

Experts and Democratic Deliberation: Insights from *An Enemy of the People*

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ABSTRACT

Deliberative democracy is a prominent political approach that is increasingly attracting the interest of management scholars. While many deliberative democracy scholars acknowledge that expertise improves the epistemic quality of deliberation, some have recognized that experts can become “problematic participants” in deliberations. Through an analysis of Henrik Ibsen’s play *An Enemy of the People*, I discuss four difficulties of including expertise in public deliberation: manipulations in the deliberative setting; exploitation of the vulnerability of experts; disregard for the limitations of expertise; and inability to translate and enroll. I also argue that the play’s ending leads readers to question the practicality of expert withdrawal. Furthermore, characters in the play suggest two other possibilities for overcoming the obstacles associated with expertise: “epistocracy” and finding new ways to increase deliberation and participation. To advance this latter option, I call for a bidirectional view of translation, following scholars in both deliberative democracy and science and technology studies, and underscore the complexities of building trust when boundary crossing between expertise and non-expertise. These insights enrich the stream of management studies that explores deliberative democracy and reinforce recent claims that management scholars should be more involved in the public sphere.

Scientific and technical expertise is crucial to identifying, understanding, and proposing solutions for the complex social and environmental challenges that society and organizations urgently face, such as those posed by climate change, biodiversity loss, genetic engineering, nuclear waste, artificial intelligence, and epidemics. However, while reliance on specialized knowledge has long been integral to every aspect of human life, including health, infrastructure, finance, and law, there is also a long-standing concern that granting experts a disproportionate role might undermine democratic modes of collective debate and decision

making, leading to “epistocracy” (e.g., Dewey, 2012 [1927]; Dahl, 1996; Habermas, 1971). Expertise faces the problem of democratic legitimacy when those directly affected by decisions have no voice in the process (Callon, Lascoumes, & Barthe, 2009; Dryzek & Pickering, 2017). Furthermore, although surveys show that overall trust in science remains high (Weißkopf, Ziegler, & Kremer, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2022), there has been recent backlash against scientific consensus, and even against scientific methods more generally, sometimes mixed with conspiracy theories (e.g., the anti-vaccine movement and climate change denialism). Vested interests have also cast doubts on science, appealing to scientific uncertainty and spreading misinformation, as seen with the case of tobacco use and climate change (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). As such, expertise (scientific or otherwise) is necessary for enriching public deliberation, but is often mistrusted when it pretends to be the sole authority without engaging non-expert perspectives.

Henrik Ibsen’s stage play *An Enemy of the People* portrays an expert who attempts to counteract political authority and challenge harmful corporate practices yet has difficulties communicating with the public. The play thus offers an opportunity to examine challenges in the relationship between expertise and public deliberation, e.g., the opposition they face from those in power, and even from the community at large, despite that they may desire to speak and act for the public good; their vulnerability to corrupt authority; and their withdrawal from public discussions altogether. The play also shows the limitations of expertise and the need to establish bridges between experts and non-experts, since the translation of expert knowledge into localized practice cannot be done by experts alone.

In this essay, I discuss themes concerning expertise and public deliberation that emerge from Ibsen’s play by engaging with the literature on deliberative democracy, which political science has embraced as an increasingly popular approach (Habermas, 2015 [1995]; Bohman, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004) and which management scholars have recently used to

explore how corporations can establish a dialogue with stakeholders to address complex social challenges (e.g., Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Moriarty, 2010; Battilana, Fuerstein & Lee, 2018; Zeitoun, Osterloh & Frey, 2014; Martí & Scherer, 2016; Ferraro & Beunza, 2018; Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020). As opposed to voting, interest aggregation, and bargaining, deliberative democracy emphasizes the participation of all potentially affected groups in public deliberation about policies; likewise, rather than coercion, manipulation, and indoctrination, it emphasizes reflection and persuasion (Dryzek, 2000). Deliberative democracy scholars (e.g., Gutman & Thompson, 2004) largely recognize that deliberations must be informed by appropriate empirical evidence provided by experts, scientists, professionals, and technical specialists. Yet, the increasing reliance on technical experts and scientific elites threatens the fundamental assumption that all participants have equal status in democratic deliberations and arouses suspicion. For this reason, experts have also been labeled “problematic participants” (Barber & Barlett, 2007).

Unpacking the obstacles and alternatives to incorporating expertise in democratic deliberation is relevant for management scholars because organizations rely on expertise for nearly every internal and external aspect of their operations. Yet, much like in society at large, referencing empirical evidence and using a particular technique is not always a purely technical matter; rather, it is intertwined with social and political concerns. Even what counts as “expertise” depends on social recognition. Indeed, expertise has been broadly defined as “the possession of special skill [*sic*], experience, information or knowledge rooted in the methods, norms, practices and goals of a specific community and which is recognized as legitimate by the wider society” (Moore, 2017: 6). The skills, information, or knowledge possessed can vary highly, and, in some cases, expertise is recognized and organized as a profession, while in others it is not. Regardless, natural scientists, physicians and health-related specialists, engineers, architects, lawyers, accountants, psychologists, and sociologists are, in most cases,

socially recognized as experts. Moreover, as Dewey (2012 [1927]: 188) has observed, expertise is often characterized by “a highly specialized language, more difficult to learn than any natural language” and seems “a mystery in the hand of initiates, who have become adepts in virtue of following ceremonies from which the profane heard is excluded.” However, as highlighted by authors from (or influenced by) science and technology studies (e.g., Latour, 2004; Callon et al., 2009; Bowden, Gond, Nybert & Wright, 2021; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2011; Garud, Gehman & Karunakarn, 2014), knowledge cannot be understood as being the exclusive domain of experts who later translate into lay language; rather, translation is a bidirectional, collective, and dynamic process that blends different forms of knowledge, including that of both laypeople and experts. For this to occur, we must explore how experts can communicate with laypeople and, conversely, how laypeople can trust or accept expert knowledge without relinquishing their critical capacity (Moore, 2007).

Ibsen’s play provides a fruitful means to analyze the obstacles to combining expertise and public deliberation, and potential ways to overcome them. In this essay, I first offer an overview of the play, then discuss four difficulties of including expertise in public deliberation: manipulations in the deliberative setting; exploitation of the vulnerability of experts; disregard for the limitations of expertise; and inability to translate and enroll. Next, I argue that the play’s ending leads readers to question whether experts should withdraw from public deliberation. Furthermore, I discuss two other possible solutions mentioned by characters in the play: “epistocracy” and finding new ways to increase both deliberation and participation. To advance the latter, I argue for a bidirectional view of translation that is in line with certain studies in the fields of deliberative democracy and science and technology and which would bridge the dichotomy between the “system” and the “lifeworld” potentially implied by Habermas (a leading figure in deliberative democracy theory). In addition, I underscore the complexities of building trust when crossing boundaries between expertise and non-expertise.

OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE*

As shown by recent contributions, works of narrative fiction and other art forms can reveal unexplored aspects of organizations, management, and leadership (e.g., Whiteman & Phillips, 2008; Patriotta, 2016; Lindebaum & Courpasson, 2019; Contu, 2023). Moreover, the characters and situations they present are perhaps even thicker and closer to real life than those portrayed in teaching cases, quantitative data, or qualitative studies. Rather than abstract theoretical knowledge, they offer a complex reality with a plurality of points of view, ambiguities, emotions, and misunderstandings. The literature on democratic deliberation, including recent adaptations made by management scholars, has been criticized for being overly idealistic (Brand, Blok & Verweij, 2020), overemphasizing consensus rather than conflict (Dawkins, 2022), and assuming a view of individuals as disembodied and dispossessed of singularities, feelings, affects, and attachments (Castelló & Lopez-Berzosa, 2023). By contrast, characters in a stage performance such as *An Enemy of the People* are concrete, embodied in flesh and bone: interactions occur among people who have mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers; who have jobs they might lose; who own businesses; who can become ill; and who are proud, cowardly, jealous, astute, or reckless. In a play, expertise is not disembodied knowledge, but it is held by a particular expert—a human being with many other facets. Engaging with a play such as Ibsen's thus offers the possibility to contribute to the deliberative democracy discussion by making more visceral the difficulty and necessity of mixing diverse types of knowledge and voices in public deliberation.

An Enemy of the People is one of Ibsen's most renowned works and continues to be performed across the globe.¹ Skillful characterizations, enigmatic and open-ended plot lines, and a mixture of realism and symbolism, make Ibsen's plays particularly captivating. A

¹ At the time of this study, the play was actively running in two locations of New York (Broadway and West End). The author of this essay has seen three performances in Barcelona.

Norwegian, Ibsen is the second-most performed playwright in the world, after Shakespeare, and his plays have been used as a source of insight into aspects of organizational life (Garsten, 2007; Sørhaug, 2007; Hernes, 2007), such as the phenomenon of whistleblowing (Garaventa, 1994; Koehn, 2006; Brinkmann, 2009) and how social institutions protect themselves through lies and hypocrisy (March, 2007). While the world his works depict differs substantially from today's, and although our current challenges largely feature global dimensions that transcend local communities, the situations and characters portrayed in the play nevertheless resonate and continue to attract the attention of audiences and scholars alike. As such, the questions it raises about expertise and public deliberation remain highly relevant to the social and environmental challenges of our day.

No summary can capture the full emotional nuance of reading a play or seeing it performed. Nevertheless, the plot of *An Enemy of the People* can be sketched as follows. Dr. Stockmann, a charismatic physician, discovers that the water feeding the public baths where he works—and helped co-found—is contaminated with bacteria. He writes an article about this, intending to publish it in the town's local newspaper. Hovstad, a newspaper editor who thinks himself a revolutionary and is intent to bring down the town's mayor, initially views Stockmann's letter with favor. The mayor, however, who is also Stockmann's brother and chair of the bathhouse's board, requests he retract the article because the repairs would be too costly for the town. Those, like Hovstad, who initially support Stockmann, turn against him, and the newspaper refuses to publish his article. In a public meeting in which Stockmann then hopes to address the water issue, the mayor succeeds in preventing him and others from speaking about the topic, thus preventing public deliberation. Stockmann then engages in a fervent monologue in which he criticizes the town's authorities, the public's ignorance, and the tyranny of the majority. The meeting's participants find this speech so offensive that they declare Stockmann an "enemy of the people." The next morning, stones are thrown through the

windows of his house, he is fired from the baths, his daughter loses her teaching job, his wife loses her inheritance, and their children are sent home from school. Yet, at the end of the play, Stockmann decides to remain in the town.

The setting includes two spheres—a small, unnamed town, and an organization (the bathhouse). Although current scholarship usually attempts to focus on one sphere (or level) of analysis, the blending of spheres that we find in Ibsen’s play is not unusual, even in today’s landscape, as shown by studies on community-based enterprises (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006), social innovation (Van Wijk, Zietsma, Dorado, De Bakker & Martí, 2019), and political CSR in which corporations provide public goods in contexts of fragile states (Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020). In the play, the mayor is also the chairman of the board and Stockmann’s brother, while the entire community is dependent on the baths, including local businesses, homeowners, and shareholders. In the public meeting in which Stockmann hopes to present his findings, he speaks not only as a doctor but as an employee of the baths (its medical director), while many of its stakeholders are also present. As such, the play more resembles an organizational setting than one might think.

Manipulating the Conditions for Deliberation

The participation of experts, though highly necessary to enriching public deliberation, can be unwelcome or even impeded, especially by those who feel it threatens their interests. Stockmann does not get a chance to explain his findings, with the mayor skillfully persuading Hovstad not to publish his article, then later preventing the public meeting from being a space of free and open communication. The mayor’s interference hinders access to information, which prevents the community from having the opportunity to discuss the issue and compare alternatives. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, this situation fails in three dimensions (using Dryzek’s (2009) terminology): inclusivity (allowing the active participation of all affected), authenticity (non-coercive communication based on mutual respect and with

terms that others can accept), and consequentiality (decisions are made or at least some shared recommendations are given to address the issue). The mayor also misrepresents Stockmann's position as politically motivated. Moreover, coercion and intimidation are used against him and his family, first by the mayor and later by the townspeople, including Stockmann's father-in-law, Morten Kiil. As the play shows, experts may have a lower chance of making themselves heard when the pressures of more powerful actors prevent a setting from being democratic and deliberative. Despite the play being written some 120 years ago, one can find striking similarities between the mayor's tactics and the campaigns analyzed by Oreskes and Conway (2011) to address scientific evidence linking tobacco to lung cancer, coal burning to acid rain, and fossil fuels to global warming.

This is not just a matter of formalities. While it is true that rules and procedures are necessary to authentic deliberation and equal opportunity of participation, procedures can be manipulated, especially by those most skilled in and familiar with them. In the play, the mayor, under the pretense of procedure, proposes that a moderator be appointed, who then strikes Stockmann's exposition of the contaminated water from the agenda, despite Stockmann—not the mayor—having convened the meeting. What seems merely procedural is thus used to avoid revealing and discussing the issue at hand. As this incident shows, a practical difficulty of public deliberation is that those who moderate them may not always be committed to the ideals of inclusiveness and the avoidance of coercion.

However, rather than insist on the need for adequate conditions for public deliberation and explain what he knows about the baths and how he came to know it, Stockmann engages in a long and fervent speech expressing abstract views about truth, human nature, and the tyrannical majority. The moderator lets him monopolize the discussion—insofar as he does not stray into the real issue of the contaminated water. As deliberative theorists have also argued, discussions that are limited to one participant's viewpoint rather than an open interaction among different

voices can lead to frustration and irritation. This can also happen when they are not set up in a way that enables progress towards making a decision or clarifying a situation that can lead to action (Mansbridge, Hartz-Karp, Amengual & Gastil, 2006). This is because one of the assumptions of democratic deliberation is that bringing different voices to the table brings additional perspectives and ideas, which improves both the quality of a decision and its legitimacy (e.g., Bohman, 1996; Pellizzoni, 2001; Lafont, 2017). This includes, but is not limited to, the voices of experts. Rather than subscribing to this view, which would at least allow him to share his knowledge, Stockmann launches an attack on “the ‘accepted truth’” that “the millions of ignorant and incompetent human beings have the same right to pass judgment, to advise, and to govern as their rare intellectual superiors” (Ibsen, [1882] 2007: 101)² and claims that “[t]he most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom is the so-called solid majority” (97). As the play makes clear, approaching community members from an elitist perspective rather than focusing on their specific issue of concern can be unfruitful.

The play’s audience realizes that neither the expert nor the politician is committed to deliberation, albeit for distinct reasons. Stockmann wants to lecture as a means to expose and clarify the issue as soon as possible, rather than debate it; the mayor wants the topic off the agenda entirely. Neither is interested in a discussion that would allow questions to be asked, new information and perspectives to emerge, or diverse stakeholders to raise concerns. As science and technology scholars have shown of open community debates, unexpected controversies can emerge, which political authorities and scientific experts are often afraid of and wish to avoid (Latour, 2004). Yet, as Callon et al. put it (2009: 28), controversies “enrich democracy” and are “a mode of exploration”; they bring information that is not just the stolid, abstract knowledge of experts but entangled with the interests, fears, and hopes of the people.

² Henceforth, with a few exceptions for clarity, only the page numbers of quotations from *An Enemy of the People* are given, corresponding to: Ibsen, H. ([1882] 2007). *An Enemy of the People*. In a New Translation and Adaptation by Nicholas Rudall. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Experts such as Stockmann may not realize that, even if such entanglements might add considerable confusion and difficulty, expertise has much to lose from not engaging with those who he (Stockmann) at one point calls “ignorant and incompetent human beings” (101). Rather than insist on proper conditions for public deliberation, Stockmann launches into abstract criticisms when he is prevented from lecturing on the issue of contamination.

Exploiting the Vulnerability of Experts

Manipulation of the deliberative setting by skilled politicians or other powerful actors puts experts like Stockmann at a disadvantage. Thus, when the adequate conditions for democratic deliberation are not in place, experts must often exhibit unusual moral courage and risk retaliation, including personal harm. As shown in *An Enemy of the People*, this can lead to great emotional distress. One of the advantages of narrative fiction, particularly theater, is that it illustrates the broader context of decisions and behaviors, which are intertwined with emotions and moods. The rivalry between Stockmann and the mayor, and the differences depicted by their characters and respective lifestyles, shows this layered nature. Similarly, emotions and interpersonal relationships meld with the communicative efforts of experts. In his incendiary monologue, Stockmann says things like, “I hate politicians. I never want to see another one. They’re like a herd of goats in a tree farm. They eat up everything. They stand in the path of a free man, whichever way he wants to turn. I’d like to see them exterminated like any other vermin” (96). Later, he says, “[I]t infuriates me anyway. I mean, if ever there is a need of a serious fight...” (117). The manipulation of more powerful actors makes the experts involved in deliberation vulnerable to emotions such as frustration and anger. While more recent developments in deliberative democracy theory acknowledge that emotions are compatible with (and even enable) the provision of mutually acceptable arguments (Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Neblo, 2020), coercion is a serious obstacle to exchanging

arguments around a given decision, thus leaving space *only* for emotional appeals and distress, as shown in Stockmann's monologue.

One way in which the mayor attempts to rein Stockmann in is to remind him that to deal with issues related to the bathhouse one must follow organizational hierarchy, claiming that "all negotiations must be made in consultation with the proper authorities" (18). Later, he tells Stockmann, "You are an employee. You have no right to be sure of anything independently" (52) and "As a minor official at the baths you have no right to express any public opinion that differs from that of your immediate superiors." Stockmann replies, "You are going too far. I am a doctor. I am a man of science. I have no right?!" (53). In a still strikingly commonplace scenario, Stockmann is accused of being disloyal, indiscreet, impulsive, and self-interested, and of lacking proper evidence. The mayor repeatedly reminds him to think of his family and threatens to fire him (e.g., 49-50, 55, 122). Hovstad also appeals to Stockman's family to make him reconsider his position (e.g., 83, 93).

Previous scholars have seen similar exchanges in cases of whistleblowing (though not named as such at the time) (Garaventa, 1994; Koehn, 2006; Brinkmann, 2009). Indeed, whistleblowers are often experts and professionals such as accountants, lawyers, physicians, nurses, engineers, and scientists who witness organizational malpractice and disclose it to the public because they have access to knowledge and information that can prove the malpractice. In these situations, whistleblowers are often vulnerable to different forms of reprisal, starting with ad hominem attacks and attempts to discredit their motivations (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999; Devine & Maassarani, 2011). Indeed, the mayor succeeds in painting Stockmann as politically motivated and merely interested in settling old scores. However, even if such insinuations are partly true, the literature on whistleblowing reminds us that the motives of whistleblowers might indeed be multifaceted and hard to disentangle (Miceli, Near & Dworkin, 2008). Nevertheless, the more severe the wrongdoing the more justified blowing the whistle

becomes (e.g., Brenkert, 2010), particularly when it is less likely that supervisors will do something, and when a whistleblower has a direct connection with or responsibilities within the organization or department committing the wrongdoing. These conditions are met in Stockmann's situation, in which the lab results are proof of wrongdoing and, further, Stockmann has a professional duty as a doctor and co-founder of the venture. Yet, as can happen to real-life whistleblowers, he is unprepared for resistance and launches into a diatribe. This, coupled with the mayor's coercive strategies, may, as the play unfolds, cause some readers to think Stockmann more reckless fool than hero. This perception is reinforced by Stockmann's views of his fellow citizens and neglect of the dimensions of democratic deliberation (e.g., inclusivity rather than monologue; mutual respect rather than insults).

Disregarding the Limitations of Expertise

At the start of the play, Stockmann says, "Surely, this is all going to be pretty straightforward" (40), assuming that the lab results confirming his suspicion of the water's bacterial contamination will drive the decision to close the baths and perform the necessary repairs with no need for mediation by a political or organizational process. Stockmann initially convenes the public meeting as a lecture, in which he would be the main speaker, and the audience would mainly listen. As Hovstad warns, things are more complex: "You're a doctor. A man of science. For you, this business about the pipes is something you think about as a separate entity. I mean, perhaps you don't realize how it's tied up with a lot of other things" (36). These exchanges and the plot's unfolding show that, on the one hand, experts cannot remain ignorant of political controversies and merely assume that expertise is self-sufficient, and that science speaks for itself. On the other hand, while entering public deliberation is inevitable and necessary, experts like Stockmann may walk on increasingly unstable ground and may be unable to dominate a debate that is always "tied up with a lot of other things" (36). In entering public deliberation, experts might take for granted that others will trust them

because of their authority and status; but going beyond their area of expertise they risk losing this trust. Later in the play, Stockmann continues to use medical analogies, such as when he states that “[t]he whole community has to be... purified, decontaminated” (63), but in his monologue strays very far from his role as a doctor and his initial arguments about proving the water’s contamination. Using his medical credentials as a platform to criticize the political and social state of his community and thus advance his own views, Stockmann can be seen as “politicizing” his expertise (Oreskes & Conway, 2011, 264), which in turn erodes his authority.

As argued by deliberative democracy scholars, the contribution of experts is not the end of the deliberation but the beginning; to have an effect it requires ratification through a political and organizational process (Baber & Barlett, 2007) in which non-experts participate and in which the equality of participation of all potentially affected parties is preserved. While experts may be aware that their truths continually undergo revision by new research and may be willing to engage in deliberation with their peers—holding one another to scrutiny and criticism and providing one another with arguments that can be recovered and retraced (Moore, 2018)—they are not always accustomed (or receptive) to continuous revision by non-scientific (or non-technical) considerations. However, expert knowledge is not the only type of knowledge that should be considered in public deliberation: different types of knowledge, competences, interests, and concerns may be relevant to understanding the situation (Dryzek & Pickering, 2017; Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020).

As mentioned, his monologue erodes any remaining trust the community had in Stockmann and he is proclaimed “an enemy of the people.” Laypeople expect from experts a diagnosis of the situation, knowledge about the consequences of possible decisions, and advice on how to proceed, but not to be told what to do and (much less) to be treated as inferior. Experts like Stockmann cannot expect citizens to accept their input uncritically, especially if the issue has social and political implications and they express views that go beyond their strict

area of competency. The authority of experts is based on their knowledge—in the play, Stockmann’s knowledge of the effects of certain bacteria on the body. While this knowledge can include academic credentials and professional affiliations, it is also built on trust. If trust is abused, poorly used, or eroded, this authority is lost (Bohman, 1996), as occurs when Stockmann calls the public ignorant. Experts build trust when they have a past record of being reliable sources of information and can explain their conclusions in an understandable way. They are also more trustworthy when they can show that they are independent of vested interests and have no personal axes to grind. If others suspect (or are misled to suspect) that the expert has personal or political ambitions (such as when the mayor fuels suspicion in Stockmann), trust can be severely damaged. Another important cue that laypeople use to determine their response to expertise and whether they will give or withdraw trust is to assess an expert’s character traits (Dryzek, 2000); for example, whether they display deliberative virtues such as “offering patient and charitable responses, showing interest in counterevidence; and readily admitting mistakes” (Brown, 2014: 60). While it is true that these signs can be misleading, or an expert might momentarily fool the public, Stockmann fails to give this cue at all, presuming his expertise to be self-sufficient, adopting an angry and arrogant tone rather than remaining calm and respectful.

The Challenge of Translation and Enrollment

Because Stockmann solely relies on the evidence provided by lab results as a given for closing the baths, neither before nor after the public meeting does he attempt to enroll support or gather knowledge from others who might have had concerns or personally experienced the consequences of contaminated water. When his attempts to speak about it are shut down during the meeting, rather than enlist the support of the community he insults them. Thus, his expertise is detached from prior local knowledge that might confirm the impact that nearby tanneries were having on the water. Most remarkably, the victims of this contamination are neither made

visible in the play's cast nor mentioned by Stockmann or anyone else in the dialogues (Stockmann does not even say what led him to suspect and test for contamination). In short, Stockmann's expertise appears as a form of "disembodied knowledge" (Bäckstrand, 2004). By not connecting with the current and potential victims or other sources of knowledge, Stockmann severely diminishes his communicative capacity. This shows how important it is for experts to communicate, using arguments expressed in ordinary language and linked to examples from everyday life to build a story of how the knowledge emerged. According to Habermas, this would mean (re)translating the language of science into the language of the lifeworld. French sociologist De Certeau (2011: 6) describes this as "bringing scientific practices and languages back toward their native land, everyday life." This can be difficult because, as mentioned above, what characterizes expertise is an artificial language that separates one kind of knowledge from another (such as when the language of Stockmann's lab results use terms like "bacteria," which the townspeople do not understand since, as Morten Kiil points out, "no one can see them" (34)).

There can, of course, be a type of translation that invokes a hierarchical view from a higher language down to a lower, more "basic" one. However, as science and technology studies remind us, merely sharing information in an accessible and transparent way may be insufficient (Callon et al., 2009). Another type of translation implies blending scientific and other forms of knowledge—a blending that experts and laypeople must do together in public deliberation by contrasting, discussing, and revising different perspectives. This type of translation, which has been defined as a "complex process of negotiation during which meanings, claims and interests change and gain ground" (Waeraas & Nielsen, 2016: 237) and which includes "the reshaping of what is finally being transmitted" (Zilber, 2006: 283), requires the enrolment and active participation of different groups, not just their passive presence.

An Enemy of the People depicts distinct stages of translation condensed into a brief period, each with the enrollment of different actors. The first begins with the water samples and ends with the lab results, which arrive in an envelope from a distant university and confirm Stockmann's theory but can only be seen and interpreted by him. The second stage begins with the lab results and continues with Stockmann writing the article explaining their consequences: the water is harmful for people, repairs must be made, and the town politicians must assume the consequences. Yet, the journalists accept Stockmann's translation because they (re)interpret it through the lens of their political views, not because they understand or are concerned for the underlying public health issue. In the third stage, Stockmann's translation, based on the (unobservable) bacteria and (incomprehensible) lab results, is challenged by the mayor, who offers an alternative translation: the lab results are uncertain evidence; the repairs would imply a high cost for taxpayers; closing the baths would have disastrous economic consequences for all citizens; and Stockmann is concealing personal and political motives. Thus, it is best to ignore Stockmann's alarmism and do nothing. This alternative is successful in enrolling most of the townspeople, including the press, which withdraws its support from Stockmann and denies him the possibility of amplifying his views. Hence, with the alternative translation, Stockmann's scientific authority erodes, and the main issue is neither discussed nor understood because it does not enroll the support and active participation of other actors.

In this process of translation and enrolment, social and political issues become entangled with technical issues in unpredictable ways at each stage, meaning new individuals and new groups can raise concerns and take actions that were not foreseeable at the start. The ramification of these issues is so substantial that they can take both the expert and the public by surprise. For example, in a fourth stage of translation (a final twist in the process, which is by this point well beyond Stockmann's control), Morten Kiil (re)interprets the situation according to his own agenda. In efforts to preserve his family's name and put pressure on

Stockmann, Kiil, as Stockmann's father-in-law and the owner of the tanneries that are the source of contamination, spends all the money he had set aside for his daughter and grandchildren (i.e., Stockmann's children) to buy up the baths' shares (which have plummeted due to rumors of contamination). Hovstad, the radical journalist who betrayed Stockmann to support the mayor, again changes sides when he learns that the shares might be inherited by Stockmann's wife, and re-extends his support (which Stockmann refuses). As these plot twists show, when the issue is translated in different ways by different actors (e.g., Kiil and the mayor), other actors (e.g., Hovstad) can change their enrolment.

In sum, translation does not just mean putting the results of expertise in lay language but understanding that local conditions in the real world are complex and varied, and that local residents and concerned groups might have accumulated relevant knowledge and have different perceptions of how decisions will affect them. Stockmann's secrecy in conducting the tests, coupled with his confidence that his expertise is unarguably conclusive leads to mistrust. To have an impact, expertise cannot be completely detached, self-sufficient, and removed from popular opinion, but involves enrolling diverse actors to jointly articulate the issues in which they are implicated and that could change their lives, thus giving these issues a public form.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPERTISE AND PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Being a work of narrative fiction, *An Enemy of the People* does not aim to propose a solution to the dilemmas and difficulties it presents. At the end of the play, Stockmann decides to remain in the town and open a school. But what might this ending tell us about the relationship between expert knowledge and public deliberation? Is it the only possible ending for this story and the only way for this relationship to conclude? Or do the characters in Ibsen's play refer to other ways the situation could have unfolded? The answer is yes, albeit in a somewhat contradictory fashion. I suggest three potential alternatives for the relationship

between expert knowledge and public deliberation that emerge from the play (the first being the actual ending). These are starting points that, while not fully resolved, connect with recent literature on the role of expertise in public and organizational deliberations, and can inspire future research.

Expert Withdrawal

In the play's enigmatic ending, we get a window onto a major temptation for scientific and technical experts: to become so internally disillusioned and externally pressured that they withdraw from society and from further public deliberation altogether. As Stockman shows, this withdrawal is compatible with a commitment to vague utopian projects that are detached from the problem at hand. First, he plans to move his family to the New World. When Captain Horster, who offers the Stockman passage, is fired for offering help, Stockmann changes his mind and decides to open a new school where he will teach his sons and the poor children in the community as a means to turn them into "free men, aristocrats" (136) who can change society in the future. While the impact of this project is uncertain, it solves neither the issue of contaminated water in the short- or mid-term nor the situation of those infected by it. This can be considered a form of expert withdrawal. From a deliberative democracy perspective, the withdrawal of experts is a problematic outcome because without their knowledge it is easier for the public space to be occupied by vested interests rather than being an open exchange in search for the common good.

Another example of the temptation to withdraw can be found in Stockmann's claim at the end of the play that "the strongest man in the world is the man who stands alone" (137-8). It is a baffling statement, first, because he is arguably not alone but surrounded by his family and a loyal friend such as Horster, and second, because it seems somewhat at odds with the decision to devote himself to education and remain in the community. Moreover, the play has shown that "the strongest man" is his brother, the mayor. Nonetheless, the statement can also be

interpreted as claiming that the strongest is the one who maintains dignity and integrity, who resists adversities and temptations, and who stands firm even amid contradicting opinions. Despite the attacks against him, we can imagine Stockmann believing he has remained unchanged, resolute, steadfast. Such resistance allows one to feel stronger, reaffirming their principles and beliefs. Regardless of whether we sympathize with Stockmann by the end of the play, it is hard to deny that he has courage, and that this courage comes from inside; it is an internal strength. Yet, although experts might follow a call of duty and display courage—paralleling recent research such as Detert & Bruno (2017), Paniccia, Poggese & Leoni (2020), and Howard-Grenville (2021), which has taken an interest in the courage of managers and management scholars—Stockmann also shows that this virtue is perfectly compatible with problematic companions such as anger, isolation, and messianic delusions. According to the play (and in other examples), the main problem for experts is not a lack of internal strength but a difficulty in communicating, persuading, and enrolling others.

Withdrawal from the public and from the problems at hand reinforces the divide between experts and laypeople; that is, between a supposedly hierarchically superior form of knowledge, on the one hand, and popular opinion (purportedly controlled by irrational and obscure views), on the other. As expressed by Stockmann, this leads experts to permanently mistrust and disrespect the people, and, echoing Tocqueville, to see the majority as potentially exercising a tyranny against the enlightened minority:

“The majority is never right! Never. Never! That’s one of the lies that is bred in this community, and freethinking men have to fight against it. Who is this majority . . . in any country? Is it the wise or the fools? I think we all have to admit that the fools form the overwhelming majority throughout this world. And it’s terrifying. But, in God’s name, how can it be right that fools hold sway over the wise? [...] The people who are right are a few rare individuals like me. The minority is always right.” (98)

From this perspective, separation would become the only way that experts can avoid being “contaminated” by the ignorant many, as one might infer from a chilling sentence in Stockmann’s monologue (which could be dangerously misused to justify eugenics): “We are

animals. But there are very few well-bred animals in our midst, and there is a frightening difference between men who are Labradors and men who are dogs of the street” (103).

Without going to these objectionable extremes, one could accept that the separation of experts from public deliberation is to some extent necessary, as they must perform their work in laboratories and offices with some level of isolation, even secrecy. On the other hand, it is undesirable for expertise to remain permanently secluded, as this would decrease the plurality of points of view and the quality of public deliberation. Indeed, a key function of expertise is to be distributed, taught, and deliberated beyond the established circle of experts (Schudson, 2006) rather than building “an asylum of refuge” to remain “uncontaminated by contact with use and service” (Dewey, 2012 [1927]: 197). Without this contact with society, experts might overlook ideas as to the direction their research should take, the problems that really matter, and the consequences that new techniques, discoveries, and inventions have for people. Furthermore, the public often wishes the voice of the experts would be heard more often; for example, it has been argued that in organizational settings employee motivation increases when well-grounded information (including financial, customer, and workplace indicators) is shared (Rousseau & Rivero, 2003).

Another way in which the separation view manifests itself, though more subtly, is when the public expects experts to simply offer information or advice and then quietly withdraw without participating in the discussion, as if they are mere servants that cannot stay for the party. This “linear model” (Moore, 2017: 45), in which the technical and political phases are separated, is based on a mistrust of experts and the asymmetry they represent (i.e., if they stay, they might take over). But, as in the case of the mayor in Ibsen’s play, this can result in vested interests dominating the space, narrowing the scope of what can be discussed, and imposing their own interpretation of the facts. If the role of experts is merely to provide information and then scurry back to their labs and offices, risks like the impact of tobacco on human health or

the importance of biodiversity might have flown under the radar for longer than they already had.

Epistocracy: Revisiting the Ship Analogy

The relationship between expertise and public deliberation in Ibsen's play might have had a different outcome. This possibility appears briefly in Act I, when Billing (a newspaper assistant who claims to be a radical but is depicted as a buffoon) states that "society is like a ship. Everyone should take a hand on the helm" (21). Horster (the sea captain) vehemently disagrees, stating, "Not on my ship." In this modern version of the classic analogy from Plato's *Republic*, the greater the uncertainties (storms, turbulent waters), the less that laypeople should be involved in decision-making. Otherwise, charlatans interfere, demagoguery prevails, problems remain unsolved, and society ostensibly sinks. However, doubts have long been voiced as to the feasibility of this analogy for society at large (Dewey, 2012 [1927]; Habermas, 1971; Dahl, 1998). If it means giving society's helm to experts (epistocracy), this raises the question of who the experts in the overall interest of society might be. In *An Enemy of the People*, the mayor is one such candidate (for both societal and political expertise), but the play's audience may question whether he has the town's best interests in mind. Then there is the medical expert (Stockmann), who challenges the mayor's views based on his own expertise on the safety of the bath waters.

It is also debatable whether the ship analogy holds for organizations. Experts do not often possess the highest hierarchical authority in their organizations. While there are arguably experts in management at the helm, scholars do not agree on how to determine who is a management expert, whether management counts as an expertise, or what type of expertise it is (e.g., Mintzberg, 2004; Bennis & Toole, 2005; Khurana, 2007; Üsdiken, Kipping & Engwall, 2021). Even if top executives were to be considered management experts, they would still rely heavily on other experts who lead the organization's various units and departments, as well as

the technicians, engineers, scientists, accountants, and lawyers with whom they must establish a common language in order to engage in decision-making. As Ibsen's play shows, if those who hold power within organizations or society block (other) expert opinions from being openly shared and discussed, problems might be momentarily concealed, but this can lead to pernicious collective outcomes in the mid or long term.

If the play were to espouse the epistocratic solution to the difficulties in the relationship between experts and public deliberation (as Horster might), its conclusion would suggest that laypeople are indeed backwards, irrational, short-sighted, and fearful, while scientists, experts, and specialists act for the common good and are unduly misunderstood. One might thus deduce that laypeople should not be invited to give their opinion because they cannot understand the problem. Real-world experts in several fields have adopted such a view. For example, as studied by Callon et al. (2009), nuclear energy experts in France spent many years thinking they were acting for the public good but doing so behind closed doors lest laypeople put "a hand on the helm" (Ibsen, [1882] 2007: 21) of such a dangerous issue. Nonetheless, they were later forced to open their meetings to public scrutiny, and public deliberations about nuclear waste are now commonplace in France, supporting the idea that, due to the often complex and dynamic nature of uncertain situations, no single expert or body of expertise can cover all points of view, no matter how enlightened, competent, and benevolent they might be. In fact, it has been argued that more expertise leads to more uncertainty, rather than less, as the "boundaries between science and policy or politics are constantly being renegotiated as part of the political process" (Sarewitz, 2004: 386). Thus, the epistocratic solution has become problematic.

Finding Ways to Increase Both Deliberation and Participation

Another potential outcome for the play is expressed by Hovstad, one of its least sympathetic characters, who first encourages Stockmann by pushing him into a political battle and then betrays him, and whose motives are far from clear (including a romantic interest in

Stockmann's daughter). Yet, despite his character flaws, Hovstad may have a point: "I've been able to see what the lower classes of society need. They need to participate in public affairs—that's what will give them power, knowledge, and dignity" (39). He repeats this argument later: "But what about the issue of advancing the population through their experience in self-government?" (65). This is a classic argument for democracy—that participation is a means for self-improvement and self-respect. If Hovstad's view is correct, an alternative ending could have been for Stockmann to convene another public meeting or find other formal or informal ways to engage others. It is, of course, debatable as to whether Ibsen would endorse this view (or any of the previous ones), but he nevertheless decided to end the play with Stockmann remaining in the community rather than leaving, being killed, or changing his view of the problem. Thus, the audience has space to wonder what happens after the play ends, since the real issue is unlikely to disappear.

This alternative, as such, does not solve the abovementioned difficulties of incorporating expertise in public deliberation. In fact, it affirms that they might not be fully resolvable. However, it also points to continued efforts toward both deliberation and participation. Within this broad alternative, one possibility might be to limit deliberation to small groups rather than an entire community or society. As the public meeting in the play shows, broadening participation may actually lower the quality of deliberation and make it vulnerable to manipulation. Yet, studies on deliberative democracy have revealed a variety of institutional innovations—referred to as mini-publics and including citizen juries, randomized deliberative entities, and hybrid forums—that suggest that it is possible for laypeople to debate complex issues that might at first seem only accessible to specialists, such as genetically modified food, other uses of genetic engineering, and renewable energy projects (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Fung, 2006). In these spaces, translation is not understood as simply moving from one side to the other (i.e., the higher language of expertise to the lower language of everyday life) but as

two-way communication. In other words, it implies “a shift in emphasis from public understanding of science to public engagement with science” (Moore, 2018: 645). In this view, the public can contribute to science and expertise because it can bring new concerns, insights, and groups of actors to the discussion. The assumption is that citizens also possess a “lay knowledge” that is valuable and necessary. In the case of *An Enemy of the People*, this would include Morten Kiil’s knowledge of his tannery, the victims’ knowledge of their illness, and other sources that could emerge if the discussion was given a chance to occur. Although they lack formal accreditation, these characters have experiential knowledge of the local context and can detect new issues and help implement solutions.

Nonetheless, the idea of limiting deliberation to mini-publics or hybrid forums is not without its critics. From the perspective of deliberative democracy, decisions require justification by all those affected and, hence, it is necessary to advance on both fronts—deliberation and participation—without sacrificing either (Lafont, 2015; Mansbridge, 2007). Narrowing citizen participation can lead to feelings of marginalization, disconnection, and cynicism, and could be seen as an attempt to bypass contestation. Increasing the overall “experience of self-government” (in Hovstad’s words) also means improving the deliberative quality of public assemblies, like the one in the play, that have succumbed to manipulation and distortion. In sum, experts like Stockmann can improve the deliberative quality of societies over time if they remain in them. However, they must constantly find different ways to engage others—even if their first attempts fail and even if some of these ways are just provisional steps that can be subject to criticism and manipulation.

DISCUSSION: EXPERTS AS “PROBLEMATIC PARTICIPANTS” IN DELIBERATION

As my analysis of Ibsen’s play has shown, expertise has much to lose when there is no democratic deliberation and vested interests take over, but also that there are potential obstacles

to incorporating expertise in such deliberations. This offers an opportunity to better understand the difficulties of deliberation in society and organizations, enriching the increasingly important stream of management literature that has adopted the notion of deliberative democracy for a variety of purposes, such as stakeholder dialogue (Unerman & Bennett, 2004), multi-stakeholder initiatives (Mena & Palazzo, 2012; Arenas, Albareda & Goodman, 2020), international accountability standards (Gilbert, Rasche & Waddock, 2011), business-NGO interactions (Baur & Arenas, 2104), responsible innovation (Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020), shareholder engagement (Goodman & Arenas, 2015; Ferraro & Beunza, 2018), and leadership (Fryer, 2012). Following the work of Habermas (2015[1995]), Bohman (1996), Dryzek (2000), Gutman and Thomson (2004), and others, these contributions share an understanding of democracy as based on a process of mutual persuasion among all the parties affected by a decision, in which reasons that others can accept are given rather than basing the decision on the aggregation of individual preferences or negotiation among conflicting interests. They also share the fundamental assumption that not all forms of communication are instrumental, strategic, or interest-based, contrasting the view in management practice and scholarship that self-interest and power determine relations among organizational actors (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1986; Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001). Another fundamental assumption is that deliberation requires plurality and inclusivity—that is, equal capacity by all potentially affected parties to voice their views and be heard, and, hence, included in the conversation. If certain participants in a deliberative setting have more information and do most of the talking, others may feel intimidated to expose their concerns, their views may not be heard, and the plurality of perspectives likely decreases. Deliberation is necessarily interactive and reciprocal (Gutman & Thompson, 2004); it is an exchange between different people rather than focused on the views of one individual or group.

Many deliberative democracy scholars explicitly recognize that expert involvement is necessary to improving the quality of deliberation (e.g., Bohman, 1996; Baber & Barlett, 2007), and often use the epistemic argument—i.e., that deliberation (in public, organizational, and interorganizational domains) improves the analysis of problems and leads to better solutions—to support this approach (Pellizzoni, 2001; Habermas, 2006). Nevertheless, Habermas’ (1985) well-known distinction between the “lifeworld” and the “system” suggests a more problematic view. In this distinction, the system (formed by the state, judiciary, and corporations) is characterized by instrumentality and strategic action, whereas nonstrategic communicative action typically occurs in the world of everyday life, where people regularly deliberate in a free, unbiased, and open way, exchanging mutually acceptable arguments about what to do. While he considers both the system and the lifeworld necessary to modern, complex societies, Habermas warns of the risk of the system colonizing the lifeworld, thus conditioning and limiting people’s open deliberations. The use of science (both natural and social) is one way that this colonization occurs, because it puts politics and government decisions exclusively in the hands of experts and marginalizes laypeople (Bäckstrand, 2004). This process, which Habermas (1971) calls “scientization,” results in the replacement of free and open deliberation among ordinary people with technocratic calculations and efficiency considerations in all aspects of life. Thus, the question remains: Does expert knowledge improve or spoil democratic deliberation?

As shown in this analysis of Ibsen’s play, problems with expertise in deliberation include the communicative shortcomings of experts, their difficulty translating knowledge, and a lack of awareness of the limitations of expertise. If experts dominate the conversation, as Stockmann tries to do, this can narrow the scope of issues that can be debated and can undermine the free exchange of ideas, which is a key value of deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2006). All this has the potential to make other participants feel excluded. As such, experts have been called

“problematic participants” (Barber & Barlett, 2007) in deliberative settings, especially if they jump into the fray without being prepared and if their expertise is “politicized” (i.e., used by experts or others as a tool to promote a desired political goal, overextending and compromising scientific accuracy). Another problem that emerges from Ibsen’s play is that experts might be precluded from participating or discredited by the powers-that-be, who are skilled in manipulating the rules of deliberation. Or, alternatively, they might choose to withdraw and remain above the fray, either feigning neutrality or remaining frustrated with society’s shortcomings.

Finally, a third difficulty is that there can be various types of expertise with different views on the same issue. While the play emphasizes medical and political viewpoints, contemporary controversies such as climate change, biodiversity, energy, and AI involve various “hard” science perspectives in addition to social science and economic ones. Indeed, there are often multiple sets of facts and diverse understandings of central values that do not spontaneously converge and must be translated in various directions (Sarewitz, 2004), as shown, for example, in the context of discussions on financial regulation and its social implications by Martí and Scherer (2016). This makes the ship analogy (i.e., the epistocratic solution) problematic. These difficulties do not imply, however, that we should give up on deliberative democracy, since, as recognized by Dewey (Dewey, 2012 [1927]; Moore, 2018), democracy is an ongoing process of experimentation and inquiry, with failures and renewed attempts.

As mentioned above, several studies on deliberative democracy theory and science and technology studies have advocated a participatory turn for scientific expertise (Pellizoni, 2001; Dryzek, 2000; Moore, 2018; Bäckstrand, 2004). This requires that experts give reasons that others can accept and, in turn, accept the principle of equal participation, which includes openness to criticism by laypeople (e.g., about ulterior motivations, sources of funding, and corroboration from other sources). It also requires that laypeople—which might include other

types of professionals, employees, and those with knowledge of local circumstances and history— are involved in defining the problem, collaborating with experts, and producing recommendations. As mentioned, this can occur in a variety of institutional forms, known as hybrid forums (Callon et al., 2009), citizen forums (Dryzek & Pickering, 2017), and mini-publics (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Fung, 2003), examples of which include the deliberative polls about energy issues in Texas, the participatory budgeting of Porto Alegre, and the British Columbia’s Citizen’s Assembly (Fishkin, 2009; Fung, 2003; Mansbridge et al., 2012), as well as conferences with concerned groups on nuclear waste, rare diseases, and the mad cow crisis (Callon et al., 2009). These examples show that citizens, patients, activists, and amateurs affected by or interested in an issue are necessary for the production and interpretation of knowledge, allowing for different translations to take place and be discussed. All these institutional experiments bridge Habermas’ division between the “system” and the “lifeworld,” if this division is understood as a dichotomy, with science falling under the former and the latter being untouched by expertise and specialized knowledge altogether.

However, even if blind acceptance of expert authority is undesirable and more room must be made for the relevant knowledge of non-experts and the co-production of knowledge, some deliberative theorists warn that not all knowledge is identical and that knowledge inequalities must still be recognized in any process involving complex societal, technological, environmental, and health issues (Moore, 2017). This means that, in addition to opening up debate and celebrating diversity, as advocated by science and technology studies (Callon et al., 2009), expertise must be trusted or accepted for these deliberations to move forward and decisions to be made. In some cases, it is not possible to open participation broadly, thus restricted deliberations are necessary. In others, deliberative mini-publics with different degrees of inclusivity and authority can be used (Fung, 2003, 2006). Yet, these formulae can work as long as they are recognized as part of a wider deliberative system in which there is the

possibility of contestation and scrutiny (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Thus, trust or acceptance of expertise is necessary but need not be uncritical, and citizens must exercise active judgement on the results and processes that expert deliberations follow, even if they do not understand all the scientific or technical facts (Moore, 2017). From this deliberative systems perspective, if bridges are not built to cross the boundaries between experts and non-experts, trust will be undermined and expertise ultimately rejected. Conversely, the same result occurs, as with Stockmann in the public meeting, when experts bridge the boundaries too quickly and unreflectively by politicizing their own expertise to advance a broader political agenda beyond the issue at hand.

RELEVANCE FOR MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP

With a few recent exceptions (e.g., Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020; Giamporcaro, Gond & Louche, 2023; Buhmann & Fieseler, 2023), management and organization scholars that adopt the framework of deliberative democracy have paid scant attention to the role of expertise and the difficulties and tensions it can face. This is surprising, given the ubiquitousness of expertise in organizational life and the business world. Any organization “relies on a division of labor in which some members of the collective develop expertise on which the others depend” (Mansbridge et al., 2012: 13), even if there are demands for more participation in the workplace, moving towards organizations as “democratic hybrids” (Courpasson & Dany, 2003) or towards a “stakeholder democracy” (Matten & Crane, 2005). In the relationships between an organization and its external and internal stakeholders, experts constantly interact and collaborate with local communities, public authorities, activists, customers, clients, employees, and investors. As in Ibsen’s play, these interactions between experts and laypeople can become problematic. The language of expertise can be seen as marginalizing other perspectives and stifling deliberation, which can lead to mistrust, suspicion, and even resistance. For example, studies on local communities affected by large infrastructure projects

(e.g., hydroelectric dams or mining sites) have shown the difficulties of community participation in public deliberation with firms due to an overload of technical information gathered in the environmental impact assessments elaborated by hired expert consultants. This can be considered part of the abovementioned process of “scientization” and can lead environmental activists and local communities to contest expertise more generally (McCormick, 2006). However, the only way for affected people to overcome feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement may be to either form an alliance with sympathetic experts who can engage in dialogue and support their cause (McCormick, 2006) or to develop their own expertise. Habermas himself (1971) calls this role of science critical or emancipatory, as opposed to purely technicist and a-moral (Burrell, 1994).

Management scholars who have begun to pay attention to the variety of spaces where experts deliberate, and in which knowledge is prepared for political decision-making processes, advocate for the establishment of bridges between experts and non-experts. A recent example is Giamporcaro et al.’s (2023) study of a European Commission expert group on sustainable finance, which recognizes that authentic deliberation might require separate spaces but also porous boundaries between them. Another recent article by Buhmann and Fieseler (2023) has studied discussions on the responsible use of AI and on AI governance, which include substantial knowledge asymmetry between experts and non-experts, and in which a variety of deliberative venues (including expert committees, mini-publics and the wider public sphere) complement and check one another. These studies recognize that in highly complex societies and organizations, science and expertise sometimes need to withdraw into closed deliberative settings, and at other times it can be useful and necessary to establish more or less secluded hybrid forums and mini-publics. As Gilbert et al. (2023) claim, the quality of deliberation and the type of criticism need not be uniform in all spaces and levels. But to avoid epistocracy,

neither should these settings be permanently closed, and in one way or another should be open to participation and critical scrutiny (Moore, 2017).

These findings resemble those revealed by management scholars that have followed science and technology studies. Garud et al.'s (2014) article, for example, about the Climategate that affected the International Panel on Climate Change (in which files were released containing exchanges among experts) shows that the credibility of experts can be undermined if they cannot explain in plain language the process by which they arrived at their conclusions and are dismissive of contrary views and concerns. This same article advocates an approach that bridges the boundary between science and non-science, so that experts enter into dialogue and co-create meaning with the situated expertise of other social groups. Similarly, studies on the AIDS crisis showed that the construction of knowledge about AIDS treatment could not be restricted to the exclusive domain of experts and had to include the voices of activists and patients (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004). Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People* highlights these views about the limitations of expertise and the need for bridges, given that the translation of expert knowledge to local situations and into practice cannot be done by experts alone. Adopting this perspective also means, for example, that facts (such as the bacteria in the play) are "not a separate entity" (36), but interconnected with the lab results, the pipes, the tanneries, the town's leadership, the bath's shareholders, the victims, and other evolving actors. In other words, a *porous* perspective can help bridge the potential dichotomy between lifeworld and system.

In addition, the play highlights other elements that can expand these contributions, insofar as it also portrays an expert that tries to act as a counterpower to political authority and harmful corporate practices, as well as a manipulated majority. Thus, an analysis of the play reminds us of the risk that public deliberation will be adulterated by powerful actors, that they can exploit the vulnerability of experts, and that experts might be tempted to withdraw from public

discussions. These are key challenges that could be studied in further research on the relationship between expertise and deliberation in organizations. One recent contribution in that direction is Bowden et al.'s study of the local climate change adaptation plans in Lake Macquarie in Australia (Bowden et al., 2021), in which case the authority of experts was eroded when a non-scientific authority took over after a contested, negotiated process in which the enrollment of different actors (including the media) and the alignment of their interests became crucial. This situation reached a point where homeowners claimed that merely discussing rising sea levels in public had already begun to hurt property values. As in Ibsen's play, this not only underscores the importance of building alliances, but also the design, organization, and procedures of deliberative settings, as well as the question of representation; a topic studied by some deliberative theorists (Fung, 2006) and now receiving attention from management scholars (e.g., Pek, Mena & Lyons, 2011; Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020). But the play also warns that experts may lack the skills to communicate with others and build trust in wider public settings, and that they must adopt a more participatory view of expertise. Thus, as shown in the above analysis, we must not underrate the difficulties and complexities that experts face when crossing boundaries so that laypeople can accept and trust the authority of expertise when a decision must be made.

Finally, the lessons offered here can also be applied to management scholars insofar as they are experts themselves. Several recent contributions have called for management research to make a greater societal impact (e.g., Hernandez & Haack, 2023; Reinecke, Boxenbaum, & Gehman, 2022; Wickert, Post, Doh, Prescott & Prencipe, 2021) and have greater involvement in public debates (e.g., Etzion & Gehman, 2019), rather than remaining above the fray by withdrawing into the comfort of offices and seminars. To increase such societal impact and participation, it may be important for management scholars to be aware of—and prepared for—the obstacles and complexities of expertise involvement in public deliberation, including the

themes that emerge in *An Enemy of the People*, such as the manipulation of public meetings, disregarding the limitations of expertise, the failure to enroll allies, and the problem of adopting a unidirectional view of translation rather than a bidirectional and co-creative one. The frustration felt by Dr. Stockmann and his difficulties in making himself heard might also be felt by scholars who care about making a positive impact on the world and on organizations. Amidst these difficulties, however, it is worth remembering that humility, respect, transparency, listening, and empathy might be more conducive to building trust among those who are skeptical or resent expertise than engaging in monologues that convey arrogance and contempt.

CONCLUSION

The issues I have raised through this analysis of *An Enemy of the People* will hopefully encourage scholars to further explore the role of expertise in public and organizational deliberations. At a time when expertise is being contested, it is perhaps a more relevant topic than ever. In contexts that are highly complex, uncertain, and surrounded by strong pressures and constraints, if experts are afraid, feel coerced and manipulated, or lose their autonomy, they cannot contribute to society and organizations. If they withdraw, refrain from engaging with non-experts, and fail to involve lay citizens in discussions on complex topics, the backlash can be stronger. Merely translating their knowledge to make it comprehensible and persuasive is insufficient; the relationship between experts and laypeople (including employees, patients, and local communities) cannot be one in which experts have the monopoly of knowledge (as Stockmann thinks), but one in which they deliberate, collaborate, and co-create applied knowledge. Yet, in this relationship there must also be trust (albeit not blind trust) in expertise—and this trust can be increased or diminished by the behavior, skills, and character of experts, as well as that of their opponents.

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