

## Learning to facilitate deliberation: practicing the art of hosting

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Deliberation is increasingly embraced as a mode of policy-making, and this paper focuses on how facilitators of deliberative policy processes become critical, pragmatic practitioners of their complex craft. We analyze how deliberation facilitators learn to do their work through ethnographic study of an approach to facilitation known as the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter. We identify three ways in which people learning to facilitate transform knowledge so that they become skilled facilitators. They do so by metabolizing hosting techniques to understand and incorporate or eschew them their repertoire; by situating hosting knowledge to apply or adapt it in particular contexts; and by coproducing knowledge of hosting with a community of practitioners. We demonstrate how these learning processes support public policy deliberations through illustrations and discuss the potential contributions of the Art of Hosting for enhancing societal capacities for deliberative policy-making.

**Keywords:** facilitation; policy deliberation; art of hosting; knowledge production; learning theories; pragmatism

This article explores how facilitators of deliberative policy processes learn their craft. A great deal is expected of facilitators in terms of their skills and the support they provide for good policy outcomes. Deliberation is increasingly identified as a preferred approach to decision-making in public policy and administration (Roberts 2004, Cooper *et al.* 2006). The values associated with deliberation include enacting democracy and inclusion (Young 2000, Fung and Wright 2003) and strengthening relationships for ongoing policy implementation (Quick and Feldman 2011). Deliberation also supports good policy outcomes by helping participants enhance their understanding of issues (Abers 2000, Fung 2007) and generate support for decisions and their implementation (Laurian and Shaw 2008).

While the benefits of deliberation are clear, how one becomes capable of deliberation is not. The ability to deliberate does not exist inherently, so it is important to examine how capacity for this form of democratic, participatory governance is built. One of the existing explanations is that facilitators with special competence play increasingly central roles in supporting collective capacity for democratic deliberation (Bingham *et al.* 2005, Escobar 2011, Moore 2012, Polletta and Chen 2013). Deliberation, as distinguished from other forms of participation in policy-making, involves multidirectional communication (Fischer and Forester 1993, Innes and Booher 2010), exploring others' perspectives (Innes and Booher 2010), exchanging public as well as private reasons about policy topics and preferences (Gastil 2000) and potentially discovering shared values (Reich 1990, Abers 2000), changing minds through reflecting upon options rather than coercion or simple bargaining (Dryzek 2000, Fung and Wright 2003) and making decisions in just and inclusive ways (Young 2000). Facilitators appear to play a key role in shaping the

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discursive exchange and group dynamics required to support these deliberation dynamics. In this paper, we examine how facilitators acquire the knowledge and judgment to do so with skill.

The skills and pragmatism expected of facilitators imply that they play a demanding, central role in the success of deliberation. Schools of public policy, public administration and planning increasingly recognize a demand for professionals with abilities to convene democratic processes and seek ways to train their students in these skills (Leighninger 2010). A diverse array of individuals have and desire these skills, both trained professionals specializing in facilitation or engagement and others, such as community organizers, public and nonprofit managers and political leaders, who facilitate in the context of a broader scope of work (Leighninger 2006, Ryfe 2007, Lee 2011). Indeed, a ‘consultancy industry’ of professional facilitators appears to be growing in size and influence, and concerns have been raised about how commercialization of these skills affects the quality and integrity of the deliberative processes these practitioners support (Hendriks and Carson 2008). The patterns of learning processes that we identify in this paper provide a new lens for critiquing what and how the participants in this emerging community of experts train themselves in their craft.

Research and practical guidance for facilitators emphasize that their individual competence is very important in determining the quality of deliberation and what results from it. Yet, this role is demanding. Facilitating deliberation is a complex ability, demanding skill and judgment in the design and implementation of engagement efforts. John Forester suggests that skilled facilitators are doing

*not just* the pragmatic work of facilitating a discussion, but the critical pragmatic work of thinking through the procedural design, thinking through the politics and ethics, the normative structuring, of that discussion in the first place.... A critical pragmatism must be attentive not just to getting agreements or ‘getting things done!’ but to the legitimacy and transparency and accountability of that pragmatic production of agreements, deals, and consequences. The critical pragmatist, we see, must attend to expertly informed outcomes and to equitably structured processes as well. (Forester 2013, p. 19, emphasis in original)

In this paper, we investigate how facilitators become prepared for their complex and demanding roles by studying a group of practitioners and analyzing both how they learn their craft and how they deploy their learning in deliberative settings. Through interpreting facilitators’ accounts of their learning and work, we answer critiques that prior scholarship on deliberation has not sufficiently captured facilitators’ views of their craft and how they are enlisted in deliberative processes (Hendriks and Carson 2008, Cooper and Smith 2012). Our analysis of what these facilitators are taught to do and how they learn to practice aligns with previous interpretive scholarship on the knowledge and judgment brought to bear by facilitators of deliberative processes in implementing deliberation (e.g., Forester 1999, Healey 2008) or evaluating its success (Mansbridge *et al.* 2006). We complement their work through an examination of how facilitators acquire those skills and perspectives. In examining co-learning that occurs among facilitators, we complement previous scholarship about the ‘co-learning’ or ‘co-production’ that occurs among participants as they interact in deliberative policy settings and produce policy decisions (Roberts 2004, Innes and Booher 2010, Quick and Feldman 2011). We also contribute analysis of an emerging body of practice formally known as the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter (hereafter, ‘hosting’ or ‘Art of Hosting’) (Block 2009, Wheatley and Frieze 2011).

To investigate both *what* and *how* these facilitators learn, we first review the skills and techniques that facilitators are typically expected to learn, referencing relevant theories on the nature of knowledge and its production. We introduce some distinctive features of the hosting facilitation approach and explain how we collected and analyzed data on hosting training and implementation from practitioners. Through grounded theory development from our data, we describe how hosts are trained, providing illustrations of how they utilize that knowledge in policy deliberations. We identify three key, interdependent transformations of knowledge that these facilitators undertake in learning their craft: metabolizing, situating and co-producing knowledge. We conclude by discussing implications of these findings for expanding societal capacities for deliberative policy-making.

### What and how facilitators learn

What do facilitators learn? Research on deliberative processes (Forester 1999, Mansbridge *et al.* 2006, Jacobs *et al.* 2009, Bryson *et al.* 2013), handbooks for facilitation professionals (Creighton 2005, Lieberman Baker and Fraser 2005, Schwarz *et al.* 2005, Sunwolf and Frey 2005, Kaner 2007, Escobar 2011) and online resources for practitioners (IAP2.org, NCDD.org, publicconversations.org) identify multiple areas of competence required of facilitators. All emphasize skills for managing discursive exchange and group dynamics, with some also suggesting that expertise in the policy content area is not necessary and that neutrality about the outcomes is desirable. These identify several key tasks of the skilled facilitator, including:

- Selecting the processes best suited for accomplishing the task at hand, combining prior planning with improvisation to respond to emerging dynamics.
- Establishing and enforcing ground rules and group norms, particularly maintaining a respectful, open and inclusive environment.
- Supporting diverse participation and manage potential problems of exclusion, power and associated conflict.
- Helping the group work toward its objectives, in part by focusing on relevant topics and managing time.
- Enhancing the development of mutual understanding, for example, through asking clarifying questions, rephrasing statements and supporting diverse perspectives.

Formal training for facilitators typically emphasizes effective techniques and concepts for accomplishing these tasks. This kind of instruction is well suited to communicating explicit and expert knowledge, which are content areas that can be articulated, codified or stored as forms of decontextualized, technical knowledge (Scott 1998, Yanow 2004). While valuable, these modes of instruction and the discrete skills conveyed are not sufficient to create skilled facilitators. The judgment described earlier by Forester (2013) also involves eliciting and activating ‘tacit’ knowledge – the practical knowledge often implicit in a situation (Polanyi 1966).

Facilitators develop this knowledge through acting, testing their intuitions and perceptions and reflecting on results. For example, when facilitators interpret and work with the emotions surrounding a policy issue and dialogue (e.g., hope, urgency, fatigue), they are assessing what a setting demands from their facilitation skills, which aspects of their knowledge to bring to bear, and how to do so. They are exercising what theories of pragmatism describe as ‘practical inquiry’ or ‘practical judgment’, which involves drawing on their broad, generalizable bases of knowledge and frameworks to interpret and act

in ways situated in the particular context (Suchman 1987, Nicolini *et al.* 2003). They orient that work to the ends they wish to achieve, in an iterative, interactive cycle of redefining the policy challenges and solutions (Schön and Rein 1994, Healey 2008).

This ‘learning in action’ (Argyris and Schön 1996) or ‘knowing in practice’ (Orlikowski 2002) is not a matter of received knowledge that facilitators can access through traditional training models. Nor is it merely a cognitive process. Eliciting the relevant features of particular contexts and exercising practical judgment are situated in practice, an embodied experience in which understanding is elicited through practical engagement with objects or problems situated in particular environments (Dewey 1925, Yanow 2004). Learning theories suggest that these capacities are better developed through interacting in and reflecting on settings iteratively (Schön 1983, Kolb 1984, Forester 1999, Thomas and Seely Brown 2011). Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) describe these processes as ‘situated learning’, an element of their theory that learning is inherently social, occurring through ‘communities of practice’ in which individuals learn through being exposed to, taking up or modifying practices in exchanges with others. The Art of Hosting community’s approach to training deliberation facilitators is unusual because it incorporates learning through practice, reflection and the intentional creation of a community of practitioners.

### **The Art of Hosting**

The intentional practice of learning through reflection is just one of several features of hosting that make it particularly well suited to our analysis of how people learn to facilitate. Introduced in Denmark, hosting approaches are now being used by the European Union Commission and in the United States, Canada, Zimbabwe and South Africa, among other places (Holman *et al.* 2007, Wheatley and Frieze 2011). Thousands of people have now been trained in hosting.<sup>1</sup> Its growing popularity alone merits critical attention from practitioners and scholars of deliberation and facilitation, including those concerned by the growing ‘consultancy industry’ of deliberative facilitators (Hendriks and Carson 2008). For that reason, while this study is not an evaluation of hosting per se, we do include descriptions of characteristic features of hosting to convey what is distinctive about the practice and the skill development it requires of practitioners.

Hosting provides a window into researching how facilitators learn both about discrete techniques, concepts and artifacts *and* about situating that knowledge in overall process designs and particular settings. People trained in the Art of Hosting are taught a suite of techniques and patterns, and hosting is more of an assemblage of practices than a method. In hosting training workshops, trainers explicitly encourage practitioners to select among sequence and modify techniques to adapt to the contexts in which they work. Experienced and new hosts are invited to participate in an Art of Hosting ‘community of practitioners’ to continue to learn and produce knowledge. Indeed, hosting knowledge is supported and generated through an open source, democratic philosophy in which the methods and ideas draw upon pooled knowledge, facilitation techniques and frameworks, developed by others willing to share them at no cost within the community.

Hosting’s orientation toward learning and shared knowledge goes beyond trainings and the community of practitioners, however. One of the explicit espoused values of hosting is to promote learning among all involved in the deliberative setting, summarized in the premise that, ‘Learning together makes us all stronger, better equipped to serve the growing needs [for a] shift in how human beings organize themselves to accomplish meaningful purpose (Holman *et al.* 2007, p. 85)’. All participants at events are presumed

to have wisdom about the problem at hand, and the point of the hosted setting is to encourage learning through the interactions. Thus, with support from the hosts, participants discover the key issues, define the content of the agenda and have responsibility for both the direction and quality of the conversation. Quick and Feldman (2011) have asserted that diverse public engagement processes produce different kinds of political communities, some in which participants are alienated, some in which the parties are atomized and some which are inclusive, meaning that diverse participants coproduce the means and ends of their policy deliberations. Viewed through this lens, the philosophy of the Art of Hosting is inclusive. This has implications for what hosts learn to do, for how they practice and for how they learn to host.

Notably, hosting practitioners play a distinctly decentered role as facilitators. The skills traditionally expected of facilitators, described above, place them in a central role: they are the actors who design the process, set forth ground rules, mediate conflict, manage time, guide who speaks and filter what is and is not relevant. In contrast, hosts play a convening role: the word ‘host’ signals their position of issuing a gracious invitation and providing a comfortable space for participants to interact. Hosting has been characterized as a form of leadership in which ‘the heroes go home’ and the job of a leader is to convene the conversation, to invite people to share their insights and develop new understandings and ultimately to enable deliberators to organize and direct themselves (Wheatley and Frieze 2011). Hosts’ roles are to legitimate the wisdom of the collective, to cultivate inquiry and experimentation by the deliberating group, and to sense and lead movement to ‘the learning edge’ in the group (Holman *et al.* 2007, p. 86). They create a ‘container’ (Isaacs 1999) or ‘hold the space’ (Senge 2006) within which inquiry, negotiation and dialogue can occur.

### Research methods

Studying a group of facilitators with any common training background provides a good sampling frame for analyzing how a large group of individuals respond to and use a particular set of facilitation techniques. Our study participants were the core trainers and all training participants in two cohorts of a 3-day, introductory workshop about hosting. These trainings were sponsored by a regional foundation that sought to foster a cadre of people skilled in participatory leadership to support community-based problem-solving. Participants were invited to take part in the training at no cost and to donate 3 days of their time to hosting activities, either through opportunities they identified or by responding to calls circulated through InCommons.

We observed the training programs in-depth and, 5 to 8 months after the training, interviewed the two trainee cohorts and their trainers (69 persons) about what and how they learn to facilitate. Studying a group of individuals trained in the same facilitation practices, by the same trainers, and in the same place allowed us to analyze learning variation and explore the influence of other factors (i.e., their previous experience, field of practice and personal preferences). We utilized a multi-sited ethnographic approach (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) to both construct a thick account of study participants’ learning processes in this locale and embed it in a broader context of increasing practitioner interest and scholarship about deliberative democracy and facilitation practices.

Study participants were active in a variety of professional fields in the nonprofit, public and private sectors. Over one-third had been facilitating for 21 years or more, and they were primarily white (80%), female (70%) and highly educated with a graduate degree (80%), which is reflective of the larger population of facilitators in the United

States (Polletta and Chen 2013). Our interviews combined a standardized set of questions with follow-up probes to elicit study participants' practice stories and their interpretation of them (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). We explored how they understood the Art of Hosting in relation to other facilitation experiences they had had, their understanding of specific practices or concepts from the training, and whether and how they were using what they had learned. When interviewing the five trainers who had participated in both cohorts, we explored their theories about how training participants take up the Art of Hosting practices and concepts, what is easiest and most difficult for newcomers to learn and implement, and the supports or barriers to ongoing learning. These trainers have high credibility within the hosting community: at the time of these workshops, each one had been practicing hosting *and* serving as a steward of the international Art of Hosting community for at least several years.

In addition to these interviews, we collected data from multiple other sources. As participant observers, all members of the research team took part in the training and participated in the local community of hosting practitioners. Through fieldnotes, we problematized our own processes of learning alongside the study participants (Marcus 1998, Dewalt and Dewalt 2002). In addition, we gathered data from three policy deliberations that were hosted by individuals from our study population of hosting practitioners. All three concerned the redesign of the direction and design of public services by public or nonprofit organizations. We observed these processes and, 2 to 8 months later, conducted interviews with nine hosting practitioners from our original data set and 23 participants about how hosting had been used.

We analyzed the data from fieldnotes and interviews inductively and iteratively using thematic coding in a grounded theory development process (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The multiple sources enabled us to identify intertextuality (the presence of common phenomena or patterns occurring across multiple interviews, observations or texts), and thereby to strengthen our inferences regarding patterns within the case (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2013). Through analysis of the fieldnotes and interviews, we uncovered three learning processes through which the study participants transformed knowledge on the way to becoming capable of critically pragmatic facilitation. From this rich data set, we have selected accounts from the participants about these learning processes and illustrations of how hosts applied what they had learned in policy deliberations.

## **Learning to host**

### ***Learning explicit techniques***

The Art of Hosting trainings use a combination of traditional and innovative pedagogical methods. Unlike many traditional facilitation trainings, the workshops are not oriented to mastering a set of 'best practices' or teaching a set of prescribed steps or an ideal process design for hosting policy deliberations. Instead, the workshops provide an introduction to skills which practitioners are invited to select from or to modify for the particular deliberations they will host. However, the training begins with teaching explicit skills and competencies, each introduced in a 1–3 hour block. They are presented as internally coherent, fairly discrete and clearly named parcels of explicit knowledge, many of them introduced from sources that are already available elsewhere. Trainers circulate and display reference materials at trainings and trainees receive a guidebook summarizing these techniques. This part of the training involved transmitting explicit techniques; when we asked study participants 5 to 8 months after their training about what aspects of the



training were most memorable to them, the vast majority cited at least one of these specific techniques.

In learning how to facilitate, our study participants were more successful in applying the techniques they had learned in the training if they had understood them well. Novices, whom we define as those with up to 3 years of facilitation experience prior to the training, were more likely than more experienced practitioners to express a need for additional training or tools to make the techniques and patterns easily available for reference. However, study participants with at 3 three years of previous facilitation experience (including Adam, Ann, Bridget, Melissa, Rosalyn, Sarah and Sonya) found it easier to recall and evaluate particular techniques and concepts from the training and were able to describe how they had – or would – use them. For them, the specific techniques were not only easy to grasp, but frequently also already familiar.

An illustration of the impacts of facilitators' acquisition of these techniques in policy deliberations comes from the use of World Café (Brown and Isaacs 2005). In the region where we conducted our study, this technique is becoming so frequently used in policy circles that even people who have not been formally trained in hosting refer to it by name. They tend to treat it as nearly synonymous with hosting, and it is the one experience of hosting that they are most likely to practice themselves in their own policy settings (Authors' publication). It is an easy and appealing technique to understand and use to facilitate intensive small-group interactions and exchanges of ideas. It occurs through having groups of four to five people consider a predetermined series of questions, with participants mixing into new groups for each question, sharing what was discussed at their previous table as input for each stage of discussion. Designed for exploration of ideas rather than decisions, World Café does not support coordinated, ongoing action, but is frequently used to reset or open a dialogue about a policy issue.

Kyle, a practitioner introduced to World Café through the training, thought it might be a solution to a problem facing a human services network where he provided facilitation support. Believing that the technique 'pulls people into the experience, rather than kind of pushing them away', he thought it could engage ethnic and racial groups that had previously been absent or silent in their annual planning process. He understood, however, that he could not unilaterally introduce the technique, but needed to codevelop it with people in the lead organization in order for it to work well. After working with their director to craft good questions for the World Café, they tried it out and found that the director and meeting participants subsequently judged that the annual planning process generated more information, connections among participants and a sense of ownership than prior approaches.

A statewide dialogue about significant declines in local and state funding streams and how to address their potentially alarming implications for service-delivery levels and coordination makes clear the policy application of the World Café technique. A group of local government associations sponsored a series of six meetings throughout the state, involving more than 400 staff and elected officials. Sponsors consistently identified their primary goals as building relationships and trust across jurisdictional boundaries so that leaders could learn from each other. To accomplish those purposes, they hired Cindy, an experienced facilitator trained in hosting, who design a session utilizing an adapted World Café technique, which included sharing a meal, sitting at pre-assigned small tables to maximize a diversity of perspectives, telling stories and working through a series of carefully designed questions.

The meeting sponsors interviewed later felt that using World Café techniques had been an excellent alternative to what one (Tai) characterized as the traditional format of

'listening sessions' that employ a central facilitator mediating a single, large-group dialogue. Another (Jay) observed that the World Café method provided 'respondents the opportunity to answer how ever they would like to answer as opposed to a more directed approach that might ask a very specific question'. They reported that they and the participants had learned from one another, enjoyed interacting with others and also acknowledged that building more durable relationships across jurisdictions takes time.

The reactions of participants in the deliberation who were not trained in hosting are also telling. World Café was not difficult for them to grasp and their reactions were positive. For example, Naomi observed that it was 'energizing to have that type of conversation with people who were in similar situations in local government'. Like those more versed in hosting, however, they also cautioned that a one-time conversation, though novel and pleasant, was not enough to address the challenging realities of local institutional change, including what Hannah, another participant, pointed to as 'the turf issue and how strong it is'. Phil, also a participant, stated, 'The only problem is with the brainstorming and the ideas and everything, with personnel and financial resources lacking, are the agencies able to even do some of this stuff?' Hosts, sponsors and participants all recognized that to produce convergence on policy directions and actions, World Café alone is not enough.

### ***Recognizing patterns of group dynamics***

Learning to host involves more than deploying learned techniques. The Art of Hosting community encourages hosts to pick and choose, blending the individual techniques into a design suited to the particular deliberations they will host. To learn how to play a role of 'holding the container' for deliberation, hosting practitioners are introduced in their training to a number of 'patterns', which describe commonly experienced group dynamics. These patterns name dynamics that facilitators recognize from their prior experience, making their knowledge of them visible and practical, helping them to make sense of complex or ambiguous group dynamics. Patterns also are meant to help hosts improve how they design deliberation, become more comfortable with surprises and improvise to deal with problems or take advantage of opportunities. Not all hosting trainees were able to use the patterns. For example, Derrick, who described himself as a more 'concrete thinker', found that guidance on general group dynamic patterns was not enough to help him design participation events and wished for 'a flowchart to help me understand when to use specific tools'. As one trainer (Kurt) hypothesized, people are so familiar with a 'linear worldview' in which 'one method or approach is always the best', that it is difficult to adjust to a more 'circular' or holistic sensibility about how to design and improve facilitation as it is unfolding.

For many other hosting trainees, however, the patterns were very helpful. In particular, many hosts experienced an 'Aha!' moment of recognition when introduced to the 'chaordic' path, a concept developed by Hock (1999) to characterize the movement back and forth between chaos and order as necessary for channeling groups' innovation potential. Rosalyn, an experienced facilitator, reflected after being introduced to the idea in the training, 'I love the chaordic path! It is an elegant summary of so much of what I've been looking at over the course of my career'. Another highly experienced facilitator, Cristina, immediately began using it in a challenging project in which it was difficult to stay focused and complete tasks with youths. The chaordic path helped her to understand the group's dynamics differently, describe the 'dance between chaos and order' to the young people and be more intentional in her interventions. A third, Tracy, who was



facilitating deliberative conversations among the leadership team at a major university about organizational policies, drew upon the chaordic path to impress upon the participants that they were trying to reach closure prematurely and instead needed to stay for a while in a more chaotic, but creative, mode.

Another way of making sense of group interactions is through awareness of individual identities, positionalities and power dynamics. The trainers and written Art of Hosting materials refer to the importance of recognizing the influence of ‘our individual characteristics and unique history’ on ‘our individual realities and the actions we take in the world’. Study participants’ individual reactions to this were diverse. A few strongly critiqued the training for not doing enough both to enact an awareness of identity, power and privilege in deliberation, the hosting role or the training workshop itself. Nora, Fernando and Cecilia asserted in interviews that they would not adopt hosting’s decentered approach to facilitation because it did not help them address power dynamics in intercultural settings in the ways that they wish. However, others who also view the world through a lens of identity intersections (e.g., of race, class, gender, sexual orientation) have expressed quite the converse. Sarah, Steve, Tami and Sonya all told us stories about using hosting expressly to redefine policy deliberation work to include dynamics of identity, difference and power. They adopted the hosting stance of ‘holding space’ to enable participants to examine critically the power relations and inequalities associated with race, class, place of origin and religious identity. They actively oriented their hosting roles to attend to, interrogate and try to address power inequalities.

### *Getting on the mat*

Pedagogically, both the training workshop and the ongoing hosting work itself are explicitly designed to support learning through practice. Novice and experienced hosts learn continually through immersion in and application of the material; in the workshop the techniques, patterns and overall hosting paradigm are iteratively explained, directly experienced and evaluated. It is an immersive practicum that runs as a lived experience of a hosted conversation. For example, hosting trainees learn Open Space Technology, a technique through which groups generate their own agenda topics for discussion in breakout groups (Owen 1997), by using it to organize small-group work during the training.

In addition, the trainers repeatedly invite training participants to ‘practice’ and to ‘get on the mat’, through an analogy to the learning-by-doing approach of martial arts in which the discipline of practice is a way of becoming comfortable with and embodying knowledge. The invitation to the training advised that it was ‘not for spectators’, and while some study participants found this uncomfortable because their personal style was to take an observing rather than an active role, they consistently acknowledged the value of physically experiencing and doing the practices to learn. One of the trainers (Andre) coached them through this, insisting that practitioners need to ‘get out of our heads and do. We can only move forward if we practice’. By experimenting with manipulating group structures and dynamics, experiencing being hosted and hosting and discussing those dynamics, the training participants are learning through experiencing and through reflecting in and on the very things that they hope to later practice.

This practicum element of the workshop seemed to directly enhance trainees’ recollection of and attachment to the techniques. For example, hosts are trained in peer circle process (Baldwin and Linnea 2010) through an opening check-in. For participants in the first training cohort of people in our study, the opening circle unexpectedly took several hours to complete. When we asked members of that group what stood out to them in their

memories of the workshop, their recollection of circle technique was particularly acute, with 8 of the 29 participants in the first training cohort emphasizing to us the lessons they learned from the circle ‘that took so long’ or ‘went on and on’ about both the benefits of making a deep connection through this storytelling technique and the risks of losing control of its pacing. Actively working with the techniques, either as hosts or beneficiaries, enabled people to remember specifically how the approaches are structured and what can result.

Other impressions of techniques were more specific to individuals’ particular experience of them. For example, Ann recalled Open Space Technology because she ‘was able to suggest an agenda item of my own ...passion and bring a group together around it, which was very helpful’. Jonathan, a younger participant, remembered the Open Space Technology technique because he and some peers had used it to convene a dialogue about ‘leadership’ and ‘succession planning’ by younger professionals, two issues that had been concerning them. Similarly, study participants recalled most vividly the training content that they had subsequently applied to a work or personal project, recounting that they learned it both by practicing and by using it in a context reflecting their ‘own concern and passion’(Jacob).

The trainers consistently refer to everyone present, themselves included, as ‘co-learners’. This signals that everyone is learning from others and capable of helping others to learn. For example, trainers quickly invite training participants into co-teaching roles: volunteers receive brief coaching from a trainer in a given technique and then find themselves introducing the engagement technique to others in the training. Our data indicate that study participants learned content more deeply by teaching it, like one trainee (Erica) who told us, ‘I remember doing the ProAction Café [an innovation developed by hosting practitioners that combines elements of Open Space Technology and World Café in a novel way] because I volunteered to head the demonstration up’.

When training participants are hesitant to jump in, the workshop leaders stress that repeated practice builds ‘courage’, and in fact encourage them to sustain their learning after the workshop by continuing to stay ‘on the mat’ through ongoing ‘practice’. One trainer, Kerry, explained, ‘If people come out of the training...feeling inadequately prepared to really use these tools, what helps is a framework of, “We’re practicing.” I think that helps’. Andre, a founder of the Art of Hosting community and trainer in these workshops explained:

These are arts that you can spend a lifetime in learning. If you’ve gone to 1–2 trainings, you are still learning. I am still a student of this even though I have been doing this constantly for 20 years. I want to temper the perfectionist in us all, saying we go to a training and then we need to be able to do everything. Impossible! Practice makes the master, or makes mastery.

Another way in which experienced hosts embody the ethic of ongoing learning through practice is to make their own process visible to newcomers in hosting workshops. A workshop exercise might be paused as trainers consult with their session cohorts, in the presence of the whole group, and discuss the dilemmas they are facing in implementing a planned activity or the reasons for making adjustments. In the first training cohort we observed, for example, there was extensive discussion about how to respond to the opening circle that ‘went on and on’.

Their modeling has direct implications for policy deliberations. Study participants told us that they have taken senior hosts’ lead to be more open-ended and transparent with participants in conversations they convene. In a community policy roundtable about priorities for maintaining a rural road system, for example, the participants began to

discuss one of several policy alternatives in great depth. The host, Nicole, became concerned that they were not only neglecting exploration of the other alternatives, but running the risk of not having time to accomplish other business the host had planned for the day. Nicole paused the dialogue to voice the dilemma she was encountering, namely about whether to redirect the group to their original agenda or to follow their strong interest in the particular policy option, and to work with the group to resolve it together.

### ***Post-training application***

Study participants did not equally take up the message that they should continue to ‘get on the mat’ and stay on it through ongoing practice. While people very consistently understood intellectually the ideas of ongoing learning and continually practicing, there was less uniformity in how much they were acting upon that aspiration. Hosts with previous experience facilitating policy deliberation were both more likely to recall specific lessons from the training, and to have subsequently applied it. In our interviews they offered many examples of how they had used the practices in their work, across a broad range of settings, including staff meetings, organizational strategic planning sessions, and community meetings about educational improvement, public health and rural sustainable development. They easily described many ways in which they had applied and adapted the techniques, consistently indicating attentiveness to their contexts. For example, Edgar, a practitioner who works in American Indian communities, described his adaptations as ‘indigenizing’ what he had learned to work in those settings; he then observed that ‘indigenizing’, which he defined as selecting and adapting techniques to do the work you want to do, is a central feature of the hosting approach in any setting.

The training model specifically encourages this kind of adaptation. As one of the trainers (Kerry) related, acquiring the techniques is only the tip of the iceberg. She described the move to a ‘deeper understanding of the tool’ in terms of several levels:

Level one is, I can go out and do a World Café or an open space. Level two is, I know how to design a World Café or open space into a project. Then I think there’s even another level, which is, I have enough understanding of group process and of how communities work that I can start to adapt, meet people where they’re at, take them through a journey, and hold energy.

Another important factor in application of learning is related to venue appropriateness. Novices and experienced facilitators offered different explanations of how this mattered. Experienced individuals could easily describe a technique, even if they had not yet applied it, because they were actively imagining and seeking practical settings in which to apply it. Several were eager to try out techniques but, as Laurie put it, had not yet found ‘the right setting’ to do so. For example, Cindy and Judi, each wanted to try Open Space Technology but had not yet been able to because of time constraints, while Fernando was waiting to try ProAction café, in which participants request intensive help from others on an agenda item of their choosing, when he was hosting a gathering of people who knew one another well. Novices were more likely to recount not finding a setting as a general inability to try a ‘hosting’ approach. For example, they attributed their difficulties to an unsupportive boss, being in a hierarchical organization, or pressure to default to familiar approaches due to urgency. The workshop trainers expected that numerous practitioners, especially novices, would evoke a variety of barriers to explain what prevented them from hosting, particularly these kinds of external constraints. However,

trainers pointed to a volitional component of novices' ability to apply their hosting training as well. For example, when Kerry invited novice practitioners to cohost an event a few weeks after the training, she observed some were 'getting it in their bones' and ready to jump in, while others were in 'in a critique mode, a stand back mode' in which they were not ready to take in and use the hosting approach. Other trainers similarly suggested the more important factor in post-training application of hosting was individual practitioners' internal readiness to practice, their willingness to get on and stay on the mat. As Alisha observed, 'Some people are willing to go experiment and practice. Not everyone has that nature'.

In policy deliberations, participants as well as hosts need to be willing to 'get on the mat' and not be in 'stand back mode' for a hosting approach to work. While not all policy deliberation settings are equally amenable, hosts' willingness to push a group to try something new seems to relate to their own level of experience. A novice facilitator, Dana, described trying to introduce a hosting sensibility into a forestry-oriented community organization she frequently works with. She had planned to use Open Space Technology for a policy deliberation meeting, but judged during the meeting that it was not going to work and scaled back to a more conventional brainstorming process with post-it notes. She attributed the non-workability of a hosting approach to having colleagues who do not like 'process' and are 'more comfortable being out in trees than sitting around a board table'.

In contrast, Bridget, who had over 20 years of experience with group processes, also encountered resistance when she tried to introduce hosting techniques. Unlike Dana, however, she prevailed. Bridget described combining elements of two techniques she had learned from hosting training to organize a policy deliberation among stakeholders with strongly held and conflicting views about the use of antibiotics in food production. When she suggested some hosting ideas to her fellow conference planners, some worried that it would create more uncertainty; less centralized facilitation control meant that 'vested interests would hijack the conversation'. Bridget pushed back, encouraging the team to 'trust the wisdom of the group'. This stance was not specific to her relationships with these individuals, with whom she had not previously worked. It came from her confidence in the value of the hosting approach of giving group space to work things out and of her ability to provide a 'container' to help them. She convinced her co-conveners to take a hosting approach, and as it turned out, a third round of conversation spontaneously sprung up over the lunch hour because the first two rounds of Open Space Technology had worked so well.

Intriguingly, while the more experienced facilitators whom we interviewed readily articulated ideas about how well hosting could work in different settings, they did not agree about the criteria for evaluating feasibility. Features that some speculated would be barriers to a hosting approach – such as working with internally diverse groups, low-income rural people, politically conservative audiences, or in projects focused on quick products – did not stand in the way of others' hosting in precisely those conditions. This implies that some aspects of judgment about what is appropriate may be reflections of personal styles or perceptions. Generally, however, experienced facilitators were able to interact with contexts in a different way from the novices, notably by challenging and reshaping contexts rather than being constrained by them.

### ***Engaging in a community of practice***

One way in which the Art of Hosting explicitly supports ongoing practice and learning is by encouraging individuals to form or join in a 'community of practitioners'. Taking part

in the community of practice takes various forms, including being part of formal local networks of trainees, participating in the international listserv, working with others in hosting teams, or documenting innovations in the training workbook, which is constantly updated. The local networking opportunities enable people to stay connected with other practitioners, build a regional identity for the Art of Hosting, or find partners with whom to cohost.

Importantly, gatherings of the community of practitioners are hosted settings that provide opportunities to experience and practice hosting. A senior trainer in our study, Andre, described the opportunities to host and be hosted in his local community of hosting practitioners as ‘practicing, practicing learning’. In the community we study, practitioners frequently extend calls for assistance in hosting events that also provide opportunities for mutual learning. For example, Kerry, another trainer, invited all participants in the first cohort to cohost an event a few weeks after their training, to provide an opportunity to continue practicing. Other study participants have supported each other’s individual practice or professional development by checking with each other or by teaming up frequently to cohost, like Tamara and Cristina, who have been cohosting a women’s interfaith dialogue circle that they started together after meeting at the training.

The communities of practitioners are also means for coproducing and exchanging new knowledge, as individuals experiment with the techniques and patterns and freely share their learning with the community. During our study period, there were two explicit manifestations of collectively produced, new knowledge. ProAction Café had just become part of the standard training. Conversely, the first cohort we studied was the first to try out a technique for gathering themes and ideas from storytelling; it has been developed further and is now routinely part of workshops used around the world.

However, some hosting trainees did not feel ‘at home’ in the community. Sometimes this pertained to the location and rhythm of interactions, such as when people found it hard to recapture the strong connections they had felt with the group during the training, or when individuals outside the metropolitan area could not regularly participate in gatherings. Very often, however, their non-participation came from not feeling as if they belonged, such as Jonathan, a policy specialist who used facilitation in his work but did not identify himself as a ‘professional facilitator’, like those whom he perceived as being most active in the community. Other newcomers felt the community of practitioners was so amorphous in its definition that it was confusing. While veteran hosts felt strongly that they meant to be inclusive, Clare told us that she and other newcomers had felt intimidated, disoriented, or envious about how to become an ‘insider’ in the community. One trainer, Alisha, acknowledged that she frequently heard that it was ‘hard to figure out to access’, and suggested that the blanket invitation and open-endedness of the community of practitioners paradoxically served as ‘barriers’ to participating.

Some hosts parlay their learning about building an ongoing community of hosting practitioners into comparable efforts to build communities among the participants in the policy deliberations they host. For example, three hosts from our study (Eve, Carolina, and Rick) subsequently worked with thirty people from public and nonprofit agencies involved in HIV/AIDS service delivery networks, specifically with an eye to reshaping the community of providers to better respond to new client needs, delivery models, and changing regulatory and funding parameters. The hosts oriented the three days of meetings to strengthening connections among providers and devoted the entire final day to discussions about system redesign and the next steps participants should take as a community. However, our observations and interviews with participants (Olivia and Eric) indicate that while some new connections and collaborations were created,

participants did not perceive a clear way forward. Indeed, in the eyes of some (Brianna and Charles), longstanding tensions between large-scale providers of one-stop services and smaller providers of culturally competent services to particular communities were not addressed and were perhaps even exacerbated by the invitation to be part of a collective community. These results echo many of the same dynamics occurring in the hosts' own community of practice. While the relationships forged through hosted events are significant, they might not be enough to make and sustain long-term policy or systems change or to overcome the feelings of some that they are not 'at home' in the collective community.

### Processes of learning to host

Despite agreement among the training participants and trainers that the workshop provided clear explanations of the techniques and concepts, study participants took up the ideas conveyed in the training to different degrees. Many individuals exercised practical judgment about how to apply hosting practices in diverse circumstances, but some were barely using the techniques and patterns. While both groups frequently pointed to features of the contexts in which they work, close analysis of their accounts suggests that learning processes help explain some of the differences in their abilities to apply the deliberative hosting approach. Those who were using the techniques and patterns had experienced several kinds of changes in themselves, in how they approach and facilitate deliberative moments and sometimes also in how they identify themselves as members of a broader facilitation community. Those who were not using the techniques and patterns did not undergo these changes. These changes involved learning through at least one of three types of transforming hosting knowledge: *metabolizing*, *situating* or *coproducing* (Table 1).

Table 1. Transformations of knowledge in learning to host.

Practice settings for learning	Related theories of knowledge	Hosting knowledge transformation
Introducing hosting techniques and sense-making patterns in hosting training	Acquiring explicit and eliciting tacit knowledge	<i>Metabolizing hosting knowledge</i> : incorporating or eschewing hosting techniques or patterns
'Getting on the mat' as an immersion practicum during hosting training; using patterns for designing and improvising policy deliberations. Cultivating a stance of ongoing learning through practice	Situating knowledge and exercising practical judgment	<i>Situating hosting knowledge</i> : applying or adapting knowledge of hosting in particular contexts through ongoing practice
'Co-learning', decentering expertise, and creating new knowledge together in the training, in an ongoing community of practitioners, and in policy deliberations. Innovating through experimenting and sharing new hosting knowledge	Learning socially in a community of practice and decentering expertise to coproduce knowledge	<i>Coproducing hosting knowledge</i> : exchanging and creating hosting knowledge through ongoing co-learning with other practitioners and participants in deliberative policy processes



### *Metabolizing hosting knowledge*

We use the word *metabolizing* to describe the embodied processes of knowledge transformation in which individuals take in and absorb or eschew knowledge about hosting. Metabolizing involves acquiring explicit and implicit knowledge through a variety of mechanisms, including formal training, assimilation of new knowledge with previous knowledge and learning through practicing. Metabolizing is a process that individuals manifest in various ways, and successfully metabolizing is not the same thing as successfully becoming an Art of Hosting practitioner. It is not merely cognitive, but also an embodied experience acquired through practicing and ongoing evaluative and volitional processes. As individuals are introduced to and try on new techniques, patterns or identities as hosts, they consider whether they work for their own personal styles or needs. They accept or reject taking that knowledge into their own practice. These processes are present in our data in accounts where study participants recalled learning through training and practicing, their evaluative statements about whether or not they liked or felt prepared to use different parts of the material, and their observations about what was hard or familiar to them about the approach.

Training participants took up hosting to different extents following the training. Examining their accounts allows us to unpack trainer Kerry's observation, when novices gathered to host a few weeks after training that some people were 'getting it in their bones while others were in a critique mode, [a]stand back mode'. Workshop trainers and participants' accounts suggest that getting it 'in the bones' is a cognitive, embodied *and* volitional process. Kerry herself attributed the differences among those she observed both to 'understanding' and whether the individuals were accepting or measuring and critiquing.

What we know from the literature on learning-in-action, knowing-in-practice and the embodied nature of learning (Dewey 1925, Kolb 1984, Orlikowski 2002) were repeatedly born out in trainers' observations about the importance of learning by 'getting on the mat', participants' higher recall of the knowledge they had most deeply experienced in the training and their desire for more opportunities to practice and apply what they had been introduced to through the training. Similarly, for participants in policy deliberations, the fact that World Café is one of the hosting practices that they could most easily and directly experience probably contributes to that particular method being their most prominent impression of what they identify, and sometimes subsequently try to apply themselves, as an 'Art of Hosting' approach.

What our study participants' accounts add to existing understandings of the acquisition of knowledge about hosting or facilitating deliberation through practice is a volitional component. The differing experiences of Dana and Bridget in trying to apply and adapt hosting approaches among skeptical peers point to the significance of the facilitator's own choice to resolve discomfort or embrace their comfort with the practices. Dana, a novice, was unwilling to push her colleagues through their discomfort with 'process', despite her strong relationships with them, and dropped back to a more directive facilitation style and expedient decision-making technique. Bridget, a far more experienced practitioner of group processes, offered a contrasting account of encouraging her reluctant colleagues to 'trust the wisdom of the group'. This was not an assertion about what she thought would happen, or her *post hoc* analysis of what did happen, but rather a statement of belief in the practices. The trainers emphasized an individual's internal willingness to metabolize the learning, like Alisha's assertion that people's willingness to experiment with the practices depended on their 'nature'.

But while these trainers were explaining metabolizing hosting knowledge in terms of a fixed feature of people's dispositions – their inherent 'nature' – trainees emphasized the

volitional component of their learning to host as they described themselves more actively critiquing hosting practices for fit with their personal style. Identity played a salient role in this aspect of metabolizing knowledge, sometimes in terms of people identifying with the practices and sometimes in terms of whether they felt they belonged or did not among a circle of practitioners. Wenger (1998, p. 149) asserts the influence of a 'profound connection between identity and practice' in how people situate learning in part through a 'negotiation of ways of being'. An example of this aspect of metabolizing knowledge lies in the study participants who opted out – who declined to take on the hosting approach in their own practice – because of their reactions to what they regarded as an inadequate treatment of the power, domination and identity dynamics of deliberation in the training. They rejected the hosting approach altogether – in effect spitting it out rather than metabolizing it – because it neglected their knowledge, embodied in their own lived experience, of the relevance of individual standpoints and the power that personal identity and experience embody.

These individuals did not metabolize knowledge of hosting because, having tried it on through the training, they determined that it did not fit them and their work. Conversely, for those who did accept hosting approaches, identity also played a part in their ability to take them up. One manifestation of identity was that individuals did not participate in the formal community of hosting practitioners because they did not identify themselves as professional facilitators. Others were confused or intimidated about how to become what they characterized as 'insiders' in a community they perceived as being well developed. An important consequence of this perception was that they were inhibited from engaging in additional opportunities to learn through ongoing practice and exchange with practitioners.

Sometimes people's willingness to mobilize and apply hosting knowledge changes over time, with the benefit of additional time for reflection and exposure to additional settings in which to consider how it would work for them as well as participants in a policy deliberation. There are two distinct moves facilitators make. The first involves their evaluating the fit of hosting to their identity and style, which we define as their metabolizing of hosting knowledge. The second is their evaluation of their knowledge with the needs, constraints and opportunities of particular policy deliberations, which we characterize as situating hosting knowledge in particular contexts. We turn next to that learning process, but first note that metabolizing hosting knowledge appears to be foundational in the sense that it is a baseline for and must initially precede other kinds of learning that need to occur for trainees to become skilled, pragmatic deliberative facilitators. Practitioners cannot use particular hosting techniques and patterns without taking on – sufficiently understanding *and* deciding to accept – explicit and implicit knowledge about hosting. An additional type of transformation of knowledge is developing judgment about how to use that knowledge of hosting in particular deliberative policy settings.

### ***Situating hosting knowledge***

*Situating* describes how facilitators develop and exercise practical judgment about how to use their knowledge of hosting in particular contexts. Situating requires placing their hosting knowledge in a setting, integrating it into the context and in so doing potentially transforming or modifying the knowledge. As a form of learning developed through practice experience, these processes involve evaluating the context and the likely implications of different hosting techniques, sequencing of work or use of particular concepts. Situating hosting knowledge is done in anticipation of, during, or following facilitating,

and frequently involves adapting explicit knowledge to better deploy it in a particular context. It is not merely a reading of the presenting context, however, but is influenced by individual facilitators, as well. Given variations in individual styles and skills, different hosting practitioners make varying judgments about what to do. These processes reveal themselves in our data in individuals' accounts of how they chose particular techniques or approaches in response to a context; their evaluative statements about how it worked or what they might do differently if they were to facilitate again; and their stories of adjusting content from the training, previous knowledge and the presenting context.

The participants in this study spoke repeatedly about what they had learned through trying out the techniques in different settings. Edgar's account of adjusting and improvising how he 'indigenized' hosting techniques to work with different communities suggests that experiencing hosting is not just a way to use the skills or knowledge acquired in training. It is also an opportunity for ongoing learning and reflection about what the techniques do, consistent with theories about the development of professional knowledge through reflection in and on action (Schön 1983, Argyris and Schön 1996, Forester 1999). An essential part of the study participants' learning was having multiple opportunities for trying out and observing the consequences of applying the knowledge in the training workshops and subsequent policy deliberations.

The idea of learning through practice implies a 'use it or lose it' dynamic in maintaining knowledge and keeping it available for use; this is reinforced by one of the founders of the Art of Hosting asserting that he is 'still a student' and that 'practice makes the master'. This stance not only cultivates humility, but also keeps the learning and application fresh. In addition, the commitment to ongoing practice includes a strong element of deepening learning through situating hosting knowledge in new contexts. The trainer (Kerry) who stated that gaining a 'deeper understanding' of hosting tools involved 'hav[ing] enough understanding of group process and of how communities work that I can start to adapt, meet people where they're at', is attesting to the importance not only of repeated practice but also of adaptation and improvisation.

Veteran hosts recounted using knowledge acquired through the training in a variety of issue areas. They did not just recall the technique; they also had developed theories, or sometimes questions, about how techniques would work for particular conditions or purposes. Kyle, for example, was explicit that using World Café to involve marginalized groups in the human services planning process was not merely a question of using the right technique, but also of fitting it into the context by building trust with the organization's director and codeveloping the World Café questions with her. Other facilitators attested they want to use a technique, but had not found 'the right setting' for it. In this situation, the barrier to transforming their knowledge into action is not whether they had metabolized the knowledge, as they understood and accepted it. Rather, they had not judged it appropriate for the problems they faced.

The ability to situate hosting practices appropriately into contexts has real implications for policy deliberations, as illuminated by our study of policy settings in which our hosting trainees subsequently practice. Participants in the deliberation about local government financing suggested that the choice of method was not well suited to their needs when they commented that the World Café conversations and brainstorming were enjoyable and 'energizing', but doubted they were enough to get traction and be pragmatic about problems like turf battles and limited resources.

***Co-producing hosting knowledge***

Metabolizing and situating hosting knowledge are not merely individual processes. *Co-producing* hosting knowledge occurs when practitioners acquire, test and generate new and renewed hosting practices through engagement with other practitioners. We describe this as ‘co-producing’, in contrast with the emic term used within the community, ‘co-learning’, to draw attention not merely to the shared experience of continual learning but also to the shared generation of new knowledge about hosting. In our data, co-producing hosting knowledge emerges in trainers’ and participants’ accounts of how learning with others through the training or subsequently hosting together, in innovations or shifts in practices discovered through the community, and in explicit encouragement to participate in the hosting community of practitioners.

The Art of Hosting model intentionally supports the coproduction of hosting knowledge in several ways. Trainers cultivate the idea that all participants are ‘co-learners’, style the hosting training workshops as opportunities to coproduce the workshop and practice together, identify their social interchanges as being part of a hosting ‘community of practitioners’, and explicitly invite others to be part of the hosting community. The original theorization of communities of practice holds that such intentionality is not necessary for learning to occur, as learning inevitably occurs through contact with others engaged in the same practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). However, hosting practitioners’ intentionality about their community and co-learning does several kinds of work.

Notably, hosts’ references to co-learning, and veteran host Andre’s characterization of the work done in his local hosting community of practitioners as ‘practicing, practicing learning’, illuminate the view that hosting *is* learning: to practice hosting is to practice learning, and to cohost is to co-learn. The invitation to participate in a community of practitioners – of co-learners and coproducers of knowledge – also reflects hosting’s distinctive and democratizing philosophies about deliberation, namely that all people in the room have wisdom, that deliberation enables the sharing of knowledge, that facilitators and others aim to decenter the authority of their position and expertise in the room and that participants coproduce deliberative policy processes as well as decisions.

The intentionality of coproducing knowledge in the Art of Hosting community has a close affinity with the coproducing paradigm of some civic engagement processes. This is described in terms of participants ‘co-learning’ through deliberative dialogue (Roberts 2004, Innes and Booher 2010), facilitators and participants ‘inclusively’ coproducing the deliberative process and policy outcomes (Quick and Feldman 2011) or consumers and providers ‘co-producing’ public service priorities and implementation (Bovaird 2007). In the hosting setting, co-learning and coproducing knowledge are not merely about trainers’ modeling deliberative facilitation for others to see or about generating new knowledge about hosting. Co-learning is actively encouraged and occurs among all participants, hosts and non-facilitators alike. Calls to ‘co-learning’ in hosting training workshops evoke the roles of hosting practitioners as participants in a unscripted deliberative process in which they cede control of the agenda, are hosted by participants stepping up to lead practice sessions, and learning from the particularities of emerging experience in the workshop.

Involving trainees in designing and running their own hosting training and ongoing community both models and enacts this philosophy. They are embodying the same inclusiveness (Quick and Feldman 2011) they aim to enable in policy deliberations. Part of what hosts are practicing and modeling through coproducing knowledge and cohosting – in the training, in their community of practitioners and in their subsequent cohosting of policy

deliberations – is the essence of the hosting approach: namely decentering the traditional role of a facilitator who plays a central role (e.g., in defining the agenda, directing the flow of conversation or directing who speaks) in favor of a convening host who shares authority (Wheatley and Frieze 2011). By design, learning to host – metabolizing the skill to convene ‘meaningful conversations’ and situating hosting techniques in context-appropriate ways – involves devolving authority to coproduce the means and ends of deliberative processes with the people being hosted.

It also has practical consequences for coproducing new knowledge: styling the hosting training workshop and gatherings of the community of practitioners as immersive, co-learning environments encourages experimentation and participation that enhance the circulation of new ideas. New knowledge generated becomes available to the larger regional and international community because participants harvest their learning and share it through accessible platforms, like websites and list serves. This learning model is akin to the work of participants in online gaming environments (Thomas and Seely Brown 2011) and open source computer engineering circles (Lerner and Tirole 2001), who coproduce new knowledge by freely sharing intellectual property, confronting challenges and creating solutions together. Similarly, having trainers in the hosting workshops make their judgments visible and open to interventions by the other people, as occurred when they paused the training to discuss what was happening and how to handle the opening circle process that was going ‘on and on’, also calls out and accelerates knowledge coproduction. The more experienced hosting practitioners make their knowledge explicit and understandable to others, partially addressing the frustration of some novices that they did not gain enough information about how to select, use and adapt the techniques in designing and enacting an engagement effort. It also models and invites others to constitute themselves as ‘co-learners’ of hosting practice. The invitation to continuous co-learning invites hosts to humility and ongoing reflective practice and learning.

### **Learning to deliberate**

Together, metabolizing, situating and coproducing hosting knowledge concretize the processes these practitioners undertake in learning to practice the critical pragmatism of facilitating policy deliberation that Forester (2013) described. Critical pragmatism is built through the seasoning of the individual *and* the community of hosting practitioners. Individuals learn by metabolizing hosting knowledge, acquiring explicit knowledge and developing implicit knowledge through practicing and accepting or eschewing it for their own practice. They also situate their hosting knowledge, exercising practical judgment about themselves and the contexts in which they work. In situating their hosting knowledge, they practice, select and adapt what they know about hosting with a pragmatic view toward what they are trying to accomplish in particular policy deliberations. And they coproduce hosting knowledge with others, renewing the resources and practices available by practicing, innovating and sharing hosting with others. While we have distinguished three learning processes, they are not strictly mutually exclusive in terms of their mechanisms or consequences. *Practice* is central in all three processes of learning to host: hosts learn their craft by practicing it.

We conclude by observing three key findings of particular relevance for enhancing societal capacities for deliberation. The three types of knowledge transformations we identify occurring, and the value of learning through practice, might be generalized beyond the facilitation hosts in our study population. They could explain how well

individuals, organizations or communities learn and adopt a diverse array of practices and paradigms for other approaches to facilitating deliberation or indeed other crafts. What makes these processes distinctively important for critical policy studies, however, are their implications for building capacity to learn about and through democratic processes. All three of our observations are related to our study participants' many accounts about the anticipated and observed value of learning through practice.

First, designing training for facilitators as an experiential practicum is an effective pedagogical approach to building capacities for facilitating deliberation. Second, would-be and seasoned facilitators need ongoing facilitation opportunities to sustain and develop their craft. Third, one of the distinctive features of what and how *hosts* in particular are is provocative for building broader deliberative capacity. Hosts' references to co-learning, and veteran practitioner's characterization of the work done in the community of practitioners as 'practicing, practicing learning', make legible that for many hosting practitioners learning *is* the practice and product of hosting. This has intriguing implications for learning to deliberate because many of the prominent claims about what is distinctive and important about deliberation, relative to other forms of democratic participation, relate to how it promotes learning. Exchange among participants facilitates sharing and generating knowledge (Roberts 2004). Similarly, deliberating together transforms understandings of issues and interests (Abers 2000, Fung 2007, Mandarano 2008) and enables participants to discover new problem definitions and solutions (Reich 1990, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, Innes and Booher 2010). In fact, measuring individual and collective learning was recently proposed as a method for evaluating the effectiveness of deliberation efforts (Deyle and Schively Slotterback 2009).

Foregrounding learning as a means and end of facilitating – as the Art of Hosting does – appears particularly promising for building capacities to facilitate some of the normatively desirable outcomes of policy deliberation. While the focus of this paper has been on processes through which facilitators learn to support deliberation, there are implications to be explored in future studies of the hosting model for whether and how *non-facilitators* learn to deliberate. Might hosting be particularly apt to encourage participants to be 'co-learners' and 'co-producers' in inclusive, deliberative processes (Roberts 2004, Innes and Booher 2010, Quick and Feldman 2011)? Hosting appears to explicitly encourage such co-learning among participants by decentering the facilitator's traditionally pivotal role in favor of a convening host (Wheatley and Frieze 2011). By design, learning to host – metabolizing the skill to convene 'meaningful conversations' and situating hosting techniques in context-appropriate ways – involves devolving authority to coproduce the means and ends of deliberative processes with the people being hosted.

The knowledge transformation processes of metabolizing, situating and coproducing knowledge through hosting are not merely supporting, but are also themselves enacting democracy. In the hosting context, the immersive, coproduction environment of training and ongoing 'practicing together' is not a simulation of deliberation or of building community. It is not merely a mechanism for building hosts' capacities to support democratic processes in other venues. It is itself a radically democratic practice, with critical implications for the qualities of policy deliberation. The purposeful intent of hosting is to create an emergent, reflective space for building inclusive community and for learning to deliberate better. This makes the hosting paradigm, and the union of training with subsequent practice in a continuous stream of learning that engages hosts and participants, a powerful means and ends of enhancing deliberative practice.



## Acknowledgments

We thank our many study participants for their generosity in sharing their time and insights with us. The reviewers and editors provided incisive suggestions about clarifying our arguments and engaging with salient questions in the field. We also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Nicholas Stuber, Ahna Minge, Leslie Watson and Mary Lou Middleton. We also thank John Forester, Bruce Goldstein, Charles Hoch, Leah Lundquist, Tuesday Ryan-Hart and participants in a Center for Integrative Leadership research seminar for their helpful critiques of previous drafts of this paper.

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## Note

1. [http://www.artofhosting.org/trainings/event-listing/?event\\_id=103](http://www.artofhosting.org/trainings/event-listing/?event_id=103) visited 22 January 2014.

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