

Literature Review for Citizen's Voice

Humanetrix

Humanetrix is a Non Profit organization that focuses on bringing people of different strata of society together as one to bring a positive change in the society. Currently, Humanetrix is focusing on Monroe County, IN. They already have a product Citizen's Toolkit which has been received well. Citizen's toolkit provides voting information to the citizens of Monroe County. It has been used by public libraries to answer election polls related questions of residents of voters of this area. However, similar tool have been developed which threaten to overtake Citizen's Toolkit popularity. These tools have been developed by the Government and cater to the whole of USA eg. Project Vote Smart [34], Indiana Voters [40]

Towards New Roads

Community Building and Social Capital

Social capital is defined as an accumulation of the knowledge and identity resources drawn on by communities-of-common-purpose. Many studies have indicated the relevance of social capital to the society [3]. In his famous book, Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam has stressed the need of building social capital in a community and its positive effects on a society. Social capital allows the local citizens to participate and contribute to their immediate environment.

Social capital is aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition [4]. Social capital can be used to encourage more community participation, adult education, environmental causes etc. Though, some books have asserted that building social capital can also lead to economic growth of the community, many papers have questioned the claims of linking economic benefit with the social capital. [5] Social capital becomes truly beneficial when it exists as a two way process for eg. when not only people draw out of it but contribute to it as well [6]. The process of building and using social capital is a continuous, non-discreet simultaneously occurring process [4]. Community building and social capital are tightly integrated. An increase in one does indicate the other one has improved too [9].

As downsizing of the federal government's role in social program moves forward, grassroots and local movements for community based social change grounded in empowerment approaches escalate [7]. Social workers will be

called in to respond to the continued dismantling of the federal safety net and local concerns for economic and social development that sustains and supports families and communities. We envision humanetrix to fit into a similar role where it is able to provide platform to empower people to make their voice heard and feel closer to and one with the society. Such an environment will foster strong sense of belongingness to the society and community in general.

We have come across several examples of both failed and successful community building initiatives. Unlike the common assumption, heavy investment of time is not the only deter for such initiatives to take off. Research [8] shows that an individual's sense of worth in the community and the feeling of belonging is largely detrimental to the success of such exercise. They label the reasons as

- **Politics of Interest groups**
Many people have little or no voice in the political process and perceive the process to be controlled by powerful interest groups; they feel that "public life is beyond their control, that their own values and interests are not reflected in the policies that shape the larger society."
- **Eroding sense of community**
The net result of this diminished sense of connectedness is a frayed social fabric in which ties within groups may be strong, but people from different backgrounds, organizations, sectors, and jurisdictions do not know each other and trust each other enough to work together to solve problems.

Linking to others for mutual influence and consensus building is a key to developing an organized political constituency. Finding opportunities for informal personal contact with decision makers, while more difficult adds credibility to one's point of view and increases the possibility of political influence. [18]

By eradicating such "drifting away" feeling and promoting oneness and sense of belonging, citizens of a community can be brought closer together. This requires empowering them and providing them with a voice of their own and assurance of not being alone in the community. This would also lead to greater bonding within the community. A feeling of being directly responsible for the development of their own community would be evocative not to deter the initiative of community building as the research indicates.

Citizen participation in local governance

It has been well established that community building can help the communities in various ways as a form of local body helping people [7], as a tie to build

more connections [9], improvement of local health [8], or as community policing [10] (working relationship between police and communities to reduce crime and enhance security) to increase crime fighting effectiveness. This helps us to utilize where situations where need of local governance was needed to be shifted partially in the hands of the citizens themselves. This shift has potential to ensure timely action, satisfaction in the quality of life, and more participation and involvement of citizens in the community and related activities.

Though the customer model has been criticized for modeling citizen involvement in terms of passive consumers who like or dislike services and who express their views of government primarily via complaint or satisfaction surveys [13] many researchers have proposed that citizens be viewed as owners of government who are proactive in managing the government's scope and affairs [15]. According to this citizen-owner model, "urban citizens owned their government and as owners had a duty to get involved in city affairs and instruct politicians and public administrators in 'shareholder' demands" [15].

The current resources in Monroe County do not allow citizens to be a part of government and play the role of shareholder in public administration. To quote, "However, citizens do not necessarily engage in the affairs of government and may act instead as disenfranchised owners, or even as subjects of the public bureaucracy." Citizens do not get to actively measure or monitor the activities of their government. Few are involved in government service. Many do not vote. They have minimal or no interaction with government. They feel ineffective in dealing with public bureaucracies and bureaucrats [16].

A value-centered paradigm of citizen involvement may be useful to both public administrators and citizens. A value perspective focuses also on the gains and benefits citizens receive from [11]. Humanetrix can fill this void where both government and citizens, work together for the society as one. The citizens do not feel left behind, and are given a chance to shoulder the responsibility of public administration. We propose a design that creates a new mode of citizen government interaction where both parties play equally important roles, and have a common goal.

Citizen's Voice - Comments, Compliments, and Complaints

People become disillusioned in a democracy when they discover how little influence they have [17]. Since the community is their immediate environment, these citizens are much more aware of the context of the problem of community, its needs, strengths etc.

Community building begins when citizens with common interests or complaints come together. Community of like minded individuals more easily organized than do locality based communities. Shared activities and common experiences of the group then become a basis for generating emotional closeness that further cements group identification.

We propose a platform for citizens to participate and play a first hand role in building their own community. As already mentioned that the citizen is at the pulse of what happens to their community and are directly affected. This makes the citizen's voice and concerns about her own society both valuable and indispensable. Empowering citizens' voice will lead to both social and political efficacy.

Our final design idea is to fill in the need to provide citizens of Monroe County where a one stop place where they can communicate openly with the government.

Complaint management not only results in customer satisfaction but also leads to operational improvement and improved financial performance [11,12].

Reason for why an organization like Humanetrix should take up this task of "empowering" citizens rather than the Government itself. If Government takes up this task, then in a way it will act to undermine the act of empowerment. Community building and coalition formation are more realistic approach to collective power than collective empowerment [39].

Citizen's voice can lead to an administrative TQM. TQM has become increasingly important in government in recent years. It is a set of principles, tools, and processes for managing and improving the quality of government services [29]. The many applications of TQM in local government include efforts in police departments, fire services, waste management, personnel management, transportation, public works, parks, and utilities [30, 31]. Local government may find TQM attractive because it helps department better understand the needs of their communities. TQM also allows administrators to contain costs and improve services [32].

Research on related initiatives

Access, information and redress are three key consumer principles at stake when examining consumer complaints in local council services. Access is concerned with consumers being able to obtain services required to make a complaint. Relevant, accurate and easily understood information is therefore important for consumers to make their complaints effectively, and redress mechanisms will enable consumers to have service failures put right [19].

Citizen's voice provides a much needed common platform to the citizens which make the access to local government easier. By providing such a tool available to the citizens, Humanetrix takes away a lot of layers from the process of contacting the government. It not only provides interface to write a mail/petition to the government but also a directory listing of government contacts if someone wants to make a personal call on some sensitive issue.

Listening to complainants is extremely important. Evidence suggests that too often public services do not want to listen to complaints and consumers are passed from one member of staff to another. Yet, the information received from complaints could be gathered as feedback from users and incorporated at the heart of the management policy [20].

A research [21] reveals a wide discrepancy between consumer experiences of making complaints about goods (74 percent success) and services (34 percent success) and a wide variation within these broad categories. Less than half of 1 percent resolves their complaint through the courts or equivalent mechanisms. Regardless of their reasons for not taking their case further, this research clearly suggests there are a great number of consumers dissatisfied with the products or services they purchase and their subsequent treatment [21].

Reasons why a significant number of consumers do not take up their complaints or do not follow them through include the fact that some consumers "can't be bothered" or "don't think it would do any good". Underlying this was thought to be a lack of awareness among consumers of their rights or the redress mechanisms available, confirming their view that more should be done to raise consumer awareness of these mechanisms and to make the mechanisms both more user-friendly and more effective.

Many offices of ombudsman suggest an agency based complaint system [23, 24, 25, 26, 27]. They reason that ombudsman office upholds for better public administration, and suffers from insufficient resources to review each concern. Most importantly an agency based complaint system brings in objectivity, and neutrality.

Complaints in local government arise from dissatisfaction with services. This is not surprising given the complexity of council services and the diverse mix of departments. Complaints may be made formally with assistance from elected members, or informally [22].

Research also indicates that the response of government may depend on the content of contact. The inclination or ability of government to respond to a citizen's attempt to influence the delivery of policy benefits depends on what citizen wishes. The nature of individual contactor can influence the governmental response. The number of citizen contacts generated, corrected for population, is curvilinearly related to social well being of neighborhoods,

such that propensity to contact is low in neighborhoods of low social well being, increases with well being until it reaches a maximum in middle levels of well being, then declines with increasingly high levels of social well being [38]. Clearly, Humanetrix enjoys a good reputation; also the NGO status helps it to establish its name. Humanetrix is in a strong position to use the social capital it has generated to start facilitating this process in Monroe County.

Internet and its effects on Community wide initiatives

Despite the general heresy, internet helps in building a community. Communication started online enhances offline communication. And in the cases where people can't meet, internet facilitates the communication. Internet as a medium has power to bring a community closer, there are definite possibilities where internet and its convenience, easy accessibility can be utilized to promote aggregation of knowledge resources of the community and identity resources of individuals and the interaction between two. The interaction can be used to enhance the commitment to the society and sense of civic attachment. This would lead to a true community building.

The characteristics of an online community are determined by the social interactions of the members, and the policies that guide them, a concept known as sociability. Software design also contributes to the character of an online community [1]. Attention to design, technology and policies of the community is therefore an important component in community development and evolution.

Amy Jo Kim, in her book "Community Building on the web" [2], summarizes an architectural, systems oriented approach to community building, in the form of following nine design strategies:

- Define and articulate the PURPOSE: Understanding the need to understand "why you're building it and who you're building it for".
- Build Flexible, Extensible gathering PLACES: Once a purpose is defined, there is a need to build flexible, small scale infrastructure of gathering places, which constituent members will work together to evolve.
- Create Meaningful and evolving member PROFILES: Developing robust, evolving and up-to-date member profile, helps the constituents of community know each other.
- Design for a range of roles: Addressing the needs to newcomers without alienating the regulars through a balancing act of designing for a range of roles.
- Develop a strong LEADERSHIP program: Community leaders provide a positive effect in the growth of community by greeting visitors,

encouraging newbies, teaching classes, answering questions and dealing with trouble makers.

- Encouraging proper ETIQUETTE: Develop some ground rules for participation, and set up systems that allow enforcing and evolving community standards.
- Promote CYCLIC events: Establishing regular online events develops a loyal following and fosters deeper relationships among members.
- Integrate the rituals of community life: Use rituals to acknowledge members and celebrate important transitions.
- Facilitate member run SUBGROUPS: To grow a large-scale community, provide technologies to help your members create and run sub-groups.

She also proposes three basic community design principles as:

Design for growth and change: Adding breadth, depth and complexity in response to the changing needs of the members, and the changing conditions of the environment.

Create and maintain feedback loops: Feedback loops between members and management, keeps the management in constant touch with what members are saying and doing, and give the information needs to evolve and update features and platform.

Empower members over time: As community grows and matures, members can and should play a progressively larger role in building and maintaining the community culture.

For the solution we are proposing, we are trying to utilize internet (in the earlier stages) to build upon and draw from the social capital. However, in the later stages of the project, we would be looking at sources other than internet which will use social capital for the community.

The few places Team Beta came across where a complaint could be lodged did not feel warm, comforting, and inviting [28]. Design is one of the strengths of Humanetrix, which can be employed to make an inviting, comforting and easy to use system. According to our interview with few people around the city, we realized that people look for simplicity, and the feeling of being heard from such initiatives.

As Humanetrix is currently championing use of internet and new opens source of technology, it is in a very strong position to utilize it for the greater good it has specified in its mission statement.

Probability of communicating with government increases with political connectedness. Probability of communicating with government, increases with localness of office. The internet appears to lower barriers of time and cost and so could lead to contacting behavior by those with commensurately lower levels political interest and concern [33].

Some envision that internet technology will enhance local democracy by allowing for more direct citizen input in policy making, expanding the scope of policy deliberation, and reducing intermediate barriers to information dissemination [35, 36, 37].

After a through SWOT Analysis, our team feels that Humanetrix is ready to and capable of providing such a platform to people of Monroe County.

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