

Chapter 17

Are You Being Served? Transforming E-Government through Service Personalisation

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ABSTRACT

In terms of public services, governments do not yet know how to treat users as different and unique individuals. At worst, users are still considered an undifferentiated mass, or at best as segments. However, the benefits of universal personalisation in public services are within reach technologically through e-government developments. Universal personalisation will involve achieving a balance between top-down government- and data-driven services, on the one hand, and bottom-up self-directed and user-driven services on the other. There are at least three main technological, organisational and societal drivers. First, top-down data-driven, often automatic, services based on the huge data resources available in the cloud and the technologies enabling the systematic exploitation of these by governments. Second, increasing opportunities for users themselves or their intermediaries to select or create their own service environments, bottom-up, through 'user-driven' services, drawing directly on the data cloud. Third, a move to 'everyday', location-driven e-government based largely on mobile smart phones using GPS and local data clouds, where public services are offered depending on where people are as well as who they are and what they are doing. This paper examines practitioners and researchers and describes model current trends based on secondary research and literature review.

1. THE MOVE TOWARDS UNIVERSAL PERSONALISATION

When it comes to public services, governments do not yet know how to treat users (citizens or businesses) as different and unique individuals.

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At worst, users are still considered as an undifferentiated mass, or at best as templates (segments). However, the benefits of universal personalisation in public services are within reach technologically through e-government developments, although organisational inertia will always lag what could otherwise be accomplished. (There is of course an argument that such a lag is highly desirable.)

Moving towards universal personalisation will involve achieving a balance between top-down government- and data-driven services, on the one hand, and bottom-up self-directed and user-driven services on the other. Whether this balance will be complementary or contradictory is likely to characterise the landscape of public e-services in the medium term.

There are at least three main technological, organisational and societal drivers (Figure 1):

1. Top-down data-driven, often automatic, services based on the huge data resources available in the cloud and the technologies enabling the systematic exploitation of these by governments.
2. Increasing opportunities for users themselves, their intermediaries or non-public sector actors to select or create their own service environments, bottom-up, through 'user-driven' services, drawing directly on the data cloud.
3. A move to 'everyday', location-driven e-government based largely on mobile smart phones using GPS and local data clouds, where public services are offered depending on where you are as well as who you are and what you are doing.

How people understand public services and use them is likely to change dramatically over the next five to ten years, as society becomes more diverse and personal aspirations change. As users of services, people are becoming more reluctant to submit to standardised relationships with large, impersonal organisations. The more is learnt about the factors shaping well-being, life styles and quality of life in the 21st Century, the clearer it will be that current services do not always meet these requirements nor genuinely engage with the particular needs of individual users in providing the personal value they need (Leadbeater, Bartlett, & Gallagher 2008).

Demands for public services are increasingly diverse in their expression, whilst public budgets are being cut because of the financial crisis and other constraints (Osimo, 2010). Not only are there new demands but also existing demands require more sophisticated responses. And, new demands often feed off existing demands – the more access to knowledge and learning we have, for example, the more likely we are to seek more of it. To use resources effectively, therefore, services must be personalised. But for personalised public services to promote public value as well as personal value, they must also be genuinely universal and available for all.

Hence the importance of universal personalisation. This needs new types of standards that move away from those based on delivery processes and outputs, such as waiting time for the delivery of a service is one week for all, or that the level of service quality is homogeneous regardless of who uses it. Instead, standards need to be built around public value outcomes which directly reflect the personal values and needs of the individual (related, for example, to his or her socio-economic profile, specific situation, context of service request, role in the service, behaviour, etc.). The move will thus be from process and output-related standards to more open standards based upon impact and user value. This also means that in future public service audits need to be based on outcomes/impacts and not just (as now) on processes/outputs, which also implies that audits must be set in their operational context and incorporate non-public sector actors, especially users and their intermediaries, in service design and measurement.

Personalised services represent a step on from user segmentation, in which a user's membership of a group determines the service offered, given that an individual could be a member of many groups requiring services from many agencies simultaneously. Membership of a group does not capture the precise individual service need. Personalised services are also a more focused expression

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