



In the developed world, impatience with politics takes another form. We don't look to technology to rescue us from failed states. We look to it to rescue us from overbearing ones. Politics in the West can appear bloated and stale. This is especially true of the large, complex and inflexible welfare systems that have grown up since the Second World War. It has become easy to associate politics with entrenched interests and stifling bureaucracy. It is tempting to blame these for the rising burden of debt faced by many democratic countries. By contrast, the tech world looks dynamic, flexible and exciting. It invents new stuff all the time. It is relentless in its search for what works, unencumbered by sterile political mindsets. When did a government last create anything as beneficial for the public welfare as Wikipedia? When did a bureaucracy ever invent anything as life-enhancing as Google?

It can be painful watching democratic politicians attempt to play catch-up with the new technology. They know they need to try, but often they don't know how. A few politicians have worked out how to use Twitter effectively, but most only get the public's attention when

they discover new ways to make fools of themselves. The track record of many government bureaucracies in making best use of the new technology is lamentable. More tax-payers' money in Britain has been wasted on mismanaged IT projects in recent years than on anything else, including mismanaged wars (and the cost of these is driven inexorably higher by the wasteful expenditure of the military on high-tech systems that turn out to be less efficient than the ones they replaced). There have been countless local experiments around the world in how to use the internet to promote more accountable and efficient government: online town hall meetings, interactive consultation exercises, micro referendums. The trouble comes in knowing how to filter the results, learn from them and then scale them up. Government is not much good at any of this: it fails to pick up on what works, in time to take advantage of it.

These failures help breed contempt for politicians not only among citizens but within from the tech industry, which often assumes that government is simply an obstacle to be overcome: an analogue annoyance in a digital world. But there are some things the tech industry doesn't understand very well. Its blind spots include the story of its own origins. There would be no tech industry on the scale we know it today without government. This is not simply because every industry needs stable and reliable political institutions to uphold the property rights on which its dynamism depends. (Tech giants are hardly less litigious than previous industrialists, and some of them, in their voracious appetite to buy up and protect patents, are as litigious as anyone in history.) It is because government