Chapter 22

Spinning Off Business Activities for Care Giver Support: The DISCOVER Attempt

Apostolos Vontas
VILABS, Greece

Vasiliki Moumtzi
VILABS, Greece

Gerry Urwin
Coventry University, UK

ABSTRACT

Demographic changes in Europe show an increased demand for quality care for family members, through innovative, broadly accessible solutions that have an overarching focus of improving the quality of life for carers through learning. DISCOVER platform is such a technology, based on existing eLearning systems and delivers digital skills training for carers, focusing in particular on opportunities for informal carers as a socially excluded group. DISCOVER business strategy provides a sustainable entity in order to deliver benefits to the carer, and cared-for communities in the future. An appropriate business model is required to support spinning off business activities for care giver support services, but allow the inclusion of those who may be disadvantaged or those who have a high need for support, but a limited ability to afford to pay for solutions.

INTRODUCTION

Over a 100 million people in Europe care for a family member, partner, relative or friend. With demographic changes there will be an increased demand for quality care through innovative, broadly accessible solutions that have an overarching focus of improving the quality of life for carers through learning, informational access and support. In this respect, we will present the attempt to spin off business activities for care giver support through the introduction to the market of the DISCOVER platform for a more efficient learning and training provision for carers.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8234-4.ch022
The objective for this chapter is to present a business strategy that provides a sustainable entity in order to deliver benefits to the carer, and cared-for communities in the future. It will suggest an appropriate business model to support such a strategy, and to allow the inclusion of those who may be disadvantaged or those who have a high need for support, but a limited ability to afford to pay for solutions.

**BACKGROUND**

Demographic changes in Europe show an increased demand for quality care for family members, but public services are unlikely to meet all of this demand, so family members are expected to take on more and more complex care tasks and make more demands on stretched professional health care workers. In addition, Home carers can experience feelings of isolation because they are less part of a professional community compared to, for example, staff in a care home. They will need ways to find answers to care questions or psychological support to help them fulfil their role. Online information, advice and guidance and access to a community of peers and experts can help, but only if it is easily accessible and in formats that are inexpensive, intuitive and easily understood.

The Digital Inclusion Skills for Carers bringing Opportunities, Value and Excellence project (DISCOVER) is a research project funded by the European Union Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme. DISCOVER aims to tackle 3 main issues:

- Increased digital competences and engagement of social inclusion actors (carers).
- Increased use of ICT solutions for delivering social support and care.
- Raising the profile of social inclusion work.

The project creates a new service to deliver digital skills training for carers. It focuses in particular on opportunities for informal carers as a socially excluded group. DISCOVER is based on existing eLearning systems in Birmingham (Birmingham City University, The Open University) and Thessaloniki (Aristotle University Thessaloniki). The DISCOVER platform integrates existing systems and provides access to rich digital skills learning experiences. Participants use a variety of channels including computer, mobile phones and digital television. The platform maximises value through repurposing and improving existing content. It is intended that the DISCOVER platform will become the single point of entry for carers. DISCOVER is piloted in 4 testbeds in Thessaloniki, several locations across the Netherlands, Zamora and Valladolid in Spain, and Birmingham in the UK, with around 400 informal and formal carers were given digital skills training. Carers will learn to become mentors for their peers and for the older people they care for, thus increasing the initial reach of the project. DISCOVER will enable carers to start on a learning pathway into wider education.

Expected benefits are improved digital skills, better communication and support for carers i.e. less isolation through virtual and real social networks, increased confidence and thus a better quality of life. Indirectly a changed attitude towards using ICT for care delivery is anticipated which in the long term supports more efficient care services. The ‘learn to learn’ approach will support personal development ultimately supporting employability.

The benefits for the older people will lie in an improved quality of care, greater skills and self-reliance all supporting a better quality of life.

The aim of this research was to develop a business plan for the exploitation of the DISCOVER solution, including a view for a phased deployment of the solution in European markets based upon user acceptance of the service during the