



Social media & mobility: Empowering citizens toward social and economic participation

Working Paper Number 3 – August 2014

Citizen empowerment and building trust in government – the empowered social citizen

The [IBM Cúram Research Institute's](#) research project: **Social media & mobility: Empowering citizens toward social and economic participation** aims to explore the role of social media and mobility based solutions in empowering citizens to achieve better social outcomes within the social protection system (in this context the term social protection covers social security, social services and social care).

Working Paper Number's 1 and 2, issued May and July 2014 respectively, examined the new relationship model emerging from social media engagement, mobility and the emerging value of the internet of things.

Working Paper Number 3, the final in the series prior to the release of the final report in October 2014, examines citizen empowerment within the social protection system derived through social media and mobility. Promoting and achieving citizen empowerment is a significant contribution to delivering service quality excellence and building trust in government.

During February and March the first round of interviews and workshops were conducted with several organisations and individuals from across the Nordic countries and Western Europe. Further interviews and workshops were conducted in Europe, North America and Latin America during April-August. An interim report was delivered at the International Social Sector Forum in Vienna in June 2014. The final report will be launched at the IBM Cúram Health and Social Programs Summit in Washington DC in October 2014.

The purpose of the working paper series is to:

- Provide preliminary commentary on the workshop and interview outcomes
- Identify theme(s) to be explored and tested in subsequent rounds of interviews, workshops and public consultations
- Seek public feedback on the initial findings to enhance the relevance and value of the final report.

Feedback and comments on this paper are most welcome and should be sent before 15 September to Eloise O'Riordan at eloise.oriordan@ie.ibm.com



Introduction

In this third and final Working Paper, we circle back to the theme of this research project: empowering citizens toward better social and economic participation. We examine the fundamental question underpinning this research - is social media and mobility contributing to citizen empowerment which in turn leads to better social and economic participation?

In examining this question we also need to consider the contribution of social media and mobility to the attainment of service delivery excellence.¹ It is a commitment to service delivery excellence by social protection organisations that contributes to building trust in government. Social and economic participation is dependent upon citizens having trust in their government. For example citizens are more confident in participating in the formal labour market if they have trust in their government to provide protection against the social risks that can affect their capacity to work. Government in turn raises the funds to cover these risks through contributions or taxes on labour.

This notion of empowerment is captured in the following comment made at the annual conference of the European Social Network, held in Rome in July 2014

“It is through investing in people that we will increase their chances to cope with life's risks, which makes for a more inclusive and more prosperous society. Investing in social services is a smart and sustainable investment.”

László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Investing in people and social services to.....*increase their chances to cope with life's risks* is key to understanding why investing in social media and mobility is not just a case of technology for technology sake, but rather an investment in enabling people to live their lives better (empowerment) i.e. enabling the empowered social citizen.

Trust in Government

Trust in government and its institutions is a foundation stone for stable and prosperous societies. Trust does not come easy and can take many years to establish and yet can be lost in a very short period of time. The social protection system is one of the most visible touch points between a government and the people. Traditionally governments have made themselves very visible in the delivery processes of the social protection system as this is where government meets the needs of people by providing assistance during their most vulnerable periods in their lives. In recent years, governments have invested heavily in improving their social protection service delivery systems to ensure their citizens not only get the services they need but also to demonstrate the fundamental capabilities and relevance of the government of the day.



Social media and mobility solutions can be seen as new tools to improve the service delivery relationship between the government and the people. A recent report published by the United Nations provides concrete evidence of the increasing use of social media by government's around the world.ⁱⁱ This increased reach through social media can serve as an instrument to increase the level of trust in government. It was reported:

The use of social media by governments is also increasing fast with the number more than tripling from 2010 to 2012 and with another 50 per cent rise in 2014, so that today 118 countries use it for e-consultation and 70 for e-government generally. Both social media and mobile channels typically do not require high investment costs as they ride on consumerisation and non-governmental platforms, but they often need a business transformation and strong commitment in the public administration to maximise benefits.

Government use of social media in this context is primarily government agencies promoting services and for consultation with stakeholders. Many social protection agencies are using social media in this way. Going beyond this requires “... a business transformation and strong commitment in the public administration to maximise benefits”. We are finding in our workshops and interviews that this requires an agency to accept that control of information and how information is shared lies within the user community rather than what is controlled by the agency itself. For some organisations, this is a challenging concept especially when information being shared is subject to legal ramifications – e.g. interpretation of policy related to eligibility and entitlement conditions.

However, social media provides a public dimension to the sharing of information - something that doesn't exist in traditional methods of information dissemination. So if and when mis-information is produced and shared there are mechanisms available to address it. How this is done however is perhaps more important than the information itself. It requires the social protection agency to participate within social media forums more as an equal within the community rather than a controlling body. From a trust perspective this raises several issues:

- Can government participate as an equal in social media?
- How does government go about it – what/which persona should be used?
- What behaviours and language should a government participant use in social media?
- Will government be welcome by the people within social media forums?
- When and where should government stay out of or back out from?

We have found several examples of social protection organisations adopting rational and pragmatic approaches to these issues with the trend towards a personal rather than a bureaucratic model. These approaches have been influenced by a desire to manage the trust and confidence dimension to ensure the social protection as a seat at the table rather than maintaining adherence to traditional information and communication flows thereby leading to potential exclusion and/or marginalisation from social media forums.



Citizen Centric Services – Time for a Rethink?

The citizen centric service mantra within the social protection system has been underway since the 1990s. Social protection agencies in countries such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada led a wave of reform away from silo based program structures to new organisational models where service delivery was aligned to the needs to individuals and their families, thereby cutting across traditional social program boundaries. But these new models, including the ones that followed in countries like Norway, France and Austria have one thing in common – while the citizen is placed at the centre of the government agencies frame of reference, these very agencies retain control of the information and the service offerings.

Recent policy initiatives in the disability and aged care sectors in countries such as the UK and Australia towards self-directed funding challenge the traditional concept of citizen centric described above. With self-directed funding models that over time are likely to spread across other programs, the citizen is given more opportunity to take charge of what services they will consume and from where they will source them. The citizen becomes a consumer rather than a beneficiary. As a consumer they demand all the benefits consumers have in an open marketplace such as choice of providers and competitive markets. In these circumstances, citizen centricity has perhaps a different meaning. The citizen places themselves at centre of their network or advisors, suppliers, friends, colleagues, providers and government agencies. The citizen has control over who is in and out of their network. This is an empowering position and contrasts with the traditional citizen centric model where people are at the centre of a government controlled service delivery system.

It is easy to see where social media and mobility become important capabilities for citizens to have to be live successfully and cope with life's risks as funding models for social protection change. At the recent International Social Sector Forum hosted by IBM and Hauptverband der österreichischen Sozialversicherungsträger - the Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions, in Vienna (June 2014), three themes emerged for social protection organisations to consider viz:

- 1) Adopt a new approach to social protection reform that includes crisis proofing in addition to the on-going structural and parametric initiatives – an approach that works at predicting the unpredictable and delivering an appropriate economic and social response.
- 2) Address intergenerational fairness within the social protection system as a matter of urgency. As populations age, there is increasing potential for social spending to be skewed towards the elderly at the expense of youth. Long term unemployment within the youth cohort has potentially much wider social ramifications than failing to fully finance rising health costs.
- 3) Wholeheartedly embrace new technology such as analytics, social media and mobile solutions to drive better social outcomes with benefits individuals and society as a whole.



The ongoing reform of social protection that must occur will happen against a backdrop of ever increasing social media and mobility adoption by society at large. Re-calibrating the citizen centric model in line with the new levels of empowerment these will bring will be an essential component for achieving greater social and economic participation.

Empowering the Homeless

One of the most disadvantaged and disempowered groups in our modern societies are the homeless. Homelessness is a much wider issue than the rough sleepers we see on our streets at night. Homelessness for many people is a combination of social determinants and health related issues. For too many people, homelessness means moving from house to house - “couch-surfing” or from refuge to refuge or spending nights in cars and other temporary places. It can mean a combination of all of the above including time on the streets. Homelessness is not something that can be solved easily and it is often well beyond the remit of a single government agency.

In researching the literature on empowering the homeless through digital means, we came across a blog by Margaret Rock written for Culture Club where she said:ⁱⁱⁱ

When it comes to making difficult economic choices, cell phones are the last refuge, likely because mobile phones are relatively easy to get, especially when compared to a landline, car, house or job. And connections enabled by mobile devices can give disenfranchised populations a sense of community while they work to rebuild. A cell phone offers a cheap way to communicate, and even a very basic Internet access can connect them to a wealth of information and resources. On a larger scale, a mobile device is a tether between a homeless person and the larger fabric of society, keeping them from falling into the pale and completely in the margins.

In the blog she referred to research by the University of Dayton’s Art Jipson, Associate Sociological Professor. Jipson documented how the homeless are turning to social media and finding equality, dignity and a way to improve their situation. Jipson found social media can be a place for the homeless to interact without being judged. As one person said, “No one on the ‘net cares if I didn’t get a shower yesterday or smell some.”^{iv}

Research by Lemos and Crane in the UK published in 2013^v supports this view. They reported:

Digital technology is increasingly ubiquitous in the lives of people in the UK. Yet the power of digital technology has not yet been fully harnessed by those working with homeless and vulnerable people. Theories that predict that homeless people will be increasingly excluded as technology becomes more important underestimate the ability of many homeless people to access and use digital technology. 70% of homeless people now own a mobile phone. Many use computers, smart phones and laptops to blog, chat, network and play. Homeless people can be engaged and empowered to use digital technology. This technology can enable vulnerable



people to voice their opinions, enhance their capabilities and facilitate communication. In turn it can be used to personalise and improve service provision.

There was a time late last century where the focus on the digital divide led to a new dimension within the definition of the “haves” and “have not” based on the level of access to computers and the internet. Over time the digital divide debate has matured with the focus now raised to social inclusion and social exclusion with access to technology as an enabling feature. What is emerging from this example of the homeless is that access to technology and the provision of appropriate services via that technology is an important component of socially inclusive policy making. It is not so much now a question of whether socially disadvantaged can access technology, it is a matter of whether the right services (i.e. business applications) are available in a digital environment to promote social inclusion.

The following Huffington post article from 2011 is further evidence of the trend amongst homeless youth towards reliance on mobile phones. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/21/homeless-teens-cell-phones_n_1163106.html

Gamification and Empowerment

In Working Paper Number 2 we highlighted Gamification as having potential within the social protection industry. However we had not found evidence during our workshops or interviews of social protection organisations actively pursuing this area. A reviewer pointed us to some examples of where gamification techniques are being used and some relevant literature.

Training for child protection case workers: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspsr/ccp/game/>

Training for people with Asperger's disease to cope with typical situations in a workplace: <http://www.ispectrum.eu/>

Experiences for unemployed youth: <http://unemploymentquest.com/>

A 2013 report from the European Commission into the potential of digital games for empowering people at risk of social exclusion stated^{vi}:

*The use of digital games and gaming is starting to show **potential in addressing issues of policy concern** including wellness and aging, education and employability of poor learners, improved quality of training and skill development in industry, and civic participation. The development of an industry providing services and products is also promising in terms of growth, and in improving the effectiveness of public services and interventions by third sector intermediaries to enable social inclusion.*



Digital gaming was described as having the potential to:

- Support disengaged and disadvantaged learners and enhance employability and integration into society
- Promote health and well-being
- Foster civic participation and community-building.

This European Commission report addresses the relationship between social inclusion, social exclusion and empowerment. The report examines digital empowerment as way of enabling people to move from social exclusion to social inclusion. Social inclusion policies aim to enable people to do what is important to them, to grow as competent subjects who have control over their lives and surroundings.^{vii}

The report noted a European Council view of empowerment as to “gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live”^{viii}. The use of social media and having access to mobility based technology are now mainstream in most countries and are considered normal activities for people of working age in the labour market. It therefore follows that the empowered social citizen is making use of social media and mobility when they are within the social protection systems in the same manner as they would be if they were in the formal labour market.

Concluding Comments

So what have we found and what does it all mean. Well it came as no surprise that social protection organisations around the world are turning to social media and mobility solutions. But that was not the purpose of this research as we knew this was going to be the case. What we found at a superficial level was the differences from organisation to organisation were more a matter of timing with some agencies concentrating on their online service strategies and individualised account models before embracing social media and mobility solutions.

What we were really looking for was a compelling *raison d'être* for actively pursuing a social media and mobility strategy within the social protection industry, over and above the fact that every other industry is doing it and it seemed at face the value the right thing to do. The research is revealing several themes that provide the basis for ongoing research and development by social protection organisations into the use of social media and mobility based solutions. These themes will be expanded upon in the final report viz:



- A new relationship model to address the power imbalance implicit within the traditional model of social protection service delivery
- A rethink on the model of citizen centricity - from government provisioning services geared to the needs of the citizen to the citizen deciding which services they need and the manner they will purchase and consume them (self-directed funding models)
- The rise of the empowered social citizen leveraging networks of trusted sources to enable them to live their lives as active participants of society whether they are in or out of the labour market
- Enabling the empowered social citizen represents socially inclusive policy making – the empowered social citizen using social media and mobility based solutions is behaving as they would be in the formal labour market. This requires a new model of trust between social protection agencies and the people they serve
- Trust in government will rise from a less interventionist role by government as people rely more on their communities of interest for their trusted sources of information – they will then participate in these communities in a manner more akin to how they would operate if they were in the formal labour market, thereby leading to better social outcomes
- Mobility solutions including the Internet of Things of will provide government with the data needed to enhance the planning, development, deployment and evaluation of social policy in line with dynamic social and economic conditions. More importantly this data will enable government to take a less interventionist role in delivering the social protection system through empowered social citizens, while having the capability to intervene when necessary and where it can add value in achieving better social outcomes.

At the beginning of this research project, the aim was to examine nine subject areas, as shown in the diagram below.





The research is revealing a majority of social protection organisations focusing towards the left hand side - the organisational view. The organisational view focuses more on internal staff needs (mobile case workers) and using social media for publishing and communication. Our interpretation and analysis of the emerging trends suggest the focus will soon shift towards the community view on the right hand side:

- Empowered consumers (citizens) living their lives better equipped to cope with social risks (citizens)
- Less interventionist government as the policy cycle is optimised with real time evaluation and targeting using big data analysis techniques – this includes data collected from social media and the Internet of Things
- A co-production approach based on social media and digital interaction between citizens and their social protection agencies for achieving empowered social citizens and less intervention by government in people’s lives.

Stay tuned for the final report to be launched at the IBM Health and Human Services Summit in Washington DC October 20-21. The report will be made available online soon after at <http://www-ibm.com/curam-research-institute>

References and Endnotes

ⁱ Lee-Archer B (2013) Excellence in service quality – current strategies and future challenges - ISSA World Forum, Doha

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ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.2machines.com/articles/162649.html>

^{iv} See : http://www.udayton.edu/news/articles/2012/08/art_jipson_facebook_marxism.php

^v Lemos & Crane (2013) *The potential for empowering homeless people through digital technology - A preliminary literature review* Lemos & Crane, London

^{vi} Stewart et al (2013) *The Potential of Digital Games for Empowerment and Social Inclusion for Groups at Risk of Social and Economic Exclusion. Evidence and Opportunity for Policy* European Commission Luxembourg

^{vii} Makinen, M. (2006). *Digital empowerment as a process for enhancing citizens’ participation*. E-learning, 3(3), 381-395.

^{viii} Council of the European Union (2004) *Joint report by the Commission and the Council on social inclusion 7101/04*