

Human Learning Systems as an Approach for Improved Public Service Experience: Early insights for potential in India

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Abstract

A significant part of how problems are experienced and observed in organizing public services was how public management was conceived and carried out. The current dominant paradigm, New Public Management (NPM), created in the 1980s, however,, has not been free of challenges and has faced increasing opposition to its inherent problems, be it slow to learn and adapt changing reality, breeding fragmentation, or dehumanization. These widely evident issues with NPM are so fundamental that this does not just require making tweaks in practice but point towards the need for a paradigm shift. Our study discusses one such alternative paradigm to public management i.e., Human Learning Systems (HLS), articulated as a set of mutually supportive management practices and recognizes the individual's freedom to determine what it means to flourish in one's life. It puts the needs of the end-user of public service, the public itself, at the centre of the public administration process. Based on the experiences of implementing HLS approach in practice at local, regional, national and global levels we aim to understand how HLS can be incorporated in Indian system of Public Service Delivery and Management and what difference it can make. Using qualitative data, our study aims to develop an understanding of 1) how public service is managed and delivered in India, and 2) how accommodative people are of the ideas of HLS, through conducting primary interviews with three important stakeholders – government officials, non-profit organizations, and private sector. We analyze our data using Nvivo to provide a rich context of the narratives based on the anecdotes of the people interviewed. Our study aims to draw implications for policy decision making at the local and national level by focusing on generating new visions for government and public policy development.

Objective

- To develop a good understanding of how public service is delivered and managed in India
- To understand whether HLS can make a difference in the delivery of Public service in India and if so, how?
- Discover & learn about the possible approaches that have worked in Indian scenarios and the ones that have failed

Methods

- **Interviews Phase 1:** May 2022 – June 2022.
- **Prepare:** Questionnaire for open-ended interviews.
- **Train:** Training to collect data via zoom/telephone/face-to-face discussions.
- **Reach:** Government officials* and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** via personal contacts, LinkedIn, contacts etc. (convenience and snowball sampling)
- **Engage:** 30 Live interview sessions completed in Phase I.

* Government officials including **district magistrates, district collectors, sub-divisional magistrates, public policy analysts, and retired personnel** were interviewed holding positions in the welfare, education, policy, economics, health, and government departments of the state and central levels.

CSOs interviewed are working in the sectors of **education, housing, urban governance, livelihoods, land rights, fund transfers, pension schemes, village blocks, and sustainable development from states covering West Bengal, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Orissa, and Karnataka.

Figure 1: Human Learning Systems

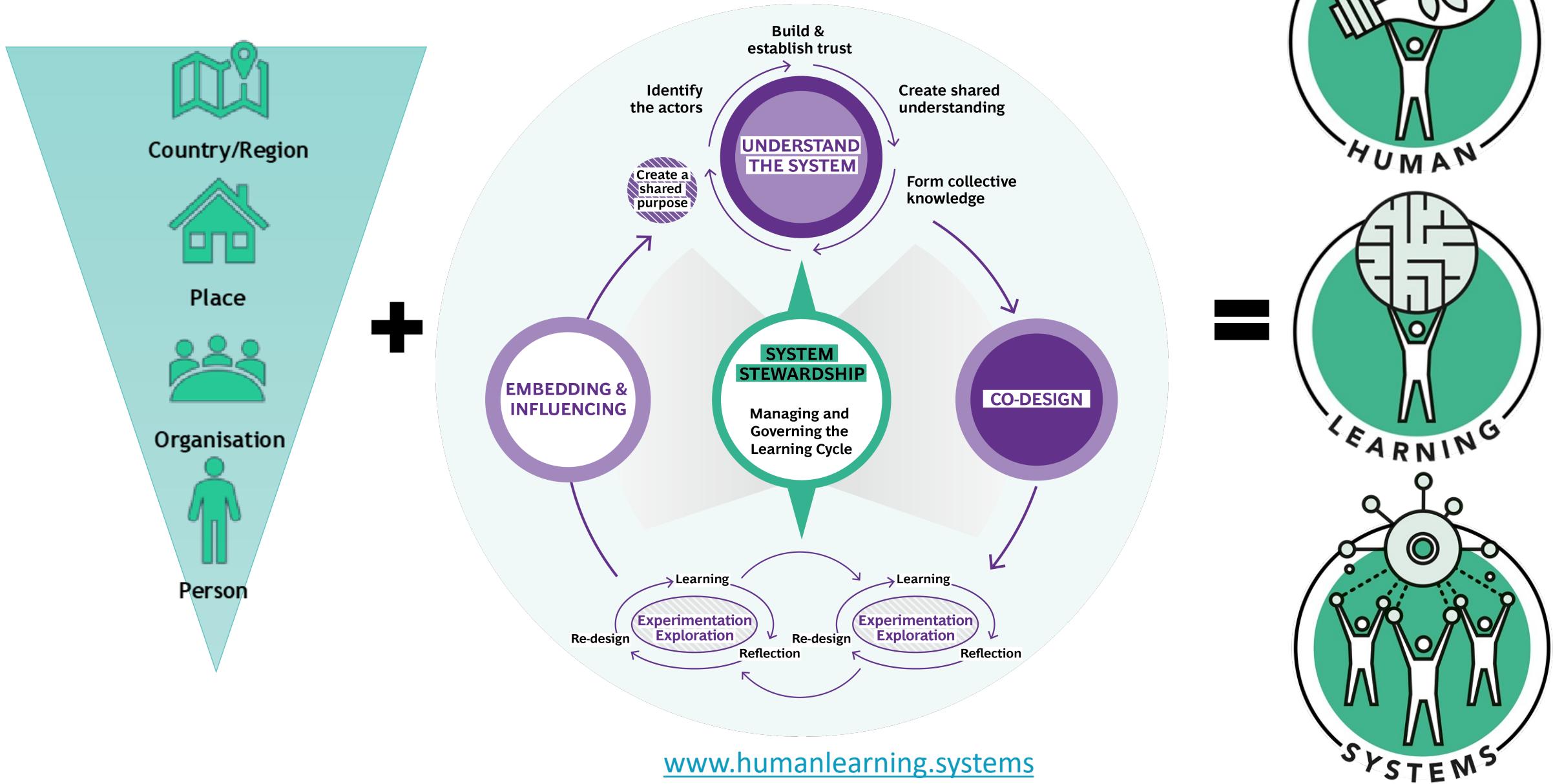


Figure 2: Government officials' explore diagram

- All interviewees believed that **Indian public service structures are complicated, rigid, and present no scope for constant learning.**
- All interviewees believed that government has ample resources and takes the front seat in 80% sectors specifically in health, nutrition, education, governance for the public service delivery and management **while only 10% gets covered by the NGOs especially working with the low income groups and rural areas.**

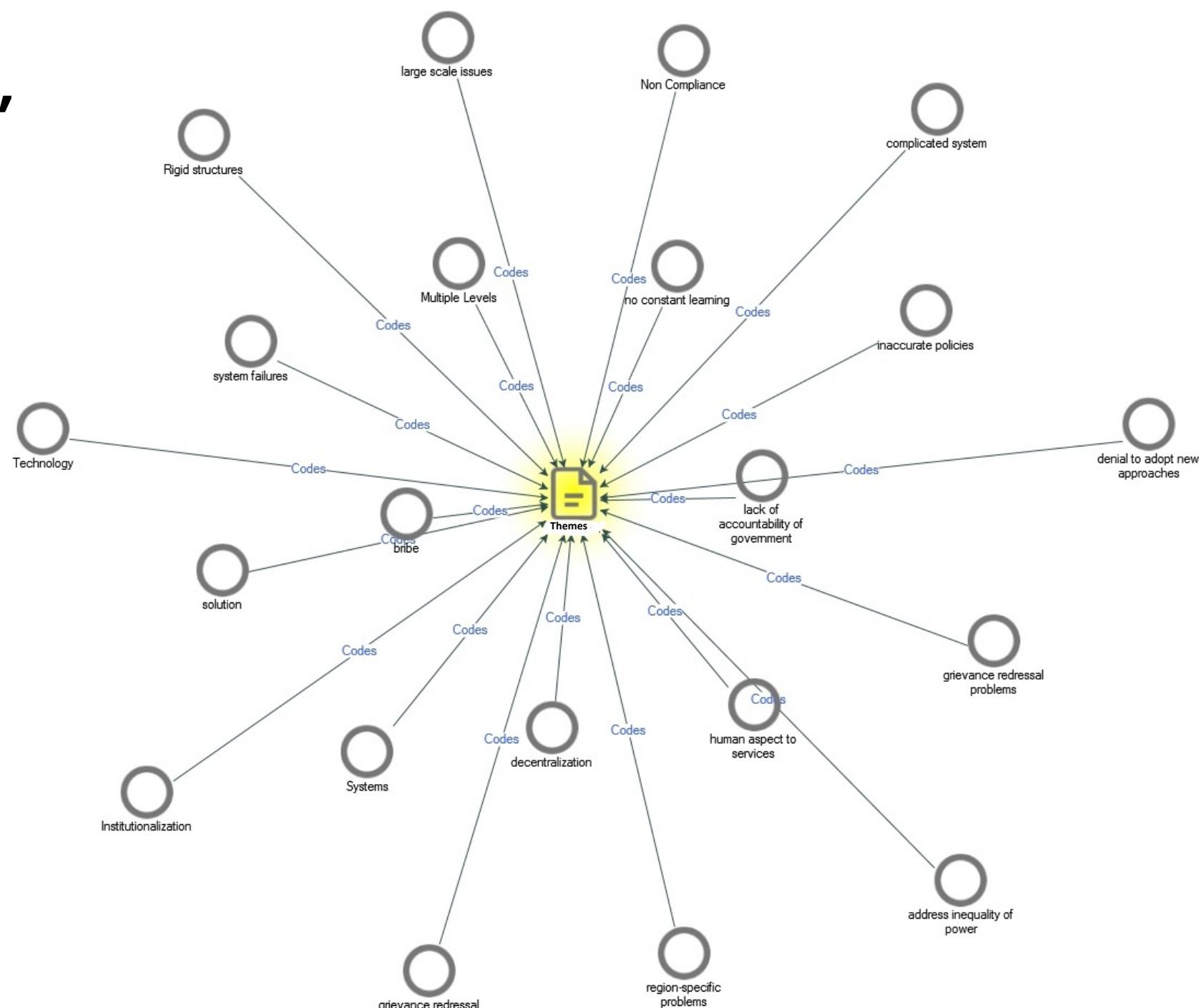
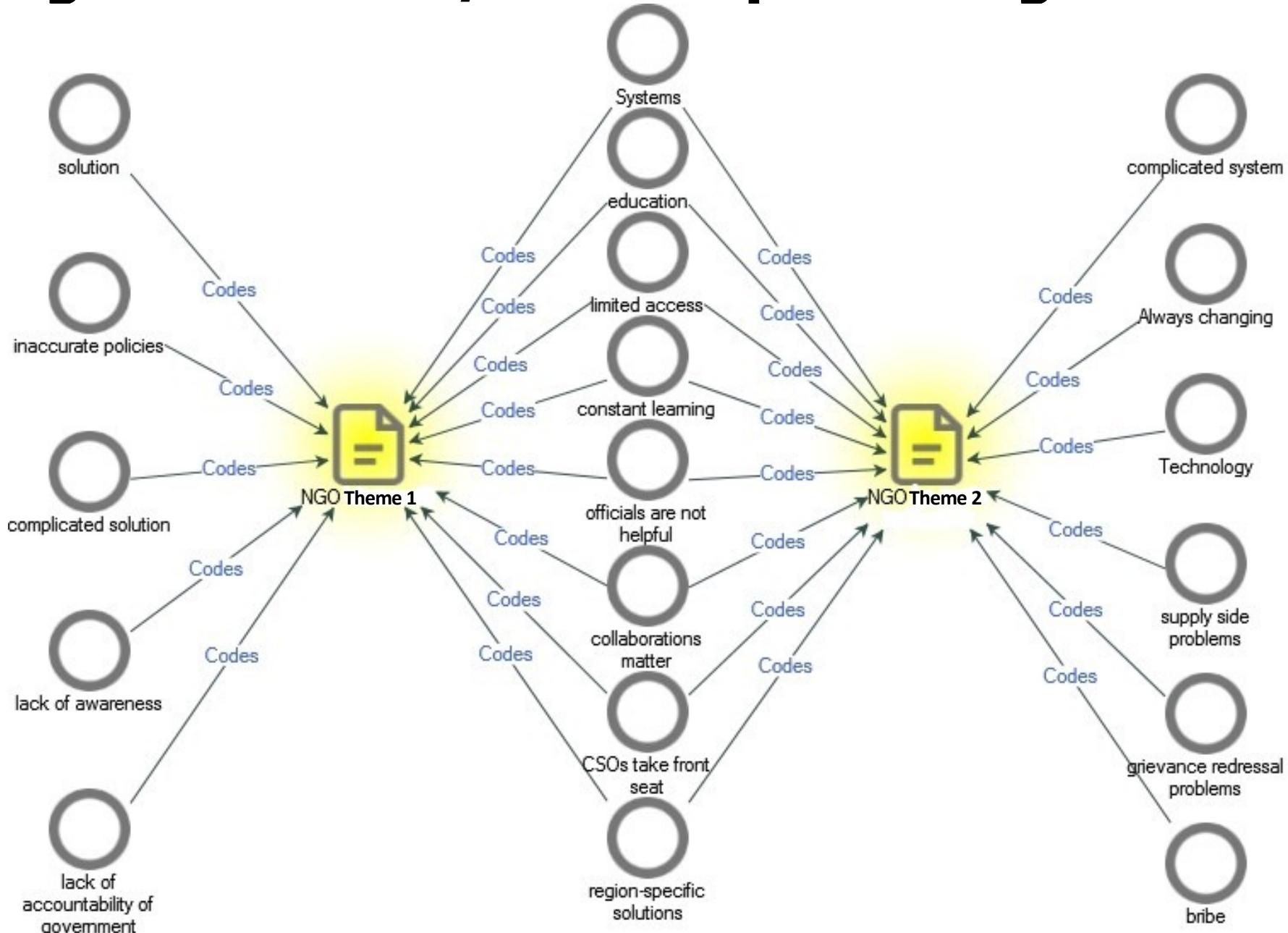
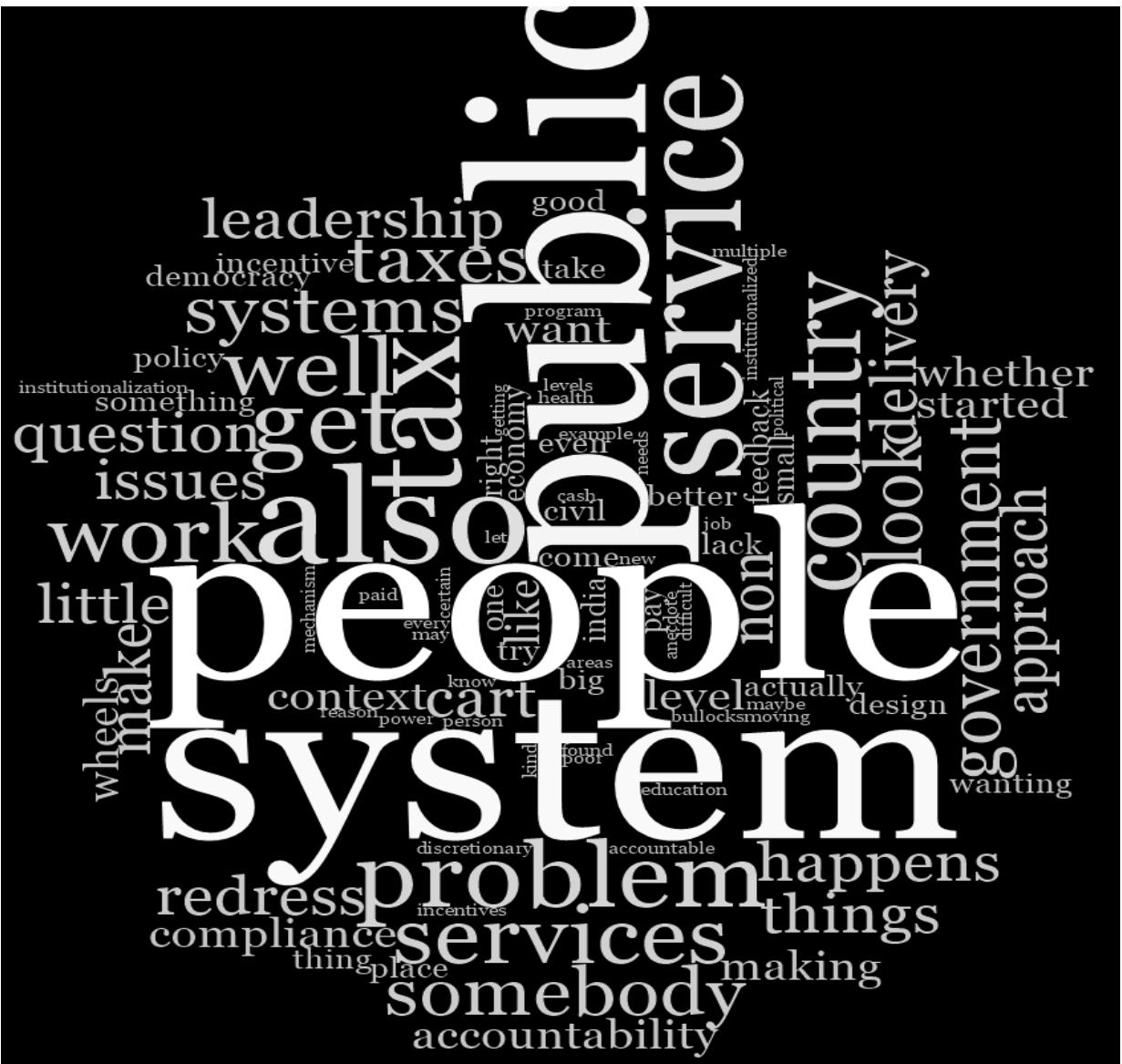


Figure 3: NGOs/CSOs explore diagram



- All CSOs held similar views with respect to the lack of awareness, limited access to education, banks, digital platforms, opportunities, assistance on the demand side show the ground reality in Indian system.
- All interviewees (100%) believed that **CSOs take the front seat in rural settings and dealing with vulnerable sections, collaborative efforts and constant learning within the system, 83% of them express unavailability of assistance from the government in Indian public service delivery which adversely affects trust, accountability, efficiency and transparency.**

Figure 4. Government Officials Vs. NGOs



Conclusion

- **Results:** Both stakeholder groups on average argue about the lack of accountability on the part of the government, faulty and complicated public service delivery and management systems, large-scale issues, inequality of power and rigidity in the system. Both highlight the scope for improvement, a human approach to service delivery, constant learning, and collaborations built on trust, interpersonal relationships among the citizenry and service providers give a ray of hope to enhance the efficiency of the Indian system. Both groups individually point out to the dissatisfaction they experience on the part of consumers where CSO group typically argues on a 2.9 (on average) score out of 5 when asked on the extent of individual services tailored.
- **Recommendations:** Greater scope for enhanced stakeholder participation and collaboration on the administrator's front; shared understanding of the system and its problems; collective action; context-specific solutions; feedback structures in place will give the now scattered Indian public service system a proper framework and shape. Putting citizens at the heart of the service delivery gives scope to enhance the "*human*" aspect; feedback, transparency and trust enhances "*learning*"; and strong interpersonal relationships and interdependence built on trust and shared understanding strengthens "*systems*".
- **Future research directions:** Phase 2 includes interviews with private sector arms, frontline workers, and panchayats to dive deeper into; understanding synthesis and development of the report; policy recommendations for public service based on the analysis of the Indian scenario.

So much to learn still.

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