INNOVATIVE AND ACCELERATED PROBLEM SOLVING OF URBAN PLANNING ISSUES VIA AN ONLINE INCENTIVIZED COMPETITION SITE

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I. Written Assignment

1) Topic: I would like to explore how a generously incentivized competition with large monetary awards, built and managed on a state-of-the-art online technology platform, could be used to solve urgent problems faced by most large urban cities, such as my home city of Los Angeles.

2) What: Many citizens are only minimally engaged in city affairs and are largely ignorant of the problems that city leaders deal with on a daily basis. Citizens have the most to gain from living in a safe, well-functioning city with rich amenities and well maintained public spaces, so how do we motivate them to be active participants in solving problems faced by their city's leaders? A generous financial reward for coming up with the most innovative solution to a city's problem by crowdsourcing from a diversified citizenry with a multitude of talents may be the answer. A 100,000 heads working to solve a problem are better than one.

3) Why: Outside of the urban planning and public administration arenas, online competition platforms such as Kaggle, Innocentive, and the X Prize have been extraordinarily successful in focusing media and public attention to important social issues and scientific puzzles, and more importantly, in crowdsourcing innovative solutions from the public that can be deployed by the companies or organizations trying to solve these problems. Due to the media attention and goodwill that highly publicized prizes and competitions generate, many philanthropic and deep-pocketed corporations and organizations have been eager to fund the prize purses to the tune of millions of dollars per prize.

4) Where: Ideally, this type of online competition platform should enable city challenges from around the world to be hosted and entries should be crowdsourced from the public. Los Angeles's air pollution problem could be potentially solved by a team of enivironmental engineers from Mumbai, India, and similarly, Detroit's high crime rates could be substantially reduced by a proven solution from an urban planning team from Singapore, which has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. Many large cities have similar problems, such as alleviating traffic congestion and parking shortages, reducing air pollution, and revitalizing slum neighborhoods.

5) Who: Who are the people that are most impacted by the issue?
a. Who do you think you would like to engage as part of this project?
Vested stakeholders include: City leaders that have been unable to solve their city's problems, innovative problem solvers who can be rewarded with large sums of money for their solutions, city residents who are frustrated with their living conditions and want to vote for their favorite solution, and companies/organizations that can benefit from commercializing the knowledge gained from brilliant solutions that are presented to the online competition platform. At the right time, I will actively engage with all of the above stakeholders.

Since this proposal is still in its early stages of planning, I wanted to test initial interest and reaction before building a mockup of the competition site. I posted this idea in the MindMixer platform and to date have received 79 votes in support of the idea. I received a perfect score of 40 points from my peers for the initial project proposal turned in for the first class assignment. I was surprised to receive this score as I actually gave a lower score to myself.

Here are some comments received from my peers who evaluated the proposal and from the MindMixer platform:

Peer #1: "It seems a very interesting idea which depends greatly in the correct implementation of the online platform."

Peer #2: "This was a well thought out proposal. I can tell a lot of research went into exploring the various platforms that could lead to greater citizen involvement in global city problems. Good luck with the project!"

Peer #3: "The proposal seems well-thought out and demonstrates that the student has engaged in a good amount of research. I like how the student proposed key elements of what the incentivized format would include as well as platforms that provide a good starting point for the project. The McKinsey and Co. report was also a great and unexpected addition to the proposal, and the inclusion of the global community makes this proposal especially strong."

Peer #4: "This is a definitely the way to go. Perhaps the idea of Sister cities could come into this nicely. Pairing global cities that have a similar problem to solve. Two heads are always better than one and each city will have specific details that they can contribute depending on how far along they are into the problem that they are trying to solve. With two cities, each with millions of citizens available to contribute to the engagement platform, the sky is the limit. The winning project can share the funds to put towards implementing their plans. All the solutions from all the participating cities should be posted online so that everyone, everywhere can draw from the creative bubble."

6) How: How does the student hope to explore this topic:
a. Data Analysis: What data do you hope to obtain and how do you anticipate using this to support your project?
I would do research on the various online competition platforms currently existing that focus outside of the urban planning/public administration context, obtain data and metrics on the sources and volume of fundraising, demographics of the contestants, content and quality of the entries, costs of building and maintaining the platform, and lessons learned by competition organizers, and share this data and best practices with experts in urban planning and city

officials to derive their input on whether such a competition platform would be viable, and obtain feedback on how best to design and build a state-of-the-art, technology driven, urban planning competition platform.

So far, I have discovered that for the highly successful online competition platforms, they share the following characteristics in common:
- large monetary award is used to attract high quality participants
- stakeholders are identified at the earliest phase of building the prize strategy so that those who share in the prize's mission and objectives can contribute financially, bring in volunteers and expertise, and spread word and draw popular support for the competition.
- the rules, process, and timing of the competition should be designed to maximize public interest and participation and rally/unite the community toward the spirit, cause, and excitement of the competition.
- analytical tools should be put in place to measure and quantify the success or failure of the competition's ability to achieve its goals, beginning from when the competition is first announced and continuing into the post prize phase when results can be implemented.
- great care is given to the design, organization, and technology used for the online competition platform so that participants have a good user experience and sponsors are happy to promote the site.

I was particularly impressed with the Netflixprize.com competition site. Netflix conducted its entire prize process online with no human interaction and minimal ongoing cost. Participants signed up online to get instant access to the 100 million movie rating data set they needed to design an algorithm for submission. They could go to an online forum to get questions answered by other participants. They submitted their entries online where they were automatically processed. The results were continuously updated on the Netflix Leaderboard, which competitors closely followed to outwit their competition. The completely online approach allowed the Netflix Prize to create a self-sustaining community of thousands of motivated and active participants. After examining the Netflixprize.com site, I have decided that the Technicities Grand Challenge should be conducted entirely online except for the judging event where the finalists present their proposal and the winners are selected.

b. Design: Describe the key design elements that you hope to include in your project.
I really like the X Prize, Innocentive, and Kaggle competition platforms and would like to adapt them in ways that are most suitable for conducting an online urban planning competition site. Key elements include:
- online submission of competition entries
- online recruiting and organizing of competition team members
- online concept-to-final-proposal progress updates by competing teams
- online fan clubs that support favorite competing teams and their proposals
- online voting and sharing of competition entries via social media
- online leaderboard for keeping track of the popularity of the competition entries
- permanent online storage and access to proposals for public use and research

7) Final Product: Describe what format you anticipate that the final product will be in. You could create a poster, video, document, or other proposed final product format.
I have created a prototype of the online competition platform at this website:
http://technicitiesgrandchallenge.splashthat.com

8) Who you are working with: Indicate whether this is your project or if you are working in a team.
Right now, I am working alone, but would like others to join me and work together as a team. My classmates can also contribute suggestions to my proposal via the MindMixer platform.

Below, I have attached an illuminating McKinsey & Co. report on the benefits and effectiveness of incentivized competition. Here are some excerpts:
"Leading philanthropists should consider how they can best use prizes as part of their philanthropic portfolio, and should accept the challenge of finding innovative ways to harness the potential of this powerful instrument."

"Well designed prizes carry a strong element of theater that makes them newsworthy and media friendly. This messaging and brand-building potential is attractive to corporations looking to burnish their image or wealthy donors seeking to signal their arrival."

"Prizes attract diverse groups of experts, practitioners, and laypeople—regardless of formal credentials—to attempt to solve difficult problems, dramatically expanding the pool of potential solvers and lower the cost of attempting or recognizing solutions."

"Prizes highlight and elevate superlative behaviors, ideas, and achievements in order to motivate, guide, and inspire others. Identifying excellence remains the cornerstone of many prizes—the essence of their power to produce change."

"A core power of prizes derives from their openness: their ability to attract diverse talent, generate unexpected approaches, and reveal unusual perspectives in the face of a problem or challenge."

"Prizes can provide valuable leverage for a sponsor's investment by mobilizing further financial or intellectual capital in support of a solution."

"One of prizes' great strengths is their ability to attract investments from competitors many times greater than the cost of delivering and awarding a prize."

"Prizes should be in the basic toolkit of today's philanthropists, and that these philanthropists should approach them strategically, with a learning mindset, and a focus on effective implementation."

"Every leading philanthropist should consider the opportunity to use prizes to help achieve their mission, and to accept the challenge of fully exploiting this powerful tool."

"Today, more than 300 people have signed up for $200,000 (total=$60M) trips aboard SpaceShipTwo, the commercial successor to the winning entrant of the Ansari X PRIZE for Suborbital Flight" "Virgin Galactic unveils model of SpaceShipTwo," New Scientist, January 23, 2008.

Please take a look at the full McKinsey report I have attached. The URL link for downloading the report is here:
http://www.mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Social-Innovation/And_the_winner_is.pdf

or click below:
And_the_winner_is.pdf

My classmates are welcome to contribute suggestions to my proposal via the MindMixer platform:
http://technicity.osu.edu/technicity-matchmaking/10-million-technicities-grand-challenge

I think this project would be truly meaningful and a boatload of fun to work on. Thank you.

II. See Final Product Submission at link below:
http://technicitiesgrandchallenge.splashthat.com

URL link for current document:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rnGAvzHG2LPPZYANjyUFWlFRFPPWw7pCXGy-qrgzNG8/edit?usp=sharing