

Crowdsourcing Strategic Documents

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Organisation: Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development

Country: Austria

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Economic affairs

Type: Digital, Methods, Public Service

Launched in: 2009

Overall development time:

6 months

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The Austrian Council for Research and Technology Development commissioned the design and development of a platform to enable strategy documents to be discussed in an open source way by inviting comments from the public, thus increasing the range of knowledge and perspectives to improve recommendations for policy makers.

The online platform splits the text of a document into paragraphs on which citizens can vote and comment. Voting makes it possible to quickly identify the controversial issues in the document, thus focussing the discussion on a small number of issues. Through commenting, the community suggests new options and alternatives to the existing paragraph.

The discussion on the platform was accompanied by active process management and feedback on the resulting changes in the document.

Why the innovation was developed

At the end of 2008, the Council finished a first working draft of its "Strategy 2020". Insufficient opportunities to discuss this draft strategy led to plans to set up a web-based discussion to enable virtual interaction with the stakeholders and the science, technology and industry community. It was decided to open up the discussion to the public to broaden the knowledge pool from which new insights and ideas could be generated.

Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve effectiveness, Increase citizen engagement

- Open up the discussion on a science, technology and industry strategy to a broader public.
 - Increase the efficiency of information gathering.
 - Access new sources of knowledge.
 - Increase momentum for implementation.
 - Establish a participatory mode and make the discussion process transparent.
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Main beneficiaries

Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- Participating public institutions that get feedback from the crowdsourcing on their suggested strategies.
- Users who can give their comments on new government strategy papers and contribute to shaping them.

Results

Efficiency

- Accessing knowledge more efficiently through the participation of the public i.e. 400 citizens registered in the first crowdsourcing discussion, providing 750 comments and 8000 votes.
 - The system radically reduces the time needed to deal with comments as they are directly allocated to the paragraph concerned.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

Inclusion of all citizens that are interested in the discussion of public strategies.

User satisfaction

The feedback provided by users, i.e. participants in the discussion, was very positive in general. Feedback focused on the fact that the Council had opened up the debate on its strategy and the innovative processes used to discuss the strategy.

Other improvements

Employee satisfaction: people at the Council were drawn into the discussion with participants on the platform and found the quality of comments, the mode of interaction and the amount of feedback exceptional.

Evaluation

No formal evaluation of the process was carried out but the innovation received a best practice certificate from the European Public Sector Award (EPSA).

Development

Design

- December 2008: brief analysis of the situation concerning the limited feedback on the draft science, technology and industry strategy from the Austrian Council.
 - Discussion on the availability of experts outside ministries who could contribute to the development of the draft strategy.
 - Proposal by the company 'cbased' to investigate options for obtaining wider feedback.
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Testing

- January 2009: feasibility study and first mock-ups of the platform by cbased.
- February - April 2009: software development and testing by cbased in close collaboration with the Austrian Council.

Testing time: 4 months

Implementation

Tools used:

May - June 2009: Opening of the platform to the public and process management by the Austrian Council and cbased.

Resources used:

- Total costs: EUR 35 000.
- Outsourced development of the platform to cbased, but joint management of the process.
- No costs in terms of additional space, training or new staff. Existing resources used and productivity increased substantially.
- Internal resources (staff, office space etc.) to develop, implement and manage the first crowdsourcing discussion of the strategy document were around one and a half to two months of resources which were already committed to the science, technology and industry strategy process but would have been used in other tasks without this innovation.

Implementation time: 2 months

Diffusion

- Subsequent crowdsourcing discussions using the same platform for the "energy research" strategy from the Austrian Council and Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology, and for the "research infrastructure" strategy from the Austrian Council.
 - Further development of the platform and diffusion of the approach by cbased.
 - The crowdsourcing platform was later also used for feedback on the "energy research" strategy, which was organised by the Austrian Council and the Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology.
 - It has also been used by a number of organisations at regional levels where cbased acted as service provider without involvement of the Austrian Council.
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Partnerships

Company cbased GmbH

Private sector

The crowdsourcing platform that splits the text into paragraphs on which participants can vote and comment as well as the innovative solution that represents a participatory decision making system using a document as a starting point were developed by the company cbased. Cbased has started to offer similar services as well as an algorithm to indicate consensus by analysing voting behaviour on the platform on a commercial basis.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The process was highly satisfactory because the innovation performed as expected (in terms of functions and usability) and created much more attention, participation and feedback on the science, technology and industry strategy than was expected. At the same time there were no off topic comments.
- Many institutions are afraid of opening up decision making processes. Our experience strongly recommends a more open and participatory approach if the institution managing the process is capable of two-way communication and interaction. It is not only important to ask for input but also give the participants feedback by telling them how this information was used, what changes were made, why certain suggestions were not taken up, etc. Without two-way interaction, processes cannot be labelled participatory.
- Some decision makers assume that giving away power by opening decision making processes or organising them in a participatory way might undermine their position. This is correct if interactions are not two-way and if the process is not properly managed. If participatory decision making processes are properly implemented and managed, the power of the community increases the standing of decision makers in the institution that is responsible for the process.

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