



The Power of the Crowd

Erdogan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, is not listening to his focus group. The thing about focus groups is that you don't (always) get to choose them. The web gives a voice to special interest groups and brings sites which rate value like Trip Advisor, Mumsnet, IWantGreatCare to life.

Governments and politicians will be rated online soon too. Just as technology and digital business models are transforming mature industries, so 'the crowd' is transforming democracy. This isn't about mob rule or Arab Spring. We all will be doing the governing, not being governed in the future.

The infrastructure of democracy- otherwise known as government – hasn't really changed in 500 years. When people required horses to get to London in order to be represented, then the concept of parliament and the need for Westminster was a powerful one.

Today, people, and not just 200 year olds or digital natives can make themselves heard through YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook. Direct. Not in the slow motion of representative democracy currently on offer in major western democracies: I vote you in, and you go off to Westminster and do what you do. I learn about it later, and shrug my shoulders if I disagree. Indirect is *out*. We all feel we know best. We demand to be heard. We don't accept the proxy of government as it's currently constructed. We are ignoring it or voting for UKIP which might be the same thing.

After the devastation of World War II, the world quite rightly gave itself a bearhug. It wanted a collective kind of bond, and established models of 'collective exchange': the NHS being the prime example. The implicit social contract was one of deference: we vote you in, we trust you, and we endure the consequences. The web flips that on its head, making peer to peer exchange and crowd-sourcing the de facto model of social exchange: collective action through individual empowerment is not only possible but the imperative.

I thought about all of this as I spent the last 4 days in Istanbul at the Dell Women's Entrepreneurship Network (DWEN) annual event where the protests went right in front of our hotel.

Here 200 alpha females descended upon this city of 13 million to talk about the bottom-up, tech-fueled, Dell-enabled empowerment while the protests surged by individuals who begged to differ with a

very top-down, patriarchal approach to government.

At its core, the Istanbul protests are about a symbol – the one major park in the city which could be torn down. But it's really about the transparency over the decision-making as to what to do with the park. And it's even more about whether the government is sliding towards a disintegration of church and state separation. You have to peel back the onion a bit to really understand what's going on. The Erdogan government believes it's delivered on its social contract. They've ushered in growth over 3 elections spanning a decade. Whether growth would have happened anyway is another matter.

I couldn't help but think of Valery Giscard d'Estaing's remark when France voted 'No' to the Lisbon treaty; 'Vote again to get the right answer'.

Government with representation – the very basis upon which democracy has its credibility – is getting granular. What 'representation' means is being defined very specifically these days. As data expands exponentially, sampling is becoming less relevant as there is a very real sense that all data can be measured if you have the right tools. That is, I don't need to be represented; I only really need to be counted, and I want to participate directly in the major decisions, not just the one big decision about who gets into office. A very powerful form of direct democracy could be waiting in the wings. Representation doesn't mean that you 'get into office' and then you shut the door, and do your job. The door is open. If you are a political leader, you must keep establishing your connection, your mandate, your leadership. Government is a constant campaign.

Leadership without followership is bankrupt. Erdogan's decision to fly to North Africa while the country is erupting in protests and now a general strike shows perhaps fatal signs of arrogance. It is a strategic error to aggravate your citizens by turning your back on them while they are flexing their muscles.

The average 20 year old in the United Kingdom

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doesn't identify with the political party offerings. They are however socially and politically aware and active, but traditional party membership is lower than ever. The digital natives see that things can change quickly in the online world. Why is government so slow to implement change in the 'real world'?

Institutions preserve problems, and entrepreneurs and start-ups are created to solve problems which the founders can't believe don't exist. In their mind's eye, the world should work a certain way, and they become obsessed to bring that future to the present. There are strong similarities between entrepreneurs and how they shape the world, and how citizens see their ability to shape society today. Not everyone will be an entrepreneur. However, we will all play a role in shaping our societies in an increasing entrepreneurial way. The world of kickstarter and kiva where people contribute their own funding to solve social problems is coming soon to your local community.

I can see a world very soon where people shrug their shoulders about what their local government does with their tax money, but they will contribute amounts – perhaps small at first – towards solving community problems. On top of paying their taxes. They will just assume that the collective exchange model of local governments will be ineffective, and that they will have to take charge. The rise of new schools is evidence as well as new models of healthcare like the Circle Partnership. Could it be that the Big Society is really little societies in action all around us?

Not too long ago, my eye caught a Times article which stated that 57% of all revenue collected through Stamp Duty went to administer – you guessed it – stamp duty. That's collective exchange in action. It's fat, it's not using technology to be efficient. New lean government which is being co-created with local little societies have low administration fees if any. It's not that social justice is less important; it's the means whereby it's achieved is not through big government, not through a 60's era collective exchange framework.

The individual is on the rise. No longer are strong individuals thought of as narcissistic, selfish, greedy. They are seen as capable of creating positive change for society. The web enables us to choose what we consume more easily than ever. We will consume government differently as well as we will co-create it on a regular basis, not just at the time of the election. We will not be separated by terms like 'labour' and 'conservative', but empowered by causes, campaigns and beliefs. The early adopters of 'new government' or 'government

in the internet age' are on the streets of Istanbul as

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well as taking their GCSE's in London. But early adopters spread to the majority and before you know it, you have a revolution on your hands.

Government is being redefined. Leaders emerge when history taps them on their shoulders. Witness Mandela, Thatcher, Aung San Suu Kyi, Pope John Paul II. The next Prime Minister of both Britain and Turkey are not only listening to their focus groups right now, they are building them. They must have a systematic way of listening daily to what the people want or the people will find someone who will. The entrepreneur knows he or she must think big, start small, and move fast. That world has reached the altar of politics. The holy curtain has been ripped, and behind it, stands just you and me. We the people. The revolution is afoot.

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