Digital enabler example: Citizen vault

In the past, public services occupied physical locations in communities. Citizens went to those locations, submitted their information (usually by filling in a form), then the data was validated by the relevant agency before a decision was made. Today, we go through a similar process online, by visiting websites, filling in forms and waiting for data to be processed and decisions to be made. This is not a digital revolution; it is a marginal efficiency gain.

In contrast, a true e-State understands that citizens should not be logging into services to pass on their information; services should be logging into the citizen to facilitate Good Government. How could this work?

Imagine each citizen had access to a 'citizen vault' that secured the citizen's individual data. Like today's banks, these would be tightly regulated organizations. These citizen vaults have two core purposes: to only store data they know to be correct and to only ever act in the interest of the individual who owns that data.

At the simplest level, if I store my name, date of birth and address in my citizen vault, how will my interaction with public services is transformed?

1. I wish to register with a doctor. My citizen vault offers me options for surgeries to register with; I choose one and am automatically enrolled because my name, date of birth and address are pre-validated. I can then book my first appointment immediately. Importantly, the surgery has no need to collect, process or store any data.

2. I would like to buy some alcohol. As I walk out of the store, I am stopped by a police officer who needs to check my age to ensure that I haven't been sold the alcohol illegally. Using a unique reference number for my citizen vault, they can confirm that I am over 18. Importantly, they are not provided with my exact date of birth, nor any ancillary information, such as my name and address, because it is not central to their enquiry.

3. I want to buy a parking permit from my local council. My citizen vault knows where I live but doesn't store the details of my car. I upload those so I can get my parking permit as well as pay my road tax. Again, no data is taken from me, processed or stored by government; it simply confirms my eligibility and proceeds on that basis.

In this way, I have interacted with three separate arms of government and no public body has had to pay to collect, validate or store my data. This has the potential to end huge and expensive IT programs and repatriate responsibility for data from institutions to individuals. The test of success will be the point at which governments stop paying IT suppliers for systems to process data and, instead, start paying citizens for access to their pre-processed data. This is true digital transformation and the first e-States will be the ones to adopt it.