

## Carnegie Council Case Study

# Listening to Citizens: The Role, Advantages, and Limitations of Technology (60 minutes)

**Case study on the ethics of using AI in diplomacy which incorporates the “Giving Voice to Values” framework**

### Introduction

In discussions of the ethics of international affairs, conversations typically focus on thorny questions of global responsibility, national integrity, international cooperation, international competition, and so on. These are hugely important issues and they are embedded in complex systemic contexts. Often for this reason, individuals—even individuals in positions of leadership—can feel as if their agency is circumscribed and their impact is limited. However, despite the fact that systemic challenges must be addressed systemically, this only happens when individuals in leadership positions take actions—often more incremental and over a longer time frame—but actions nonetheless.

Additionally, it is also critical to consider how individuals can have an impact on such questions, even if they are not in positions of political leadership.

The Giving Voice to Values (GVV) approach to values-driven leadership development is focused on helping individuals to identify, pre-script, rehearse, action-plan, and peer-coach ways to act on their values-based choices—whether this means focusing on those in leadership positions; on those much deeper into the organizational bodies of national governments and policymaking organizations; and/or on committed citizens acting from outside the public sector.

The case below is intended as an example of the latter type—individuals who are not necessarily in senior positions within government organizations but who nonetheless want to find ways to exercise positive influence and act on their values effectively.

### **Background reading/resources on the Giving Voice to Values approach to values-driven leadership (choose one or more):**

- *Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right*, Mary Gentile, Yale University Press, 2010
- *Ways of Thinking About Our Values in the Workplace*, Mary Gentile, OB—1126, (Free)
- Coursera MOOC: [Ethical Leadership Through Giving Voice to Values](#) (Free to audit; fee if taken for certificate)

### **Carnegie Council readings/resources for follow-up discussion:**

- “The Ethics of AI Agents in Global Governance,” *Ethics Empowered: Leadership in Practice*, Carnegie Council, April 21, 2026 (Event)
- “An Ethical Grey Zone: AI Agents in Political Deliberations,” Eleonore Fournier-Tombs, Carnegie Council, November 13, 2024 (Article)
- “The Trade-offs of AI in Diplomacy,” Carnegie Ethics Accelerator, Carnegie Council, February 12, 2024 (Report)

### **Case Study**

#### **Listening to Citizens: The Role, Advantages, and Limitations of Technology**

Elena works in the Communications and Outreach office of her country’s government administration. Her role is to collect, respond to, collate, assess, and report on the comments, complaints, and requests submitted by citizens with regard to proposed legislative and policy changes before they are finalized.

Citizen comments come in a variety of forms: voice messages, live phone calls, email messages, and comments on an Internet portal. In addition, social media and press coverage, as well as citizen demonstrations, are monitored. Reviewing, recording, and addressing each of these is a time-consuming task and there are five others in Elena’s department who do the same work. They divide the incoming comments by subject matter and each of the six staff members is assigned several specific topics to monitor so that they can become more deeply immersed in the nuances of the legislative and policy changes they are monitoring.

Elena’s office is looking for ways to lower costs in anticipation of upcoming government budget cuts, as well as ways to streamline and increase efficiency through the use of artificial intelligence. Additionally, the government has announced a new emphasis upon modernizing its functions through technology and there is a great deal of excitement among the elected officials who believe they can promise reductions to government budgets through the use of AI.

Therefore, Elena has been asked to participate in a pilot program to test the use of AI in her department. One of the policy changes that she is monitoring will also be assigned to an AI agent and their speed and efficiency in handling citizen input will be compared. Elena is concerned that she may be participating in a pilot that will end up eliminating her position but she feels she has no choice but to participate.

After two months running this pilot, the results of Elena's and the AI agent's work are compared. Upon first review, it appears that the AI agent has been more efficient than Elena. On average, AI appears to reduce time spent on each comment significantly. Production of reports is also much faster. However, the conclusions drawn by Elena as opposed to the AI agent differ in some significant ways, at least in Elena's view.

She believes that the AI agent is not as effective at interpreting the written and spoken comments of respondents who are not using their first language. She also believes that AI is not as effective at interpreting accented speech. And when respondents call in "live," the automated questions are less customized to the speaker, not to mention that Elena believes that callers may feel put off by the automated process. On the other hand, she also wonders if some callers may feel more willing to speak openly since there is not a "real" person on the other end of the call.

Finally, due to all these questions, when Elena compared her report with the AI-generated report, she was concerned. Although overall, they both concluded that the policy was acceptable to the majority of commenters, Elena believes that she gathered more nuances that suggested potential adjustments that would make the policy more likely to be successful in the long run.

Elena wants to raise her concerns but she is aware that her position will not result in the cost savings that her managers are looking for, nor will it save time. Additionally, she is aware that her position may appear to be simply a self-serving interpretation since it would protect her own position, and she may seem anti-technology at a time when there is great enthusiasm within the administration for the hoped-for benefits of AI. And finally, she must admit that AI could make her own job easier.

She knows that she wants to make sure that the citizens who voice concerns are heard and taken seriously but she is not sure how to express her opinions in ways that will have the greatest positive impact. What can she say and do to voice her values effectively? What data does she need to gather? How might she re-frame her views? What objections ("Reasons & Rationalizations") is she likely to confront—and how can she respond to them? Who should she speak to, in what sequence, and in what context? Who should she enlist in her process? Etc.

## **Giving Voice to Values Approach to Scripting and Action Planning:**

### 4 Questions

#### **1) What is the values-based position that the protagonist (you) wants to take?**

*Answering this question briefly ensures that everyone is focused on the same task.*

#### **2) What is at STAKE or at RISK for all affected parties, including the protagonist?**

*This question is considered NOT in order to do a stakeholder analysis because the protagonist has already decided what they believe is the right thing to do. Rather this question is considered in order to identify motivations, fears, needs, impacts, and so on that may be useful in crafting the most effective action plan. For example, there may be ways to re-frame an issue so as to minimize risk or at least to acknowledge the impacts of what we are proposing.*

#### **3) What are the “Reasons & Rationalizations” that the protagonist is likely to encounter?**

*Identifying the kinds of objections or “push back” that we might encounter when voicing and acting on our values gives us the opportunity to be prepared to respond effectively. Be sure to take a look at the document we shared titled “Examples of Responses to Reasons and Rationalizations” that provides examples of just some of the ways we can respond to frequently heard objections.*

#### **4) What is the most effective “Script” and “Action Plan” that the protagonist can take?**

*What can they say? To whom? In what sequence? What data will be needed? What examples (positive and/or negative) will be useful? How can they respond effectively to the most likely “Reasons & Rationalizations” that may be encountered? Is this done alone or will allies be needed? Is this best done one-on-one or in a group? Can the challenge be re-framed so as to reveal potential positive impacts of doing the right thing? Can the challenge be re-framed so as to reveal potential negative impacts of doing the wrong thing? Is this a “one-off” situation/decision . . . or is this a “systemic” challenge that must be addressed systemically? If the latter, what sorts of steps will be required? And so on . . .*