Article

'Removing Barriers' and 'Creating Distance': Exploring the Logics of Efficiency and Trust in Civic Technology

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Abstract

Oriented around efficiency, civic technology primarily aims to *remove barriers* by automating and streamlining processes of government. While *removing barriers* is vital in many matters of governance, should it always be the aim of civic technology? In our ongoing ethnographic research to understand the work of community engagement performed by public officials in local government, we have observed how this orientation around efficiency in civic technology can inadvertently *create distance* in the relationships between citizens and governments. In this article, we discuss how an orientation around trust could open a space for civic technology that primarily aims to *close distance* in the relationships between citizens and public officials. We do so by first providing an account of how trust functions in the work of public officials performing community engagement, calling attention to where and when efficiency is at odds with the importance of relationship building between public officials and citizens. We build on ethnographic findings and a series of co-design activities with public officials to develop three strategies that operate under the logic of trust: historicizing engagement, focusing on experience, and mediating expectations. In all, by focusing on trust and the relational work of *closing distance*, civic technology can move towards addressing the growing crisis in confidence being faced in democracies.

1. Introduction

This article draws from our experience leading one of the Citi Foundation's Living Cities City Accelerator cohorts in the city of Atlanta, Georgia. The City Accelerator program provided financial support and supervision to assist city governments in pursing projects to improve the quality of life for residents with a focus on community engagement the year Atlanta participated (Living Cities 2015). The goal of the Atlanta project which ran from 2016 to 2018 was to examine and re-imagine how the work of community engagement occurs within the city, and to do so the Mayor's Office, partnered with us, Georgia Institute of Technology's Participatory Publics Lab, along with the Atlanta Housing Authority, and a local non-profit the Westside Future Fund (Asad, Le Dantec, Nielsen, & Diedrick, 2017). Our role was to lead research efforts which involved collecting interviews from community members and public officials, as well running a series of co-design activities in order to develop insight for improving the work of community engagement throughout the city (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a, 2018b).

It is within this work we observed two logics: one of *efficiency* and one of *trust*—each of which provide a distinct orientation for civic technology. To understand these logics, consider the following perspectives of

ATL 311, a website and mobile platform for fielding service requests, uncovered during our interviews with public officials from the Department of Public Works and a City Council member:

> We get feedback from the system [ATL 311], which is the heaviest utilized tool for customers to relay their needs to us. And in terms of us turning those requests into deliverable services, we track our efficiency and our responses and we do it on a daily, weekly, and monthly and annual basis, so that we can make sure our resources are aligned in the right places to meet our established minimum levels of service. (Public Works)

> When people touch their government that way [using ATL 311], I think that's really super cool. The one challenge for us is…it deprives us of information about what people are caring about in the district…one of the things that is true about the council offices before the arrival of the app is that we were very basic constituent service…my water bill is wrong. Help me correct my water bill. There's a pothole. I need the police. (City Council)

In this case, using technology to improve the transactions of service delivery in one department comes into conflict with the relational work in another. Driven by the logic of efficiency, the value of ATL 311 for Public Works is in how the system *removes barriers* to service transactions. Using technology to remove barriers is the dominant mode of civic technology pursued across the major public, non-profit, and business leaders (Gordon & Walter, 2016). On the other hand, the perspective from city council points to the logic of trust reflected by the concerns of how the system *created distance* in his relationships with constituents by removing points of contact. This raises a series of questions: do opportunities for contact—even through the mundane work of being able to solve a problem with a water bill or fix a pot hole—provide the building blocks for civic relationships? Do the inefficiencies of personal interactions provide the relational and affective support necessary for broader participation in governance? Does the distance created in this instance eventually lead to policy that is also distant?

The above example typifies what we call the trap of *removing barriers* and *creating distance*: the unintended result of unbridled pursuits of efficiencies by civic technology. According to Gordon and Walter (2016, p. 244), the danger of this trap occurs "when the application of technology to civic life is celebrated purely for its expediency, transactionality, and instrumentality, then *other uses* and users are potentially sidelined" (emphasis added). In this article, the 'other use' we explore is the relational work of *closing distances*. Driven by the logic of trust, closing distance primarily aims to develop relationships between public officials and citizens. We detail this logic drawing from ethnographic findings and a series of co-design activities conducted with public officials during the Living Cities-supported project in Atlanta. Based on our findings, we argue that in order to address the growing crisis in confidence, civic technology needs to operate from the logic of trust. Subsequently, we provide three strategies to achieve this: historicizing engagement, focusing on experience, and mediating expectations.

2. Background

2.1. Crisis in Confidence

The Living Cities project focused specifically on Atlanta's westside communities—five historically African American neighborhoods bordering west of downtown. Through the 1930s to 1960s the westside of Atlanta was a vibrant community known throughout the country as the hub of the powerful Civil Rights Movement (Keating, 2010). However, the community began to decline during the 1970s from a combination of suburbanization and white flight. Those changes were followed by disinvestment in infrastructure and social services in the 1980s, and then the drug epidemic of the 1990s (Etienne, 2010; Kruse, 2013). Over the last three decades, two consecutive sport stadia were built for the city's professional American Football team: the Georgia Dome was completed in 1992, replacing the Fulton County Stadium on the same site; and the Mercedes-Benz stadium was completed in 2017 adjacent to the Georgia Dome (which was subsequently demolished). The construction of the Georgia Dome ignited a sense of excitement and promise of new opportunity in the community in the early 1990s; an excitement which was short lived. According to Bruce Deel, a pastor and the CEO of City of Refuge, a homelessness nonprofit active in the area: "We just didn't really see the positive impact…we saw a new building go up and a lot of people get pushed to the edge of our neighborhood" (Garlock, 2014). This history was fresh in mind while the Mercedes-Benz stadium was being constructed according to Lloyd Hawk, CEO of a Historic church in the community (which was eventually demolished and relocated as a result of the Mercedes-Benz stadium): "Twenty-one years ago when they built the first stadium, there was money committed to the neighborhood…But if you go through the neighborhood now, you'd have no idea" (Garlock, 2014). Given this history, the development of the Mercedes-Benz stadium set off a contentious battle between the city and the community to secure a robust community benefits agreement guaranteeing various improvements to the area (Leslie, 2014). However, no such agreement was reached and the entire process lacked meaningful community engagement, further fraying the fabric of civic relationships between the city and the westside (Diedrick & Le Dantec, 2017).

The events in the westside communities of Atlanta present a local instance of what can lead to a "crisis in confidence" which is characterized by a deeply rooted

antipathy toward both public officials and opportunities for participation in governance (Levine, 2015).

Unpacking the larger crisis being faced by democracy around the world is beyond the scope of this article; however, at a high-level its sources are many and have built over time: limitations of the state in the context of globalization (Held & McGrew, 1993), enduring income-equality (Uslaner, 2002), and increased skepticism toward expertise are just a few sources (Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2016). Taken together, these issues produce increased uncertainty and risk in society (Beck, 1992). Indeed, the stadium developments exemplify such uncertainty for the communities involved given the scale of the potential social, economic, and cultural impacts to the adjacent neighborhoods. In the face of this uncertainty, why should westside residents expect the city would act in their interests with regards to this matter? Consequently, when "citizens cannot understand nor effect their government" then "limiting it and ignoring it becomes a rational response"(Levine, 2015). As a result, *distance* is created in the relationships between the public and their representatives. In this way, distance can be viewed as the precursor and the progenitor of the crisis.

2.2. Distance

While many currently view distance and its corollary distrust as a crisis of modern democracy, both distance and distrust were foundational guiding design values of liberal democracy. Fueled by the distrust of the traditional power structures of the monarch and sovereign, liberal democracy relied on mechanisms to limit the discretion of those in power (Held, 2006). At the same time, liberal democracy was also very much distrustful of direct citizen control of government (Madison, 1788). Thus, the trade-off between distrust of those in power as well as distrust of direct citizen participation produced a representative system in which citizens legitimize a government of divided powers but remain outside of—and thus *distant* from—that government (Urbinati, 2006). It is also worth mentioning how this distance is experienced differentially across racial and social class lines as "privileges of wealth, status, and family background pave the road to political power, while disadvantages of class, gender, and race erect hurdles" (Young, 1999). African Americans in particular have experienced the most violent and systematic distancing from their government; beginning with the fundamental social distance imposed by the three-fifths comprise (Ohline, 1971), to the spatial distance created by segregation of Jim Crow's "separate but equal" laws (Woodward, 2002), to the distance in economic power perpetuated by discriminatory loan practices, inadequate access to education, and work-place discrimination (Oliver & Shapiro, 2013). That being said, the crisis in confidence cuts across race and class lines (The Aspen Institute, 2019; Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2016) and is forcing governments to re-evaluate the foundational roles of distrust and distance in representative democracy.

While a certain level of realistic political distrust has always been good, almost essential for democracy (Hardin, 1999), the source of distrust in the crisis stems from "alienation that leads to the inability to expect competence or fiduciary responsibility, or negativism, or irrationality [which] is not healthy for a democracy as leaders need at least some grant of trust to govern effectively" (Barber, 1983). Therefore, while distrust is functionally equivalent to trust as a social control mechanism for democracy, the crisis is causing it to be overdrawn. This is problematic as the operating cost of distrust is far more taxing socially, cognitively, and emotionally as:

> Distrust tends to absorb the strength of the person, making life more difficult, to an extent which leaves little capacity to explore and adapt to his environment in an objective and unprejudiced manner; hence allowing for him fewer opportunities. (Luhmann, 1979)

Quite the opposite of trust as a social control mechanism, which is said to improve the overall function of government by enabling greater willingness to compromise on issues, increasing the ability to enact major legislation, as well as afford stronger commitments to less fortunate people (Uslaner, 2002). From this perspective, addressing the crisis requires more than immediate effort towards resolving any one particular source of distrust. Rather, it calls for a rethinking of the very nature of the relationships between the public and their government. In particular, the *distance* representative systems necessarily place between citizens and their representatives.

In this vein, we can view the goal of the City Accelerator project as a local attempt at addressing distance in how the project pursued developing a more collaborative and equitable way for the city to do the work of community engagement ("Atlanta Community Engagement Playbook", 2018). The project reflects what many in political science consider to be an important way to address the crisis: for public officials to "go out and get democracy" through the work of community engagement (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). Understood as a mechanism for sharing power with the public (Roberts, 2015), community engagement differs from political participation—which refers to voting or volunteering for a political party—and from the civic engagement that Putnam used to describe how citizens harness social capital to collectively address issues (Putnam, 1995). Rather, community engagement is a collection of practices performed by public officials to meet and invite the public into the process of governing (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018b).

3. Exploring the Logic of Trust

During our research in the Living Cities project, we conducted 48 semi-structured interviews with public officials across 30 departments and agencies throughout Atlanta's City Government. Our interviews centered on how these publics officials describe how they perform

the work of community engagement and role of trust in that work. Each interview lasted roughly an hour and was recorded and fully transcribed. The interview transcripts were subjected to a grounded theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2014)—first completing open-coding of the data followed by focused coding to pinpoint and develop salient categories. For the purposes of our argument here, we limit our discussion to three categories within our findings that are illustrative of the logic of trust: the work public officials undertake to build civic relationships, how distance and trust factor into that work, and how we can understand distance in regard to civic technology use.

3.1. Building Civic Relationships

We begin by discussing the work undertaken by public officials to build civic relationships which exposes the logic of trust within the wider landscape of community engagement. To illustrate, the director of a city-wide project that is meant to transform many neighborhoods with access to green space, transportation options, and affordable housing reflected:

> We believe we are a new neighbor. We move into a part of the project that we haven't been before, we're now a neighbor because we're not going anywhere. We're there for the long haul. So, as a new neighbor, how can we get to know our neighbors?

As their work of building this new infrastructure takes them from neighborhood to neighborhood, they recognize they lack relationships with residents who may be uneasy about the coming changes. To address this gap, the director talked about building relationships in a proactive manner:

> We host a Saturday, anybody-come kind- of event and people come with their kids, their grandkids. They hang out with us…we tell them what we're working on and give them a chance to talk to us about what we're doing and how it affects them.

Hanging out on the weekends becomes a tool for establishing a relationship. The goal of these sessions was not to advance the plan, but to build relationships and provide a human access point into the municipal operations responsible for the city-wide project. The Director's approach emphasizes the importance of trust and direct, personal contact between municipal officials and the public to whom they are accountable.

Building relationships often requires empathizing to understand the nuance in feelings and emotions connected to an issue, rather than just recording the facts or collecting responses from a survey or opinion poll as illustrated in this remark by a public official in economic development:

> A lot of stuff that happens down here is so nuanced that I don't think I'd ever get away from wanting to talk to somebody directly and get a sense of how they felt about something, not just the facts about it.

The nuance of felt experience points to how the affective qualities of community engagement are predicated on building relationships and connects to how people articulate attachments to issues and begin to work collectively toward political outcomes (Le Dantec, 2016). As an example, a public official in city planning noted that when working with residents to get input on proposed plans:

> Most of the time these conversations are very emotional conversations, because there are real systemic issues that have plagued most of these communities for a long time. And yet, there's consensus around what needs to be changed. However, there's also the fear that when things change, will I even be able to stay here?

The emotions, fears, and concerns expressed about gentrification and displacement as a consequence of urban renewal play against a desire to see the area in question improved. Understanding local histories and knowledge is very important in these instances which requires taking the time to listen to residents to legitimize concerns.

3.2. Trust Work and Distance

We found each public official's approach to building relationships differed: from formal public meetings in the case of planners with clear lines of accountability, to informal weekend gathering in the case of public-private development partnerships trying to build good will. Looking across the themes in these approaches, we developed the notion of 'Trust Work' to describe the role of trust in building relationships (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a). We identified eight practices of Trust Work which all pursued a unifying goal: to close various manifestations of *distance*. To explicate this theme of distance, we turned to the social psychology literature which has described distance as the subjective experience that something is far or close to oneself (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Distance research tries to understand how different perceptions of distance impacts behavior and decision making across various social situations (Maglio, Trope, & Liberman, 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). We leveraged this literature and connected to trust through how uncertainty grows with distance as "something becomes increasingly distant there are more and more possible states in which that something will not materialize" (Maglio et al., 2013). Whether something will materialize (or not) gives rise to the need for trust as trust is a mechanism for dealing with the uncertainty distance introduces.

We used this conceptualization of distance as a lens in our analysis of the role of trust in the work of commu-

nity engagement (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a). We argued each dimension of distance (social, temporal, hypothetical, spatial, knowledge, power) between public officials and citizens presents uncertainty that trust needs to overcome. To illustrate, the work of community engagement in city planning often needs to overcome distance in the form of knowledge of planning procedures. Left unchecked, this distance leads to information asymmetry between planners and city residents that produces uncertainty (and risk) that in turn undermine opportunities for community engagement. In order to enable meaningful community engagement, city planners need to close this distance in knowledge by working to make planning procedures accessible for city residents.

3.3. Distance and Civic Technology

With the logic of trust now exposed, we can use it as a lens to understand how different civic technologies mediate relationships between public officials and citizens. For the purposes of this article, we will focus on civic technology designed with government as the intended customer or user which includes bespoke systems like ATL 311, more specialized applications like Cycle Atlanta (Le Dantec, Asad, Misra, & Watkins, 2015), and also general purpose social media platforms appropriated by government (Kavanaugh et al., 2012).

There were many ways civic technology factored into the work of community engagement we examined during the Living Cities-supported project in Atlanta. Whether as a tool to manage communication or enable service interactions, different purpose-built and commercial software platforms were critical to getting the work done. Often, the desire for technology was based in a need to make work more efficient. However, efficiency can be at odds with the logic of trust which requires awareness, relationships, and shared responsibility; all of which take time to develop. To illustrate, one city council person noted:

> Internet technology can help you get the information quicker, but being in front of someone, being able to see these emotions, get a hug, get a handshake, eat over some bread and some food…that's going to get you a little further.

The observation here is rooted in the logic of trust that comes from being an elected official and highlights how civic technologies are interpreted as transactional tools for information and service exchange, rather than tools for establishing connection within constituencies. Being able to convey and experience emotions through affective interactions "get a hug, get a handshake, eat over some bread and some food" exemplify the Trust Work practice "meeting people where they are" (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a). This practice closes spatial distance by eschewing spaces of institutional authority in favor interacting in familial social places of constituents. The

space of interaction is important for trust, as trust is easier to develop in conditions of social and spatial proximity (Barber & Gambetta, 1992). Moreover, the effort by public officials to 'meet people where they are' conveys the desire to develop relationships as well as ownership of the distances present. This effort is often lost on use of internet technology which obviates both time and space, yet time spent in space is the currency of closing social distance.

Using civic technology always involves weighing the tradeoff between the logic of efficiency and the logic of trust. A public official in the city housing authority described this in her contrast of social media use vs face-to-face interactions, "I do think that, while social media can be great and mailings can be great, that one-to-one relationship is really the most key, the most important." Similarly, a public official working in the city's economic development department speculated on the use of virtual meetings to cut down on time and labor in community engagement, "could we use technology to meet instead? What if we're able to have that same meeting, cut down your travel time, cut down the cost for food, things of that nature, get cut straight to the chase." In the face of limited staff and budgets, civic technology could improve both Trust Work and participation by allowing opportunities for interaction in a more efficient manner which would lead to greater sustainability by *removing the barriers* of time, space, and money. However, the logic of trust needs to be considered in order to avoid the trap *removing barriers and creating distance* by disrupting the affective qualities of face-to-face modes of community engagement.

4. Designing Strategies for Closing Distance

To better understand how to avoid the trap of removing barriers and creating distance, we engaged 13 of the public officials from the Living Cities project through a series of design activities to develop strategies that could inform how civic technology might be orientated around closing distance. Our overall approach drew from co-design methodology (Sanders & Stappers, 2008): a design practice that aims to leverage those who will eventually be served through the outcomes of a design process by affording them the position of 'expert of his/her experience.' In our case, the 'experts' are public officials; therefore, we designed an activity which provided tools for them to both ideate and express the role of trust and technology in their work of community engagement. Specifically, we designed a set of materials that required the public officials to explore how they might overcome common barriers to developing trust in their work of community engagement. The workshop activity required participants—working individually—to think through how they would approach building trust in a specific goal they would like to achieve in their community engagement work. To achieve these goals, the activity required them to match together three forms of prompts

we provided based on the elements of our previously developed conceptual framework of trust in community engagement (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018a): *barriers* to trust, *actions* to overcome said barriers, and different forms of *technology* they might operationalize to help with the process. Thus, during the workshop each participant worked individually on reaching their goal by thinking through how to build trust by matching the barriers they felt were relevant—to actions that would address those barriers—and finally technologies they have access to (or envision having access to) that would aid their process. This allowed us to get a wide view of how public officials across a range of municipal roles address barriers for trust in their goals of community engagement.

Each workshop ran concurrently in three sessions over the course of two weeks. Each session was approximately two hours and took place on our campus. One researcher recorded ethnographic fieldnotes and photo documentation while the lead author ran the workshops. We also audio recorded the workshops which we then partially transcribed to provide additional fidelity to key exchanges identified in our ethnographic notes. We subjected the data from these workshops (how participants worked with the materials, observational field notes, photos and audio) to a thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1984) which produced three strategies: historicizing engagement, focusing on experience, and mediating expectations. Discussing these strategies offers us a comparison with the logic of efficiency from which we can identify differences and thus further outline the contours of the logic of trust.

4.1. Historicizing Engagement

We developed the first strategy, *historicizing engagement*, by analyzing how public officials articulated the work necessary to develop empathy and understanding of past experiences in order to build relationships. For instance, an official in public safety described how his department must contend with how "many people have past experiences where crimes have been committed against them or family and friends that they feel were not taken seriously." He pointed to the importance of having personal conversations throughout these communities to develop empathy and sensitivity with these past experiences of injustice. Likewise, an official in community health described the necessity of "being prepared to go slower and/or move away from the agenda when necessary" in his agency's work of overcoming the history of negligence that underserved communities felt towards outsiders who alleged to work benevolently but, in the end, used engagement to further their own agendas. Slowing down and providing opportunities for shared decision-making to set the goals of projects around (and in response to) history were important for his department's goal of involving communities—some which are very uneasy due to the history of health inequities in the city.

Engaging with history came to be a major theme throughout the workshops. Officials wanted to understand how to best attend to the memories, emotions and experiences of the past that pose barriers for trust in the present. From the standpoint of trust, there was an understanding that a key part of trust as a process is overcoming fear and doubt that may stem from negative past experiences. This finding further exposes the logic of trust from which we developed the strategy—*historicizing engagement*—which signifies that the process of closing distances must be grounded within the history that has produced them.

Historicizing engagement conflicts with the logic of efficiency in how it requires time and patience for the affective work of engaging the past to unfold. In contrast, civic technology is most often associated with the discourse of "moving forward," "innovating," and "reaching for the future" (Schrock, 2016). There is an urgency in this discourse to remove the barriers of history—which are often linked to inequity, broken promises, and distrust—all of which can hinder "progress." Confronting this discourse, historicizing engagement calls for civic technology to actively engage history by exploring how past experiences can be brought to bear on current systems and processes. Doing so is vital for closing distance and developing relationships because trust as a process will always be forged upon past experiences which serve as the raw material for forming expectations that overcome uncertainty (e.g., the history of broken promises regarding the stadiums in the westside communities of Atlanta).

4.2. Focusing on Experience

We developed the second strategy, focusing on experience, by analyzing how public officials went about addressing issues they face with providing meaningful and enjoyable community engagement experiences. For instance, a regional planning official was concerned with avoiding transactional engagement experiences:

> Agencies can get a bad rap for only engaging communities when they must put together a periodic plan for funders, etc. Agencies can be seen as disingenuous or inauthentic if they only engage communities in these 3 or 4 year intervals.

Engagement can feel transactional when it occurs only to satisfy institutional needs rather than the needs for ongoing relationships with the communities that they serve. Another official working in parks and recreation remarked at how the experience of engagement is typically too narrow as citizens are given limited agency in the larger picture of how decision-making processes play out. He believes this leads communities to devalue participation resulting in one-off engagements that ultimately reduce input because people participate once but never return.

Improving the experience of engagement came to be a major theme throughout the workshops. What entails

a 'good' experience differed significantly based on the domain of the official (e.g., public safety vs infrastructure maintenance) but overall there was a commit to explore ways of doing engagement that take the experience of participating as a central goal. From the standpoint of trust, there was an assumption that improving the quality of experience of engagement was vital to enabling ongoing interactions which are the building blocks of trust. This finding further exposes the logic of trust from which we developed the strategy—*focusing on experience*—which signifies that distance is closed as trust develops over time through the accumulation of experiences.

Focusing on experience conflicts with the logic of efficiency in how it pushes back against the tendency towards transactionality in civic interactions. Indeed, engagement is often treated as a requirement—a pro forma obligation, rather than a worthwhile experience in of itself (Gordon & Baldwin-Philippi, 2013). Moreover, when civic technology does focus on experience, it tends to do so under the guise of "customer experience" adapting the private sector discourse of "running the government like a business" (Dutil, Howard, Langford, & Roy, 2008). While improving the quality of experience in receiving services from the government is important (as ATL 311 does), equally important is the quality of the experience of participating in the decision-making processes of government. As such, *focusing on experience* calls for civic technology to focus on how the experience of engagement can be made enjoyable, creative, and productive for those involved. Doing so is vital for closing distance and developing relationships as trust as a process develops over time only through the accumulation of experiences; it is both the opportunity for and quality of experience that eventually reduces distances (e.g., opposite the poor experiences of community engagement in the westside communities of Atlanta).

4.3. Mediating Expectations

We developed the third strategy, mediating expectations, by analyzing how public officials went about building and maintaining expectations with communities during community engagement. To illustrate, an official working in infrastructure development described the challenges with maintaining expectations in his work which can operate on a timescale of decades. He describes how this "can be a frustration that change isn't coming fast enough…" In this case, the immediate needs of engagement are out of step with the longer term economic, social, and cultural ramifications of the work which in turn can problematize political will and institutional relationships. Similarly, an official working in public safety wondered if a data visualization might be able to aid in "give[ing] the community hope…something to look forward to" regarding ongoing efforts to address systemic crime in an area. He described how the police department would first need to provide the basis for positive expectations with the residents about how they would

address the issues being faced and inviting community members in to set goal and then follow through with maintaining these expectations by working with the community as the work unfolded.

Supporting expectations came to be a major theme throughout the workshops. Officials wanted to understand how expectations could be enabled to sustain the community engagement necessary to reach goals in the face of uncertainty. From the standpoint of trust, there was an understanding that expectations in community engagement are often fraught and tenuous over time; as promises are made (and sometimes broken) the positive expectations that undergird trust become unstable. This finding further exposes the logic of trust from which we developed the third strategy—*mediating expectations*—which signifies that supporting the expectations that form around the work of community is vital to closing distance.

Mediating expectations conflicts with the logic of efficiency in how it pushes back against the tendency towards expediency in how expectations are typically approached in civic interactions. This is reflected in how civic technology often mediates expectations through providing open data systems intended to remove barriers to information and provide a common understanding and set of expectations of a civic processes or services (O'Hara, 2012). O'Hara's study of such systems reveals that open data initiatives often take a top down approach—where public institutions decide alone what to release and what not to—which in turn fails to be meaningful for citizens therefore failing to engender trust. In contrast, mediating expectations calls for civic technology to engage the importance of agency, affect, and relationships in mediating expectations. Doing so is vital for closing distance as trust as a process is fundamentally about how expectations can be formed to enable cooperative action in the face of uncertainty (e.g., attending planning meetings during the uncertainty of the second stadium's development).

5. Conclusion

Neither the local crisis in confidence in the westside communities in the city of Atlanta nor the larger crisis in confidence in democracies around the world will be solved through increasing efficiency of institutions by creating systems like ATL 311. Yet, that is not to say the logic of efficiency is always inappropriate in matters of governance. In fact, there are cases where efficiency is vital. For instance, in the work of the civic technologist Jazmin Latimer during her time at Code for America. Efficiency was the primary goal of the online platform "Clear My Record" she designed: a tool allowing legal-aid providers to reclassify convictions more efficiently which helps low-income Americans lift legal restrictions that threaten their physical and mental well-being (Latimer, 2016). Rather, efficiency is only problematic when it is unbridled, when it becomes an all-encompassing neolib-

eral logic that prefigures design and use of civic technology. This becomes particularly problematic in situations where efficiency is not always desirable; for instance, when the higher priority is assuring that a community's voice is heard, that a process is fair, or that the most vulnerable are able to safely express themselves. If the technologies we design in the civic space are only concerned with efficiency, the ability of public officials to engage publics that are most distant will be constrained as public officials are also at the mercy of the systems that get deployed within their work environments (i.e., the city council person grappling with the impact of ATL 311).

The decisions about the technologies we design and use in the civic space structure social and political relations as Langdon (1986, p. 49) once remarked:

> [As] our society adopts one sociotechnical system after another it answers some of the most important questions that political philosophers have ever asked about the proper order of human affairs….What is the best form of political society?

According to the logic of trust "the best form of political society" is one which works towards closing different manifestations of distance between the public and their governments: distance in power of decision-making, distance of spatial and social closeness, temporal and hypothetical distance in reaching civic goals, and distance in knowledge of civic processes. To achieve such a society we will need to answer to Langdon's crucial question (1986, p. 53): "what forms of technology are compatible with [this] kind of society we want to build?" While we can not yet answer this question, the Trust Work we described and the strategies we offered provide the conceptual seeds to guide civic technology towards operating from the logic of trust.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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