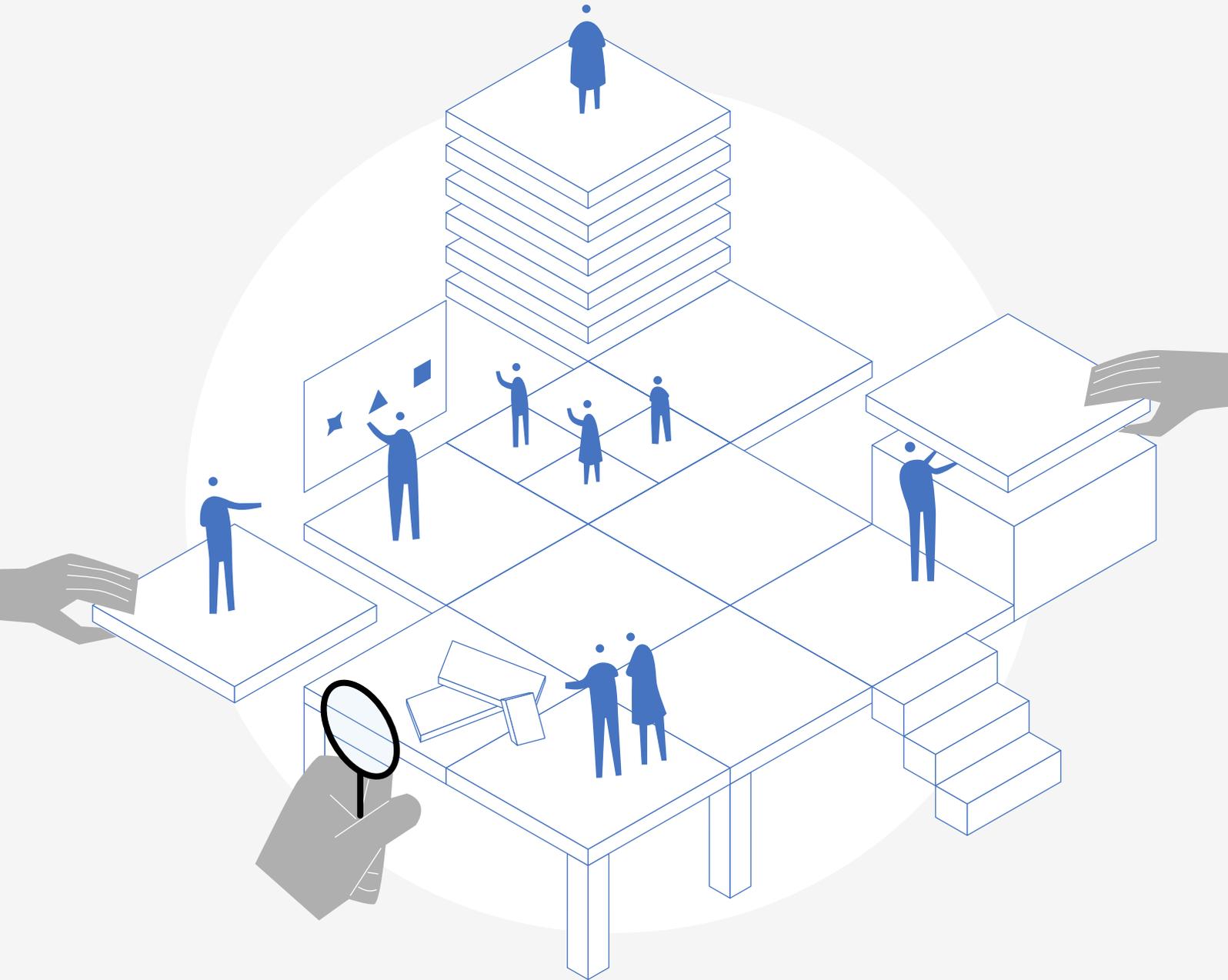


# Principles for Societal Platform Governance



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# Introduction

A societal platform is a development mission in a specific focus area (such as, but not limited to, education, healthcare or economic opportunity). It aims to catalyse systemic change at population scale (extending services to all affected people). It leverages an open digital infrastructure to share the ability to develop contextual solutions with an ecosystem of co-creation partners (e.g. Social Enterprises, Governmental Institutions or Private Sector). It amplifies, by orchestrating and enabling, the diverse developmental initiatives taken up by a network of key actors across the society, including the state, civil society and private sector.

These [societal platforms](#) aim for impact with deliberation—impact is the mission, and the platform is the means, (Unlike the other way round for commercial platforms). The impact and mission are rooted in rights, equity and freedom, and additionally democratic [values](#). These translate into enabling choice, nurturing dignity, and restoring agency for all.

So, for these societal platforms, technology architectures, data governance, programs and partnerships must all line up to serve a mission to deliver impact for the communities of interest. [EkStep](#) is a Societal Platform mission that leverages a core digital infrastructure, a network of developers, to enable learners across India access learning opportunities material generated by experts and [their peers](#), as well as capabilities and means to conduct their core activities more effectively and efficiently. For EkStep, assets, governance practices and engagement with the ecosystem must serve the aim of enabling learners.

While a clear mission statement is critical to get started—it is not enough. Values and principles, established through relational approaches (embedding, not enforcing) become critical to ensure continued impact and amplification of rights, equity and freedom.<sup>1</sup>

The mission, which articulates the desired social impact, is a distinguishing feature of Societal Platforms. Accordingly, any set of values and principles that aim to frame governance or design must centre the mission. In centering the mission, it is critical to watch out for mission

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, one question to consider is whether Societal Platforms will cease to exist or pivot to a different mission, once the desired impact has been attained. There is no right answer - various entities may adopt different approaches - such as pivoting, merging/de-merging, etc.

creep, which is a situation where the platform begins to serve a different mission. Accordingly, paying attention to the limits of the mission itself is important.

None of this is to say, however, that Societal Platforms must adopt a rigid and unyielding approach to their mission. Missions must evolve—but, when they require different value systems, such as rejection of democratic values, or the (replication of the) platform becomes an end in itself, then there must be due reconsideration.

The principles articulated in this document aim to provide a framework for thinking about infusing societal values into governance. In the current form, they do not do more than provide a guiding value framework for governance. They are meant to stimulate thought (and, hopefully action) bearing in mind the stage of platform evolution and the context. Specific governance approaches must necessarily be evolved in context—keeping in mind the nature of the platform, its stage of evolution and importantly, the social and political environment within which it operates.

We recognise that any articulation of values or principles raise important questions about who framed them, and who gets to make decisions around them. Why should individuals and institutions of privilege have a disproportionate say in setting the agenda, as it were? We have no easy answers to offer here—but we hope the fundamental principles of accessible co-creation and accountability pave the way for wider and deeper engagement, and critiques around these principles. And that governance evolvability enables and drives for accommodation of wider voices in this area.

## What we have attempted here

In this paper, we attempt to articulate a set of principles that could guide us in governing societal platforms. In doing so, we attempt to move towards calibration of values, rather than blandly state categories. The calibration accounts for societal values, and aspire to maximise societal impact with a focus on the rights of every individual.

At present, we keep the focus primarily on sarkaar and samaaj platforms. Sarkaar has the additional obligation of being available to all as it is financed by public resources. We believe these principles can apply to bazaar platforms too; however, more work is required to understand the ways to navigate conflicts between profits and societal values when they arise.

Our starting value system is co-governance (Murray, et al 2019). This is a way where stakeholders use each other's resources to achieve better societal outcomes with improved efficiencies.

## Research Process

This piece and the principles have emerged from desk research. We conducted 7 interviews (list in appendix) and a brief round table with a few societal missions. We used the processes to generate a long-list of principles. Analytically, we attempted to “cut” the principles different ways to look for mutual exclusivity—however, principles are related to each other and form elements of a broader value system that is rooted in rights, and democratic principles.

We believe more needs to be done here—getting to an understanding of the operation of these principles in context, sharpening the processes of governance/how-tos, and understanding specific breakdowns at scale—all require thought and research. These values and the ways in which they operate on the ground require exploration.

However, this report is a starting point, and is structured as follows: the following section articulates how we frame the principles. Within each principle, we document what it is, why we think it is relevant, who it may be applicable to, and an already operationalised example. We have not been able to find examples for every principle mentioned. We also explore some concerns that may arise from scale. We leave specific questions for each value/principle that may be starting points for further inquiry. A brief conclusion and resource lists appear at the end.

# Building a platform

Values for governance can be imagined even prior to the operation of the platform. It is our hope that in discussions on establishing a societal platform, examining a few questions to frame values and governance may be helpful:

## **Developing a platform: Need for the platform/ extensions to it**

Developing and making extensions on the platform require careful thought, and ideally should not result in crowding-out other players. Societal platforms do not always come with the assumption of capturing value, but rather societal impact. Therefore, they should consider the systemic and competitive impacts of establishment and extensions. Any technology deployment should be closely linked to a gap, that can best be filled by the proposed technology (and ideally, also by no other way). This means ensuring that platform instantiation, regardless of societal value very carefully engages with existing and embedded systems.

## **Establishing norms and boundaries: What will the platform not do?**

All societal platforms are embedded in socio-political systems. However, it is important to establish the fundamental norms/boundaries *a priori* (such as, democratic values, not enabling authoritarianism). These need to be discussed among founding teams upfront. Referring to the Societal Platform [core values](#) is helpful in this aspect.

A related point is conflicts, and being aware of conflicts early is important. Platform work inherently generates a range of conflicts of interest—ranging from level playing-field distortions due to private ecosystems of extenders to potentially enabling harmful platform interactions (social media platforms amplify problematic content to drive engagement).

# Principles for governance of societal platforms

## Understanding the framework

Beyond a core set of considerations for platforms, we see the principles as two types—pillars and levers. These need to be understood as embedded in the societal platform context and the legal, social and political system. They are neither abstracted from the context nor absolute—so feasibility and the ability to operationalise must inform the process of translating this into governance at the mission or platform entity level.

### **Pillar principles**

These go to the core imagination of a societal platform and are foundational values. They may be seen as those values that make platforms societal, and support and align with the mission. Equally, the notion of ‘good’ in good tech is linked to principles of community ownership, accountability and co-creation.

### **Lever principles**

These are instruments that increase the impact, efficacy, and efficiency of a societal platform. Implementing these principles may increase reach, amplify impact, and support the innovation of open co-creation environments. At the governance level, these would have implications on everyday practices of management—which would be specific to the platform context and the stage of evolution.

## **Pillar principles**

*Community ownership, co-creation, accountability, governance evolvability* are pillars of Societal Platform governance. These may be seen as fundamental—and working towards them can radically shift societal platform imagination from efficiency/consumer lenses to societal impact frames. They underpin platforms' aspirations for social good and impact.

Our research and conversations show us that these values cannot be 'implemented' overnight. Various factors—including nature of the platform, the socio-political context in which they operate, stage of platform evolution—influence implementation. However, attempts must be made to iteratively calibrate and implement for community governance, co-creation, accountability, underpinned by governance evolvability.

# 1



## Be for and of the society

**What** Put society first in platforms. Embody societal cares and concerns into governance and co-creation processes to unlock imagination and problem-solving.

**Why: Restoring agency and system leadership<sup>2</sup>** Societal platforms exist to serve society and communities, not the other way around. Accordingly, societal goals cannot end at delivering services through platforms, but must go beyond to strive for wider and deeper societal good. In order to do so, towards [restoring agency](#) and system leadership, platforms must embody community in their very essence. Restoring agency, that is—providing choice and ability to platform users—cannot stop at enhancing capabilities to use a platform. It must go to truly empowering users to claim a broader set of rights via platforms. Similarly, system leadership is not merely about establishing large networks and sector pre-eminence, but unlocking the imagination of society to solve problems at scale. Community involvement enables that.

**Who** Communities must play significant and formal roles in governance in societal platforms. Communities include all actors who are co-creating upon and amplifying the shared enabling societal platform infrastructures, as well as participants and users.

**Concerns at scale** Formal ways of including community refer to board seats for community in *sarkaar* and *samaaj* platforms, and equity shares along with board representation in *bazaar* platforms. Communities could also play a role in managing established governance frameworks (eg. around content governance) at the ground level. But as networks become large and complex, problems arise in being able to identify the right representatives for communities, and in some instances, the right communities. It is possible that privileged, vocal and visible communities are represented at the expense of others—a problem that could occur without scale too, but is magnified

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<sup>2</sup> The 'Why' for each of the pillar principles derives from the values articulated by Societal Platform.

as networks become larger. Early examples show the possibility of bringing in civil society as a representative for the community; however, both the opportunities and challenges need further evaluation.

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#### **FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- › How can we create safe and clear pathways for community participation in platform entities at the board level?
- › What are the challenges and limits of community governance for multi-platform entities?
- › How do you identify the true representatives of a community? How do you solve for contradictions within the community?
- › What are the practices for implementing community governance at scale?

#### **EXAMPLE**

Amul, is an Indian dairy cooperative society managed by a cooperative body, the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd., which today is jointly owned by 36 lakh milk producers in Gujarat. Elected representatives manage the board, which is responsive to the farmers needs and suggestions.

## 2

### Make accessible co-creation a habit



**What** Aspire to have co-creation at all levels of the platform; unlock opportunities for co-creation of participants.

**Why: Share Solvability  
and Inspire Co-creation**

Societal platforms work at scale, for *samaaj*, *sarkaar*, and *bazaar*, which have diverse and dynamic needs. Embedding any value system by design (impact, privacy, inclusion—by design) requires discovering the parameters from those who are affected by it. Co-creation improves platforms, but importantly, co-creation engages communities to embed longer-term values of citizenship, trust and responsibility.

At design and extension stages, engaging with the ecosystem of extenders and participants is essential for the platform to be sustainable in the longer run. Values of shared solvability and co-creation at all levels (upon the shared infrastructure) require conscious adoption of practices of co-creation.

However, it is not enough to aspire for co-creation without considering questions of access. Actors on platforms—builders, extenders, and participants—experience breakdowns in accessibility for co-creation, and efforts to govern co-creation processes must account for accessibility. Participants may be hindered by social structures like gender, caste, and class. Co-creation mechanisms may not sufficiently accommodate people with disabilities. Thinking about co-creation from the standpoint of accessibility can widen the range of those who engage in co-creation processes, in turn amplifying the societal impact of platforms.

**Who** Actors who build shared infrastructures must engage with users in order to catalyse the change they wish to see. These include extenders and participants. Embedding values of accessible co-creation must begin at the technological infrastructure layer, in order to unlock this at all levels.

At all levels of the societal platform, actors can play differentiated roles in co-creation. On the shared digital infrastructure, upon which platform development happens, co-creation can come in design. With respect to

innovation co-creation networks (extenders), co-creation must be facilitated, particularly by platform owners/entities. Co creation can ensure that platform extension work does not happen in silos, and limit overlaps and conflicts. With respect to the impact amplification networks—which may be both online and offline—co-creation to inform design and extension pathways, can be impactful.

### Concerns at scale

Co-creation is not a one-time exercise nor is it easy. In particular, the process of co-creation when it involves community actors requires considering the social structures on the ground. Power relations affect community engagement processes—and paying attention to these relations is critical. At scale, these risk entrenching power divides more deeply. Co-creation requires acknowledgment of power relations, historical and structural injustices, and labour by those in power.

It may appear that the Societal Platform principles of ‘seeking rapid evolution’ is at odds with co-creation. However, exploring short cycle co-creation models to identify what works is critical. These may involve embedding feedback and survey processes within design, and developing and working with smaller groups of users. As the platform becomes ubiquitous, best fit co-creation design principles can be arrived at. It should also be noted that the platform should consider resilience as a value and continuously iterate upon as the nature of the platform evolves.

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### FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

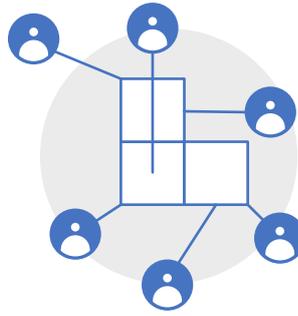
- › How do we go from process to identifying long-term, structurally sound co-creation approaches?
- › How can we embed co-creation at all stages of the platform life cycle?
- › What capacities do actors require to co-create?

### EXAMPLE

ShikshaLokam is working on a mission to enable and amplify leadership development opportunities in school education in India. Unnati is an app developed using the ShikshaLokam platform which helps leaders from various areas to collaborate and execute projects. ShikshaLokam enables participants (typically, school leaders) to conduct surveys, to further understand how to engage with parents and elders in the communities they serve. This approach embeds co-creation in the process.

### 3

## Embed accountability



**What** Clearly articulated responsibilities, indexed for context. Established and accessible grievance redressal process.

**Why: Restoring agency** Accountability is a set of processes (such as due process, fairness) that are owed to by institutions, and in this case to all actors on the platform. It is important to clearly articulate the ways in which these operate, and the consequences of breakdowns in delivery.

Platform operation without articulated consequences and liability, risks alienating and losing trust of communities of interest; it also hampers trust with extender and developer communities. Clear articulation incites compliance with principles. Importantly, accountability is not just a process but also a set of values (such as transparency), and adherence to these magnifies societal impact.

**Who** Levels of accountability and liability differ by actor, and by platform type. Platform entities, especially *sarkaar* entities, are typically accountable and liable for failures of service provision as well as exclusions. They also emerge from legal obligations and frameworks. *Samaaj* platforms may have lower levels of (expected) accountability. However, they may choose to have higher levels of liability for failures or breakdowns. Clear codification of accountability processes is important with respect to the assets, processes and the interactions.

Clear codification also includes delineating responsibility. This means articulating the specific degree of accountability for actors across the system—especially, the level of platform responsibility as a shared space.

**Concerns at scale** While a general set of norms and processes for accountability and liability can be established by the platform, the local nitty-gritties of the operations and the specific concerns of the community may sometimes be at conflict. While it is best that specific processes for accountability should be left for the local actor, what they are in each instance need to be articulated sharply.

Accountability is not limited to articulating liability for breakdowns. It also means establishing clear, and accessible grievance redressal mechanisms, likely embedded in the platforms themselves. For *sarkaar* platforms, engaging civil society can be helpful in translating accountability into action.

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#### **FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- › How do entities build buy-in around accountability, especially if they are not derived from legal/regulatory expectations?
- › Are there any examples of how grievance redressal mechanisms have been deployed?
- › How can dispute resolution mechanisms be designed to involve all stakeholders?
- › Are levels of accountability (and therefore liability) different for *sarkaar* platforms given obligations to serve everyone.

#### **EXAMPLE**

Annual Performance Assessment Report (APAR) is a self-appraisal system followed in the Indian bureaucracy. India has a strong APAR system where the agreed goals for the next year have to be filed by 30th April of each year. Historically, APARs were getting filed late every year and came into prominence only during the time of promotions. Using the digital platform of Sparrow, a lock-in period was ensured (by 31st December of each year), beyond which the APARs could not be edited. In this case, this ensured individual accountability for actions.

# 4



## Design for evolvability

**What** Values and norms that the platform espouse must evolve according to the relevant democratic social ideals of the times by identifying recurrent themes.

**Why: Seek Rapid Evolution** Governance processes must not be seen as static, beyond the core compliance to constitutional/legal frameworks and commonly agreed upon normative values. The core commitments include democratic values, and individual and community rights. Beyond that, just as technical architectures should allow for structures and features to evolve and adapt to challenges and opportunities, so too governance must evolve. Governance norms would benefit from anticipating future changes and design for a resilient platform, whenever possible.

**Who** Platform entities and builders need to play a critical role in governance evolution. While extenders, amplifiers and participants can engage in iterations, ultimately each governance evolution must come from platform builders and owner entities. This custodianship of governance processes is a significant one for platform owner entities. The process of evolution itself must follow the other principles.

**Concerns at scale** At scale, there may be conflict between rapid evolution and principles of governance evolvability. However, having the right checks and balances upfront in the limits/boundary conditions for governance and distributed leadership ensures that values related to diverse experiences are embedded in the governance processes to support evolvability. The process of governance evolvability requires ongoing discussions, and can be built on the principles of co-creation, accountability and society-orientation articulated previously.

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**FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- › How to identify core vs evolving values?

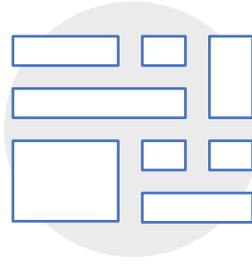
**EXAMPLE**

ECHO India is a not-for-profit working towards both building capacity and extending access to speciality care for underserved communities using the telementoring model. ECHO India has a fidelity team to ensure that the values and norms are being adhered to at each interaction/encounter. As the hubs evolve into superhubs over the course of the platform, the values keep evolving to ensure the current needs of the participants are accounted for.

## Levers

*Partition for autonomy, subsidiarity, offline architectures, indexing for impact, revenue model fit, relational control and innovation ecosystems*—can be seen as levers. These levers enhance the impact, efficiency and reach of platforms. These principles sit alongside the core values, in supporting societal platforms.

# 5



## Partition decision rights

**What** This means articulating clearly the decisions (on the platform, assets/content, applications) that are to be taken by each actor. This also includes minimising decision dependency between actors through modularity. Specific players are best suited to do what they are already doing. Enabling and empowering them vs replacing is critical.

**Why: Resolve for diversity, Inspire co-creation** As platforms scale, modularity in decision making ensures a reduction of latency in platform interactions and governance processes. It also ensures all actors have clear roles in the platform. Allowing autonomy in decision-making at each level by identifying redlines or triggers where platforms intervene, ensures that communities of users govern decisions most relevant to them.

**Who** Often, those who are platform owners, creating the shared digital infrastructure, decide how decision rights must be partitioned. Typically, decision rights with respect to asset content and app interfaces are retained with those who are in the co-creation environment. In this framework, communities play a role in implementing governance frameworks with respect to group membership, content, etc as relevant

**Concerns at Scale** It is quite possible that at scale, modularity may lead to invisibility, with federated units taking contradictory decisions. Since societal platform models need to work for diverse solutions at scale, during each potential modification of the platform by either addition of new actors, by significant process changes, or re-orientation of the platform, modularity and autonomy processes must be examined. This way the decision-making regarding the solutions are more specific to context and also equitable.

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**FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- › How to ensure standardisation across modules/units?
- › How to resolve variation in values?
- › When does a problem become too big for the modules to handle and goes to the superstructure above?

**EXAMPLE**

Wikipedia has the governance mechanism of 'Wiki Projects' where small, decentralized social structures govern themselves in a locally organised manner, dealing with developing guidelines for stylistic conventions and the creation of content. These could be thought of as these as local jurisdictions in the site, within which local leadership, norms, and standards for writing are agreed upon by editors familiar with a particular topic.

# 6

## Collaborate offline with formal and informal architectures



**What** Leveraging the long-standing, embedded relationships of trust of community organisations and individuals, while being cognizant of the power relationships, can provide significant amplification for societal platforms.

**Why: Open value creation, Restoring agency** Offline architectures (institutions, individuals and civil society) play a significant role in enabling platform adoption and impact—indeed, they are the entities for whom societal platforms are built. These offline architectures are embedded in context and can play a role in amplifying key interactions, addressing breakdowns of awareness and ability, and ensuring accountability. These entities understand the context best. Importantly, in order to consider those who are offline, and bring in their choices and experiences into the platform, it is important to create an environment which is both online and offline in nature.

**Who** The primary role for engaging with offline architectures lies with the platform entities and builders. However, co-creators/extenders, would also benefit from having their own approaches to engaging with offline architectures to embed and amplify impact.

**Concerns at Scale** The approach must be to systematise engagement with offline architectures as much as possible. Identifying the right offline architectures is critical, as some of these entities and individuals may cause more harm than good. Just as much as offline intermediaries can unlock the ability of platforms to distribute the ability to problem solve, rent-seeking intermediaries may undo these potential gains. While there is no one pathway to identify the right architecture at all times, being mindful of the values articulated here, the core mission of the platform, and the changing incentives and dynamics on the ground can be helpful. Additionally, being mindful of the fact that offline architectures come from entrenched social systems and power structures, is important. This means that the ways of engagement must be encoded as the platform attains scale.

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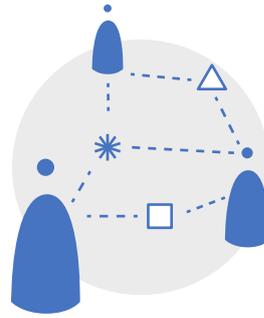
**FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- › How to identify the right offline architectures?
- › How do you ensure offline architectures retain their independence?
- › How do we finalise on who better represents the voice of the community?

**EXAMPLE**

Pratham is a large-scale independent non-profit organization working to improve the quality of education in India. Given the limitations of access to technology in rural areas, Pratham supports a hybrid learning program. This involves getting children in the age group 10-14 in a village to form their own groups of 5-6 each, thus enabling them to co-create a learning space within their community. Digital devices (where feasible) and content is placed directly in the hands of children providing them with opportunities and choices—through peer to peer learning and shared resources—to learn on their own. In order to unlock the ability to problem solve, community based children's groups engage in choice-based learning and are guided by the coaches and youth members in the communities.

# 7



## Index for interactions that drive impact

**What** Indexing all processes, including governance processes, to increase the interactions which drive impact on the ground.

**Why: Inspire co-creation, shared solvability**

Platforms generate value through some interactions which add value (to the platform bottom lines) and impact (to the communities of interest). These interactions are amplified and built upon to enhance adjacencies. For societal platforms, some interactions and processes on platforms drive impact for the communities of interest, which is linked to their mission. Beyond accurately identifying the relevant interactions, it is important to index governance processes to amplify them, and foster further development.

**Who** For impact amplification at scale to happen, it is essential to support interactions at all levels. And, builders and extenders need to be aligned to optimise platform interactions. Conflicts between these actors need to be resolved with these interactions in mind.

**Concerns at Scale** At scale, the ability to consistently and correctly determine interactions becomes difficult. Moreover, it is possible that value from some interactions are at odds with others.

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### FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- › Are there multiple interactions that drive impact?
- › What if indexing governance for an interaction undermines the agency of one of the participants?

### EXAMPLE

In ECHO India, the key value interaction is the engagement between health care workers and expert doctors in a conversational, case-study oriented approach. The aim of this interaction is to ensure distributed capacity for healthcare, but not in a hierarchical, teacher-learner frame. The nature and the structure of this interaction (weekly session) is critical—timeliness, structure, and the character of the conversation between the hub and the spoke is important. ECHO India governs this process very seriously by operationalizing structured and random checks and training/intervention, if in case needed.



## Fit funding to mission

**What** Funding models must be aligned with mission statements and platform values.

**Why: Restoring agency** Revenue models must serve platform missions, and revenue models are critical for long term sustenance of platforms. Funding must align with the goals/plans for platform evolution as well as the fundamental, underlying mission and imagination of societal good. Therefore, establishing a funding model is both a functional process as well as a normative one.

**Who** Platforms that are financed/subsidised by public funding (*sarkaar* platforms) or receive subsidies, have differential obligations towards transparency, pricing, navigating conflicts of interest and accountability. For *sarkaar* platforms, by design it becomes important to be shared as a public good. *Samaaj* platforms, which are subsidised by philanthropic resources, have an ability to be flexible, and can explore community and co-operative funding models. In models where participants or users pay a fee, determining value-sharing is critical.

**Concerns at Scale** Revenue models are both pre-conditions and consequences of scale. However, consistently implementing them at scale, while remaining true to evolving missions is critical.

### FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- › What about instances of conflict? How are they to be navigated?
- › What do processes of changing orientation and business model involve? How are these to be navigated?
- › What special obligations and limitations apply to platforms that are publicly financed?

### EXAMPLE

eGovernments Foundation works with state governments to deploy technologies for public grievance redressal and revenue functions. While the core technology is developed through philanthropic/private capital, implementations/system integrations are paid for by the state governments. Typically, white-labelled services/apps are provided to citizens. In this context, evaluating a pricing model must account for the source of funds (part private, part public funding), the type of service (government to citizen, grounded in entitlement) and the mission (easier access to all to the state).

# 9

## Nurture relational management



**What** Platform governance needs to evolve to embedding norms and values in all actors, rather than express process controls and procedures.

**Why: System leadership** Platform governance can emerge from gatekeeping and controls (content moderation through gatekeeping, standardised forms and procedures, metrics based controls). However, these are costly and also limit the responsiveness of the system. Accordingly, it is critical to move towards relational management which is focused on embedding norms and values (in code, where feasible) and in the actors in the system. This means that every actor on the platform shares the same values—and some values such as data minimisation, for example—are embedded in code.

**Who** The platform should embed values as every actor is a bearer of them. This means that these become replicable at every level of the platform.

**Concerns at Scale** Embedding values, which are not easily measurable, consistently across at scale is challenging.

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### FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- › How can consistency be ensured? What is the balance between process control and relational control?
- › How do platforms respond to bad actors?



## Foster societal innovations

**What** Build ways for extenders and participants to co-create upon the shared digital infrastructure.

**Why: Shared solvability** The impact of societal platforms is directly linked to the quality of interaction on the platform. Continually supporting innovations on the platform is critical. Recognising that those who are not on the platform, but at the edge of it may be innovators allows platforms to remain at the cutting edge of innovation and continue to deliver societal value. This is built on open resources (APIs, content, data and source code<sup>3</sup>) and open processes (crowdsourcing, open source development). Together, these lead towards democratization of platform value. For societal platforms, all innovators may struggle with the capacities—technological or otherwise—in converting ideas to modules/ extensions/apps that can sit on platforms. Accordingly, being deliberate and thoughtful in supporting extenders and participants is critical.

**Who** To inspire co-creation, it is critical to take note of the innovation happening at the edge of the platforms. The ecosystem should be able to make use of the platform and its related structures to co-create solutions to achieve impact at scale by network amplification.

**Concerns at Scale** Building ecosystems at scale is costly and challenging. At scale, there is also variation in the capacities and types of innovators, requiring customisation of programs and means of engagement.

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### FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- › How to navigate values of openness with software/technical interpretations of openness? Do they require different approaches?

### EXAMPLE

Datameet, hasgeek and various state and central government departments, ministries have hackathon challenges for the innovators to gather and propose solutions.

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<sup>3</sup>Openness of code may also be linked to government regulations.

# 11

## Build capacity to amplify values



**What** Build team and partnership capacities and skills to amplify societal values. This means seeking those relationships that can nurture these values; practically, it means aligning hiring, training and incentive structures for these values.

**Why: Resolve for diversity** Unlike other platforms, societal platforms care for impact. Other platforms seek to build networks and amplify interactions in order to profit. In ordinary commercial platforms, the skills and capacities required amongst the ecosystem are well-established and include measurable skills for growth and business development. In societal platforms, these skills are not enough – individuals and partners need to have a value system that aligns with the mission, and an ability to grapple with and navigate system complexities.

**Who** For societal impact to happen, it is essential for an organisation to have capacities and skills reflective of the values of the societal platform. So people who have a firm understanding of the society and its complexities must be part of the platform and its governance principles. To embed multiple viewpoints, the platform should reflect diversity.

**Concerns at Scale** Doing this at scale is complicated by the difficulties in measuring and assessing these values. However, articulating these values and building cultures of appreciation may enable these to become more widely accepted.

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### FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- › How may we begin to articulate the social values and skills that are required for societal platforms?
- › In what ways are these values context-dependent?

# Conclusion

This report attempts to articulate an early version of principles and values that must frame governance approaches within platforms. They are *prior* to governance—they reside at the level of values.

We acknowledge that this report raises more questions than it answers! Many questions arise—when problems that platforms aim to address change shape so as to become unrecognisable, or disappear altogether, how should platforms evolve? Should the existence of a societal platform be in perpetuity? Equally, we need to ask whether these values are to be calibrated differently for *sarkaar*, *samaaj* and *bazaar*, platforms?

Further research is required to shed light on calibrating these principles further, testing them in context, and articulating a set of practices and actions around them. Next iterations relate to extending these out to speak to more practical, everyday considerations, and identifying best practices for actions.

# Resources:

[Building a National Scale Learning Platform](#)

[The 7 Key Principles of Platform Design](#)

[Designing positive platforms: a guide for a governance-based approach](#)

[Designing for social impact](#)

[Decentralization in Wikipedia Governance](#)

[The Hidden Order of Wikipedia](#)

[Platform cooperativism](#)

*Platform Ecosystems - Aligning Architecture, Governance, and Strategy* - Amrit Tiwana

*Societal Platforms* - Padmini Ray Murray, Paul Anthony & George Syeda Zainab

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## Appendix

### List of interviewees

1. Dr Lalitesh Katragadda, Avanti Finance
2. Dr. Sunil Anand, ECHO India
3. Stina Heikkila, Platform Design Toolkit
4. Dr. Santosh Mathew, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
5. Khushboo Awasthi, Shiksha Lokam
6. Hiren Doshi, eGovernments Foundation
7. Sanjay Jain, Bharat Innovation Fund

### List of organisations in the roundtable

1. EkStep foundation
2. eGovernments Foundation
3. Avanti Finance
4. Digital Green
5. Arghyam
6. Reap Benefit



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