Citizens speaking as experts: A grounded practical theory of expertise discourse in deliberative forums

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Abstract

This study examines discursive strategies that lay participants utilized to situate their expertise during deliberative forums. In doing so, we seek to consider how expertise discourse contributes to and might undermine democratic deliberation. To make these connections, we draw on Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) and Communication as Design (CAD). Our analysis describes three forms of expertise discourse by participants within deliberative forums: institutional expertise, local expertise, and issue expertise. Expertise discourse is co-produced between participants, contributes to the information base, and most frequently comes in the form of institutional expertise. Based on our analysis of this discourse, we formulate two problems with expertise discourse within deliberation and our corresponding design recommendations for how to manage these problems.
Introduction

The role of experts and expertise within deliberative democracy has rarely received sustained attention (Brown, 2014) despite long acknowledgment that experts and technical information play an important role in creating the conditions for public deliberation (Gastil & Black, 2008). Too often there is a tendency to limit public engagement to matters of ethics and values rather than expose expertise to scrutiny, thereby polarizing ‘science’ and ‘the public’ (Hagendijk & Irwin, 2006). Through this move and others, experts and lay citizens are often put into tension with each other. Some versions of deliberative theory even define lay deliberation in opposition to technical expertise (e.g., Fung, 2003). The lay perspective is associated with a lack of relevant technical expertise, professional experience, political interests, and, in some cases, even experience with the topic at hand (Brown, 2009). Despite conceptualizing experts and lay participants as distinct groups, expertise is always part of (lay) deliberation because it permeates modern society, shaping people’s identities and assumptions (Brown, 2014). Even most so-called lay people have expertise of some kind that becomes relevant during deliberation (Goodin, 2008). Conceiving of lay people in terms of utter lack of knowledge neglects the wide range of deliberative resources (experience, knowledge, skills) that lay participants bring to bear on deliberation, and obscures the transformation in knowledge and understanding that deliberation aims to bring about (Brown, 2009). Yet scholars have not studied how lay people position themselves as experts during deliberation nor addressed the discursive strategies that citizens use to situate their expertise within deliberative interactions (Kerr, Cunningham-Burley, & Tutton, 2007).

This study fills a gap by first looking to the discursive strategies that participants utilized to situate their (perhaps momentary) expertise during deliberative forums. In doing so, we seek to consider how expertise discourse contributes to and might undermine democratic
deliberation, that is we aim to connect the empirical study of expertise discourse within deliberation to normative theory about the role of expertise within deliberative democracy. To make these connections, we draw on Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) and Communication as Design (CAD). GPT is a problem-oriented approach to theorizing communication practices that considers both the discursive means through which people engage in practices and the norms and values that guide talk (Craig & Tracy, 2014). From GPT, we maintain a problem-orientation by examining the dilemmas inherent within the use of expertise discourse in deliberation and analyze the technical level: how do participants within deliberation use expertise discourse? Rather than following GPT to produce praxis-oriented theory that might guide how participants in deliberation might negotiate these tensions, we instead approach these problems from the normative standpoint of deliberative democracy and have an interest in improving deliberative design. Thus we turn to CAD to generate communication designs that create the conditions and structures necessary for publics to come together and deliberate (Sprain, Carcasson & Merolla, 2014). CAD supports the development of design principles that aim to construct interaction that make unlikely communication (e.g., public deliberation) actually possible (Aakhus, 2007; Aakhus & Jackson, 2005).

The next section situates this research within the interdisciplinary literatures on experts and lay people within sociology of science and science and technology studies before turning to the context of deliberation, which suggests potential challenges with integrating expertise into deliberation. Then we introduce our analytical methods drawn from GPT. Our analysis section begins by describing three forms of expertise discourse by participants within deliberative forums: institutional expertise, local expertise, and issue expertise. Based on our analysis of this discourse, we formulate two problems with expertise discourse within
deliberation and our corresponding design recommendations for how to manage these problems.

**Literature Review**

**Experts and lay people**

Scholars have made much to do about the divide between expert and lay knowledge, particularly as this knowledge relates to domains of science, math, and technology and broad applications of specialized knowledge in public policy decision-making. The Sociology of Science has historically emphasized scientific expertise and traditional forms of knowledge and has, thereby, looked to expertise as a social position that gives experts prominence over public interests and wider society (Evans, 2008). Expertise has been studied retroactively as something someone obtains/is attributed due to knowledge and credibility (Evans, 2008). In turn, efforts to engage citizens in sociotechnical controversies often present themselves as introducing a distinctive “lay perspective” (Brown, 2009). More recent turns to increase public participation are predicated on leveraging the knowledge of lay citizens, looking to knowledge as culturally and experientially complex and qualitatively different from the knowledge of subject specialists (Evans, 2008). Lay citizens are assumed to have knowledge through experience, common sense, non-professional knowledge, experiences, values, and opinions (Brown, 2009). Collins and Evans (2002) challenged the ways that expertise has been destabilized from more traditional domains of specialist knowledge and claimed that the public cannot and should not be considered experts in the same ways (see also, Evans, 2008; Collins & Evans, 2007). While on the surface, these claims call into question the credence of lay citizen’s knowledge and inclusion in deliberation, Evans (2008) underscored the contingency of all knowledge, whether lay or expert, or derived from science or experience (see also, Collins & Evans, 2002, 2007). While specific forms of knowledge are not to be prioritized, it is important
to theorize the kinds of knowledge lay people can and cannot contribute and reformulate notions of how expertise is granted and characterized in public engagement process.

Within Science and Technology Studies (STS), the dominant presumption is that the differences between expert and lay knowledge are what make it valuable to draw on both of them for public problem solving. Constructivist work has developed powerful epistemological arguments claiming that exposure to a wider range of public knowledge, values, and meanings can create science that is more socially intelligent and robust (Chilvers, 2007). Yet this work often maintains a distinction between expert and lay knowledge. Expert knowledge generation is institutionalized and exclusive, focused on universalizing prescriptions; lay knowledge is embedded in the world, shared and developed informally within social groups and communities (Petts & Brooks, 2006). Lay people not only bring knowledge about their local environment but also reflect on their relationships to experts and expert knowledge. Whereas professional experts adhere to technical mindset by emphasizing rigorous methodologies, empirical methods, and scientific judgments, citizens give greater weigh to contextually-oriented social experiences, a socio-cultural rationality (Fischer, 2004). While maintaining distinctions between experts and lay people, these conceptions resist thinking about expert-lay interactions as one-way transmissions of experts translating their knowledge to lay people; instead, lay people evaluate expert claims for themselves (Brown, 2014).

Our research focuses on how these understandings of expert and lay knowledge are infused into discussions about deliberative democracy. Thus we explore the foundations of deliberative epistemology before looking at specific roles for experts within deliberative forums.
**Deliberative epistemology**

Deliberative democracy draws on the premise that deliberation (as a social activity) requires appropriate and adequate empirical evidence—or a solid information base (Gastil & Black, 2008)—yet expertise alone cannot answer moral and political questions (Brown, 2014). Moral and political questions call for deliberation—groups of individuals engaging in an inclusive, respectful, and reasoned consideration of information, views, experiences, and ideas (Nabatchi, 2012). Whereas inclusion is usually justified in terms of moral commitments of democracy, epistemic diversity also provides the basis for improvement in the pool of reasons and provides a stronger means for testing possible outcomes of proposals (Bohman, 2006). The presence of multiple perspectives also reduces the cognitive errors to which homogenous groups are most vulnerable—even homogenous groups of experts. This epistemic motivation for diversity need not directly aim at reaching the “truth” or even gaining better outcomes through deliberation so much as avoiding errors in judgment (Bohman, 2007).

Central to this conception of epistemic diversity is the expectation that participants are able to adopt and employ a variety of social perspectives. It may be impossible to predict in advance the relevant deliberative resources that a person might possess (Brown, 2009; Rayner, 2003). In contrast to the singular perspective of the expert or impartial observer, this mode of inquiry is multiperspectival in that it aims to take into account the positive and negative dimensions of current conditions as well as to incorporate the various perspectives of relevant social actors (Bohman, 2006). Ideally, citizen input poses alternative questions, tests sensitivities to different methods, considered ignored uncertainties, and examines new options or possibilities (Petts & Brooks, 2006).
Through deliberation, people may increase their understanding of an issue and even change their attitude about what action should be taken. The fact that people come into deliberation theoretically open to the possibility that they might change their mind—and the fact that opinion change actually occurs—is what makes deliberative democracy different from other forms of democracy (Luskin, Fishkin, & Hahn, 2007). The potential for shifting opinions as a result of deliberation has become a popular area of research (Niemeyer, 2011; Luskin, Fishkin, & Hahn, 2007; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005; Lowenthal & Lowenstein, 2001; Mackie, 2006; Barbas, 2004). Empirical research has examined how deliberation impacts net opinion change (Luskin, Fishkin, & Hahn, 2007) and public opinion polling (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005), how web-based deliberations effect public opinion (Price et al., 2004), how consensus influences policy attitudes (Barbas, 2004), and how attitude change can be latent, indirect, delayed, and disguised (Mackie, 2006).

Multiple forms of knowledge are appropriate within deliberative exchanges, including systemic, scientific, idocyncratic, and anecdotal forms of evidence (Renn, 2004). Whereas early conceptions of deliberation focused on rationality and reasoning-giving (cf. Cohen & Habermas), many accounts of deliberation presume that this communication will take multiple forms, including storytelling (Black, 2008; Sprain & Hughes, in press). The cognitive virtue of deliberation is that it allows participants to articular viewpoints clearly within a context of different perspectives that supports clarifying substantive controversies (Blok, 2007).

From a deliberative perspective, the major concern is to avoid expert domination: how can public deliberation effectively integrate experts into public discussion without crowding out or silencing the voices of citizens and so-called nonexperts (Sprain et al., 2014). Yet some deliberative democrats stress that expert authority is not always misplaced. Warren (1996) argues that expert authority is the result of the audience’s judgments about the merits of that
authority, deserving of trust and deference in his or her areas of expertise. He maintains that critical scrutiny is essential to establishing expert authority. Responding to critical questioning and challenges is essential to democratic authority that might otherwise be damaged by hierarchies of status and inequalities of resource distribution. Knight and Johnson (1997) argue that on contested issues those who invoke expertise can be compelled to provide reasons for a given decisions when their claim to authority might have otherwise sufficed. Nonetheless, if the responses to critical questioning are poor, deliberation may aggravate the erosion of trust and credibility if the participating groups do not share common ground (Renn, 2004).

**Expertise within deliberative processes on socio-technical issues**

While democratic deliberation scholars have long oriented to expertise and questioned the role of experts in the process, limited work has addressed the complexities of how expertise is established by citizen participants. Several papers have addressed how citizens interact with experts within specific deliberative designs. Empirical research on Danish consensus conferences has shown that citizens may lend too much authority to experts due to their impenetrable semantics and social status (Blok, 2007). Based on this case study, Blok called for more public contestation of scientific judgments and assumptions, arguing that disclosing expert commitments and disagreements serves as a minimal precondition for citizens to exercise skepticism towards scientific claims. Conversely, Zorn et al. (2010) found that participating with scientists in deliberation led laypersons to have more positive attitudes toward scientists and increased empathy form them. But not only were laypersons influenced by the scientists—scientists were also influenced laypersons. Davies and Burgess (2004) studied how citizens positioned specialist expertise and made judgments about the legitimacy and credibility of expert’s knowledge claims within deliberative processes about organ donation. Their work concluded that citizens sought to assess knowledge credibility in relation
expert authority and patient experiences. Citizens further made judgments of legitimacy based on perceptions of openness to collaborate with other experts. Their work concluded a complex relationships between knowledge, credibility, legitimacy of positioning, and identities, which reflected who citizens came to trust and consider as important sources of knowledge.

Sprain and Hughes (in press) analyzes the use of small stories to demonstrate how several participants are positioned as experts within small group discussions due to their firsthand stories and experiences with immigration. O’Doherty and Davidson (2010) further underscored the centrality of subject positioning in making knowledge claims. They argued that individuals occupy, constructed, shifted, and leveraged different subject positions during interaction. In this way, citizen shift subject positions to assert knowledge about specific aspects of discussion. Analysis of deliberative interaction demonstrated how participants used personal experience to warrant different types of deliberative knowledge claims (i.e., expert, cultural/religious, and patient). It was more likely for universal, expertise claims to be taken up by fellow citizens for continued discussion. Kerr, Cunningham-Burley, and Tutton (2007) demonstrated that participants privileged claims to technical knowledge, rarely challenging them.

Taken together, these studies point out how specialist knowledge claims are judged to be legitimate and credible during deliberations. They further highlight how identity and subject positioning are interactionally situated, that claims to technical knowledge often go unchallenged, and how these specialist claims received fellow participant uptake and were given positive appraisals. By moving from more theoretical discussions of the expert–lay divide to more practical discussion of how citizens establish expertise, these studies suggest that citizens, while not fully specialist experts, can exercise expertise. These case studies point to emergent questions: How is expertise discourse positioned? What technical
discourses do participants use to situate their expertise? To answer these questions, we analyze expertise discourse.

**Expertise discourse**

Our approach to understanding expertise is grounded in studying the situated use of expertise discourse within Language and Social Interaction (LSI) research. Not surprisingly, LSI scholars differ in how they define expertise (Sprain, 2015). A few scholars treat being an expert as a fixed social position or role; considering a person to be an expert in a particular field means that talk can be considered expertise discourse in that field. Candlin and Candlin (2002) challenge the simple, role-based appraisal of expertise, arguing that what counts as expertise needs be local, site-specific, and narrowed to particular critical moments within the discipline, activity, and site in question. A scientist speaking at a public forum, for example, might shift in and out of speaking as an expert. Expertise discourse then becomes a communicative ability as a marker of expert behavior, which could be locally marked by level of knowledge, professional experience, firsthand experience, or professional judgment. Indeed, experts should have an intuitive grasp of a situation so that they can manage complex interactions with relying on rigid analytic principles (rules, guidelines, maxims), employing a variety of voices polyphonically, as the context and shifting roles warrant. This competence underscores that experts are frequently managing multiple roles and identities within a given interaction beyond that of expert.

Despite this broad approach to domains of knowledge that could ground expertise, displaying specialist knowledge often reveals itself in science-related discourse practices such as offering technological solutions, presenting counterintuitive findings, making arguments about cause and effect within an empiricist discourse, and drawing from scientific documents
(Buttny, 2009). When speakers position themselves as experts within an interaction, they may draw on elements of the general expertise discourse, or they may also use discourse moves that establish their interactional identity as experts.

**Methods**

**Empirical materials**

The data analyzed for this project come from three public deliberation processes held in two Colorado communities: a water forum on how to meet future water needs, a food day forum on food production and consumption practices, and a local food forum that explored possibilities for developing a sustainable local food economy. These topics were selected because they present environmental issues likely to raise a range of different forms of expertise discourse. Utterance-level transcriptions of 19 small group discussions totaling over 500 pages were analyzed.

**Analytical methods**

Drawing on GPT as a metatheoretical and methodological framework (Craig & Tracy, 2014; Tracy, 2005; Tracy & Craig, 2010), our analysis focused on two levels: the problem level and the technical level. The problem level is concerned with the symptomatic, dilemma-causing characteristics of practice that call for reflective thinking. Rather than begin with the problem level as it often done in GPT (Craig & Tracy, 2014), we developed dilemmas empirically after analyzing the use of expertise discourse at the technical level. The technical level focuses on available communicative strategies and techniques. In our case, we asked: how do participants in deliberative forums use expertise discourse? Coding categories were developed by inductively looking to interactional moves made in discussions from ten groups from across the three processes. A coding scheme was then developed around types of
expertise. To refine the coding scheme, two researchers coded four transcripts independently and then discussed specific examples. The purpose of this move was refining categories not strict inter-coder reliability.

**Forms of expertise discourse**

Within these deliberative forums, there were three primary forms of expertise discourse (summarized in Table 1): (a) institutional expertise; (b) local expertise; and (c) issue expertise. These four forms of expertise are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for participants to use more than one form of expertise discourse within a single turn. Below we introduce each of these forms of expertise with exemplars from our data.

**Institutional expertise**

In institutional expertise discourse, knowledge and status derives from positions in professional fields, government, and civil society organizations. This is often accomplished through discourse practices such as credentialing by referencing a specific title (e.g., “I’m a small chicken producer”) or professional area (e.g., “by working on this day in and day out.”). Yet this is also accomplished indirectly by speaking from the first person on behalf of institutions or narratives that situate the speaker within relevant scenes (e.g., “people are calling me...”).

A range of related practices of expertise talk by turning to Excerpt One from the local food forums where participants are discussing the difficulties of regulatory compliance (i.e., obtaining permits and navigating government agencies) when farmers want to market their products publically on small-scales.

Excerpt One (Local Food Forum)

1 Oakley: How do they get the- the people that decide the regulations seem to always dump it on the building department, what does the building department hafta do with
agriculture? The meat processing plant got dumped on the building department, the cheese processing plant got dumped on the building department.

Charlie: Well I can tell ya from my field, the assessment world, one of the issues that I think some of these smaller medium farms that wanna do the local thing and- and process their- their vegetables and what have you, and try to sell it locally, is- the tax law is all for raw, unprocessed produce, beef, whatever that agriculture product may be. The moment you start to process it, you lose that ag classification and tax break. If you’re a lettuce farmer, and you- you know pack up all your lettuce and send it to somebody else, don’t wash it and all that, you’re not processing their lettuce, as long as you wash it, you- you become a processor, and under the tax rules, property tax rules, then you would not get the ag classification on the- on the land underneath that processing building, that would be a commercial or market value to that land. The building itself would probably get a similar um treatment valuation, but then you know there’s the equipment processing that becomes personal property, it gets taxed, um and I’m not certain what- what the personal property bit, but um there becomes tax consequences to becoming a processor of food versus a producer of the food and shippin it out to somebody else to process. Up here, the planning department has come to my office to ask about what are the- people wanna know what are the consequences if they do set up their own little um vegetable stand two months outta the year. And I’m told there is no consequences to that, that’s- that’s a temporary use of that ag land, if somebody wants to have a retail space there’s another question. In their- in their barn, where they’re gonna be selling beef jerky, or sellin t-shirts, or sellin processed food, that’s more of a permanent fixture, a permanent setup, so yes, technically I would- I would be- I would hafta follow the statutes and- and reclassify that from ag land and an ag out building to a commercial building, with a commercial value
Oakley questions the roles of the building department in the regulatory process. By answering this question, Charlie adopts an interactional role of expert within the group. Yet this positioning is bolstered through various tokens of institutional expertise discourse. In line 5, Charlie responds to this questioning by speaking from his experience working for the county assessor’s office and observing local farmers navigate the regulatory process—“I can tell ya from my field, the assessment world.” This statement qualifies him as an expert; however, it is a less direct way of credentialing his role in the office (i.e., he does not explicitly say where he works or his rank). Charlie leverages his institutional position to bring up “one of the issues” faced by local farmers: the tax law. In lines 6–23 he details how property tax classifications can change when farmers sell their own produce on-site, sharing technical knowledge and his fluency with the topic. Although the statement, “I’m not certain” in line 17 is a hedge noting the limits of his expertise, he goes on to further discuss the tax consequences. In lines 19–20 he references more specific experience he has had in the past with the planning department. Through first-person stories of relevant professional interactions, he reinforces his institutional expertise, eventually speaking on half of the institution in lines 27–28: “I would hafta follow the statues and- and reclassify that from ag land and an ag out building to a commercial building, with a commercial value.”

**Local expertise**

Local expertise is when knowledge derives from living in the area impacted by a problem that results in the interactional identity of expert. Analytically, lots of local knowledge does not position participants as expert because this local knowledge is commonly shared by all participants so it does not differentiate someone as an expert within this particular group. In other words, local expertise must be given credence and/or leveraged in the conversation for it to qualify as expertise talk. Related discourse practices of local expertise talk include
references to place and length of residency, drawing on specialized knowledge of local policies and practices, and assessments about the overall effectiveness of public actions taken over time.

In Excerpt Two, Emmett moves away from his expert positioning with the planning department—mentioning additional credentials—to speak from his experience as a longtime resident, returning to the point he made that producers need to do “due diligence” in the permit application process (see Excerpt Five: lines 80–83). In line 35 he shares that he had not only lived in the area for many years, but that living in the area had given him experiential knowledge and the trials of the regulatory process. In line 36 he specifically references interaction, which suggests an understanding of what is typical and, furthermore, is leveraged in the discussion.

Excerpt Two (Local Food Forum)

29 Emmett: ...we’re in a situation that government to some extent needs to look at how they can reduce that regulation, and- and make it- do less, do a better job. I’m not exactly sure what that is, but I know that in the 40 years I’ve lived here, the many people that I’ve-you know have interaction with with regard to you know regulatory agencies and things we do, is that- is that they you know, it’s hard for the- you know the normal person to quote do due diligence without say maybe hiring an attorney, or hiring you know hiring- I’m just saying, it’s- it is extremely difficult, and I see people, and there are levels of frustrations just you know oh, I’m not gonna do it.
Once more, experience is called for to mitigate institutional affiliation. Expertise is situated according to longevity of residence, rather than his work with regulatory systems. That said, problems arise in so far as his statements legitimize his local knowledge and are further attached to institutional affiliation and authority. Contrary to assumptions that citizens’ experience is grounded in experience it seems that in order to legitimate this knowledge it must be attached to technical knowledge that arise from that experience. Yet references to experience continue to prevaricate expertise as localized and lay.

**Issue expertise**

At times, participants’ extensive knowledge of the issues and related matters under deliberation irrespective of the source of this knowledge. Issue expertise talk is characterized by showing exceptional knowledge of local political systems, governing policies, and community planning; technical knowledge not tied to professional experience; historical knowledge of practices and the issue at hand; and the ability to provide instances of how others have addressed this issue. In other words, this person is “well-informed.” In Excerpt Three, Tom (Lines 44–47) is able to answer a question about demand hardening in a concise way:

Excerpt Three (Water Forums)

38       Jack: What exactly is demand hardening?
39       Hank: That’s defined down here under opponents argue. It’s the first bullet. I was wondering about that too.
41       Jack: Yeah, I don’t know what that means.
42       Adam: I didn’t quite understand that myself.
43       Tom: The basic idea is that if we take lots of measures to conserve and we kind of get down to bare bones water use to meet our needs, then when the next drought comes, there’s no more opportunity to conserve, we’ve already taken it. I find that a very lame argument
In other instances, issue expertise is done by using technical language or explaining about a player like the local water utility works without having to ask for explanation—even encouraging others to skip background explanation because someone already understands what would otherwise be considered expert knowledge.

**Features of expertise discourse in deliberation**

Across these different forms, expertise discourse has several key features. First, it is often co-produced. That is, participants often engage in positioning other people as experts—or challenging their expert positioning—even as their own talk attempts to position themselves as more or less expert. The previous excerpts have shown this getting done multiple ways: asking people questions, challenging each other, deferring to others. Sometimes this gets done in a general way (e.g., asking a question to the group), but it is also directed at specific individuals, cuing their established expertise within the group.

Expertise discourse does improve the information base of the deliberation. Members are able to provide definitions, explain how systems work, and answer factual questions posed by other participants.

Across our data, institutional expertise discourse was the most frequent form of expertise discourse. This may be surprising since “lay” participants are typically associated with other forms of socio-cultural reasoning. But our data show participants frequently using various forms of institutional expertise discourse. This does not mean that participants did not use other forms of knowledge. Instead, it demonstrates how these forms of knowledge rarely resulted in the status of expert within the group. Local expertise did appear in our data, but local ways of knowing rarely resulted in expert status within the group. Instead, local ways of knowing were typically shared among participants and thus not oriented to as a form of expertise.
Deliberative dilemmas

After analyzing the forms of expertise discourse within deliberation, we approached the problem level by interrogating this discourse from the perspective of deliberative theory: when did the use of expertise discourse within forums pose problems for deliberative democracy? By grounding this question in our empirical analysis, we aim to develop deliberative designs based on actual practice. We identified two dilemmas in our data that warrant additional attention.

**Dilemma 1: Experts can see information as a solution, undermining attention to other dimensions of the wicked problem.**

Our first dilemma centers on ways that experts can presume that all that citizens need is information about a situation (the information deficit model) whereas deliberation focuses on questions about what should be done, which necessarily involves making value judgments and imagining new futures. In the local food forum, Speaker Two speaks from his past experience with the planning department when discussing the permitting process. In lines 48–51, he attests to his past experience with a specific producer and provides technical knowledge regarding the permitting process.

Excerpt Four (Local Food Forum)

Ryan: Since I’ve worked with a producer in- through the planning process, I’ve realized how many permits it takes to- to the point that you’re actually producing and selling, and having been through that, I think I’ve got a pretty good idea of what it takes, and like working with Mark with Valley Farms, he’s got a list of six or seven permits that he’s gotta get that he had no idea that he had to get beforehand, and now that I’ve worked with him, I know everything that needs to happen. And so- and I know I’ve shared that with the extension office, and if there can be a clearing house of information of what all needs to happen so when you come- so when you’re first starting, you have an idea of I need this permit, this permit, this permit, this permit. I’m not saying that it’s easy by any means, but some permits are easier than others to get depending on what you’re doing, there is order to where- to how you should do it, because with Josh, all of those other permits were if you do this, you will get it. With us, a land use permit, it was well you have all these impacts to your neighbors, to the roads, to all of this other- yeah, all
of this other stuff, and ours was a very- it’s a very subjective permit where you could
not get that- you could not get that, and by starting with us, it kind of eliminates a step
where if you had gone and gotten all those other permits and then came to us, and we
denied him, then it would- he’s just wasting his time

In a subsequent turn (i.e., Excerpt Five: lines 66 and 68–71), he further asserts his willingness
to be of assistance and the importance of people seeking out his knowledge of the permitting
process. This move of expert talk self-positions him as having expertise based his professional
experience.

Excerpt Five (Local Food Forum)

Taylor: Come- come in and talk to me, because-

Casey: And I do, but-

Taylor: You've got- we've got so much information that we can provide anybody and
everybody, and that’s what we're there for. We don’t- we don’t wanna see anybody
not- we don’t wanna tell anybody no. But we also hafta look out for everybody else.
And we're willing to work to try to find ways- ways around it.

Morgan: But have you ever come up with a situation where it's just not working, and can that
change?

Taylor: I mean I've only been there a little over a year, and uh yes, we have seen it, that was
before I started working, but I feel like in that situation, if he had gotten the information
in the first place, it could've avoided all of that confusion. Yeah.

Karen: Yeah, and how do you get that out to the general public so that you know, they know
what- you know, we need to get- find out what the permits are before we purchase
land so we kn- you know, so.

Taylor: That's part of due diligence, I think, like starting something. And a lotta people don’t do
their due diligence, they think oh, I can do this, they have these grand plans, and then
they try to go through the regulatory process, and find out that it- what they want to do
is just not feasible.
In line 74, Taylor continues to perform expertise talk by responding to a Morgan's questions about his experience, framing his talk as sharing necessary information that others lack. The problem for Taylor arises when others challenge the bureaucratic complications. Given his professional experience, he has knowledge of the intricacies of the process that could be support deliberations. Yet rather than entertaining questions about the problems with the permitting process (questions that deliberation might improve), the expert maintains an orientation that information from existing entities is sufficient to address citizen concerns.

This excerpt does show one way that participants within deliberation can minimize this dilemma: they can challenge the expert, soliciting reasoning about a position or alternative examples. In this case, other participants refuse to accept the expert’s information as a sufficient solution to their problems. In other situations where experts present information as an obvious solution, facilitators should intervene with moves that reframe the group to focus on questions about what should be done. These moves might include framing information as a place to begin deliberation. This move is in line with a facilitator following an ethic of passionate impartiality that maintains the need for a facilitator to uphold democratic values (Sprain & Carcasson, 2013). In this case, the facilitator is upholding the principle of democratic legitimacy that maintains that deliberation is grounded in reason-giving that is subject to challenge.

Dilemma 2: Managing the boundaries of expertise can create hierarchies in the group that undermine equal participation and consideration.

The second dilemma stems from the boundary work that participants do around expertise. It may be easy to imagine that people use expertise discourse to raise their standing in the group as a means to shut down others yet this was not the dominant pattern in our data.
Instead, hierarchies were reinforced by how participants positioned others as experts.

Consider the following example from the water forums where Robert inserts himself into the conversation, commenting on a previous discussion at his table regarding the price of water.

Almost immediately he presents his credentials as a member of the governing board for a local water district. He goes on to provide specific details about the structure of the water utility as an account for why water prices remain low. His authority is used in lines 90–91 to conclude with his position on subject; however, to the end of line 91 through lines 92 he hedges his comment to another participant, positioning Gary as an additional expert on the subject matter.

Gary—who works for the regional water conservancy district, is involved with various Poudre River conservation organizations, and mentions that he gives historical presentations about regional issues—responds in agreement with Robert.

Excerpt Six (Water Forum)

Robert: Can I comment on that? And kind of back to your question too, there was a comment earlier that water is too cheap. Well, as a member of a Board of Directors of a water district, we are a non-profit organization, we are a governmental entity. We don’t have stock-holders, or shareholders, and we don’t pay dividends. We price our water based on what it costs to deliver the water to the people. So when you say water is too cheap, we’re not a private entity. We deliver water to the public at the cost of what it costs us to produce it. So unless you want water utilities to become a private entity and start making a lot of money water is going to stay kind of what it is from my perspective. Brian I don’t know if I am out of line on that but...

Gary: No I tend to agree. There are a lot of people who would argue for social reasons and other things that you want to keep the resource that people need to survive at a low cost. So we have been trying to do that through the years but you run into the dilemma of people saying you are not charging enough so people don’t conserve. (echoes of agreement) Our charter doesn’t allow us to bank a million dollars every year, we are a public entity.
Robert’s hedging to Brian allows for corroboration with another participant, yet positions their knowledge as affiliated and validates the work of the local water district as not subject to scrutiny. Randy establishes a dangerous standard that some experts should help determine what topics are more reasonable than others. Notably, this expertise discourse does not focus on a factual question but instead on the judgment about what counts as a reasonable cost of water.

This use of expertise discourse to establish hierarchies poses a problem for deliberation when these hierarchies foreclose equal participation and consideration. These violations call for a passionately impartial facilitator to intervene on behalf of the principle of equality. This intervention essentially aims to redress power imbalances in the group. Power balancing can be difficult to accomplish (Kadlec & Friedman, 2007) yet warranted. In this case, facilitator moves might include reframing an expert comment as contestable by asking for reactions or counter arguments. Drawing on the different forms of expertise discourse, the facilitator might consider asking for other types of expertise that could counter power imbalances such as asking for a particular type of local expertise or social identity expertise.

Often these hierarchies are created by participants who position other people as more expert through discourse moves hedge one’s own expertise while reinforcing the expertise of someone else. Deliberative designers should recognize that these moves may stem from speakers who are managing their own face needs when speaking as an expert. They do not want to appear foolish by claiming an inappropriate amount of expertise so they engage in boundary work that positions their expertise relative to others. A facilitator should not call out this behavior as inappropriate, but they can help minimize it by affirming a different basis for standing within deliberation. Deliberative inquiry requires diverse perspectives that together keep a group from making foolish choices. Reminding a group of
this orientation might help shift how individuals do facework around their own expertise and that of others.

**Conclusion**

Our analysis reveals three forms of expertise discourse used by “lay” participants within deliberative forums: institutional expertise, local expertise, and issue expertise. Unlike presumptions that local expertise might be the most prominent given associations between lay participants and local knowledge, our data showed institutional expertise discourse was most frequently used. This serves as a powerful reminder that citizens leverage a wide range of deliberative resources, including relevant institutional experiences and knowledge from their professional, civic, and organizational lives. Although specific deliberative designs may want to maintain a role for outside experts, it is not particularly useful to maintain a clear distinction between lay person and expert.

Rather than focus on the categories of lay and expert, deliberative designers should focus on the dilemmas that stem from the actual use of expertise discourse within deliberation. Our data suggested two dilemmas worthy of concern: how experts present information as a solution and the hierarchies created around expertise. By starting with GPT’s impulse to understand the technical level, we are able to make design recommendations for facilitators based on actual practices.
References


Table 1: Forms of Expertise Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expertise Discourse</th>
<th>Discourse Practices</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional expertise</strong> — Expertise stems from profession or institutional authority</td>
<td>Credentialing by claiming field</td>
<td>I worked there for irrigation companies, I've been out in it. And the reality is, when you have a lot of water in the river, you will not be able to see the difference from one level to the other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>institutional status</td>
<td>I worked in the building department here from 1977 to 1998 as a private sector consultant and done things beyond that, but I- but I have seen, since the early days, where we uh our regulations have become excessively difficult in some cases, and what we've done is- is we're in a situation that government to some extent needs to look at how they can reduce that regulation, and- and make it- do less, do a better job.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>first person narratives of professional situations,</td>
<td>Since I've worked with a producer in- through the planning process, I’ve realized how many permits it takes to- to the point that you’re actually producing and selling, and having been through that, I think I’ve got a pretty good idea of what it takes, and like working with Mark with Valley Farms, he's got a list of six or seven permits that he’s gotta get that he had no idea that he had to get beforehand, and now that I’ve worked with him, I know everything that needs to happen.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>jargon</td>
<td>Yeah, and uh they- they’ve done the common technical plat, the hydrology, they put those all on the same, as I say, they- they started talkin apples to apples, so when Halogen and Seamen and- and Glade are all looked at, you’re talkin the</td>
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same numbers for hydrology.

speaking on behalf of institutions

Um, there’s a few concrete things that we’re proposing, one is the uh . . . . Um, the um proposals that we’re making are a number of concrete ones, and uh one is first of all, developers have long been required to turn in water to the municipality, uh in a sufficient quantity to serve the residents that they’re- they’re uh creating, their resident- homes that they’re creating.

deferring to other experts

Andy and Gary, and Robert, tell me if I’m wrong, but the value of their water for ag use is about 1/10th of what it is for development.

position as answering other questions

To Dennis’s question, the ownership of water is a transferable piece of property. How that ownership is stratified now has been changing and will be changing. I know regionally, it’s moving to agricultural use to municipal use.

speaking to institution’s plans for the future

Fort Collins’ um water utility has a forum or a policy uh group that’s looking at water policy, and uh the ag board made a presentation to them about where we think uh- . . . . we have our first meeting where they’ve invited policy group members and have ins and outside people on May 11th, we’re gonna begin that discussion.

allusions to deeper knowledge

I’ve got- I’ve got a pretty large data set that’s strong analysis that really demonstrates that that’s not- that’s not the whole story here.

Local expertise — Expertise stems from local knowledge beyond that is considered common knowledge within the group

References to place and length of residency

I’ve lived within 2 miles of the Poudre River for 25 years so love the river for what it is. Also, my bent is I am very interested in ag, I’m a large animal vet, I’m very sympathetic to the needs of ranchers and farmers. So I look at things from 2 different places.

Assessments about the overall effectiveness of public actions over time

I was reading about the CO River Compact in 1922 and they appropriated water and had about 5-10 years of above average rainfall so the CO was really cranking. And they allocated water based on the amount that was there in 1922. Well in 2002 there wasn’t quite so much water. It has
created a real conundrum. I have to go back to water law, and I think everyone wants to stay away from it. And I think there are some opportunities there to rethink, M&I and ag, and maybe we need to factor in the environmental.

| Express specialized knowledge of local policies and practices | I know that in the 40 years I've lived here, the many people that I've- you know have interaction with- with regard to you know regulatory agencies and things we do, is that- is that they you know, it's hard for the- you know the normal person to quote do due diligence without say maybe hiring an attorney, or hiring you know hiring- |

| **Issue expertise—** Expertise on the issue under consideration (independent of source of knowledge) | … the Johnson Reservoir in Nebraska is fed by the Tricounty uh Diversion Canal that comes out of North Platte Nebraska, is exactly what you’re talking about, and there is no river after North Platte Nebraska on the Platte River, um low flow types. So I- I- don’t agree that it’s uh completely innovative. I think it has been done. |