Knowledge Synthesis Methods

10. Expert consultation[1]

Summary of method

The consultation of a designated set of experts, either individually or in a group, to gather judgement, evaluation or opinion. This can use online consultation, in-person meetings, individual interviews, written consultation or group meetings.

There are no formal reporting requirements. Martin *et al.* (2012) suggest four aspects of an expert elicitation exercise that ought to be reported because they are required to determine its comprehensiveness and effectiveness: study design and context, elicitation design, elicitation method, and elicitation output.

Slocum (2003) provides detailed guidance on setting up an expert panel who produce a report, which can be an appropriate form of expert consultation for complex or technical issues.

Key references

Martin, T.G., Burgman, M.A., Fidler, F., Kuhnert, P.M., LOW-CHOY, S., McBride, M., Mengersen, K. (2012). *Eliciting expert knowledge in conservation science.* Conservation Biology 26, 29-38.

Full text available from: http://caestuaries.opennrm.org/assets/25c6ecae38d70f4c1075fee788e0155b/application/pdf/0611_Martin_etal.pdf

Slocum, N. (2003). *Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual.* United Nations University, King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment.

Available from: http://archive.unu.edu/hq/library/Collection/PDF_files/CRIS/PMT.pdf Accessed 29/01/2017.

Examples of application

This method is extensively used in Government and European Union consultations. An example is during the Environmental Impact Assessment or Strategic Environmental Assessment processes. The method is seldom explicitly documented.

[1] A guidance note from Dicks LV, Haddaway N, Hernández-Morcillo M, Mattsson B, Randall N, Failler P, Ferretti J, Livoreil B, Saarikoski H, Santamaria L, Rodela R, Velizarova E, and Wittmer H. (2017). *Knowledge synthesis for environmental decisions: an evaluation of existing methods, and guidance for their selection, use and development – a report from the EKLIPSE project.*

Expert consultation	
Cost	Expenses and compensation of the work time for experts (1 hour – 1 day), staff costs for organising meetings, summarising discussions, writing synthesis (up to 1 week FTE)
Time required	Can be completed in 1 week to 1 month. However a formal expert panel could take longer to deliver its report
Repeatability	Moderate (lower if different individual experts consulted)
Transparency	Moderate. Can be increased by publishing expert names, justification of selection of the experts (why some were not consulted), conflict of interest declarations, procedure of consultation, statements by the experts and results (how the results were interpreted)
Risk of bias	High
Scale (or level of detail)	Any scale, but coarse resolution
Capacity for participation	Moderate and dependent on how the experts are asked to provide their information. For example, individual phone conversation are less participatory than statements in a public hearing process
Data demand	Good overview of expertise/experts in the field needed for adequate selection; can depends on experts access on data
Types of knowledge	All: Scientific, technical, opinion-based, indigenous and local knowledge (if ILK knowledge holders are the 'experts'); explicit and tacit
Types of output	Written and oral statements, reports, can include minority opinions, recommendations
Specific expertise required	Adequate selection of experts (including self-selection biases) , facilitation and moderation skills, ability to handle conflicting expert views

Strengths	Weaknesses
Rapid access to knowledge	Not systematic or comprehensive
Can incorporate all types of knowledge	No documentation of the evidence or studies used
Low cost	Subject to bias from individual (self-selected) experts with strong unsubstantiated opinions