A Synthesised Stage Model for Collaborative Public Service Platforms

Aulia Zulfa, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands
Bram Klievink, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands
Mark de Reuver, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands
Marijn Janssen, Delft University of Technology, Delft, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Collaboration between government, the private sector and citizens is deemed critical to further improve the quality and effectiveness of public services. However, the stage models describing and guiding the development of e-government do not or only rarely cover external collaboration for improving public services. The authors argue that this gap can be filled by including insights from literature on the evolution of platforms, which can serve as a medium for collaboration between public and private parties. This paper aims to synthesise e-government maturity models and platform development models to act as a guide to move from government-centred public service improvement to collaborative innovations by government, businesses and citizens. The result is a platform development model with five stages. To see how the model holds in practice, three cases are investigated. The authors find that their model shows promise but also requires further evaluation and refinement.

KEYWORDS


1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, there has been a rapid transformation in government functions (Devadoss, Pan, & Huang, 2002). All over the world, government organizations are looking for ways to improve public service delivery and move towards electronic service provisioning (Layne & Lee, 2001; Reddick, 2004). For instance, they aim to work towards offering integrated and executable services in a “one stop shop” (West, 2004; Wimmer, 2002). One way of doing this is through a combination of efforts by actors from the public sector, the private sector, and citizens in innovating and delivering services (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). However, although collaboration among multiple parties has been a growing topic in the literature, government institutions often still work in “silos” and address issues from a sectorial perspective (UN, 2014). For this reason, development models that apply the concept of collaboration among multiple parties could be of help for governments to serve as a guide to move from government-centred public service innovations to innovations driven by government, businesses and citizens, in collaboration. However, this type of collaboration is hardly discussed in the existing stage models that provide a guide in public e-service development and that regularly fail to help in achieving real transformation (Klievink, Van Veenstra, & Janssen, 2009).
A promising way to actually realise these collaborations seems to lie in the concept of ‘platforms’. Platforms offer opportunities to be employed as a medium for multiple parties to work together in generating products or services. A platform can serve as a foundation where participants can leverage the platform’s assets to create complementary products (Thomas, Autio, & Gann, 2014). A platform can also act as an intermediary where multiple groups from different sides of the platform can interact and transact (Singerling, Klievink, De Reuver, & Janssen, 2015). These groups can include multiple private and multiple public organizations. Yet, the concept of platform is still rarely incorporated into public e-service development. We notice a gap between platform development in the industry context and its application in public e-service provision. As both platforms and public service delivery are often represented in growth or development models, synthesising these two types of models should offer insights and guidance for developing platforms for innovation of public services.

This article addresses the following question: what are the stages for public e-service innovations by governments in collaboration with the private sector and citizens? To address this question, we focus on synthesising models representing the development of public e-service provision and platform development stages. We investigate e-government maturity models, which represent the development of public e-service provision by governments, and platform development models to represent the development of platforms. The synthesis results in a theoretical platform development model for governments. The model consists of five stages: internal, citizen co-production, provider partnership, two-sided collaboration, and external innovation. Based on the literature, we detail each of these steps and offer an initial evaluation of the model by analysing three cases.

The article is organised as follows. In section two the research methodology is presented. It outlines the three main steps we have undertaken in order to answer the research problem. In section three, the platform development model is constructed by following a meta-synthesis approach. The five stages of the model are then described in terms of platform business model components. The subsequent section discusses the case studies and lessons learned. Finally, in section five we draw conclusions and discuss future work.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND BACKGROUND

Our approach consists of three main steps. First, a qualitative meta-synthesis is employed to synthesise e-government maturity models and platform development models. This step consists of seven sub steps to compare and contrast each stage of the models that are included in the synthesis (Noblit & Hare, 1988). These steps are described in detail in the next section. The approach requires the selection of key attributes for the synthesis. As key attributes we use 1) the type of platform (‘platform stream’) (Thomas et al., 2014) and 2) platform openness (Eisenmann, Parker, & Van Alstyne, 2009). The concept of platform openness is used to see how external parties (private sector and citizens) are involved in each of the stages. Platform streams are used to understand what kind of platform the stages of the model discuss. Thomas et al. (2014) identify four types: organisational platforms, product family platforms, market intermediary platforms and platform ecosystems. We compare and contrast all of the stages of the models we include in the synthesis, resulting in five sequential stages that delineate the evolution of a platform, based on the involvement of the private sector and citizens.

Based on these stages for collaborative public service provision, we analysed the participation of the actors in each of the stages in the model. The analysis of the models is based on the parts of platform business models (Klievink & Janssen, 2012), whilst taking public participation into account (Walravens & Ballon, 2013). The platform business model components consist of the following: stakeholder management, technology use, public value creation, return on public investment and
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