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# Exploring Economists & Society: Constructing Expert Identity

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**Exploring Economists & Society: Constructing expert identity**

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**Abstract**

The recent economic crisis has created a heightened interest in economics and greater demand for economics experts. The media has played an important role in meeting this demand as mediated expertise is relied upon to understand the complex relationships within society (Albaek, Christiansen and Togeby 2003; Beck 1992; Boyce 2006; Giddens 1990). Such interactions of experts with media are a key element of the knowledge flows within society (Sturdy et al. 2009) and so have attracted research attention (Ekstrom and Lundell 2011; Hutchby 2006; Montgomery 2008). This paper contributes to this literature by focusing on the under-researched area of the expert interview (Montgomery 2008), and in particular on the less-studied interview with the social science expert (Cassidy, 2008). The management experts chosen – economists – are key to the knowledge flows about business. Using discourse analysis we examined interactions on a prominent Irish radio news programme, building on previous literature which analyses radio interaction (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002; Hutchby

2006). Interviews with a well-known economist are analysed. This provides insights into how discursive tools are used to construct and preserve an expert identity in media interactions and how this influences the construction of the economy in knowledge flows.

## **Introduction**

The media has provided a platform for experts to engage with societally important issues (Rowe and Brass 2008) and for their expert discourse to circulate in society. Thus the media plays a vital societal role in facilitating the knowledge flows from the expert (Sturdy et al. 2009). This paper addresses a particularly important aspect of knowledge flows, the media interactions of an expert economist. We do this by first looking at the role of experts, and specifically economic experts, in within society, noting the peculiarities of economics expertise. We then go on to discuss how this expert role is legitimised in society. The methodological approach is then outlined. The analysis section highlights a prominent data feature: calculating devices, and considers how these are utilised by the expert to construct and legitimise his identity. We also look at the use of a legitimisation device, utilised when an expert is more strained in legitimising his identity. The paper then draws to a conclusion.

## **Economists' expertise in Society**

The study of knowledge within society has received much attention recently (Innerarity 2013). Research has tended to focus on either the production of knowledge (MacKenzie 2012) or knowledge consumption (Alvarez, Mazza and Pedersen 2005). An important emerging interest however is on knowledge flows from production to consumption (Sturdy et al. 2009). Media is a prominent platform facilitating these flows, serving as an intermediary between the knowledge producers and knowledge consumers and a facilitator of the necessary interaction (Sturdy et al. 2009).

Traditionally it has been perceived that the production of knowledge was confined to academia (Hessels and van Lente 2008) and originated from the ‘high intelligensia’ or ‘public intellectual’ within academic institutions (Osborne 2004). However, although it is acknowledged that ‘institutions such as think tanks and political parties are largely dependent upon the university system to do their research for them’ (Osborne 2004, p.432), research now suggests that the location of knowledge production is much more heterogeneous. Gibbons et al. (1994) have provided a framework for this change in perspective, what they call ‘Mode 2’ knowledge production. Mode 2 knowledge production broadens the scope of where knowledge is produced. Its main proposition ‘is the emergence of a knowledge production system that is ‘socially distributed’’ (Hessels and van Lente 2008, p.741). This re-imagining of how knowledge is produced has resulted in a broader definition of knowledge workers, moving away from the historical fixation on the previously mentioned academic elites, referred to by Fourcade (2009) as the ‘Public Minded Elites’, and towards a more inclusive definition. This revised definition includes a much broader population of ‘professions of the intellect’ (Osborne 2004, p.436). Amongst primary knowledge producers that would be included in this broader definition are academics, management gurus, publishers and consultants (O’Mahoney, Heusinkveld and Wright 2013).

Historically, it was the preserve of academics to confine their research output to the closed circles of academic publications and the role of others, like consultants and public policy officials, to disperse knowledge more widely (Fincham et al. 2008). Consultants achieve this through commodifying knowledge in a manner where it can be ‘sold on the market’, which assists in the flow of knowledge for wider consumption is of growing research interest (Heusinkveld and Visscher 2012). While this remains vital, experts now interact with society more directly, either from institutional pressure to popularise academic knowledge or from a heightened sense of providing a public good (Fourcade 2009; Rowe and Brass 2008). Osborne (2004, p.432) argues that the media is manifestly of increasing importance to universities and that as a re-

sult academy has acknowledged the importance of the media and changed its identity from an *advisory* mold of specialist expert to a *networked* one (p.433).

The media has provided the platform for this increased engagement by experts with society, so allowing the media to continue to occupy a powerful position in knowledge circulation (Boyce 2006). The power that the media holds within a knowledge society is through its intermediary and procurement role. These roles mean that the media has the ability to select an expert as a source or contributor, and thereby influence whose expertise is recognized (Arnoldi 2007, p.55). The media's procurement role is similar to the role provided by intermediaries who source appropriate consultants to meet specific end user requirements (O'Mahoney, Heusinkveld and Wright 2013). This has resulted in an increasingly interdependent and fraught relationship between experts and the media, as both academics and journalists are principle actors in the knowledge flows within society, through their roles as 'knowledge' or 'intellectual' workers (Rowe and Brass 2008, p.679). The media is reliant on experts to inform their audience of issues of societal importance and to provide them with the knowledge that wider society consumes. Experts are reliant on the media to give them a platform. This altered relationship has also caused a change in identity from experts as they find themselves increasingly being called upon 'to be something like 'mediators', bringing ideas quickly and decisively into public focus, brokering their ideas in the context of different spheres of influence' (Osborne 2004, p.435). The emergence of a mediator identity as part of an academic's overall identity appears to have been influenced by the emergence of intermediaries or 'knowledge brokers' (Meyer 2010). The duty of such knowledge brokers is to assist in the dissemination of knowledge from knowledge producers to a society (Meyer 2010, p.120). This identity of mediator intellectual 'is interested above all in *ideas*; not the 'big ideas' of the epoch of 'grand narratives' but ideas which are going to make a difference, and especially ideas which are 'vehicular' rather than 'oracular'" (Osborne 2004, p.441).

## **The Legitimacy of Expertise and Economists' Knowledge.**

We live in increasingly uncertain times, what has been referred to as a risk society (Beck 1992). 'The risks faced by contemporary advanced capitalist societies take the form, *inter alia*, of the potential for ecological disruption, for war and social dislocation, and for economic depression and demise' (Reddy 1996, p.223). The risk society thesis put the sharing and distribution of risks at the centre of comprehending contemporary societies (Beck 1992). Such times cause trepidation as unpredictability permeates through society. The advent of the risk society has resulted in science becoming 'more and more necessary, but at the same time, less and less sufficient for the socially binding definition of truth' (Beck 1992, p.156). This has caused experts becoming increasingly prominent but also increasingly questioned. Public opinion has long had a close relationship with scientific and expert knowledge, however 'the risk society thesis argues that the latter has lost a measure of authority over the former' (Young and Matthews 2007, p.136). This has been accentuated by the legacy of distrust of scientific expertise that has emerged in light of a number of recent controversies, e.g. GM and BSE (Whatmore 2009, p.588). This has resulted Consequently, society is presented with a dilemma, as 'decisions must be made in the light of available scientific knowledge, but they must also be democratically legitimised' (Innerarity 2013, p.13), what Collins and Evans (2007) have called the Problem of Legitimacy. Experts do understand the necessity for public participation in reinforcing their expert claims, as this 'grants legitimacy without making demands on meaning' (Young and Matthews 2007, p.141). This 'Problem of Legitimacy' has been bred out of the political right of the public to contribute to societal debates (Collins and Evans 2007, p.113). Therefore, the role of the layperson is seen as that of facilitator or interpreter, rather than contributor (Kerr, Cunningham-Burley and Tutton 2007). The challenge for the expert is to communicate their knowledge in a manner that is accessible to the general public to increase public acceptance and their legitimacy (McLennan 2004), echoing the call by Billig (2008) for academics to make their research more accessible to wider society by using simpler, less technical prose. However, Collins and Evans ar-

gue that ‘the social sciences of the last decades have concentrated too hard on the Problem of Legitimacy to the exclusion of other questions’ (2007, p.113).

Giddens (1990) argues that modern societies are required to place a large amount of trust in abstract social institutions and expert systems in an attempt to mitigate the risks society faces. These expert systems are very often charged with attempting to manage these risks, and they have gained legitimacy by constructing uncertainty as calculable and probabilizable risk, and by positioning themselves as providing satisfaction and security to society from these risks (Reddy 1996, p.246). However, the risks society faces today requires ‘a rejection of scientific pretensions to authoritative calculation and the insertion at the very centre of the scientific enterprise of a more accessible and democratic discourse’ (Reddy 1996, p.248). The balancing of this tension is crucial to experts continuing their societal work in managing risk. However, an important clarification needs to be made to determine the amount of societal input in expert decision making. This ‘Problem of Extension’ (Collins and Evans 2007) is difficult to quantify and measure, but is important to rectify to ensure swift decision making of societal risks.

Within the expertise of economics, there has been a motif of being skeptical of expert knowledge itself. It has been argued that it is folly for economists to try to forecast future economic trends. Hayek (1945) argues that the extent of any one person’s knowledge is limited and imperfect. Therefore, it is unreasonable and illogical for society to suppose that any one person could offer forecasting advice on how a market will perform in the future. This argument would contend that economic risks, such as those that precipitated the recent economic crisis, were unknowable or not predictable in advance (Davies and McGoey 2012, p.65). On this view predicting future events and attempts to pre-empt markets is a demonstration of arrogance of experts. Furthermore, Hayek (1945) notes that economic planning often fails to consider or recognise the constant minor changes that inevitably contribute to the whole economic picture. This argument is of interest to this research, as it is in tension with the

commonly held 'all-knowing' construct of the expert (Davies and McGoey 2012, p. 65), and offers an interesting insight into the unique nature of economic expertise.

## **Methodology**

This paper draws on a discourse analytical tradition inspired by Potter and Wetherell (1987), and has been developed in studies of management by writers such as Whittle and Mueller (2010). Central to our Discourse Analysis (DA) approach is the interactional context in which the discourse is produced. In this regard this research views the interactive nature of the construction of identity as paramount, something that was investigated previously (Fitzgerald and O'Rourke 2012). Given the importance of interactive discourse, radio was identified as an appropriate data collection source. Previous research has demonstrated how radio can provide a rich site for the collection of such interactive data (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002; Hutchby 2006; Thornborrow 2001). Consequently, radio is increasingly being used as a data collection source in its own right (Hutchby 2006), as it is an excellent source of interaction and is becoming 'an increasingly popular site for sociological and discourse analytic attention' (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002, p.579).

This research focuses on *how* economists perform expertise by analysing how they construct their identity and the identity work that they utilise. In doing so, it builds on previous work done on radio interactions (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002; Hutchby 2006) and on the analysis of economic discourse on Irish radio (O'Rourke and Hogan 2013; O'Rourke and Hogan 2014). A prominent Irish radio show, Morning Ireland, was selected as the data source for this research and interviews with a well-known expert economist, Ray Kinsella (RK), are analysed.

## **Analysis**

The analysis is structured on what has been identified as a key interpretative repertoire utilised by the identified expert to articulate his identity as an economic expert, but before that is presented a necessary gloss on the economic context for the media interactions.

### *The context of economic crisis in Ireland*

The Atlantic economic storm that hit in 2008 ended a period of economic growth, known as 'the Celtic Tiger' (Chari and Bernhagen 2011) during which Ireland jumped from an economic laggard to a star (Whelan 2010). This came to a shattering stop in late September 2008 when, faced with the prospective of a collapse of the Irish banking system, the Irish government guaranteed the loans of the Irish banks; in what become known as the Bank Guarantee (Honohan 2010). The spectacular nature of the Irish economic collapse and the subsequent consequences of the Bank Guarantee decision created a heightened interest in economics and an increased societal demand for economic experts in Ireland. This is reflected in recent research (Chari and Bernhagen 2011; O'Rourke and Hogan 2013; Whelan 2011), government commissioned publications on what caused the crisis (Honohan 2010), and a plethora of popular literature.

### *Calculating Devices*

Calculating devices are useful concepts that can provide justification or support for a particular argument or identity. In the extracts below, an identified expert, Ray Kinsella (RK) of the Smurfit Business School in the University College Dublin (UCD), a well-regarded institution of postgraduate business education in Ireland, is shown to utilise calculating devices to support his identity. The main calculating device that RK is seen to utilise is the markets. However, he also utilises established institutions, namely The Irish Times and the European Parliament, as legitimisation devices when his expert identity is challenged to a greater extent. The markets are often called upon

**Extract 1**

**IR:** Ray Kinsella, eh, what do you make of this rescue package, this guarantee which the government is putting in place?

**RK:** I think it's hugely significant and it's very welcome. I think it shows that the central bank, the department of finance and the regulator have learned from the experience of other countries. Have learned from the experience of the UK and the United States. And they have put in place a package that does two things. It is a pre-emptive strike against the shorters, and I see that's very clearly reflected in the, eh, gains that Christopher talked about in Anglo Irish. But it also moves to re-assure depositors and also counter-parties in the market. Now that re-assurance is hugely important. There is fear, and there was concern out there, eh, among many of your listeners, and I think this does a great deal to bring re-assurance.

**Source: Morning Ireland Interview with Ray Kinsella on 30th September 2008: 8secs to 1m 1sec**

as a utility by economic experts, serving the function of validating claims made in their discourse. Interaction with established institutions demonstrate engagement from the expert with wider society, which offers legitimacy to expert claims (Collins and Evans 2007). Experts' rhetorical authority and apparent distance from the body politic serves to make them a powerful tool in media discourse.

In the above extract, we can see that IR frames the initial question in an inviting manner, which suggests that the IR is acknowledging that RK is an expert. The question also takes the form of a non-confrontational question. This would be in keeping with Montgomery's (2008) expert interview as opposed to the confrontational style associated with interviews with public figures, e.g. politicians. The purpose of this welcoming approach may be to put the expert, in this case RK, at ease to facilitate RK in a transfer of his knowledge to the listenership. If this is the case, the IR is playing an important facilitatory role in providing a context for RK to connect with society.

RK responds to the question with a strong affirmative declaration. This direct re-

sponse may be used to appease the IR and to meet any potential expectations of RK, as an expert and intellectual, to provide closure on the question posed. The affirmative response in itself is interesting as RK does not state explicitly whether the ‘guarantee’ is good or bad, but instead states that it is ‘very welcome’. This begs the question, who is it welcomed by? RK does go on to qualify this initial affirmative declaration by using the markets as support. The use of the markets here is interesting in that it appears that the success of the policy initiative is predicated on the appeasement of the markets - ‘it also moves to re-assure depositors and also counter-parties in the market’. The re-assurance of depositors is understandable, given that the majority of them could be assumed to be citizens or residents in Ireland and as such would have a stakeholder interest in the well-being of the banking industry. However, the re-assurance of the counter-parties in the market is somewhat more unclear. RK stresses the importance of these counter-parties by emphasising how ‘hugely important’ this re-assurance is. It would appear that this specialist knowledge of the market allows RK to justify his assertion of the bank guarantee being a ‘very welcome’ development and providing necessary ‘re-assurance’. Using the markets in this way appears to present the markets as a preserve of experts that is unchallenged by non-experts and accepted as legitimate by society. This acceptance is suggested by the fact that the IR does not object, interrupt or contest the assertion made by RK. If this is the case, then this extract also suggests that RK is quite savvy in his interaction with the media, as he is able to provide the knowledge flow that is expected of him but also able to protect what makes him an expert (understanding of the markets). This media savvy position may echo the ‘mediator’ identity (Osborne 2004) in that it brings an idea to the public focus, in a largely, but not totally, accessible format.

Although RK appears to dominate this extract, the role of the IR should not be understated. The platform that the media provides for experts is important to allow a transfer of knowledge to take place. To achieve this the IR has to be cognisant of the guest and change interview style appropriately. This is an important skill as interviewers may have to adopt a number of different styles within short time periods. Therefore, being able to switch from a facilitating role to an accountability role is very important.

Boyce (2006) discussed this intermediary role that media offers to assist in the flow of knowledge in society. To fulfil this role, the performance of journalists and broadcasters is vital, and in 'live discourse', as is presented in this extract, the interaction is paramount to facilitating knowledge flow. The IR provided the platform for RK to give voice to his expertise on the topic. Also, note that RK was allowed to present his opinions without interruption or contradiction, something that other prominent societal figures, such as politicians, do not enjoy (Montgomery 2008). RK then presented an identity that goes beyond the traditional identity associated with an expert, that of an advisor, to a networked identity (Osborne 2004) that utilises skills of media savviness in knowledge flow.

**Extract 2**

**IR:** And, let's talk about this third way that they've been going in. Not the bailout, the buying of the toxic loans that has been talked about but failed of course in the U.S. Not the nationalisation that has happened in the UK and in the Benelux countries, ah, with, ah, the banks there. But a guarantee. Effectively a guarantee of the banks, em, capital. It's, it's a, kind of unusual approach- approach. Will it work?

**RK:** Yes I believe it will. To the extent that the Irish, em, financial system can, em, control its own destiny, yes I believe it will. And it's again, it's reflected in the reaction in the markets this morning. Now that reaction is coming against markets that have basically tanked in the Far East, em, and in other markets that have opened earlier. So, em, we're seeing a major continued slide in other markets, but a hugely positive response in the Irish market.

**Source: Morning Ireland Interview with Ray Kinsella on 30th September 2008: 1m 17secs to 2m 13secs**

The above extract offers some interesting insights into how the markets are utilised. Again the IR is fulfilling the role associated with an expert interview, and facilitating the flow of knowledge from the expert by presenting non-confrontational discourse. There is a marked difference between how the IR constructs the question in this extract, as opposed to the previous extract. The IR tries to give some context of the discussion for the audience before allowing RK his turn. However, the IR appears quite hesitant to articulate a definite point of view of the issue of the guarantee. By phrasing

it as an 'unusual' approach, and by being quite hesitant in saying this, the IR appears to be unsure of the validity of the guarantee; appears to be unsure as to whether it will work. It could also be construed that the IR does not want to pre-suppose an answer before RK offers his expert insight into this topic.

The turn from the IR to RK is interesting in the contrast it offers from both sets of discourse. The hesitant tone of the IR has been replaced by the very definite tone of RK. This immediate definitive tone serves as a good distinguishing device between interviewer and expert; between non-expert and expert. RK has linked the approval of the market with the issue of the sovereignty of the Irish Financial System, and more implicitly, to the stability of the Irish economy. RK contrasts the reaction of the markets in Ireland with the markets 'in the Far East' that have 'basically tanked' and he uses this contrast to assert that the Irish bailout option, the Bank Guarantee, was justified and correct. This position is legitimised by the reaction of the markets, 'a hugely positive response'. RK also uses the markets to legitimise his economic forecast. It could be argued that there was an expectation on RK to offer some forecast. Given the Hayekian position (1945) previously discussed, what is interesting here is how RK legitimises his forecast. It is based on his ability to interpret the markets or as he puts it 'reflected in the reaction of the markets'. This interpretative ability appears to grant RK the capability to offer forecasts.

In this extract RK is using the markets for a number of purposes. First, it legitimises his identity as an expert. The IR appears to be indicating the potential risks associated in the context of the interview and is looking to RK to offer re-assurance or to manage that risk. The IR is clearly expecting a forecast from RK, and RK immediately meets this expectation of the IR by offering his forecast of the situation ('Yes I believe it will'). RK provides some contingent factors for this forecast - if it allows the Irish financial system to 'control its own destiny'. These contingent factors allow RK to fulfil his role of an expert and also protect it from rebuttal, questioning his support for the bank guarantee or that he thinks it will be successful. RK discourse also serves to offer some re-assurance in this context of uncertainty and risk. The ability to interpret

markets would not be found in general societal discourse, and could be inferred as discourse of a technical nature. Secondly, it protects his identity as an expert. By using the markets as a calculating device, but declining to explain how they work or how he interprets them, RK maintains and protects his position as an expert. The markets are such a powerful calculating device precisely because they are generally unquestioned (Caliskan and Callon 2010) by the non-expert. We can see this evident in the way RK is allowed to use the markets to verify his assertion without any probing, interjection or follow up by the interviewer. This interview style reflects the Expert Interview described by Montgomery (2008) and further legitimises RK's identity as an expert. Interestingly what RK does not contest the assertion from the IR of the suggested failed responses to the economic situation adopted by other countries, specifically the U.S. and the U.K. This may suggest an appreciation of RK of his role in transferring knowledge in the media sphere, that of a mediator (Osborne 2004), reflecting that the creation of ideas is the product of interactions (Osborne 2004). The interaction in Extract 1 is critical in that the idea of the bank guarantee working, subject to some contingent factors, was essentially co-created. That is to say, the IR provided the context of the outcome, and RK, the expert, provided the validation. In this sense, an idea has been generated and, importantly for mediation, has been moved forward. Such ideas do not necessarily need to be a 'grand narrative' but ideas that may make a difference and are communicated in the 'vehicular' rather than 'oracular' (Osborne 2004, p.441). What RK has skilfully done is transfer knowledge that has been produced, retained ownership of that production, and protected his expert identity through the inclusion of contingency factors in his forecast and by using a calculating device that is unknown to the layperson.

### **Extract 3**

IR: We're hearing from the trade unions, from the opposition parties, em, that it's just indecent to cut the wages of somebody who's on €17,000 a year.

RK: Well good morning Aine. I think the background to this is simple and it's extremely painful. Eh, the economy is now at a point where the burden of levies and taxes is beginning to cannibalise its ability to maintain, let alone create, jobs. I think it would be difficult to frame a budget and the intervention of the IMF now looks much more likely than it did 3 or 6 months ago. Now in these circumstances I think, the circumstances created by the banks and exacerbated by government policies, I think we're faced by an absolutely appalling dilemma Aine. On the one hand, David Begg and Jack O'Connor on the, eh, trade unions are absolutely right. That there is a threshold of decency. Em, it shouldn't be like this. At the same time, the reality is that simply to hold onto a job, to have the dignity of a job and a roof over your head, people are working fewer hours. If you speak to the ladies in the local supermarkets, they're working fewer hours. People are working fewer days a week. And people, as the Central Bank points out in its very recent report, people are taking pay cuts. So the debate on the minimum wage is really an extension on what's happening deep in the long grass as it were. And the question I think is, do we have the right to stop people who are willing to work for less than the minimum wage? Now it's an appallingly, eh, painful question and I really do not pretend to have the answer. But I do think this. I, I do think Aine that congress has to address the issue of whether or not the removal of the minimum wage would help safeguard jobs and factors that have been hardest hit by unemployment, by cuts in public services

**Source: Morning Ireland Interview with Ray Kinsella on 23rd July 2009: 51secs to 3m**

Extract 3 offers a more implicit use of the market as a calculating device. RK poses an initial question which considers whether a society has the right to stop people working for less than the minimum wage. This question implicitly considers whether a government has the right to interfere in the market to set a minimum wage and also questions the idea of a government as a calculating device. What is interesting in this extract is how RK constructs this argument. RK does not overtly advocate a supporting position for the removal of the minimum wage, but rather links this issue to 'circumstances' that were caused by the banks and government policy. This allows RK to

frame the topic of removing the minimum wage as ‘an absolutely appalling dilemma’, and to go on and position his advocacy for removing the minimum wage as the least worst option available. RK also skilfully deals with the conflicting argument put forward by trade union representatives and raised by the IR by first agreeing with them about a ‘threshold of decency’, but then dismisses it by questioning whether we have the right to determine what a threshold of decency is; whether we should allow people not to work for less than the minimum wage. RK goes on to suggest that ‘the removal of the minimum wage would help safeguard jobs’, and the possession of a job is something that he equated to dignity previously. Therefore, this implicitly suggests that interference in the normal workings of the market, which would naturally decide the wage level, would result in the removing of a person’s dignity. This appears to suggest that free markets are the best method to safeguard jobs and that the markets are the most appropriate mechanism in determining the wage rate.

Here it can be seen that RK is using the markets in a neoliberal economic discourse. An increased role of government in the economy had become a hallmark in the aftermath of the economic crisis. This subtle use of the markets is a clever way to legitimise an economic philosophy that was derided as contributing to the economic difficulties that Ireland had found itself in. The contrast between the production of knowledge in this extract and in that illustrated in Extract 1 is that this extract demonstrates RK confirming, dismissing, and then validating a contrasting point to that raised by the IR during their turn, rather than confirming and then validating the point, with some contingency factors, as was evidenced in Extract 1. This demonstrates a skilled flexibility in using discursive techniques by RK but also the importance of the interaction between IR and RK in the final point produced in the interview.

Furthermore, RK cleverly distances himself from the neoliberal viewpoint that he is professing by precipitating the assertion that an elimination of the minimum wage would decrease unemployment by acknowledging it is an appalling question that he is pondering. This acknowledgement may serve to indicate that RK is aware of that the neo-liberal viewpoint he is suggesting may be unpopular with the wider society. Fur-

thermore, it allows RK to present the option of the removal of the minimum wage as reasonable as it would reduce unemployment and allow a fair wage to be determined by market forces. RK is also utilising a skilful discursive device that allows him to validate an argument with minimal conflict or dissent. RK is initially confirmatory in his discourse, agreeing with a previous sentiment, before going on to validate or contradict that initial confirmation by through either providing some contingency factors and linking the argument with extraneous variables. This is a very clever discursive tool as it allows him to make a point without much dissent and thus to protect his expert identity. Furthermore, this skill indicates that RK is a skilful mediator who is adept at packaging knowledge in such a way so that it transfers to the intended audience, Irish society in this instance, in a manner and context that he intends.

#### **Extract 4**

IR: But nobody anticipated this. Nobody, eh, you know (.), arguably it's a very difficult thing to manage, maybe saying nobody can manage it is too strong. But nobody, least of all I would suggest yourself, has actually anticipated— anticipated the crisis that we're dealing with at the moment.

RK: Well many of my colleagues were writing about this for some time. A year, a year and a half ago I wrote about it in the Irish Times. I spoke about it in the European Parliament. Eh, I said this crisis is different. This crisis is much different, is much deeper, it's seismic in nature. So I think people, em, have, em, have said yes this is coming.

**Source: Morning Ireland Interview with Ray Kinsella on 23rd April 2009: 1m 19secs to 1m 59secs**

The role of the IR is very interesting in the above extract. Again, the hesitant tone is evident as the IR seems reluctant to offer a definite position about the crisis, initially stating that 'nobody anticipated this' to quickly retracting that statement. Then the IR goes on to question the role of RK in not anticipating the crisis. This is a marked contrast from the non-confrontational tone that is generally adopted by IR's during expert interviews. The IR does hesitate when posing the point to RK, which suggests a potential reluctance in making the point, but questioning the expert like this does present

an interesting dilemma for RK in that it is a style of questioning he may not be use to In questioning whether RK had ‘anticipated the crisis’, it could be construed that the IR is putting RK’s identity as an expert in question, as an expert is often called upon to forecast a potential outcome or to offer advise as to what may happen in the future.

RK deals with this immediately in his turn, again offering very direct and assertive discourse. RK refutes the claim made by the IR that nobody forecasted the crisis by claiming that many of his colleagues had been discussing it, and then also confirms that he had also been discussing it. However, the justification for this is different. Rather than use the markets as a calculating device, as RK has done in the previous extracts, he instead uses well established institutions as legitimation devices. We make the distinction here RK appears to be more defensive in this Extract and is more strained in legitimising his identity. This is evident in his more direct and insistent justification of his role and utilising multiple institutions to refute the challenge made to his expert role. In defending his own identity as an expert, RK uses the Irish Times, a prominent national newspaper in Ireland that is often perceived as the record of the day, and the European Parliament, an established political institution where one may imagine reputable discussion on societally important issues would take place, but the operations of which is probably relatively unknown to wider society. What is interesting to consider is why RK has used these institutions instead of the markets to support his identity in this instance. It would appear that the main difference between this extract and the previous extracts is that the identity of RK has been called into question and that to refute this, RK has utilised devices that have a level of public engagement to justify his position. However, these institutions would not have the unknown quantity of the markets, which were utilised previously, and consequently it seems that RK is more strained in justifying his role in this extract as compared to the previous extracts. It also seems to suggest that RK recognises the ‘problem of legitimacy’ (Collins and Evans 2007) and recognises these institutions as supporting his claim for legitimacy by demonstrating that he has sought public engagement, and potentially acceptance, of his opinions.

## Conclusions

What is evident from the analysis of this radio discourse is that the markets are of paramount importance to legitimising of the identity of an economist's identity. RK cleverly utilised the markets to impart a controversial economic ideal, that of a reduction or elimination of the minimum wage, and simultaneously to distance himself from any potential negative societal reaction to this ideal. This distancing is done through the use of markets as a calculating device. RK can always claim that this is not his privately held opinion, but the inevitable outcome of expert understanding of the workings of the market. RK has skilfully used the markets as a tool to validate expertise. Its unknown nature makes the markets inherently accessible only to a select few, and its use in discourse serves to ensure that their expertise is legitimised and unchallenged (Montgomery 2008).

The recent economic crisis has elevated the prominence of economics experts. This research has tried to demonstrate the discursive skills utilised by economists in constructing themselves. If experts are going to play an increasingly prominent role in the circulation of knowledge in society, then it is important for society to be cognisant of tools they utilise to legitimise themselves and the knowledge that they produce. An economist's skilful utilisation of discourse demonstrated in this paper allows him to transfer knowledge but also protecting his position as an expert. The power of the expert appears to be not in the knowledge that they produce but how they produce it.

Experts, as knowledge producers, play a vital role in the knowledge flows in society. It is important to understand the manner in which they perform this vital role to fully understand how increasing knowledge throughout broader society is to be achieved. In fulfilling this enlightened goal, experts are left in a quandary, as the transfer of their knowledge could lead to a diminishing of their societal standing and of what makes them distinct within society. Therefore, it is understandable that they would try to protect their position as much as they can. In the analysis presented above, this has been

achieved through the skilful use of a calculating device, and of demonstrating a media savvy trait in their identity.

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