

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Beyond Problem Solving: Reconceptualizing the Work of Public Deliberation as Deliberative Inquiry

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This article introduces deliberative inquiry (DI), a practical theory designed to guide the work of deliberative practitioners working in their local communities to better address wicked problems by improving the quality of public discourse. DI reconceptualizes the work of public deliberation as sparking and sustaining a unique form of inquiry suited to addressing wicked problems. DI moves from a linear event-focused model where deliberation produces refined public opinion and decision outcomes to using deliberative principles to guide a cyclical learning process. DI seeks to improve community decision making by focusing on obstacles to deliberative engagement, deliberative tensions inherent to wicked problems, and resources for collaborative action. Understanding of these elements is refined throughout the 4 tasks of the deliberative cycle.

Keywords: Deliberation, Inquiry, Collaboration, Wicked Problems, Deliberative Practitioner.

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Many of the problems plaguing local communities are wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973)—problems that are “ill-formulated, involve uncertainty and confusing information, have many decision-makers and affected parties with different and conflicting values, and promise ramifications for the whole system” (Ferkany & Whyte, 2012, p. 3). Such problems pose particular governance and communication challenges. Most importantly for our purposes, the systemic and paradoxical nature of wicked problems means they cannot be solved in the sense that a solution can be identified and implemented that results in the problem being settled for any significant time frame. Rather than attempting to solve wicked problems, communities need better processes for discovering, understanding, and managing the tensions and paradoxes inherent within systemic, value-laden problems. As Charles Handy (1995) argues:

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The more turbulent the times, the more complex the world, the more paradoxes there are. We can, and should, reduce the starkness of some of the contradictions, minimize the inconsistencies, understand the puzzles in the paradoxes, but we cannot make them disappear, or solve them completely... paradox has to be *accepted*, coped with, and made sense of, in life, in work, in the community, and among nations. (pp. 12–13)

Owing to the prevalence and endurance of wicked problems, communities must develop increased capacity to manage them in order to thrive. Addressing wicked problems well requires at least three components: (1) broad, diverse, engaged audiences who are exposed to quality information and consider multiple perspectives, (2) genuine opportunities for those audiences to work through the inherent tensions, tradeoffs, and paradoxes to issues, and (3) ongoing collaborative and complementary actions designed in response to those tensions. In this essay, we argue that a particular deliberative approach we term deliberative inquiry (DI) is well suited to help communities better handle wicked problems. Drawing on Daniels and Walker's work on collaborative learning (Daniels & Walker, 2001), DI is a perpetual learning process that combines traditional policy analysis and the analysis of public discourse with structured, productive interaction between relevant parties, all with an eye toward identifying and supporting the move to action by a broad range of actors. We offer DI both as a practical guide for deliberative practitioners to improve and reflect upon their work, as well as a road map for theorists and researchers to understand deliberation as a cyclical learning process with particular key elements and practices.

This essay provides a practical theory for using DI to address wicked problems facing communities. Substantial gaps between deliberative theory and practice are widely acknowledged (Mutz, 2008; Thompson, 2008). One productive means of bridging theory and practice is to evaluate whether deliberative practice sufficiently meets criteria for deliberation developed from normative theory (e.g., Knobloch, Gastil, Reedy, & Cramer Walsh, 2013; Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, & Leighninger, 2012). DI inverts this relationship. Rather than starting as a normative theory, DI was developed through extended engagement with deliberative practice.¹ Both authors worked as deliberative practitioners with the Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation (CPD), doing the work of designing deliberative forums in our region. Following Barge and Craig's (2009) suggestions for managing tensions in practical theory, we also engaged other deliberative practitioners in ongoing conversations through the Kettering Foundation, Public Agenda, the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation, and the University Network for Collaborative Governance. These conversations contributed to the development of the theory and also position us to share insights gained from our research and experience.

DI is a practical theory (Cronen, 2001) of how deliberation can be used to "address practical problems and generate new possibilities for action" (Barge & Craig, 2009, p. 55), particularly at the local level. DI fits within the tradition of practical theory as transformative practice (Barge, 2001). This type of practical theory is assessed by whether it informs patterns of practice that make life better. We developed this

theory to help practitioners design effective interventions in their communities. Our theory will prove its value when employed by practitioners to guide their practice. DI provides a theoretical orientation for learning about local issues that integrates deliberation into how communities address wicked problems and offers a process model (the deliberative cycle) for doing this work.

As a practical theory, DI foregrounds and significantly expands the role of the deliberative practitioner (Fischer, 2004; Forester, 1999). Within DI, practitioners serve as process experts who actively work to cultivate deliberative habits in their community and translate deliberative practice into usable knowledge concerning the issue at hand (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979). The deliberative practitioner in DI must serve multiple roles: postempirical policy analyst (Fischer, 2003), emphatic critic (Condit, 1993), issue framer, process designer, convener, facilitator, and reporter. We reconceptualize the *work* of the deliberative practitioner by theorizing it in terms of sparking and sustaining a unique form of inquiry. In turn, this theory has utility for training deliberative practitioners by laying out core competencies of deliberative work.

The focus on the role of the practitioner in DI raises important questions regarding the relationships between practitioners, participants in deliberative events, and the broader public. In DI, practitioners play a key role in cultivating, designing, and supporting deliberative practice; but they are also central to the insights produced through deliberation. Practitioners, for example, are responsible for analyzing the data produced at deliberative events and reporting on these events in a way that contributes to the public dialogue and informs subsequent engagement. This does not discount the learning experienced by participants within deliberative events. As deliberative theory and research contend, deliberation has an educative effect for participants (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006; Pincock, 2012). Participants engage in social learning about other perspectives (Kanra, 2012), learn about the issues under discussion (Fishkin, 1997), and develop democratic skills, attitudes, and dispositions (Gastil, 2004). Owing to the self-reinforcing nature of deliberative practice (Burkhalter, Gastil, & Kelshaw, 2002), the role of practitioners may diminish over time as communities develop stronger habits of deliberation and collaboration on their own, and require fewer interventions.

To situate our practical theory, we briefly describe the work of the CPD and introduce illustrative cases. We then review deliberative democracy theory and research that inform our work and explain how DI differs from prominent models of deliberation within communication research. Then we discuss key elements of DI that contribute essential insights for addressing public problems: obstacles to deliberative engagement, deliberative tensions inherent to wicked problems, and resources for collaboration. Finally, we explain the deliberative cycle, a process model for doing DI within communities.

Local context and cases

The CPD was established in 2006 to serve as an impartial resource to northern Colorado. It was developed in response to the limitations of the dominant expert

and adversarial models of public discourse, particularly in terms of their inability to address wicked problems effectively (Carcasson, 2014; Carcasson & Sprain, 2012). Its mission is to *enhance local democracy through improved public communication and community problem solving*. It attempts to create the conditions for better communication by running projects designed to help the public talk and work together across perspectives in innovative ways (Sprain & Carcasson, 2013). Utilizing trained undergraduate students as facilitators, the CPD initially began running meetings on public issues to provide students with a community experience and introduce the community to deliberative processes. Those projects quickly revealed the limitations of an event-focused model of deliberation. As the CPD was asked to run projects by local governments and community organizations, the faculty realized that what happens before and after these meetings was critical for moving from weaker forms of public participation (e.g., public participation for personal benefit or communicative influence) to stronger forms (e.g., cogovernance and direct authority) (Fung, 2006). The cycle of DI was thus developed to capture and organize the broader range of tasks the CPD delivered to the community.

CPD faculty are *pracademics* (Ponser, 2009)—individuals working to make deliberation happen through the design and facilitation of public processes (practitioners) while using research to analyze the issues, evaluate deliberative practices, and improve deliberative designs (academics). As boundary spanners and brokers, pracademics can make singular contributions to both academic and practitioner communities (Ponser, 2009). To illustrate DI, we draw on three case studies where we engaged in DI: K-12 grade configuration, water conflict, and Silver Tsunami. Nonetheless, our practical theory was developed through—and is supported by—over 30 community projects, ranging from single meetings to ongoing, multiyear processes that have received awards.

Grade configuration

Our local school district considered reconfiguring grades. The town had 3-year junior high schools (grades 7–9) and 3-year high schools (10–12). Many parents felt 9th graders needed to be in high school, yet a switch would mean that 6th grade was moved into middle school, which many opposed. The school district wanted the public to weigh in on the issue, but it did not want to hold a public hearing that would polarize parents. Instead, the school district approached the CPD to design meetings that would frame the tough choices facing the district, and engage participants in small group deliberations about these approaches to better inform the school board's decision.

Water conflict

Our community is embroiled in a prolonged conflict over a proposed reservoir, which has polarized the community. A coalition of government, university, and business groups thought that our community needed to find more productive ways to talk about water, but they did not want to only discuss the reservoir. This group developed

a three-part series over 4 months to discuss an overarching question: How should our community meet future water needs? The series started with a public dialogue where invited speakers talked about what they valued about the river before public comments. Three educational sessions with presentations about water law, conservation, engineering options, and the like followed, which were recorded and shown often on local public access television. Finally, the CPD facilitated small group deliberations wherein participants could work through four broad approaches to meeting future water needs that highlighted the inherent tensions.

Silver Tsunami

Our town faces what has been called the “Silver Tsunami,” the projected wave of aging and retiring baby boomers. Working with the local senior center, we have held eight large public meetings sharing demographic trends and identifying and working through community priorities for how to adapt to the Silver Tsunami and spark a more “age friendly” community. The ongoing program won an award from the state association of senior centers, sparked the creation of two new nonprofit organizations, and contributed to a national grant from the National Association of Area Offices on Aging.

Deliberative democracy theory and research

Since the deliberative turn in democratic theory around 1990, scholarly attention to deliberation has exploded. Deliberative work includes normative theory on deliberative democracy, empirical research on the efficacy of deliberation, a movement for political reform, and a profession of forum design and facilitation (Dryzek, 2010). This proliferation has resulted in multiple conceptions of deliberation itself: deliberation as a form of talk (e.g., Pan, Shen, Paek, & Sun, 2006), deliberation as a way of making collective decisions and reaching mutual understanding (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2008), deliberation as careful weighing of alternatives (e.g., Mathews, 1994), deliberation as a social and analytical process (e.g., Gastil & Black, 2008), and deliberation as an organizing principle for political life (e.g., Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). Indeed, *Communication Theory* has been an important place to conceptualize deliberation (e.g., Black, 2008; Burkhalter et al., 2002) and explore links between deliberative theory and practice (e.g., Hickerson & Gastil, 2008; Pingree, 2007; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2006; Tracy & Muller, 2001) without authors necessarily sharing the same understanding of deliberation. In this piece, we use a general definition of deliberation as groups of individuals engaging in an inclusive, respectful, and reasoned consideration of information, views, experiences, and ideas (Nabatchi, 2012).²

DI draws heavily on theoretical and empirical work on deliberative democracy. Two rationales for preferring deliberative democracy over other democratic models are often provided: its intrinsic value and instrumental benefits (Nabatchi, 2012). Recognizing divisions between government decision-makers and the public, Habermas (1984, 1987) provides deliberation as a corrective to power inequalities that leave

the public without influence. Thus the opportunity to participate in effective deliberation is central to democratic legitimacy (Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2000). Gutmann and Thompson (2004) argue that deliberation promotes mutually respectful processes of decision-making in the face of incompatible values. Deliberation does not make these differences suddenly compatible, but it can help participants recognize the moral merit in an opponent's claim, thereby fostering mutual respect and reciprocity.

Deliberation also provides instrumental benefits for individuals, communities, and government institutions. Normative theory argues that deliberation results in better policy decisions (e.g., lessens impacts of bounded rationality, forces public justification of private demands, increases policy consensus, legitimizes the ultimate choice), builds community capacity (e.g., cultivates leadership, promotes community organizing, and fosters collaboration), and benefits individual participants (e.g., provides civic education, refines individual positions, builds political efficacy and sophistication, and fosters mutual understanding between perspectives) (Bohman, 1998; Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). In turn, empirical research has evaluated the extent to which these instrumental benefits are accomplished in practice (for review, see Kinney, 2012; Pincock, 2012; Ryfe, 2005).

DI presumes these intrinsic and instrumental benefits; it focuses on the practical tasks necessary to realize them. What distinguishes DI from many other theories of deliberation is the understanding of *how* deliberative outputs best contribute to policy-making, governance, and community action. Deliberative events are "typically one-off experiments that occur within the confines of a single issue over a short period of time" (Nabatchi, 2014, p. 1). Such linear processes result in an output (e.g., a verdict, written analysis, or statement that conveys a judgment and reasoning) that articulates the conclusions of the deliberating group (Knobloch et al., 2013; O'Doherty, 2013). To discuss two prominent deliberative designs in communication research, the Citizens' Initiative Review produces a Citizens' Statement that highlights the most important findings from a weeklong deliberation about a measure (Knobloch et al., 2013). In Deliberative Polling, the "deliberative conclusions" of a randomly selected sample are aggregated through individual surveys to represent a counterfactual but informed opinion (Fishkin, 2009). These deliberative outputs contribute to policy-making and governance in several ways. Sometimes the outputs are simply inserted into the public discourse through reports and media coverage that share the "deliberative conclusions" as a form of refined public opinion (Fishkin, 2009). The Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review publishes the Citizens' Statement in the voter's guide, and social science research demonstrates that other voters use it as a cue for their own voting choices (Gastil, Richards, & Knobloch, 2014).

Alternatively, DI offers a model of how deliberative outputs can contribute to ongoing, local community efforts to address wicked problems by expanding what counts as a deliberative output. Within DI, the output of any single deliberative event may not come in the form of conclusions about an issue—at least not in the form of a verdict or policy statement. Instead, DI is a cyclical process focused on producing and utilizing insights about three key elements discussed below: (1) obstacles to

deliberative engagement, (2) deliberative tensions, and (3) resources for collaborative action.

Key elements of DI

DI focuses on much of the same material that would be found in other typical forms of problem solving, such as defining problems and their impacts, identifying a range of causes and potential actions, establishing criteria for judging the value of those actions, and weighing the positive and negative consequences among them. DI, however, has three subject areas of particular concern to deliberative practitioners. Throughout the process of DI, practitioners keep an eye on these elements, working to better understand them, sparking greater understanding and engagement of them in the community, and ultimately improving how the community manages wicked problems by helping them overcome obstacles, work through the tensions, and build on the resources.

Obstacles to deliberative engagement

The first element of DI focuses on a wide range of troublesome issues that impede the tackling of wicked problems. Deliberative engagement seeks genuine interaction and communication across perspectives. Unfortunately, bringing multiple perspectives together in the same room to address difficult issues can be problematic, especially in a fractured political environment dominated by distrust, polarization, and cynicism (Pew Research Center, 2014). To identify the most relevant situated obstacles, the deliberative practitioner asks: what is making it difficult for relevant audiences to engage each other and the issue productively? What do we need to know or deal with before we bring people together (again) to engage this topic? Once identified, the deliberative practitioner may attempt to resolve those barriers, design processes that bracket or mitigate them, or take them on directly.

Deliberative theorists discuss many challenges to accomplishing deliberation, such as power imbalances between participants, citizens' motivation and aptitude, lack of political conversation across differences, manipulation of public opinion, group polarization, and the lack of safe, public places for authentic public discussion (e.g., Collingwood & Reedy, 2012; Fishkin, 2009; Hendriks, 2009). We agree with Kadlec and Friedman (2007), who argue that although these challenges are significant, deliberative practitioners can often mitigate their impacts through planning and process design. Beyond the general obstacles to deliberation noted above, our work has encountered three types of obstacles that have received less attention: simplifications that overexaggerate differences between perspectives that can cause undo polarization, the misrepresentation of motives, and factual gaps or disputes.

One of the most common problems within discourse on public issues is that issues—even complex issues like wicked problems—are simplified and framed narrowly. This simplification is often fueled by human nature and people wanting to avoid paradox and tough choices, which pushes them to rely on *wishful thinking*

(Yankelovich, 1991). Some of the markers of simplification include *magic bullets* (assuming there is one solution to complex problems), *devil figures/scapegoats* (assuming the problem is caused by one individual or entity), or *paradox splitting* (Bryan, 2004) (attempts to resolve a difficult issue by focusing on one side of a paradox and ignoring or dismissing the other). Within grade reconfiguration, many parents were guilty of paradox splitting, focusing on either the importance of having 9th graders in high school or the concerns of 6th graders moving up to junior high thereby ignoring the inherent tension between those two options. At the beginning of the Silver Tsunami project, it was clear that many participants overemphasized the importance and feasibility of expanded public transportation options to address mobility issues for seniors, to the point that it served as a magic bullet that needed to be deconstructed. Similarly, in the water project, some believed that either conservation measures or efforts to stop growth would be sufficient to solve future water needs. Deliberative engagement in each project was designed in part to disrupt those assumptions. All of these assumptions oversimplify the issue, making it easier to believe that there is one clear, obvious solution, which makes it more difficult to commit to the tough work of developing mutual understanding and deliberating across perspectives.

Wishful thinking is particularly problematic because it often sparks polarization, as opposing sides struggle to understand how opponents could possibly justify their viewpoints. When groups are polarized, misrepresentations of the motives of opposing groups serve as red herrings, keeping a community from understanding the real issue or working together (Yankelovich, 1991). In its worst form, each side attacks positions that no one actually holds, and polarization and distrust increase through a vicious cycle. During grade configuration, some parents thought that the new superintendent was just trying to make a name for himself by making big changes. By attributing selfish motives to him, these parents dismissed the proposal without taking time to understand the issue from the district's perspective. Deliberative practitioners should look for ways that groups fundamentally misunderstand other people since they are unlikely to collaborate productively without trust. Deliberative interventions work to transform conflicts animated by good versus evil "wicked people" narratives to ones that redefine perceived adversaries as collaborators facing a shared wicked problem.

Public discussions also get derailed when opposing sides operate with a significantly distinct set of facts, especially when those facts are strategically selected and framed to support predetermined positions and appeal to specific audiences. Similarly, significant gaps between public assumptions and expert knowledge can also be problematic (Daniels & Walker, 2001). During the water forums, disputed factual issues often kept groups from grappling with the broader issues; for example, people disagreed about the cost and environmental impact of a particular reservoir. DI seeks out and tries to address such issues. Sometimes they can actually be resolved empirically by experts or participants; other times, fact questions need to be reframed as disagreements over what should be done rather than an issue of what is (Sprain, Carcasson, & Merolla, 2014). The Silver Tsunami forums began with a presentation by

the state demographer due to the lack of awareness of changing demographics and the corresponding need to establish a common base of information. Although resolving all relevant fact questions is unreasonable, good processes supported by trusted impartial practitioners and a solid information base can certainly help push audiences to engage issues more productively (Kadlec & Friedman, 2007).

Overall, this first element can be conceptualized as focusing on what Lindblom (1990) called the impairments to quality public decision making. In *Inquiry and Change*, Lindblom expressed this perspective forcefully:

Improving the quality of inquiry by citizens and functionaries does not rest on improbable or improbably successful positive efforts to promote better probingIt rests on what might be called negative reforms—reducing impairment, getting the monkey of impairment off the citizen’s back. Societies do not need to urge citizens to probe; they need only to permit them to do so. They need only to reduce the disincentives to probe, the diversions and obfuscations that muddle or dampen probing, the misinformation and indoctrinations that misdirect it, and the intimidations and coercions that block it. (p. 230)

The goal of this element is to remove the blinders that restrict quality deliberation and community action in order to set up stronger possibilities for productive engagement. Addressing these barriers seeks to shift the focus from the unproductive conflict between misunderstood combatants toward citizens actually working through the tensions within and between their perspectives.

Deliberative tensions

Above all, DI focuses on identifying and engaging the natural tensions inherent to difficult issues. David Mathews (1998) and Daniel Yankelovich (1991) have often written on the importance of surfacing and working through tradeoffs between different approaches, and considering all the consequences, positive and negative, of potential actions. Such tensions do not only exist between perspectives—the focus of much political discussion and conflict management—but are also inherent within individual perspectives permeated with competing values. Democratic life is immersed with paradox, as many of the primary American values such as freedom, equality, justice, and security reveal critical tensions within and between them that impact almost all public issues (Stone, 2002). Drawing on the work of Chaim Perelman, DI presumes that groups are not necessarily distinguished by which values they hold—most audiences share common values—but rather how they rank them. As argued in *The New Rhetoric*, “the simultaneous pursuit of these values leads to incompatibilities, [and] obliges one to make choices” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 82).

DI infuses deliberative theory with concepts from the management theorists centered on competing values (Quinn & Cameron, 1988), dynamic complexity (Senge, 2006), paradox (Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 2011), and polarity management (Johnson, 1996). These theorists make similar arguments about the need for leaders to abandon simple frames and the need for certainty (empirical or

ideological), and to embrace the reality that excellence inherently involves constantly negotiating paradoxical tensions. They call for organizations to build capacity for collective learning, adaptability, and interaction across multiple perspectives and layers of the organization since paradoxes cannot be negotiated from the top down. Many of the paradoxes and polarities that animate this literature — cooperation versus competition, flexibility versus efficiency, performing versus learning, and tradition/stability versus innovation/change — are also relevant to community life.

Research on paradox management highlights the positive results of groups moving beyond the simplicity of limited strategic frames that suppress paradox to the complexity and creative tension of recognizing and responding to them (Quinn, 1988). Simply explaining the nature of wicked problems before a deliberative event can have an inoculation effect (Pfau, 1997), as citizens realize that wickedness is inherent to the problem and its competing values rather than assigning wickedness to opposing groups. Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that the “awareness of tensions trigger[s] a management strategy of acceptance rather than defensiveness. Acceptance entails viewing tensions as an invitation for creativity and opportunity” (p. 391) and “lays the vital groundwork for virtuous cycles” (p. 393).

These paradoxes and polarities are not simple dichotomies or opposites to choose between; rather, they are the underlying building blocks of wicked problems that require examination and struggle. David Zarefsky (2009) captured our perspective on the importance of addressing such tensions:

Our tasks include reconciling unity and diversity, individualism and community, nationalism and global citizenship, liberty and equality, quality and quantity, faith and doubt, the present and the future. None of these pairs consists of opposites in the logical sense; they are not in principle irreconcilable. But they are inherent tensions and often seem to work at cross purposes. Articulating how they can work together, how we can get the best of both, or how we can transcend the tension, is the task of a responsible rhetoric. (pp. 19–20)

Within DI, the deliberative practitioner plays a key role in helping communities recognize and work through such tensions.

Within the water conflict, stakeholder disagreement revolved around tensions between the health of the river, local agriculture, and the growth of the community. Outside of deliberative forums, people focused separately on the health of the over-worked river, the plight of the farmers, or the need to support cities dealing with growth. Citizens frequently indicted others for not caring about the environment, farmers, or the local economy. Yet the issue inherently connected these values within the wicked problem. As the community grows, municipalities need access to more water resources to support economic vitality and keep the cost of living low, but the area is semiarid and a high percentage of the available water sources are dedicated to agriculture. The kind of talk the community needed was to engage these tensions and, ideally, identify ways to negotiate them. Through deliberative engagement, we provided the community a framework that helped them recognize and work through

the tensions between and within these perspectives. For example, participants discussed the challenges of sustaining agriculture while providing supplies for municipal growth demand rather than deciding between agriculture or cities.

Because the key tensions within issues are rarely an explicit part of public discussions, deliberative practitioners must uncover them, frame them, and then get participants to engage those tensions during deliberative events. This starts by identifying the values and interests that underlie the issue. Framing opposing interests in positive terms—what people care about expressed as widely held values—can help participants hear the reasons behind multiple different perspectives and develop both mutual understanding and greater self-awareness of the tensions within their own perspectives. Then the practitioner must map how these different values come into conflict or are prioritized differently within different approaches to an issue. The facilitator works in a manner similar to Celeste Condit's (1993) image of the emphatic critic who locates "pieces of common ground among various voices and to discover options for those compromises necessary for co-existence A good empath will discover good options, and will help others to see those as good options, but ultimately, the parties or the people must and will decide" (p. 189).

Resources for collaborative action

The third element of DI focuses on resources for collaborative action from a broad range of actors. We use the term "collaborative action" to denote a wide-ranging set of complimentary activities that DI works to spark (discussed further in the next section). Owing to the nature of wicked problems and their underlying paradoxes, community responses must be ongoing, creative, and reflexive (Senge, 2006). In moving away from technical solutions or solutions that simply involve opposing groups changing "their" behavior, DI seeks to support broader ownership of issues and recognition of the importance of democratic governance (Boyte, 2005) and adaptive change (Heifetz, 1994). Throughout the DI process, deliberative practitioners seek to identify resources to assist in these endeavors, help the community recognize them, and work with the community to expand and build upon them. A number of such resources have been discussed within the interdisciplinary literature on collaboration and community problem solving (e.g., Daniels & Walker, 2001; Straus & Layton, 2002; Susskind, McKearnen, & Thomas-Lamar, 1999). Resources for collaboration include: a wide range of engaged actors (individuals as well as public, private, and nonprofit organizations), relationships of trust and mutual understanding, a robust community culture of engagement supported by democratic skills and attitudes, a solid information base and trusted information resources, and community capacity to bring those resources to bear on difficult issues (such as impartial conveners and facilitators, legitimizers, institutional champions, funders, and safe, physical places for citizens to come together).

DI works to identify and amplify existing resources, as well as build more. If resources are particularly low, then projects may focus more on building those resources rather than focusing on a move to action. If resources are stronger, then

projects can be more ambitious. When done well, deliberative practice creates a positive feedback loop, so that each project serves a dual purpose of addressing that issue while at the same time building additional capacity for future projects (Carcasson, 2009a, 2009b).

The deliberative cycle

The deliberative cycle (Figure 1) offers a process model for doing DI and structuring deliberative practice. Rather than focusing primarily on facilitation of deliberative events (which practitioners tend to do), the deliberative cycle outlines four related tasks of DI that make up the learning process: deliberative issue analysis, convening, facilitating deliberative engagement, and reporting. These activities do not tend to occur naturally in our communities, thus, they represent interventions that deliberative practitioners perform in order to influence the quality of inquiry and support deliberation. A full account of each task is beyond the scope of this article, but we provide a brief overview of the key dimensions of each.

At each stage in the deliberative cycle, deliberative practitioners should be attending to the key elements—identifying them and designing the next intervention strategically to garner additional insights regarding them. DI, therefore, differs from forms of public engagement that primarily serve to provide citizens opportunities to express their opinions on issues (e.g., “public input”) or cast a vote. Instead, DI relies on communication designs (Aakhus, 2007) that have participants interactively respond to framed materials and each other and engage particular tensions as a means of improving deliberation and knowledge of the issue. Collaborative action is placed in the middle of the cycle because it is an important consequence of DI. Action may occur after going through the cycle once or several times. The goal for deliberative practitioners is to improve the quality of discourse concerning the issue with each trip around the cycle, so when the move to action is endeavored decisions are improved and wicked problems are managed better. Practitioners also work with communities to identify

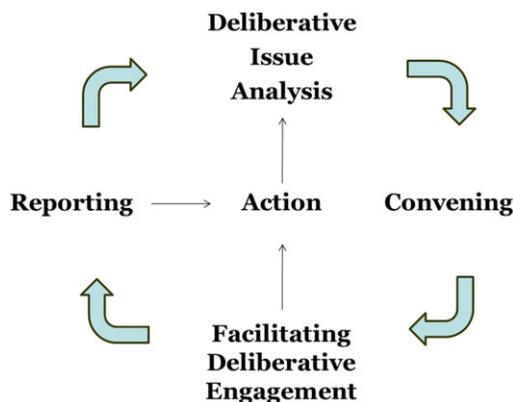


Figure 1 The deliberative cycle.

the best time for decision-making and moving to action, seeking to avoid moving to action too early on one hand, and “decision avoidance psychosis” on the other (Tropman, 2003). Overall, we tend to agree with Kadlec and Friedman (2007), who argued that deliberation’s capacity to promote change has “often gone untapped by deliberative democrats, who often seem to feel as if their work is done when deliberations conclude and a report is written. Rather, the conclusion of a round of deliberation marks not the end of the deliberative democrat’s work, but a new and most challenging phase of it, an *activist* phase of a particular kind” (p. 19).

Within DI, action can take multiple forms by multiple actors at multiple times. Within the new governance (Bingham, Nabatchi, & O’Leary, 2005) or democratic governance (Boyte, 2005) frames, the importance of actions across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors is heightened. As Boyte noted:

Governance intimates a paradigm shift in the meaning of democracy and civic agency—that is, who is to address public problems and promote the general welfare? The shift involves a move from citizens as simply voters, volunteers, and consumers to citizens as problem solvers and cocreators of public goods; from public leaders, such as public affairs professionals and politicians, as providers of services and solutions to partners, educators, and organizers of citizen action; and from democracy as elections to democratic society. Such a shift has the potential to address public problems that cannot be solved without governments, but that governments alone cannot solve, and to cultivate an appreciation for the commonwealth. Effecting this shift requires politicizing governance in nonpartisan, democratizing ways and deepening the civic, horizontal, pluralist, and productive dimensions of politics. (p. 536)

A deliberative event may spark actions from individuals or groups, changes in organizational policy or behavior, increased coordination across organizations, the creation of new organizations or partnerships, and/or support for changes in policy (Goldman, 2003). For grade configuration, the school board had decision-making authority. When explaining and implementing their decision, they drew on the arguments made for and against the proposal to explain their reasoning and address parent concerns. In the water project, reporting showed a need for a better understanding of the technical options available so a working group was convened to study the local situation for a year and lay out options that could be brought back to the public. Through the Silver Tsunami project, two new organizations have been formed to support collaborative development of a grant-funded aging plan for the county, including task teams, long terms goals, and actions steps for each. The plans specifically work to identify actions for individuals, nonprofit organizations, private businesses, and local government.

Deliberative issue analysis

The first task of DI is to analyze the situation through a deliberative lens (Fischer, 2003). This represents both the initial entry point into DI as well as a stop on the ongoing cycle. Deliberative issue analysis involves researching issues, positions, and

community voices in order to identify the current state of the three key elements, build a clear map of the issue, and develop the best possible framework for deliberation. At this stage, the analysis utilizes basic research techniques such as referencing books, articles, newspapers, web pages, and message boards as well as conducting interviews with various stakeholders. In particular, it works to combine and compare expert and public data, as significant gaps between the two often represent important obstacles. At times, open-ended surveys may be utilized to gather additional perspectives on the issue from the general public or key stakeholders. During the water project, the initial event attracted over 200 participants to hear stories about the river and launch the project. Toward the end of that event, we passed out short surveys with simple prompts focused on the river such as “I am concerned that ...” and “One thing particularly valuable to me is ...” Those responses were compiled and then analyzed to assist in the process design. Overall, deliberative issue analysis should consider a wide variety of sources in terms of perspective (e.g., concerns from multiple stakeholder groups) and in terms of form (e.g., expert information, activist appeals, public opinion, etc.). Analysts must be particularly careful to go beyond simply summarizing the dominant voices to help insure broader inclusion, which is critical for addressing power imbalances and honoring the commitment to democratic values (Hendriks, 2009; Young, 2001).

The ultimate task of deliberative issue analysis is to be able to map an issue in a way that will enable participants to consider multiple perspectives and the tensions between and among them, essentially setting the community up for making progress on DI's key elements. Utilizing their initial analysis, deliberative practitioners can develop plans for which of the elements are most in need of focused attention. At times deliberative issue analysis results in developing background materials such as the “choice-work” issue guides produced by National Issues Forums and Public Agenda. Such guides include general information about an issue as well as naming and framing it for deliberation by focusing on a shared problem, identifying more than two approaches to addressing that problem to get beyond entrenched opinions, and listing pros, cons, and tradeoffs among various solutions (Friedman, 2007). As practitioners move through the cycle multiple times, deliberative issue analysis often works to compare insights from deliberative events to broader assumptions concerning public opinion and expert sources in order to identify better ways to engage potential gaps (Carcasson, 2011b).

Convening

An important aspect of deliberative engagement and addressing wicked problems is the need to engage broad audiences, particularly going beyond the usual suspects and empowering previously disengaged audiences. This move is in line with the shift from envisioning citizens as just voters to envisioning a more robust role for the public as problem-solvers and cocreators of public goods (Boyte, 2005). Through convening, DI seeks to facilitate the repopulation of the public sphere and the “rehumanization of our civic relationships” (Briand, 1999, p. 81).

Convening involves bringing people together for deliberation, which can be a difficult task given the barriers to collaboration. Practitioners must often work to undo public apathy and distrust to rebuild a culture of respect, engagement, and collaboration. Convening starts by thinking about who will and should participate in a deliberative event. Practitioners tend to use one of the following recruitment strategies: election, random sampling, purposive or “targeted” sampling, and self-selection (see Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012 for review). This decision can be influenced by the desire to uphold the democratic ideals of inclusion and equality, particularly in the face of criticisms that democracy by discussion will inherently favor powerful voices and exclude those on the margins (Young, 2001). These important challenges have influenced scholars and practitioners alike to think through recruitment strategies (Ryfe & Stalsburg, 2012). This can include reducing the material and symbolic costs of participation through various strategies (e.g., paying participants, providing child care, holding meetings in convenient locations and times, etc.), and partnering with civic organizations to recruit through existing local networks.

Convening is also connected with the need to create and sustain safe public places for genuine public discussion. As Briand (1999) argued:

we lack readily usable public forums where citizens can meet each other (and policy makers can meet with them), not to complain, criticize, and assign blame, but to deliberate together. An effective decision-making process must therefore enable a large number of people to carry on a sustained, informed discussion. It must also create a truly public, neutral space where all citizens will feel welcome, safe, respected, and hence inclined to talk, think, and work together. (p. 82)

Deliberative spaces often require different environments than the typical public hearing with lecture-style seating and a raised platform for experts or legislators. Locally situated deliberative practitioners can play critical roles in finding or creating such places.

Facilitating deliberative engagement

The third task within the deliberative cycle is by far the most well known by deliberative practitioners: designing processes to discuss issues through interactive communication. There are volumes of work on different processes of deliberation and public engagement (for reviews, see Gastil & Levine, 2005; Holman, Devane, & Cady, 2007) that are too lengthy to review here so we will focus on the general goal.

The engagement within DI is often much more structured than other forms of public participation. Rather than simply providing the opportunity for participants to “express themselves” or listen to experts or politicians, deliberative events are designed for interaction and have participants react to framed material designed to improve the conversation by engaging deliberative tensions. This typically requires multiple design features: deliberately framed goals and background material, ground rules, small groups with trained facilitators, note takers, and ample time. The water forums used anonymous keypad voting to establish common ground

on key values across perspectives while also highlighting underlying differences. The participants then worked in small groups of 5–8 with trained facilitators and notetakers walking them through a framing document (vetted with local groups) that laid out four approaches to northern Colorado's water future. After focused discussion, participants completed worksheets to identify the best reasons in support of each approach as well as the most prominent concerns.

Active facilitators may be the most important ingredient, as they are often critical to turning the event from a collection of individual opinions to an interactive experience where the hard work of listening, mutual understanding, and collaboration is more likely to occur (Dillard, 2013; Forester, 1999; Fischer, 2004; Moore, 2012). Facilitators are trained to intervene as necessary to spark interaction, ensure engagement with the tensions, and support the learning process. Each CPD event involves an agenda and facilitator's guide that provides specific questions and highlights key tensions and topics to address, while maintaining participant control of the conversation. The fruits of the conversation are captured through multiple means, such as notes or recordings of the small group conversations, wireless keypad data, participant worksheets and surveys, public easel notes, and more. This data can then be analyzed and inform reporting. As is typical for deliberation, the data is much more focused on the arguments being made, the reasoning provided, and the values expressed or implied, rather than simply an aggregation of the policy positions that may have been expressed. Such data provides important raw material for the deliberative practitioner to better understand how the community engages the issue and potential ways to move forward.

Reporting

The fourth task within the deliberative cycle involves the analysis and reporting of what occurred during the first three tasks in order to produce a tangible record of the work, inform broader audiences, and help move the public conversation forward. Reports from deliberative forums provide a competing source of information to advocacy organizations, technical experts, and opinion polls.

Often practitioners are committed to transparency, which means that all of the materials shared and collected during a deliberative forum are made public. At the CPD, we often post all of our notes and written comments on our web site within days of an event. This practice stems from wanting to maintain the legitimacy of the deliberative process, insure people feel heard, and honor the hard work of the participants. But members of the public are not often trained to make sense of all of this information—in fact mountains of data can even alienate the public. Reporting provides ways to interpret and understand the significance of data from meetings. Within DI, knowing how many people support a particular position can be less important than knowing *why* they hold these positions, their arguments and reasons for supporting a particular stance. Precisely because the interaction sparked by DI causes participants to engage the issue much differently than typical political discourse, the data derived from deliberative events is qualitatively different than public comments

or other forums. We see how people react to key tensions and to each other, rather than a simplistic stream of individual voices. For example, the report to the school board on the grade configurations forums did summarize the percentages of attendees that were for or against the change, but much more valuable to the district was the analysis of the arguments made to support those positions. That analysis later proved critical to implementation, as the district could work to heighten the advantages to the change and mitigate the stated concerns. A clear statement of the most common arguments from the different perspectives also helped the district identify and react to clear misconceptions that had arose during the process.

Deliberative reporting should capture what is unique about a deliberative forum and thus should in part focus on insights concerning the key elements (Carcasson, 2011b). Deliberative reports need to not only report findings from deliberative forums but also explain how to use this sort of information and what next steps may be most important for tackling wicked problems. Owing to the cyclical nature of DI, one key function of reporting is to better understand the key elements before the next convening, thereby setting up subsequent deliberative issue analysis and future engagement.

Conclusion

This essay offers DI as a practical theory to guide the work and training of deliberative practitioners working in their local communities to improve the quality of public discourse and build capacity to address wicked problems. DI reconceptualizes how we think about deliberation, moving from an event-focused model dedicated to problem solving to using deliberative principles to guide ongoing learning focused on managing wicked problems through improved public communication and collaborative action. Learning about the three key elements of DI—key obstacles to deliberative engagement, deliberative tensions, and key resources for collaborative action—facilitates a fundamental shift in how issues are addressed and public dialogue is structured. The deliberative cycle provides a process model for doing this work in communities grounded in particular forms of communication.

Just as DI provides deliberative practitioners a practical theory to guide their choices, it also expands the role of the deliberative practitioner to facilitate deliberative democracy in their communities. The reliance on deliberative practitioners could certainly be seen as a weakness of DI. After all, few communities have well-equipped deliberative practitioners willing and able to provide such services to their communities. Nonetheless, we argue that the prevalence of wicked problems and the limitations of prevalent problem solving strategies call for DI and deliberative practitioners equipped to do this work. This need for locally situated deliberative practitioners represents a clear opportunity for communication scholars, their departments, and their students, who often possess many of these skills and will likely find that expertise in great demand as their communities continue to shift to the deliberative model of community problem solving (Carcasson, 2011a). Indeed, a

growing number of communication departments are developing centers committed to deliberative engagement in their communities.

DI provides these scholars a practical theory and process model to guide their work and training programs that can and should be further refined and tested through deliberative practice and empirical research. The fidelity of this practical theory can be demonstrated by how practitioners use it to guide their deliberative engagement. DI also provides an overarching theoretical framework to guide research on deliberative practice that interrogates individual tasks of the deliberative cycle. Future research could also compare case studies using DI to cases using other models for deliberative engagement to demonstrate the impact of conceptualizing deliberation as particular type of learning.

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Notes

- 1 Although we begin with deliberative practice, we are not suggesting that this practice was atheoretical. Instead, our work was initially informed by the academic fields of argumentation, rhetorical criticism, postempirical public policy analysis, deliberative democracy and collaborative problem solving, and critiques of deliberation. See Carcasson, 2009a for a discussion of specific sources and their influence on CPD's deliberative practice.
- 2 This definition is line with Type II deliberation (Bachtiger, Niemeyer, Neblo, Steenburg, & Steiner, 2010), which shifts away from deliberation as a purely rational discourse to incorporate other forms of communication such as storytelling, rhetoric, and humor. We maintain an important role for reasoning and respect within deliberation while recognizing the ways that these norms can be strategically used to silence certain voices (see Lozano-Rich & Cloud, 2009). DI follows the ethic of passionate impartiality, which was developed by engaging critical theory's challenges to deliberation (Sprain & Carcasson, 2013). Passionate impartiality holds that the deliberative practitioner must balance their role as impartial convener with commitments to democracy, inclusion, and quality information in order to fulfill their broader commitments to improved communication and decision making.

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