Category: Applications of E-Technologies

Veteran Service Management and E-Government Service Delivery Performance

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF ORGANIZATIONS

The importance of electronic service delivery was recognized at the beginning of the emergence of the Internet (Huang & Hu, 2004); thereafter much attention has been devoted to it as a solution to the issue of the traditional service delivery system (Cetiner & Ryan, 2004; Gassan, De Boer, Mourshed, & Rea, 2001). Too often there is little or no congruence between the image of the service communicated by the service firm and the service actually delivered. This leads to unmet customer expectations and probably to non-satisfied customers, who have lost their faith in the firm and its ability to keep its promises.

Governments also invest in veteran service management (VSM) and e-government to increase their service delivery performance. Veterans are the nation's population who have been discharged or retired after serving on active duty with the United States Armed Forces. E-government refers to efforts in the public sector to use information and communication technologies to deliver government services and information to the public (Gant & Gant, 2002; Gefen, 2002). Government agencies face challenges in making veterans aware of the benefits of online services they are receiving. Anecdotal evidence shows the Internet's Web portal can enable governments to increase their e-service delivery performance. However, there is little existing research that has tested how the use of Web portals to strengthen existing VSM can increase e-government service delivery performance.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how VSM, using Web portal aggregation, may impact electronic service delivery performance. Specifically, the study examines:

- the theoretical foundation of VSM,
- the theoretical impact of VSM on government service delivery performance,
- theoretically and empirically how VSM, supported by Web portal aggregation, may impact e-government service delivery performance.

This research focuses on government Web portals that deliver electronic services to veterans. The Web portal of the North Dakota Government Rural Outreach (GRO) Initiative has been selected as the sample U.S. government Web portal for this research. That Web portal has been chosen because it has a component dedicated to veterans and county veteran service officers (CVSOs).

Data were collected through open-ended interviews with CVSOs. A total sample consists of 10 CVSOs. The study used content analysis to analyze data obtained from a sample of CVSOs, using the GRO Web portal, to test the hypotheses. The CVSOs assist all veterans and their dependents in obtaining all benefits to which they are entitled, both federal and state. The CVSOs are chosen because they play the role of intermediary between veterans, veteran service and benefits providers, and government agencies. CVSOs interact on G2G (government to government) and G2C (government to citizen) basis in order to serve veterans.

CVSO and Veteran Population in North Dakota

A total of 22 CVSOs have an office in the north eastern part of North Dakota while 12 CVSOs serve veterans in the north western part of North Dakota. A total of 16 CVSOs serve veterans in the south western part of North Dakota while 18 CVSOs assist veterans in the south eastern part of North Dakota.

In terms of location, 18% of CVSOs cover the north western part of North Dakota; 32% work in the north eastern part; while 24% are located in the south western part and 26% in the south eastern part of North Dakota.

There are 14,840 civilian veterans in the north eastern part of North Dakota while 11,387 reside in the north western part of the state. Most of the civilian veterans (about 22,783) are located in the south eastern part of North Dakota. Approximately 7,116 civilian veterans live in the south western part of North Dakota.

In terms of location, 21% of civilian veterans are located in the north western part of North Dakota; 22% are located in the north eastern part; while 13% reside in the south western part and 44% in the south eastern part of North Dakota.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF VSM AND DESCRIPTION OF E-GOVERNMENT

Several theoretical perspectives from information systems (IS) reference disciplines are relevant for this study. One of these IS reference disciplines is marketing. We draw upon role theory (RT) and service encounter theory to explore and understand the theoretical foundation of VSM. Those theories have been adopted by marketing researchers for examining service delivery (Bitner, 1995; Solomon, Carol, Surprenant, & Evelyn, 1985).

A service encounter theory is a form of social exchange in which participants normally seek to maximize the rewards and minimize the costs of the transaction (Solomon et al., 1985).

Usually, an encounter is especially relevant in situations where the service component of the total offering is a major element of that offering. In e-government delivery service, governments do not sell goods to the public or business, compared to the private sector.

In the public sector, the total offering is relatively stable, offering such as social security and unemployment benefits do not almost change and are pure service. A service encounter remains important in government e-commerce application because in many government services deliveries there is a high level of service encounter between CVSOs and veterans or government agencies.

Role theory (RT) is based on a dramaturgical metaphor (Solomon et al., 1985). It is the study of the behavior associated with a socially defined position and role expectations are the standards for role behavior. Each role that one plays is learned (Solomon et al., 1985). In many routine service encounters, the roles are well defined and both the customer and employee know what to expect from each other (Bitner, 1995).

According to RT, each participant in government service delivery has a role to play. Through the lens of RT, CVSOs and veterans' role in these relations are well defined and both know what to expect from each other. The RT also helps understand that each role that one (CVSOs, veterans or government agencies) plays is learned.

VSM, Service Encounter Theory, and RT

In fact, we build on foundational advances in RT and service encounter theory in examining VSM components.

In this study, a VSM is defined as the process whereby a CVSO understands veteran expectations, teaches veterans ways to secure services for themselves, develops partnerships of service, and cooperation with government agencies in order to serve veterans (Moon, 2002). The extent of VSM is split in two in this research: VSM from G2G perspective (G2GSM) and VSM from G2C perspective (G2CSM). The two major G2GSM components identified are: cooperation and partnerships of service. The two major G2CSM components identified are: empowerment of veteran and understanding veteran expectations. These components are analyzed through the lens of RT and service encounter theory. Further, we hope to test how the use of Web portals to strengthen existing VSM can increase e-government service delivery performance.

- **Cooperation:** It is defined in this study as coordinated actions taken by government agencies, veteran service providers, and CVSOs to achieve mutual outcomes. Cooperation promotes effective working relationship success. Wilson (1995) presented a cooperative model in which both parties achieve lower costs by working together to lower both buyer's and seller's operating costs. This enduring desire to maintain a valued cooperative relationship should, in turn, impact e-government service delivery performance.
- **Partnerships of Service:** Partnerships are created when CVSOs communicate and share information closely with veteran service providers or government agencies. In the management of service delivery, frequent quality communication needs to be in place to foster partnerships and cope with changing services needs (Moon, 2002). A partnership helps both parties stay on the course of mutual interests (Moon, 2002).
- **Empowerment of Veteran:** Empowerment of veteran generally refers to the process CVSOs adopt to educate, teach, encourage, and reward veterans who exercise initiative and make valuable creative contributions or do everything that is possible to help solve their problems. Most government agencies prefer to deal with empowered veterans because they are easy to serve, because they understand the