

Workshop Report: Game of Cards

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1. *Background and Objective*

This workshop, which was conducted at the PCST conference 2018 in Dunedin, New Zealand, was a demonstration of a method under development for stimulating discussion of key ideas and principles in science communication. The statements are proposed for various training situations, e.g. for researchers being introduced to public communication, or for science communication practitioners.

The stimuli for discussion are short statements that aim to set out, explain or interrogate current perspectives in the field. These are presented on cards that can be easily distributed, sorted, selected, rejected and re-ordered, in iterative fashion. The cards each carry a short phrase that sums up an idea, a problem, or an issue in science communication. They are intended to prompt discussion, even to provoke disagreement, rather than being closed statements simply to be absorbed and applied.

2. *Cards and Statements*

For this demonstration, a set of 12 cards was prepared showing the following phrases:

1. The publics of science communication are always a matter of interest, never the only problem, and never only a problem
2. Science communication presents itself as dedicated to the public interest; back-stage, it is driven by strategic objectives
3. Science in public is too important to be left to scientists only, or to science communicators only
4. Science events may provide as much entertainment as going to the cinema; (when) does the focus on entertainment put science content at risk?
5. Science gains from recognising and acknowledging publicly its own limits, including what it does not know
6. The public has a right to know how science really works, including the messy bits
7. Science communication is approaching being an end in itself; discussions about effectiveness are rarely conclusive
8. Science needs public critique, and it can gain from public controversy
9. Science communication rarely reaches “the general public”; it more often reaches restricted and separated publics
10. The deepest and longest-lasting impacts of public communication of science may be on the scientists who take part
11. The publics of science communication are more than market segments; they are groups of citizens

A twelfth card contained the unfinished phrase, “Science communication is ...” and, as part of their activity in the workshop, participants were asked to complete the phrase, as they saw fit.

3. *Workshop Phases*

The participants at the PCST conference were mostly quite familiar with science communication issues. They were asked to go through the exercise as if they were novices, and to assess the value of the method proposed. Their “tasks” in the course of the workshop were organised in the following phases:

- Groups were formed of three-four people each
- The full pack of 12 cards was given to each group
- The workshop leaders explained the concept of cards as stimuli to discussion through elaboration of one example each (c.15 minutes)
- The groups were asked to select, through discussion and shuffling of the cards, the five cards they considered most valuable to promoting discussion and understanding of science communication and to put six cards aside (20-25 minutes)
- The groups were asked to compose two additional cards they considered useful inclusions in the pack, and to complete the phrase, “Science communication is ...” (20-25 minutes)

The final intended phase was feedback from participants on the exercise; in the 70 minutes available to us in the PCST conference, we did not give this adequate time. It should be noted also that none of the groups completed the exercise as intended, i.e. supplying two additional cards plus the finished phrase, “Science communication is ...” All groups did part of this, but all also gave most of their time to discussing the supplied phrases and their implications.

4. *Results*

All four groups selected card 7 (see list above) as ‘valuable’; three groups selected cards 5 and 10; and cards 2, 4, 6 and 8 had two selections each. Of the 11 cards, eight were represented in the four groups of five chosen as ‘valuable’. (It should be noted that the cards were not themselves numbered and were distributed as handfuls of pieces of paper, so there was no implicit rank-ordering.) Thus, it can be observed that there were diverse views on the use of individual statements for developing understanding of the field. In introducing the workshop, the tutors had signalled they would be looking to see if there was consensus around any statements as being particularly useful to the imagined training – there was not.

One strong response during and after this workshop was that some of the statements were ambiguous and that this caused confusion. As indicated above, the workshop presenters were aware of such possible ambiguity and considered it potentially useful for promoting discussion. On further reflection, however, some of the statements were revised. For another workshop a month later in a different setting (with Masters students in Barcelona, Spain), statements 1, 7 and 11 above were rephrased as follows, taking account of feedback in the earlier workshop:

- The publics of science communication always require close attention, but not as the only problem, and never only as a problem
- Science communication has nearly become an end in itself; discussions about its effectiveness are rarely conclusive
- The publics of science communication are more than market segments to be targeted; they are groups of citizens with whom to discuss and act

In the Barcelona (shorter) iteration of the workshop, the absence of consensus on the use and usability of the individual statements was even more striking than in the workshop at PCST 2018. The four groups were asked to assign two statements each to 'valuable' and 'not helpful'. The groups made very different selections and some statements (e.g. number 1, 4 and 7 above) were assigned by at least two different groups to opposed categories.

In the light of these and further experiences it is anticipated that the statements will continue to be revised, some will be removed and new ones added. The structure of the workshop, including the guidance to participants, will also be modified to maximize the contribution by those attending.