

# Public Information and Participation:

In nanotechnology and biotechnology assessment

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## Overview:

- Public information;
  - Models of public participation:
    - 1) Tanking up (benzin) model (Greve 2010);
    - 2) Branding model (Urdu 2001);
    - 3) Battlefield model (Waltz 2009; Jennings 1997);
    - 4) Dialogic model (Burchell et al 2009; Kurath & Gisler 2009; Deetz 2007);
      - a) pro-forma dialogues;
      - b) native dialogues (consensus model);
      - c) dynamic & iterative authentic dialogues;
  - Conclusion
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## Public information in technology assessments

- giving predetermined interpretations;
  - giving predetermined meanings to the public;
  - meanings are not made in a vacuum:
    - they are, and will always be worked out—in a process where interpreter's present situation, knowledge, ideologies, values, & politics of interest groups will commingle with history;

So,

- the question of which & whose meanings are given importance, voice, & for what intended purposes: is crucial;

## Tanking up (benzin) model of PP in technology assessment

- meaning giving: by dominant actors to the public;
- assumes existence of fixed, objective, or natural meanings—to be accepted by all publics;
- ignores discrepancy b/n senders' intended meaning & interpreted meanings by multiple publics;
  - including silent, silenced, or openly oppositional meanings;
- naturalize the cultural:
  - if it ignores or denies investment of values in development & interpretations of all technologies;
- ✓ naturalizing dominant values, beliefs, ideologies;

## Branding model of PP in technology assesement

- find out what targeted public want, tolerate, or desire;
- gain insight on public expectations, values or needs, & use this insight to design & deliver effective messages:
- sell technology through rational (logical) or affective (emotional) appeals:
  - ❑ manage public attitudes and perceptions;
  - ❑ control publics' meaning-making processes;
  - ❑ manufacture/engineer needs, desires; etc
- ✓ reproduce & reinforce hegemonic values, beliefs, or ideologies;

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## Battlefield model of PP in technology assessment

- win-lose implicit or explicit value struggles;
  - defensive reasoning: kills opportunity for learning;
  - prospect of questioning or reflecting on their taken-for-granted assumptions, values, beliefs, knowledge—is too threatening;
  - discrepancy between “theories in action” (the way they think they are acting), & “theories in use” (the way they really act).
  - ❑ **Self-serving, self-sealing, impervious to change;**  
(inspired & appropriated from Chris Argyris 2008)
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## Pro-forma PP dialogues

- conform to conventions, social expectations, or calls for dialogues;
  - “suspension of disbelief”:
    - good at creating subtle imageries or illusions of “we care”; “we are listening”; “we empathise” etc;
  - therapeutic: provide a space for “venting”;
  - all involved know that initiated dialogues are mere performances/acts:
    - all involved don’t believe in, or trust the dialogue initiatives;
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### Native dialogues (Baxter 2004; Deetz 2004, 2007)

- space for expressing multiple elite meanings;
  - seek consensus, common ground;
  - denial of bias & prejudices in all interpretations;
  - ignores differences in human values, experiences, or knowledges;
  - preclude alternative, non-elite meanings;
  - “violate” powerless voices (values) & ideologies;
  - techno=natural, orderly, stable, & predictable...
  - sanitize what is otherwise cultural;
  - reproduce dominant values, & ideologies;
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### Authentic dialogues (Deetz 2004, 2007)

- equal access to technology assessments forums;
  - Qn taken for granted assumptions, values, knowledge;
  - recognize differences & diversity of values & meanings;
  - embrace conflicts & differences in meanings of new technologies = pathways to new discoveries;
  - integrates multiple social values—including less powerful ones—in core R&D, as well as technology developments, decisions, & structures;
  - produce new shared meanings/values;
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## Conclusion

- ❑ Need for authentic dialogues that:
  - embrace value differences and value conflicts;
  - embrace differences in experiences & thus knowledge— even within the same culture or subculture;
  - open and transparent value debates;
  - transform value differences and conflicts into positive and creative energy;
  - further collective meaning making;
  - produce – collectively – shared new values;
  - provide opportunity for collective learning /growth;