World Economic Forum

Rethinking Personal Data

PROJECT OUTLINE

June 2010
Project Overview

Our ever-expanding use of technology is driving the creation of vast stores of personal information in the digital world. The question of how best to use these data to create societal and economic value through innovative services has been a widely discussed for many years. An endless array of services which could be created based on such data is imaginable. “The industrial revolution of data” seems to be at hand. However, unlocking the promise of personal data is proving quite complex. In part, this is because key stakeholders - consumers, public authorities and the private sector - have very diverse, and sometimes conflicting, interests. Interestingly, the most difficult conflicts to resolve are those within each group. For example, governments are eager to deliver better services in a more cost effective manner through moving more data online. However, they have very real concerns about creating unintentional security threats if they make too much data publicly accessible. Similarly, consumers are torn between the desire to shield their information from commercial exploitation, and the attraction of innovative new personalized services, or even simple discounts, that many companies offer in return for access to that data. This lack of clarity around desired outcomes makes it difficult to build an ecosystem where everyone feels like they win.

Despite the daunting nature of the challenge, “wait and see” is no longer a viable strategy for most actors.

Over the past few years, discussions among the member companies of the World Economic Forum with governments, regulators, academics and advocacy groups have clearly shown that there is a short-term need for collaborative action.

- First, the accelerating availability and spread of personal data and its usage is unavoidable – it is already happening and will only accelerate.
- Second, certain ecosystem participants are moving ahead in exploiting personal data, creating services and aiming to rally customers and public authorities around their offerings, influencing public opinion and legislative frameworks as they go. Other private and public sector actors who have a stake in the use of personal data need to actively engage now or risk not having a say in the emerging policies, and standards.
- Third, there is a real risk that unilateral approaches will create major bottlenecks, or at the very least sub-optimize the outcome for the broader ecosystem, including consumers.
- Fourth, while there is no “one-size-fits-all” design of a future ecosystem which can be applied top-down in all (geographical) contexts; stakeholders require a framework, i.e. a set of common goals or values of a future ecosystem and potential routes to achieve such a common vision.

It is against this background that the World Economic Forum has set up the multi-year project “Rethinking Personal Data” which has been kicked off in a multi-stakeholder workshop on 15 June in New York. At the Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos in January 2011, leading executives will come together with public sector representatives, user interest advocacy groups, academics and industry experts to discuss a future which holds benefits for each involved stakeholder group and how best to move toward this end state.

To prepare this discussion the Forum will work together with a selected group of leading experts, public authorities, advocates and executives from telecom, technology, media and Internet firms to:

1. Increase understanding of the different stakeholder interests from end users, governments and commercial parties highlighting of the common opportunities, interests and tensions which need to be addressed as they shape the ecosystem.

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1 We call such a future ecosystem in which users, the public sector and the private sector mutually benefit a win/win/win ecosystem.
2. **Illustrate the opportunity** by outlining the societal and commercial value which could be created by further leveraging personal data.

3. **Detail real-life use cases.** Survey the current landscape of related activities from organizations and private companies. Show how recent and current attempts either succeeded in aligning stakeholder interests and sustainably creating social and economic value (and how such examples could be scaled) or what can be learned from failed initiatives. Highlight alternative business model architectures which could potentially enable those common set of principles. Explore a set of collaborative activities that stakeholders can support in the short and mid term (e.g. how to increase general awareness and “data literacy”, how to pressure-test theories in real pilots)

4. **Identify a collective set of principles which could serve to establish a balanced ecosystem across all key stakeholder communities.** What distinct roles exist in the ecosystem and which participants are best suited to fill them? Which principles are important to end users, and how can they provide the foundation for the ecosystem, e.g. by serving as a charter for individual data rights in a digital world? Which commercial interests should be protected? What legal frameworks can provide a basis for contracts, regulation, etc., e.g. what does data ownership actually entail? What technological principles provide the necessary safeguards, e.g. interoperability or security?

To capture the insights from the stakeholder representatives participating in this project and to ensure a leveraged discussion at the 2011 Annual Meeting the Forum will develop

- A comprehensive, report summarizing the project’s insights and recommendations
- An industry specific report providing an assessment of the opportunity, relevant risks and a series of actions

Companies, public sector authorities, experts and advocacy groups will have several opportunities to participate in the first phase of this project:

- **Between July and September 2010** Interested experts can join an advisory board that will guide the project through the end of the year. Individual interviews with interested stakeholders to explore the areas of focus listed above.
- **On 29th September 2010** a personal data workshop, assembling a wide array of key stakeholders from the Telecom, Technology, Media and Internet industries, public sector representatives and thought leaders, will be conducted in New York. This workshop group will review and fine-tune insights and hypothesis for recommended actions for the private and public sector.
- **Between October and December 2010** a series of other convening events will occur via partner organizations to continue the dialog and refine the focus. Additionally, drafts of final reports will be finalized for release in early 2011.

For any questions or if you are interested in joining the Rethinking Personal Data project please contact:

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