Selected Forms of Democratic Discussion (continued)				
	Key Aspects of Public Discussion of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports			
	Interactivity	**Exploration & Development of Conceptual Possibilities**	**Small Groups of Diverse Citizens**	**Trained Facilitators**
Form of Democratic Discussion				
Aimed at Informing, Educating, or Broadening the Public's Policy Thinking				
Public Hearings	X • citizens do not interact • public officials may ignore citizens	X • plans • advocacy • formal rules	X • many participants • may or may not be diverse	? • trained in procedure
Debate	X • advocacy, not collaborative	X • advocacy of "given" positions • formal rules	X • two sides • often "experts"	? • trained in managing debate
Mass Media	X • mostly one-way flow from "source" to "user"	X • information, persuasion, entertainment	X • Individual readers, viewers • often "experts"	? • trained in "objectivity," debate, entertainment
Issues Forums	X • series of set speeches rather than discussion	X • citizens react to pre-established "positions" • formal rules	X • many participants	? • trained in enforcing rules

- Bureaucratic networks result from and sustain informal and formal discursive interactions among government officials, usually in the executive branch of government. The degree to which they are "democratic" probably varies considerably—but much the same could be said of each of the alternative types of democratic discussion listed here. For a detailed description of the democratic nature of IF public discussion, see U-5, "The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic."

(1) Contrasts between IF public discussion and other familiar forms of public discussion

Reading across the table's *rows* makes it relatively easy to see which (if any) of the four aspects of IF public discussion are embodied by each of the eleven other forms of democratic discussion. Reading the table across each row reveals three broad patterns:

- No other form of democratic discussion embodies all four of the key aspects of IF public discussion.

- All of the alternative forms of democratic discussion aimed at informing, educating, or broadening the public's policy thinking lack at least three of the four of the key aspects of IF public discussion.

- Jury deliberations are perhaps "most like" IF public discussion. Nevertheless, there remain two crucial differences between the two processes. Juries properly (1) focus on "the facts" (rather than conceptual possibilities); and (2) are charged with making decisions—"rendering a verdict" (rather than exploring and developing an area of concern and conceptual possibilities for addressing it). In all other cases, the differences between alternative forms of democratic discussion and IF public discussion are both at least as significant and more numerous.

(2) Contrasts between IF public discussion and particular aspects of IF public discussion

Reading down the table's four *columns* helps clarify still further the contrasts between IF public discussion and other forms of democratic discussion by drawing attention to particular aspects of IF public discussion that are most often lacking in other forms of democratic discussion. Reading the table down each column shows that:

- While interactivity can characterize other forms of democratic discussion, it usually happens "by accident" rather than through reliance on regular supports such as active facilitation and/or small groups. The two exceptions—Supreme Court and jury deliberations—both significantly diverge from IF public discussion in being aimed at (legal) decisions rather than conceptual exploration and development of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

- None of the other eleven forms of democratic discussion regularly engages in the exploration and development of conceptual possibilities. "Bureaucratic networks" perhaps do so occasionally, but only by resisting

the need—ever present in bureaucracies—to solve the immediate practical problems of government.

- Juries probably come closest to relying on small groups of diverse citizens. With twelve members, the typical jury perhaps qualifies as a small group of citizens. Yet the two processes most often used to constitute juries (random selection and *voir dire*) are intended to promote representativeness and neutrality rather than diverse views—and may even have the effect of discouraging them. Though important in courtroom settings, both representativeness and neutrality can discourage the kind of unorthodox or unconventional thinking most useful in the exploratory and developmental discussion of conceptual possibilities.

Most of the other forms of democratic discussion have a question mark in the facilitator column because while they typically rely on facilitators, facilitators may lack training in exploratory and developmental discussion. (Those marked "X" are so marked not because they lack trained facilitators but rather because the facilitator is trained to do something other than encourage exploratory and developmental discussion—often to hinder it or squelch it altogether.)

See also:

A-1, "Governance" (pp. 30-35)
A-2, "Possibilities" (pp. 36-38)
A-4, "Experts and Citizens in Public Discussion" (pp. 43-47)
U-3, "The Objective of Public Discussion" (pp. 101-06)
U-4, "The Distinctiveness of Public Discussion" (pp. 107-09)
U-5, "The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic" (pp. 110-14)
B-3, "Facts and Concepts" (pp. 124-29)
B-5, "Interactivity" (pp. 135-38)

<u>S</u>anctuary Discussion and Public Discussion

Section S

The essays in this section describe sanctuary discussion, its use in developing staff work reports, and the use of staff work reports in public discussion. The essays highlight both the distinctive aspects of sanctuary discussion and the way in which staff work reports can enable useful interactivity both between sanctuary discussions and public discussions and between public discussions and broader democratic discussions.

Sanctuary Discussion
S-1

Introduction

At the mention of "citizen discussion," we tend to conjure up images of rapid-fire, heated exchanges between partisans, often in the glare of the media spotlight. Haste, partisan heat, and intense public scrutiny may to some extent be inevitable features of citizen discussion. But they can also create an environment in which real discussion may wilt before it has a chance to thrive. Interactivity Foundation (IF) has originated and tested a means of providing citizen discussion a refuge from such threats. We describe this shelter as "sanctuary." Although sanctuary discussion is distinct from the public discussion that is the main focus of these essays, it can contribute importantly to public discussion, as described in the other essays in this section.

A. Sanctuary Discussion for the Preparation of Citizen Staff Work Reports Described

Sanctuary shelters discussion by providing three forms of protection that are absent from most forms of democratic discussion (usually by design): adequate time to listen and learn, confidentiality, and anonymity.

(1) Adequate discussion time

Although the actual time spent in sanctuary discussions can vary, sanctuary discussions cannot be hurried. Practical constraints such as external deadlines are relaxed to the fullest extent possible in order to allow discussion to unfold according to its own pace and rhythm.

More specifically, ample time is given for:

- actual panelist discussion

- panelist interaction outside of organized discussion sessions

- panelist reflection between meetings

- planning and editorial support on the part of the discussion facilitator.

(2) Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a second important aspect of sanctuary and can be ensured in various ways. IF panelists sign a non-attribution agreement at the beginning of a discussion project. This legally binding agreement prevents both the panelists and

the facilitator from attributing statements made during discussion sessions to individual panelists.

(3) Anonymity

Anonymity extends confidentiality from the individual portions of sanctuary discussions to their overall results or products, such as staff work reports. Anonymity is best preserved by both omitting the names of individual participants from reports and avoiding personal attribution for any particular statement or quotation.

B. The Purposes of Sanctuary

In general, the purposes of sanctuary are to ensure that discussions are as unhurried and open as possible and to encourage the broader public that might examine their results (in a form such as staff work reports) to focus on their development and content rather than the specific background of the citizens who participated in them.

(1) Adequate time

Sanctuary eliminates haste (and sometimes heat). This allows the discussion to proceed at a pace dictated the internal evolutionary dynamic of exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of conceptual possibilities—rather than by extrinsic factors like pre-established schedules, external events, or decision-making timelines. Sanctuary frees participants from such "practical" pressures, allowing them time for thoughtful and full discussion.

(2) Confidentiality

Confidentiality, such as that conferred by a formal non-attribution agreement, frees participants to express themselves openly and fully. It protects them from the fear of having their views "used against them"—whether during sanctuary discussion or later, in public. This sort of fear is not uncommon. It can arise any time participants become concerned that what they say might:

- be contradicted by a perceived authority or expert

- be ignored, dismissed, or ridiculed by other participants

- threaten their material interests

- undermine their social status, standing, or reputation.

By preventing a public "tally" of who contributed what to the sanctuary discussion, confidentiality frees participants from fear of psychological, social,

political and/or economic reprisal. Confidentiality helps create a refuge in which unproductive criticism and self-censorship is minimized and open, empathetic, and constructive discussion can be encouraged to flourish. It emboldens participants to "make mistakes," express unpopular views, challenge conventional ways of thinking, and change their minds as they develop conceptual possibilities.

(3) Anonymity

Whereas confidentiality is crucial during actual sanctuary discussions, anonymity becomes important once they are over. By not attributing elements of the resulting work product, however large or small, to individual participants by name, the specific background of individual panelists is kept "off the record." This is designed to make it difficult—if not impossible—to evaluate or discuss the development or results of sanctuary discussions, such as staff work reports, in terms of their "authors'" detailed credentials, backgrounds, or political leanings. Public discussion of a sanctuary discussion can instead be channeled into the areas that are likely to be far more useful: the sanctuary discussion's results and the process by which they were developed. As a result, subsequent discussion is not only more fair, it is substantively enriched—more likely to be of use to citizens, each whom ultimately bears the burden of personal exploration, development, and choice.

C. Contrasts between Sanctuary Preparatory Discussion and Other Forms of Citizen Discussion

Democratic discussion, deliberation, and dialogue have been conceived of in scores of ways, some of which feature elements that bear at least a passing resemblance to sanctuary discussion as described above. Closer inspection of these alternatives will almost always reveal, however, that the concept of sanctuary discussion is quite distinctive. Indeed, few (if any) concepts of democratic discussion, deliberation, or dialogue—whether theoretical or in actual use—embody any one of the central aspects of sanctuary described here, at least in any robust way. So far as we know, none combines all three.

D. Interactivity between Sanctuary and Public Discussion

One of the reasons that sanctuary discussion is so unusual is that it fills a niche that other institutions and approaches often leave open by design.

Participatory democracy, for example, is rooted in face-to-face encounters. Representative democracy, for its part, depends on open meetings and records. Moreover, few governmental bodies can afford to "let discussion run its course."

Most alternative versions of citizen discussion end up mimicking one of the two basic forms of democratic governmental decision making, both of which seem to positively exclude the possibility of sanctuary. (For example, the many theorists and groups emphasizing the so-called "public sphere" as an alternative to "state-centered" citizen discussion are in effect advocating a non-governmental form of participatory democracy.)

Yet there is—or at least can be—a connection, an interactivity, between sanctuary discussion and public discussion. Sanctuary discussions can produce results or "products" that can serve as the opportunity or occasion for interactivity between sanctuary discussion and public discussion. One such product of sanctuary discussion, staff work reports, are provided for public use by democratic citizens and thus provide a way for the broader public to interact with sanctuary discussions. The next essay describes staff work reports in greater detail.

Staff Work Reports for Public Discussion
S-2

Introduction

Sanctuary discussions need not culminate in a written document. But if their results are to be made available for public discussion of areas of public policy concern, they need to be put in some written form. This essay describes one such document: staff work reports for public discussion.

As noted in the concluding section of the preceding essay, staff work reports for public discussion can be thought of in the abstract as the potential locus of interactivity between sanctuary discussions and public discussions. Alternatively, staff work reports for public discussion can be described as a means of conveying to the public the results of a sanctuary discussion in such a way as to stimulate and enhance public discussions by citizens of an area of public policy concern.

A. Staff Work Reports for Public Discussion Described

Like other "staff work," staff work reports for public discussion represent advance work. But staff work reports are importantly different from conventional staff work in that they are:

- conceptual rather than technical or quantitative

- intended for citizen governance discussions rather than for use in advocacy, debate, or governmental decision-making.

Both the content and form of staff work reports for public discussion follow from their potential function as advance work for public discussion by democratic citizens of particular conceptual possibilities rather than as preparation for advocacy or action (such as governmental decision-making).

(1) Content

Staff work reports for public discussion can be described as initial conceptual work for further citizen discussion. Among the components that can make staff work reports for public discussion useful for the purposes of stimulating and enhancing further public discussion by democratic citizens are

- a short description of the sanctuary discussion process

- a description of the selected area of concern

- a description of contrasting conceptual possibilities that are the sanctuary panelists' response to the area of concern

- the results of the panelists' testing in sanctuary of the practical consequences that might result from implementing the contrasting conceptual possibilities

(2) Format

The style and presentation of staff work reports for public discussion can both promote and enhance public discussion as well. Sanctuary discussion leaders can help to ensure through their editorial work that staff work reports for public discussion are useful by making them accessible, engaging, and easy to use.

B. The Purposes of Staff Work Reports for Public Discussion

As the locus of interactivity between sanctuary and public discussions, staff work reports can both promote and enhance public discussion.

(1) Staff work reports as promoting public discussion

Staff work reports for public discussion can be used to promote public discussion by stimulating citizens' interest in discussion.

Staff work reports for public discussion can promote public discussion when they engage or deepen citizens' interest in public discussion by:

- raising new concerns for public policy

- raising new possible questions for public policy about perennial concerns (such as fairness, freedom, security, or the environment)

- describing new and/or contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing policy concerns

- highlighting consequences of conceptual possibilities that may have been ignored in public discussion.

(2) Staff work reports as enhancing public discussion

Staff work reports for public discussion can also be used to encourage and enhance citizen discussion. That is, they can be used not only to get discussion going but to give it a head start by providing other citizens a conceptual "leg up," a springboard, a starting point or—where staff work reports for public discussion

contain at least four contrasting conceptual possibilities—several useful starting points at once.

Staff work reports for public discussion can enhance public discussion by:

- helping public discussion focus on ideas rather than on personalities or credentials

- encouraging the exploration of new questions and possibilities that may relate to an area of concern

- focusing citizen discussion on conceptual possibilities rather than authoritative pronouncements, answers, or recommendations

- focusing discussion on governance or the conceptual aspects of public policy

- highlighting for citizens the necessity of choice

- drawing attention to the consequences of choices, including those that may otherwise be overlooked or ignored.

C. Contrasts between Staff Work Reports and Other Policy Reports

As indicated in Table S-2.1., staff work reports for public discussion differ from conventional think tank reports, governmental staff work documents, "blue ribbon" commission studies, and academic papers in many respects.

Table S-2.1. Contrasts between Conventional Policy Reports and Staff Work Reports for Public Discussion

Feature	Conventional Policy Reports	Staff Work for Public Discussion

Content	Governmental (policy action[s])	• Governance
		  ○ area of concern
		  ○ contrasting conceptual possibilities
		• Possible practical consequences

Purpose(s)	Close off public discussion with decision and/or advocacy	Promote and/or expand public discussion by democratic citizens
Authors	Experts and/or stakeholders	Experts and non-experts
Setting	Public	Sanctuary
Discussion Process	Open-ended discussion	Facilitated discussion, editorial assistance between sessions
Selection Process	Compromise, polling, or consensus	• Convergence • Preservation of contrasts

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Public Discussion of Staff Work Reports
S-3

Introduction

The previous essay described staff work reports as a way to connect sanctuary discussion and public discussion. This essay describes several possible ways in which public discussion of staff work reports might be connected to broader democratic discussion.

A. Public Discussion of Staff Work Reports as a Means of Promoting and Enhancing Democratic Discussion

As described in greater detail in Essay U-3, public discussions of staff work reports are intended to *promote* and *enhance* democratic discussion among citizens more generally. These, then, are the links between sanctuary discussion, staff work reports, public discussion, and broader democratic discussion:
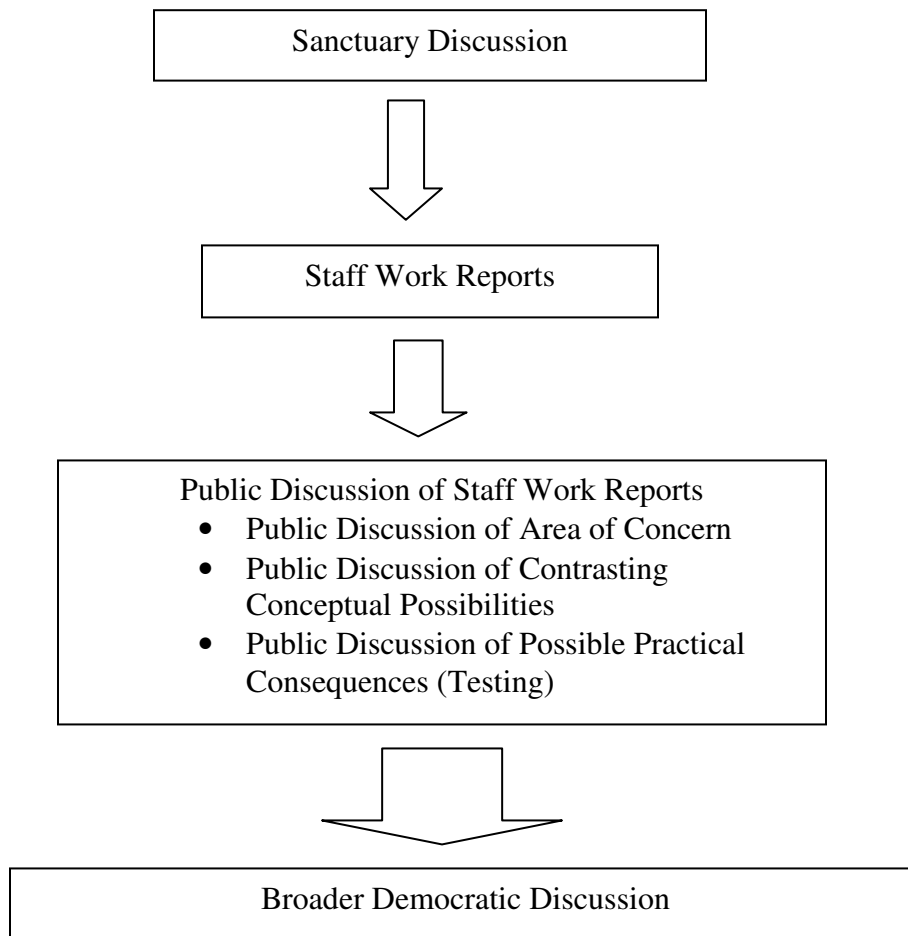
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Sanctuary Discussion          │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ⇓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│         Staff Work Reports           │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ⇓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Public Discussion of Staff Work Reports        │
│     • Public Discussion of Area of Concern       │
│     • Public Discussion of Contrasting           │
│       Conceptual Possibilities                   │
│     • Public Discussion of Possible Practical    │
│       Consequences (Testing)                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ⇓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Broader Democratic Discussion    │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```

B. Public Discussion of Staff Work Reports as Promoting Public Discussion

Public discussions of staff work reports achieve the goal of promoting public discussion to the degree that they:

- lead *more citizens* to get involved in democratic discussion than would otherwise have been involved and/or

- encourage already active citizens to become *more involved* in the discussion and/or

- have effects which induce *other citizens* to get involved (see Section D., below).

C. Public Discussion of Staff Work Reports as Enhancing Public Discussion

Public discussions of staff work reports are most likely to achieve the goal of enhancing discussion when they actually focus on the staff work report, since the contrasting conceptual possibilities at the core of staff work reports encourage citizens to break free of the various limitations on current public policy discussion described in Essay U-2.

When they do, public discussions may make a useful contribution to current democratic policy discussion more generally by:

- Encouraging the public to take notice of a newly emerging area of concern and/or

- Suggesting new ways of thinking about an existing area of concern and/or

- Suggesting new conceptual possibilities for addressing an area of concern and/or

- Encouraging the public to consider additional possible practical consequences or well-known consequences in a different way.

D. Magnifying the Impact of Public Discussion

It is in their nature as a species of democratic discussion that public discussions are likely to vary a great deal, even with respect to the same staff work report. And the relationship these public discussions bear to other democratic discussions is simply unpredictable, at least in its particulars. All that can be said with any degree of certainty is that public discussions are not likely to *displace* other forms of democratic discussion. On the contrary, public discussions can—under the right

circumstances and with the right kind of guidance—promote and enhance democratic discussion more generally.

The impact of particular public discussions of staff work reports will depend on innumerable factors, many of which will be beyond the control of those who conduct them.   Still, it is worth considering how to make the most of their ability to promote and enhance democratic discussion. This section describes two generally and potentially complementary possibilities for magnifying the impact of public discussion. Varying circumstances may present other possibilities.

(1) Self-contained and self-sufficient public discussions

This approach may be useful in situations in which a single public discussion event or short series of public discussions alone may be sufficient to transform democratic discussion in a significant way. For example, a group of state legislators might be looking for a way of thinking about an area of concern and be ready to carry their discussions on after participating in a public discussion of a staff work report. However, such situations are likely to be as rare as they are difficult to identify. Moreover, as the legislative illustration suggests, few groups qualify as self-contained and self-sufficient on the one hand and "democratic" on the other.

(2) Ripples in a pond

A much broader approach follows from viewing public discussions like a stone thrown into the middle of a pond, with discussion rippling outward to other individuals and groups in the broader democratic public. When this happens, all of the effects listed in Section B. will be magnified and the goal of promoting discussion will be furthered in the process. This effect cannot be guaranteed, but it can be encouraged during public discussions by selecting (or convening) groups that:

- have a known capacity or at least clear potential for organizing and conducting public discussions

- are known for promoting—or at least being open to—democratic discussion

- either have a broad-based membership or access to a broader public

- have active supporters

- communicate actively with other groups

- are willing to generate and pass along feedback from discussion participants.

No group is likely to fit this profile in all particulars. Some will be strong on some points, weaker on others. As a practical matter, this argues for pursing a well-considered mix of public discussion events.

<u>A</u>spects of Public Discussion
Section A

This is the first of two sections that explore various answers to the question "What is public discussion?" It describes public discussion's content, participants, mode of "decision-making," and use of language.

Governance
A-1

Introduction

In conventional usage, "governance" is typically used in place of "government" to suggest "direction" or "guidance" as opposed to the specifics of governing. Other times governance is used to denote the complex of institutional arrangements that govern a particular social sphere, activity, or sector of the economy. The concept as described in this essay builds on the breadth of these notions, but goes further in emphasizing the conceptual aspect of governance, which is contrasted with the technical and action-orientation of "government."

Governance is a fundamental concept for public discussion: governance is what is critically lacking in the content of current policy discussion and governance is what public discussion is intended to inject into current policy discussion so as to "enhance" it.

A. Governance Described

Governance describes the content, focus, and/or outcome of policy discussion.

(1) A Starting point—governance and current limitations on democratic discussion

Essay U-2 describes a series of limitations on current democratic policy discussion. Two of these limitations have to do with the conduct of democratic discussion (limited citizen participation; citizens' reluctance to fully speak their minds). The rest are more centrally concerned with the results, outcomes or content of democratic discussion:

- an exclusive focus on self-interest

- failure to address emerging policy concerns

- predominance of technical over practical considerations

- narrowness

- bias toward facts

- constrained information.

As a starting point, then, governance can be understood as a public policy discussion whose results in some way transcend one or more of these limitations.

(2) A Fuller description

    a. the purpose of governance is to expand and clarify citizens' policy choices

        The usefulness of governance lies in its potential to clarify and expand the policy choices available to democratic citizens.

    b. governance is anticipatory *and* exploratory

        Governance is both anticipatory *and* exploratory.

        Governance is anticipatory in that it involves either addressing emerging concerns or taking a fresh look at perennial concerns.

        Governance is also exploratory. If it tackles an emerging concern, governance will of necessity be exploratory. If it deals with a perennial concern, governance will have to be self-consciously exploratory. Either way, governance does not involve identifying "solutions to" or "recommendations for" areas of concern but is rather a process of developing contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing them.

        Governance deals not with "what is" or with "what should be" but rather with "what might be." The goal of governance is not to encourage citizens to agree about "where they are" or even where they should be going, but to broaden citizens' view of where they might be going—i.e., of the public policy possibilities open to them. This is how governance contributes to expanding citizens' choices.

    c. governance is practical

        Governance is "practical" in four senses:

- As already noted, the purposes of governance are practical: expand and clarify citizens' choices in the short term and improve the usefulness of public policy in the long term.

- To the extent governance succeeds in its purpose of expanding and clarifying citizens' choices, governance may pose a practical challenge to citizens to consider possibilities they might not otherwise have considered.

- Conceptual possibilities are not "neutral," but are based on morally charged memories, perceptions, beliefs, habits, and emotions—all of which have practical consequences (however difficult these may be to discern).

- Conceptual possibilities for addressing an area of concern represent coherent and plausible alternatives for public policy in the "real" world of practical politics.

d. governance is conceptual

Governance describes policy in terms of possibilities. Possibilities are described in terms of concepts. These concepts are generally of three types (examples are from Interactivity Foundation's Citizen Staff Work Report *Privacy and Privacy Rights*):

- concepts that describe why the possibility might be desirable (e.g., "open democratic discussion")

- concepts that describe what a possibility might be like: who has responsibility and for what; citizens' habits and thinking; group interactions (e.g., "vigorous government protection of basic liberties combined with non-governmental means for dealing with other invasions of privacy")

- concepts that relate what a possibility might be like to why it might be desirable (e.g., "the protection of basic liberties is a prerequisite for an open discussion of ideas").

Like all concepts, all three types of governance concepts require selection and integration.

Integration is necessary if we are to make sense of the multitude of recollections, perceptions, and projections of which we as human beings are capable. Concepts allow us to focus.

Selection is likewise unavoidable because there are practical (as well as neurological) limits on how much human beings can pay attention to. A concept that incorporated "everything" would be like a map on a 1:1 scale—as big as the area it depicted and therefore more trouble then help. Concepts allow us to focus on what matters.

(3) Implications: governance v. "government"

Governance is a relatively straightforward notion. But it has many important implications. These can best be brought out by further contrasting it with "government." Some of these contrasts are suggested in Table A-1.1. The top half of the table recapitulates what has already been said about the differences between governance and government. The lower half draws out some of the more important implications of these basic distinctions.

Table A-1.1. Contrasts between Governance and Government

	Governance	*Government*
Feature		
Purpose	Develop possibilities (to clarify/expand citizens' choices)	• Make a decision (i.e., narrow choices to one path of action)
Temporal Focus	Emerging or perennial concerns	Current concerns
Content	Practical (what could/might be)	Technical (what is/should be)
Elements	Concepts (what/why)	Statutes/ Rules/Orders (how/when)
Implications		
Participants' Qualifications	• Willingness to develop possibilities • Practical intelligence	• Interest in making decisions • Technical expertise
Pace	Deliberate	Hurried
Control of Discussion	Citizens	Leaders
Role of facilitator	Guide	Director

These contrasts are significant. However, it should also be born in mind that there is a high degree of interactivity among the features of governance and government.

The most broad-ranging of these interactivities is that governance and government each takes its practical meaning from the other. Governance informs government. Without governance, government is merely a set of regularized collective behaviors. Governance explains what the behaviors are about—what they mean and what they are trying to accomplish. But government is what governance is aimed at informing.   If governance is not aimed (at least potentially) at producing consequences through policy, it risks becoming an academic exercise, drained of practical content.

It should also be remembered that it is probably more useful to think of governance and government as "ideal types" rather than absolutes. Most public policy discussions will contain elements of both—though as currently conducted public policy discussions tend to focus on government and are thus limited in the ways described in general terms in essay U-2,"Some Limitations of Current Democratic Discussion."

B. Governance Illustrated

(1) An Illustration from recent history

Since governance is a shorthand way of indicating much of what is lacking in current public discussion, essay U-2's illustration of the limitations on democratic policy discussion is apropos here as well. Democratic discussion preceding and surrounding the recent Iraq conflict also illustrate some of the importantly distinctive features of governance and "government."

Examples of governance in public discussions of Iraq might include

- "preemptive defense" (respond to a serious threat of attack)

- "reactive defense" (respond only if actually attacked)

- "nation building" (further democracy and human rights)

Examples of "government" in public discussions of Iraq include

- military planning, strategy, and tactics (e.g., force requirements, timing)

- diplomatic planning, strategy, and tactics

- relative utility of military v. diplomatic options ("hard" v. "soft" power)

- occupation planning, strategy and tactics

- exit planning, strategy and tactics

These examples also illustrate the interactivity between governance and "government"—that each takes its practical meaning from the other. Any element from either of these two lists raises questions about the elements in the other: Which governmental option (or set of options) best serves a particular governance possibility? What are the governance implications of a chosen governmental option (or set of options)?

(2) Illustrations from Interactivity Foundation's work

As depicted in Table A-1.2. on the following page, governance is at the heart of both Interactivity Foundation's use of sanctuary discussions and the understanding of public discussion explored in the various essays in this volume.

Table A-1.2. How Interactivity Foundation (IF) Sanctuary Discussion and Public Discussion Contribute to Governance

Governance Feature	IF Sanctuary Discussions Contribute to Governance by	Public Discussions Contribute to Governance by
Purpose is to Develop Possibilities to Clarify/Expand Citizens' Choices	Producing Staff Work that - explores the area of concern - develops contrasting possibilities - tests for practical consequences	Using Staff Work to help clarify/expand choices "directly" and to promote public discussion to further clarify/expand choices
Focus on Emerging Concerns	Beginning with Area of Concern	Using Staff Work to help focus discussion on an Area of Concern
Practical Content (What Could/Might Be)	Producing Staff Work that contains conceptual possibilities rather than technical analysis or recommendations	Using Staff Work to help focus discussion on conceptual possibilities rather than technical analysis or recommendations
Conceptual (What/Why)	Producing Staff Work that is conceptual rather than technical	Using Staff Work to help focus discussion on conceptual possibilities rather than technical questions

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See also:

S-1, "Sanctuary Discussion" (pp. 17-20)
S-3, "Public Discussion of Staff Work Reports (pp. 25-28)
A-2, "Possibilities" (pp. 36-38)
U-2, "Some Limitations of Current Democratic Discussion" (pp. 85-100)
U-3, "The Objective of Public Discussion" (pp. 101-06)
B-3, "Facts and Concepts" (pp. 124-29)

Possibilities
A-2

Introduction

Public discussion begins with the exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of possible conceptual questions in a selected area of concern. The next step in public discussion is to explore, develop, and then select and exclude possible conceptual answers to those questions in the form of contrasting conceptual possibilities. This essay describes the concept of possibilities, the next what is meant by "contrasting." As will be seen, the concept of possibilities is perhaps more subtle than commonly thought.

A. "Possibilities" in Conventional Usage

Possibilities are usually understood to be either situations or events that might or could happen ("Rain is a possibility tomorrow") or events or situations we might want to bring about (as in "A more coherent foreign policy is a possibility"). The difference between the two usages is the element of choice: the specifics of tomorrow's weather is (largely) unaffected by human choice, while foreign policy could be described as the result of a sequence of choices and actions flowing from the past through the present and into the future. The use of the term "possibility" highlights the open-endedness of public policy and the reality that both public policy-making and public policy discussion both require choice.

B. Possibilities—A Blind Spot in Expert Policy Discussion

Interestingly, possibilities is a term that is as familiar in everyday language as it is unfamiliar in academics' and policy makers' discussion of public policy. Among both groups, discussion tends to be dichotomized into "empirical" analyses of "what policy is" and "normative" analyses of "what policy ought to be," the latter sometimes taking on a clear advocacy orientation. Possibilities, by contrast, describe "what policy might be," usually in practical terms. Though concerned with "the real world," they are not confined to what presently exists. And though they describe different states of affairs that might be considered desirable in discussion by democratic citizens, they are not confined to a single preferred view of what should occur. Thinking in terms of possibilities thus fills in an important gap in conventional democratic discussion for citizen governance.

C. Possibilities—Doubly Open to Democratic Discussion

The gap that possibilities fill in citizens' public policy discussion for democratic governance can be filled as easily by non-expert citizens as by experts. Expertise may confer advantages when *debating* current and future policy, but because

exploring and developing policy possibilities relies on creativity at least as much as on technical knowledge or analytical skill, citizens are generally as capable as experts of doing so. Citizens, as much as experts, are capable of thoughtful individual choices for possible democratic governance.

Possibilities are open to democratic discussion in another, equally important sense, as well. Inherently open-ended, possibilities tend to invite further exploration, development, and choice rather than foreclosing it as experts' policy conclusions often do, especially when immediate practical solutions or courses of action are expected or needed.

D. Interactivity between "Contrasting, "Governance" and "Possibilities"

Possibilities relate to the other key terms that describe the basic contents of staff work reports and public discussion that uses them as a starting point.

(1) Possibilities ensure that the conceptual alternatives participants develop are at least minimally *contrasting* because possibilities:

- can diverge in many ways and therefore allow a greater degree of conceptual variety and complexity than even thorough descriptions of current policy or lists of public policy recommendations

- entail a plurality of "alternatives" rather than a single "answer" or even set of "recommendations" (i.e., a "singular possibility" may well be a contradiction in terms).

(2) Possibilities also encourage discussion participants to develop contrasting democratic governance (rather than government) alternatives because possibilities:

- tend to keep participants' discussion at the conceptual level needed to think in terms of "what might be" rather than at the level of immediate problem-solving or policy "fixes"

- are essentially open-ended and invite continuing discussion and revision in the light of further democratic discussion and changing events.

E. Possibilities and the IF Discussion Process

Possibilities, like many of the key concepts discussed in this essay series, enter into public discussion in many ways, as outlined in Table A-2.1, on the following page.

Table A-2.1. Possibilities and Public Discussion

Aspect of Public Discussion	Relation to Possibilities
Individual Discussion Steps	
Initial Starting Point (1) Staff Work Reports (2) General Description of Area of Concern	(1) Possibilities presented in a form that invites further discussion by a diverse democratic public concerned with governance (2) "What might be" left largely open to participants' inquiry/choice
Exploration and Development of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities	Highlights the open-ended nature of possibilities; underscores plurality inherent in concept of "possibility"
Selection (and Exclusion) of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities	Underlines the necessity of choice as an important component of public policy possibilities
Rendering of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities as Relational Constructions in the Simplest Formal Language	Intended to: • facilitate practical testing • make conceptual possibilities accessible for public discussion by diverse democratic citizens
Testing for Practical Consequences	Ensures that participants' view "what might be" from the perspective of possible actual consequences
General Aspects	
Contrasting Nature of Possibilities	Reinforces exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of a plurality of conceptual possibilities
Facilitation	Supports exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of a plurality of conceptual possibilities
Regular Editing of Project Work Materials	Encourages exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of a plurality of conceptual possibilities
Non-linearity	Open-endedness of process reinforces open-endedness of the possibilities that are sought
Use of Language	Allows possibilities to develop with as few linguistic constraints as may be possible

See also:

A-1, "Governance" (pp. 30-35)
A-3, "Contrasts" (pp. 39-42)
T-3, "Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities" (pp. 65-69)
B-4, "The Necessity of Choice" (pp. 130-34)

Contrasts
A-3

Introduction

Like sanctuary discussion, public discussion is intended to produce results in the form of at least four conceptual possibilities which, together, embody real contrasts. As explained in previous essays, both governance and possibilities encourage or even require discussion participants to think in terms of contrasts. This essay begins at a general level by describing how contrasts, in turn, contribute to the objective of stimulating and enhancing democratic discussion and, over the longer term, encouraging useful public policy. It then completes the description of the interactivity between governance, possibilities, and contrasts by explaining how contrasts may promote public discussion in terms of governance and possibilities. It concludes by highlighting some of the aspects of public discussion that encourage such contrasts.

A. How Contrasts Contribute to the Objective of Public Discussion

Both staff work reports and any reports that result from public discussions are likely to be most useful if the governance possibilities they contain represent genuine contrasts. Contrasting possibilities may differ in many useful ways. Any set of contrasting possibilities will thus describe not merely a *spectrum* of possibilities, but rather a broader *field* (or multi-dimensional conceptual "space").

Contrasts are useful in two strongly interactive ways. Contrasts can encourage— though they cannot guarantee—both breadth and clarity in public discussions (and in any subsequent discussions or choices among diverse democratic citizens based on the reports of public discussions). Whether in public or democratic discussions or in situations of individual or social choice, contrasts tend to:

- broaden the range of alternatives under consideration

  - directly—by including additional alternatives
  - indirectly—by suggesting alternatives that may have been ignored

- clarify the possible practical consequences that might result from different conceptual possibilities.

B. How Contrasts Encourage Governance and Possibilities

There is interactivity between the concepts described by the phrase "contrasting governance possibilities". As noted in previous essays, this means that governance supports possibilities and contrasts and that possibilities encourage exploration and development in terms of governance and contrasts. It also means that contrasts are useful in working toward governance concepts that are described in terms of possibilities.

Contrasts reinforce governance- (as opposed to government-) thinking by:

- helping convert analytical distinctions, technical issues, and differences of degree into conceptual insights and descriptions

- broadening and deepening the discussion

- blunting partisanship and encouraging exploration and development of possibilities for what diverse democratic citizens might find worth discussing.

Contrasts reinforce thinking in terms of possibilities by:

- accustoming discussion participants to think of alternatives in general or conceptual terms, which can help them think beyond such givens as "what is" or "what should be"

- clarifying each of the possibilities' limits, which can encourage discussion participants to develop specific new possibilities beyond or in addition to the possibilities already under consideration

- blunting partisanship and encouraging thinking in terms of what other democratic citizens might find worth discussing.

C. Aspects of Public Discussion that Encourage Participants to Explore and Develop Governance Possibilities that Embody Contrasts

Table A-3.1 on the following page summarizes those aspects of public discussion that most directly encourage participants to explore and develop conceptual possibilities that embody contrasts.

Table A-3.1. Public Discussion and Contrasts

Aspect of Public Discussion	**Contribution to Contrasts**
Individual Discussion Steps	
Initial Starting Point (3) Staff Work Reports	(3) Staff Work Reports—Possibilities presented in a form that invites further discussion by a diverse democratic public concerned with governance
(4) General Description of Area of Concern	(4) Area of Concern • "What might be" left largely open to participants' inquiry/choice • Encourages development of alternatives to conventional thinking by focusing on knotty, perennial, or emerging concerns about consequences • Possible questions for initial discussion avoid framing the discussion in an immediately selective way
Discussion of an Area of Concern	Generates a varied set of possible questions and possible conceptual answers
Requirement that Staff Work Reports Contain at Least Four Conceptual Possibilities	Requires a variety of possibilities; encourages useful contrasts among them
Testing for Possible Practical Consequences	Further elaborates contrasts among possibilities
General Aspects	
Facilitation Planning	Encourages exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of useful contrasts
Meeting Facilitation	Keeps panelists aware of purpose; encourages exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of contrasts
Regular Editing of Discussion Work Materials	Highlights and encourages fuller exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of emerging contrasting possibilities
Non-consensual Selection and Exclusion	Allows inclusion of contrasting possibilities without full panel support
Focus on Governance	Encourages priority of conceptual differences over technical exactness
Use of Language	Linguistic constructions subordinated to conceptual exploration and development until testing for possible practical consequences

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See also:

Experts and Citizens in Public Discussion
A-4

Introduction

As Interactivity Foundation (IF) has learned through actual experience, experts and lay citizens complement each other well in sanctuary discussions. Experts and lay citizens can complement each other in public discussions, as well. This essay explains why and how both "experts" and lay citizens might both be expected to make useful contributions to public discussion, especially when engaged in discussion together.

In the current policy-making process, the respective roles of experts and lay citizens in public discussion are narrowly typecast. Frequently experts do little more than instruct (or lecture) non-experts about how public policy can or should work, while non-experts do little more than make heard their support for or opposition to policy that has already been formulated by expert decision-makers. Neither the lecture nor the public hearing style of expert-lay "dialogue" involves much in the way of real discussion. By contrast, all three alternative types of public discussion described in these essays (of an area of concern; of contrasting conceptual possibilities; and of possible practical consequences) involve significant interactivity among participants. And all three have the potential of being most useful when this interactivity includes real interactivity between experts and lay citizen participants, i.e., when experts and lay citizens together discuss the same contrasting conceptual possibilities.

A. Complementary Contributions

Experts' and lay citizens' contributions to public discussion are at least potentially complementary in the sense that, while overlapping, they are likely to be both different and mutually "correcting."

(1) Overlapping sources

We are used to thinking of "citizens" and "experts" as categorically different. Experts are authorities, citizens uninformed (and not necessarily well informed ones at that). Experts know the answers, citizens don't (and may not even be very aware of the questions). Experts have well-reasoned positions, citizens off-the-cuff opinions (or no opinions at all). And so on. As a result of such stereotypes, we tend to think that only experts have much to contribute to democratic discussion of any type. In part this is because as a society we have narrowed our view of what counts as public discussion to an exchange between authorities. (If democratic discussion is confined to an exchange between authorities, then citizens will be relegated to the passive role of "listener.") But these categorical distinctions are also the product of a series of artificial dichotomies between citizens and experts—artificial because they conceal significant overlap in the

sources of citizens' and experts' potential contributions to democratic discussion, public discussion in particular.

Citizens and experts both can usefully contribute to the same public discussion because both:

- have a general knowledge base upon which they can draw in discussion, made up of moral convictions, emotions, memories, and non-technical beliefs about the past, present and future

- are capable of conceptual insights relevant to the exploration, development, selection and exclusion and practical testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities

- have a set of individual preferences, values, and interests

- have a set of social preferences, values, and interests

- must, as individuals and members of various groups and organizations, face the necessity of choice.

Together, the first two items in this list suggest that "All citizens are experts"—at least in the sense that they have some ability to contribute usefully to the more analytical and conceptual side of governance discussions. Likewise, the last three items in the list suggest that "All experts are citizens" and so have some ability to contribute usefully to the more "public" or "ethical" side of governance discussion.

This overlap may not be widely recognized. But it is offers a practical explanation for citizens' and experts' willingness to engage in thoughtful discussion with one another: both groups can learn from one another about matters that concern them both.

(2) Different contributions

a. the contributions of experts to public discussion

Experts are specialists in a particular substantive or analytical field, whether by study, training, professional experiences or, perhaps most typically, by some combination of these. In the best of circumstances (see section B., below), such "specialists" can make two useful contributions to public discussion:

- technical knowledge ("empirical" and/or "theoretical")

- logical and analytical ability

b. the contributions of lay citizens to public discussion

We tend to recognize that individual lay citizens can find thoughtful discussion with others personally valuable. Less often appreciated is the degree to which their very status as "generalists" puts lay citizens in a position to make a number of useful contributions to public discussion, including:

- life experience

- creativity

- breadth of view

- relatively dispassionate interest in the public good.

(3) Experts and lay citizens tend to dampen each others' excesses in public discussion

Experts and lay citizens will tend not only to contribute different positive things to public discussion, they will also tend to ensure that each other's contributions are not diminished by being taken to excess.

The very attributes that make experts valuable to public discussion—technical knowledge and analytical skill—can also undermine experts' usefulness if taken too far. When not appropriately channeled, technical knowledge and analytical skill can undermine a discussion by leading participants to focus on:

- technical problem-solving

- the purely analytical side of contrasting conceptual possibilities to the complete exclusion of moral considerations

- defending or reforming—rather than rethinking—the status quo (due to commitments to particular disciplinary boundaries, conventional ways of thinking, or current institutions)

- advocacy.

If these tendencies are not effectively countered then public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities will be frustrated, as experts either content themselves with working out narrow policy "fixes" or become advocates for particular positions that they regard as the "right" or "authoritative" answers. Fortunately, citizens' contributions—life experience, creativity, breadth, and

public spiritedness—will tend to act as a corrective to these tendencies (a tendency that can be further enhanced, as noted in section C., below).

Similarly, the attributes that make citizens' contributions especially valuable to public discussion—life experience, creativity, breadth, and public spiritedness—can also undermine their usefulness, as when they lead participants to

- broaden discussion to such an extent that it loses any useful focus

- overlook the social, political, and economic aspects of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

These tendencies tend to be less of a threat to public discussion than those posed by an "excess" of expertise, and can usually be handled by an alert facilitator even when they do arise. But to the extent they do exist, they too are likely to be effectively countered by the complementary contribution of experts, which can be expected to counter citizens' tendencies to lack focus and rigor.

In this way, expert and lay citizen contributions tend to act as a break or constraint on an excess of the virtues of the other. Each group can in this way protect or safeguard the contributions of the other.

B. The Need for Caution in Involving Experts in Public Discussion

Public discussion must admit all interested parties to qualify as "democratic" or "public." And, with some help from the facilitator, even in the absence of any experts, it can produce useful results, particularly if focused on exploration, development, selection and exclusion, and/or practical testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

For the reasons just given, experts can improve the likelihood that public discussion will be useful—but only if lay citizens are able to exercise the constraining effect described at the end of the last section. Sometimes they will be able to accomplish this wholly on their own. Sometimes citizens will need the help of the discussion planner and facilitator, who will have to take care to prevent experts from dominating the discussion.

As a general rule, the more the discussion concentrates on contrasting conceptual possibilities, the less the danger that experts will divert discussion into technical arguments or advocacy and the more discussion will be enhanced by the interactive contributions of both citizens and experts. Focusing on contrasting conceptual possibilities in public discussion can help ensure interactive discussion between experts and citizens because in addressing contrasting conceptual possibilities:

- citizens' conceptual creativity, breadth and moral sensibilities will matter at least as much as experts' technical knowledge and analytical ability

- citizens will be on relatively equal standing with experts in the exploration, development, selection and exclusion, and/or practical testing of possibilities since possibilities relate to the future, which no one can know with anything approaching real "authority"

- advocacy is ruled out by the very plurality of the possibilities under discussion.

C. Encouraging Complementarity between Experts and Lay Citizens in Public Discussion by First Developing Citizens' Sense of Competency

Beyond a focus on contrasting conceptual possibilities and active facilitation, it may be possible to encourage complementarity between experts and lay citizens in public discussion by giving citizens some advance time to work together in the absence of experts. In a number of IF sanctuary discussions this approach has helped lay citizens develop a sense of competency, which in turn enabled them to work more constructively with experts.

Integrating this feature of sanctuary discussions into public discussion need not contradict the principle of keeping discussions fully open to the public. Lay citizens could, for example, meet in separate preliminary sessions. Or they could meet in separate concurrent sessions before joining experts in a "plenary" discussion. In either case, citizen competency is likely to be enhanced, and the resulting complementarity between experts and lay citizens in public discussion encouraged.

See also:

A-2, "Possibilities" (pp. 36-38)
U-3, "The Objective of Public Discussion" (pp. 101-06)
U-4, "The Distinctiveness of Public Discussion" (pp. 107-09)
U-5, "The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic" (pp. 110-14)

Convergence
A-5

Introduction

As public discussion moves along, it relies on two distinctive, if not unique, decision-making processes. The first is to preserve any possibility as long as even one discussion participant wants to report it for consideration by other citizens not party to the discussion. The other is convergence, described here as both the current that moves developmental and exploratory public discussion along, and its result.

A. Discussion Processes and The Necessity of Choice

Discussion processes, even when seemingly abstract, are practical affairs, at least in one sense: their participants must repeatedly confront the necessity of choice.

All discussion processes need a way to make choices or decisions. If they are to progress at all in the direction of producing useful results rather than degenerating into mere aimless talk—as deliberation, dialogue, and especially debate all too often do—discussion processes need a way to make choices about:

- where to begin—the concerns or questions that will serve as a starting point for discussion

- what to keep alive—the material that will be carried forward from one discussion session to another

- when to conclude—when to end discussion

- what (if anything) to disseminate—the material that will be made available to those not party to the discussions.

The *way* in which individuals engaged in group discussion make such choices typically interacts in multiple ways with the practical *direction* or *content* of their choices, as will now be seen.

B. The Limitations of Conventional Alternatives to Convergence

The two primary alternatives to convergence are polling and consensus. Neither is "wrong." But both are limited in important ways by the kind of decisions these alternative processes are intended to produce.

(1) Polling

Polling is a procedure for sorting or aggregating the preferences of individuals in a group in response to an already-stated question or set of choices. Examples are surveys, ranking, and voting. Polling can be useful, especially when discussion needs to give way to making actual choices among alternative course of action. But polling has significant limitations.

The main limitations of polling as a procedure for making decisions in the context of group discussion is that it tends to be:

- too formal—polling tends to allow the decision-making procedure to unduly influence the discussion by

    - focusing attention on the decision-making procedure rather than on the substance of the discussion it is meant to serve

    - encouraging compromise and lowest-common-denominator thinking rather than boldness, creativity, and innovation

- too decisive—polling tends to close off discussion in a way that does not encourage participants to revisit insights later in the discussion, even though such insights might prove useful

- too divisive—polling tends to foster advocacy and defensive position-taking of a sort that may be useful in democratic debate and action situations but often limits discussion to:

    - yes-or-no certainties

    - attempts to influence other participants rather than to encourage the openness and collegial interactions that are most useful for exploratory and developmental discussion.

(2) Consensus

Many groups and thinkers, sensitive to the reality that polling substitutes statistically aggregated "preferences" for more interactive processes, have turned to consensus as an alternative decision-making procedure. Consensus is a process in which a decision is made only if all members of the group "freely" agree to it. Especially in small groups, consensus may prove more productive than polling. And, at its best, consensus can keep formality, decisiveness, and divisiveness within bounds.

However, consensus, too, has its limitations, which for the most part are mirror images of those that constrain polling. Many of these limitations have to do with

the fact that consensus can only very rarely function "at its best." Unless a group is both small and already highly unified, consensus is unlikely to work very well—if at all. In most circumstances, consensus tends to lead to one or more of the following results, all of which undermine discussion:

- not formal enough—consensus, however understood or described at the outset of a discussion, tends to remain sufficiently nebulous a notion—at least in practice—that it can easily fade from view as a practical requirement. When this happens, the need to actually make decisions along the way also fades, with the result that the discussion wanders aimlessly.

- not decisive enough—consensus not only discourages attention to closure, but often makes closure impossible (in the process preventing the discussion from moving forward at all). This can result because consensus allows and may even encourage participants—even those with the best and most public of motives—to:

    o insist on attempting to convince others that they have the "right" answer(s)

    o insist on exploring the minutiæ of their differing perspectives

    o "hijack" the discussion by insisting on having their positions attended to for what may be "altruistic" but purely personal motives

    o focus on the gratification of "talk for its own sake" rather than on useful results.

- not divisive enough—consensus tends to blur useful distinctions and erase insights by:

    o placing a higher value on the act of coming to group decisions than on their content (group unity can take precedence over a careful consideration of the usefulness of what is being agreed to)

    o encouraging "groupthink"—even when it does not lead participants to confuse "efficiency" and "quality" as described in the previous point, consensus tends to heighten individuals' natural desire to avoid standing out (even when there is no ostensible pressure to conform from particularly authoritative, forceful, or influential group members)

    o constraining discussion to either particular actions or a wider range of subjects that have been mutually agreed upon in advance of

discussion (in which cases it parallels the "pre-ordained" aspect of polling).

C. Convergence

(1) How convergence differs from polling and consensus

Although convergence is a decision-making procedure, even more than consensus convergence resembles a process more than an event. Convergence describes the movement in a discussion toward a similar view of the desirability of possibilities. Convergence represents a quite minimal degree of agreement in order to move toward some sort of choice (or, in the case of governmental discussion, action). It can be thought of as an iterative—and interactive—distillation of the views of discussion participants, a distillation which, however, preserves the richness of the foregoing discussion. Like all interactive processes, it takes time. A suitable deliberative pace ensures that convergence will not prematurely exclude useful material or foreclose possibilities. Convergence tends to increase participants' respect for each others' views and heightens participants' sense that decisions are both interactive and shared.

Convergence often requires that debate be replaced by interaction that is exploratory and developmental. Explicit decisions are generally deferred until mutual agreement emerges—not about details, but about the general nature of the possibilities under consideration.

Although as a process convergence may well be theoretically open-ended, in practice the process is bounded by participants' desires to move the discussion forward according to the agreed-upon time constraints governing the discussion.

(2) Convergence contrasted with polling and consensus

The primary differences between convergence and the two conventional approaches to decision-making in group discussion contexts are that convergence:

- requires no yielding of the "self" to the group. Truly consensual processes require that individuals be ready, at the end of the day, to yield the floor and their positions to the wisdom of the group. Polling requires that individuals be ready to acquiesce to the majority or some other calculated standard. The process of convergence, by contrast, arises out of interaction and it allows the preservation of difference while encouraging the minimal agreement necessary for discussion to move forward. (At the same time, convergence can evince varying levels or degrees of agreement.)

- is even less formal than consensus, which typically ends up being buttressed by procedural rules to deliver on its promise of fairness and unity.

- aims not at a single "solution" (consensus) nor a mathematically derived ordering (polling), but at the accumulation and selection of a limited number of plural possibilities—and the preservation of the central elements of the thinking from which they developed.

(3) Interactivity: decision-making process and outcome

The interactivity that unfolds between the *process* of convergence and its *outcomes* are the key to understanding how convergence avoids the limitations of polling and consensus. Convergence can: (1) operate informally; (2) lead to decisions while avoiding either premature closure or total lack of closure; and (3) encourage decisions while avoiding the divisiveness of polling and the unity of consensus—all because the consequences of convergence are:

- Selected *possibilities* rather than final action choices

- *conceptual possibilities* that can be developed further rather than actual policies or specific recommendations to be applied or enforced

- *multiple* and *contrasting* conceptual possibilities that might be usefully applied to action rather than singular (and possibly premature) decisions.

The exploration, development, and testing of multiple and contrasting conceptual possibilities cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules, but result rather from the interactive "flow" of discussion—a flow that is better served by a reliance on convergence than by either the divisiveness of polling or the unity of consensus.

See also:

IF-3, "IF Public Discussion Contrasted with Other Forms of Democratic
　　　Discussion" (pp. 11-15)
U-3, "The Objective of Public Discussion" (pp. 101-06)
U-4, "The Distinctiveness of Public Discussion" (pp. 107-09)
U-5, "The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic" (pp. 110-14)
B-4, "The Necessity of Choice" (pp. 124-29)

Language and Public Discussion
A-6

Introduction

This essay suggests a way of thinking about and using language in public discussion.

Philosophers, social thinkers, and cognitive scientists of various kinds have long argued hotly about the origin and nature of language. But "ultimate" questions about language need not be answered conclusively in order to describe the kinds of language (or ways of using language) that might be most useful in particular contexts. The context that interests us here is public discussion or, more specifically, public discussion of selected areas of concern, contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing them, and their possible practical consequences.

Whether for psychological motives or because they are bent on advocating a particular policy, some citizens' desire to "win" will express itself as an attempt to exercise control over language. Other citizens will equate precision with clear thinking, forgetting that the aim of exploration and developmental discussion is not precision, but the multiplication and clarification of possibilities. Still others, concerned above all with achieving some form of consensus, will forego true exploration and development as long as they are satisfied that those present are in agreement about how to express themselves.

By contrast, the general approach to language described here is one of maintaining a certain distance or caution about language: by guarding against the impulse to "get it right," by being aware of its obvious and potential limitations, and by remembering that while language may be an "end in itself" in other contexts, in public discussion it is not. Language should serve public discussion, rather than the reverse.

A. Language and Exploration

Because it involves a broadening process of multiplying avenues of inquiry the conceptual work of exploration—whether of an area of concern, contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it, or their possible practical consequences—is particularly vulnerable to linguistic narrowing. The process of exploration can easily fall into any of several enticing linguistic traps, all of which undermine the essentially conceptual work of exploration. The two most common both have to do with an overblown concern with "getting the words right." Some citizens, spurred by a desire to "win," may insist on certain phrases or terms. Others, motivated by the altruistic aim of striving to achieve exactness, sometimes attempt to impose more precision on a discussion than it can—or should—bear.

To avoid these traps and allow exploration to proceed most usefully, a certain ambiguity in language can be tolerable, perhaps even desirable. "Positive" ambiguity can help:

- prevent arguments over terms, definitions, or constructions (participants can understand concepts in their "own" language without needing to defend it)

- keep conceptual possibilities and their accumulating meanings open to discussion until ready for external communication to those not party to the group discussing them

- encourage thinking beyond the boundaries that language creates or imposes (conceptual possibilities may develop before language becomes available to describe them aptly or fully)

- prevent false consensus, i.e. consensus based on agreement on terms rather than convergence on concepts

- encourage awareness of the need for exploration as a prelude to selections, exclusions, and the further development and testing of possible answers.

Using language, with its general rules, is useful for reflecting reality but too often is used to define reality in positive or rigid terms, despite the unavoidability of future change. Public discussion cannot of course do without words. Yet words necessarily channel and narrow discussion because all words result from choices to represent or construct something in one way rather than others. Nevertheless, participants— especially with the help of an able facilitator—can resist this narrowing process to some degree, primarily by allowing conceptual questions and their answers to be referred to by preliminary descriptions rather than labels or definitions. Using groups of words ("descriptions") narrows thinking less than single words or definitions. Thinking of descriptions as preliminary or tentative keeps them more open still.

The more that citizens discuss concepts without trying to define them, the more will concepts have a chance to infuse the language that is ultimately used to describe them, and the less the danger that language, with all of its prior conceptual baggage, will overly circumscribe them, either directly (through narrowing participants' thinking) or indirectly (by diverting them into arguments about terminology and construction).

During exploration, it is important to remember that as individuals, and perhaps even more as interacting citizens, we often find ourselves in the position of groping toward the new, of being able to grasp something only partially or inchoately. In such situations, we very often think or feel or "know" something before we can "put a name on it."

B. Language and Development

Because exploration and development are interactive, but different, sorts of tasks the language apropos to the development of possible questions during public discussion

of an area of concern and of possible answers during public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities will tend to be both similar to and different from that which is most useful during the exploratory phase of these types of public discussion.

During the initial phases of development, the nuances of possible questions and possible answers are fleshed out. This remains a conceptual rather than linguistic process that, for the reasons given in the previous section, can be seriously limited by a concern over definitional exactness. As they are developed, conceptual questions and conceptual answers should be allowed and encouraged to take on a life of their own, with new meanings added to (or subtracted from) the old and variations being selected or excluded as the discussion unfolds. This process involves clarification—but still in a conceptual sense. Sometimes the result will be a simplification of the original concept(s), sometimes a further constructive organization into a more complex whole.

If development—whether of possible questions or possible answers—moves on to the task of improving their coherence, however, language may begin to play a more significant role. Still, this role will not be determinative since practical coherence, while perhaps aided by the avoidance of linguistic contradiction, is not the same as linguistic rigor or logical rigor, although it may bear a close resemblance to them.

Should participants in public discussion converge on a number of contrasting conceptual possibilities they may wish to communicate them to other citizens and/or policy-makers or test them for possible practical consequences. The latter task, especially, will depend on a degree of linguistic exactness or directness that would be out of place during exploration and the early stages of development. To be communicated effectively to others, contrasting conceptual possibilities should be expressed coherently and accessibly. Ambiguities that can be an asset during exploration and the initial stages of development should be translated into terms that most citizens will find useful. Even greater linguistic exactness is needed for testing, for reasons that are described in the next section.

C. Language and Testing

When public discussion aims at testing conceptual possibilities for their possible practical consequences, the language in which possibilities are expressed should be more precise—in the sense of being simpler or more direct or more minimal—than will prove useful to either conceptual exploration or even the latter phase of development. (Linguistic constructions made available for practical testing of selected possibilities in Interactivity Foundation sanctuary discussions are called "relational constructions.") This is because testing is more helpful if it starts from a relatively "fixed" starting point—if all can see what is being tested.

The consequences that are explored by participants during testing are the practical consequences of a particular conceptual possibility. But while any conceptual

possibility might be expressed in any number of ways, any test of a possibility can only be performed on a single one of its expressions at a time. The results of testing are thus likely to be more useful to other citizens when it is relatively clear to them just what was being tested, even if it is understood that what was being tested is only one formulation of the conceptual possibility among perhaps many.

See also:

A-2, "Possibilities" (pp. 36-38)
A-5, "Convergence" (pp. 48-52)
T-2, "Public Discussion of an Area of Concern" (pp. 61-64)
T-3, "Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities" (pp. 65-69)
T-5, "Public Discussion of Possible Practical Consequences—Testing" (pp. 73-77)
U-4, "The Distinctiveness of Public Discussion" (pp. 107-09)

<u>T</u>ypes of Public Discussion
Section T

This section complements the preceding section's answer to the question "What is public discussion?" by describing three types of public discussion: public discussion of an area of concern; public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities; and public discussion of possible practical consequences. This section also includes essays describing two forms of "advance work" that may be especially useful in preparing for public discussion of an area of concern on the one hand and public discussion of possible practical consequences on the other.

Area of Concern
T-1

Introduction

Public discussion tends to be most useful when it proceeds from a point of departure appropriate to its distinctive processes and the products intended to evolve from them. This essay describes such a beginning point, or "area of concern," and the various ways it contributes to the usefulness of public discussion. The interactivity between an area of concern and public discussion is then highlighted with a series of contrasts with other starting points for public dialogue.

A. Area of Concern Described

An area of concern is a relatively brief description of a phenomenon or trend and some of the possible governance concerns to which it potentially gives rise. Areas of concern thus involve matters citizens might really care about. They are broad, open-ended, and are presented in such a way that they can evolve during public discussion. They provide a source or stimulus for exploring and developing further possible conceptual questions and answers and for public discussion of their possible practical consequences.

(1) Areas of concern evoke matters citizens might care enough about to engage in governance discussions

Unbounded by any formal requirements regarding content, areas of concern will nevertheless tend to succeed in setting the stage for public discussion if they describe a concern (or set of concerns) that citizens consider significant and are either

- emergent (i.e., just becoming actual or "visible")

- perennial (e.g., fairness, welfare, security, freedom, the environment)

- un-addressed in current public discourse

- highly complex.

(2) Areas of concern are broad

Breadth is the second aspect of an area of concern. The term "area" is meant to evoke a field, arena, or general topic rather than anything particular, specific, or pre-defined. Given their breadth, areas of concern typically highlight broad concepts rather than facts.

(3) Areas of concern are open-ended

A corollary of breadth is open-endedness. Because they are described in broad or general terms, areas of concern are not absolute definitions, comprehensive statements, or conclusive analyses.

(4) Areas of concern evolve during discussion

Most forms of public dialogue stray only slightly from their starting point. Not so public discussion based on an area of concern. An area of concern is a starting point of a public discussion but will continue to evolve as it is subject to citizens' exploration, development, and selection and exclusion. As it does, the original, open-ended, description of the area of concern is broadened and deepened, often to such an extent that the new description will by itself represent a useful contribution to further public discussion, even apart from any attempt to describe governance responses to it.

B. Usefulness of Areas of Concern in Public Discussion

Areas of concern have the qualities they do because those qualities tend to prove useful in public discussion.

- Because they focus on matters of potential citizen concern, areas of concern provide sufficient focus to begin a discussion, but due to their breadth, open-endedness, and evolutionary quality, they are able to do so without at the same time pre-determining public discussion's content.

- All four aspects of areas of concern—their focus on matters of potential citizen concern, breadth, open-endedness, and evolutionary quality—help ensure that public discussion's flow is the result of the interactivity of citizen participants rather than choices imposed by the facilitator.

- All four aspects of areas of concern also enable lay citizens to avoid being overawed or silenced by the "authority" of experts.

- Breadth, open-endedness, and the evolutionary quality of areas of concern also encourage conceptual discussion. In particular, these qualities mean that as a starting point for public discussion, areas of concern will tend to be conducive to:

  o exploration and development of an area of concern

  o exploration, development and/or testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities rather than debate.

C. Areas of Concern Contrasted with Other Starting Points for Public Dialogue

Employing an area of concern to begin a citizen discussion may not seem unusual. But doing so may be as unconventional as the kind of public discussion to which their use is so well suited. As illustrated by the following list, most public dialogue and deliberation begins from starting points which lack one or more of the key aspects of an area of concern:

- "Agendas" tend to be relatively rigid, not only with respect to content, but with respect to the order in which matters are discussed. They may even manage in some cases to ignore citizen concerns altogether.

- "Debates" (such as those that feature so prominently in parliamentary or legislative processes) tend to be highly structured, allowing discussion of only a very reduced number of "options" rather than the exploration and development of multiple conceptual possibilities. As debates proceed, these beginning options are usually narrowed still further into the opposing positions of "winners" and "losers." In practice they also tend to feature experts and cast lay citizens in the role of spectators.

- "Hearings" tend to solicit "input" on one or at most a few courses of action, already selected by officials.

- "Town meetings" tend to focus on coming to a decision about a "problem" or "issue" that has already largely been defined prior to the discussion. As important as "problems" and "problem-solving" can be, it is ultimately upon the thoughtful individual citizen that the democratic duty devolves to explore and develop public policy possibilities for the public interest of governance.

See also:

IF-3, "Interactivity Foundation Public Discussion Contrasted with Other Forms of Democratic Discussion" (pp. 11-15)
A-1, "Governance" (pp. 30-35)
T-2, "Public Discussion of an Area of Concern" (pp. 61-64)
B-3, "Facts and Concepts" (pp. 124-29)

Public Discussion of an Area of Concern
T-2

Introduction

Citizen dialogue and decision-making processes can take many forms, depending on the objectives of participants, their place in the policy-making process, and the constraints within which they are working. Still, citizen dialogue continues to be thought of almost exclusively in terms of "debate"—of a contest to win favor for competing positions. One alternative to thinking about citizen dialogue in this way is to conceive of it as exploratory and developmental public discussion.

Public discussion can focus on a selected area of concern, contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing an area of concern, and/or the possible practical consequences of contrasting conceptual possibilities. This essay describes public discussion of an area of concern. The remaining essays in this section describe the two other types of public discussion.

A. Public Discussion of an Area of Concern Described

This section describes the purpose and process of public discussion of an area of concern.

(1) The purpose of public discussion of an area of concern

Public discussion of an area of concern is intended to provide a re-description of the initial description of the area of concern that will be useful both in itself and as the starting point for public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

The purpose of public discussion of an area of concern is neither to *answer* questions nor even to answer *possible* questions, but to explore and develop the original questions relating to the area of concern with a view to arriving at an expanded, richer list of *possible questions*.

As a type of public discussion, exploratory and developmental discussion of an area of concern can lead to discoveries of two different types. Through discussion democratic citizens may discover new policy questions—or they may discover new ways to think about policy questions about which they were already generally aware. The re-discovery of familiar questions is probably more common. But even when citizens re-discover questions they have considered before, their views of the questions are likely to change, sometimes significantly. Re-discovery of "known" questions through exploratory and developmental discussion can lead citizens to a clearer and fuller understanding of any or all of the following:

- rediscovered questions' moral (consequential) and ethical (prescriptive) content

- rediscovered questions' conceptual content

- rediscovered questions' limitations or boundaries.

Both discovery and re-discovery of this kind can be useful in themselves because they serve the goal of promoting citizens' autonomy by *engaging them in civic activity* on the one hand and by *clarifying and expanding their choices* as individual citizens on the other. (Ultimately we might expect expanded civic engagement and enhanced citizen choice to improve the quality of public policy as well.) However, it should be remembered that since citizens already need to be stimulated and engaged if they are to get involved in serious public discussion, public discussion of an area of concern will perhaps most typically sustain, rather than create, civic motivation and citizen autonomy.

Both discovery and re-discovery during public discussion of an area of concern can also be useful because they provide a rich set of questions with which to begin public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

(2) The process of public discussion of an area of concern

Public discussion of a selected area of concern is an interactive process of exploration and development—either of "new" concerns or of new ways of understanding "old" concerns.

Public discussion of a selected area of concern proceeds through these five conceptually discrete, but ultimately interactive, steps or moments:

a. Choice of a starting point

Public discussion of a selected area of concern begins with a minimal conceptual description of the area of concern and a short set of conceptual questions. These can be taken from staff work reports like those produced by Interactivity Foundation or can be developed by the discussion facilitator.

b. Exploration: search for possible conceptual questions regarding the area of concern

Once underway, discussion of a selected area of concern shifts into a search mode.

The searching that is at the heart of exploration of an area of concern is neither linear nor random. It is not linear because the "destination"—possible questions about the selected area of concern —is not known. It is not random both because it is oriented by the general nature of the concern that citizens

have gathered to discuss and because those engaged in the discussion interact with each other and with what they find along the way. As panelists interact with each other and the material they are exploring together, the discussion moves along a path (and according to a logic) of its own (though again, that path would be nearly impossible to chart in advance).

c. Development: elaboration and refinement of possible conceptual questions regarding the area of concern

The questions that result from exploration are not "left alone" but re-examined to see if they yield variations, refinements, or additional questions. As thorough as this second stage may be, however, it can never be exhaustive. Different citizens will have different concerns; all citizens are limited. Hence the list of possible questions resulting from developmental questions will also be selective.

Taken as a whole, the questions in their developed form amount to a re-description of the area of concern. This new description can be useful by itself, for the reasons described earlier. Or it can be useful as the starting point for public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

d. Selection and exclusion of possible conceptual questions

Selection and exclusion during public discussion of a selected area of concern is informal rather than formal. Possible questions are not eliminated; nor are they "endorsed." But as finite beings with particular individual and social concerns, citizens will choose to raise some questions and leave others unasked. This is why it makes sense to call the questions that result from public discussion of an area of concern "possible" questions.

e. Conclusion of exploration and development pending choice or further discussion

Like most practical activities, public discussion of an area of concern — however deliberate its pace—must come to an end, either to face the necessity of choice (actual decisions or actions) or to await future opportunities for useful additional discussion, either of the same area of concern, of conceptual possibilities for addressing it, or of their possible practical consequences.

B. The Place of Public Discussion of an Area of Concern in the Policy-Making Process

A well organized policy-making process would ensure that exploration and development of citizens' concerns occurred before other sorts of discussion ensued (such as debate, which is primarily a means of organizing and pressing for choices

among already formulated possibilities) and then gave way to actual decisions or actions.

Yet while exploratory and developmental discussion of citizens' concerns makes sense in the early stages of policy discussion, in actual policy discussion it is almost wholly absent. Policy discussion tends to be used either to make decisions or ratify decisions that others have proposed or made in the name of those participating in the discussion. Hence while the *conceptual* place of public discussion of areas of concern is clear, as a practical matter it remains to be seen where and how it can actually be developed in the policy-making process

C. Encouraging Exploratory and Developmental Public Discussion of an Area of Concern

Exploratory and developmental public discussion of an area of concern (whether developed by a discussion facilitator or taken from a staff work report) will be encouraged to the extent that the facilitator helps participants focus on:

- concepts rather than technical problem-solving, debate, advocacy or efforts to develop a consensus

- the content of concepts rather than the language with which they are expressed

- contrasts between conceptual questions, since these are useful in moving "beyond" the familiar or conventional

- the flow of the discussion rather than external constraints such as schedules or deadlines.

See also:

T-1, "Area of Concern" (pp. 58-60)
T-3, "Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities" (pp. 65-69)
U-1, "Democratic Discussion, Public Discussion, and the Policy-Making Process" (pp. 79-84)
U-3, "The Objective of Public Discussion" (pp. 101-06)
B-3, "Facts and Concepts" (pp. 124-29)

Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities
T-3

Introduction

Another alternative to thinking about citizen policy discussion as debate or as a decision-making mechanism is to view it as a process of exploring and developing contrasting conceptual possibilities for democratic governance. This can be a useful activity—whether on its own, or in combination with public discussion of possible practical consequences, as described in Essay T-5.

A. Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities Described

This section describes the purpose and process of exploring and developing contrasting conceptual possibilities as a type of public discussion.

(1) The purposes of exploring and developing contrasting conceptual possibilities

Public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities is intended to yield a set of possible answers to the questions explored and developed during discussion of a selected area of concern (whether in sanctuary or in public discussion). These contrasting conceptual possibilities serve the immediate purpose of clarifying and expanding citizens' choices and the longer-term purpose of enhancing public policy. Contrasting conceptual possibilities can also be subjected to "testing" for possible practical consequences in further public discussion.

Through exploratory and developmental discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities democratic citizens may discover new policy possibilities or they may discover new ways to think about policy possibilities about which they are already generally aware. The re-discovery of familiar possibilities is probably more common. Yet when citizens re-discover possibilities they have considered before, their views of the possibilities are likely to change, sometimes significantly. Re-discovery of "known" possibilities can lead citizens to a clearer and fuller understanding of any or all of the following:

- rediscovered possibilities' moral (consequential) and ethical (prescriptive) content

- rediscovered possibilities' conceptual content

- rediscovered possibilities' limitations.

All of these impacts are probably facilitated and heightened when exploration and development deals with *contrasting* possibilities.

Both discovery and re-discovery serve the same immediate purpose, namely: to promote citizens' autonomy by engaging them in civic activity on the one hand and by clarifying and expanding their choices as individual citizens on the other. (Ultimately we might expect expanded civic engagement and enhanced citizen choice to improve the quality of public policy as well.) However, it should be remembered that since citizens already need to be stimulated and engaged if they are to get involved in serious public discussion, public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities will perhaps more often sustain rather than create civic motivation and citizen autonomy.

Once contrasting conceptual possibilities have been explored and developed and then selected and excluded in public discussion, they can be translated into relational constructions, at which point they are in suitable form for the third type of public discussion, testing for their possible practical consequences.

(2) The process of public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities

Like the other two types of public discussion described in these essays, public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities is an interactive process, both in the sense that it involves the interactions of citizens and in the sense that its various moments interact with one another and with the other two types of public discussion.

Like public discussion of an area of concern, public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities involves five interactive stages or moments. Public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities can, however, usefully focus on one or another of the three intermediate stages (exploration, development, or selection and exclusion).

a) Choice of a starting point: possible conceptual questions

Public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities, too, needs a place to start. Such a starting point is provided by the possible questions explored and developed during discussion (in sanctuary or in public) of an area of concern.

b) Exploration of possible conceptual answers

Public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities begins with a search for possible answers to the possible questions explored and developed during discussion (in sanctuary or in public) of an area of concern. The focus at this stage is not on fine-tuning participants' answers (which would be more akin to agreeing on the most convenient way to travel to a pre-selected destination) but on looking for something new—new conceptual possibilities especially.

To remain consistent with the process of exploration that produced them and the aim of stimulating further exploration, the "results" of exploration should be a survey not of a single possibility or two, but of multiple and contrasting

conceptual possibilities. In this way, the results can better reflect the best that the public discussion discovered rather than just a portion of participants' thinking.

As with exploration of an area of concern, exploration of contrasting conceptual possibilities is fundamentally open-ended. There are many reasons exploration of conceptual possibilities cannot be exhaustive. Among the most compelling is that, unlike a state (or section of the universe), public policy cannot be adequately or usefully "mapped" in any definitive way. This is because the policy world and policy possibilities respond to forces that are to some degree foreseeable but also to an important degree beyond our control in an ever-changing world. In addition, possibilities are themselves fundamentally open-ended. If exploration cannot be exhaustive, the best that can be hoped for is that it be an ongoing, developmental affair.

c) **Development of possible conceptual answers: grouping, elaboration and refinement of conceptual possibilities**

Development of conceptual possibilities begins where exploration has left off, i.e., with the full set of conceptual possibilities discovered in prior discussion. During development exploration may continue, with new discoveries being added to the old. But as development proceeds the emphasis will shift, however subtly, from acquiring wholly new concepts to grouping and elaborating those that have already been discovered.

Conceptual answers are grouped into conceptual possibilities—but in a way that allows their continual recombination as the discussion unfolds.

Elaborating and refining conceptual answers can take place at the level of individual conceptual answers or at the level of conceptual possibilities. In both cases, it can take a number of different forms, including:

- identifying and ordering their significant elements—especially those that are contrasting

- identifying and filling in conceptual gaps

- working out their conceptual implications

- grasping their various interactivities

- eliminating conceptual and practical inconsistencies.

d) Selecting and excluding contrasting conceptual possibilities

Although there may be some informal selection and exclusion of conceptual possibilities during the exploratory and developmental stages, public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities also allows for a more formal selection and exclusion process.

At this stage participants decide, through a process of convergence, on those contrasting conceptual possibilities they would like to test for possible practical consequences and/or report for further consideration by other democratic citizens. Individual conceptual possibilities are only "excluded" (or dropped from further consideration) if all present agree to do so. Individual conceptual possibilities are "selected" as long as even one participant is in favor of doing so.

e) Conclusion of public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities pending choice or further discussion

As with public discussion of an area of concern, public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities —however deliberate its pace—must come to an end, either to face the necessity of choice regarding actual decisions or actions—or to await future opportunities for additional discussion. Indeed, in the case of public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities, the necessity of choice is perhaps more pressing. Theoretically or abstractly speaking, exploration and development of contrasting conceptual possibilities can be no more be exhaustive than of an area of concern. Yet the usefulness of public discussion is if anything more, not less, dependent on the usefulness of the conceptual possibilities they yield than on their re-description of a selected area of concern. And actually arriving at the point at which they are able to make such possibilities available to other citizens will require of discussion participants no small measure of self-imposed closure.

B. The Place of Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities in the Policy-Making Process

Public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities can be a useful activity, either on its own or—given adequate time—in combination with one or both of the other forms of public discussion.

The exploration and development of contrasting conceptual possibilities surely has its place, namely: after exploration and development of possible questions and before other sorts of discussion such as debate and deliberation aimed at actual decisions. Citizens can without difficulty usefully focus on conceptual exploration, development, and selection and exclusion. Unfortunately, like public discussion of areas of concern, public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities is far from being a regular feature of today's policy-making process.

C. Encouraging Exploration and Development of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities in Public Discussion

Exploratory and developmental public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities (in response to questions developed either in sanctuary or in a previous public discussion) can be encouraged using the same general strategies that apply to public discussion of an area of concern, i.e., by keeping participants focused on:

- concepts rather than technical problem-solving, debate, advocacy or efforts to develop a consensus

- the content of concepts rather than the language with which they are expressed

- contrasts between possible conceptual answers, since these are useful in moving "beyond" the familiar or conventional

- the flow of the discussion rather than external constraints such as schedules or deadlines.

See also:

Relational Construction
T-4

Introduction

"Relational construction" is a term of art that can be used to describe the kind of direct and minimal linguistic formulation of a contrasting conceptual possibility that allows testing its possible practical consequences (and possible subsequent development).

Relational constructions do not as a rule result from public discussion. However, they *enable* testing for possible practical consequences, and so are worth describing in their own right.

A. Relational Constructions Described

Relational constructions result from distilling the core concepts of a conceptual possibility into language that is "direct" in the sense of being relatively minimal, neutral, and free of ambiguity. This section further describes both their purposes and the means by which they are derived.

(1) Purposes of relational constructions

Although relational constructions can serve as useful "summaries" of contrasting conceptual possibilities, their principal purposes are to allow discussion to:

- move from the exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of contrasting conceptual possibilities to their testing by converting the language appropriate to exploratory and developmental description to language consisting of a small number of propositions, each of which is stated with sufficient clarity that its possible practical consequences can be readily explored

- return—if time permits—from testing back to the development (in the form of conceptual revision) of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

By allowing this back-and-forth movement from testing to development and back again, relational constructions are thus intended to serve as a kind of linguistic "bridge" between the more conceptual work of development and the more practical work of testing for possible "real world" consequences. The adjective "relational" in "relational construction" highlights this important interactivity.

(2) The process of deriving relational constructions

Although there is probably no "ideal" way to distill the conceptual description of a conceptual possibility into a relational construction, the process will tend to share certain characteristics.

a. participants

Distilling the conceptual language of a conceptual possibility into more formal language is generally best left to one individual (the facilitator), if possible in consultation with the original "authors" of the conceptual possibility. This approach avoids unproductive arguments over textual minutia while ensuring cogency and fidelity to the original conceptual description. Such an approach is well suited to sanctuary settings, less so to public discussion.

b. translating conceptual description into relational constructions

Distilling the conceptual language describing a conceptual possibility is not an exact science. However, it tends to be more useful for later testing when care is taken to use language that is relatively concise, unambiguous, dispassionate, and as free of jargon as can possibly be constructed.

It is in the very nature of language that these desiderata can never be fully achieved. All language involves selection and exclusion. Hence there can be no language "purified" of all bias and ambiguity. It is in this sense that relational constructions are "constructed." At the same time, some constructions serve their purpose better than others. And it is perhaps by keeping in mind their use in practical ("real world") testing that relational constructions can best be distilled or constructed.

B. Relational Constructions and Public Discussion

Although relational constructions contained in staff work reports will usually be the starting point for public discussion aimed at testing for possible practical democratic consequences, and although relational constructions are phrased in formal language, they are not meant to be immutable. On the contrary, because they are a kind of linguistic bridge between the conceptual and the practical, relational constructions allow democratic practical testing of the conceptual and then—given adequate time and interest—a return during public discussion to further conceptual development in light of the results of practical testing. If the relational constructions are good translations of the conceptual possibilities developed in previous sanctuary or public discussion, then subsequent testing in public discussion need not be reduced to debate but can rather usefully clarify the choices each and every democratic citizen must ultimately make in the area of concern under discussion.

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See also:

Public Discussion of Possible Practical Consequences—Testing
T-5

Introduction

A third alternative to thinking about public discussion as debate or as the immediate prelude to decision-making is to understand it as a means of testing contrasting conceptual possibilities, the subject of this essay. Testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities—whether these have been developed in sanctuary discussions or in previous public discussions—is well suited to public discussion, either by itself or in interactive combination with public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

A. Testing for Possible Practical Consequences Described

This section describes the purpose and process of testing for possible practical consequences as a type of public discussion.

(1) The purpose of testing for possible practical consequences

Whereas public discussion of an area of concern and of the conceptual possibilities for addressing it clarify citizens' choices primarily by expanding and refining their repertoire of choices, testing clarifies citizens' choices primarily by illustrating the possible practical consequences that might follow were each particular public policy possibilities previously developed in public discussion or presented in a staff work report actually "in place" in "the real world." At the same time, testing can often contribute to the other types of public discussion (see Section B., below).

Although testing's immediate aim is primarily practical rather than conceptual, it shares with the other types of public discussion the larger aim of promoting citizens' autonomy by *engaging them in civic activity* (specifically, public discussion) and *clarifying and expanding their choices* and may, in turn, contribute to improved public policy. And, because it presupposes a certain level of citizen involvement, testing, like the other types of public discussion, will most typically sustain, not create, civic motivation and citizens' autonomy.

(2) The process of testing for possible practical consequences

Again like the other types of public discussion, testing in public discussion is an interactive process. It involves citizen interaction. And its various moments, described below, interact with one another and with other possible forms of public discussion.

a) Key moments in testing for possible practical consequences

Testing assumes that conceptual possibilities have been first explored and developed, then selected and excluded, and then translated into a "testable" form—i.e., minimal relational constructions.

Testing itself involves three—sometimes four—conceptually distinct but interactive moments:

- Specifying a series of policies that might implement a conceptual possibility (this first sort of possible practical consequence might be described as possible implementation consequences)

  Testing starts by identifying a limited set of (governmental and non-governmental) policies that might be used to implement each of the contrasting conceptual possibilities (usually four to nine in number). Because (1) not all possible means of implementing a particular conceptual possibility can be explored given practical limits on citizens' time; and (2) not all possible means of implementing a particular conceptual possibility will be of equal interest to citizens, this step involves a relatively formal process of selection and exclusion.

- Listing of possible practical consequences of possible implementation policies

  Once possible policies for implementation have been specified, participants list their possible practical consequences. This second sort of possible practical consequences might be to: culture, social norms and values, social processes (e.g., market prices), institutions (both governmental and non-governmental), groups, organizations, and/or individuals—but participants may come up with consequences that do not easily fit within these categories. Furthermore, participants may wish to explore chains or sequences of consequences—the consequences of consequences, as it were (though there will be a limit to how far such sequences can usefully be pursued).

  The consequences of implementation consequences that are listed by participants are not excluded by debate, consensus, or vote. Consequences are not judged as to their "truth" or "desirability." Nor are they refined, except perhaps qualitatively. They are simply enumerated. The term "possible practical consequences" is descriptive only; it is not used to exclude anything from the discussion. It is up to discussion participants to decide what "counts" as a possible practical consequence.

For these reasons, it may well turn out that testing will result in a list containing consequences that are ambiguous or even contradictory.

- Further exploration and/or development of conceptual possibility in light of testing

  Testing usually yields results that can contribute to the further exploration and/or development of a conceptual possibility. However, there will typically be practical constraints on the degree to which any given public discussion will present participants with an opportunity to take advantage of this potential.

- Conclusion of testing pending choice or further discussion

  As with exploratory and developmental public discussion, discussion involving testing must come to an end, either to resume later or to come to terms with the necessity of choice. Testing is in this sense, like exploration and development, always "unfinished."

b) Testing is illustrative, not conclusive

It bears emphasizing that testing, like exploratory and developmental discussion, is also unfinished in the sense of being open-ended. Hence testing can be characterized as illustrative rather than conclusive.

Testing deals with possible practical consequences, which can never be fully or exhaustively known because:

- the world of human affairs changes in ways made unpredictable by citizens' intentional choices, the sometimes random effects these produce, and natural forces that are themselves to an extent unpredictable

- different citizens have different concerns and will therefore "test" for the consequences of different concerns

- different citizens will perceive even the consequences of similar concerns in different ways.

Attempts to forecast or predict the future, which typically employ statistical techniques, ignore these points. They may be quite accurate in their own terms—able, for example, to predict whether a given policy will increase or decrease economic growth (and even by what amount). But the precision with which they are stated obscures the residual element of randomness they always contain and the number and breadth of concerns they exclude (e.g.,

employment, justice, well-being, and environmental integrity in the example just given).

B. Interactivity between Testing for Possible Practical Consequences, and Public Discussion of An Area of Concern and Public Discussion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities

In actual public discussion, testing will perhaps typically interact with discussion of an area of concern and contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it in several ways:

- Testing for practical consequences may begin informally or as part of a discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

- Testing can lead to new discoveries about the conceptual possibility(-ies) under discussion.

- Testing can lead discussion participants to elaborate or refine the conceptual possibility(-ies) under discussion.

C. The place of Testing for Practical Consequences in the Policy-Making Process

As noted in the introduction, testing for practical consequences is well-suited to public discussion, either on its own or in combination with public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

Testing, like discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities, is most usefully conducted well in advance of other sorts of discussion like debate and deliberation aimed at making actual decisions. Unfortunately, opportunities for public discussion that incorporate testing are perhaps at least as rare as those that offer opportunities for exploratory and developmental discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

D. Encouraging Testing in Public Discussion

Testing in public discussion can be encouraged in a variety of ways. Beyond attending to language, testing will tend to be encouraged when participants:

- are allowed sufficient time

- focus on qualitative consequences rather than on precise measurements, statistics, predictions, or quantitative forecasts

- refrain from debate about whether a particular consequence is "true," "likely," or "real."

See also:

The <u>U</u>sefulness of Public Discussion
Section U

The essays in this section address the question "What might be useful about public discussion?" The first describes how public discussion might fit into the larger public policy-making process. The next three essays describe some limitations on current citizen policy discussion and how public discussion might serve as a useful corrective or addition. The last essay in this section underscores the distinctly democratic aspects of public discussion.

# Democratic Discussion, Public Discussion, and the Policy-Making Process
U-1

Introduction

The objective of public discussion is to promote and enhance democratic discussion, which in turn can lead to more useful policy-making. This essay describes the place of democratic discussion in the policy-making process and public discussion's relation to it.

A. A Conventional View of the Policy-Making Process

Below is a conventional depiction of the policy-making process, borrowed from an introductory college textbook on American government.
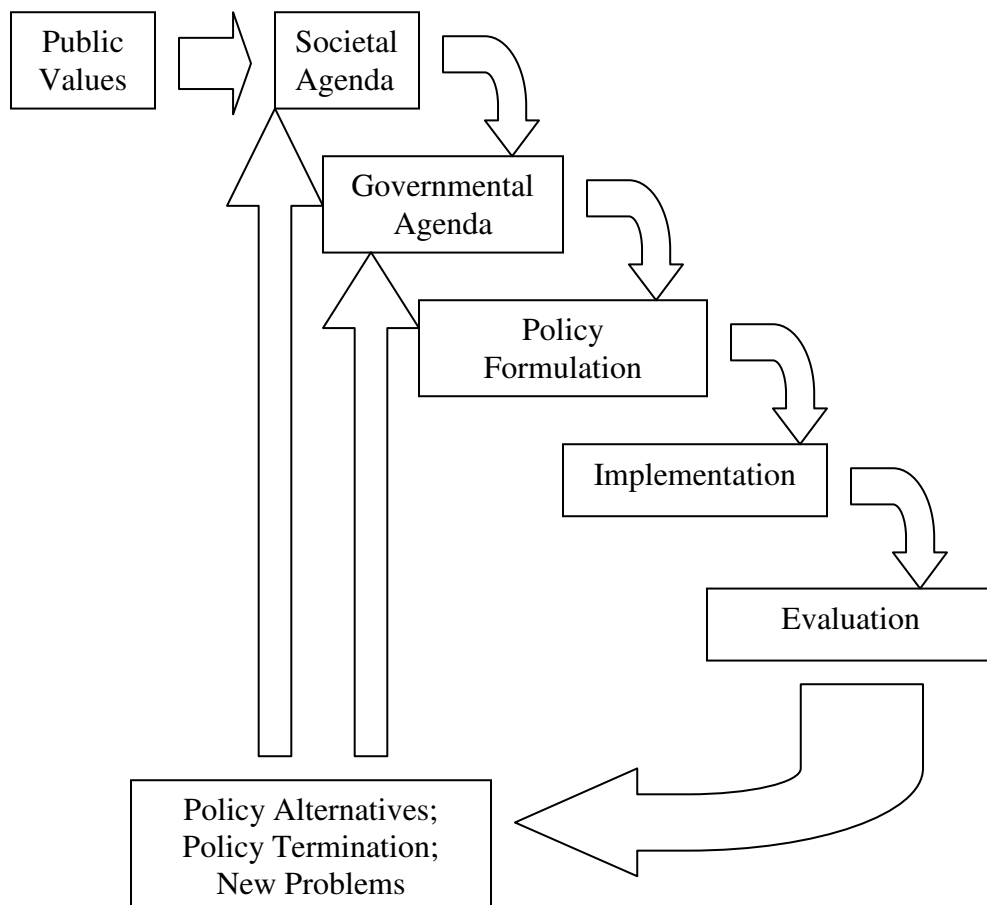
Chart U-1.1. The Policy-Making Process (Adapted from *American Government: Politics and Citizenship*. Jerold L. Waltman. St. Paul: West Publishing, 1993. p. 390)

This view of the policy-making process is conventional both in the sense that it represents a widely shared view of how the policy-making process actually works and in the sense that it conforms to a number of widely shared expectations about how it should work. These qualities make it useful as a starting point for thinking about how public discussion might relate to the practical world of actual policy-making. And the sequence or order among the various steps or stages in the policy-making process, though apparently "fixed," actually helps highlight the essential contingency of the process—and the need to confront the necessity of choice when considering where and how best to enter into it. But Chart U-1.1. is only a starting point. Indeed, among the central concerns of this essay are to highlight the many things this portrayal of the policy-making process leaves out and to describe how they might be filled in.

B. Where Democratic Discussion Currently Fits into the Policy-Making Process

That a textbook schema of the policy-making process is almost by definition conventional represents an open invitation to re-conceptualize its categories and how they might relate to one another.

Consider, to begin with, what is absent from Chart U-1.1.:

- Emotions, habits, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, norms, concepts, and concerns (What the public cares about and how it cares about it are reduced to the cramped category of "public values.")

- A description of how "public values" are—*or might be*—formulated ("Public values" are held to be the original or basic source of public policy, but are taken as static givens.)

- A description how the "societal agenda" and the "government agenda" *might be* connected (The accompanying text identifies only three possibilities: interest groups, policy entrepreneurs, and political parties [Waltman 1993: 385].)

- Any recognition that "policy alternatives," "policy termination," and "new problems" might influence "public values" (Although the text accompanying the chart indicates that such a connection exists, it apparently merits no connecting arrow in the chart.)

In short, although political scientists are increasingly challenging the notion that citizens' largely unexamined and mostly individual "values" are—and should be—the proper and exclusive "source" of policy, that notion remains deeply entrenched, in- and outside of academia. So, too, does the assumption that policy outcomes have little or no impact on "public values."

What might fill in these gaps? —Two interactive concepts. The first would replace the concept of "public values" (top left of the Chart S-1.1.) with a more expansive, inclusive, and practical description of citizens' orientations to the choices they face as citizens in the present. The second concept would link this present-oriented description of what goes into citizens' immediate choices to a dynamic description of how citizens' might arrive at choices. This dynamic description would bridge the gaps in the flow chart between "the public" and "societal agenda" and between policy outcomes (bottom right of Chart S-1.1.) and "the public" (upper left of Chart S-1.1.). It would, in other words, describe how the public might be involved at the beginning of the policy-making process and how it might be affected by the results of the policy-making process.

"Democratic discussion" is such a concept. It is a shorthand way of referring to various processes that involve citizens in policy-making through the medium of discussion. Public discussion is one kind of democratic discussion among others— although of a very distinctive sort. Public discussion is democratic discussion in which citizens interactively explore and develop selected areas of concern (among which will figure the results of past policy-making), contrasting possibilities for addressing them, and test the consequences of applying these possibilities. As is explained in greater detail in sections D. and E. below, this means that public discussion may be particularly well suited to contexts in which policy-making has not yet reached the stage of actual decision-making or action.

C. Where Democratic Discussion Might Fit into the Policy-Making Process

An increasing number of democratic theorists and citizens' groups have been promoting various forms democratic discussion over the past two decades. Their motives vary, and they tend to disagree rather sharply over the questions of where and how to insert democratic discussion into the policy-making process.

It is probably best to pay these family quarrels only so much heed. Just as there is no single form of democratic discussion, there is no single point at which democratic discussion should be inserted into the policy-making process. Democratic discussion can take multiple useful forms; democratic discussion can be made part of nearly any stage of policy-making (even "implementation").

D. Where Public Discussion Is Most Likely to Be Useful in the Policy-Making Process

Most believers in democratic discussion focus their attention on one or another stage of policy-making. The broadest division is between those who think that democratic discussion's most important contribution is to the "societal agenda" (or to what is sometimes called "preference formation") and those who believe that democratic discussion should be used at the point of "policy formulation" (or "will formation").

Public discussion as explored in this volume is primarily directed toward the former: toward the discussion of public policy *before* decisions or actual choices are on the table (though it begins with an area of concern rather than "preferences" and concludes with contrasting conceptual possibilities rather than an "agenda").

The view that public discussion—whether based on prior public discussion or a sanctuary staff work report—might best be used in this way results from two closely interactive considerations, the first related to current limitations of citizen policy discussion (described in the following essay), the second related to where—or when—public discussion can be most useful. Both point in the same direction.

(1) Limitations of current democratic discussion can best be addressed before the actual stage of policy formulation and decision

Many of the limitations of current democratic discussion that can be addressed by public discussion are clearly best addressed *early* in the policy-making process, including:

- Broad conceptual exploration and development of areas of concern

- Broad conceptual exploration and development of possibilities

- Broad exploration and development of possible practical consequences through testing.

All of these require the kind of deliberate pace that only time (and patience) allow. The closer the point at which policy is enacted, the less time is available to address them and the more advocacy is likely to intrude on the discussion.

(2) Democratic discussion is most likely to have a positive impact on both citizens' thinking and policy choices (whether exercised directly or through representatives) when conducted before the actual stage of policy formulation and decision.

- The closer discussion is in time to actual decisions, the more it will tend to be subject to manipulation, "influence," and advocacy for particular interests or results.

- The prospect of even relatively proximate decisions may lead citizens to think that further discussion is unnecessary.

- Actual decisions may effectively put at least a temporary stop to discussion.

E. Public Discussion—Complementary Contributions to Democratic Discussion

Public discussion can serve as in instance of democratic discussion and/or it can serve to stimulate and enhance wider democratic discussion.

The distinctiveness of public discussion does not mean that it is the best form of democratic discussion at all times and in all circumstances. Other forms of democratic discussion may be better suited to different stages in the policy-making process, e.g., the context of actual decision-making or "policy formulation." Public Discussion is intended not to displace but rather to complement other efforts by:

1. clarifying citizens and groups' choices about the *elected representatives* who are the source of the bulk of democratic government action, most of which is ultimately based on compromise.

   In a representative democracy such as ours policy decisions are "in the end" most often made by representatives. Governance discussions can help citizens make wiser governmental choices indirectly through representatives.

2. clarifying citizens and groups' future choices in *participatory* arenas (such as New England Town Meetings).

   Direct or participatory democracy does not inherently or necessarily involve interactive discussion. Even when it approximates the deliberative standards its proponents uphold, the policy outcomes it produces will be *more* thoughtful if participants have been able to build on the careful and interactive exploratory and developmental discussion of others. (This is the basic idea behind Interactivity Foundation's Citizen Staff Work Reports, which allow later democratic citizens in their public discussions to build on the discursive efforts of sanctuary participants.) In participatory arenas, too, prior public governance discussions can help citizens make wiser governmental action choices, though in this case the choices are made by citizens directly.

3. providing a means for citizens and groups to influence the "*societal agenda*" in a thoughtful way and in a thoughtful direction.

   Citizens' and groups' ongoing discussions—those that will figure in individual and collective action at some future point—are perhaps as much a concern as those that might inform choices in the present. Sustained democratic discussion can be particularly useful (to both individual citizens and society as a whole) across a wide range of issues, especially those that pose significant moral, conceptual, or organizational challenges, and/or that are only just emerging into view.

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Some Limitations of Current Democratic Discussion
U-2

Introduction

Americans are privileged to enjoy perhaps the world's strongest legal safeguards on the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. Yet as undeniably important as these safeguards might be, they do not by themselves ensure either widespread or robust democratic discussion. As a first step in analyzing what this sort of democratic discussion might require, this essay describes some of the most signal limitations of contemporary American democratic discussion and explains how public discussion might address them. The essays also include a number of possibilities for addressing these limitations drawn from the experiences of Interactivity Foundation (IF) projects.

A. Limitations of Democratic Discussion Described

There are at least four reasons to engage in a careful review of the limitations of current democratic discussion:

- It is important to challenge the assumption that the First Amendment by itself can yield the kind of "discussion" implicit in the notion of democracy.

- Although we may share a strong intuitive sense that there is one "ideal" or "perfect" form of democratic discussion, there are in fact dozens of competing understandings of what democratic discussion might entail. Although helpful, the very existence of these alternative ideals and models means that those committed to improving democratic discussion must ultimately make choices about what form of discussion they wish to promote. An understanding of what is currently amiss can help clarify this choice and set priorities.

- Meanwhile, those who have devoted the most serious attention to the task of elaborating discursive ideals have almost all too often ended up advancing largely unhelpful generalizations or wildly impractical standards. It is perhaps more useful to at least begin by focusing on what is currently wrong with the way democratic discussion is currently conducted. Charting the limitations of current democratic discussion can serve as a conceptual starting point for the more positive statements presented in the remaining essays in this section.

- A review of the current limitations on democratic discussion also provides a practical and historical context for the more abstract conceptual description of the usefulness of public discussion given in the other essays in this section and of governance given in essay A-1.

This essay does not attempt to pinpoint the causes of the various limitations that are described. Most have multiple causes. Others have causes that are difficult to discern or locate. But the main reason not to dwell overmuch on causality is a

practical one: addressing specific limitations and producing practical contributions to democratic discussions in specific contexts does not necessarily depend on altering large institutions, the structure of the mass media, the U.S. Constitution, social psychology, or American political culture—not to mention "human nature" (even if that were desirable or possible)—at least not in the short or medium terms.

Nor is any attempt made here to measure the varying extent or degree of the limitations described below. Nor are they ranked in importance. Each limitation probably vitiates public policy discussion in a different way, depending on many different social, political, cultural, and historical factors. And each tends to reinforce one or more of the other limitations, meaning that as a practical matter, each limitation does more damage to the ultimate quality of democratic discussion than might be apparent if it was considered in isolation. (Thankfully, this also means that ameliorating any single limitation will usually have positive results on one or more additional feature of democratic discussion as well.)

(1) Lack of citizen participation

There is a wealth of political science research extending back over some fifty years showing that American political participation is low in both absolute and relative terms. This research also shows that the more demanding participation is, the lower the percentage of citizens engaging in it. Thus, while research on the specifics of citizen involvement in democratic *discussion* is extremely scarce, it is reasonable to suppose that only a small proportion of the citizenry discusses policy concerns and an even smaller fraction discusses them in a way that avoids the other limitations described in this list.

Low levels of participation in democratic discussion are of special concern. Low levels of citizen participation in democratic discussion deprive *individual citizens* of certain intrinsic benefits of democratic discussion: personal growth, community, enhanced sense of autonomy and control. Low participation also deprives *the public* of the benefits of robust democratic discussion, primarily in the form of intelligent public policy.   Finally, low participation hurts citizens *both individually and as members of a larger public* because it limits the clarity and range of their individual and collective choices.

Low rates of citizen participation probably contribute to all of the other shortcomings described below as well, if only because narrowing the range of voices heard tends to impoverish democratic discussion in various ways:

- By definition, the fewer citizens involved in a public discussion, the more others have "opted out," being not only reluctant to fully speak their minds, but unwilling to speak up at all.

- The fewer citizens involved, the more likely any given discussion will be skewed toward the self-interest of the particular groups or individuals actually participating.

- Other things being equal, the smaller the number of participants the more likely immediate concerns will overwhelm anticipatory thinking. Widening the circle increases the likelihood that someone will suggest taking a longer view.

- Other things being equal, the smaller the number of participants the less likely practical considerations about *what* to do and *why* to do it will be taken into account. Practical concerns of this sort are open to citizen discussion in a way that technical and expert discussions are not. The more citizens involved, the greater the likelihood that practical concerns will receive their due.

- Other things being equal, the smaller the number of participants the more likely discussion will be narrowed prematurely, i.e. before contrasting conceptual possibilities can be explored, developed, and tested.

- Other things being equal, the smaller the number of participants the more likely public discussion will focus on narrow considerations of fact. Citizens can usually discuss conceptual issues on an even footing with specialists, even when they are not experts.

- Other things being equal, the smaller the number of participants the more likely information sources will be restricted in scope and/or openness.

(2) Citizens are reluctant to fully speak their minds

Even when citizens do participate in public discussions, they are often reluctant to fully speak their minds. "Self-censorship" happens for many reasons, from the sinister (pressure from a powerful person or group) to the everyday (fear of ridicule). And it may always be difficult to voice unpopular views.

Whatever the causes, when citizens unduly edit themselves, everyone loses. The suppression of citizens' concerns—even when self-administered in some sense—short-circuits democracy in a very direct way. If citizens do not fully voice their concerns, they will go unaddressed or, if addressed, they will fail to be fully explored.

Self-censorship aggravates at least two other limitations of public policy discussion. When citizens are hesitant to fully express themselves, they may

fall back on what are seen as the most "acceptable" kinds of appeal, those that have the "clearest" or most "obvious" legitimacy. In our culture, these tend to be appeals based on self-interest or the interests of particular groups. This can in turn narrow public discussions by excluding a wide range of other considerations, including those based on the public interest or on "what is possible" as opposed to "what is desirable or right for me/us right now."

(3) Predominance of self-interest

Our liberal culture and political heritage confer great legitimacy on self-interest. Our attachment to market arrangements and legal rights reflect this. So, too, does our democratic history. For familiar reasons, appeals to self-interest are almost always considered valid. As well they should be: good public policy should in general be based on citizens' interests. But not all policy can be reduced to individual or even group interests. In many cases "the public interest" is worth considering as well. And there are many other concerns—emotions, purposes, needs, habits, and consequences among them—that cannot be reduced to "interests" at all.

Yet often public policy discussions involve little more a calculus of self-interest, with opposing sides arguing only about which individuals' or group's interests count or which interests matter the most.

When self-interest predominates in democratic discussion, citizens may be reluctant to speak in terms of the community's interest or of other concerns that cannot be reduced to the common coin of "interests" at all. Self-interest also can lead to short-sightedness and unwillingness to anticipate future policy concerns, as well as a narrowing of the range of questions and possible answers that enter into public discussion.

(4) Failure to address emerging policy concerns

Contemporary democratic discussion typically focuses on solving immediate problems of one sort or another. Although practical problems need to be addressed, an exclusive focus on problem-solving leaves little room in policy discussion for anticipatory thinking. Immediate issues are debated. Crises are addressed. But all too often emerging concerns, possibilities for dealing with them, and the consequences of those possibilities are simply set aside as a luxury that thoughtful democratic discussion cannot afford.

Even apart from its interactions with the other limitations of democratic discussion, the predominance in democratic discussion of reactive thinking is a concern because it impoverishes discussion and thus deprives citizens of a fuller range of choices. Discussing future possibilities, on the contrary, widens the range of the possible—and helps clarify choices as well.

Failure to address emerging policy concerns also tends to restrict public discussion to questions of self-interest, narrows its scope, and limits the degree to which practical considerations are addressed.

(5) Frequently ignores practical considerations

Americans' famous "pragmatism" often turns out, ironically, to fall far short of being truly practical—in at least one sense. True, democratic discussion typically devotes considerable attention to *how* or *when* to do something. But perhaps as often other considerations that are every bit as practical—relating to *what* or *why* questions—get short shrift, if they are discussed at all. Being practical is not only a matter of "getting something done" (or done efficiently or "on time"); it is also a matter of exploring *what might be done* and *why* to do it. It is practical considerations of this latter sort that are often left out of public discussion. Concerned as we rightly are with "doing it well," we often fail to discuss whether there might be alternative possibilities and why we might be motivated to pursue them.

Failure to carefully explore practical considerations can seriously undermine both the "quantity" and "quality" of democratic discussion. To the extent it excludes lay citizens, discussion that focuses on technical how and when questions tends to undermine the "quantity" of public discussion, i.e. its democratic base. And to the extent it leads to a focus on purely instrumental considerations, it erodes the "quality" of democratic discussion by diverting attention from the exploration and development of policy alternatives, upon which expanding and clarifying citizens' choices depends.

Excluding practical considerations from public discussion also tends to narrow the scope of discussion—both directly and by excluding citizens, who may feel unwilling to challenge technical experts' authority or decide to opt out entirely.

(6) Overly narrow

Public discussion is narrowed anytime possible questions and answers to them are excluded from consideration. Perhaps the two most common occasions on which this happens are when specialized or technical thinking predominates and when, despite robust discussion, there is no attempt to integrate the various contributions of participants.

For practical reasons, discussion can never be "complete," but a concern arises whenever democratic discussion either excludes non-technical considerations or when even wide-ranging discussion yields no coherent alternatives.

When discussion is narrowed unnecessarily or prematurely, citizens may feel excluded or be unwilling to participate fully. Emerging concerns—especially those of a practical nature—will likely be passed over in favor of more current, tangible or quantifiable questions. So, too, will insights into the larger context shaping the policy concern in question. In such cases, the upshot will be that however well discussion accounts for "the trees," it will fail to develop a coherent view of the "the forest," much less contrasting views of the possibilities it presents.

(7) Bias toward facts

Facts—in particular those subject to quantification—tend to dominate current policy discussions. When they do, a great deal goes unexplored, even unrecognized, including the way in which:

- Facts are "selected" from a logically infinite set of descriptions of "reality"—and that someone is therefore responsible for selecting them

- Facts take on meaning in a larger context provided by theoretical or conceptual frameworks

Facts are hardly a bad thing. Indeed, they are arguably quite necessary for *governmental* action. But they probably obscure "the bigger picture" relevant to governance discussion as often as they clarify it because their limitations aren't recognized and the frameworks which they inform and which inform them go unexamined.

As is true of many of the other limitations of current democratic discussion, this limitation tilts discussion in favor of those in positions of authority—i.e., those perceived to have the firmest command of the facts—and away from lay citizens. Facts also tend to focus our attention on the immediate and concrete and away from what "might be," namely: emerging concerns and possible conceptual ways of addressing them. Ironically, if not paradoxically, over-attention to facts can even obscure our grasp of current realities, as when the demand for "just the facts" closes off all consideration of where or who they came from and what they might mean.

(8) Constrained information

Closely linked to our current fixation with facts is the belief that more information is the answer to all public policy concerns. True, additional information can be helpful, sometimes even crucial. But it is a mistake to think that information is by itself informative in any but the most trivial sense. As journalists and intelligence officers know—information is only as good as its source. When it comes to "information," quality often counts at least as

much as quantity. And all information must be filtered, made sense of. And "Constrained" information is information of questionable quality and/or information derived from questionable sources.

Constrained information is a serious concern not only because it directly subverts the integrity of democratic discussion by forcing citizens to conduct their discussions "in the dark" and because it can discourage citizen involvement. Constrained information also interacts in a couple of other subtle ways with the limitations already described. It narrows the range of considerations that enter into democratic policy discussions. Moreover, constrained information is an open-door to self-interest. When information is lacking or untrustworthy, people tend to become defensive. They also tend to clam up. By itself and through these various interactions, constrained information also tends to limit citizens' choices.

Table U-2.1. on the following pages summarizes points (1)-(8). It lists each of the eight chief limitations of current democratic discussion and indicates some of the ways they interact, as well as some of the reasons we might be concerned about them as citizens of a democratic society.

Table U-2.1. also highlights an important theme in our discussion so far: all of these limitations tend to *obscure citizens' choices and/or prematurely narrow the range of choices available to citizens*, whether considered as individuals or as groups. Citizens must repeatedly face the necessity of choice both as individual and as social beings, but they are better able to do so if their choices have first been expanded and clarified.

Table U-2.1. Current Limitations of Democratic Discussion

Description of Limitation	Why a Concern	Interactivity with Other Limitations
1. Lack of Citizen Participation	• public denied benefits of citizen participation • citizens deprived of benefit of participation • prematurely narrows range of citizen choice	→ all other aspects of public discussion
2. Citizens are Reluctant to Fully Speak Their Minds	• citizens' concerns not aired and thus tend to be ignored • prematurely narrows scope, richness of discussion • narrows range of citizen choice	→ narrows range of discussion → predominance of self-interest
3. Predominance of Self-interest	• impairs consideration of "public interest" • prematurely narrows range of citizen choice	→ reluctance to speak openly → failure to address emerging policy concerns → unduly narrows range of discussion
4. Failure to Address Emerging Policy Concerns	• narrows scope, richness of discussion • does not expand range of citizen choice	→ focus on self-interest in meeting immediate needs → narrows range of discussion → too much attention to "how" and "when"; too little attention to "what" and "why" (possibilities in the area of concern)
Table U-2.1. continued on following page		

Table U-2.1. Current Limitations of Democratic Discussion (continued)		
Description of Limitation	**Why a Concern**	**Interactivity with Other Limitations**
5. Frequently Ignores Practical Questions	• non-technical contributions viewed as lacking authority • fails to explore possibility of "public interest" • does not clarify citizens choices	→ lack of citizen participation → citizens reluctant to speak their minds → narrows range of discussion
6. Overly Narrow	• appeals to authority, excludes or dissuades participation of non-"experts" • narrows scope, richness of discussion • ignores relationships • narrows range of citizen choice	→ lack of citizen participation → citizens reluctant to speak their minds → failure to address emerging policy concerns → practical considerations ignored → bias toward facts (lack of conceptual thinking)
7. Bias toward Facts	• fails to expand citizen choices • fails to clarify citizen choice	→ lack of citizen participation → citizens' reluctance to full speak their minds → failure to address emerging policy concerns → ignores practical considerations → constrained information
8. Constrained Information	• lack of clarity about choices • appeals to authority exclude or dissuade participation of non-"experts") • narrows scope, richness of discussion • narrows range of citizen choice	→ lack of citizen participation → citizens' reluctance to fully speak their minds → self-interest mutes other motives, including public interest

B. Current Limitations of Democratic Discussion—An Illustration from Recent Policy Discussion

The pubic discussion surrounding the US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq illustrates the various limitations described in the previous section. The Iraq example also highlights the way in which a felt practical need to proceed rapidly to governmental *action* can exacerbate these limitations in various ways.

(1) Lack of citizen participation

Policy toward Saddam Hussein's Iraq and toward Iraq since his defeat by the US military has elicited high levels of public concern. There have been protests supporting and, increasingly, opposing the Bush administration's Iraq policy. Bumper stickers, lawn signs, and letters to the editor have proliferated as the occupation has lengthened. Even relatively early on, there were indicators that public concern over Iraq was the motive force behind Howard Dean's challenge to the Democratic Party establishment and for George W. Bush's ultimate victory over John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. But even high levels of concern and activism do not necessarily generate serious and interactive discussion. Indeed, they may sometimes make serious exploration of possibilities difficult. In the Iraq case, democratic discussion clearly took a back seat to advocacy—"stop the war" v. "support the troops"—and, where it did occur, attracted few participants. From town meetings to learned journals, concern about Iraq has encouraged citizens less to exchange their perspectives and develop alternatives than to harden their views and insist on the rightness of one or another of an extremely narrow range of "options."

(2) Citizens' are reluctant to fully speak their minds

"Partisanship stops at the water's edge." "Rally around the flag". These are usually understood as exhortations, but they also at least partly describe citizens' recent stance toward Iraq. Participation in democratic discussion has been not only limited, but perhaps with these nostrums in mind, many of those who have spoken up nevertheless did not really "speak out." Both prior to the invasion and for many months afterward, democratic "discussion" was largely confined to statements in favor or opposed to the administration's approach. Alternative possibilities took nearly two years to emerge, despite the growing prospect of a prolonged US presence in Iraq.

(3) Predominance of self-interest

Although Iraq has tended to be discussed in terms of the "national interest"—as opposed to group or partial interests—alternative possibilities have not figured prominently in public discussions. Dissenting views there have been. But these have most often differed from official government policy only in offering

different views of how a relatively static and invariant concept of "the national interest" might best be served. Explorations of the concept of "national interest" itself have been infrequent. Even more rare have been attempts to develop Iraq policy possibilities in terms other than "interest."

(4) Failure to address emerging policy concerns

Democratic discussion of policy toward Iraq has exhibited a strong tendency to focus on the here-and-now. Indeed, an aura of crisis pervaded the subject almost from the start. What might be done once Saddam was toppled was apparently not discussed even by those most responsible for high-level decisions.

(5) Frequently ignores practical considerations

Practical considerations were ignored in the run-up to the Iraq invasion in the sense that alternative motives for the invasion were fully explored and developed neither (apparently) by most high-level administration officials nor by most citizens who, in the realm of security policy, are more dependent on government officials than almost anywhere else. Before the bombing began, the focus of democratic discussion was on narrower "technical" questions: How many troops were needed? How long would they have to stay? How much international support would we need? Citizens may have been interested in such questions, but they did little to expand or even clarify the fundamental choices they faced. Nor are they the sort of questions most laypersons felt competent to answer. As the occupation became prolonged, this limitation was addressed to at least some extent, as critics and commentators began to question why we invaded and what we were trying to accomplish. This has been useful. It has also encouraged citizens to rejoin the discussion. But many citizens still seem more ready to acknowledge that national security (and by extension our involvement in Iraq) is "hard work" than to ask what we are working for.

(6) Overly narrow

Public discussion of US policy toward Iraq has been narrow in both of the senses described earlier. Specialists—particularly military and defense officials—have dominated. And it took many months for their contributions to begin to be well integrated with those of experts from other fields.

(7) Bias toward facts

The menu of facts available to the public has never been richer. But perhaps because Iraq is a "national security" concern, facts tended to crowd out exploration and development of conceptual possibilities until well into the second year of occupation.

(8) Constrained information

Citizens' dependence on the government is greater in the realm of foreign policy than in most other arenas and possibly greatest when it comes to military and other "national security" issues. As the Iraq case illustrates, even policy elites are dependent on good intelligence.

Note that while America's Iraq policy is a particularly stark illustration of the various limitations of public discussion and some of the ways in which they interact, none of the limitations is absolute. Citizens have become more involved. Some have begun to speak out. After many months, citizens began to discuss alternative conceptual possibilities. And so on. But public discussion of Iraq remains more notable for its murkiness and poverty than clarity and richness.

Despite the limitations democratic discussion faces in the realm of national security affairs, in which information is limited and timely action at a premium, things could have gone differently in the Iraq case. Public discussion of governance policy for Iraq might have helped—and could still help—democratic discussion do more to:

- explore and develop the area of concern

- explore and develop contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing citizens' concern(s)

- test those possibilities for possible practical consequences.

C. Possible Constructive Responses Based on the IF Discussion Process

One way to view public discussion is as a response to limitations on current democratic discussion. IF is actively exploring possible ways of applying the experience it has gained using the IF Discussion Process in sanctuary discussions to public discussion. The following are possible lessons for public discussion from IF's initial sanctuary projects.

(1) Lack of citizen participation

IF sanctuary projects get a limited group of lay citizens involved in thoughtful governance discussion. Over the course of the projects, citizens come to relish the experience. This seems to suggest that public discussion that is also exploratory and developmental will likewise induce citizens to get involved. Even if this participation is limited to a few hours, it may prove useful to citizens both a means of fulfilling their duties as active citizens and as individuals and members of various social groups who are called upon to make choices for themselves and others.

(2) Citizens are reluctant to fully speak their minds

IF facilitators are trained to help citizens overcome their reluctance to fully speak their minds in sanctuary. Sanctuary discussions also have additional features that encourage openness:

- participants are selected for their ability to address areas of concern from a variety of perspectives and are instructed not to limit themselves to defending any particular point of view

- participants are granted anonymity and confidentiality to discourage "self-censorship"

- discussions unfold over a course of approximately two years, which encourages group trust and a full exploration of the area of concern.

While confidentiality and anonymity may be difficult to replicate in public discussion, good facilitation and a relatively unhurried pace may help citizens "speak out."

(3) Predominance of self-interest

Careful facilitation and a deliberative pace also may help ensure that public discussions, like IF sanctuary discussions, incorporate more than strategic calculations of self-interest.

(4) Failure to address emerging policy concerns

The areas of concern that are chosen for IF projects are all "emerging" either in the sense that they have yet to figure prominently in democratic discussion—such as depression or human genetic technology—or because their social, political, or technical context is undergoing such profound change that fundamental rethinking involving the exploration, development, and testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities is in order—such as privacy, rewards for work, and education. (The Iraq illustration discussed above was characterized by this latter sort of "emerging" context of profound change, captured in the phrase "The Post-9/11 World.")

(5) Ignores practical considerations

All three types of public discussion described in the various essays in this volume—like the various stages of the Discussion Process used in IF sanctuary discussions—incorporate "what" and "why" considerations very directly.

- Participants in public discussion begin with the careful exploration and development of a selected area of concern. The central goal of this initial type of public discussion is to develop a broad understanding of what might be at stake in an area of concern like "privacy and privacy rights" or "responsibility for health care."

- Participants then go on to explore and develop several contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing the area of concern, already given a rich conceptual description.

- The final step in public discussion is for panelists to develop an illustrative practical "test" of the contrasting possibilities. The aim at this stage is for panelists to describe what they see as the likely practical consequences of each of the possibilities that have been developed in sanctuary or that they have themselves developed in the second stage.

(6) Overly narrow

Public discussion as described in these essays ranges very broadly. Its results are also carefully integrated, particularly as participants begin to develop contrasting conceptual possibilities. That IF sanctuary panelists generally approximate these goals is partly due to their individual traits: prospective panelists are recruited for their ability to think broadly. But another important feature of the IF Discussion Process contributes to this goal as well: panelists are not all narrow experts or specialists. Instead, IF projects begin with two panels—one of which is explicitly drawn from a pool of "non-experts" or generalists. This helps ensure breadth. It also helps ensure that, when the two panels come together to finish their work, their efforts will be more thoroughly integrated than might otherwise be the case. It seems reasonable to suppose that that lay citizens will have the same general effect in public discussion. IF facilitators further encourage both breadth and integration, another effect that is probably replicable in public discussion.

(7) Bias toward "facts"

Facts play very little role in the IF Discussion Process, which unfolds almost entirely at the level of conceptual exploration and development on the one hand and thoughtful practical speculation about future consequences on the other. Public discussion is no different in this respect, as described at length in the various essays in the preceding section.

(8) Constrained information

Neither the IF Discussion Process nor the sanctuary setting places any premium on "information," *per se*. What does count in sanctuary discussions is trust, which both results from and further encourages transparency about the "sources" of panelists' views. Our experience is that both the anonymity and relaxed pace

of sanctuary settings strongly encourage trust among participants. Good facilitation and an unhurried pace are likely to be among the features conducive to trust most easily translated from sanctuary to public discussion.

In these ways, many of the same aspects that counter the limitations of democratic discussion in sanctuary will probably have at least some application to public discussion. The best evidence of their success in sanctuary is the actual content of the Citizen Staff Work Reports that have been developed by IF panels. And IF's Citizen Staff Work Reports are perhaps the Foundation's biggest resource in meeting the limitations of democratic discussion in the larger public arena. Citizen Staff Work Reports encourage those who are engaged—or might become engaged—in wider democratic discussions to address the limitations of contemporary democratic discussion by:

- stimulating citizens' interest with contrasting conceptual possibilities that can serve as a useful and accessible *starting point* for public discussion

- encouraging openness by presenting a series of contrasting conceptual possibilities rather than hardened positions or even a set of recommendations, both of which tend to elicit "yea" or "neigh" responses rather than real exploration and development

- countering narrow calculations of self-interest through an emphasis a broad exploration and development of the area of concern and the likely practical consequences of several contrasting conceptual possibilities

- addressing emerging policy concerns

- incorporating practical considerations

- broadening discussion by including the views of generalist-citizens as well as experts-specialists and then integrating them

- averting the bias toward facts by instead concentrating on broader conceptual questions and answers—and their necessarily speculative practical consequences

- explaining the source of the Citizen Staff Work Reports clearly (i.e., in-depth sanctuary discussions among generalist-citizens as well as experts-specialists facilitated by an IF Fellow), so that whatever "information" the Citizen Staff Work Reports contain can be evaluated fairly.

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See also:

The Objective of Public Discussion
U-3

Introduction

The primary objective of public discussion is to promote democratic discussion of policy concerns as a way of contributing to citizens' individual and social choices and, through them, to useful public policy making. This objective comprises two goals that tend to be mutually reinforcing: (1) stimulating democratic discussion; and (2) enhancing democratic discussion. These goals are understood in much more practical terms and as part of a broader and more flexible view of "democracy" than is typical of either academic defenses of democratic discussion (or "deliberation") or of groups advocating "democratic participation."

A. Stimulating and Enhancing Democratic Discussion Described

(1) Democratic discussion

The democratic discussion that Interactivity Foundation (IF) is concerned with promoting relates to public policy concerns and is conducted by members of the public, i.e. citizens. A democratic discussion is thus one in which "democratic citizens" are both the "subject" and "object" of the discussion. Citizens carry out the discussion; citizens' policy concerns are also what the discussion is about.

Democratic discussion need not occur in what are typically thought of "public" places (like town meetings or legislatures) or according to conventional formats (like hearings or debates). Indeed, there is almost no limit on the variety of places and ways in which democratic discussion takes place—or at least might take place.

The content of democratic discussion is also much broader than conventionally acknowledged. While it is true that democratic discussion often addresses urgent crises, pressing problems, and actual choices, it is often freer and richer when dealing with broader and less immediate concerns and when it involves the exploration, development, and testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

(2) Stimulating democratic discussion

Democratic discussion has been *stimulated* when there is more of it than before. Getting more citizens involved in democratic discussion is one way to accomplish this. Another is to broaden or deepen the involvement of those who are already engaged in democratic discussion.

These might be considered worthy aims because:

- more democratic discussion means greater citizen involvement—one measure of the health of a democracy

- more democratic discussion means more useful input for citizens' current and future choices

- involving more citizens or deepening the involvement of those already participating is also likely to enhance democratic discussion, as thinkers from Thucydides and Aristotle on have observed.

(3) Enhancing democratic discussion

Democratic discussion can be enhanced in a variety of ways, not just one or two, as is usually implied by those who endorse it. In general, democratic discussion has been *enhanced* any time it does more to:

- transcend narrow self-interest (whether of individuals, groups, or segments of society)

- encourage citizens to truly speak their minds

- incorporate foresight

- exhibit breadth

- anticipate social concerns rather than responding to "crises"

- incorporate empirical knowledge

- incorporate theoretical knowledge

- incorporate practical as well as instrumental thinking, i.e. deals with the "what" and "why" of policy as well as the "how" and "when."

The goal of enhancing democratic discussion is served by improving any one of these features. Democratic discussion of policy concerns is enhanced to an even greater extent if more than one of these features can be improved at the same time.

Although there may be other ways of pursuing this goal, engaging the public in discussions of contrasting conceptual possibilities for democratic policy governance is likely to be a particularly effective way of enhancing democratic discussion. Discussing contrasting conceptual possibilities:

- discourages partisanship while encouraging serious discussion

- encourages the exploration, development, and testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities

- expands citizens' choices by broadening their awareness of alternative approaches to addressing a given public policy area of concern

- helps citizens clarify the choices they must make as individuals and members of groups and society as they come to terms with a selected public policy area of concern.

(4) Stimulating and enhancing democratic discussion as (usually) mutually reinforcing goals

a. more democratic discussion can mean better democratic discussion

Stimulating democratic discussion is useful in its own right. But as already noted, increasing the "quantity" of discussion can lead to an increase in its "quality" as well.

b. better democratic discussion can encourage more democratic discussion

Enhanced democratic discussion likewise stands on its own as a useful goal. But it, too, tends to support a complementary goal, that of stimulating democratic discussion. Successful democratic discussion further motivates those who participate in it, as IF's accumulating experiences with sanctuary discussion clearly shows. Successful democratic discussion can also encourage those who observe it to get involved.

c. when the goals of stimulating and enhancing democratic discussion conflict

In some circumstances, increasing the "quantity" of democratic discussion can threaten the "quality" of democratic discussion—as when having too many participants diminishes the level of interactivity between them or makes it difficult to maintain a useful focus. Such conflicts may occasionally become irresolvable. If and when they do, a choice must be made. On the one hand, as long as some minimum level of quality is preserved, democratic discussion will be valuable. On the other hand, a better mix of quality and quantity might be had elsewhere. And because there will almost always be alternative possibilities for democratic discussion, choosing where, with whom, and for how long to conduct democratic discussions will always be a matter of ongoing judgment.

B. Stimulating and Enhancing Democratic Discussion Illustrated

(1) Illustrations from outside IF

a. academic

Democratic discussion has been the focus of academic interest since ancient times. But beginning about a generation ago, scholarly interest exploded, especially within the fields of political science and political theory. The literature on democratic discussion (or "democratic deliberation," the term preferred in academic circles) is immense and growing rapidly. Yet despite the undeniable breadth and variety of positions in this literature, most of them diverge in important ways from the objective being described here. Unlike the goals set forth in academic theories of democratic deliberation, the goals of stimulating and enhancing pubic discussion:

- are grounded far less in philosophical speculation about the value of democratic discussion than in observation—both of actual democratic discussion and of IF's own work, including our accumulating experience with sanctuary and now public discussion

- result not in a very general view of discussion, such as "the exchange of reasons" or "full and fair debate," but in a well worked out view of how public discussion can most usefully proceed—i.e., through the exploratory and developmental discussion of

  o an area of concern
  o contrasting conceptual possibilities
  o possible practical consequences

- do not entail viewing a particular discussion venue or format as always the best place or only way that democratic discussion can take place but rather are consistent with the view that democratic discussion can be adapted on a case-by-case basis to the actual discussion possibilities that might exist at different times and in different places.

b. advocacy groups

Many groups are interested in promoting citizen participation. Some are explicitly interested in promoting citizen "dialogue," "discourse," or "deliberation." Despite the family resemblance these approaches bear to public discussion as described here, however, there remain important differences between how these groups conceive of their objectives and the objective of public discussion.

The goal of *stimulating* democratic discussion largely converges with that of groups whose aim is promoting some form of real discussion, exchange, or deliberation. At the same time, one of the central aims of this volume is to clearly distinguish "public discussion" from "debate," "advocacy," "problem solving," "mediation," "deliberation aimed at decision making" and the like. Not all public "talk" involves a real exchange of ideas, much less an exploration of possibilities. Some groups are satisfied anytime they can "get people talking." But as noted earlier, it is important to acknowledge that the goal of stimulating democratic discussion—getting people talking—can run counter to the goal of enhancing democratic discussion.

The goal of *enhancing* democratic discussion diverges from that of most other groups in one or all of the following ways:

- Although advocacy groups tend to be somewhat more catholic than their academic counterparts in their view of democratic discussion, like scholars they, too, tend to focus on one discursive venue or format. Others focus on one or another policy concern. But the view being described in this volume is "agnostic" about where and how democratic discussion can or should occur and quite "ecumenical" about the kinds of policy concerns citizens can or should discuss. As already noted, there is a wide variety of forums and forms that may enhance democratic discussion, and virtually any policy concern is worthy of democratic discussion—as long as citizens choose to discuss it.

- Advocacy groups are typically unconcerned with the actual *process* and *outcome* of democratic discussion; if democratic discussion is "reasonable" in some general sense, it is assumed to be a good thing and to have produced good results. By contrast—and the contrast is significant—the process of public discussion explicitly involves engaging citizens in the exploration, development, and testing of contrasting conceptual possibilities, while the outcome of public discussion in terms of democratic discussion is assessed by reference to the specific features listed in A(3) above, which can be employed as a set of concrete (if qualitative) yardsticks to judge whether democratic discussion has really "succeeded" or "failed"—as well as how and why.

(2) An illustration from IF's work—Citizen Staff Work Reports

IF supports others who are interested in conducting public discussion in various ways. One of the most important of these is by making available to citizens its Citizen Staff Work Reports. IF's Citizen Staff Work Reports are produced and presented in such a way as to directly contribute to the objective of promoting democratic discussion. Table U-3.1. on the following page describes the key

features of the Citizen Staff Work Reports that are intended to further the goals of stimulating and enhancing democratic discussion.

Table U-3.1. How IF Citizen Staff Work Reports Can Stimulate and Enhance Democratic Discussion

Feature of IF Citizen Staff Work Reports	How It Can Stimulate Democratic Discussion	How It Can Enhance Democratic Discussion
CONTENT OF REPORT		
Possibilities rather than recommendations	• Invites discussion rather than suggesting that discussion has produced definitive conclusions	• Helps avoid advocacy • Anticipates social concerns rather than reacting to "crises"
Contrasts rather than a single "answer" or set of "answers"	• Invites discussion rather than suggesting that discussion has produced definitive conclusions	• Helps avoid advocacy • Exhibits breadth
Broad concepts rather than technical or quantitative detail	• No requirement for technical or quantitative expertise, authority, or credentials	• Incorporates foresight • Exhibits breadth • Anticipates social concerns rather than reacting to "crises"
Focus on governance rather than government	• No requirement for expertise specific to the functioning of government institutions	• Helps avoid advocacy • Practical as well as instrumental thinking • Anticipates social concerns rather than reacting to "crises"
Testing for possible practical consequences	• Unusual and engaging feature of Reports • No requirement for technical, quantitative, or governmental expertise, authority, or credentials	• Exhibits breadth • Anticipates social concerns rather than reacting to "crises"
DISCUSSION PROCESS USED TO GENERATE REPORT		
Sanctuary		• Helps avoid advocacy • Citizens free to speak their minds
Includes both citizen-generalists and expert-specialists		• Empirically and theoretically grounded • Practical as well as instrumental thinking

See also:

The Distinctiveness of Public Discussion
U-4

Introduction

Public discussion as described in this volume is distinctive, if not unique. Taken as a whole, public discussion is distinct from other forms of democratic deliberation, discussion, and dialogue. A number of its individual features are also distinct. And some of its individual features interact in ways that further distinguish public discussion. The purpose of this essay is to collect these features in one place. Other essays in this volume, referenced below, describe most of them in greater detail.

A. Distinctive Features of Public Discussion as a Whole

(1) Learning *and* decision-making

It is useful to distinguish between discussion processes aimed at some form of learning and those aimed at some form of decision-making. Public discussion aims in the first instance at learning—participants in public discussion do not make action decisions, but can rather expect to expand and clarify the (action) choices they will later face as citizens acting individually and collectively. A number of other processes have the same aim. But public discussion is also intended to generate staff work reports that can later be used in other public settings that contribute to either learning, decision-making, or both. This may well be unique. Rare is the theoretical model or deliberative practice that strives to *combine* these, much less do so in a conscious and thoughtful fashion.

(2) Use of Staff Work Reports

Though public discussion can begin with an original description of an area of concern, it more typically builds on a staff work report. Staff work reports can themselves be described as the products of a process of learning or inquiry (usually in sanctuary), but their ultimate value is as tools for enhancing public discussion's ability to contribute to learning and, later in wider democratic discussion, to both learning and decision-making.

(3) A well-developed discussion process

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of public discussion is that, while fluid and adaptable, it lays out in careful terms just how discussion might usefully proceed: by exploration and development of an area of concern, contrasting conceptual possibilities for addressing it, and/or their possible practical consequences. In describing the actual process of dialogue or deliberation, most academics and groups simply invoke "taking turns" or "the exchange of reasons" and leave it at that.

B. Distinctive Individual Features of Public Discussion

(1) Possibilities

A number of other discussion processes generate multiple outcomes such as visions, futures, or scenarios—rather than single recommendations. However, these are generally not explicitly viewed as "possibilities."

(2) Contrast

The emphasis that public discussion places on *contrasting* conceptual possibilities has no parallel in any other discussion process, even those that aim to generate multiple outcomes.

(3) Deliberate pace

Public discussion proceeds at a deliberate pace. While open-endedness characterizes neither the individual types of public discussion nor public discussion as a whole, the pace of public discussion is to the maximum extent possible set by the unfolding discussions themselves rather than an "artificial" timeline imposed by either a need to make a decision, resolve a problem, or conform to an official schedule.

(4) Intentional search for different forms of insight

Many other processes—such as public hearings—integrate lay persons into expert discussions. But public discussion does not view participants as either "authorities" or "stakeholders" but rather as "citizens," some of whom are more likely to contribute technical/analytical insight—"specialists"—and some of whom are more likely to contribute experiential/synthetic insight— "generalists."

(5) Decision-making (selection and exclusion) during public discussion by convergence

Convergence is altogether foreign to other forms of democratic discussion, whether theoretical and practical, all of which rely on either consensus or some form of polling.

(6) Facilitation

In most, if not all, forms of democratic discussion, facilitators tend to be either highly directive (as in parliamentary processes) or absent altogether (as in many small group processes). In public discussion, however, facilitators attempt to

manage the discussion flow, while leaving to participants the exploration and development of content.

C. Distinctive Interactive Features of Public Discussion

(1) Governance

Public discussion is anticipatory, practical, and conceptual. While a number of other deliberative processes also address "what" and "why" questions, none attempts to *combine* these three key features of governance.

(2) Testing

Public discussion's approach to testing for possible practical consequences is also unique. Other processes incorporate attempts to evaluate outcomes. But as a type of public discussion, testing for possible practical consequences is unique in two ways. First, testing explores a unique type of outcome—selected practical consequences rather than, say, statistical trends or quantitative predictions. Second, testing explores a unique kind of "event"—selected contrasting conceptual *possibilities* rather than assertions about what will or should happen.

The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic
U-5

Introduction

As indicated repeatedly in these essays, public discussion (whether of an area of concern, contrasting conceptual possibilities, or possible practical consequences) can be considered more truly "discursive" than advocacy, deliberation for decision-making, or public hearings in the sense that it is more centrally concerned with interactive citizen discussion. This essay describes a number of senses in which public discussion is also more truly "democratic" than such alternatives, as well.

A. Reprise: What is Discursive about Public Discussion

Public discussion can occur only if citizen participants interact by thinking and communicating with one another. As noted at various points in other essays, any number of techniques and activities, including the use of small groups and effective facilitation, can help ensure that such interaction takes place.

B. Why "Giving Each an Equal Say" Cannot Ensure that Discussion Will Be "Democratic"

The interactive discussion that is at the conceptual heart of public discussion and is encouraged by proper meeting organization and facilitation may or may not characterize town hall meetings, public hearings, and other public forums. Often it is precisely what attracts citizens to these arenas—their "openness"—that vitiates their discursive potential. A discussion in which few or no limits are placed on who speaks or on what can be said (other than, perhaps, some minimal standard of germaneness) may seem free, inclusive, or "democratic." Yet giving citizens full rein to say what they please cannot prevent speech that is trivial, self-serving, manipulative, threatening, or simply oblivious to the concerns and interests of others. Nor can simply letting everyone have a turn to speak prevent each speaker in turn from "tuning" out the others. Hence in its application the rule "Each gets equal say" is likely to be anything but democratic: it cannot insure that all citizens are really heard; that any single citizen actually listens to any other; or that any of the participants engage in further interaction. Giving everyone equal say does little by itself to ensure that the results of the discussion will be useful to the participants *as democratic citizens who must exercise choice,* both individually and collectively.

C. The Senses in Which Public Discussion is "Democratic"

Public discussion is rooted in an account of discursive equality quite different from the one that leads to the precept "Give Each an Equal Say." And it features a number of other democratic aspects that distinguish it from other conventional views of public dialogue, as well.

(1) Discursive equality in public discussion

a. a disposition toward cooperative learning

Public discussion proceeds not according to the rule "Each has an equal say" but rather from the belief that "Each has something worthwhile to say." The differences between these two orientations could hardly be more profound.

The first difference is in the thinking behind these different views of equality-in-discussion. The "equal time" rule follows from a commitment to treating citizens' interests equally. A belief in listening to other citizens requires an additional commitment to learning from others—not only from their assertions, but also from their efforts to explore and develop conceptual possibilities.

The second difference relates to applying the two notions, and follows from the first. The rule "each has an equal say" can be and in practice tends to be applied mechanically (if not mathematically); a belief that "each has something worthwhile to say" can only be "applied" through the ongoing judgment of both participants and facilitator in the context of the continually unfolding interactions that make up the flow of a discussion. It is the sum of these judgments about the discussion's flow that together shapes not only how much individual participants speak, but what they say and how they say it.

The ethic of equal time admonishes us to apportion air time to others on an equal basis. A disposition toward cooperative learning inclines us to do more; it inclines us to interact constructively with others as we listen to them as well as talk to them.

This admittedly more "demanding" understanding of discursive equality is what allows public discussion to move from participant to participant in a varied, non-linear, or perhaps organic fashion. And it is a precondition of seeing public discussion as a way of encouraging citizens to actively explore and develop public policy thinking so as to be able to act not only as its informed "clients" or "customers" but as its contributing architects.

b. how a disposition toward cooperative learning is supported in public discussion

Public discussion sustains a disposition toward cooperative learning even as it draws upon it. In general terms, public discussion reinforces a cooperative learning disposition by:

- focusing on--
  - a broader conceptual framework rather than narrower and detailed policies
  - future possibilities rather than current problems
  - contrasts rather than a narrow range of alternatives, and
  - concepts rather than facts

  all of which tend to level the discursive playing field between technical experts and lay citizens

- recognizing that an active, though non-directive, facilitator will usually be necessary to ensure truly interactive discussion that is focused on the group's goal of exploring and developing conceptual possibilities for democratic public policy in a selected area of concern.

(2) Shared purpose

To qualify as "democratic," a thing or process must in some sense be "of, by, and for the people." Perhaps surprisingly, many forms of putatively "democratic" dialogue fail to live up to this basic criterion, even when they succeed in efforts to accord everyone an "equal say." The simple reason for this is that participants may be acting wholly as individuals rather than concerned citizens. If a discussion lacks focus or is made up of a laundry list of individual concerns, it is less "democratic" than anarchic. Consensus-seeking, on the other hand, tends first to narrow discussion and then, finally, puts a stop to it altogether as participants join in advocacy of a group position.

Conceptual exploration and development and testing for possible practical consequences all provide discussion with a shared purpose—without at the same time introducing the usually deadening effects of consensus-seeking. Participants share a discursive task, but are free to pursue it as they see fit with only a facilitator to assure the flow of exploration and development of possible courses of policy action. True, their interest in public discussion constrains them in certain ways (as does their collegial relationship and any "authority" they have delegated to a facilitator/editor). But absent these limits or boundaries, real interaction would be impossible or at least highly cumbersome and time-consuming. Agreement on the task at hand and how to approach it—itself "democratic"—it is a precondition of cooperative and constructive discussion.

(3) Civic responsibility

Citizens engaged in public discussion, like citizens more generally, can be viewed as having both rights and responsibilities. If citizens have a right to contribute, the corresponding responsibility might be thought of as the responsibility to contribute in such a way that furthers the group's shared purpose concerning discussion. This sense of responsibility tends to emerge in public discussion as the product of a cooperative disposition and a shared purpose. If participants all have something worthwhile to contribute and share a purpose in pursuing the particular discussion of exploration and development of possibilities in an area of concern, each is likely to feel an individual responsibility to contribute interactively to the discussion.

(4) Usefulness to a wider democratic public

One of the distinctive features of public discussion as described in this volume is that it is explicitly conceptualized and organized so as to be useful for a wider democratic public. As long as it yields useful (usually written) materials that can be passed along to other citizens and groups—such as staff work reports— public discussion can be useful to other citizens and/or policymakers. Feedback from public discussion can: stimulate additional public discussion among other citizens and even elected or appointed formal policymakers; enhance later democratic discussions; and usefully inform policymakers' judgments. Even one of these impacts can widen public discussion's already deeply democratic character.

D. Enhancing the Democratic Potential of Public Discussion

Implicit in the preceding paragraphs are a number of suggestions for enhancing the democratic potential of public discussion. To make the most of the democratic features of public discussion, facilitators and meeting planners can, among other things:

- clarify at appropriate intervals the nature of the tasks involved and how they will be approached

- ensure that citizens are not cowed by experts

- choose meeting times that are convenient for as many citizens as possible

- provide sufficient time for adequate discussion and full participation by all in the exploration and development of conceptual possibilities for public policy action

- give participants an opportunity to review written meeting records

- carefully review and record discussion results for later consideration by other citizens and/or policymakers.

<u>B</u>asic Concepts
Section B

The essays in this final section are intended to broaden and deepen the descriptions provided in the previous essays. The final essay can be usefully consulted both as a kind of summary of the volume as a whole and as a description of some of the more important forms of interactivity between the concepts described in individual essays.

Change and Consequences
B-1

Introduction

Public discussion can be described as having a flow or direction, but no pre-established path, much less a prescribed outcome. Public discussion flows from the exploration and development of a conceptual area of concern to the exploration and development (and selection and exclusion) of contrasting conceptual possibilities and from there to testing for possible practical consequences. This is true whether public discussion builds upon a staff work report prepared in sanctuary or starts with its "own" description of an area of concern. Among other things, this flow is intended to allow participants to thoughtfully consider change, conceptualized as a sequence of consequences flowing from past choices through the fleeting present and into the future.

A. Change, Choice, and Consequences

Change, which seems inherent in "the human condition," often confronts us as individuals, and as members of groups and society, with the necessity of choice. When circumstances change, we must decide whether to change with them, or to resist them, or to seek other possibilities.

Change is often described using the seemingly common-sense categories "past," "present," and "future." While suggestive, these categories do not seem to do justice to how we actually experience change, for we are never really "in" the present, nor are we ever really wholly separate from or uninfluenced by either the past or the future. In addition to obscuring the ever-ongoing interactivity between "past," "present," and "future," these categories say little about what sort of interactivity might connect these various aspects of change.

An alternative is to think of change in terms of consequences—more specifically, in terms of sequences of interactive consequences of physical events and human choices, whether those choices relate to the "past," "present," or "future." Understood in this way, the concept of consequences accommodates both the moral and the non-moral, the physical and the social, the "intentional" and the "unintentional" aspects of change.

Thinking of change as a sequence of consequences also helps us keep in mind that change—especially in the realm of public policy—invariably implicates two kinds of human choice: choices about the actions that lead to consequences and choices about which consequences could or should receive our attention (and how). Policy change results at least partly from "past" human choices and confronts us with choices in the "present," choices that will have consequences for the "future." Likewise, because consequences themselves are in principle infinite, a significant element of choice

must be exercised if we are to discuss or act on them meaningfully. We must select which consequences to consider and the meanings we will attribute to them.

Conceptualizing change in terms of consequences may also be useful because it allows us to think of change as an ever-unfolding process. It may be more useful to think of consequences themselves as "flowing" from the past through the present into the future rather than as "moments" or "instants" that are somehow stopped or held constant by imposition of categories like "past," "present" and "future." Just as change is unavoidable, so too is the movement or flow of consequences. Thinking of change in terms of consequences allows us to continue to think of the "past" as in some sense "over" or "done with," the "present" as what is with us now, and the "future" as still to come—all the while reminding us that due to the ceaseless nature of change "past," "present," and "future" are ultimately inseparable and are ever interactive.

Finally, seeing change as a sequence of consequences involving human choice helps us appreciate the degree to which our understanding of "causes"—especially in the social realm most relevant to public policy—is not "absolute" but always limited by unavoidable choices about:

- which consequences might matter to ourselves or to others

- how they might matter to ourselves or to others

- how to interpret their use for ourselves or others.

B. Consequences and Public Discussion

Each of the various types of public discussion interactively considers consequences, but does so in a different way.

(1) Exploration and development of an area of concern

The first form of public discussion—exploration and development of an area of concern—deals with the ever-emerging consequences of past choices. As captured in an area of concern, consequences are neither wholly "past" nor "present," but "coming into view" in the always fleeting "present."

(2) Exploration and development of contrasting conceptual possibilities

The second form of public discussion—exploration, development and selection and exclusion of contrasting conceptual possibilities—deals with possible ways of addressing the emergent consequences described or included in an area of concern.

While its focus is "the present," this stage or type of public discussion is conceptually linked to the exploration and development of "present" consequences (the area of concern) because the exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of current possible choices in the form of contrasting conceptual possibilities takes place in response to the consequences that are explored and developed and thereby re-described during discussion of the area of concern. The exploration, development, and selection and exclusion of current possible choices in the form of contrasting conceptual possibilities is also conceptually linked to testing for "future" consequences because it involves the exercise of practical judgment to arrive at current possible choices in the form of the contrasting conceptual possibilities that are the subject of testing for "possible practical consequences."

(3) Testing for possible practical consequences

The third form of public discussion—testing—deals with the possible practical consequences of contrasting conceptual possibilities. Here, too, an exploratory and developmental approach in discussion is most suitable: testing is not an attempt to "predict" the future but to selectively explore and develop the links between possible choices and the sequences to which they might give rise in actual practice.

Again, while its focus is "the future," testing is conceptually linked to the exploration and development of "present" possible choices in the form of contrasting conceptual possibilities because it is the choices described in contrasting conceptual possibilities whose practical consequences testing explores and develops.

C. Interactivity between the Treatment of Consequences in Different Forms of Public Discussion

Each of the three forms of public discussion addresses consequences in a way that is conceptually linked to their treatment in the preceding and/or succeeding stage of discussion. This allows public discussion—even when concentrating on only one type of consequences—to address change as a *process* rather than as a series of discrete or separable "moments" or "instants" in time. This is probably all the more true when public discussion is able to flow from consideration of one to a second and/or third type of consequence.

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See also:

T-5, "Public Discussion of Possible Practical Consequences—Testing" (pp. 73-77)
B-2, "Absolutes and Uncertainty" (pp. 119-23)
B-4, "The Necessity of Choice" (pp. 130-34)

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Absolutes and Uncertainty
B-2

Introduction

Public discussion is a critical response to absolutes and a constructive response to uncertainty in the realm of democratic policy choice.

A. Our Craving for Absolutes

That our craving for absolutes is pervasive and deep seated is confirmed by many phenomena:

- language understood as absolute relations

- science understood as authoritative

- religious fundamentalism

- political fundamentalism

- philosophical essentialism (or foundationalism)

- the mathematization of the social sciences (reflected in the predominance of statistical and modeling methods)

- economism

- resistance to questions.

B. Whence Our Craving for Absolutes?

Theodor Adorno believed that all cravings for absolutes were rooted in fear: "Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown," he wrote.[1] Still, that there are so many species of absolutism (or fundamentalism or foundationalism) suggests that our craving for absolutes may have other sources, not reducible to fear, as well, such as:

- laziness

- lack of time or leisure or training for considering alternatives

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[1] Quoted in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/. p. 2.

- confusion

- wariness of other persons or groups (rather than fear of "the unknown")

- sincere belief

- self-promotion (whether in a profession or in politics)

- the need for predictability amidst endless change

- the necessity of choice.

C. Theoretical Uncertainty—The Absence of Final Answers

"Theoretical uncertainty" exists because, as limited beings, we cannot know everything and because what we can know we cannot know with complete certainty.

Anthropologists call us "homo sapiens." But although "knowing" may be our most distinctive trait as a species, this capacity is far from absolute—as philosophers, theologians, and scientists repeatedly remind us. Most—if not all—philosophers and theologians through history have been at pains to point this out. Philosophers' conclusions about what we can know almost invariably come with attendant corollaries about what we cannot know. Theological speculation is even more insistent on humans' limitations: we may be made in god's image, or able to approach a godlike state, but we cannot actually become god or be "omniscient." Meanwhile, the more scientists make us aware of the marvels of the human brain, the more they help us appreciate its physical limitations: we think and "know" as we do because we have brains of a certain kind that are embedded in bodies of a certain kind, themselves embedded in larger biological and physical systems.

This lack of absolutes characterizes even those realms we think of as most "certain": science and mathematics.

The notion that science yields positive "truths" is alien to most scientists, who view their theories as contingent and evolving. Philosophers and historians of science, for their part, long ago abandoned both the notion that science yields "positive" truths and the notion there is a single scientific "method." Moreover, science involves significant elements of selection and exclusion. Questions, hypotheses, variables, measures, methods, and instruments and methods of observation all require choice.

Meanwhile, Gödel's theorem in mathematics, which showed that any system of signs was either incomplete or contradictory, stands as a challenge to any view of mathematics (or logic, or language) as a perfectly reliable (or "absolute") means of representing "reality." We may be able to think without the use of symbols. But we must ultimately rely on symbolic systems to communicate our views of "reality" to

each other. If such systems are intrinsically limited, as Gödel apparently demonstrated, our collective efforts to communicate "reality" to each other will also be intrinsically limited, as well. The best we can reasonably hope for is to arrive at useful descriptions, not "perfect" or "absolute" ones.

Uncertainty is even more apparent in the realms of literary interpretation, philosophy, history, and the social sciences. In all of these areas, no "method" can fully eliminate uncertainty because of the following factors and, more importantly, because of the interactivity between them:

- Change—changing circumstances render predictive "certainties" beyond human capacity

- Morality—part of evaluating the "truth" in these realms has to do with their moral content, which if not always uncertain at least requires continual application to changing circumstance because morality must deal with future consequences derived from past consequences and experience

- Choice—human beings can react to unfolding events, a capacity which includes the ability to react to—and "falsify"—predictions made about our behavior

- Language—all of these forms of inquiry are to one or another degree dependent on language (another distinctive human trait), which shapes them even as they shape language

- Democracy—as long as one accepts the need to engage other citizens as equals, one must also attend to the "realities" they represent

D. Practical Uncertainty—The Necessity of Choice

Even if we could abolish or ignore theoretical uncertainty, it would reappear as soon as we confronted the unavoidable need to make choices for thinking about how to live our lives individually and socially. In other words, even if we could know everything and know it with complete certainty, the necessity of choice would re-create uncertainty anew. In addition to theoretical uncertainty, then, the necessity of choice means that we continually confront practical uncertainty, as well.

Choice (or selection and exclusion) is inescapable at every stage of practical *inquiry*—the more so the more thoroughgoing the inquiry that precedes choice. The necessity of choice results from (1) our practical human nature (we are more interested in or concerned with some things than others); and (2) our limitations (we cannot focus on everything at once, for were we to do so we would end up focusing on nothing at all). Choice is required if we are to settle on the:

- concerns that will motivate inquiry (from memories, beliefs, emotions, habits, and hopes for the future—themselves the products of prior selection)

- questions for continuing inquiry

- answers

- possibilities

- consequences

- language in which we render all of these.

E. The Consequences of Relying on Absolutes

Uncertainty cannot be eliminated, though like almost anything else, it can be ignored. Doing so, however, carries a potentially great premium. Adorno believed that a craving for certainty was the root cause of "domination" in all its forms. Apart from imposing our "certainties" on others or on nature, there are at least four other reasons to be suspicious of absolutes. Relying on absolutes can lead to failure to:

- explore currently unknown but potentially useful possibilities

- anticipate and react to that which is not—or cannot be—anticipated by the "certainties" with which one is operating

- learn from experience

- learn from those who do not accept one's own "certainties."

F. Dealing Constructively with Uncertainty

Public discussion not only acknowledges uncertainty, but in some senses "welcomes" it as useful to democratic discussion and choice. Although public discussion as a whole might be characterized as a means of constructively confronting uncertainty in the realm of democratic governance policy, some of its features deserve special emphasis. These are presented in the Table B-2.1. on the following page.

Table B-2.1. Features of Public Discussion that Deal with Uncertainty

Feature	Deals with Uncertainty by
Process	

Starting point
  • Staff Work Reports
  • Area of Concern
	• Highlighting governance, contrasts, possibilities, consequences
	• Focusing on an emerging concern; beginning with questions rather than assertions

Disposition toward Cooperative Learning	Encouraging free-flowing discussion of conceptual possibilities and their possible practical consequences rather than defensive assertion or insistent advocacy

Non-linearity	Allowing participants to
	  • change "directions"
	  • adapt to discussion
	  • dispense with "absolute" linguistic proofs of their statements

Content	
Governance	Encouraging further exploration and development by other democratic citizens competent to discuss conceptual possibilities
Possibilities	Underlining the contingent nature of the selected public policy choices and consequences being explored and developed
Contrasts	Further accenting the contingent nature of the possibilities and consequences being explored and developed
Practical Consequences	Underscoring the selective and thus necessarily always partial nature of future consequences

See also:

A-6, "Language and Public Discussion" (pp. 53-56)
U-5, "The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic" (pp. 110-14)
B-1, "Change and Consequences" (pp. 116-18)
B-4, "The Necessity of Choice" (pp. 130-34)

Facts and Concepts
B-3

Introduction

   While facts have an important, even indispensable, role to play in deliberation about governmental questions that will result in action choices, public discussion of democratic policy governance is more usefully conducted in terms of concepts.

A. Facts Can Be Useful without Being "Objectively" or "Absolutely" True

(1) General limitations on facts (why facts cannot be wholly authoritative)

   Facts are conventionally thought of as "given," as "objectively" or "absolutely" or "positively" true—the bedrock of what is known. But even the most "solid" facts are limited in important ways, especially those that relate to public policy, because:

   - *facts neither choose, interpret, nor represent themselves*

      On the contrary, we must rely on (non-factual or theoretical) frameworks to choose where to look for facts (and what counts as "seeing" them). Without the help of other, interpretive frameworks, we could not make sense of the facts we did see. Finally, in order to communicate them to others, facts get encoded in language (or mathematics), which introduces yet another set of choices which, once made, impose their own logic on "reality." Hence facts result from numerous (and interactive) layers of choice. Any set of facts is less "given" than *constructed*, less the "only right" description of reality than the one we have arrived at through usually complex and interactive sequences of selection and exclusion.

   - *facts relating to public policy cannot claim even the solid footing we generally associate with physical facts like those that figure in the natural (and perhaps to a lesser extent the social) sciences because they are:*

      o further constructed so as to be relevant to particular beliefs about (1) how the socio-political world works or might work; and (2) how the socio-political world should or could work

      o subject to constant change.

(2) Usefulness of facts to public policy

   Despite these limitations, facts are useful—even essential—in crafting public policy. As long as their interactively selected character is recognized, facts can provide a stable point of departure for *governmental* policy analysis. Government

action results from confronting the necessity of choice by arriving at a decision, which always means moving from a consideration of plural possibilities to a "single" course of action. The further along the movement from plural possibilities to a "single" course of action, the more useful facts become.

Moreover, facts are captured symbolically (in language and/or mathematics), which allows them to be recalled and communicated to other human agents. That facts are retrievable and repeatable is thus of great use to public policy as it coordinates citizens' activities, actions, and behaviors.

Still, it should be kept in mind that facts are not given, but are rather a kind of "achievement"—the ground that citizens and policy-makers have *made* "solid" (by selection and exclusion) for the construction of public policy. Especially in the realm of governmental public policy, facts can be most usefully described not as a substitute for but rather as the result of interactive discussion and choice.

B. Why Facts Tend to be of Limited Usefulness in Public Discussion

Contrary to much conventional wisdom and perhaps even common sense, facts may do more harm than good to some forms of public dialogue—in particular the various types of public discussion described in these essays.

Given the limitations described in the previous section, it is not hard to see why facts might be of limited usefulness in public discussion of possibilities for democratic governance policy. In general, we might say that facts are highly selected and involve an attempt to impose stability and constancy. This makes for an ill fit with public discussion, for at least four reasons.

(1) Undue attention to facts diverts discussion away from the content of policy to assessing the validity of information

A focus on facts diverts attention from the substance of the discussion to the validity of the "information" participants may cite (its sources and the techniques—often quantitative—used to derive and analyze it). These discussions will tend to have an advocacy character, even though there can be no way to definitively resolve them (because they are themselves heavily dependent upon selection). A practical corollary is that experts will tend to control the discussion, using their factual "authority" to silence non-experts.

(2) Undue attention to facts diverts discussion away from governance to government

As already noted, facts are useful for governmental problem-solving. But for that very reason, they tend to get in the way of governance discussions. To the extent discussion focuses on facts, one or more of the following tendencies is likely to develop:

- the policy concern under discussion will be taken as a given rather than be subject to full exploration and development

- interest in immediate concerns will displace longer term and emergent concerns

- how-to questions will displace the exploration and development of conceptual possibilities and their consequences

- a narrow focus on specifics will drive out a consideration of more general questions and answers.

Thus while facts are appropriate to governmental discussion of choices for action, governance discussions require peeling back and reconsidering anew the many interactive sequences by which facts end up being selected (or "prepared" or constructed)—sequences involving theoretical, perceptual, and interpretive frameworks and the consequences of linguistic choices and rules.

This is true even of testing for practical consequences. Facts are useful in practical testing—which may well result in thoughtful revision or development of conceptual possibilities. But the facts that are useful in practical testing are themselves selected by those undertaking testing, and so cannot yield results that are ever "definitive" or "final" or "predictable."

(3) Undue attention to facts diverts discussion away exploration, development, conscious selection and exclusion, and testing of possibilities

As noted in Section A., facts involve multiple and interactive layers of selection and exclusion. Nevertheless, once in place, facts tend to be granted the status of absolutes. To the extent this does take place, focusing on facts in discussion strongly inhibits the discussion of possibilities—of what might be (which is both unpredictable and subject to individual and social choice). Meanwhile, undue attention to facts can lead to attempts to "invalidate" conceptual possibilities rather than thoughtfully consider their possible practical consequences.

(4) Undue attention to facts diverts discussion away from contrasts

Facts result from multiple selections and exclusions, or "narrowings." When discussion focuses on facts, the range of policy possibilities under discussion will tend to be narrowed rather than be subject to full exploration and development and conscious selection and exclusion. Discussing contrasts, on the contrary, necessarily involves a widening—a consideration of plural possibilities.

As with so many aspects of public discussion, these limitations tend to be interactive in that they often reinforce one another, further limiting public discussion of conceptual possibilities for democratic governance policy.

- Focusing on the validity of information will tend to make it difficult or impossible to discuss governance, possibilities, and contrasts.

- Focusing on government rather than governance will tend to make it difficult or impossible to discuss possibilities and any but a narrow range of contrasts.

- Focusing on absolutes rather than open-ended exploration, development, and testing will tend to make it difficult or impossible to discuss governance, possibilities, and contrasts.

- Focusing on a narrow range of givens rather than contrasts will tend to make it difficult or impossible to discuss governance and possibilities.

C. Concepts and Their Usefulness in Public Discussion Described

This section describes concepts and their usefulness in public discussion of contrasting conceptual possibilities.

(1) Concepts described

Concepts can be described as representations that are abstract or general rather than detailed or specific. Concepts can perhaps best be further described in terms of three forms of interactivity. Concepts—particularly those relating to governance:

- connect or organize different entities, whether "things" or "processes"

- do not "stand alone" but rather "take their meaning from their place in a larger theory or network of doctrines and practices with which they are associated"[2]

- require judgment on the part of the user (and, hence, choice) about when, where, and how they apply—and the consequences of doing so.[3]

(2) Usefulness of concepts in public discussion

That concepts are *general* and require *judgment* for their use makes them a useful medium for public discussion.

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[2] Blackburn, Simon. *Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 13.
[3] Blackburn, Simon. *Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 13.

That concepts are general:

- encourages attention to governance rather than the narrow details of "information" or government policy

- makes them suitable for discussion of possibilities for democratic policy governance

- makes them suitable for discussion of possibilities for democratic policy governance that are plural or contrasting

- allows them to be used in public discussion of

  - an area of concern
  - contrasting possibilities
  - possible practical consequences.

That concepts require judgment:

- allows citizens to participate as co-equals with experts or specialists (since concepts strongly resist being stated in authoritative terms, they invite participation on equal terms by both specialists and generalists, citizens and experts)

- calls attention to the various ways that informal and formal choice must be dealt with in discussion.

D. Encouraging a Conceptual Focus in Public Discussion

A conceptual focus during public discussion can be encouraged in a number of ways, including:

- discussing contrasting conceptual possibilities

- focusing discussion on exploration and development and, perhaps to a lesser degree, testing for possible practical consequences

- careful meeting preparation and firm facilitation.

See also:

The Necessity of Choice
B-4

Introduction

Human beings may or may not be endowed with "free will." But we cannot avoid exercising our capacity for choice. The "necessity of choice" refers to the practical reality that as human beings, we are more or less constantly confronted with the need to exercise choice—both in our capacity as actors and in our capacity as inquirers. This is not a particularly controversial notion, even as it applies to inquiry. But the need to confront choice, perhaps particularly during processes of inquiry, is often ignored or denied. Public discussion is intended, among other things, to remind participants of the necessity of choice so that they may exercise their capacity to choose in ways that are conscious, creative, and useful to themselves and to other citizens.

For philosophers (and now cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists), whether we can exercise "free will" when making choices is a question of intense scrutiny and discussion. What has often been lost in this centuries' old discussion of "free will" is the importance of the reality of choice itself. "Free will" may or may not exist; choice does. And—particularly in a democracy—choice exists for citizens in a way that is so pervasive and pressing that it is appropriate to describe it as "the necessity of choice."

A. Action and the Necessity of Choice

The necessity of choice is most obvious in the realm of action. Not all human behavior is the result of conscious, purposive, or intentional, choice. But neither can everything we do be reduced to "instinct," the subconscious, environmental factors, physical processes, or "god's will." Human beings may be by nature more or less "free," more or less "constrained"—but we are neither so free nor so constrained that we can avoid making choices about what to do next. We are free enough—and the external social, cultural, natural (and, perhaps, "supernatural") constraints within which we live loose enough—that we can and must steadily select some things while also excluding others. We cannot do all that we might like to do; we must choose. Interestingly, too, the more we imagine we might do, the greater our burden of choice: the more we multiply possibilities, the more we must select and exclude from among possibilities order to actually act on any one of them. This is particularly true for democratic citizens, who are called upon to think and choose both for themselves as individuals and for society.

American culture strongly values "choice." Curiously, our culture also seems to treat choice as "occasional" or "avoidable" rather than "necessary" in the sense being developed here. Consider these conventional strategies for limiting or avoiding choice—and how they are challenged by the necessity of choice:

- Certainty—yet certainty is vanishingly elusive even in the purely theoretical realms of mathematics and logic (while theoretical certainties, if they did exist, would still require application to practical realities—always an imprecise or "uncertain" procedure)

- Passivity—yet "doing nothing" is itself a choice

- Delay—yet delaying a choice represents a choice to wait to do something

- Routine—yet however mechanical, a routine is of course simply the result of a choice to repeatedly do things in a certain way or sequence

- Habit—yet habits, too, are the result of a sequences of choices and are changeable through choice

- Addiction—addiction adds an element of dependency to habit, but is also the result of a sequence of (admittedly less and less "free") choices

Moreover, it should be noted that all of these purported instances of "non-choice" can be changed or at least altered by the exercise of future choices. (This is true even of addiction. Were it not, there would be no such thing as ex-addicts.)

Hence the necessity of choice cannot be evaded. Even to evade choice one must first choose to evade it; having chosen to evade choice, one can always choose to alter one's course by further choice.

B. Inquiry and the Necessity of Choice

Public discussion is a particular form of inquiry ultimately aimed at promoting democratic discussion and, ultimately, enhancing public policy, a form of regularized action. And inquiry, no less than action, is subject to the necessity of choice because selection and exclusion are involved at every stage of inquiry.

- Inquiry does not begin "automatically," of its own accord. We begin inquiring when we are motivated to do so by an interest or concern. Interests and concerns may appear self-evident or "given." But even the most pressing concerns compete for our attention. Hence inquiring about one concern rather than another usually involves a significant element of choice.

- Inquiry does not begin in a "place" of its own choosing, either. Once initiated by a choice, inquiry must be given a starting point—a question (or series of questions). This, too, requires choice.

- Questions usually admit of more than a single possible answer. Further choices usually must be made about which possible answers are worthy of

further attention. Here again, we see that the necessity of choice very often arises out of the plurality of our concerns and the possibilities that might address them.

- Once the process of inquiry has selected a set of possible answers to a chosen set of possible questions, those possible answers can be further developed. This development process, too, requires choice or, more precisely, two kinds of interactive choices. In order to develop possible answers (possibilities) we must choose:

  - which of our multiple *concerns* will continue to guide, shape, inform, and constrain our inquiry about possibilities
  - which *conceptual* alternatives to include in the various possibilities we are developing.

- A consideration of the possible practical consequences of policy possibilities is integral to policy inquiry. Such testing activity, too, requires choice because we cannot possibly imagine all of the likely or probable consequences that might follow from any given policy possibility. We must of necessity select some consequences for consideration and choose to ignore others.

- Discussion as a form of inquiry of course relies heavily on language. As anyone who has ever used a thesaurus knows, language is, among other things, a matter of choice. Not only individual words, but syntax, style, tone, and structure are all rhetorically "constructed."

- Policy inquiry begins with the necessity of choice; it must also end there if it is to be "practical" or useful rather than "theoretical".   Policy inquiry could go on forever—but only at the cost of being severely divorced from action. To make sense as a practical activity, then, policy inquiry—like all human activities—must confront a final instance of the necessity of choice: the necessity of choosing when (or where) to stop inquiry.

C. The Consequences of Ignoring The Necessity of Choice

The necessity of choice does not describe a metaphysical or physical reality so much as an ubiquitous practical challenge that is best met head on. Ignoring the necessity of choice (like failing to deal effectively with uncertainty) can impose serious consequences. Failing to confront the necessity of choice can mean failing to:

- take responsibility

- understand or appreciate others' choices, especially if different from one's own

- engage in the serious exploration, development, and practical testing of alternative possible choices.

D. Confronting The Necessity of Choice in Public Discussion

Public discussion can be described as not only confronting, but openly embracing, the necessity of choice because:

- its very purpose is to expand and clarify the range of possible choices available for further discussion, choice, and possible action by a democratic public

- it begins with a deliberate effort to broaden participants' understanding of the possible questions and answers in the selected area of concern

- all of its important aspects—its individual steps as well as the general features that apply to all of its steps—rely on some degree of informal or formal selection and exclusion, as indicated in Table B-4.1., on the following page.

Table B-4.1. Choice/Selection and Exclusion in Public Discussion

Aspect of Public Discussion	Type of Choice/Selection and Exclusion
Individual Discussion Steps	
Exploration and Development of the Area of Concern	Informal, by participants
Exploration and Development of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities	Informal, by participants
Selection and Exclusion of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities	Formal, by participants
Translation of Contrasting Conceptual Possibilities into Relational Constructions	Formal, by discussion facilitator/editor with participant review
Testing for Possible Practical Consequences	Informal, by participants
Writing of Staff Work Report	Formal, by discussion facilitator/editor with participant review
General Aspects	
Possibilities	Formal, by participants after thoughtful discussion of "what might be" rather than "what is" or "what must be"
Contrasting Nature of Possibilities	Formal, by participants after thoughtful discussion of alternatives
Facilitation	Informal, by discussion facilitator/editor
Editing of Discussion Work Materials	Formal, by facilitator/editor with participant review
Non-linearity	Informal, by participants who are free to reconsider preliminary choices, aided by discussion facilitator/editor
Use of Language	Informal initially to keep choices open; becomes formal only as ongoing discussion enables the translation of contrasting conceptual possibilities into relational constructions

See also:

A-6, "Language and Public Discussion" (pp. 53-56)
B-1, "Change and Consequences" (pp. 116-18)
B-2, "Absolutes and Uncertainty" (pp. 119-23)

Interactivity
B-5

Introduction

This essay provides a general description of interactivity. Readers will develop a fuller understanding of interactivity by consulting other essays in this volume, which describe particular forms of interactivity.

A. Interactivity Described

Interactivity always involves a living or physical *process* or a *relationship* (or multiple processes or relationships). The most important features of interactivity are that it:

1. unfolds over time as ongoing change

2. unfolds among or between entities (whether these be persons, physical or linguistic "objects," or processes)

3. yields something more than the mere sum of the entities which enter into it

4. is non-linear

5. is developmental

6. can take various forms

7. can yield different outcomes (or products or results) depending on the form it takes.

Any one of these features would make interactivity difficult to capture in a neat formula. (For example, because there are multiple types of interactivity, no one "definition" will fit them all.) Together, the interactivity among its primary characteristics renders a formal definition of interactivity impossible. This isn't to say that interactivity is somehow ineffable or mysterious. Each of its features can be more fully described. And they can be illustrated. The remainder of this essay will do both. (Many of the other essays in this series describe individual instances of interactivity in greater detail.)

(1) Interactivity unfolds over time

Whatever its form, interactivity needs time to unfold. Even forms of interactivity that appear to exist "outside of time" such as between language and concepts, or between thought and action, can be seen to have a significant temporal element, if

only because they relate to human beings, who are unavoidably situated in time. The language and concepts we use, as well as the relationships that develop between them exist—and unfold—in time. Likewise, our thoughts and actions, and the many ways they relate to each other, emerge in a temporal context of constant change.

(2) Interactivity unfolds among or between entities

Interactivity is dynamic: it involves movement or action. The movement or action is always between or among more than one thing, person, or process. One can certainly imagine interactivity within a single person, thing, or process, but even then there would have to be different parts or aspects of the person, thing, or process involved moving or acting on one another.

(3) Interactivity yields more than the mere sum of the entities which enter into it

Interactivity can no more be reduced to the sum of its parts at the level of consequences than at the level of process. Because interactivity involves reciprocal influence of one sort or another, it will change the persons or entities that are party to it. The result of interactivity will always be something other than the "average" of the entities' starting positions.

Interactivity describes something beyond collective thought or action. The entities involved must do more than think, or act or move *in the same direction*; they must have some kind of effect on each other, as well.

(4) Interactivity is non-linear

Interactivity does not unfold in a straightforward fashion, but involves digressions, detours, and backtracking. When it leads to useful results or "progress," it may do so through incremental or "breakthrough" steps, or through a combination of slow and steady movement with more rapid change.

(5) Interactivity is developmental

Because interactivity involves processes that are both non-additive and non-linear it is also developmental—in two senses. First, interactivity's outcomes, results, or consequences are unpredictable or open-ended. Second, interactivity's consequences are neither final nor absolute. They are, rather, subject to ongoing change or revision.

(6) Interactivity can take various forms

Interactivity comes in a multitude of forms. Among those most relevant to public discussion are conceptual, discursive, and practical forms of interactivity (all of which are critically involved in individual and social choice for both thought and action)—and the various forms of interactivity that exist among these. And each

of these can be further divided, in some cases into classes of interactivity that are wholly unique to the entities involved. But interactivity can also exist in other arenas as well. For example, it is increasingly clear that some biological processes display interactivity. Perhaps even some fundamental chemical and physical processes are best thought of in terms of interactivity, as well.

No one form of interactivity dominates public discussion (see Section B.2., below). It is, rather, the multiplicity of forms of interactivity that distinguishes public discussion.

(7) Different forms of interactivity yield different consequences

Different processes and ways of relating yield different consequences or outcomes. To take but three examples: conceptual relationships yield conceptual outcomes; personal relationships yield personal outcomes; and different kinds of personal relationships yield different kinds of consequences: psychological, ethical, economic, social, political, and cultural.

B. Interactivity Illustrated

(1) Interactivity—a general illustration: voting with and without discussion

The electoral process can involve more or less interactivity. One form of interactivity that may be involved in the electoral process is democratic discussion. By contrast, the mass casting of ballots is certainly a coordinated (or collective) process, but involves no significant interactivity. Democratic discussion among voters exhibits all of the primary features of interactivity. Democratic discussion:

- unfolds over time, in this case the period roughly corresponding to the election cycle

- unfolds among or between entities, in this case those who discuss the election

- yields something more than the mere sum of the entities which enter into it, in this case changed perceptions and, sometimes, changed choices

- is non-linear, in the sense that it pursues its own "internal" dynamic

- is developmental, in the sense that it has no fixed "end" point

- can take various forms, because discussions can take place in various places, in various ways, for varying periods of time, and among varying numbers and kinds of individuals and groups

- can yield different consequences depending on the form it takes, because different types of discussion are likely to produce different results or "effects."

(2) Interactivity—illustrations from public discussion

Public discussion can aptly be described as an "interactivity of interactivities," which is to say that it involves numerous forms of interactivity, often several at once. As noted earlier, a fuller description of particular instances of interactivity in public discussion, as well as the forms of interactivity between them, is left to other essays. Table B-5.1. presents a selected list of specific cases of interactivity in public discussion as illustrations of the seven aspects of interactivity identified in Section A..

Table B-5.1. Interactivities in Public Discussion

Interactivity in Public Discussion	Illustrates that Interactivity…
Between staff work report and discussion participants	• is developmental • unfolds between or among entities
Among discussion participants	• unfolds over time • unfolds between or among entities • yields more than the sum of its parts • is non-linear
Between results of public discussion and other citizens and/or policy-makers who make use of them for further democratic discussion and/or policy action	• unfolds over time • unfolds between or among entities • is developmental • can take various forms • can have different results
Among types of public discussion • of an area of concern • of contrasting conceptual possibilities • of possible practical consequences	• unfolds over time • unfolds between or among entities • yields more than the sum of its parts • is non-linear • is developmental • can take various forms • can have different results

See also:

IF-1, "Overview of the Interactivity Foundation Discussion Process" (pp. 2-7)
U-5, "The Senses in Which Public Discussion is Democratic" (pp. 110-14)
B-1, "Change and Consequences" (116-18)
B-6, "Some Root Concepts: 'Truth,' 'Method,' and 'the Good'" (pp. 139-46)

Some Root Concepts: "Truth," "Method," and "the Good"
B-6

Introduction

From a practical point of view, the usefulness of public discussion depends in the first instance not on theoretical claims about "truth," "method," or "the Good," but on how well it actually works in practice. As a practical activity, public discussion needs to be judged according to its practical results. Nevertheless, in order to be able to judge practical results we must ultimately rely on some more abstract or theoretical notion of what counts as "useful" to begin with. Without such a notion, judging the results of public discussion would be impossible. These essays have suggested many of the key elements of such a notion: the extent to which public discussion involves and engages citizens; the breadth and quality of the new questions it explores and the new possibilities it develops; and the degree to which it succeeds in broadening and clarifying citizens' choices—all of these are relevant to judging the "usefulness" of public discussion. Still, one might ask what supports these concepts or, better, what nourishes them. Are these various components rooted in a particular understanding of "truth," or in a commitment to a particular "method" of arriving at truth, or in a certain view of "the Good"? The answer, described in this final essay, is that public discussion has roots in concepts related to each of these conventional categories, roots which are highly interactive and themselves continually nourished by practice.

A. Root Concepts: "Truth," "Method," and "the Good"

On what does the usefulness of public discussion ultimately depend? —Not on its conformity to certain plausible views about what is "true"; not on its dependability as a "method" for arriving at "truth"; not on its consistency with a compelling view of "the Good." The usefulness of public discussion depends, rather, on all of these to some extent, but especially on the *interactivity* between them and their ability to "grow" as they develop in response to actual practice.

(1) Individual concepts of "truth," "method," and "the Good"

Public discussion has firm but flexible roots in clusters of interactive concepts related to "truth," "method," and "the Good."

Public discussion's conceptual roots are "firm" both in the sense of being well-grounded in reflection on practice and in the sense of providing a coherent and clear approach to further practical and conceptual activity. They are "flexible" in the sense that they are compatible with a variety of "fundamental" or "basic" religious and philosophical orientations and convictions.

The interactive concepts that make up public discussion's root concepts of "truth," "method," and "the Good" have all been described in detail in earlier

essays. Here they are clustered together so that readers can see how they converge with and diverge from more conventional understandings of these categories.

a. "truth"

Public discussion is rooted in a cluster of concepts relating to "truth," including:

- the pervasiveness of change, viewed as sequences of consequences

- the lack of absolutes

- possibilities (which have a conceptual quality because they deal with "what might be")

- exploration

- development

- the necessity of choice

- the selectiveness of facts and the importance of concepts

- governance (which is conceptual as well as practical)

- interactivity.

b. "method"

Public discussion is rooted in a cluster of concepts relating to "method" including:

- interactivity

- exploration

- development

- testing for possible practical consequences

- convergence

- language's potential both to limit discussion and to communicate its results to other citizens.

**c.	"the Good"**

Public discussion is rooted in a cluster of concepts relating to "the Good," including:

- possibilities (which concern "what might be" rather than "what should be")

- democratic discussion as the cooperative exploration and development of possibilities and choices

- individual and social choice as both a response to emerging consequences and the source of future consequences

- expansion and clarification of citizens' individual and social choices.

(2) Interactivity between root concepts

Unlike many "theories" or "philosophies," public discussion's root concepts are not all derived from a single source, whether a view of "truth," "method," or "the Good." Instead, the root concepts that pertain to such traditional categories *interactively support* one another, as can be seen by reading across the rows in Table B-6.1. on the following three pages.

Table B-6.1. Interactivity between Public Discussion's Root Concepts

	"TRUTH"	**"METHOD"**	**"THE GOOD"**
"TRUTH"			
Pervasiveness of Change (Consequences)		• exploration • development • testing	• choice as both a response to emerging consequences & source of future consequences • expansion & clarification of choice • democratic discussion as cooperative exploration & development of possibilities & choices
Lack of Absolutes		• interactivity (in discussion) • exploration • development • testing for consequences • convergence	
Development		• development • convergence	
Necessity of Choice		• exploration • development • convergence	
Selectiveness of Facts, Importance of Concepts		• exploration • development • convergence • language as first limiting possibilities & then a means of sharing possibilities	
Governance		• exploration • development • convergence	
Possibilities		• exploration • development	
Interactivity (of concepts)		• interactivity (in discussion) • convergence	
[Table B-6.1. continued on following page]			

Table B-6.1. Interactivity between Public Discussion's Root Concepts
(continued)

	"TRUTH"	"METHOD"	"THE GOOD"
"METHOD"			
Interactivity (in discussion)	• lack of absolutes • interactivity (of concepts)		• democratic discussion as cooperative exploration & development of possibilities & choices
Exploration	• pervasiveness of change • lack of absolutes		
Development	*All aspects*		• expansion & clarification of choice
Testing for Possible Practical Consequences	• change as consequences • lack of absolutes • necessity of choice • facts, concepts • governance • possibilities		
Convergence	• lack of absolutes • development • necessity of choice • facts, concepts • governance • interactivity (of concepts)		• democratic discussion as cooperative exploration & development of possibilities & choices
Language as First Limiting Possibilities & Then a Means of Sharing Possibilities	• lack of absolutes • development • necessity of choice • facts, concepts • interactivity (of concepts)		• choice as both a response to emerging consequences & source of future consequences
[Table B-6.1. continued on following page]			

Table B-6.1. Interactivity between Public Discussion's Root Concepts (continued)

	"TRUTH"	"METHOD"	"THE GOOD"
"THE GOOD"			
Democratic Discussion as Cooperative Exploration & Development of Possibilities & Choices	• pervasiveness of change, viewed as a sequences of consequences • lack of absolutes • development • necessity of choice • facts, concepts • governance • possibilities • interactivity (of concepts)	• interactivity (in discussion) • convergence	
Choice as Both a Response to Emerging Consequences & Source of Future Consequences		• language as first limiting possibilities & then a means of sharing possibilities	
Expansion & Clarification of Choice		• exploration • development • testing	

(3) organic development of root concepts

Root concepts are not "givens" but rather a means for exploring possible answers to possible questions regarding democratic governance policy in selected areas of concern. For this reason, root concepts are not static. They evolve over time through interactivity—both between conceptual reflection and actual practice and between individual persons and groups of persons. The root concepts discussed in this series have all undergone two stages of development: "doing" (i.e., their actual use as practical guides) and further refinement as discussion of the results of "doing" has led to further "learning." Rather than being seen as complete, root concepts should be viewed as being under continual interactive development as a result of ongoing discussion about their interaction with the practical "environment" of actual public discussion.

Another way of describing this important aspect of root concepts is to say that there is significant interactivity between root concepts' practical and organic aspects. Root concepts can be seen as having been developed through a process of learning by interactive reflection on experience and are thus organic rather than mechanical. They can also serve as practical guides to public discussion, the conduct of which in turn informs their continued development. The practical use of root concepts thus sustains their conceptual development while the conceptual development of root concepts sustains their practical use.

B. Contrasts with Other Approaches

In some respects at least, the notion of root concepts is bound to sound familiar. Many organizations are engaged in practical policy work; certainly some are genuinely committed to continual development of their own conceptual underpinnings. And some, like Interactivity Foundation (IF), attempt to make the most out of the interactivity between practice and development of possibilities. At the same time, it is important to avoid confusing root concepts with a number of even more familiar notions, such as "assumptions," "first principles," "foundations," "building blocks," "fundamentals," and "frameworks"—all of which (though perhaps in varying degrees) tend to be deductive rather than interactive, and static rather than developmental. Unlike the root concepts that inform and guide public discussion, such notions:

- may be used for purely theoretical purposes such as description, explanation, or prediction rather than as practical guides to action

- even when practical, may be so abstractly formulated as to be of little use as guides to practical action

- tend to focus discussion on the "ultimate" or "essential" reasons for doing things rather than on useful ways of accomplishing objectives to which different individuals can be committed for different reasons and at different times

- tend to be posited as "givens" rather than seen as emerging from discussion

- tend to be understood as the "starting points" from which other concepts are deduced rather than as interactive with other concepts

- as "starting points" or "givens," tend to get in the way of continual development rather than inviting it and even depending on it

- because they tend to be difficult to alter, these notions—particularly when used as "givens"—usually:

  o lag behind changing circumstances
  o impose overly rigid constraints on action
  o dampen or even block learning from interactive reflection on experience.

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See also: