Knowledge Synthesis Methods

16. Joint Fact Finding[1]

Summary of method

Joint Fact-Finding is a process in which separate coalitions of scientists, policy-makers and other stakeholders with differing viewpoints and interests work together to develop data and information, analyse facts and forecasts, and develop common assumptions and informed opinions (van Buuren *et al.* 2007). Finally, they can use the information they have developed to reach decisions together.

A comparatively small group can be involved, but all opposing positions need to be represented.

A similar process called 'Double sided critique' is also considered by Pullin *et al.* (2016).

Key references

Schultz, Norman. *"Joint Fact-Finding."* Beyond Intractability. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: July 2003.
http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/joint-fact-finding

McCreary, S. T., Gamman, J. K., & Brooks, B. (2001). *Refining and testing joint fact-finding for environmental dispute resolution: Ten years of success.* Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 18(4), 329-348.

Examples of application

Joint fact-finding was used by the Scheldt Estuary Development Project (ProSes), during the development of joint policy for the Scheldt Estuary in Belgium (van Buuren *et al.* 2007).

It was also used with infrastructure stakeholders in Rotterdam, to ascertain if, how and when the transport infrastructure would need to be adapted to climate change (Schenk *et al.* 2016). The process was convened by the municipality of Rotterdam, and funded by the City of Rotterdam and Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment.

Schenk, T., Vogel, R. A., Maas, N., & Tavasszy, L. A. (2016*). Joint fact-finding in practice: Review of a collaborative approach to climate-ready infrastructure in Rotterdam.* EJTIR, 16(1), 273-293.

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[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.*

van Buuren, A., Edelenbos, J., & Klijn, E. H. (2007*). Managing knowledge in policy networks. Organising joint fact-finding in the Scheldt Estuary.*

Joint Fact Finding	
Cost	Resources to run the process, and maybe also to fund new research activity
	Usually requires a skilled facilitator or mediator
Time required	Usually rather time-consuming; however depends on where the in the process it is used and the nature of the question (complex and contested vs. relatively straightforward)
Repeatability	Medium. Outcome depends on personalities involved; process rather than "a method"
Transparency	Creating protected spaces might sometimes be needed, especially in mediation; however, the result and the process can be communicated transparently
Risk of bias	High if not all relevant groups included and the process is not well facilitated
Scale (or level of detail)	Any
Capacity for participation	Can be limited to relevant scientists/stakeholders holding opposing views but can also include elements to involve the general public
Data demand	The process does not require any data at the outset. The subsequent data demands depend on what is requested by participants, and the question to be addressed
Types of knowledge	All
Types of output	Shared understanding and clarity about remaining disagreements
	Policy learning
Specific expertise required	Qualified facilitators or mediators are essential for success

Strengths	Weaknesses
Enables policy learning	Managing competing interests can be difficult, and needs highly skilled facilitation
Identifies which 'facts' are disputed	
Potentially provides a process to reach agreement through co-designed research	Ability to invest resources can be asymmetric among stakeholders, creating imbalance of 'power'
Recognises that knowledge isn't 'value-free' and can be interpreted differently by those with different interests	Requires mutual trust and respect, which cannot always be achieved
Can build mutual trust and respect among stakeholders	Knowledge and learning are held within a small, temporary network and may not be retained in decision-making institutions