

***A Practical Framework Towards Open Government
“Moving Beyond Openness and the Forward-looking Walkways to Open Collaborations”***

Kanok Karnchanapoo, Well Consulting Group, Thailand

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Abstract

Open Government is nowadays a popular concept for public administrators and policymakers. Nevertheless, the applications on this are still varied depended on one's interpretation. Many understand that Open Government is only about openness and transparency of the government to the people based upon "Freedom of Information" principles and "Right to know" doctrines. However, in the digital era, many public administrators and policymakers also applied Open Government as an Open Data by opening public sector's data and information with private sectors and people sectors for further usages and analytics to leverage on the power of big data. Furthermore, Open Government can be deployed as Open Collaboration to empower citizen as well as encourage participation in public sector's activities and even in certain government roles in order to leverage the collaborations and competencies among public sectors, private sectors, and people sectors. Therefore, in the article, these various concepts and applications will be explored to gain comprehensive understanding of Open Government in several dimension. Besides, the challenges of applying Open Government in reality will be discussed. Indeed, public sector's information often labeled as confidential and sensitive. Moreover, citizen participation in public sectors can also be complicated due to numerous limitation. As a consequence, reluctance and resistance to open are common issues. Therefore, in the end of this section, the comprehensible framework for evaluating priority and considering stepping stones towards Open Government Initiatives will be presented.

Keywords: Open Government, Collaboration, Open Data, Participation, Openness

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Introduction

Open government is one of the most important issue in public management nowadays. Especially, in the world of digitalization and data, this concept becomes more crucial and valuable because it is not only about creating transparency but it is also about how to establish platforms for open data and further collaborations. Therefore, in this conceptual paper, the various concepts of openness will be widely discussed and the tools for the first-step implementation of open government will also be introduced so government agencies could apply the tools and concepts practically for the utmost benefits of the citizen.

This conceptual paper will begin by exploring various concepts of openness in the open government. Then, simplified tools for assessing the degree of openness and prioritizing the initiatives to open government data will be introduced. Finally, the key challenges in implementation will be highlighted.

Reviewing Concepts of Openness

Openness in open government can be viewed through different perspectives. The first perspective is transparency, which is the beginning concept of open government. Government should be transparent according to basic democratic principles that people have freedom of information and right to know what government is doing. Also, the public information handled by government is also belonging to the citizens. This can be considered as public goods that everyone should have an access equally and openly anywhere and anytime. This concept is mainly about basic right of citizens.¹

In fact, transparency is not optional but it is mandatory. Especially, if people needs to know any government information, they will finally get those information eventually because nowadays the information is abundant and flowed freely over the internet and social media. Thus, this free-flow of information cause very high risk of information leakage despite the confidentiality and secrecy of data. The critical issue is that these leaked information may be inaccurate and distorted so it could be harmful and create distrust between people and government. Therefore, in this perspective, the government should take position to promote freedom of information and proclaim information by itself rather than risking the information leakage.²

The second viewpoint of openness is participation. Nowadays, many people believe that only government transparency is not sufficient, however the government should also engage citizen and stakeholders to share idea and even make decisions collectively. However, according to the literature review, there are many level of participation.³

Inform: This is the very basic level that government only notify its policy or procedure after the final decision were made. The engagement level is very low and it is mainly one-way communication.

Consult: this is the participation form that we usually see. Government or public agencies hold the public hearings for citizen and stakeholders to comment and suggest on particular

¹ Sandoval-Almazan, R. (2015). Open Government and Transparency: Building a Conceptual Framework. p. 3.

² Meijer, A. J., Curtin, D., & Hillebrandt, M. (2012). Open government: Connecting vision and voice, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 78(1), 10-29.

³ UNDP, U. N. (2016). Citizen engagement in public service delivery. *The Critical Role of Public Officials*, 7.

policies before incorporating those feedback to the decision making. This can consider two-ways communication. Of course, it is more participatory than the first one but there is still not much interaction and engagement.

Involve: in this form, government or public agencies invite citizen and stakeholders to join the team to undergo the working activities and decision process so they can discuss and get advice interactively throughout the whole process. The form of this participation can be appointing citizen as an advisor in policy steering committee or the public agency working group.

Collaborate: the process of this is quite similar to INVOLVE, except that the government or public agencies allow citizen and stakeholders to make decisions together. This can consider as a co-creation between citizen and government or public-private partnership in case of private sectors. Therefore, this is very high engagement scheme.

Empower: this can be considered as ultimate level of participation as government or public agencies play a role of facilitator to open the forum for citizen or stakeholders to be the owner of the whole process to generate policy alternatives and then make the final decisions themselves. The government only provides authorities and resources while the citizen is the real conductor.⁴

Therefore, when talking about openness in terms of citizen participation, it is very worthwhile to explore the level of it. The diagram below (Figure 1) shows the degree of participation according to stakeholder feedback taking and influence in the decision making.



Figure 1: Assessing Level of Participation

The third viewpoint is openness for data sharing and collaborations. This is a contemporary concept as big data and data analytics become very crucial and powerful. Indeed, government and public data can be considered as big data that could lead to value creations for every sector. Therefore, in this idea, government should open up their data not only for the sake of

⁴ Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2004). From responsiveness to collaboration. Collaborative Public Administration: Some Lessons from the Israeli Experience, 701-702.

declaring itself for transparency but also for making data available for further utilization and collaboration. This perspective can be named as open data collaborations, which focuses on open data for sharing among beneficiaries.

However, data sharing can be categorized in many forms based on level of openness and level of collaboration (Figure 2) as following.

Data Exchanging: This is a common form that we have always seen. A few organizations exchange the data for certain mutual benefit in specific circumstances. For example, public agency exchange data with a university to research project about policy alternatives. It is good that at least there is a level collaboration here however this is not a sustainable model as requires efforts to collect and select the data to exchange and mostly task-based which is not constant. This is low level of openness as only few information is open and low level of collaboration due to this discontinuous manner.

Data Partnering: In this form, a few organizations have an agreement to share the certain data and allow accessibility within the partners. This is more efficient ways of data sharing as the related personnel can obtain the data themselves for further usage. However, the degree of openness and collaboration is still low as the data only opens limitedly for the specific group with specific objectives for mutual benefit.

Data Collaboration: In this form, a large number of public and private organizations especially in the related industry or similar ecosystem or function share the data for their members to broadly use and utilize. This is more open and collaborative and the benefits belong to wide-ranges of people.

Open Data Collaborations: This is the ultimate form of openness and collaboration that most of the government data and non-confidential private sector data are open for everyone. With this idea, public sector, private sector, education sector, and all citizen shall have access to the data and they can utilize and make use of the data for further value creation without any hurdles. The good example of this model is Estonia, which has fully implemented e-Government ecosystem and created big data sharing platform so called X-road⁵. Therefore, combining the concept of open government together with data sharing and collaboration not only enables and achieves openness and transparency but this also encourages engagement and empowerment, increases government efficiency and effectiveness, and establishes collaborative environment that finally leads to value creation for government, public sectors, private sectors, the citizen, and the society in overall.

⁵ Vassil, K. (2016). Estonian e-Government Ecosystem: Foundation, Applications, Outcomes Estonian e-Government Ecosystem: Foundation, Applications, Outcomes. Retrieved from Public Documents of World Bank.

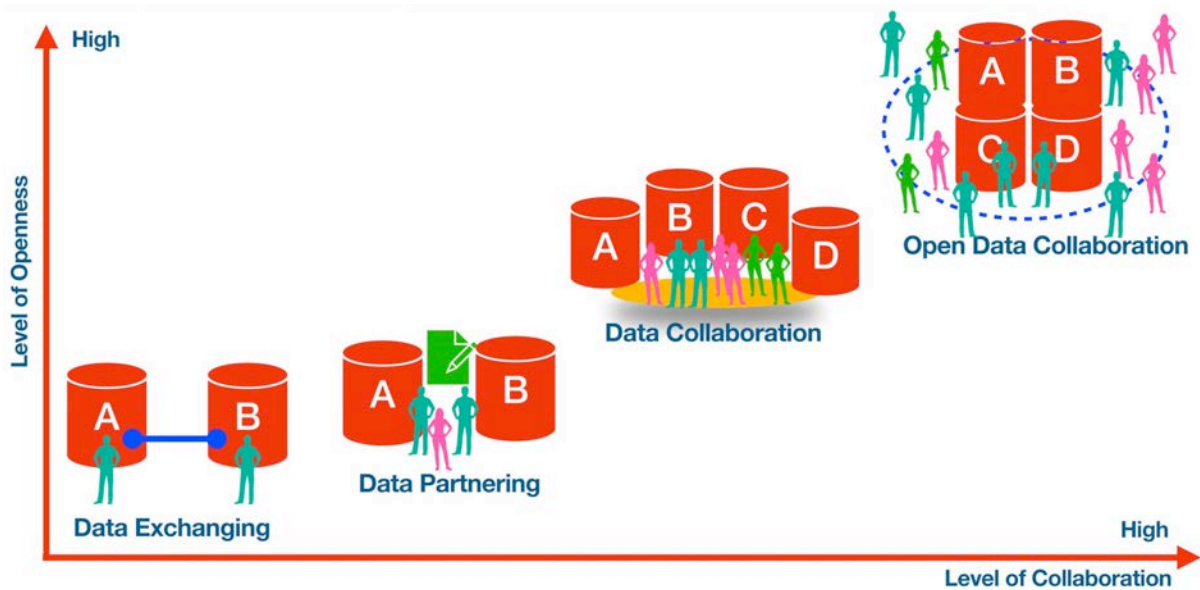


Figure 2: Openness for Data Sharing and Collaborations

Assessing the Level of Openness

The next key question is how could the government agencies gauge their openness level. The diagram in Figure 3 was developed by asking a simple questions whether the targeted public agencies mostly have one-way or two-ways communication with citizen and whether the services are provided on online platform or offline platform. This is a simple diagram for basic considerations for government agencies to understand their current stages of openness so the could develop further to higher level, which could require more complex tools for assessing in deeper details. Thus, the benefit of this diagram is to help public administrators to assess openness level of the government agencies and the proper action can be taken for higher-level steps.

Assessing The Openness

The communications and services between the agencies and stakeholders or citizen is mostly

	One-Way Communication	Two-Ways Communication
Online	Limited Communication on Open Platform Information are mostly available through Website and e-services. However, most is one-side information for reference with limited channel for communication.	Open Communication and Platform Numerous channels for information flows and communications are in place i.e. Social Media, Chat box and Chat bot, Open Data Collaboration Platform.
Offline	Limited Communication and Platform Need to meet in person to make a request of information and ask questions with rigid instruction and documentation to undergo.	Open Communication on Limited Platform Still require meeting in person to request an information, but the request and service can be customized and the feedbacks are welcomingly discussed.

Figure 3: Assessing the Level of Openness

The first category is limited communication and platform (Bottom-Left in the Figure 3), when an agency still communicates on a one-way basis and is relied on offline platform. For example, people have to go to the on-site service to request the information they need and undergo lots of processes to get that information. If any agencies fall on this category, it is very urgent for the improvement.

The second category is open communication on limited platform (Bottom-Right in the Figure 3), when an agency falls under two-ways communication and offline. These agencies are already good in engaging people therefore the next stepping stone is to primarily get information technology and infrastructure in place and acquire necessary resources to build up good online platforms.

The third category is limited communication on open platform (Top-Left in the Figure 3). In fact, some public agencies might already utilize online platform but the services and communications are still on a one-way basis without major tools to gain feedback or engage in conversation with citizen. Nevertheless, since the online platform is in place, it is a good groundwork towards better collaborations and data sharing. Therefore, the next key step for agencies under this category is to enable more features that allow interaction from citizen and the users as well as to allocate resources and manpower for engaging people in conversation and developing potential initiatives according to the feedback of the citizen.

The fourth category is open communication and platform (Top-Right in the Figure 3). An agency under this category has continuously created two-ways communication with citizen through online platform. The next step is to increase efficiency and effectiveness to serve citizen's need and generate best user's experiences. Indeed, digital technologies i.e. Artificial Intelligence (AI), Chat Bot, or Internet of Things (IoT) could be utilized to identify citizen's insights so as to interact with the citizen according to their needs and preference in a customized manner. Also, aiming at developing open data collaboration platform would also be another aspiring direction.

Prioritizing Open Government Initiatives

Government data is massive and it is certainly not practical to be fully opened in a short period of time as there are still numbers of challenges and concerns. Government data sometimes contains sensitive data that could lead to different interpretations on government intentions, actions, and performance in both positive and negative ways. Besides, data privacy is another key concern as sharing some data could violate individual right and people's privacy. Nevertheless, these concerns should not be a justification to avoid open the data or revoke open government initiatives. Instead, searching a way to overcome these challenges and creating step-by-step actions are essential. Therefore, in Figure 4, this simplified two by two framework is introduced to initially identify the concerns on data sharing as well as suggest the action and prioritization.

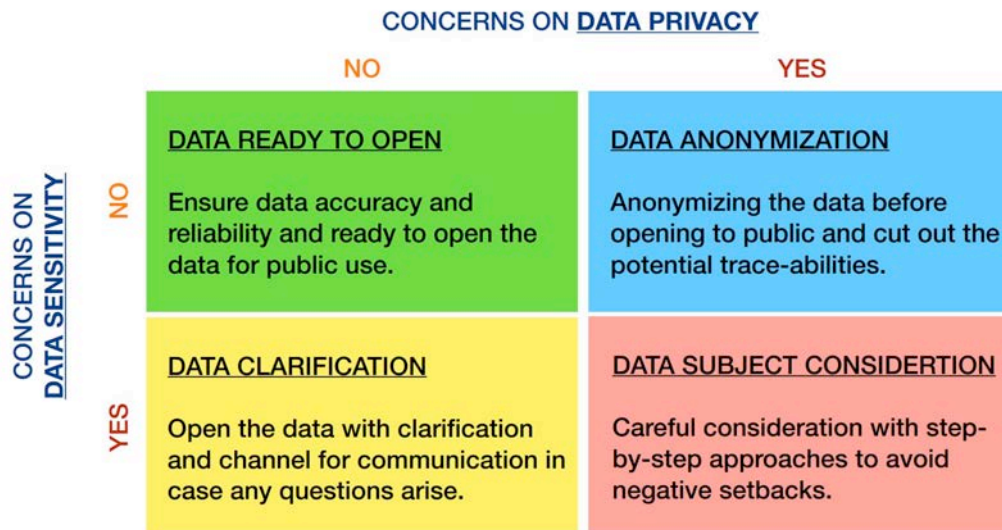


Figure 4: Prioritizing Open Government Initiatives

There are two dimensions in the framework whether the hurdle and concern of that data sharing is on data sensitivity or on data privacy with the answer whether it is yes or no.

If both answers are no (Top-Left in the Figure 4), it means the data is ready to open so government agencies need only to ensure its accuracy and reliability before sharing to public. In this case, government can release the data in this category without delay.

If only data privacy is a concern (Top-Right in the Figure 4) the data can still be opened but need to undergo anonymization process to ensure no personal information is leaked out and cut out potential traceability. The next step's priority is on data anonymization in this case.

If only data sensitivity is a concern (Bottom-Left in the Figure 4), for example, the data could be widely debated among people and spread over the news and social media and it could potentially be a negative impact to the government and lead to distrust from citizen, the data could still be opened but it must be shared with clear and concise clarification as well as designated communication channel in case any questions may arise. The next step's priority is data clarification and communication channel setting in this case.

Finally, if both answers are yes (Bottom-Right in the Figure 4), the data is considered both sensitive and private. It is worthwhile to take time to carefully considered the impact in every aspects before laying out step-by-step approach for data sharing. Both data anonymization and clarification as well as two-ways communication platform creation are crucial. Anyhow, the ultimate goal is still to open that data but must do with well-rounded consideration and proper strategy.

Key Challenges

To implement open government concepts as well as share the data, there are certain key challenges to be aware of and overcome. First and the most important challenge is the mindset. It is possible that some government agencies may fear of opening the data since they do not want to take risk on how people would think about it and do not need to handle the comment and feedback. This is the nature of self-protection. Therefore, it is important to shift

this mindset in a way that feedback and comment are opportunities to improve and respond accurately to citizen's needs. Thus, openness is a big opportunity to gain those constructive feedbacks. The second challenge is the unaligned expectation. Sometimes, government agencies have concrete reasons not to share certain information or limitations on collecting some information regularly. Thus, it is important to set the clear direction and communicate to citizen and stakeholders to align expectations as well as listen to their comments so government can shape the open data direction and allocate resources and efforts on opening key data that serve people's need at first. The third challenge is digital literacy. As most opened data is the data that offered via online platform, government agencies should focus on creating digital people and enhancing digital competency to the organizations.

Conclusion

In the era of digital technology and data, open government concepts should be examined beyond the transparency viewpoints. Instead of only declaring information, governments and public agencies should focus on how could they could engage citizen as well as public and private sectors in an open platform that every people could access and utilize the data for value creation as well as collaborate with each other. Hence, the first stepping stone is the most challenging. It is important that government agencies must be able to assess their current level of openness in order to take proper strategic actions and then prioritize the further open government initiatives by classifying the data to be opened in different categories which require different implementational directions. Therefore, this conceptual paper provides these simplified tools for public agencies to embark on the initial steps towards open government and open collaborations.

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Contact email: kanok.karnchanapoo@gmail.com