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## Synthesising the outputs of deliberation: Extracting meaningful results from a public forum

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# Synthesising the outputs of deliberation: Extracting meaningful results from a public forum

## Abstract

Recent years have seen an increase in empirical studies of public deliberation. This has led to important advances in thinking through issues such as who to include, how best to inform lay audiences about a particular topic, and how to maximise the perceived legitimacy of deliberation. An important issue that has not received much attention is how to define, identify, and report the results of deliberation. The conversations among individuals that occur over the course of a deliberation can be understood as a large and complex set of qualitative data. The *deliberative discourse* that is produced over the course of a public deliberation contains a large number of statements by participating individuals, and it is not immediately obvious how certain statements might be extracted to characterise the official results of the deliberation. In particular, public deliberation aims to guide deliberants towards collective decisions – therefore, social scientific methods of analysis that do not orient to changes in individual deliberants’ positions at best only capture a part of what is going on. Further, qualitative analyses such as thematic or content analyses may give equal importance to considered and informed positions produced nearer to the end of a deliberative event and relatively uninformed and preliminary positions expressed at the beginning. While such analyses can provide important insights, they are therefore not sufficient on their own for identifying the results of deliberation. In this paper, I argue that the results of a deliberative forum are best conceptualised as constituted by at least three distinct factors: 1) the initial framing and structuring of the deliberation; 2) the facilitation process; and 3) the final (post-hoc) collation and analysis of materials by an analyst or host of the deliberation. I conclude that any meaningful and legitimate representation or synthesis of the results of deliberation should take into account the complexity of the discourse that is produced in such settings. The recent case of the BC BioLibrary Deliberation is used to illustrate and ground the discussion.

## Keywords

Public deliberation, deliberative output, analytical output, deliberative conclusions, biobanks, qualitative data, discourse

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## **Introduction**

In examining case studies of public deliberation, it seems that the primary effort often goes toward the construction and implementation of the forum. Questions that guide these efforts include how (and who) to recruit, how best to inform lay audiences about a particular topic, and how to maximise the perceived legitimacy of the deliberation. Without detracting from the importance of these considerations, an element that is often not considered is how to extract meaningful and legitimate output from such public forums. In other words, how does one identify the conclusions of the deliberating group from among a large range of statements and deliberations?

Many topics involving health that might be the subject of public deliberation are complex. They are often not bounded neatly by discipline; they often cross multiple areas of expertise; and they may involve rather technical information. If one considers all the conversations that individuals have during a deliberative forum about such a topic as potentially relevant, then it is this set of conversations that can be considered as the data source upon which the formulation of deliberative conclusions will rest. However, data arising from deliberations are fundamentally different from other forms of qualitative data such as interviews or focus groups, and it is not immediately obvious precisely how such a deliberative data source might be approached to yield legitimate deliberative conclusions. In particular, the process of deliberation is explicitly directed towards producing collective decisions after a process of exchanging views and increasing knowledge. Therefore, typical social scientific methods of data analysis that aim to 'uncover' underlying and pre-existing opinions, values, or positions are not appropriate here. For example, social-cognition approaches such as those underlying the health belief model rely on the notion of a 'belief' that can be definitively associated with an individual and 'measured' via interviews or questionnaires. While such approaches are important, they clearly do not capture the full scope of what goes on or is produced in deliberation. In particular, they do not allow for the recognition and identification of positions that are the explicit result of collective deliberation and are most likely not the previously held positions of individual deliberants.

The purpose of this paper is to engage with the question of how to conceptualise and identify the conclusions of deliberation in ways that are epistemically valid and have the potential to be perceived by both participants and broader publics as politically legitimate. The focus is on conclusions both in the sense of products of analysis and those that might be considered for policy input. I begin by outlining the nature of the problem, focusing on some of the epistemic and methodological

challenges inherent in synthesising the results of deliberation. I argue for and describe a particular structure of deliberative discourse. I then outline the notion of a deliberative output, which can be conceptualised as the ratified collective conclusions of a deliberative forum. I then present the core argument of this paper, which is that the results of a deliberative process cannot be conceptualised as constituted purely through a post-deliberation analysis; rather, the results of deliberation are constituted by three components: the initial framing or structuring of the deliberation; the facilitation process; and the ultimate collation of materials for presentation by the host or analyst of the deliberation. I use the example of the BC BioLibrary Deliberation (O’Doherty, Hawkins, & Burgess, 2012) to showcase one avenue of achieving structured and ratified conclusions of a deliberative forum, and illustrate how additional analysis of deliberation transcripts can add value to the formal results of deliberation.

## **The Problem of Defining Results of Deliberation**

Although a detailed discussion of the goals of deliberation is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief examination of how they might provide a foundation for defining a ‘result’ of deliberation seems appropriate. Gastil (2008, p. 8) explains that “when people deliberate, they carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view.” Structured deliberative forums are thus processes by which citizens are given the opportunity to learn about a topic, engage others in debate about the issues, and then come to *collective decisions* on what policy on the topic should entail.

Recently Kanra (2012) has argued critically that theoretical attention on deliberation has overemphasized the decision-making aspect over social learning processes inherent in deliberation. This criticism mirrors other insights about deliberation being constituted by complementary goals of producing better citizens as well as better (social) decisions (Bobbio, 2003; Cobb, 2012). Whether envisaged as a process of social learning or as leading to a decision (or both), an important component of deliberation is therefore the explicit goal of leading to a specific collective product. Surprisingly, however, not much attention has been focused on precisely how the content of such a product should be achieved or defined at the conclusion of a deliberative forum. Guidelines underlying deliberation focus on such factors as respectful engagement between participants, and positions taken by participants being justified and challenged by others; in other words, there is a general emphasis on the importance of providing a process for citizen participation that enables discourse while avoiding manipulation (Dryzek, 1990). While these considerations are clearly important as they qualify the fundamental goals of deliberation, they do not specify the particular way in

which certain statements or positions can be identified as representing the collective product of deliberation. Importantly, it is therefore not necessarily clear how particular conclusions or recommendations can be synthesized from the deliberative process for policy input.

### **Conceptualising the results of deliberation**

A first step in gaining traction on this problem is to develop a clear conceptualization of the particular product envisaged as the end goal of deliberation. Some efforts have been made in this regard. For instance, Niemeyer and Dryzek (2007) identify metaconsensus and intersubjective rationality as ideal outcomes of deliberation. Metaconsensus, defined as “agreement about the nature of the issue at hand, not necessarily on the actual outcome” (p. 500), is an important outcome of deliberation because it is seen to emerge from the requirement that deliberants transcend their private interests and engage with alternative views, beliefs, and values. Niemeyer and Dryzek further describe an intersubjectively rational situation as emerging “when individuals who agree on preferences also concur on the relevant reasons, and vice versa for disagreement” (p. 500). Intersubjective rationality is an important outcome of deliberation since it allows for normative criteria to be applied to decisions, without having to designate particular decisions as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. As pointed out by Bächtiger et al. (2010) and many others, there has been a certain slippage in differentiating between deliberation and other forms of communication. The concepts of metaconsensus and intersubjective rationality are therefore important not only for envisaging the outcomes of deliberation, but also for defining the character of successful deliberation over other forms of dialogue.

However, the value of the constructs of metaconsensus and intersubjective rationality lies in their description of theoretical and abstract outcomes of deliberation. They do not tell us anything about the specific content that could be characterized as the conclusion of a deliberation on a particular issue. Thus, if we consider the particular conclusions that a group of individuals reach after successful deliberation as the ‘product’ of deliberation, then metaconsensus and intersubjectivity (or similar constructs) are designed to tell us about the quality of the product (and the procedure leading up to it), rather than the product itself. Notions such as metaconsensus and intersubjectivity may therefore allow us to evaluate whether the conclusions of a deliberative forum satisfy the criteria of normative theoretical models of deliberative democracy. What they do not do is specify how one might synthesise the discussions that take place in a deliberative forum to prepare a concise set of conclusions or recommendations that could be presented to policymakers.

One can speculate that one reason for the lack of attention to developing specifications for achieving a particular product of deliberation is that in many cases this may be seen as obvious. It is certainly possible to envisage situations in which the formulation or identification of deliberative decisions is relatively straightforward. For example, Niemeyer (2004) analyses the process whereby participants in a citizen's jury arrive at conclusions about policy options pertaining to a controversial road in the tropical North East of Australia. Notably, the deliberants were given a limited number of policy options to structure their responses and preferences (p. 356):

**Bituminise:** Upgrade the road by sealing with bitumen.

**Upgrade:** Upgrade the road, to a dirt road suitable for conventional vehicles.

**Stabilise:** Stabilise specific trouble spots, such as steep slopes, on the road but leave it as a 4WD [four-wheel-drive] track.

**Status quo:** Maintain the road in its current condition as a 4WD track.

**Close:** Close the road and rehabilitate it.

Niemeyer's report on the deliberation includes far more nuanced discussion of deliberants' reasoning underlying the preference options, and certainly does not suggest that a final decision on preference options should be understood as a straightforward directive. The purpose of presenting this example is thus not to identify limitations of the approach, but rather to point out that in some cases it may be both feasible and appropriate to provide deliberants with an a priori structure of possible decisions that are available for a problem and that constitute acceptable outcomes of deliberation.<sup>1</sup> In such cases, the 'output' of deliberation might simply be seen to be the endorsement of any one of those options. Alternatively, if no consensus were reached, a crystallization of informed opinion could still be achieved (in the example above, Niemeyer reports a split between the positions of 'closure' and 'status quo'). However, it is a special case for the problem under consideration to be parsable into five distinct policy options. Most controversial problems relating to health policy are far too complex to be represented in this fashion. A particular example is that of the social, ethical, and legal challenges surrounding biobanks (Burgess, O'Doherty, & Secko, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Niemeyer (personal communication) points out that it was mainly for research purposes that deliberants were offered discrete policy preference options. However, this does not detract from the observation that some issues can meaningfully be broken down into an a priori structure of discrete and available solutions.

There are no obvious pre-formulated policy options that can be presented to a deliberative forum, from which one could emerge as the best possible option. Although some definite policy options are emerging, for instance, for alternative models of informed consent (Caulfield & Kaye, 2009), there are also substantive critiques claiming that the very focus on informed consent is misplaced and that consent options need to be discussed in the context of just one component in the larger issue of biobank governance (e.g., Winickoff, 2009).

While it is thus possible to pre-formulate policy options for deliberation on the topic of biobanks or other health policy issues similar to the road closure example, the choice of policy options to present for deliberation is itself not neutral but subject to a particular reading of the situation. This is not to say that any kind of framing of issues pre-deliberation is inappropriate; rather, there is a justificatory burden on the organizers of the deliberation with regard to the particular agenda they choose to put before the public forum. This point is dealt with in more detail below in the consideration of the example of the BC BioLibrary.

One further point should be considered in conceptualizing the results of deliberation. Returning to the road closure example, it is conceivable that it is not only the endorsement of a particular policy option that would be useful to policymakers, but also the detailed reasoning of the public forum as to why that particular policy option was favoured. Particularly when the deliberation does not result in consensus, but in a persistent disagreement crystallized around two mutually exclusive positions, the reasoning behind each position is arguably vital information for the ultimate decision-maker(s). Indeed, Niemeyer (2011) emphasizes that the reported outcome of deliberative processes should focus on expressed reasoning, rather than just aggregated preferences. The substantive policy outcome for the road closure deliberation was thus not based simply on the preference options, but rather on a detailed discussion of underlying reasoning and the two main positions that emerged. Thus, no matter how neat and well-structured the policy options are that are presented for deliberation, it may well be necessary to engage with the largely unstructured qualitative data to emerge from deliberation to get the most out of the results of the process.

### **The structure of deliberative discourse**

Independent of how the product of deliberation is envisaged, analysis or synthesis of the conversations that occurred in a given deliberation requires some systematic approach to qualitative data. The problem of extracting meaningful conclusions from large amounts of qualitative data is not new and many methodological solutions have been proposed and are being used successfully to analyse data from interview and focus group studies, as well as Internet discussion groups and other newer forms of social interaction. However, there are certain

features that make public deliberation distinct from these other forms of data, such that many existing approaches to analysis cannot appropriately be applied to deliberative data without further refinement. As outlined above, to appropriately be characterized as deliberation, discussions need to satisfy certain conditions. While there is some disagreement on precise definitions of deliberation (see also Delli Carpini, Lomax Cook, & Jacobs, 2004), Chambers' (2003, p. 309) definition provides a useful outline of commonly accepted characteristics:

Deliberation is debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants. Although consensus need not be the ultimate aim of deliberation, and participants are expected to pursue their interests, an overarching interest in the legitimacy of outcomes (understood as justification to all affected) ideally characterizes deliberation.

Assuming that these criteria are satisfied by the discussions of a given deliberative forum, there necessarily will be certain features that characterise the discourse emergent from such a forum. That is, the structure of *deliberative discourse* is distinct from other forms of discourse, and the features of this structure need to be taken into account in the analysis of deliberative data (see also O'Doherty [2012] for an extended discussion on deliberative discourse). Based on Chambers' definition of deliberation, there are at least three features that need to be taken into account in synthesising or extracting conclusions from deliberative data:

1. As a goal of deliberation is to produce considered opinions, and deliberants are intended to become increasingly informed over the duration of the process of deliberation, each individual's statements (as well as statements of the group as a whole) will ideally be characterised by being increasingly better informed.<sup>2</sup> That is, particular statements of even the same individual will differ in the degree to which they take into account relevant information. When considering different and potentially contradictory statements of one individual deliberant, for example, it seems intuitively correct to allocate greater weight to those statements that show evidence of taking into account a greater depth and breadth of considerations, and that possibly occurred later in the process of deliberation.

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<sup>2</sup> For those who object to this implied cognitivism in analysis of discourse and follow a strong relativist epistemology for analysis, the notion of a particular statement being 'better informed' than another can also be operationalised as a statement that takes into account a larger set of available technical information than another statement on the same issue.

2. Over the course of deliberation, participants are expected to listen to others and take their views into account in the formulation and refinement of their own views and statements. Once again, therefore, the principles of deliberation upon which the format of discussions is based seem to imply that more weight is given to certain statements over others in the process of synthesising the conclusions of the deliberation. In particular, it would seem appropriate to give more weight to statements that are demonstrably more collective than others. (Note that I am here not making normative claims about how deliberation ought to proceed. I am rather describing norms for the analysis of deliberation that are implied by the structure of discourse if it is produced through adherence to typical deliberative norms. Though there is some debate about the role of self-interest in deliberation (see Mansbridge et al., 2010) this debate pertains to the norms of deliberation, rather than analytical norms of how to conceptualise the 'product' of deliberation).
3. Following from the previous point, the nominal goal of deliberation is to reach agreement on certain statements or recommendations. If such consensus is reached, then the statements it incorporates are conceptually and analytically distinct from other statements made by participants over the course of deliberation. Arguably, any analysis of deliberative discourse that attempts to synthesise discussions or extract conclusions fails if it does not take into account the distinct character of deliberative conclusions versus other statements produced during the deliberation.

A main point of the preceding analysis is to illustrate the reasons why content or thematic analyses cannot be applied in a straightforward fashion to deliberative data when attempting to synthesise results. In particular, such analyses do not distinguish between statements made at the beginning of a deliberation and those made closer to the end, which are likely to be characterised by important differences in the amount of information taken into account and the degree to which these statements incorporate reflection on other deliberants' views. Such analyses will also not be able to account for individuals changing their minds and expressing different positions over the course of deliberation. Nevertheless, such kinds of analyses can still be useful. Elsewhere (O'Doherty & Burgess, 2009) we have argued for a distinction between the deliberative and the analytical output of a public deliberation. Deliberative output is here defined as an explicit collective statement of deliberants about a position or policy preference. Importantly, deliberative output should be recognizable by deliberants as the result of their deliberations (which is often not the case for complex analyses conducted on qualitative – or quantitative – data.). In contrast, the analytical output of a deliberative forum can be conceptualized as any analyses of the deliberative data that follow accepted principles of social scientific inquiry. Different forms of

analytical output will likely go beyond the simple reporting of deliberants' collective statements and may or may not be accessible to deliberants.

Because analytical output may draw more comprehensively on recordings and transcripts as well as other relevant materials such as flip charts and field notes or even materials from wider contexts such as media influences, it is likely to yield additional insights not available in the deliberative output. Nevertheless, there is a political legitimacy to deliberative output that is not necessarily available to analytical output. After all, if a public forum is gathered for the specific purpose of generating and voicing a public position on an issue, the primary mandate would seem to be the reporting of that collective voice, rather than an analyst's reading of the deliberative event.

### **Constructing Deliberative Output**

If the arguments presented above are accepted, then a corollary is that the constitution of the results of a deliberative forum relies on the particular balance between pre-imposed deliberative structure, the actual process of facilitation, and post-deliberative analysis. Which of these three factors predominates is, of course, variable and dependent on the particular case. Overall, however, there is a tension between pre-imposing structure and allowing for issues to emerge through deliberation.

Although a high level of pre-deliberation structuring of the issues is likely to be more useful to policymakers, such framing of issues has been criticized because it may diminish the ability of those consulted to freely elaborate on the nature of their views and position (Petersen, 2007). At worst, too narrowly focused public engagement may come to be seen as mere tokenism. On the other hand, providing no structure at all and allowing discussion to roam widely may reduce the relevance of the conclusions, as policymakers may not be able to act on the advice emerging from the public forum.

Below I use the case of the *BC BioLibrary Deliberation* to illustrate an example of a process for constituting the deliberative output on a complex health topic. I illustrate first the process and rationale underlying the pre-deliberation structuring of the topic and issues to be presented to members of the public for discussion. The purpose of outlining this structure is not to endorse our particular approach, but rather to illustrate in a case study how the trade-off between pre-imposing structure and allowing for emergent issues can be managed. I then briefly describe the role of facilitators in assisting deliberants to work towards collective statements. Finally, I give some examples of how the deliberative output (i.e., the

explicit collective statements of the group) can be meaningfully supplemented with additional qualitative analyses for particular purposes.

### **Pre-deliberation structuring of topic and framing of issues**

The BC BioLibrary is a not-for-profit publicly funded platform that acts to network existing biobanks in British Columbia (BC), Canada (Watson, et al., 2009). As part of its governance mandate, the BioLibrary has made a commitment towards public engagement and taking views of the public into account in constructing its daily operations and ethics protocols. To this end, the BC BioLibrary Deliberation was conducted in April and May 2009 to provide BioLibrary management with legitimate, meaningful, and informed public input on issues relevant to BioLibrary management decisions. The BC BioLibrary Deliberation followed previous work (the BC Biobank Deliberation conducted in 2007), in which members of the public were consulted about their views on biobanking. A key difference between the two events is that the 2007 BC Biobank Deliberation involved almost no pre-deliberation structuring of issues (Burgess, O'Doherty, & Secko, 2008), whereas the 2009 BC BioLibrary Deliberation presented members of the public with a well-articulated choice architecture. Here I give only a brief description of how this structuring was achieved; more detail is available in O'Doherty and Hawkins (2010).

Issues to be discussed were presented to deliberants in the form of a workbook that was divided into five sections, each dealing with a distinct topic pertaining to the social and ethical implications of biobanking. Each topic contained between one and five specific questions to be deliberated by forum participants. Each section included an introductory paragraph outlining the main characteristics of the problem and the particular questions that participants were asked to discuss and use to formulate recommendations for the BioLibrary. Each section also included additional information in the form of vignettes and explanations of relevant terminology (for a more detailed description of the items discussed under each of the five topics and a copy of the complete workbook, see [www.biobanktalk.ca](http://www.biobanktalk.ca)).

The structure of the workbook constrained deliberation in two important ways. First, deliberants were restricted from spending too much time on issues that were not directly relevant to the topic. Given the relatively high cost of such forums and the limited time that is available for members of the public to give their input, it is highly desirable to keep discussion reasonably focused. Second, and more importantly, constraining the deliberation to the issues identified in the workbook ensured that the final recommendations of the forum were within the scope of BC BioLibrary management to act upon and put into practice. No matter how relevant the items discussed by deliberants might be to the larger issues or to expressing

their particular values or lived experiences, there is limited efficacy if the ability to act on recommendations falls outside the purview of the sponsor of the deliberative forum.

Nevertheless, in spite of the benefits of such structuring of issues, as argued above, this relatively high degree of imposed structure carries with it a justificatory burden regarding the particular framing of the issues that is chosen. If the framing is so tight that it does not allow deliberants to express underlying values or interests, the very purpose of the deliberation becomes questionable. Worse, if the framing of issues is deemed to be inappropriate or simply endorsing particular vested interests, the deliberation may work to undermine public trust (Walmsley, 2009). That is, the deliberation may be perceived as a rubber stamp to provide legitimacy to preconceived outcomes of those in power (irrespective of whether such a perception is justified or not).

In the case of the BC BioLibrary Deliberation, the particular structuring of issues was achieved by analysis of the practices of the BioLibrary to identify precise junctures where there was uncertainty regarding the most ‘ethical’ or appropriate way to construct institutional policy and governance. There was thus genuine regulatory uncertainty for which public input was sought. In addition, the issues presented for deliberation were cross referenced against the results of the previous BC Biobank Deliberation (O’Doherty & Burgess, 2009). The results from this previous deliberation were not based on any framing of the issues (deliberants were free to choose their own agenda and decide which issues they deemed were most important). This cross-referencing ensured that emergent themes and values that arose during unstructured deliberations on biobanking were identified and incorporated in the structure imposed on deliberation for the subsequent structured deliberation. Building on this prior knowledge of informed public discourse on biobanking also enabled us to identify unwarranted assumptions on our part and align the framing as much as possible with public values on the subject. Most importantly, it was recognised that no matter how much effort went into the pre-deliberation framing of issues, we may still not have gotten it right; our pre-framing of questions for deliberation may still not be optimal for deliberants to be able to fully express their collective views as policy recommendations. For this reason, all pre-deliberation framing of issues was deemed provisional and, where necessary, issues were reframed during the actual deliberation to help deliberants better express their positions.

### **Facilitation towards group opinion**

Given the obvious importance of the role of the facilitator in deliberation, surprisingly little has been written on the subject. Here I only have time to touch on the matter briefly and will confine myself to describing the role of facilitation

in the BC BioLibrary Deliberation. This forum involved 25 citizens who were assisted in their deliberations by one main facilitator and three 'small group' facilitators who coordinated conversation in breakout groups of 8-9 individuals. Deliberants worked through the topic in a structured manner, using the workbook as a guide to address each of the five topics in turn. In each case, the topic was introduced in the large group by senior BioLibrary personnel who provided technical information and explained the relevant ethical challenges. Deliberants then split into the small groups where they shared ideas, experiences, and opinions on the particular topic. They then reconvened in the large group to attempt to work towards agreement on a collective statement on the issues discussed.

Although the facilitation task was to work towards consensus, agreement was not forced; and when it was evident that the group was divided on some issue even after in-depth deliberation, this was logged as a persistent disagreement and the poles of the argument clearly articulated and documented. Discussion of each item was concluded with a vote (see Moore & O'Doherty, under review, for a more detailed theoretical discussion of voting in deliberation). Importantly, this vote was not intended to revert to a model of aggregative (rather than deliberative) democracy (Young, 2000). Rather, the purpose was to provide a certain closure to discussion on one issue, enabling a shift to the next issue, and to ensure that participants who disagreed with a majority or vocal minority view had an explicit opportunity to express themselves. The practice of calling a vote for each question and recommendation also allowed the facilitator to obtain clear documentation of divergent views and the reasoning of both majority and minority perspectives. Once all five topics were dealt with in this way, the group was guided through a ratification process of all conclusions they had reached over the previous four days of deliberation. The collective statements to come out of this final ratification were collated and presented to participants on a poster, which was seen to constitute the 'official' results of the deliberative event.

Each step of the facilitated process served a particular purpose. The small group deliberations served to give all participants the opportunity to speak and further familiarise deliberants with the particular issues being discussed before working towards conclusions. However, to avoid duplication of tasks and the formation of strong group positions before deliberation in the large group, facilitators purposefully kept the small group from working towards too much agreement at this stage. Once in the large group, the facilitation changed from attempting to elicit experiences and opinions from each individual to working towards explicit group opinion. This was effected by emphasising the notion of *civic solutions* to the challenges being discussed; that is, moving deliberants from simply expressing their personal views on the matter to attempting to come to agreement

on policy solutions that would accommodate the plurality of values and interests present in society. As outlined above, where consensus was not achieved, the nature and degree of disagreement was articulated and documented.

Finally, the ratification process at the end of the deliberative event served to overcome order effects in the presentation of the different topics and to allow the group to take into account the totality of information and views they were exposed to over the four days of deliberation when finalising their conclusions. The role of the facilitators in all of this was critical, as it is through them that the process of deliberation is conveyed to participants and enacted. It is also through the facilitators that different sessions of the deliberative event are geared towards expression and exploration of diverse views, versus convergence to collective statements of opinion.

### **Supplementary post-deliberation analyses**

Deliberative output, as defined and illustrated above, may benefit from having a certain process legitimacy in that it allows for the representation of the results of deliberation with minimal post-deliberation analytical intervention. It thus has the particular advantage of being recognised by deliberants as being the set of conclusions they reached, particularly if there was a ratification phase. However, deliberative output may turn out to be a rather abbreviated representation of what occurred in a deliberative forum. It certainly does not contain the richness that would be available from a more in-depth analysis of deliberation transcripts reflecting many hours of conversation. Such additional analyses therefore have the potential to provide insights not available from a study of deliberative output alone.

For example, one component of the deliberative output of the (2007) BC Biobank Deliberation was a call for independent governance of biobanks. While this is a clear recommendation that can be interpreted in a fairly straightforward manner, additional analysis of the reasoning that took place over several days of deliberation to lead up to this recommendation allows us to understand the public value systems that were invoked to justify this particular position, as well as the particular (cultural/emotional/institutional) functions that citizens had in mind when recommending independent governance (Hawkins & O'Doherty, 2010). Another example is the issue of how to manage the initial introduction between a biobank and potential donors. This issue was flagged by BioLibrary personnel as one of particular interest (owing to regulatory and ethical uncertainty) and so constituted one of the five topics of the workbook for the (2009) BC BioLibrary Deliberation. Although the deliberative output gives some clear guidance on the collective recommendation of how to manage this process, additional analysis of deliberation transcripts provides rich detail not available in the deliberative

output, and yet of value to BioLibrary personnel in formulating best practice guidelines for how to approach potential new donors (O'Doherty, Ibrahim, Hawkins, et al., 2012).

It is important, however, to recognise that in terms of political legitimacy, it would be difficult for such supplementary analyses to replace the ratified deliberative output of a public engagement. While additional analyses can be invaluable in helping to address questions of particular interest to policymakers, in the context of representing the conclusions or results of a deliberation, they should not be viewed on the same level as the ratified collective statements of the deliberative forum.

## **Conclusion**

Structured deliberation offers social scientists a unique form of data with distinct analytical implications. In purporting to measure public opinion, most traditional survey methods implicitly assume that individuals have pre-formed opinions (or values, preferences, etc.) that are relatively enduring and bounded, and thus 'cognitively available' and possible to report to researchers. In utilising the results of such studies, then, policymakers presumably attempt to formulate policy that, ideally, conforms or at least takes into account these opinions and values. It is worthwhile to note that the epistemological foundation underlying such approaches has been criticised, based on empirical studies pointing to the situatedness of the social interaction in which 'opinions' are produced in such research settings (e.g., Lipari, 2000; Puchta & Potter, 2002). That is, implementation and analysis of studies involving surveys, interviews, and focus groups are argued to produce, rather than measure, public opinion. In this context, data from deliberative forums present an interesting development: an explicit goal of deliberation is for participants to develop a collective position on a given issue. The product of deliberation is thus an explicitly acknowledged, socially and culturally situated, and negotiated social construct.

Given this observation, reporting of the product of deliberation (here termed deliberative output) needs to be separated conceptually from analysis of transcripts or other deliberation data (here termed the analytical output of a deliberation). Moreover, taking the principles of deliberative democracy seriously implies that synthesis of deliberative data must take into account the features of deliberative discourse that led to the production of collective statements by members of the deliberating group (features include increasing awareness of technical information, consideration of social implications and other deliberants' views on the issue). The epistemic foundation for a synthesis of deliberative data needs to involve recognition that the result of deliberation is not a measure of

values or opinions that existed with individuals prior to deliberation; rather, the result of deliberation is something that is produced collectively through the deliberative process. I have argued here that how this product is achieved depends on at least three factors: the pre-deliberation structure and framing of the topic and issues presented to deliberants for discussion, the process of facilitation, and any post-event analysis that may be undertaken. Accordingly, meaningful and legitimate representation or synthesis of the results of deliberation should take into account the complexity of the discourse that is produced in such settings. While I have described one example of achieving legitimate synthesis of the results of a deliberation on biobanking, this example is meant to be illustrative rather than prescriptive. Context is of paramount importance and generalisations can thus be made only on the level of principle, rather than aiming for strict adherence to methods.

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