

Innovation

Government 2.0

Wikinomics and the Challenge to Government



by
Anthony D. Williams



Anthony D. Williams is the coauthor of *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* and vice president, *Government 2.0* at New Paradigm. He has an MA in research and political science from the London School of Economics and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Government.

Today, thanks largely to the internet, the kind of creativity and innovation that used to take place primarily within the confines of corporate walls now occurs across large, loosely connected networks of firms and individual entrepreneurs.

Already, millions of people have joined forces in self-organized collaborations that have produced dynamic innovations in goods and services rivaling the world's largest and best-financed enterprise networks. If masses of ordinary people can peer-produce an operating system (Linux), an encyclopedia (Wikipedia), the media (YouTube/Current TV), a mutual fund, and even a physical thing such as a motorcycle, one should carefully consider what might come next.

Arguably, this vast global network of specialized producers who swap and exchange services for entertainment, sustenance and learning is becoming an economy unto itself.

But what does Wikinomics entail for government and how will mass collaboration trans-

form the business of delivering public services and the nature of democracy? Could societies "open source" government much the way thousands of dispersed Linux programmers converged on the internet to develop one of the world's leading computer operating systems? Would large-scale, web-enabled consultations improve political decision-making or channel greater ingenuity and urgency into efforts to solve global challenges like terrorism and climate change? What about the provision of public services: could public agencies use ongoing collaboration with citizens, civil society and the private sector to achieve better results at a lower cost?

Research conducted at the Toronto-based think tank New Paradigm suggests that the answer is "yes" to all of the above (see sidebar). Indeed, a confluence of technological, demographic, social and economic forces holds the promise and the inevitability of new models for delivering the functions of government – call it Government 2.0.

It's time for governments to stop paving the cow paths – that is, fo-

cus on automating existing processes and moving existing government services online. The emerging "age of participation" presents an historic occasion to fundamentally redesign how government operates, how and what the public sector provides, and ultimately, how governments interact and engage with their citizens.

Accelerating service transformation

After decades of effort and investment, governments that once supplied standard transactional services through a fragmented public bureaucracy are increasingly providing citizens and other stakeholders with a single window to public services. But as new waves of innovation wash over the internet, it is time for governments to move up the capability ladder yet



again. Once the *sine qua non* of e-government, single window service offerings constitute one-way information flows to the citizen and are no longer sufficient in a world where customers are increasingly accustomed to participating in dynamic online communities such as Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia.

The new function-rich infrastructure of the Web 2.0 provides public agencies with significant opportunities to infuse innovation into the business of delivering services. For example, the age-old question of “who does what” can now be answered more creatively than ever before. Public services need no longer be provided by government alone; they can be provided by any combination of public agencies, the private

sector, community groups, or citizens, using the web as a mechanism for collaboration, innovation and engagement.

Public service providers seeking to target young people can use web services and widgets to syndicate the delivery of services and information through new venues such as Facebook and YouTube. And, new waves of mobile and pervasive computing will enable governments to deliver highly individualized “anytime, anywhere” services to a generation of young users that increasingly accesses the web through cell phones and mobile computing devices.

Enabling a 21st century work environment

The stereotypical image of public sector employment as

home to rigid, repetitive and hierarchically-managed work environments must change if governments wish to remain competitive in the battle for talent. All too often, young employees arrive in the public sector workplace and are dismayed to discover that many of the applications and devices they are accustomed to using in their personal lives are not available for them to use professionally.

Drawing on their experience on sites such as Facebook and YouTube, young government professionals have organized their own ad hoc communities that transcend departmental and organizational boundaries using blogs, wikis, and social networking tools. More often than not, their enterprising, under-the-radar efforts have been stamped out by senior managers who cite as justification concerns about data security, legal constraints, or fears that sensitive information could leak out to the public.

Some leading agencies in the United States have seen past these constraints and are demonstrating how Web 2.0 technologies can promote knowledge sharing, better communication, increased collegiality and cross-departmental collaboration. For example, the US Department of State’s Diplopedia provides a living repository of organizational knowledge and enables foreign service officials to share vital information with colleagues around the world. Similarly, the Director of National Intelligence created Intellipedia, a wikified (but highly secured) intelligence portal, to promote better intelligence gathering and sharing across a variety of

federal intelligence agencies. Both the Department of State and leaders within national intelligence community have noted the important role these technologies play in building bridges between the incoming generation of young employees and their senior peers.

Preparing for digital-era policymaking

In most countries, policymaking has always been a static, top-down process. Politicians study issues, seek counsel from a select group of advisors, deliberate and enact laws on the population’s behalf. Most citizens are on the periphery, playing no role other than casting a ballot every few years.

Times have changed. Web 2.0 technologies can make the process of engaging citizens in policymaking easier and less costly than ever before by providing tools to support knowledge creation and community building, two core aspects of digital-era policymaking.

For example, government agencies can post background information on the web and use online videoconferencing to bring in expert testimony. Web-enabled forums can provoke discussion and debate among hundreds, thousands and even millions of geographically dispersed participants. Wikis provide a platform for collaborative editing of policy documents, while social-networking technologies can connect citizens and organizations with common goals and interests.

Networked Knowledge California (NKCA), for example, illustrates what can be done when simple web-based tools

transform raw public data into formats that are meaningful and useful to community residents and local-government policymakers. Research shows that tax delinquency, unpaid utility bills, mortgage defaults, building-code violations and tenant complaints all start to climb well before buildings are eventually abandoned and neighborhoods slip into decline. Spotted early enough, a community's decay can be reversed through a combination of well-targeted public programs and private-sector investment. But although the danger signals are all on public record, they're typically inaccessible to the public, buried deep within the bowels of city hall.

Through an intuitive web-based interface, NKCA knits together municipal databases and inspection records, looks for indicators of urban decay, and plots the information on local and state-level maps posted online. Rather than having to look at each database separately, public officials, citizens and businesses can search by zip code or other parameters to view comprehensive information on one property, or see at a glance which communities might be headed for trouble.

Private-sector developers can now spot potential investment opportunities such as a cluster of buildings in financial difficulty, while community organizations are using the NKCA as a tool for community empowerment. NKCA even has a code-enforcement tracking system that lets residents monitor the City of Los Angeles' responses to housing-

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Government 2.0: Wikinomics, Government & Democracy is a global, syndicated research project that will identify and analyze emerging opportunities to harness new models of collaboration to transform the public sector. It builds on a wealth of continuing research by New Paradigm and a global faculty of experts. The aim of the investigation is to equip subscriber organizations with relevant information and the insights required to exploit new models of web-based collaboration to reinvent the way they develop policy, partner across institutional boundaries, and engage and serve their constituents.

The program will be conducted in partnership with the world's leading thinkers and practitioners, funded by both governments around the world and private companies seeking to participate in this transformation. Member organizations get access to dozens of original white papers and case studies that demonstrate how leading organizations are addressing the opportunities and challenges inherent in Government 2.0 transformation. Members also receive a private executive briefing at their premises and an opportunity to engage in ongoing peer-to-peer collaboration with other member organizations through New Paradigm's All-Member meetings and interactive member working groups.

For more information contact:

Joan Bigham
Executive Vice President, Strategy &
Business Development
860-536-6693
jrbigham@newparadigm.com

Anthony Williams
Vice President, Government 2.0
416-863-8864
awilliams@newparadigm.com

code complaints and violations similar to the way online customers track their FedEx packages. Data that might otherwise have gone unused in filing cabinets is suddenly a catalyst for better policymaking, more effective local government and neighborhood economic development

Overcoming the crisis of leadership

Transforming the structures of government from command-and-control hierarchies to innovative and agile networks of public and private participants is proving to be a major

challenge. Deep and resilient legacies combine to frustrate progress. Common obstacles to change include conflicting timeframes and motives, particularly between the public service and politicians; a lack of incentives to innovate; and the absence of urgency in many quarters.

Persuasion has long been one of government's most crucial powers and public leaders will be called upon to master the art. Persuading agencies to experiment with Web 2.0 technologies and new strategies for delivering services; persuading managers that social networking technologies

are not a distraction but an essential tool in today's workplace; persuading customers that data sharing will result in greater convenience and higher quality services – these are just some of the challenges for which leaders must plan.

It is truly a time when either government plays an active and positive role in its own transformation, or change will happen to it. The transformation process is at the same time exhilarating and painful, but the price of inaction is a lost opportunity for government to redefine its role in a new golden age of democracy. 