

A New Paradigm Applied: The Social Relief Sector

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We are facing a new paradigm driven by a discontinuity induced by technology change, i.e. the separation of information from physical goods driven by information technology diffusion.

To recap, the new paradigm has the following factors:

1. enables a massive growth in wealth
2. reduces transaction costs
3. requires trusted custodians of information
4. enables new forms of organisations
5. changes the boundaries between organisations and the market
6. creates the self-interest for people to own information defining their person
7. requires maximum storage of data to realise maximum returns

The paradigm directly changes several fundamentals in the Social Relief sector and ushers in a period where more change can be expected, with new technologies and concepts changing the way society ensures a minimal standard of living for its members.

The first point covers the massive growth in wealth from society, as it transitions from an industrial orientation to an information orientation. A necessary part of such a change is the broadening gap between those who are capturing returns from this transition and those who have not adapted. As time goes on this gap will narrow, as society's norms adjust to the new circumstances. The social relief expected in this new society, moving from the industrial norm of providing food for sustenance and shelter to including sufficient information services to enable a person to operate in an information society. In theory an information society should generate sufficient surplus food and shelter to enable everyone to live comfortably without work, but in practice, people will continue to contribute to society for a mixture of lifestyle improvement and social contact reasons.

The second point, reduced transaction costs, enables social services to be delivered using different mechanisms from simple entitlement schemes. Targetted assistance is feasible, enabling subsidies on specific items to encourage preferred behaviour. Assistance could be charged against personal accounts, enabling society to balance the benefits provided by a person to society versus the costs of supplying services. Social relief can be automatically enabled whenever somebody interacts with information services using entitlement and other criteria.

The third point is the automated delivery of social services requires a trusted custodian of the information used to determine entitlement. The increased sophistication of targetted assistance relies upon detailed information of a person's activities, which in turn is a substantial intrusion upon a person's privacy. The access to information on the entire population enables the identification of need for social relief and the tracking of social interventions to determine the effectiveness of specific programmes. The use of a trusted custodian enables an intermediary where social relief can be distributed by an organisation and accepted by individuals without any

need for personal interaction, thereby maintaining human dignity and achieving social goals at the same time.

The fourth point is that the information paradigm enables new forms of organisations. The social relief sector is a leader in the use of not-for-profit organisational forms, and can be expected to further develop this model to enable temporary alliances of resources drawn from across the world to meet specific programme objectives and reduce location-dependency for service delivery.

The fifth point is that there is blurring of the demarcation between social relief organisations and the people provided with relief. The use of people to drive automated service delivery incorporates the Consumer of social relief services into the social relief organisation service model, thereby enabling people to look after themselves to a greater extent. The Consumers can be organised into small organisations to provide support to each other and to enable the Consumers to co-operate improve their own lives, thereby enabling social relief through indirect means.

The social relief services will rely upon access to information that enables the identification of need and delivery of relief. However, as this information can be used by other interests to manipulate, control or influence individuals, it is the individual's interest for them to control access to information that personally identifies them. The sixth point is ownership of the information that personally identifies a person is the best mechanism to prevent abuse of information, and thus it is in the interest of each person to maintain property rights of such information. The individual can then minimise access to the information required to deliver social relief services, while the social relief agencies can deliver their services and minimise collateral damage to the Consumers of their services.

The final point is that the delivery of social services in an information paradigm requires storage of as much data as possible, to enable the tracking of trends, the altering of emerging patterns and the delivery of services. It is in the interests of both Consumers and Suppliers of social relief services to ensure that all data is collected and maintained, to enable information to be extracted as required to meet future needs of society.

These changes can all be predicted by applying a new paradigm of an Information economy, but probably represent only a portion of the real benefits, many of which will become apparent only in the context of the new paradigm once it is entrenched. The consequence of these changes is a substantial improvement in the social circumstances of the average person, thereby enabling society to prosper in a period of changing and avoiding the risk of social disturbances by those who perceive themselves as dispossessed. The ease of the transition depends on the skills and dedication of people in the sector to the consumer of their services.