

online collaborative networks in multi-stakeholder governance. is consensus a viable concept?

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William (Will) Tibben
School of Computing and Information Technology
University of Wollongong
Australia

Introduction

- Online collaborative technologies enables participation in decision making by people all around the world
- Factored on a general sense of optimism about consensus – our research questions this optimism
- Are there better models by which online decision making and knowledge development can proceed?

Background- William Tibben

- I became involved in the South Pacific region in my former career in broadcasting
- I was technical adviser to the Samoa Broadcasting Service from 1990-1994
- I was challenged in many ways – mainly about my assumptions about how technology works and the influence that local context (culture, socio-economic conditions) can have on the operation of technology

Background- William Tibben

- University studies in the late 1990s created new opportunities to learn about information technology and the Internet
- I was motivated to create ways that enabled technicians and engineers in isolated places to participate in social networks with other technicians/engineers as a strategy for problem solving (mainly using fax)

Background

- Its perhaps not surprising that I should gravitate to multi-stakeholder governance (MSG)
- One aim of MSG is to distribute benefits of the Internet to all parts of the world

Research context for MSG

- The assumption that online networks will empower marginalized and less involved groups to participate in policy development may be naïve.
- Why?
 - Personal experience of membership of PICISOC
 - An academic question about how practical the concept of consensus is.

Research context for MSG

- The research question - *If* consensus is not a viable justification for MSG, is there an alternative justification that can still achieve the goals of empowerment for marginalized and less involved groups?

Arrow and the Limits of Organization

- Arrow has reservations about the adequacy of consensus as a decision making model
- He reasons that consensus is only possible if the following two conditions are met:
 1. full information is available to all people; and
 2. people share the same values about what constitutes the best outcome.
- Even though his work largely refers to pre-Internet era it is still persuasive.

Authority: why is it important?

- In some circumstances, true consensus is difficult, time-consuming, if not, impossible
- In the bricks and mortar world, organizations bring relief to this situation by bringing together people with differing areas of expertise
- Such people are given authority to make assessments of available information on behalf of others

Authority and Expertise

- The link between authority and expertise is crucial to ensuring that the best information is selected for decision making and ongoing knowledge development.
- This has implications for online collaborative networks.

Implications for online collaborative networks

- Analysis of this link in studying online collaborative processes yields interesting questions about MSG processes.
- Can it always be assumed that all members have equal expertise to make the best decisions?
- Does expertise naturally confer greater authority on some?
- What if expertise confers authority that is at odds with the formal authority of forum moderators or the body that hosts the forum?

Proposed questions

- How would you assess your expertise to contribute to decisions in this committee?
- Are there opportunities to develop expertise to influence decision making?
- Do you feel satisfied that your participation in the online group is worthwhile in terms of outcomes achieved by the committee?
- Do you feel satisfied that your participation in the online group is worthwhile for the organisation you represent?

Next steps

- Research instruments shared initially with APRALO leadership group for feedback
- Gain ethics clearances from my university.
- Once this has been achieved deploy research instruments (survey monkey with possible opportunity for interviews)

Co-researcher

- Karthik Nagarajan
- Recently completed PhD which investigated:
 - Customer Service And Complaints Handling Practices Of The Internet Industry In Australia
- Currently lecturing with Federation University (Sydney campus)

- Questions:

Thank you