Does Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Enhance Deliberative Democracy in Hierarchical Organizations? Innovative Use of ICT for Increasing Public Value and Communicative Rationality in Local Governance

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Visions and ideals bring out the best in people  
-Emery & Purser (1996)

Introduction

Does Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enhance deliberative democracy in hierarchical organizations? In other words, does ICT enhance individual engagement in collective actions? For making an appropriate and sound answer to this question, we should explore a question: can deliberative democracy work in hierarchical organization? However, this question can be answered differently based on the researcher’s perspective. According to Elliott Jaques (1990), “Thirty-five years of [my] research have convinced me that managerial hierarchy is the most efficient.” Nevertheless, he affirmed that why there is the effort to search for alternatives to the hierarchy. The first reason is the trend of increasing complexity and second reason is that organizational tasks separate into discrete categories of increasing complexity (Frederickson, Smith, Larimer, & Licari, 2012).

In the field of public administration is undergoing a rapid transformation from the centralized government that has lost of rules to the democratic governance process in order to cope with vexing public and societal problems and global challenges. The hierarchical system has been dominated by concepts of efficiency, productivity, control, formal authority, and the coordination of functional activities. The management of public organizations is no longer simply instrumental in carrying out public policy like the Hamiltonian; public administration now acts as the guiding force for not only implementing but also designing economic, technological, political, and social change like the Madisonian (Jun, 1986; Kettltl, 1983). This article presents findings from a deliberative experiment, that is, an innovative case in utilizing ICT for answering the questions on the possibility of deliberative democracy in a local government in South Korea.

A local government district of Seoul, Geumcheon-gu, has held a series of forum workshops in order to find tasks for reforming their local governance process and to have opportunities to share their own innovative ideas among its public employees. The workshops took a place between February 28 and April 6 in 2011 at the Seoul Training Institute for public servants that is located in Seocheon, Chungcheongnam-do. There were five two-days seminars (Each workshop has 50 participants) during those time periods. Total 217 public servants were participated in those workshops. Those members well represented all age, gender, rank and departments of Geumcheon-gu. In this study, answers for aforementioned question are explored and preliminary findings and lessons on the local deliberative democracy experiment with ICT are discussed.

Local Governance and Deliberative Democracy

To explain the concept of local governance, this question should be asked: “What is the difference between government and governance?” Historically, most of the old ideas about