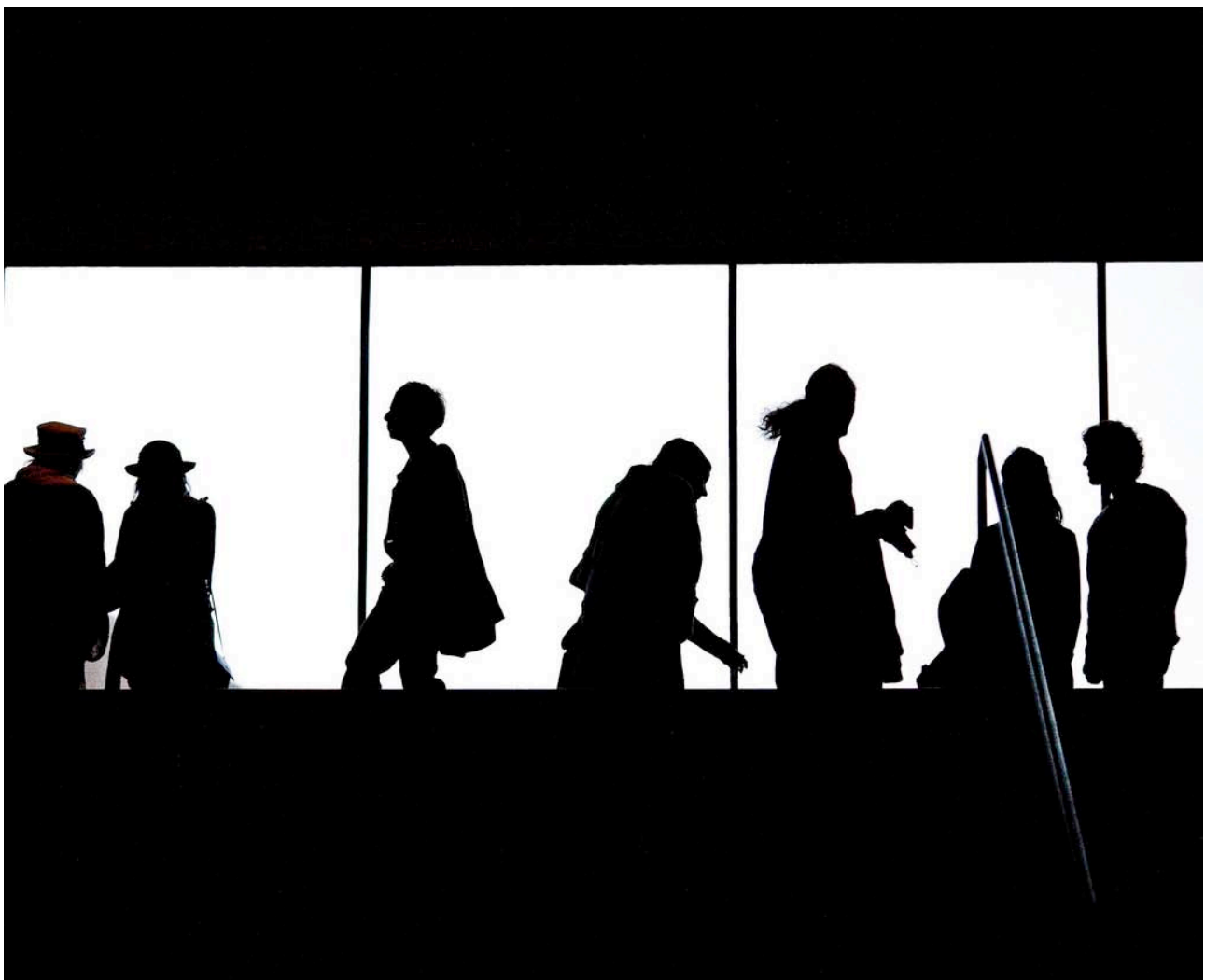# UPGRADING DEMOCRACY

INSIGHT EDITION

CENTRE FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT, 2009

ABOUT INSIGHT

InSight is the online journal of the Centre for Policy Development. Each edition unpacks a complex issue for a general audience, presenting hard-hitting policy analysis and ideas in a collection of punchy, plain-English articles and essays. *InSight* aims to be a whinge-free zone – we challenge our authors and our readers to go beyond criticism of current government policies by proposing viable alternatives. Catch up on past issues of *InSight* at http://cpd.org.au/insight

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This edition of *InSight* looks at 'Upgrading Democracy': the need to open up access to government information and to harness online tools to increase citizens' influence over the decisions that affect their lives. Each essay in this compilation represents the author's own opinion – comments made by individual authors do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Centre for Policy Development or vice versa. This edition is also available to read and discuss at http://cpd.org.au/insight/upgrading-democracy and a version of it has been submitted to the Government 2.0 Taskforce – see http://gov2.net.au/submissions/received/

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) is a progressive think tank dedicated to seeking out creative, viable ideas and innovative research to inject into Australia's policy debates. Our work combines big picture thinking about the future of government with practical research on options for policy reform. We give a diverse, cross-disciplinary community of thinkers space to imagine solutions to Australia's most urgent challenges and we connect their ideas with policy makers, media and concerned citizens. The CPD is a non-profit organisation, and donations to our research fund are tax deductible. If you'd like to join the CPD supporters or hear about future CPD publications go to http://cpd.org.au

CPD AND DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

The best-designed policy in the world is meaningless without a healthy democracy. The Centre for Policy Development recognises that we need to strengthen and evolve Australian democracy so that it can fulfill its original purpose: giving us the power to shape the decisions that affect our lives. Australia was once regarded as the 'social laboratory' of the world - we led the march for women's suffrage in the late 19th century, developed new forms of public institutions at arm's length from executive government, and gave the world the 'Australian ballot'. Our Democratic Renewal program provides a platform for CPD fellows and others to research ways in which Australia can revive this reforming legacy and lead the world in democratic innovation. As part of this, we are hosting an ongoing discussion on Upgrading Democracy – looking at how to use the internet to improve access to the information citizens need to scrutinise politics and policy, and to dramatically increase participation in policy debate. http://cpd.org.au/category/all-articles/democratic-renewal

HELP US MAKE CPD A 2.0 THINK-TANK

The Centre for Policy Development, which originated from an online policy portal, is very interested in expanding the circle of citizens involved in the research and development of policy ideas. Our new Sustainable Economy Ideas Index aims to apply the power of crowdsourcing to the task of making great green policy ideas easier to find and understand. We provide a creative-commons licensed rss feed of regular 'Thinking Points' on current policy debates at http://cpd.org.au/thinking-points. As far as we can tell, we're the only think tank in the country that enables comments on our policy papers. But our website, frankly, needs help. We'd like your ideas on how to improve it at http://cpd.org.au/blog/cpd-two-point-zero. Even more, we'd like to put your web skills to work on our wishlist of interesting thinktank2.0 projects: http://cpd.org.au/volunteer. And if you don't have time for either, we'd love you to consider making a donation to the cause at http://cpd.org.au/donate.

UPGRADING DEMOCRACY

Contents

Editor: Fiona Cameron

Editorial Team: Thanks for the marvellous editorial efforts of Antoinette Abboud, Reged Ahmed, Sophie Howlett, Miriam Lyons, Kate Miller, and Marisa Wikramanayake

Foreword

Lindsay Tanner, Minister for Finance

The Australian Government, like governments around the world, is facing three intersecting trends which have significant implications for its public agencies and decision makers. The range and depth of the challenges faced by government is expanding. The resource base with which to meet these challenges is dwindling. And citizens' expectations of their involvement in solving these challenges is changing fundamentally.

The Government 2.0 agenda is a way of thinking, through a technological frame, about how to adapt our government in light of these trends. It is a way of thinking about how to make government smarter, cheaper, and more informed, responsive and engaged. It is a way of thinking about reorganising government organisations and people to be more focussed on citizens and on public value.

It is an ambitious reform project because it touches on big and disparate agendas – the efficiency, transparency and innovation agendas – and thinks about how to connect them in meaningful ways.

The issues involved here are subtle and often not amenable to 'top down' direction. Indeed, as the Government 2.0 Taskforce's Issues Paper made clear, at a high level we already know what many of the answers are.

Government information is currently secret unless a specific decision has been taken to be open. We need to reverse that presumption so that openness is the norm unless there is a compelling reason to remain closed.

But the devil is in the detail. While the Australian government co-authored and signed OECD principles which endorse this approach towards openness, we are still a long way from working through all the institutional issues that must be addressed to realise it.

For that reason the Government 2.0 Taskforce has been set up to filter the government 2.0 agenda into a practical set of demonstration projects, tools, advice and actions for the Commonwealth.

The Taskforce has an investment fund to support projects which demonstrate the value of the two sides of the government 2.0 coin – online engagement and opening up access to public sector information. This is important because for those who doubt the benefits of government 2.0 a good example is often more persuasive than theoretical explanation of potential benefits.

The Taskforce has been engaging vigorously with Australia's government 2.0 community. As a natural consequence of its brief the Taskforce has sought to conduct much of this engagement online, including through charting the development of its thinking through regular blog posts by members, and making a number of its key discussion papers open to early 'beta' review by the community. I both hope and suspect that this will become the norm for government inquiries.

As you read the submissions in this thoughtful compilation I'd like to you to keep in mind the following thought. For government, embracing the 2.0 agenda is a little bit like embracing a new language. Even strong enthusiasm for learning must be tempered with the realisation that the language cannot be mastered overnight. Inevitably there will be early errors of understanding and expression – errors that can seem almost inexplicable to those who can speak the language fluently!

The Government 2.0 Taskforce is the translator and language instructor for government on the 2.0 agenda. Its job is to sweep across government, highlighting the star performers, cajoling the laggards, and improving the fluency of government on the suite of issues which carry the 2.0 badge.

Contributions like those found in the following pages are crucial to this effort. They demonstrate the government 2.0 truism that the community is served better when the insights and efforts of citizens can be used to broaden what we mean by the public service.

Lindsay Tanner is the Federal Member for Melbourne and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation in the Rudd Labor Government. He has been the Member for Melbourne since 1993 and in opposition held a range of shadow ministerial positions. Lindsay holds Bachelor degrees in Arts and Laws, a Masters of Arts degree and has written numerous books and articles on social, labour, and economic issues, including a weekly blog for Fairfax's Business Day website. Lindsay is committed to social justice and regularly participates in a range of forums on social issues.

Introduction

Martin Stewart Weeks

Government 2.0 is a label whose convenience should not detract from the significance of the changes it implies. It heralds a sustained process of innovation that will change the way we govern.

It's easy, given its origins in the world of technical and social networking, to get the impression that the ideas and potential changes with which it is associated are (a) largely the domain of super geeks and (b) ephemeral, easily dismissed as niche or even perhaps a passing fad.

As the essays in this collection demonstrate, nothing could be further from the truth.

The ideas, examples and advice they present are increasingly the engine for a larger endeavour that is creating new ways to govern, lifting our chances of solving the big dilemmas, and making the most of the big opportunities, with which we are faced. We will find ourselves, in the process, 'rebooting' government and 'upgrading' democracy and, as a consequence, refreshing our public culture with new sources of trust and legitimacy.

The essays here touch on pretty much every dimension of this venture.

There are technologies to learn and infrastructure to build. There are new behaviours to absorb and some old behaviours to discard. There are large and demanding agendas of institutional, organisational and administrative change to be conceived, to be designed and then patiently to be lead and sustained, often in turbulent and unpredictable conditions. It's a project that has to be prosecuted at every level – political, intellectual, moral, technological, professional, administrative and organisational – pretty much at the same time.

But at its heart, the Government 2.0 venture is a project whose success is going to depend on changes that will be, in many cases, emotionally confronting. They will challenge much of the received wisdom about what it is to be a good public servant, how to be a successful and effective politician and Minister and, just as importantly, how to be an engaged and effective citizen. They will ask interesting questions about civil society and about our collective capacity to accelerate the velocity of innovation in our policy and governance processes. And they will pose demanding questions too about the definition and distribution of power, authority and control, offering some exciting but unsettling answers at times. They will introduce new dilemmas about accountability and performance.

Embarking on these changes is an imperative about which we don't seem to have much choice.

The range and complexity of the tangled challenges that crowd the policy agenda are putting existing institutions and aspects of their associated culture and business processes under severe stress. We're beginning to learn that we can't afford to leave any source of insight, innovation and invention out of the mix, either within or outside government. Social technologies of communication and collaboration will increasingly create new tools and platforms that will render our public governance and policy models both more expert and more democratic. They will be enabled and often accelerated by renewed instincts, and a range of new practical methods, for openness, participation and transparency.

But perhaps the most exciting dimension of these remarkable and sometimes uncomfortable challenges is the opportunity they offer for Australia to reinforce and, in some cases to recapture its reputation as a world leader in public innovation. A bit of leadership and imagination coupled with the kind of invention and solid, practical advice captured in the essays presented here, will give us a good chance to turn that ambition to reality.

About the Author

Martin Stewart-Weeks has over 20 years' experience in organisational management and consulting in the corporate and public sectors and with a wide range of not-for-profit organisations. Martin has held senior policy, management and advisory positions for Ministers and government agencies at the federal and state government level in Australia. In his current work with the Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG) at Cisco, Martin works at the senior executive and political level to help shape Internet business solutions and online strategies at both an agency and whole-of-government level. Martin chairs a small working group of people from the corporate, public and community sectors who are establishing the Australian Social Innovation Exchange (ASIX). The Exchange is part of a global network of thinkers and practitioners combining to lift the rate and impact of social innovation as a major contributor to sustainable prosperity. Martin is also a member of the Government 2.0 Taskforce. He writes here in his personal capacity.

UPGRADING DEMOCRACY: OPENING WINDOWS

Miriam Lyons

The night before the Government 2.0 Taskforce was announced, I joined a group of other Gov 2.0 enthusiasts at a Canberra laksa house to chat about the following day's #publicsphere on Open Government - the second in a series of innovative consultation events hosted by Senator Kate Lundy. Along with a chance to eat the largest noodle soup in the history of Canberran cuisine, I also had the opportunity to gripe about something that had bugged me for a while - the appalling state of most government inquiry websites. Why, I asked, is it so hard to build a website that provides more than a long list of downloadable PDF submissions? The website of the Henry Tax Review[1] is a classic example. The tax review is one of the most important inquiries held by the Rudd Government so far, with over a thousand submissions. Yet a member of the public who wants to find out what ideas other people have submitted about the future of Australia's tax system has nothing more to go on than the fact that 'AAFCIS', 'ACT Peak Oil' and 'Adams, James' made submissions that are 1.2MB, 51KB and 9KB in size, in November, May and April.

On the bus home the next day, reflecting on the inspiring ideas of the #publicsphere presenters and on Lindsay Tanner and Joe Ludwig's encouraging words on the role of the new Taskforce, one of my fellow noodle-eaters tweeted to ask the name of the inquiry I'd been complaining about. He then proceeded to scrape the PDFs from the url I sent him, and turned them into a searchable database at http://ray.haleblian.com/taxreview/index.html.[2] It's a pretty basic site, but overnight, purely for the hell of it, Ray Haleblian transformed an obscure, inaccessible mountain of data into something that is just that little bit easier for an interested citizen to use.

Beyond FOI: why open access is important

The federal government's proposed Freedom of Information (FOI) reforms will narrow the 'Cabinet in Confidence' exemption so that it only applies to documents actually prepared for Cabinet and not, for example, documents piled on a trolley and wheeled through the cabinet room. This is just one example of the importance of stronger FOI laws to protect citizens' right to know what their governments are doing. However, in the long run, we may find that it is not the Freedom of Information bill itself that has the strongest impact, but the publication scheme that goes with it.

Describing the new publication scheme, then Special Minister of State John Faulkner said that it would: 'not only encourage, but mandate, agencies to publish what they can lawfully publish...the publication scheme aim(s) to change the emphasis – from agencies defining their publication of information by what is required, to a culture of openness where information is made available unless it is against the public interest to do so.'[3] There are some flaws in the draft FOI bill[4] that is to establish the scheme, but if these flaws can be fixed, it will represent a giant leap forward in what is becoming known as 'open access government'.

When I raved about the need for open access government in the 'open government and media' group of last year's 2020 summit, I found myself getting a lot of blank looks from FOI advocates. So it's probably worth spelling out the difference between FOI and open access.

Think of FOI as the ability to knock on the front doors of parliament house and demand access to documents that you've guessed are contained inside. Now think of open access as a parliament house that leaves its windows open so you don't need to knock, and you don't need to guess - all the information on which governments base their decisions, or that they gather in the course of doing their job, is there to be seen. There will still be some locked and curtained windows labelled 'private', but openness will be the default.

The work of people like Ray Haleblian demonstrates one important principle of open access.[5] It is not enough for data to be released - it should also be released in a way that is accessible, useful and re-usable. He also demonstrated the fact that when data is available, there are many people who are willing and able to transform it in ways that are helpful for other citizens. The following articles explore the challenge of making use of this energy by building open-access principles into the heart of government.

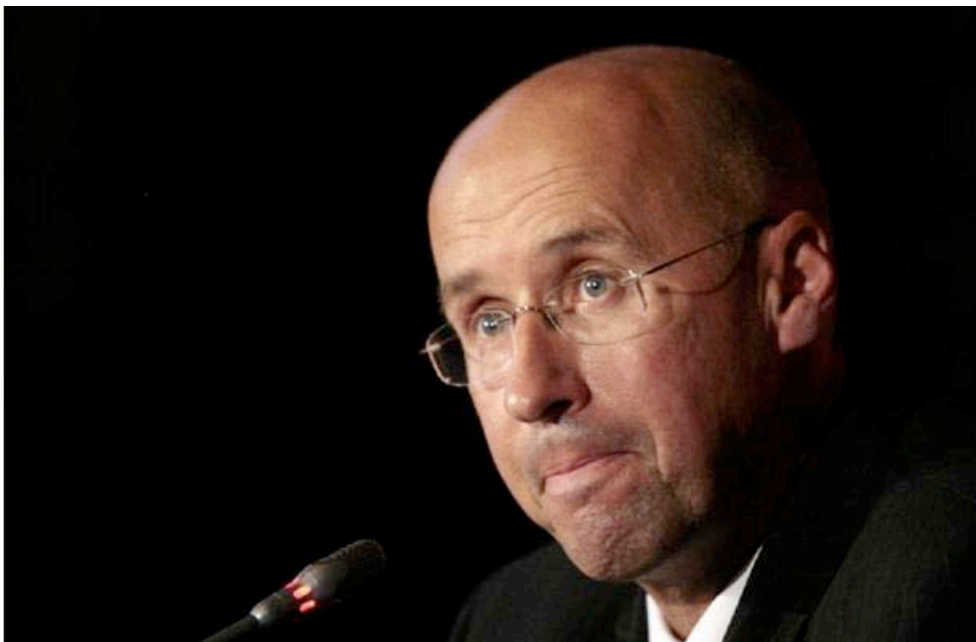[1] http://taxreview.treasury.gov.au/content/Content.aspx?doc=html/submissions.htm
[2] http://ray.haleblian.com/taxreview/index.html
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Promise versus Practice: The Dilemma of Open Government

Michael Richardson

Meet Kevin Page. He is the Parliamentary Budget Officer in Canada. An energetic, smart and dedicated man, Page is one of the linchpins of accountability and transparency in Canada. His job is to prepare reports and analysis for Parliament on the effect and cost of federal government initiatives.

That job exists because the then-opposition Conservatives, handed scandal and corruption in the final years of the previous Liberal government, campaigned on accountability and transparency. They won and created the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO). Now they want to shut it down.

In other words, Kevin Page personifies the dilemma of open government.

His first major report, in September 2008, on the cost of Canada's war in Afghanistan, put the full figure around $18 billion – above government claims.[1] Since then, he has revealed dodgy economic forecasting by the government, poorer than claimed economic performance and problems with auto sector bailout proposals.[2] He does his job fearlessly and well.

Therein lies the rub. Promising more open government is easy on the campaign trail, but putting promise into practice? That presents unique challenges for most governments.

The blunt tool once used to pound opponents can, in power, suddenly become a double-edged sword. It's now *your* inner workings on display, *your* mistakes under the microscope and *your* decisions made more accountable.

Ask Kevin Page what that can mean. Requests for PBO work can come from any Member of Parliament or a Parliamentary Committee. It's been excellent for democracy in Canada, providing the opposition parties with top-notch, credible critiques of government action. Less helpful for the government.

So much less helpful, in fact, that the PBO's good work has prompted its muzzling. Starved of funds, its functions curtailed, the PBO and Kevin Page are testament to the fact that governments are not always comfortable being open.[3]

That's why, as the Rudd Government's Task Force on 'Government 2.0' steps firmly into this territory, it's worth stepping back from the nitty-gritty task of implementing new tools for open government. As the experience of other countries shows, the big picture is rife with challenges.

Parties mostly campaign on things they want to do: reform education, tackle climate change, cut taxes, etc. In power, if their implementation is fumbled, those policies can reflect badly on the government. Openness (including accountability and transparency) is about introducing a new dynamic into the operation of government itself.

Openness can make life tough. Transparency opens the door to criticism; ending secrecy increases risk and exposure; accountability means being held accountable.

The reflexive progressive response is to recognize the obviousness of these claims and nevertheless assert the need for the principle to triumph. It's thus tempting to dismiss Prime Minister Harper as having a penchant for secrecy, much like his political role model John Howard.

Such an analysis isn't helpful. It fails to recognize the pressures and dynamics at play in putting promises of open government into practice.

One clear factor is that the pay-offs from increased accountability are often deferred: avoiding scandal and corruption; increasing citizen and civil society engagement; making it tougher for the opposition to wield the same blunt tool of 'no accountability, no transparency'. All benefits, but ones that can feel distant to a new and surely-virtuous government. By contrast, the risk of mistakes and negative stories overwhelming the government's message and narrative seems immediate.

Given the dominant role of communications and media staff in many political offices, it's not surprising that short-termism dominates. The prevention of immediate damage is often more highly valued than potential long-term benefits. In a media culture transfixed by scandal, openness in action can seem like a very big risk to spin doctors, press secretaries and strategists.

Another dynamic is illustrated by President Obama's efforts on transparency. After the secrecy and unaccountability that characterized the Bush years, committing to greater openness was a political no-brainer for candidate Obama.

Obama had the credentials to back it up, having sponsored the 'Google for Government' legislation that made large quantities of US federal government material accessible online.[4] To his credit, President Obama *has* acted to increase transparency – but he's also drawn significant criticism on the liberal left for failing to live up to his ideals.

In many areas of open government, Obama's efforts have been admirable. The White House's 'Open Government Initiative' is well underway. Over several months, and with buy-in from multiple agencies, the White House developed and improved sites like http://data.gov and http://usaspending.gov to bring about new levels of access and transparency.[5] Openness on government operations is certainly making strides under Obama.

In contrast, under pressure from the intelligence and military communities, he refused to release photographic and other evidence of American torture during 'war on terror' interrogations. Despite rescinding many Bush Executive Orders on secrecy, he has quietly maintained a similar attitude to secrecy and even threatened to veto expanded intelligence briefings to Congressional leaders.[6]

For Obama, the pressure to retain strong secrecy in a national security context is evidently having its effect. At least in the security sphere, the best intentions for transparency can run aground.

Laying the accountability groundwork early – and continuing to build on it – is smart policy. If the inertia in party rooms and civil services can be overcome it will pay dividends, especially in the long term, as long as it isn't wound back like Canada's Parliamentary Budget Office, or allowed to grow rusty and inefficient like freedom of information in Australia.

The UK's Labour Party is no doubt ruing its failure to ensure greater transparency in MP spending. If all MP and House of Lord expenses had been made public automatically, would any have been so foolish as to bill taxpayers for moat cleaning, duck houses and adult films?

The obstacles are obvious. Accountability can create discomfort for governing parties, like the PBO's exposure of overly optimistic forecasting in Canada's 2009 budget.[7] There can be internal pressures to limit open government. Administrative challenges, institutional resistance from politicians and civil servants, and competing priorities can all push back. Governments also possess finite resources and finite energy. New governments are still learning the ropes. Old governments rarely have the appetite for reform. Crises, economic and otherwise, consume the attention of policymakers and the public.

The media, although reliant on access to information laws for investigation, doesn't find transparency sexy unless it's accompanied by corruption or scandal. This can be a blessing – the issues are not muddied by a stream of mindless punditry – and a curse – lack of popular pressure for accountability.

Does all of this mean the case is hopeless? That greater transparency should not be a priority for Australia? Absolutely not.

Advocates should continue to apply pressure. Solutions should be proposed. Tools developed. Ideas put forward.

Open government currently has a momentum of its own that should be capitalised on.

Government websites make accessing information far easier than ever before. Incremental steps forward, like the UK site http://direct.gov.uk that provides people with a single port of call for government services, are a sign of progress. In fact, such initiatives, simple as they are, help transform open government from an abstract concept into a helpful reality for citizens.

Stronger and more efficient freedom of information processes, independent watchdogs and parliamentary budget offices all strengthen democracy and hold governments to account.

What matters is building a culture of openness that works with, rather than against the processes of governance. Accountability needs to produce better government, not simply slower government.

For a strong, confident and popular government the price of delivering on the promise of accountability and openness is worth paying.

Let's hope the Rudd government puts its promises into practice and doesn't offer watered down accountability instead. With little to lose, now is the time for this government to act.

Otherwise open government in Australia, no matter how many nifty technologies are developed, will end up like Canada's Kevin Page: marginalised, starved of resources and on the chopping block.

About the Author

Michael Richardson lives in Ottawa, Canada. He has an MSc International Relations from the London School of Economics and suspects he is the only Australian speechwriter in Canadian politics. He worked for Maxine McKew on the 2007 Australian federal election.

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Case Study: South Australia's Plan for Open Access Government

Amy King

In the wake of Britain's recent expenses scandal, 'transparency' has become a new buzzword in British politics. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has appointed Sir Tim Berners-Lee, one of the creators of the World Wide Web, to help open up public access to government data collected by taxpayer-funded agencies. At the same time, Opposition Leader David Cameron has argued that the public has a 'right to data', and has pledged that a Tory government would openly publish statistics on crime, education and healthcare. Britain's newfound passion for government transparency is laudable, even if a scandal over lack of transparency lies at the heart of all this talk. It begs the question, would a government ever freely choose to open up access to government data – even the negative stuff – unless forced to by public pressure or scandal?

While it might be tempting to say no, the reality is that, here in Australia, one government has freely chosen to experiment with open access government. In 2004, the South Australian state government introduced a whole-of-state Strategic Plan for South Australia.[1] On paper, this hardly seems revolutionary. Governments create sweeping policy proposals everyday. Like other strategic plans, this one included policy objectives and specific targets to be achieved in a range of social, economic and environmental areas.

South Australia's Strategic Plan was, however, different. First, data transparency was at the heart of the Strategic Plan. South Australia's Premier, Mike Rann, vowed that the state's performance against a range of targets would be measured by an independent group of experts every two years, and their findings publicly released. Second, the Strategic Plan purposefully set about changing the nature of the interaction between the people and the politicians, the community and bureaucracy. These two features make South Australia's Strategic Plan an important step towards genuine Government 2.0, but how have they worked in practice?

In 2006, the South Australian government updated the first iteration of its Strategic Plan. This process turned what was essentially a top-down, government-led policy initiative into something far more reminiscent of Government 2.0. The state government appointed a team of independent auditors to publicly report on how the government was doing against approximately 80 different targets. Statistics on areas such as homelessness, business growth, statewide Aboriginal mortality and the health of the River Murray were published, and it became clear where South Australia was succeeding, failing, or doing nothing at all. From there, the government called on members of the community to help decide where South Australia wanted to be as a state, and what we had to do to get there. Almost 2000 South Australians took part in community consultations, wrote emails or sent text messages to contribute to the policy-making process.

Since 2006, South Australia's experiment with open access government has had mixed results. The process of creating, revising and enacting South Australia's Strategic Plan has been accompanied by some important shifts in government thinking. Opening up access to government data and trusting the community to help come up with, and implement, government policy is a scary thing for politicians and bureaucrats. Tanya Smith, Deputy Chief Executive of South Australia's Department of Premier and Cabinet, told me that:

> 'There was a fair amount of fear in the government about the risk of sharing data with the community, when that data revealed less than ideal progress towards a target.'

Over time, however, Smith believes that this fear has receded noticeably, particularly because the Premier has maintained his commitment to data transparency. More importantly, Smith argues that the reliance on data—and the commitment to sharing that data—has made the government and the public service far more focused on evidence-based decision-making.

The evidence used in this decision-making has been made publicly-available in statistical reports[2] on South Australia's performance against 98 different targets. These reports are updated every six months. Where

possible, target data is disaggregated by geographic region, gender, age and for Aboriginal South Australians. While more than half of the Plan's targets are measured using data already available in the public domain, the government also publishes administrative data held by government agencies about their programs, as well as data collected by a government-led Household Survey[3] which was initiated as part of the Strategic Plan. From the perspective of an outsider looking into government, one of the most important outcomes is that members of the community no longer have to trawl through a myriad of reports and websites to find data on South Australia's key social, economic and environmental indicators.

Has this new access to data actually reshaped governance in South Australia? Government 2.0 represents a shift in implementing policy, so that those on the outside have real ability to communicate, collaborate and participate in decision-making. Those who have led South Australia's Strategic Plan are the first to acknowledge that community collaboration still has a long way to go. Smith told me that:

> 'The tricky bit always comes with seeking ongoing community involvement but not being able to necessarily fund that engagement. We are counting on the concepts of shared interests and goals to keep people on board and sometimes that isn't enough.'

While South Australia's Strategic Plan has created mechanisms for community involvement in developing and achieving state targets, the government freely admits that they have still chosen to place government at the centre of the Plan.

In addition, although the Strategic Plan has taken important steps in opening up data and decision-making processes, the Plan is short on targets relating to transparency in general. The first iteration of the Strategic Plan included a measure on improving the transparency of government decision-making. Today, however, the Strategic Plan measures only the transparency of government decisions which have an impact on the business community. While it is clear that the South Australian government has made a broad commitment to opening up the process of governance in South Australia, there is always the risk that this commitment might wane without a formal measure of the government's progress on transparency itself.

Yet from the perspective of a community member who has been closely involved with the Strategic Plan, I would argue that South Australia's experiment with open access government has been remarkably successful in three particular ways.

First, by actively seeking out the contribution of the public and non-government sector, the South Australian government demonstrated a fundamental respect for knowledge and experience held outside the bureaucracy. That respect increased when the government accepted virtually all of the community's recommendations about the targets that should be included in the Plan and how they should be achieved. It is also worth remembering that the Strategic Plan has teeth; success or failure in meeting targets is published openly. Furthermore, the departmental Chief Executives must report to the Premier and Cabinet on how far they've come in achieving targets such as increasing the use of public transport, reducing the proportion of low birthweight babies, or raising the proportion of young people enrolled to vote.

Second, South Australia has experienced an attitudinal shift about the benefits of open access government. Quite simply, the government cannot achieve the Strategic Plan's targets on its own. Improving the health of South Australians, for example, does not only require the provision of government-funded healthcare services. It is arguably more important that South Australia finds ways to ensure that individuals take their own preventive healthcare steps throughout life. Yet the process of working out how to make this happen cannot take place behind closed government doors. As Smith notes,

> 'If you want the community to be involved in achieving the targets, then they need to feel a sense of ownership. That only comes if they've been invited in to help design the target and its measure.'

Finally, South Australia's experiment with open access government has begun to create new opportunities for problem solving, both within and outside government. The Australian Institute for Social Research based at the University of Adelaide has expanded the data collected by South Australia's Strategic Plan to produce an ongoing study[4] on the status of women in South Australia. Similarly, the University of South Australia's Centre for Work + Life[5] has created the Australian Work and Life Index in response to the Plan's push for data on the work-life balance. Within government, the Strategic Plan's commitment to data transparency has helped to enhance problem-solving and interaction between departments and target areas. Now, as the South Australian Department of Trade and Economic Development concentrates on building the state's population growth by 2050, it must work with the government's Sustainability and Climate Division to ensure that population growth does not come at the expense of cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.

These successes have made South Australia's Strategic Plan a potential model for new forms of governance around the country. So far, the Rudd government has shown commitment to greater evidence-based policy and the use of targets in funding agreements between the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments. Yet for proponents of open access government, data transparency and ongoing community engagement

remain the most important aspects of South Australia's Strategic Plan. South Australia provides an important case study for the future of open access government in Australia.

About the Author

Amy King is a doctoral student in international relations at Oxford University and an Australian Rhodes Scholar. Amy is a former Chair of the South Australian Minister's Youth Council, a member of the youth network for Australia's National Commission to UNESCO, and she developed a mentoring network for young women in South Australia. From 2006-2007, Amy was appointed by the South Australian government to be a member of the state's Strategic Plan Update Team and Community Engagement Board. Amy holds degrees in International Relations and International Business from the University of South Australia, with dual university medals, and a master's degree in Chinese (with Distinction) from OxfordUniversity.

[1] http://saplan.org.au/component/option.com_frontpage/Itemid.1/
[2] http://saplan.org.au/content/view/149/186/
[3] http://saplan.org.au/content/view/152/184/
[4] http://www.aisr.adelaide.edu.au/gio/
[5] http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/default.asp

Case study: OpenAustralia on Practical Transparency and Gov 2.0

Katherine Szuminska

Why talk about transparency? The idea of transparency in government is often taken for granted. Transparency underpins many of the ideas of Government 2.0, but what is transparency really, what does it mean in practice and how do we go about implementing it?

Why should Government be transparent?

We want to know that a government's actions reflect the wishes of the people it represents. Transparency is the mechanism for ensuring that the elected Government is accountable to the voters. The Hansard gives us access to the Parliamentary proceedings, but it is only one small part of transparency. Discussion about government transparency to date has largely centred on requirements that Parliamentarians disclose any financial interests or influences that might result in a conflict of interest or improper influence in the political process.[1]

There are a number of reporting requirements in the Australian parliamentary system that deal with electoral processes, campaign spending, donations, personal interests and gifts to government officials. The Register of Members' Interests and Register of Senators' Interests contain information of financial interests, stocks and shares held, gifts received over a certain value, and memberships of Clubs and Associations for Representatives and Senators.[2] These are the things that are considered to have the potential to influence their behaviour in Parliament. Until OpenAustralia published both Registers online you could only view them if you visited the respective Registrars' offices where the hard copies were held. While those documents have now been scanned and are available to view online, they are originally handwritten for the most part, not machine readable, and not always legible. The information might now be there to see, but it is not easy to reuse it or cross reference with other data. Would it be too hard to have Parliamentarians update the information straight onto a publicly accessible document online? To connect disparate information sources we need to make them open to more advanced scrutiny.

If we take transparency beyond this minimum level of accountability-focused reporting, things start to get much more interesting. Giving everyone access to *all* the information that Government decision makers use to make decisions would allow for much better-informed debate and increase the possibilities for collaboration. When you know how things work the barriers to participation are lowered and you can invite others in more easily. This approach to transparency also has the benefit of allowing government departments to collaborate

more effectively with each other: it is much easier to share information with everyone than to go through the process of deciding what to share with whom.

How do we do transparency?

Becoming transparent requires organisational change, but it is not as hard or scary as you might imagine. The key is not to view it as something that you tack on to the side as a reporting necessity, but of changing the process at the core of your normal activities.

Let's see how a single everyday event in Parliament is currently made more complex by lack of a transparent process.

Recently, during a debate on climate change in the Federal Senate[3], a chart was exhibited to Senators (having previously also been circulated to Senators out of session). There followed some discussion about how to include the document in the Hansard so it could be on the public record. There was some confusion about the procedure and about whether such a document could be reproduced in the Hansard. This confusion only occurred because the process of publishing the proceedings of Parliament in the form of the Hansard is a separate process from the day to day activities of Parliament.

Let's imagine, for a moment, this alternative scenario. An MP wants to discuss a chart in Parliament. Before the sitting of the day starts, she uploads the image to a publicly accessible website which might be the official repository of all Parliamentary documents. From this website MP staffers download the documents, possibly print them out and circulate them further. In this case, the means of distribution of the chart is one and the same as the means of transparency. So, it is no more effort to make a document publicly accessible than it is to share it with other members of Parliament. In fact, it would require slightly more effort to distribute a document just to members of Parliament and not the general public.

This subtle but important shift in procedure could reinforce the idea that public accessibility is the default. Private communication would still be possible but requires a little more effort and in most cases would not be necessary.

Is Government 2.0 just about making government transparent?

No, Government 2.0 is not just about transparency. In other parts of this submission to the Taskforce, you will read that Government 2.0 is also about making government and citizen interaction more collaborative and interactive and making government services more focused on the needs of the citizen. However, transparency enables and underpins Government 2.0.

As you open up to the possibility of sharing some decision making responsibilities through Government 2.0 style collaboration, you also share some of the duty of transparency with others in the decision making process. As government becomes more transparent, organisations representing interest groups that have a legitimate claim to join in also need to become more transparent. We can start with those who already have legitimate involvement in the political process, lobbyists.

The public has a right to know who is lobbying the government and on whose behalf. As of July 2008 there is a Register of Lobbyists.[4] However, at the moment, there are a number of exemptions.[5] Companies which do not hire an external lobbying firm to work for them (e.g. those that are big enough to have lobbyists on staff), religious organisations, charities and not-for-profit advocacy organisations who claim to represent their members, can all currently lobby the government without this information appearing on the public record in the register.

The joys of being a transparent organisation

For the last 18 months, OpenAustralia.org[6] has been bringing information from the Hansard and other federal Parliamentary documents together to create a more useful way to view the proceedings of federal Parliament. OpenAustralia.org is based on the extraordinary work of the UK charity mySociety[7] that built TheyWorkForYou.com.[8] We adapted their open-source web application software to Australia.

All of the development of OpenAustralia.org to date has been done by unpaid volunteers. The purpose of OpenAustralia Foundation, as a national digital online library, is to enable sustainable continued development of the website and also to develop new exciting projects that give citizens better access to information, improving engagement in the process.

All the software that drives our website is open-source[9] including the parser code that takes data from the official Parliamentary website and repackages it into a much easier to use format, ready to be loaded into our database. We do this so that there is absolutely no question that the information on our website is impartial and non-partisan. You can be sure that we do not manipulate the data on OpenAustralia.org in any way that

gives preference to one side of a political debate over another because you can scrutinise every step of the process yourself.

We've learned an enormous amount from the open source software community.[10] We're committed to opening up our own data and sharing it. To make this as easy as possible for ourselves we're doing as much as we can electronically and online. It is usable now, but there's room for improvement as we mature as an organisation. We look for tools that make it easier for us to work openly as much as possible too.

We have our calendar on the web. We have an open ticketing system[11] for bugs and technical queries. Initially, the bug database just contained software fixes additions and improvements, but then I wanted to be able to put in the organisational tasks as an experiment to see if that worked for me as a workflow, and for others to easily see what we were doing aside from writing software. In this case it has involved some extra work, but I love that I can point immediately to anything I've been up to online. So when someone asks for an update, I can just send them a link which they can bookmark or sign up to for updates. I am currently looking for a better way to do this.

We encourage users of OpenAustralia.org to tell us what's wrong. If you send in a query to the website that goes to contact [at] openaustralia.org, this is received privately by a few core volunteers. Whether those queries show us there's a technical problem, or a chink in our website's usability, or a suggestion for a new feature, we'll create a public ticket in our bug database. This wouldn't have any reference to the individual but we'll usually let people know that if they're comfortable using that system, they can follow it themselves. So far its technical appearance seems offputting for most of our users, so we're looking for way better way to do that. Projects we're intending to do[12] and our constitution[13] are all online.

We have been developing and fostering a community of civic-minded software developers. We run an open mailing list[14] for anyone interested in the development of OpenAustralia or similar projects in Australia. Beyond initial private contact, we try to steer communication to these publicly accessible forums so that it's out in the open.

When we have meetings, we haven't recorded live conversation so far, but the text based side goes through Internet Relay Chat (IRC)[15] and, when we use it, is logged, and minutes posted online too.

Connecting our online community back out in the world, we recently held our first Hackfest in June 2009 which was kindly hosted by Google at their Sydney offices.[16] Over 40 people gave up their Saturday to work with others on cool civic-minded projects. We are currently planning two more Hackfests for the coming months, one in Sydney and one in Melbourne, and are encouraging others to hold similar events in their region.

While some of our data are still more accessible than others, as we make improvements and find better ways of bringing it all out in the open, we hope collectively it can serve to demonstrate the possibilities of a truly transparent organisation.

We're committed to full financial transparency, as we have made clear on our website.[17] On that basis we took a few small donations early on, totalling around $700. However, we did not specifically say that we would make donors' identities known, so we'll discuss that with those benefactors and make that wording clearer in future. We haven't spent any of those donations yet, but we know that in future we want to make it easy to follow any money we receive and where it goes too - follow this ticket[18] if you want to keep tabs on this issue.

So what now?

Government and non government transparency is an enabler of government 2.0 and citizen 2.0. Transparency should not make the work of governments and citizens more difficult, rather it should have practical benefits that make our shared work easier. For this to be the case it is essential that transparency is not tacked on to existing processes but becomes an integral part of working life. It should be built into our work from the outset if possible. We can all learn a lot from the open source community about how to collaborate across time and space, online and in the open.

If we make financial and other processes transparent by opening up information to public scrutiny, we can not only see how we are being influenced by financial and other forces, but also learn about our own behaviour and that of others. In doing this we can strengthen the trust in our public institutions and public commitment to the decisions made by them. In the longer term that will make it easier to improve decision making processes collaboratively, by working across departments, institutions, and communities. We open up all these possibilities by changing the way we work.

OpenAustralia is not asking anyone to do anything we're not exploring ourselves. By incorporating

transparency into our own work we hope to strike up more conversations and connections with those of you who are doing the same.

About OpenAustralia & OpenAustralia Foundation

OpenAustralia.org is the first project of the OpenAustralia Foundation. OpenAustralia Foundation is a not-for-profit charity, recently granted deductible gift recipient status as a national online library. Our aim is to support a nationwide open access public digital reference library for the purpose of making information relating to public bodies accessible and useful for all Australians.

About the Author
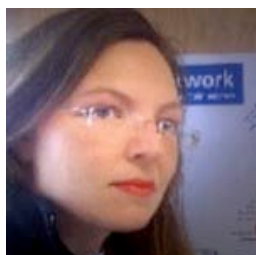
Katherine Szuminska is one of the founders of the website, OpenAustralia.org and a director of the OpenAustralia Foundation, a not for profit institution aiming to find better ways of making government, public sector and other useful information freely and easily available for the benefit of all Australians. She's also a volunteer gardener around the Blue Mountains where she lives, and very occasionally squeezes in a bit film VFX supervision. kat [at] openaustralia.org.
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[1] http://www.transparency.org.au/; http://www.democracy4sale.org/
[2] Registers of Senators' and Members' Interests entries listed under each senator and representative e.g. http://www.openaustralia.org/mp/bob_debus/macquarie#register & http://www.openaustralia.org/senator/helen_coonan/nsw#register
[3] http://www.openaustralia.org/senate/?id=2009-08-13.21.2&s=chart#g23.1
[4] http://lobbyists.pmc.gov.au/
[55] http://lobbyists.pmc.gov.au/lobbyistsregister/index.cfm?event=faq#4
[6] http://www.openaustralia.org
[7] http://www.mysociety.org/
[8] http://www.theyworkforyou.com/
[9] http://software.openaustralia.org/
[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_and_open_source_software_community
[11] http://tickets.openaustralia.org
[12] http://software.openaustralia.org/towards-the-future.html
[13] http://blog.openaustralia.org/foundation/
[14] http://groups.google.com/group/openaustralia-dev
[15] irc: irc.freenode.net/openaustralia
[16] http://blog.openaustralia.org/2009/06/15/inaugural-openaustralia-hackfest-was-terrific/
[17] http://blog.openaustralia.org/join-us/
[18] http://tickets.openaustralia.org/browse/OA-329

UPGRADING DEMOCRACY: OPENING DOORS

Miriam Lyons

There's one every election day. Sometimes you can pick them from a distance. The way she slams the car door and glances back at it once, quickly, like she needs to remember the location of her getaway vehicle. The way he approaches the entrance to the polling station crabwise, nervously avoiding eye contact. But the real giveaway is when they raise their hands above their heads and charge through the little crowd of volunteers holding how-to-votes like every card is a cudgel poised to strike if they don't run the gauntlet fast enough. As one woman confided to me on November 24, 2007 as she went in to cast her vote, 'I hate doing this'.

Why do some people hate voting? Election days should be national holidays. The weather bureau should set the date for the first hot day of Summer. Water restrictions would be eased for that one day of the year, so the kids can run through the sprinklers at the local school or town hall while their parents head in to vote, and maybe catch up for a coffee with that nice couple they met at the neighbourhood demo last week. AEC officials could run free refresher classes open to new and aspiring citizens and anyone who wagged 'applied civics' at school. And of course, everyone would be given the rest of the day and a fair slice of the following morning off work so they can follow the election results in style.

All in all, elections should be a knees-up celebration of the fact that people no longer have to be the playthings of any bloodthirsty slave-monger who decides to slap some bent metal on his head and call himself a king. In the era of the welfare state it's easy to forget that governments didn't start out as tools of the people, but as bureaucracies designed to help the powerful to serve themselves more efficiently. Our franchise was wrested from unwilling hands, and the public service - government as the public's servant - was also born from that struggle. The strongest protection for that historic achievement is a population of well-informed citizens who enthusiastically defend their right to have a say.

Despite the appeal of re-engineering election day, the best way to inspire more democratic enthusiasm has nothing to do with elections but with what happens in the intervening years. The following articles look at the second major step towards Government 2.0: opening up the doors of government and inviting citizens inside to take a more active role in the decisions that affect their lives.

It's often said that decisions get made by those who show up. Whether or not people 'show up' is influenced by how much time they have, how interested they are, how qualified they feel to participate, and whether they think that their contribution will make a difference. Obviously not everyone will want or need to participate in every decision. But we can certainly expand the pool of people who are actively involved in decision making if we're willing to open up the process and make it easier, more appealing, and more rewarding.

While they should not be a replacement for face-to-face public meetings and hard-copy publications, online tools have a number of unique advantages for increasing public participation in decision-making, many of which are outlined in the following articles:

Accessibility: online forums are often more accessible to people in remote areas or less mobile people who rarely get a chance to participate in public meetings

Engagement: some tools, such as consultation blogs, can be more informal and inviting than formal inquiries. This can inspire a wider group of people to be confident enough to contribute

Collaboration: Most consultation processes focus on the communication of groups and individuals' ideas to a central committee, with little opportunity for horizontal communication between those being consulted. There is enormous potential to use online tools to increase the quality and depth of ideas that emerge from a consultation process (see the Future Melbourne case study on page 31 for an example of how this can work).

Cost: it's cheaper to run a website than a series of public meetings. Again, this should not be an excuse for holding fewer public meetings but for having their 'virtual' counterparts more frequently.

Ease: GetUp! has demonstrated the enormous untapped energy of busy people who find it difficult to make time for traditional forms of community involvement but love having a say through a quick and simple online form.

Why is this important?

If Government 2.0 was just about making the same decisions in the same way using a different medium, none of this would be particularly exciting. What makes it exciting is that we are starting to see a much-needed upgrade of democracy's operating system - one that might be more capable of handling the increasingly complex problems we need it to solve.

Rebooting Australia?

James Dellow and Lee Bryant
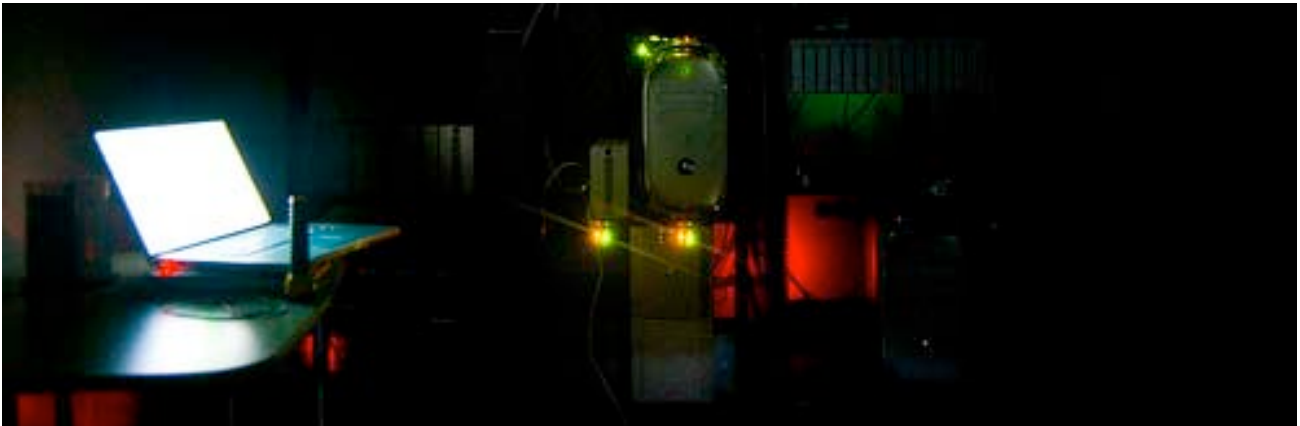
Australia's history and unique geography have both played an important role in shaping Australian society and the system of government that supports it. Building on the foundations of Britain's legal and parliamentary system, local political leaders built the institutions that eventually transformed Australia from a colony to an independent nation. They did it, however, in a way that suited their times and the task of managing a large continent. Can Australia's 20th century governance structures deliver solutions to 21st century problems?

Increasingly, distance and a relatively small population are no longer barriers to the changes that come with globalisation. Like the rest of the world, Australia now finds itself facing an array of interlinked social, economic, geo-political and environmental challenges. These challenges can only be solved if we are all part of the solution, not by governments alone. Unfortunately, the current political class has no vision that involves the people, other than as periodic voters or focus group members. This old model of government is failing to solve the difficult, complex challenges and long-term issues we are facing.

For example, the inability of the States to agree on the effective management of the Murray-Darling Basin highlights the inefficiency of the current approach and its inability to deal with complex problems[1]. One solution proposed is to centralise policy and decision making about this particular problem at a Federal level, but it is neither clear nor certain that moving the issue to a higher level of government will mean that they are any better equipped to solve it[2].

It is now time to take a serious look at how we can leverage human talent, energy and creativity to begin rebooting the Australian political system. We need to create sustainable, affordable, long-term mechanisms for public engagement. A new approach to government in the 21st Century can use the vast human resources that exist both within government and among citizens to accelerate progress, solve complex problems and help develop modern, affordable services.

Smarter, simpler, social technology has a key role to play here. Our society is capable of running itself better, and cheaper, if we trust people to be part of the solution, rather than passive 'consumers' of services who just get to swap their federal and state representatives periodically. We need to see government as an enabler or a force multiplier that can combine with the energy and resources of ordinary people to improve governance and public service delivery. This, however, also means re-balancing our expectations of government and encouraging (and possibly educating) us as citizens to be, individually and collectively, more socially responsible. Social tools supporting real conversation between government and citizens can also help people develop realistic expectations, instead of making unlimited demands (e.g. expecting a Scandinavian level of services combined with a US level of taxes).

The first thing we can do is to make better use of government spending to make it go further. Government procurement should be treated as a stimulus fund, and used to deliver social and economic benefits as well as products and services. Big ticket projects in areas such as IT, Health and Defence have a high failure rate, which is made worse by the tendency to select a large supplier and require them to spend all the money up front in one big hit. This has now been recognised in the case of the national e-health record rollout, with calls for a more pragmatic and incremental approach that targets identified areas of need first[3].

Instead, it makes more sense to adopt an investment mindset and provide seed funding to various potential suppliers (ideally community groups and small companies as well as generic corporations that specialise in outsourcing contracts), and then provide more substantial first and second round funding to those projects that show potential, until a clear winner emerges. This way, funding can be leveraged to stimulate innovation as well as deliver a service, and an iterative multi-round approach is more likely to pick winners than just handing over the whole thing in one go.

Social Innovation Camp (http://sicamp.org) is an early example of using this approach for designing Web-based solutions to real social issues. It brings together software developers, designers and social entrepreneurs to transform a set of early-stage concepts into prototype web-based tools in under 48 hours. Ultimately the aim is for the best idea to become sustainable social ventures. Social Innovation Camps have taken place in the United Kingdom and the concept is being taken to Eastern Europe (Slovakia), New Zealand, and is coming to Australia in March 2010 (http://www.asix.org.au/sicamp).

The second thing we can do is harness people power to improve existing democratic and public services. If we are to target spending on public services better, then we also need better ways of surveying and identifying need. Too many public sector bodies are created as part of a shiny new political initiative and then waste huge sums of money consolidating their own position rather than helping people, before finally being wound down after a few years.

One of the best lessons of the social web is the idea of rapid feedback-driven iteration as an evolutionary model. The launch of a service is just the beginning of a process whereby user involvement and feedback drives improvements and refinements. Giving feedback need not be onerous. There is a wealth of (often ignored) behavioural and usage data that can provide useful feedback to developers and designers, even where it needs to be anonymised. Instead of 'experts' gathering requirements, obtaining a huge budget and then spending it all in one go, this evolutionary model seeks to co-create services with users. There is a lot of good thinking emerging around concepts of service (co-)design4 in the public sector, and perhaps it is time to apply this on a bigger stage. There is both a cost and a quality rationale for citizens to participate in the process of service delivery, which implies going way beyond the current practice of occasional consultation.

For example, Patient Opinion (http://patientopinion.org.uk) is a pioneering service that provides a transparent feedback channel for patients and their families about their experiences of receiving care in the UK's public health system. For the people concerned it ensures individual complaints of poor quality care are addressed. This system can also be used to say thank you for the treatment received and much of the feedback through Patient Opinion is actually positive. However, more critically, this qualitative feedback compliments quantitative data collected by hospitals and helps to actually drive process and service improvement, rather than simply reporting that data.

In government, as in business, we suffer from organisational models that are too expensive, cumbersome and inefficient to succeed in the current climate. We need to place people above process and – assuming we have hired the right individuals and trained them well – let them get on with their job. Key to this is the introduction of simple, social tools that let people develop their own networks within organisations and use these to get things done. Corporate IT has become a blocker not an enabler and we urgently need a new, more human-scale approach to internal communications and knowledge sharing within organisations in both the private and public sector. We need flatter, more agile organisational structures instead of the stultifying middle management bureaucratic machines that exist because organisations fundamentally don't trust their own people, let alone their customers and users.

The big question, though, is how to achieve this? Despite the presence of politicians on Twitter, Australia's public institutions are unchanged, and we are still left with a government designed for the 20th century. We also lack some of the catalysts for change, like MySociety (http://www.mysociety.org/) in the UK, and our third sector is woefully under-prepared to step up to an enhanced role. In the United States, the Internet was crucial to Obama's spectacular refactoring of the US body politic, and has acted as a driver for even greater innovation in how government operates.

There are some positive signals. Initiatives like OpenAustralia (http://openaustralia.org) show that even if the government itself lacks the capability, then the Australian community is itself ready for the job of creating new people-powered structures and services. The 20th century is over, and we urgently need more scalable solutions to 21st Century problems. Harnessing people power online would be a good start.

About the Authors

Lee Bryant is an on-line social communication specialist with a strong belief in the empowering potential of the Internet. Pre-Internet, he wrote and researched in the field of International Relations, working as a media consultant for the Bosnian government in London and Sarajevo during the war. In 1996, he co-founded one of the first successful online agencies to focus on building online knowledge communities, and also helped establish the social enterprise Brixton Online, a pioneering local online community in London. Lee is on the Board of Involve, a charity that is exploring new forms of public participation – http://involve.org.uk - and the Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation – http://fstc.co.uk - that runs the Muslim Heritage project. In 2002, Lee and his team founded Headshift to focus on the emerging area of social software. Headshift is now at the forefront of the social software industry, and its clients and partners include health care bodies, government agencies, NGOs and think tanks.

James Dellow is a Senior Business & Technical Consultant at Headshift. His professional background includes experience with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), Ernst & Young, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service and Sydney's New Children's Hospital. He was awarded a Master of Business & Technology (MBT) from the University of New South Wales in 2005. However, his under-graduate qualifications are in public sector management and working at Headshift is allowing him to take an active interest in exploring the opportunities for Government 2.0 in Australia.

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[1] Transcript of interview with Senator the Hon. Penny Wong on 29 May 2009
http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2009/tr20090529.html
[2] Snatch the Murray-Darling Basin from the states to save it, Crikey, 24 July 2009,
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Making the most of collaboration - http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/makingthemostofcollaboration
The Collaborative State - http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/collaborativestatecollection
Service Design is a glossary of terms related to Service Design and contains links to further reading - http://www.servicedesign.org/
Social by Social: A practical guide to using new technologies to deliver social impact - http://www.socialbysocial.com/
Success stories from Think Public, a specialist service design consultancy - http://thinkpublic.com/success.php
Notes from the Engine, a specialist service design consultancy, on their experiences in public service design
http://www.enginegroup.co.uk/service_design/v_page/organisational_challenges_of_public_service_co_design and
http://www.enginegroup.co.uk/projects/pcs_page/building_a_social_innovation_lab

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Government 2.0: Crossing or Creating Digital Divides?

Peter John Chen
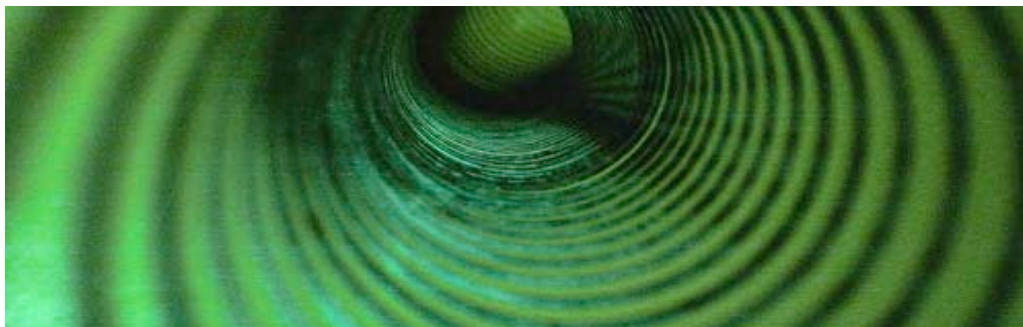
Government 2.0 is an engaging idea that reflects two distinct periods of thought: the 'classical' model of democratic practice which focuses on citizen participation and peer relationships[1], and; the modern era of public management in which organizations and public servants are expected to be more flexible and responsive to citizen's demands, and can employ technology skilfully to create 'public value'[2].

While Government 2.0 remains an elusive concept in definition and practice – hence the establishment by the Commonwealth Government of a Taskforce to examine methods to 'accelerate' its inevitable development[3] – it tends to be characterized as having three main objectives in State-centric nations like Australia[4]:

- Establishing conditions that encourage citizen participation within the sphere of government (formally and informally);
- Enabling action at the level of communities (be they physical, professional, of interest, or purely virtual) to identify and respond to social problems, and;
- Reconfiguring the administrative functions of the State to more fundamentally reflect principles of flexibility and responsiveness.

Overall, the meta-narrative of Government 2.0 is all about *boundaries*: how can we reduce those common barriers to action that inhibit our natural inclination to solve collective problems. It fits neatly with the common (but academically contested[5]) theory of 'democratic decline'[6]: that these barriers to action have disengaged communities, disconnected citizens from the State, and in doing so undermined State legitimacy and therefore capacity.

The Government 2.0 program is ambitious, aiming to solve, in its essence, the twin dilemmas of collective action and organizational agility. So it is unsurprising that the program's proponents have had problems determining the most effective method of realising the concept.[7] In the early iterations of the idea (back when it was encapsulated within the concepts of e-government or e-democracy) the program tended to focus on 90s-era change strategies: large projects aimed at 're-engineering' organizations through detailed analysis of business rules and the development of new computer systems that reflect these renewed organizational priorities and activities.

This model dominated the approach of the Commonwealth under the Howard Government. It achieved a number of initial wins (particularly in delivering administrative efficiencies and the redevelopment of information systems supporting welfare and employment services)[8] but struggled when the discussion shifted from *consumers* of government services to *citizens*. The project-oriented, top-down approach fits neatly with the automation of interactions that are highly constrained by legislative entitlements and sanctions, but is unresponsive when asked to interface with individuals who are acting in the more amorphous world of democratic practices: where the rules of the game are themselves subject to contest and debate.

Lessons are learnt, however, and the current iteration of Government 2.0 has taken on a considerably different character. Rather than seeing this form of democratically enabling governance as something to be 'delivered' by the State (programmatic e-democracy), current discussions have taken on a more pragmatic character. Individuals and organizations (State and civil society) should undertake a wide array of activities[9] to determine 'what works', with high levels of public engagement. Thus, rather than stick dogmatically to an ideological position about what emerging forms of governance should look like, the future, like the web itself,

should take an organic character. Given the 'third way'-like approach to this round of re-examination and implementation, it is unsurprising that the idea attracts support from across the political divide.

The fact that it is supported across the political divide, however, does not mean that this concept is free of ideology.

Just as the initial e-government agenda was strongly influenced by the dot.com bubble of the mid to late 1990s, the concept of Government 2.0 is shaped by its parent concept: Web 2.0. In taking inspiration from Web 2.0 to overcome the limitations of the first generation of online government initiatives, Government 2.0 also implicitly accepts some of its inherent ideological components.

The concept of Web 2.0 – less a theory than an attempt to define a transitional phase in the fast moving evolution of the internet – emerges from two recent technological developments. The first comes from the 'pull' side of the communications equation: the public's shift from dial-up to 'always on' fast broadband as the most common method of accessing the internet.[10] The second is 'push': the revitalization of web browsers and web programming that altered the internet from a comparatively static publishing medium to an interactive 'platform' for dynamic content.

The important aspect of Web 2.0 is not the breakthrough popularity of any of its 'exemplar' applications (YouTube, Flickr, Wikipedia). It is that – as Axel Bruns argues – Web 2.0 changes what's on the other side of the screens: *us*. In a 'read-write' world of amateur bloggers and citizen journalists, the new technology changes us from simple consumers of content (users skilled in navigating around the web) to '*produsers*': producer-users adept at navigation *and* creation, neither audiences nor directors.[11] *Produsers* don't just 'break the fourth wall'. That barrier is meaningless for people who'll download a popular cartoon, ironically re-edit it with dialogue from a classic 1950s red scare film, and post it back to Facebook for the enjoyment of their social network. *We* are the Media.

For me, the notion of *produsers* is reminiscent of Henrik Bang's political concept of the 'everyday maker'[12]: politically interested, but practically-minded individuals who want to have an effect at the local level and are not interested in a role in the broad scale of public life. The everyday maker is interested in affecting their local narratives and conditions, they will opt in and out of participation when they have something to add, or something to fix. Just as the *produser* asks of the web 'what can I create?' the everyday maker asks 'what can I resolve?'

It is this notion of the inventive *produser* or everyday maker that Government 2.0 wants to bring to the realm of democratic citizenship. Rather than seeing the State as a pre-determined (and increasingly unappetizing) menu of services and limited avenues for political participation (voting, party membership, pressure group activity), a Government 2.0 is one where citizens freely cross the boundary of participation in response to our concerns, interests, and abilities. Government 2.0, therefore, pushes at an open door: citizens benefit because they can act in their own interests, while the State gains access to valuable human capital. This brings legitimacy through public participation in 'collaborative governance' rather than the top-down administration of the democratically impoverished post-parliamentary democracy[13]. Government 2.0, therefore, sits at a cusp: the exponential growth seen in, say, Wikipedia articles from 2003 to 2006, could be reproduced in participative governance and co-production – if only we can reprogram or 'reboot' government in the right way.

The notion of a permeable membrane between the political and the apolitical world is not new to thinking about government structures. In the 1960s Robert Dahl introduced his notion of *homo politicus* (the politically active citizen) and *homo civicus* (the non-active citizen) in his work on pluralist politics[14]. According to Dahl's narrative, while *civicus* was largely disengaged from the political process because of an interest in their personal, professional, and domestic lives, there was no significant barrier to a member of this group entering the public sphere. This could be done by forming or joining the pressure groups and voluntary associations that are at the heart of the pluralist's view of political life. Indeed, where *civicus's* interests were substantially threatened, that form of mobilization would occur. This periodic activation (and the threat thereof) thus served as an automatic regulator of the actions of *politicus*, and the establishment of barriers to participation (money politics, policy oligopolies) was regarded as anti-democratic.

This neat 'thermostatic' model of political life became increasingly unrealistic because pressure groups did not act in the way prescribed by Dahl: shifting away from being mobilizing organizations capturing large numbers of active citizens to focusing on joining 'insider' policy cliques. Like political parties, these voluntary organizations now increasingly focus on capturing large numbers of political *donations* for the use of professional policy staff.

Complexity and expediency are at the root of this change. For Bang, the complexity of modern government both discourages everyday makers from engaging with state or federal politics and renders their capabilities less valuable for interest groups. Our fragmented and specialized society instead promotes the growth of the 'expert citizen': full-time political professionals located in voluntary organizations, who specialize in matching

problems with resources through their mastery of the complex governance networks that exist in post-industrial 'hollow states'.[15]

The question for Government 2.0, therefore, is not about next steps. The question is how it defines the minimum skill set and workload required to be an effective citizen.

Through its parent concept of Web 2.0, Government 2.0 comes with a number of implicit statements about what the next generation of citizen will look like: The web is 'personal' and focused on individual action and entrepreneurialism. It's a 'maker' world that prizes technical skills to rip, mix and post ideas, software and data. And importantly, it's all about 'conversation', the key currency of the blogosphere.

These may well be the characteristics of citizenship our society values. But we should adopt Government 2.0 having clearly reflected on the rights and responsibilities these characteristics entail, and the implications for those who may fall outside of the standards set for *homo politicus 2.0*.

The radical individualism of some web cultures serves as a warning: meritocracy based on technical skill promotes and values only one type of expertise, technical 'information literacies'. While these skills can be empowering, we must also recognize how high standards don't always lift all boats. The almost fetishistic shift to an 'evidence base' in some professional policy making circles may have served to rationalize policy debate away from ideology and back to the reality-based community,[16] but sometimes at the cost of other types of knowledge[17] (occasionally deliberately). Barriers to participation are not eliminated, they're simply reconfigured.[18] For Bang, the alienation of 'lay' knowledge is an important cause of the pathology of non-participation.

If we must be *produsers* how many of us make the cut? It's hard to tell. If evidence from the United States is anything to go on, however, then we can generously say it's less than 22% of the population (if posting a comment online at least once in a two year period makes you a rip-mix-burn expert). Realistically, the figure might be more likely in the 7% range (adults who daily blog, just smaller than the number of people who *read* blogs on a daily basis).[19] While that certainly is a conversation of *produsers*, many of us are clearly still sitting on the sidelines. Maybe generational replacement will fundamentally alter this, but after 18 years experience of the World Wide Web, perhaps we should start to question whether this ever youthful 'new media' will ever be capable of delivering our projected hopes for participative democracy.

The notion that Government / Web 2.0 is 'all about conversation'[20] also needs to be teased out. The conversational nature of blogs, social networking services, and e-consultation chat systems is appealing to our imaginary 'classic' democracy (be that the Athenian marketplace, European coffee houses,[21] or even the walk-and-talk Whitehouse of the *West Wing*[22]). But this – intensely American – notion of political exchange needs to be questioned in the cultural context of Australia.

Australians are not, by and large, a politically declarative bunch. Unlike the button-wearing politics of the United States, surveys show that explicitly political personal conversations have been a constantly *declining* form of political activity in Australia[23], with Australians more likely to see overtly political speech through the lens of the hectoring bores of *Don's Party* (1971) than James Stewart's impassioned filibuster in *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). The concern, therefore, is that Government 2.0 might just demand that we become technically far more engaged than we currently are, to undertake a specific form of political interaction in which we are decreasingly interested.

What social contract lies at the heart of Government 2.0? Must we be expert citizens or is there space for the everyday maker? Gerry Stoker has argued that, rather than raising the bar, we need to accept the value and appropriateness of a 'politics for amateurs'.[24] We need, therefore, first to define what that means, then the reprogramming can begin.

About the Author
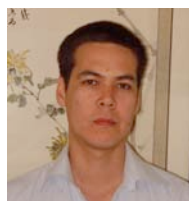
Dr Peter John Chen is a lecturer in Politics and Public Policy in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Electronic Engagement: A Guide for Public Sector Managers* and a co-author of *Electronic Democracy? The Impact of New Communications Technologies on Australian Democracy*. Dr Chen served as the inquiry consultant on the *Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into Electronic Democracy* (2004-5). His research focuses on the political use of, and impact of, new technologies.

[1] As opposed to hierarchical relationships that characterize conventional understandings of power politics: the top-down orientation of State action and corresponding inverse narrative of bottom-up resistance.

[2] Moore, M (1995) *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[3] Government 2.0 Taskforce (2009) *Towards Government 2.0: An Issues Paper*, 23 July, p.3.

[4] As opposed, for example, to the United States, where there is less of an emphasis on the role of the Government on 'community building', reflecting an avoidance of government intervention in the private sphere.

[5] Norris, P (2003) *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Putnam, R (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

[7] The array of Government-sponsored electronic consultation trials is a good example of this problem. While some jurisdictions claim success (e.g. Queensland), most initiatives at the local, state and federal level have not lived up to early expectations of rejuvenating participation. Chen, Gibson and Geiselhart (2006) *Electronic Democracy? The Impact of New Communications Technologies on Australian Democracy*, Focused Audit, Democratic Audit of Australia, Canberra: Australian National University.

[8] Examples would include the development of the ATO's E-Tax package, and the creation of Centrelink and the Job Network system.

[9] Including, but by no means limited to, the default release of datasets to enhance the capacity of citizen oversight and policy debate, the development of electronic and online consultation and collaboration 'agora' for citizen participation, and greater emphasis on social capital projects to address local issues through collaboration building.

[10] Australia still retains about 1.3 million dial-up internet accounts. These tend to be predominantly located in rural and remote areas. This number has been tapering off over recent years as customers switch to broadband services (normally ADSL) and new customers enter the market choosing broadband where available. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) *8153.0 - Internet Activity, Australia, Dec 2008*, Canberra: ABS.

[11] Bruns, A (2008) *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, New York: Peter Lang.

[12] Bang, H (2004) *Everyday Makers and Expert Citizens: Building Political not Social Capital*, Canberra: ANU.

[13] Richardson and Jordan (1979) *Governing Under Pressure: The Policy Process in a Post-Parliamentary Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[14] Dahl, R (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in the American City*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

[15] The hollow state is 'a metaphor for the increasing use of third parties, often nonprofits, to deliver social services and generally act in the name of the state.' Some authors also note the 'hollowing out' effect of devolution and global/regionalization. Milward and Provan (2000) 'Governing the Hollow State', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 10(2) pp. 359-380.

[16] Suskind, R (2004) 'Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush'. *The New York Times Magazine*. 17 October.

[17] For example, indigenous knowledge, local histories, and information from outside of a narrow band of technical specialties.

[18] Batterbury, S (2007) 'Evaluation and Exclusion from the Public Arena: the Case of the British Deaf Community', *Open to the Public: Evaluation of the Public Arena*, Boye, Breul and Dahler-Larsen (eds), New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

[19] Pew Internet and the American Life Project (2009) *Trend Data*, http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data.aspx

[20] Stewart-Weeks, M (2009) 'The Great Promise of Web 2.0', *Government 2.0 Taskforce*, http://gov2.net.au/blog/2009/08/10/the-great-promise-of-web-2-0/

[21] Goode, L (2005) *Jürgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere*, London: Pluto Press.

[22] That happy fantasy world liberals could retreat to during the Bush administration. Jennifer (2008) 'West Wing -- My Fantasy Alternate Reality', *Mixed Race America*, September 24, http://mixedraceamerica.blogspot.com/2008/09/west-wing-my-fantasy-alternate-reality.html

[23] McAllister and Clark (2007) *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study, 1987-2004*. Canberra: Australian Social Science Data Archive.

[24] Stoker, G (2006) *Why Politics Matters: Making Democracy Work*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Identifying and Managing the Risks of (not) Engaging Online

Matthew Crozier and Crispin Butteriss
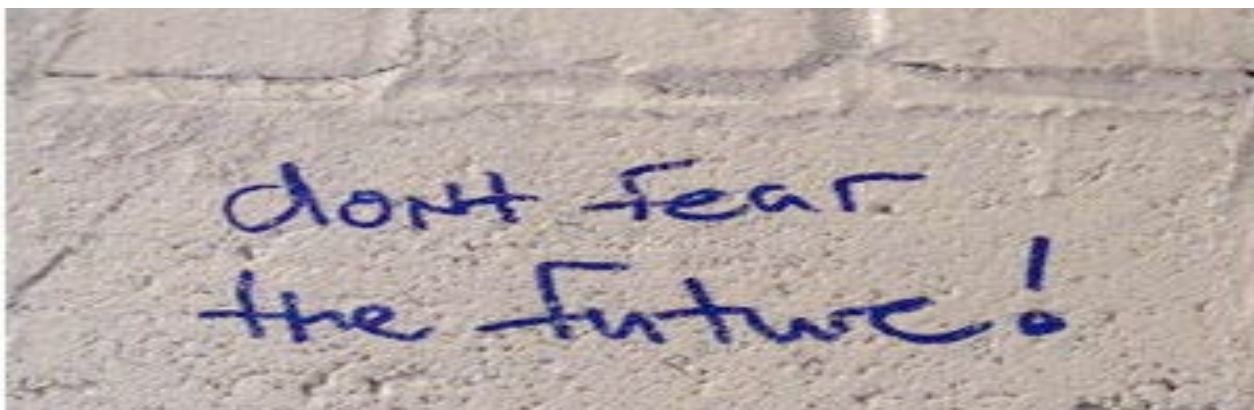
As the founders of *Bang the Table*, a company that hosts and moderates online engagement, we spend a good deal of our time talking to potential clients about the perceived risks of engaging the community online. This essay reflects what we have learned from that experience about attitudes to online engagement and risks, both perceived and real, and then shares some of our thoughts on the best ways to manage those risks.

Despite the many benefits of involving more people in decision processes[1] there remains a sense of reluctance and fear in many quarters when it comes to embracing new technologies in order to give those people a voice. Some decision makers persist with the belief that to allow the community to communicate directly and openly with an organization represents an unacceptable degree of risk.

This fear was well summarized by Matthew Fraser & Soumitra Dutta[2] of INSEAD in a 2008 interview:

> 'The challenge for senior managers is to get over what we call the 'fear factor' and tune out the naysayers in their organisations who are resisting Web 2.0 tools at the workplace because they feel threatened by them. When open, networked communications enter corporate bureaucracies – especially on blogs and wikis – a lot of people feel threatened because they have been in gatekeeper positions controlling information. They don't like open communication.'

This is as much a matter of organizational culture as it is about risk. Many of today's decision makers began their careers in an era when the mantra was controlling the message and some have not yet moved on from that position. These people can represent unmovable obstacles preventing new technologies from being integrated into community engagement programs.

But Web2.0 has already taken away the ability to effectively control the message[3] whether you choose to embrace it or not. The fact is that you can and will be criticized online regardless of whether you stick your head in the sand and ignore it or choose to manage it.

If evidence is needed of this loss of control visit http://qantassucksworld.com or http://councilgripe.com or one of countless other sites that aim slings and arrows at large institutions. These sites are easy to set up, involve little or no legal risk for their instigators, are next to impossible to shut down and, thanks to the power of Google, are very easy to find.

Without proactive measures on the organisation's part[4], these 'sucks' sites can become a home, not just for the die-hard minority who are determined to hate your organisation what ever you do, but also for the ordinary punters who want to go somewhere to get advice and assistance.

This is happening to countless public and private sector organisations around the world[5]. How do we deal with it? Simple - engage. Having an online presence that you control (though we use the term control loosely) is the way organizations will learn to manage the risks posed by the openness of the Web. This even has a name – online reputation management[6].

If public and private sector organisations have sites where stakeholders and customers can come and have a dialogue both with the organisation and each other then the organization has nothing to fear from the web. In fact it can drive significant and positive change both in terms of external reputation and internal culture.

Having said this we do not advocate just jumping on the latest online bandwagon and hoping for the best. There are a number of sensible precautions you should take as part of any online engagement.

Tools

Firstly you will need to select your online tool or platform[7]. Think about the group you are targeting, the purpose of the interaction and what is the easiest tool for them to use to talk with you. Use a platform designed specifically for the proposed purpose so you get a meaningful result. You will need to monitor, moderate and report on your community engagement. Importantly, you need accurate and meaningful statistics on the behaviour of people when they visit your site. Some of the most meaningful results of online engagement come not just from comments, but also from analysis of the behaviour of those who choose not to.

Anonymity

In the online world, the quality of the ideas is more important than the identity of the person submitting them. We would recommend that you allow users to be anonymous. The potential for damage being done by cyber bullying is effectively mitigated by anonymity; responses to forum comments in your name feel very personal, but a distance is created if you write as Donald Duck. Anonymity is also a great leveller - people are judged on their ideas alone. At many public meetings we have observed people using their social and physical stature as a battering ram to win debates. In an online debate these trappings are left at the door.

Managing trolls and disruption

Clearly stated rules of engagement are key to minimising disruption. You will need moderation to ensure that the discussion stays clean, safe and relevant. Moderation should be impartial and demonstrably independent. It also needs to continue outside business hours. Ensure that the rules are clearly stated before the process commences and stick to them, as your credibility is at stake. Whatever you do don't remove comments that comply with the rules even if they are uncomfortable for you.

Bang the Table has managed over 100 consultations and in that time we have only seen one serious instance of people attempting to corrupt a process with multiple logins. This was easily detected and dealt with. However, it is something that people worry about, so for the integrity of the process it is important to manage this risk and to be seen to do so. This can be done as part of the moderation process when your system tracks IP and email addresses.

Of course no system of weeding out those who want to cheat the process is foolproof but it's worth pointing out that all forms of engagement can be corrupted. People get bussed into public meetings, form letters get sent in as submissions. The real protection is in the way you interpret the results. Don't just count the number of comments for and against a proposal - look for new ideas and issues and take the overall community temperature and you really cannot get into trouble. Giving people a chance to have their say and to get involved builds community confidence in your decision-making processes.

Good publicity for your site is also a very effective protection from individuals or small groups who want to skew your results. The more successful you are at getting the word out to people about their opportunity to have a say, the harder it is for any group to wield a disproportionate influence. The best form of publicity depends on your target audience but in our experience traditional media is usually the best way to get the word out. Local radio and newspapers get directly to your target audience in a way that it is hard to do online unless you are specifically targeting high web usage individuals. Even then you may find a lack of suitable points of aggregation for local content available to you online[8].

Give good guidance to staff

Create some guidelines for your staff so it is clear when and how online tools should be used. There are some great examples already available,[9] so you won't need to start from scratch.

Provide alternatives

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, don't assume you can engage your entire community online. You cannot. Don't let a conversion to web 2.0 disenfranchise those who would prefer to speak with you by other means. There will always be some groups in society who want to engage face to face or by snail mail and to remove that opportunity would be a backward step. Online engagement should be an addition to, not a replacement for, your traditional community engagement activities.

If you follow these basic tips and allow your community the opportunity to engage with you online then you can effectively manage most of the risks posed to your organization by the web. The alternative is to hold out a little longer, but before long the community will come to view those who do not engage online with justified suspicion: 'Do they really care what we think?'

About the Authors

Matt Crozier is a co-founder and Director of Bang the Table Pty Ltd. Matt has extensive experience in the public sector, having worked for the NSW Department of Planning as the Regional Director in the Hunter, the NSW Premiers Department as a Senior Policy Advisor, the UK's Rural Development Commission as Head of Rural Economy and the London Underground as Manager, Environment. Matt has a first class honours degree in Economics, and two Masters Degrees; one in Environmental Economics and a second in Transport. Matt is also chairman of Compass Housing Services, a major not for profit community housing provider.

Dr Crispin Butteriss is a co-founder and Director of Bang the Table Pty Ltd. Crispin's doctorate (UNE, 2003) explored ways to bring adult and organisational learning theory and practice into community engagement processes. Crispin has worked for various New South Wales government agencies including the Environment Protection Authority, Department of Planning and Premier's Department. He has extensive experience working with community and government stakeholders to develop public policy. Crispin also has a first class honours degree in Natural Resources.

[1] http://www.onlinecommunityconsultation.com/2009/04/why-government-organisations-should-be.html
[2] http://www.insead.edu/alumni/newsletters/December2008/ThrowingSheepintheBoardroominterview.htm
[3] http://sparksheet.com/who-controls-your-message/
[4] http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/18/30122.html
[5] http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/60685/gripe_sites_when_something_sucks_post.html?cat=9
[6] http://www.toprankblog.com/2007/03/basics-of-online-reputation-management/
[7] http://www.onlinecommunityconsultation.com/search/label/online%20tools
[8] http://www.onlinecommunityconsultation.com/2009/05/place-based-social-networks.html
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http://blogs.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digitalengagement/

Culture in the New Order

Stephen Collins

'There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.'

— Niccolo Machiavelli
The Prince (1532)

One of the biggest hurdles for the public sector and legislators tasked with fulfilling the promise of Government 2.0 will be the cultural change involved.

Culture change is tough in any organisation, let alone in huge, distributed, diverse and largely conservative organisations such as federal and state public services. Yet it is this change that will be the make-or-break factor in the transformation that the Government 2.0 Taskforce will advise the Federal government on and that other levels of government (and other governments across the world) are also seeking to make.

Change is an uncertain thing. How do we convince others of the need for the change? How will we be successful? How do we define success? How do we measure that success when we don't even know where the journey of change might take us? And how do we go about making change happen despite this uncertainty?

The Government 2.0 Taskforce is moving ahead fairly well in defining the issue for its audience and incorporating input from the Gov 2.0 community of interest. There are some significant issues that the Taskforce will need to address when it delivers its report:

- a lack of a cohesive 'whole of government' approach at any level of government

- a view of accountability that inadequately rewards those responsible for success and innovation

- inadequate trust and permission models across public sector management

- a need to shift to openness as a default, including removing the reticence to participate and obstruction of participation

- a negatively-coloured perception of risk

Of course, *these issues are not problems for all individuals*, nor even their agencies, in the Australian public sector. They are, however, representative of the public sector generally, based on my experience as a public servant and my time working with the public sector as an outsider.

In New Zealand,[1] the US and the UK,[2] the public sector has been equipped with well-publicised rules of engagement for workers that permit them to actively engage with the public in online communities. These

rules are ably backed up by existing codes of behavior that govern overall public sector employee conduct. In Australia, such rules exist,[3] but the weight attached to them, their currency, the level of publicity and explicit, high-profile support for them from either Ministers or the most senior levels of the public service is largely missing or unclear.

No wonder both individuals and agencies are largely confused or indeed, oblivious, to what the position is on the engagement of public servants online.

Other nations have appointed both Ministers for Digital Engagement and, in the case of both the US and the UK, senior public servants whose ambits include digital engagement. In the US, we have seen the young, vibrant and demonstrably engaged, Vivek Kundra,[4] the United States Chief Information Officer, driving change from the top. In the UK, Andrew Stott[5] is the Director of Digital Engagement, and is also leading the way, connecting directly with the public and public servants. These people understand the online environment and its importance to the advancement of the Government 2.0 agenda, and also visibly live and breathe the culture it requires.

In this country, we have neither a Minister nor a senior public servant with carriage of digital engagement as a specific responsibility. Some Ministers even seem at cross-purposes. The Internet censorship agenda being advanced by Senator Stephen Conroy, is in fact anathema to the Government 2.0 model. Yet Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner is strong in his support[6] for a reform agenda that can hardly be enhanced by a filtered and potentially slower Internet.

In my time as a public servant, and in my experience since, the model of accountability that we see in the public sector is largely tied to responsibility for action and carriage of blame should something go wrong. Again, this is *not true of the entire public sector*, but it does represent the perception you get from the whole.

Taskforce member, Martin Stewart-Weeks of Cisco noted recently that:

'We need a theory of "accountability 2.0" to match the instincts and values of gov2. Any ideas?'[7]

My response[8] to Martin argued that it was not just accountability that was needed, but also new models of authorship, trust and permission. In order to achieve the cultural change needed with the least possible resistance, several things must happen.

First, I believe *a mandate to implement these reforms and to behave and implement in the required way* is needed *from the highest levels*. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet should be the ones that deliver this mandate to the Australian Public Service (APS), to remove any possible doubt about whether agencies and individual public servants are acting in accordance with the wishes of the elected government. They should be supported by the APS Commissioner, the Finance Minister in his capacity as the Minister responsible for the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) and the Special Minister of State.

And, second, the sometimes closed culture of the public sector must be shifted to one in which:

- the creators of innovative programs and thinking are identified for their good work, publicly and often

- openness and publication of material is the default (it should be noted that the FOI reform agenda of the current government is moving this way)

- *all public servants* are explicitly and implicitly permitted to engage with the public online (and offline) where they have the necessary expertise to do so, and

- public servants are trusted by their senior executive and Ministers to not just do their job but to do it in the public eye and in concert with an engaged, contributing public.

An example of the need for this is alive and kicking now in the work of the Government 2.0 Taskforce. As noted by Matthew Landauer of OpenAustralia,[9] just one of the public servant members of the Taskforce has seen fit to engage via the online channels the Taskforce is using, whereas almost all of the non-public servant members of the same have engaged in some way. This is unfortunate.

There is an active Australian Government 2.0 community on Google Groups.[10] Yet, very few of the many public servants who participate there do so officially. Many of them have explicitly stated that they are unsure or afraid of the consequences of doing so. They use personal email addresses and are sometimes reticent to discuss not only what agencies they work for but what projects they are involved in. That this approach is viewed as necessary by so many is disappointing.

Third, and finally, there needs to be a change in the negative perception of risk in the public sector.

It is not often that you encounter a public servant whose perception of risk encompasses risk as an opportunity to innovate. You more often encounter a fearful perception of risk that imagines how an adverse

outcome might be difficult to explain for the member of the Senior Executive who will be questioned in Senate Estimates. You can hardly blame public servants for being risk-averse in these circumstances – so the circumstances must change.

All these changes must be supported by relevant and ongoing education and mentoring to ensure that the public sector is equipped with the skills to manage this transformation with the greatest opportunity for success.

I'm under no illusion that the change needed in the public sector at all levels of government will be easy. So, what to do? I do not have all or even many of the answers. But I have many ideas. As do others. It is when these ideas are allowed to come forward, treated seriously and acted on equally seriously that we will have the most opportunity to bring about this much needed change.

So, public sector, let's act. Let's 'take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things'.

About the Author

Stephen Collins is a thinker and doer in social media and user experience with a passion for government reform. He worked for many years in the Australian public sector and consulting industries and founded acidlabs in late 2006 to help bring his philosophy of a more open, collaborative and hyperconnected world to his clients. Stephen now works with a range of organisations in the public and private sectors helping them change old corporate culture into a new model — one where people, conversation, collaboration and community are at the heart of everything they do. He is a contributor to ABC Unleashed and is a frequent speaker and interview subject for media, conferences and seminars in Australia and internationally.

1 http://www.webstandards.govt.nz/implementing-social-media-monitoring/
2 http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/work/codes/participation-online.aspx
3 http://www.apsc.gov.au/circulars/circular088.htm
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5 http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2009/090513_digital.aspx
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Case Study: Public Sphere as a Gov 2.0 example of Open Government

Senator Kate Lundy and Pia Waugh

Government 2.0

We are using the term Government 2.0 to describe the new opportunities presented by online technologies and social methodologies to achieve a more open government.

There are many wonderful Web 2.0 and bleeding edge initiatives in government, often done under the radar and on a shoestring budget. A successful 'Government 2.0' initiative may leverage various Web 2.0 tools as well as online community and consultation processes, but ultimately must have an outcome that is tangible and beneficial to citizens. It ought to make people's interaction with government a more satisfying and personally relevant experience.

Some practical Gov 2.0 examples may include:

- Using GeoSpatial data to display the most accessible government services available to a young mother in Cowra.
- Using social media tools for constituent consultation on a new government proposal or legislative draft.
- A government agency making some of its data publicly accessible, and then working collaboratively with the broader community and industry in preparation for or in the midst of an emergency situation.

Open Government

Open Government policies and practices provide benefits in different ways to different people:

- **Citizens**: having open access to information and decision-making helps build trust and confidence in their government. Communities can effectively become part of the process, rather than simply having decisions imposed upon them.

It's important at this point to clarify the distinction between the work of elected members of Parliament, which includes politicians' interactions with their constituents - and the administrative aspects of government, which include the delivery of services such as health, education and social welfare. With that in mind:

- **Politicians**: Open Government sets a higher benchmark for accountability for politicians. It also provides opportunities for greater and more meaningful interaction and to garner a broad range of community and expert perspectives, in order to make well informed decisions about important issues.

- **Government administration**: Open Government policies and practices lead to more effective and efficient service delivery and decision making by directly engaging with citizens to accurately define their needs and tailor services accordingly.
- **Industry**: Taking an open approach to government can produce some exciting secondary outcomes such as innovative use of Public Sector Information (PSI) in the private and public sectors, creating new opportunities for economic growth. A good example is the value adding by the private sector to open geospatial information generated in the public sector.

The benefits of Open Government, and open approaches generally can be summed up by Cory Doctorow:

> 'Historically, openness - in the widest sense of the word - has been an important contributor to economic success: Open societies experience faster economic growth and political stability than closed ones.'

How government administrations deliver services within the context of both Open Government and Gov 2.0 presents a real challenge and leads us to the first principle of Open Government: how to make services genuinely citizen-centric.

The 3 Pillars of Open Government

Due to the convergence of impending faster network access (NBN), mainstream use of the Internet and online tools, the resourcing and ICT up-skilling of school children (Digital Education Revolution[1]) and the global shift towards e-Government and better online engagement with citizens, there is an opportunity to construct what we see as the three pillars of Open Government. These three pillars are citizen-centric services, open and transparent government services and facilitating public and private innovation.

1. **Citizen-centric service**: governments have a responsibility to serve the needs of citizens as best they can, and in a way that is individually meaningful to each person. Information can be aggregated and presented in a way that is personalised to a specific person's need, all with very little information from the citizen (such as a postcode or work status).
2. **Open & transparent government processes**: citizens have a right to participate in the democratic processes in an informed and empowered way. This means creating a genuine means of engagement between citizens and governments in policy development and decision making. This partnership will become increasingly important as we as a society face new social, economic and environmental challenges that require rapid and well-informed responses.
3. **Facilitating public and private innovation**: there is some government data that for either security or privacy reasons cannot be made publicly accessible. However, there is a lot of data that can be published, and through open access - particularly in open formats - can be aggregated and value-added. 80% of government data can also be linked to a location, which provides opportunities for delivering citizen-centric services through mapping, as well as opportunities for public and private innovators to aggregate and present data in new and useful ways.

The core responsibilities of government, in relation to this third pillar, lie in:

- opening up appropriate government datasets for public use and mashups
- using open standards, open formats and open APIs
- ensuring useful metadata is collected, maintained and published
- applying permissive copyright to data to simplify management and use of data

While considering what the principles of Open Government should achieve, the question for us became 'What can we do to translate the theories into practice?' We came up with several ideas, one of which was the Public Sphere initiative. Our Public Sphere initiative is a practical attempt to tap into the wisdom of the crowd, capture and record those insights, and then collaboratively organise and draft them in the form of advice to decision makers.

The Origins of Public Sphere

Although Pia has only been working in the office for 5 months, we have known each other for 5 years and have often exchanged notes on where technology and democracy converge. This led to us collaborating on running

a local summit called 'The Foundations of Openness: Technology and Digital Knowledge'[2] inspired by the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit. In retrospect this local summit was a very basic prototype for Public Sphere. Video of the event was supposed to be streamed live, however we had limited success at the time. We did however have an overwhelmingly positive response to this idea.

The next incarnation of this type of interactive policy development came in early 2009 in collaboration with Adjunct Professor Tom Worthington (ANU) on the topic of Green ICT. Tom's innovative use of Moodle[3] in both events meant that we were able to capture the content in a perpetually open environment.

The third incarnation combined the lessons from the earlier prototypes. In early planning, the Public Sphere was designed to be purely a virtual environment for policy collaboration. After our research and experimentation, we realised that the inherent strength of the new online social media tools were most effective when used to complement a physical get together - a focused, timely and facilitated presence - ideally with a specific goal that people can rally around. This is why each Public Sphere includes a short conference-style event as well as the open online submissions period for input to the blog or wiki. The discussions are encouraged to be online, whether through Twitter, comments on the Live Blogging (which doesn't require an account) or other methods. This means there is a continual and distributed feedback loop on what is being said or discussed, which helps us understand community responses to ideas being put forward, as they are put forward, and in a way that can be easily analysed after the event. In the traditional sense, people can physically attend the conference and network. However the idea is that people can participate equally in the process and discussions, whether in person or online.

We then wanted to capture everything in a meaningful way, whether it be a thoughtful treatise or a reflective tweet. We needed to do justice to people's time, effort and expertise. Our task was to come up with a method that was collaborative and transparent, but resulted in a document presented in a digestible format for government decision makers. A wiki was the obvious tool.

In designing the Public Spheres, we've tried to combine the best aspects of a highly accessible conference that doesn't disadvantage virtual participants, has a strong peer review process and applies the most collaborative possible process of government consultation.

The outcome from this process is a briefing paper that identifies all the ideas put forward, the community responses to the ideas and specific policy recommendations on the topic. This paper is then formally presented to the most appropriate channels in government. For instance the issues paper can be delivered to the appropriate Minister to assist with their decision-making, as we have done with all of our Public Sphere briefing papers to date. In the immediate future, we hope that government agencies and departments could use a similar methodology to help them develop a well-informed view that in turn becomes frank and fearless advice to their Minister.

Public Sphere is part of an ongoing experiment and we understand it is only part of the solution. We look to the exemplary Smithsonian example,[4] where the actual policy itself was developed through a publicly editable wiki. Through our successes we hope to encourage similar innovations throughout government in crowdsourcing policy development to improve democratic participation in Australia and to work towards an even more open government through Gov 2.0.

Useful references

Writings and references by Senator Kate Lundy:

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Podcast interview with Professor Larry Lessig of Creative Commons fame
http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/06/02/conversations-at-copyright-futures/
GLAM WIKI: Finding common ground - speech on access to PSI, current government initiatives and the importance of digitising and making available cultural assets
http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/08/07/glam-wiki-finding-common-ground/

Spatial information: New Zealand steps up - speech
http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/08/26/spatial-information-new-zealand-steps-up/
The Gov 2.0 Public Sphere briefing paper is a comprehensive list of resources, case studies and other useful information on this topic. It is compiled from the input of over 300 individuals
http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/07/29/briefing-paper-and-recommendation-endorsements-from-public-sphere-2-government-2-0/
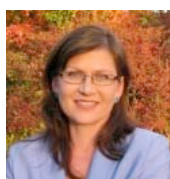
Writings by Pia Waugh:

Gov 2.0 - Where to Begin (Parts 1 to 3)
http://pipka.org/blog/2009/07/08/gov-2-0-where-to-begin-part-1-of-3/
The Foundations of Openness - a paper on practical implications of closed and open approaches to technology. Meant as a guide
http://pipka.org/blog/2008/07/23/the-foundations-of-openness/

About the Authors

Kate Lundy was first elected to the Senate for the ACT in 1996, at the age of 28. She is the Parliamentary Representative on the Advisory Council on Australian Archives. She began her career at age 16 as a labourer in the construction industry, becoming involved in the Building Workers Industrial Union (now the CFMEU), and later becoming a workplace delegate and a full-time union organiser.

Pia Waugh is an Adviser to Senator Kate Lundy. She has previously worked as a consultant at Waugh Partners in Sydney, Australia, as a Research Coordinator for the Australian Service for Knowledge on Open Source Software (ASK-OSS) and as the Open Source strategist for a large systems integrator.

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[3] http://moodle.com.au/
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Case Study: Collaborating with the Crowd for better Policy Development

Mark Elliott, Darren Sharp and Matt Cooperrider

Introduction

A feedback loop of innovation in social processes and online tools has presented a new possibility, and in fact, a new reality: complex tasks such as writing an encyclopaedia or a city plan are now being crowdsourced. The use of Web-based collaborative communities and tools allows labour, intelligence and interest to be used to develop policy collaboratively, enabling the interests of the public to be better represented and engaged.

However, while the tools for such work now exist, there is no developed body of knowledge on how to engineer such collaborative communities purposefully. What are the right processes to use - collaboration, cooperation, coordination - and what are their differences? What online tools can best support these processes? How do we ensure that if we build it, they will come? If they do come, how do we ensure they achieve the right objectives?

This article explores Collabforge's development of such a body of knowledge, supported by case studies of our work including Future Melbourne, the world's first collaborative city plan, and wePlan, the online collaborative development of a large park management plan hosted by Parks Victoria.

Collabforge mapped the process of the City of Melbourne's ten year planning process in order to identify opportunities for collaboration. Once these points were identified (both opportunities and necessities), a custom wiki, FutureMelbourne.com.au, was developed whose structure was specifically designed for integration with the city planning process. Collabforge has also undertaken this same process with Parks Victoria, the result being the collaborative development of a large park management plan wePlan.parks.vic.gov.au.

Collaborative Policy Development in Australia: Background and Context

The Australian public policy landscape is changing. While policy development has always involved interaction between participants from within government and diverse stakeholders outside government, there is a growing trend of participation that brings together players previously separated by time, space and political expediency. The rise of Gov 2.0 gives governments and the public sector access to communications tools that allow new levels of collaboration, cooperation, and coordination. These tools enable powerful new modes of information sharing, citizen engagement and social connection that can invigorate traditional approaches to policy development.

Australians are early adopters of new technologies and have embraced blogs, wikis and social networking services in their millions. Recent market research from Forrester reveals that three-quarters of Australian online adults now use social media, and one-quarter create their own content[1]. While face-to-face interaction and one-to-many media remain essential for community consultation, collaborative social technologies open up opportunities for citizen participation that were unattainable until very recently. New trends in 'crowdsourcing' provide a method for the distributed production of ideas leading to greater efficiencies in knowledge generation. These methods create more open boundaries between governments, policy makers and citizens and recognise that knowledge is widely distributed throughout society.

An increasing number of Australian governments and public sector agencies have started using these techniques successfully to overcome some of the limitations of traditional community consultation. In

November 2007 Collabforge began helping the City of Melbourne to develop its new city plan in collaboration with city officers, councillors, stakeholders and public participants from Melbourne and around the world. The result is an award winning, world-first, wiki-based, collaborative city plan: FutureMelbourne.com.au

Collabforge worked with the City of Melbourne to map the existing city planning process and then reengineered that process to employ Gov 2.0 solutions. Most importantly, an open source wiki-based collaboration environment enabled collaboration amongst the City officers and stakeholders, as well as members of the general public, during the public participation period.

A Strategic Framework for Collaborative Policy Development

Creating collaborative policy outcomes requires careful consideration of how best to bring the various participants together to work towards a common objective. There is a tendency for organisations to focus exclusively on the tools and technologies, A common flaw in projects of this nature is that they offer an invitation to participate, whether via a blog, wiki or social network, that is divorced from any context for collaborative collective action.

In our experience, the projects that succeed are planned strategically from the outset. This ensures that important issues are considered early on, such as identifying:
- the underlying processes you want your tools to articulate, augment and support;
- the appropriate environment for engagement to employ and develop; and
- the right framework for ensuring appropriate quality and quantity of contributions.

The need to be strategic when engaging the public is not news to those working in government. Politicians have turned constituent engagement into a science, and there is a large body of knowledge about it. Such knowledge is lacking, however, in the context of web-enabled collaborative policy development.

Traditional policy consultation typically defines how the public can engage by specifying a narrow window of participation: 'please comment on this proposal'. This kind of narrow invitation results, not surprisingly, in a string of comments. While this outcome is easily tracked and reported, it allows little to no genuine dialogue between participants and the consulting organisation.

In 2007, Collabforge's founder Dr Mark Elliott developed a generalised framework for collective activity applicable in any and every human context where such activities occur.[2] In the context of collaborative policy development, this framework can provide a valuable means for thinking about and designing online engagement. This approach outlines three processes - collaboration, cooperation, and coordination - and defines them in this context.

In doing so, the framework offers a means of identifying, classifying and interrogating collective activity (collective activity refers to any instance of human interaction, knowingly or otherwise, where there is a productive outcome of any form).

Collaboration:

According to this framework, **collaboration is a process in which all participants have add/edit/delete rights to the same pool of content.** This provides criteria by which to judge the relevance and applicability of collaboration to your project - is it appropriate and/or possible to give all participants add/edit/delete rights? Doing so must be integrated within your objectives and your drafting process. If your collaborative process draws upon more than a few people, then it will require specialised tools (such as a wiki). If such tools are employed, risk management and community support processes such as moderation and community management will need to be closely considered (see below for more on this topic).

Collabforge mapped the City of Melbourne's ten year planning process in order to identify opportunities for collaboration. Once these points were identified (both opportunities and necessities), a custom wiki, FutureMelbourne.com.au, was developed whose structure was specifically designed for integration with the city planning process.

Cooperation:

Cooperation is a process in which an aggregated gain is enabled by members who, while adhering to a predetermined set of rules, contribute individual units to the final outcome. In other words, they follow a step-by-step guide to participation. The output of such a process can then be aggregated to form a net gain, for example, a corporation's profit, the results of a survey, or more efficient resource usage through recycling. In fact, cooperation is the process traditionally employed by governments as a means of public input into policy development. A common example of cooperation in policy development is the use of a blog to introduce issues to the community and solicit comments from the community. The aggregated output of the blogging and commenting process is an increased collective understanding.

Coordination:

The final collective process outlined in the framework, coordination, yields outcomes that are greater than the sum of the parts it draws upon by bringing together disparate, collectively produced elements into a common space. An example is the way a search engine brings together disparate webpages and resources on the Internet.

Understanding Public Spaces for Policy Engagement

Once the underlying processes have been identified, it is critical to map out the most appropriate spaces available for public engagement. It is important to ensure that traditional opportunities for engagement are available for those not able, or not willing, to participate online. In the FutureMelbourne project, these included face-to-face Question and Answer sessions with the public, public forums, written submissions, and distribution of hard copies of the plan to local libraries and community centres.

The 'always-on' social web has grown rapidly in reach and appeal to become an important extension of the public sphere. People engaged in these spaces are potentially having conversations that are important to your organisational objectives, and if they are not discussing your policy initiative in this globally accessible environment, they likely will soon. Engage this space:
- to stimulate, lead and use constructive discussion about your project;
- to take an active role in shaping the conversation and conclusions made;
- to create positive branding, marketing, innovation and reputational outcomes; and
- to receive early warnings through environmental scanning

Drawing participants from the social web is a core strategy for success, as such participants will be the vanguard of contributors to online policy development. Since the social web is a conversational space, it is crucial to identify where your issues are being talked about (e.g. city planning blogs) and to draw that conversational energy into collaborative contributions for your policy development project. The next step is to create a focal point (like the Future Melbourne wiki) that provides a compelling value proposition (to co-create Melbourne's city plan) which catalyses public attention into meaningful contributions.

Planning for and Managing Contribution

Once you have the attention of a number of potential participants and the necessary value proposition, effective community management becomes an imperative. Community managers act as the organisation's interface with the participants, so they are important in setting the tone and quality of engagement in your online space. In addition to choosing someone whose personality embodies your organisation's values and is attuned to the project's objectives, they must have strong collaborative skills.

For long term projects, the guidance that a community manager provides should be aimed at catalysing 'community governance' - the capacity for participants to share rights and responsibilities with the host organisation (e.g. moderation, welcoming newcomers, blog posting, etc). This is important as a means of vesting the responsibility for the project in the participants, thereby generating buy-in, and shared ownership - critical ingredients for collaboration.

Quantity of contribution: How do you ensure that if you build it, they will come... and contribute?

There are several approaches for ensuring quantity - many Web-based collaborative initiatives suffer from the assumption that if you build it, they will come. This is rarely the case. Instead, it is imperative to employ strategies for:
1. attracting participants through a strong value proposition;
2. overcoming the 'cold start problem' (people are hesitant to contribute when there is little or no prior contribution); and,
3. ensuring awareness of your project through relevant promotional and marketing campaigns.

It is important to remember that just because someone visited your site, it does not mean that they will contribute collaboratively. In fact, it's safe to assume that the majority will not. This is not a lack of interest, rather it is simply indicative of the fact that collaborative engagement requires more energy and time than simply browsing a site. Therefore, it is important to provide a range of engagement opportunities so that you draw visitors in with activities requiring minimal energy (such as voting) while providing a pathway for them to develop their investment in and engagement with your initiative[3].

Quality of contribution: If they do come, how do you ensure quality and a focus on the set objectives?

Quantity of contribution is just one side of the coin, the other being quality. A great starting point for ensuring quality of contribution is drawing upon the community manager to actively contribute, thereby serving as a role model for the community.

'Guidelines for participation' should set out rules and recommendations for all participants regarding their contributions and interaction with other community members. They should be hosted in a prominent location and communicate:

- the social norms of the community;
- the ideal quality of contributions;
- the behaviour expected by all participants (which must include the host participants); and,
- the participation methods that accommodate different levels and areas of interest and allow for different energy/time investments.

Collaborative policy development initiatives require an effective vision and engagement strategy that will establish a collaborative premise and process, and genuinely extend goodwill to the community. Articulating this collaborative context can help alleviate community confusion and misdirection and increase the likelihood for a more constructive and high-quality outcome.

Conclusion

Momentum is building for Australian governments and public sector agencies to join other Western democracies in adopting more collaborative approaches to policy development using innovative social processes and Web-based tools. The framework and methodology for collaborative policy development outlined above is based on Collabforge's successful implementation of client projects including Future Melbourne and wePlan. It will help government agencies establish the right collaborative context for community online engagement and help ensure your initiative achieves its objectives.

About the Authors

Dr Mark Elliott is Director and founder of Collabforge. As chief consultant for Collabforge, Mark has successfully designed and managed a range of high profile projects working closely with clients in a highly versatile and collaborative capacity. In 2007/08, Mark led Collabforge's reengineering of the City of Melbourne's ten-year planning process. The result was an award-winning, world's first city plan to be developed in a wiki - FutureMelbourne.com.au. Prior to founding Collabforge, Mark completed a PhD investigating the underlying dynamics and mechanisms that drive and enable online mass collaboration. Mark.Elliott@collabforge.com

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Web2.0 tools for Gov2.0 beginners: a practical guide

Barry Saunders

Engaging with people online is not difficult. The tools are available and affordable and there is certainly no need to invest in building bespoke platforms. However the wide range of options and choices can, at times, be bewildering. The spaces where most people already congregate are optimised for commercial, personal and social outcomes, not for political discussion. Yet these spaces are often at the cutting edge of interaction, web design, privacy control and social expectations. How do we make use of these sites without abusing them, or losing track of the purpose for using them in the first place?

The following review of Web2.0 tools focuses on one unique feature of Gov2.0 - the ability for governments to shift from orators to conversationalists. We'll therefore look at the potential of Web2.0 tools to improve the quality and reach of *conversations* between governments and citizens.

Tracking (finding the conversation)

Before we venture out into web2.0 to talk to people, we need to listen. Let's say we want to gauge interest in the National Broadband Network (NBN). We need to figure out what people are talking about first - so we're not just barging into the coversation. Let's come up with some search terms ('*NBN', 'National Broadband Network', 'Nbnco', 'Conroy'*) and use some free tracking tools to find out what people are saying and to whom. Some good ones are Google Alerts (google.com/alerts), Social Mention (socialmention.com) and Twitter Search (Search.Twitter.com).

Now we can go out into those spaces with some preparedness.

Chatting (starting the conversation)

There are a number of web2.0 services that can fulfill some discussion and collaboration functions. We'll look at what sort of use you can make of the different services.

Twitter

The Benefits: Twitter (twitter.com) is a great way of quickly gauging interest in an issue, and a call for responses put out on Twitter will gain a lot of interest. Twitter has also proven to be a powerful tool for the coverage of events and public hearings. Attendees can publicise and discuss the hearing in real time and engage with people who are unable to attend in person. Twitter is definitely low-hanging fruit and a very fertile area for relatively little effort. The lesson: any public consultation should tweet at an early stage.

The Limitations: The biggest drawback is it's hard to have substantive debate in the 140 character limit. Many Twitter users are fairly passive and tend be self-selected insiders and broadcasters. They are more likely to be interested in internet politics, telecommunications issues, civil liberties and the like. For more specialist issues we will need to target other spaces.

Examples: Senator Kate Lundy has done a great job using Twitter to discuss government consultation reform at http://twitter.com/katelundy. Conversations are tagged with the #publicsphere hashtag, and you can find them at http://twitter.com/search?q=%23publicsphere

Facebook

The Benefits: Facebook (facebook.com) has far more people subscribed than Twitter, and there is more space for conversation to flow. You can also reach people who are not into the public performance element of Twitter. The privacy controls allow for a far more personal space and people only share the information they're comfortable with. Another advantage is that there are more 'average' (i.e. non-geek) users on Facebook.

The Limitations: You have to add people as 'friends' before you can engage substantively with them. Facebook also has quite onerous terms of use that may conflict with how government departments wish to use their information.

Examples: One way that Facebook can be useful in public consultation is through the use of surveys. Don't let the simplistic (or annoying!) survey applications you've seen on Facebook put you off - the functionality exists to create more sophisticated and detailed ones. CNN's Political Ticker shows one way a survey application can be used to host debate: http://apps.facebook.com/politicalticker/

Obama's first Facebook application successfully used the tool to promote his campaign and educate people around issues related to the election, as well as bringing like minded people into the election campaign: http://jilltxt.net/?p=2040

MySpace

The Benefits: While users are moving away from MySpace[1] there's still value in using it. It has a large youth demographic, often overlooked in government engagement. MySpace is a good place to begin the process of combined education and engagement - if the uncoolness factor associated with government can be overcome.

The Limitations: A MySpace campaign would have to be targeted to the site's smaller, mostly youthful demographic and as such may not translate well to other age groups.

Example: http://www.myspace.com/impactau presents social issues in a youth-friendly way and promotes discussion.

Youtube

The Benefits: Youtube is great for promotion, particularly as its viewers increase and people move away from watching prime-time news. It also allows longer-form videos. Most accounts are limited to 10 minutes but this is still a lot longer than the average TV grab. As such, a video post can explain a policy in greater detail and in a more relaxed style. Youtube allows for comments and people can even post their response in video format.

The Limitations: While Youtube is useful for promotion and explaining issues in a personalised manner, the commenting function of Youtube is poor and overrun with trolls (users who post malicious comments to antagonize others). This can severely degrade the user experience, and requires effective and close moderation.

Example: Barrack Obama is a pioneer of using Youtube to win over a deeply partisan public. Obama develops support for his political initiatives through bypassing the mainstream media/elected representative nexus to engage people directly: http://www.youtube.com/barackobama

Blogs

A 'blog' can simply refer to a platform that allows for regular publication, user comments and easy syndication. This kind of platform can obviously be useful for gov2.0 projects - as demonstrated by the Government 2.0 Taskforce itself (http://gov2.net.au/). But the blogs we've all heard about are more usually self-published websites run for reasons of passion, interest, self-development or (in rare cases) money.

The Benefits: Blogs can be a powerful way of engaging with interested people, and the boundaries of a discussion can be mapped by monitoring the blogs of those already talking about the issue. This information can form the seed material for later debates and can help governments refine policy. One option is for a department or agency to partner with major political blogs to generate public debate. Online Opinion (http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/), Vibewire (http://vibewire.net), Larvatus Prodeo (http://larvatusprodeo.net/), Open Forum (http://www.openforum.com.au/) and the like have active communities of politically minded participants who would contribute greatly to policy development.

It is easy to track multiple blogs using aggregators such as Regator.[2]

Limitations: blogs are a low risk and simple element for any engagement but are not the most interactive of

platforms so are best augmented with other tools. Blogs can be difficult to track because there isn't a single website where you can easily follow the conversations. However, by using tools such as RSS (a live feed of content), Google Alerts and possibly proprietary tools such as ViralHeat (http://www.viralheat.com/) or Radeon6 (http://www.radian6.com/) you can keep on top of blogs you've opted to monitor.[3]

Examples: Larvatus Prodeo has regular long running debates around issues of political importance. http://larvatusprodeo.net/2009/08/13/where-now-for-the-cprs/ Open Forum successfully hosted a blog-style conversation on behalf of the National Human Rights Inquiry at http://www.openforum.com.au/NHROC

Petitions

Petitions are an age-old method http://www.efa.org.au/Campaigns/lobby.html of interacting with government. More recently organisations like MySociety have created simple tools to email your representative http://www.writetothem.com/ or to directly petition the PM http://www.mysociety.org/projects/no10-petitions-website/. Basic tools like http://www.petitiononline.com/ and http://www.gopetition.com.au/ still exist, but more targeted options tend to be more effective. http://act.ly/ provide a petition tool that works via Twitter, and GetUp does highly targeted petition-based campaigns after getting feedback from membership.

The Benefits: As an established form of interaction with government, petitions have a long history and are accepted as indicative of community sentiment. Highly targeted and researched petitions campaigns such as those run by GetUp have proven very effective.

Limitations: Many petition systems are poorly designed. Without management by moderators, the demands may be impossible, undesirable, directed at the wrong people or simply incomprehensible.

Examples: Supporters of a change to abortion law in Queensland have created an online petition on the QLD governments own petition platform[4] and used Twitter, Facebook and email to spread it to interested parties.

Ideas capture & prioritisation tools

There is a growing genre of tools designed specifically to capture and prioritise ideas and feedback from customers and website users, and some of these tools are now being put to work in the service of consultation and policy development projects.

The Benefits: Because these tools have proved extremely valuable for companies seeking feedback and ideas from their customers, their functions are improving quite rapidly. For example when a user submits a new idea through http://uservoice.com it automatically searches for similar ideas in its database, helping to prevent duplication of effort. Most tools in this genre put a lot of effort into good user interface design, possibly making them more appealing to citizens with limited online experience.

The Limitations: These tools may require heavy moderation if used in pursuit of detailed policy discussions. With the strong emphasis that most such tools place on voting favoured ideas to the top (combined with less support for collaborative editing than wikis), they may turn conversations into populary contests rather than steering them towards the collaboration, cooperation and compromise required for good policy development.

Example: Obama CTO (http://obamacto.org/) is an independent site run to demonstrate user feedback software. It allows users to create discussion topics, and to comment and vote on initiatives put forward. This enables users to iteratively develop policy initiatives. The site has a nice user management system, with elements of web2.0 forum software (the interface is very similar to Digg). Another Obama initiative used the 'ideascale' platform to seek ideas on his administrations's open goverment agenda (http://opengov.ideascale.com/).

Wikis

The Benefits: Wikis are a type of collaborative software where all participants have add/edit/delete rights to a shared pool of content. Wikis extend the reach of traditional policy development by leveraging the knowledge and creativity of a global community of participants beyond the elite few usually involved in the policy development process. This expanded collaborative engagement can lead to more participatory and representative policy outcomes while increasing shared ownership, buy-in and voluntary compliance to the

policy outcome. Wikis enable increased scope in the types of participation possible, by allowing people to self-select the types of activities most appealing to them (providing supporting research, drafting original work, engaging in discussions, correcting spelling & grammar). This tends to lead to an increase in the quality of individual contributions as each participant is focused on their interests. Wikis also store every revision participants contribute, providing a significant advance over traditional document collaboration in that the changes between every version (from origin to completion) can be reviewed and sorted by date or contributor.

The Limitations: Wikis can be overwhelming to new comers. Additionally, wikis do not inherently come with a structure, indicating a need for moderators to guide participation by demonstrating pathways. Wikis present a new way of working, and as such, may require associated change management support for implementation in more traditional workplaces.
Examples: FutureMelbourne.com.au, presented above as a case study by Mark Elliott, Darren Sharp and Matt Cooperrider, was an open source wiki-based collaboration environment that enabled collaboration amongst the many City officers and stakeholders, as well as members of the general public during the public participation period. Parks Victoria's wePlan.parks.vic.gov.au is drafting a large park management plan in a wiki which is open to contribution from anyone in the world with web access. The New Zealand government placed the NZ Police Act on a wiki to allow people to participate in writing the new version (http://computerworld.co.nz/news.nsf/news/CD149DF28FBBEFA1CC257379000BA824). This wiki was open to public comments for 5 business days during business hours (http://computerworld.co.nz/news.nsf/news/CD149DF28FBBEFA1CC257379000BA824).

Forums

http://www.reddit.com/*The Benefits:* A forum is unlikely to win awards for fancy technology but, along with blogs remains an effective method of engaging the community online. Forums are simple to use and allow freeflow discussion (especially if structured to allow indented responses which encourage discussion). The conversation can be easily moderated and the results reported on. While forums or message boards are arguably web1.0, they draw engaged readerships and are good at publicising news and discussions. Some of the new news-aggregator sites such as Reddit (http://www.reddit.com/) and Digg (http://digg.com/) also function as forums and have long, engaging conversations about political issues[ii][5] (or cute cats). A front page mention on Digg can draw a large number of visitors and discussion will happen on their site and yours.

The *Limitations:* Forums can tend towards the snarky if they are not carefully moderated. However, there is no evidence that the trolls who try to dominate can do so more effectively in an online forum than they do at a face to face event and there is some evidence that in an anonymous forum the Trolls actually incite others to comment and contribute to the discussion. www.onlinecommunityconsultation.com/2008/05/bullying-standover-tactics-and.html

Examples: There are free forums available on the web and also specialist products aimed at community engagement such as Bang the Table and Open Forum. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations used an online forum as part of its development of a new Early Years Learning Framework (http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Projects/Pages/earlyyears.aspx) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slashdot_effect

Discussing (having the conversation)

While the issue of people forming echo-chambers online[6] may be somewhat overstated, there's no denying that people self-select towards those they already substantively agree with.[7] Social media does amplify this effect, which is a problem when we want people to engage with those they disagree with as well.

This is why the creation of a 'third space' can be especially valuable. One that is independently operated, free to take risks and experiment, and that utilises the best aspects of social media, while providing the necessary education, management and dispute resolution that any policy discussion requires.

The reality of e-democracy is that democratic engagement in the policy process requires a concurrent commitment to education.

The ideal community engagement site would contain all the necessary information for people to educate themselves on the issue before engaging in the debate. The site would also need to provide plenty of help to teach people how (in the technical sense) to make their contributions.

Moderators who are well versed in the issues and well versed in online community management should run the site itself. The site should use RSS or email alerts so participants and moderators can track conversations.

Reflecting (understanding the conversation)

There are many tools for understanding the conversation. High-end data-mining applications used for advertising, like Leximancer (https://www.leximancer.com/), are probably overkill for this kind of thing. Human understanding and discussion are of far more value for the purposes of this review.

The two issues that are most important are searchability (a technical issue) and moderation (a people issue).

The moderators' role should include summing up conversation in conjunction with participants. Search systems and a permanent archiving creation within the discussion site will allow moderators to annotate summaries with links back to primary source material. The site should be built in consultation with organisations like OpenAustralia (http://openaustralia.org/) to ensure searchability.

A combination of easy access to original discussion, engaged feedback and facilitation by moderators will ensure that participants' perspectives are accurately communicated.

To make e-democracy truly collaborative the final thing to remember is that neither government nor activists control it.

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[1] http://www.techcrunch.com/2009/01/22/facebook-now-nearly-twice-the-size-of-myspace-worldwide/
[2] http://www.regator.com/
[3] See http://wiki.kenburbary.com/ for a longer list
[4] http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/EPetitions_QLD/CurrentEPetition.aspx?PetNum=1281&lIndex=-1
[5] http://www.reddit.com/r/politics/comments/9bp8t/by_denying_the_poorest_americans_affordable/
[6] http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/col/leon/2004/11/03/echo_chamber/index.html
[7] http://social.cs.uiuc.edu/people/gilbert/pub/hicss09-echo-gilbert.pdf

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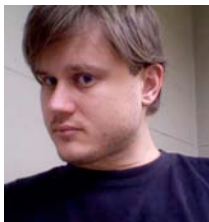
Barry Saunders is a social media producer, filmmaker and journalist. He has worked in new media and journalism for 4ZzZFM, Indymedia, Vibewire, YouDecide2007, WWF-Australia and Geekdom, as well as undertaking academic research into new forms of journalism and access to knowledge.

CPD ideas for the Gov 2.0 Taskforce: open-sourcing policy development

Miriam Lyons

As a number of contributors to this submission point out, there are many lessons from the emergence of open-source software that can be applied to the practice of Gov 2.0. The Centre for Policy Development is particularly interested in the potential for 'open-sourcing policy development' – applying the philosophy of open source software to the policy cycle.

The relevant features of the open-source software development community in this context are as follows:
- **transparency**: the code is published, so you can see how it does and doesn't work
- **participation**: you can submit suggestions for changes to the code easily, and permission to tinker with it yourself is preemptively granted via open source licencing)
- **collaboration**: a distributed community collaborates on continuous improvement of the code

In order to open-source policy development we need many of the same features:
- **transparency**: open-access government, in which the information behind decisions is readily available
- **participation**: the barriers for contributing to policy development are lowered by improving the opportunities to participate both online and offline, and creative commons licenses for government data free up citizens to tinker with it
- **collaboration**: cultures and communities of collaborative policy development emerge

A number of obstacles are stifling the potential for open-sourcing policy development. Two ideas on how to overcome these obstacles are briefly flagged below.

Obstacle to open access: lost revenue

The Taskforce (Issues Paper p.8) has taken the OECD principles on access to public sector information as its starting point, which includes the recommendation that costs for accessing information 'should not exceed marginal costs of maintenance and distribution'. Some agencies have charges well above that level built into their business plans. Additional, Australia-focused evidence of the benefits of reducing or eliminating fees for access to data may be helpful, for example:

- Detailed research into the public value of ABS data and usage patterns of that data over time
- Analysis of options for opening up access to the HILDA data[1]
- An Australian equivalent of the UK study[2] on Public Sector Information models commissioned by the UK Treasury and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform including costing of lost revenue if the most affected departments and agencies (for example ASIC[3]) were to cut cost-recovery charges.

Obstacle to participation & collaboration: poor inquiry websites

The Taskforce Issues Paper quotes a comment from Andy Williamson that 'failing to integrate online engagement fully into the policy cycle means that people see little point in being engaged' (p.6). The point in the policy cycle at which better online engagement would result in the most immediate and fruitful improvements to policy development is the public inquiry phase. It's time to find out what Inquiry 2.0 would look like.

The Gov 2.0 Taskforce has itself acted as a demonstration of the potential to advance from the conventional approach to public inquiries, with active engagement on twitter, a well-functioning blog, and nice use of the commentpress tool to enable paragraph-by-paragraph commenting on its issues paper. A simple step for the Taskforce to take might be to develop or commission a basic checklist for the managers of government inquiries and their websites. In the long run, inquiry websites might include some of the following features:

- Collection and publication of metadata about each (non-anonymous) submission, including the postcode of the author, whether the author is an organisation or an individual, which of the terms of reference or which paragraph numbers the submission refers to, keywords/tags for the submission, etc.

- Web submission forms that automatically search the database of existing ideas as the author types to alert authors to other similar submissions that have already been published (similar to the function currently provided by the http://uservoice.com/ user feedback service).

- Where submissions contain the results of quantitative research, authors could be strongly encouraged to upload the datasets on which their research is based along with their submissions.

- A 'Policy Sandbox' (the term is based on Wikipedia's sandbox, which allows users to try out edits before submitting them), which allows registered users to create their own wiki version of a green paper and invite others to help them edit it. A text comparison tool (standard with most wiki software) could then highlight the changed sections, making it easy for individuals and groups to prepare submissions to the next round of the inquiry.

- A 'citizen profile' (this idea may possibly become easier once the existing plan for introducing a single sign-on for all federal government websites has been implemented), which allows people making submissions to track their submissions to multiple inquiries.

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[1] http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/data.html
[2] http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file45136.pdf
[3] http://www.asic.gov.au/asic/asic.nsf/byheadline/Finding+out+about+other+companies?openDocument

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