A SYSTEM AND METHOD OF MANAGING AN INSURANCE SCHEME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present application relates to a system and method of managing an insurance scheme.

The present invention may be implemented by a traditional life insurance plan operator for its members or may be implemented by another party.

Conventionally, insurance policies such as life insurance policies operate on the basis that an insured person, sometimes referred to as an insured life, pays a premium to the life insurer, and the life insurer pays a predetermined sum, referred to as the sum assured, to the insured life or his/her beneficiary on the occurrence of an insured event. Typical insured events are the insured life suffering disability, contracting a dread disease or dying.

However, during the time between the purchase of the insurance and a claim to the insurance the insured life's financial position may change negatively resulting in the undesired outcome that the insurance received by them does not cover their needs.

Thus, the quantum of insurance purchased in the event of any insurable event may be correct at the inception of the policy but may not be sufficient after changes in their financial position.

A system and method of managing an insurance scheme is provided to address this.

SUMMARY

According to one example embodiment a method of managing an insurance policy includes:

defining a plurality of mechanisms to protect an insured person from adverse financial outcomes;

receiving a selection of at least one of the plurality of mechanism from the insured person and storing the selection in a memory;

on the occurrence of an insured event, retrieving the stored selection;

calculating a basic insurance amount to be paid to the insured person based on an insurance policy of the insured person;

determining based on the stored selection of mechanisms if the insured person has suffered any adverse financial outcomes since the inception of the policy and if so then calculating a further financial protector amount to be paid to the insured person based on the stored selection of mechanisms; and

paying the basic insurance amount and further financial protector amount to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary.

The plurality of mechanisms may include at least some of an asset protector, a debt instalment protector and a currency protector.

The method may further include:

monitoring the compliance of the insured person with a wellness programme; and

altering the further financial protector amount based on the insured person's compliance with the wellness programme.

According to another example embodiment a system for managing an insurance policy includes:

a memory for storing a policy inception interest rate level which is an interest rate level payable on debt of the insured person;

an interest rate determining module to determine after the policy inception an interest rate level payable on debt of the insured person at that time;

a comparator module to compare the determined interest rate level with the inception interest rate level;

a calculating module to calculate a debt protector amount to be paid to the insured person if the determined interest rate level is higher than the inception interest rate level; and

a payment module to pay the debt protector amount to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary on the occurrence of an insured event.

The plurality of mechanisms may include at least some of an asset protector, a debt instalment protector and a currency protector.

The system may further include:

a monitoring module to monitor the compliance of the insured person with a wellness programme; and

the calculation module altering the further financial protector amount based on the insured person's compliance with the wellness programme.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating an example system to implement the methodologies described herein; and

Figure 2 is a block diagram illustrating an example method of managing an insurance scheme.

DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

The systems and methodologies described herein relate to a system and method of managing an insurance scheme such as a life insurance scheme.

Conventional life insurance schemes operate on the basis that an insured person, referred to as the insured life, pays premiums on a regular basis to the life insurer, specifying a sum assured which is an amount to be paid out on the occurrence of an insured event. For example, on the death of the insured life, a predetermined death benefit is paid to the nominated beneficiaries of the insured life. If the insured life is disabled or suffers a dread disease, a different, lesser amount is paid out.

The method and system will be described with reference to these kinds of schemes but it will be appreciated that the method and system could equally be applied to other types of insurance schemes.

It will also be appreciated that the system and methodology may be implemented by any relevant person or organisation. For example, the system and methodology may be operated by the organisation which operates the life insurance scheme or may be implemented by another

associated organisation. In one example the system and methodology may be implemented by a financial organisation which issues credit cards to its members.

For purposes of illustration, the system and methodology will be described herein as being operated by the managers of a life insurance scheme.

A plurality of life changing events are defined. The plurality of life changing events in the example includes disability, contracting a dread disease or dying as these are typical of the kind of events which are insured by life insurance schemes. However, it will be appreciated that in other contexts these life changing events may be other events such as the birth of a child or changing jobs to name but a few examples.

However, during the time between the purchase of the insurance and a claim to the insurance the insured life financial position may change negatively resulting in the undesired outcome that the insurance received by them does not cover their needs.

Thus, the quantum of insurance purchased in the event of any insurable event may be correct at the inception of the policy but may not be sufficient after changes in their financial position.

Referring to Figure 1 of the accompanying Figures, an exemplary system for implementing the above methodologies is shown.

The system includes a server 12 which includes a number of modules to implement the methodologies described herein.

The modules described may be implemented by a machine-readable medium embodying instructions which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to perform any of the methods described above.

It will be appreciated that embodiments of the present invention are not limited to such architecture, and could equally well find application in a distributed, or peer-to-peer, architecture system. Thus the modules illustrated could be located on one or more servers operated by one or more institutions.

The system implements a method of managing an insurance policy and includes a memory 10 associated with the server 12.

In the accompanying drawings, the memory is illustrated as a database 10. It will be appreciated that the memory could take any other suitable form.

A plurality of mechanisms to protect an insured person from adverse financial outcomes are defined and stored in the memory 10.

In one example embodiment, the plurality of mechanisms include at least some of an asset protector, a debt instalment protector, a currency protector, a credit or debit card interest protector, a severe illness medical booster and a cash payout mechanism. These will be described in more detail below.

The server 12 receives typically via a communications network 22 a selection of at least one of the plurality of mechanisms from the insured person and stores the selection in a memory.

It will be appreciated that the insured person could select the required mechanism or mechanisms using a computer to access the server 12 over the communications network 22. Alternatively, this could be done by the insured person instructing a third party insurance sales person to make the necessary selection. These are but a few examples of how this could be implemented.

It will also be appreciated that a default setting could be implemented, for example that all of the mechanisms on offer are included unless the insured person indicates to the contrary.

On the occurrence of an insured event, the stored selection is retrieved and a basic insurance amount to be paid to the insured person based on an insurance policy of the insured person is determined by a determining module 14.

The determining module 14 then determines, based on the stored selection of mechanisms if the insured person has suffered any adverse financial outcomes since the inception of the policy. If so then calculating module 18 calculates a further financial protector amount to be paid to the insured person based on the stored selection of mechanisms.

A payment module 20 pays the basic insurance amount and a further financial protector amount to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary.

A few example financial protection mechanisms will now be described. However, it should be appreciated that other financial protection mechanisms could be incorporated into the present invention.

The exemplary financial protection mechanisms will be referred to as an asset fall protector, a currency protector and a debt instalment protector.

Describing firstly the asset fall protector, a notional starting value is recorded in the memory 10. On the occurrence of a claim to the insurer, the calculating module 18 performs a calculation to determine how the notional starting value would have incremented if invested in a moderate growth investment fund as opposed to simply increasing at the rate of CPI. Therefore, the calculation module calculates a first amount being an amount to which the notional starting value would have grown if invested in

a moderate fund between the inception of the insurance policy and the claim.

Next, the calculating module 18 calculates a second amount being an amount to which the notional starting value would have grown if invested in a bank account with an interest rate equal to CPI between the inception of the insurance policy and the claim.

If the second amount is larger than the first amount this indicates that typical moderate growth fund type investments have not performed over the life of the insurance policy as expected and it is therefore likely that the insured person's other assets invested in such funds would have also not performed as anticipated at the policy inception.

This is therefore an indication that the insured person has suffered an adverse financial outcome.

In this scenario, an extra payment is made which is referred to herein as a financial protector amount.

If the first amount is larger than the second amount this indicates that typical fund investments have indeed performed over the life of the insurance policy and it is therefore likely that the insured person's other assets invested in such funds have also performed as anticipated at the policy inception and that the insured person has not suffered any adverse financial outcome due to this reason.

The quantum of the financial protector amount can be determined in a number of ways.

One example would be to calculate the difference between the first amount and the second amount and to pay this difference to the insured person.

The currency protector mechanism of the illustrated embodiment works as follows. To illustrate this example the currencies used will be the South African rand and the US dollar.

At the inception of the policy a notional amount of South African rands are converted to US dollars by the calculation module 18. This inception dollar value is stored in the memory 10.

On the occurrence of a claim to the insurer, the calculating module 18 performs a calculation to determine what the notional amount of South African rands would be when converted to US dollars at the time of the claim.

If this US dollar amount is less than the inception US dollar amount stored in the memory 10 then the insured person has suffered an adverse financial outcome due to the depreciation of their home currency with respect to a foreign currency.

In this scenario, an extra financial protector payment is made.

Again, the quantum of the financial protector amount can be determined in a number of ways.

One example would be to calculate the difference between the US dollar amount at the policy inception and the US dollar amount at the time of the claim and to pay this difference to the insured person.

Another example of a financial protection mechanism is the debt instalment protector.

In this example, a policy inception interest rate level is determined by the determining module 14 and stored in the memory 10.

The determined inception interest rate level may be set by one or more financial institutions or may be set by a regional authority such as a government in a country.

In South Africa, the interest rate level is set by the relevant financial institution but is linked to an interest rate set by the South African Reserve Bank and is usually slightly higher than the interest rate set by the Reserve Bank.

In any event, what is important about the interest rate level is that this determines the interest amount payable by the insured person if they have any debt. Therefore, any increase in the interest rate effectively means that the insured person will require more money to service their debt and will have less free money available to finance their living expenses.

In order to protect against this, the method includes determining after the policy inception an interest rate level payable on debt of the insured person at that time.

The interest rate level can again be obtained by determining module 14 accessing an official database or website to obtain this information or by receiving this information via communications network 22.

A comparing module 16 compares the determined interest rate level with the inception interest rate level and if the determined interest rate level is higher than the inception interest rate level then it is assumed that the insured person will have suffered an adverse financial outcome since they will be paying more interest on any debt they may have.

In this scenario, a financial protector amount is again calculated and paid to the insured person.

It is envisaged that the methodology will be implemented by periodically determining after the policy inception an interest rate level payable on debt of the insured person at that time. One example of periodically is monthly.

In this example, the determined interest rate level is each time compared with the inception interest rate level and if the determined interest rate level is higher than the inception interest rate level then a debt protector amount to be paid to the insured person is calculated by the calculating module 18.

However, in this example, the calculating module 18 will also add the calculated debt protector amount to any previous periodically calculated debt protector amounts to arrive at a total debt protector amount.

On the occurrence of an insured event the total debt protector amount will be paid to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary as the financial protector amount.

As described above, it will be appreciated that at the time of the insurance policy inception the insured person selects one or more of the plurality of mechanisms to protect themselves from adverse financial outcomes.

Even if the insured person selects a plurality of mechanisms there may in fact have been no adverse financial outcomes in which case they will obtain no further insurance payment.

Alternatively, only a single one of the plurality of mechanisms selected may result in a further insurance payment being made.

Finally, all of the plurality of mechanisms selected may result in a further insurance payment being made in which case each of the amounts calculated for each of the mechanisms will be added together to arrive at a total further financial protector insurance payment.

A payment module 20 then pays the further financial protector payment amount to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary.

In one example, this is implemented by the payment module 20 communicating via a communications network 22 with a server of a financial institution (not shown) and instructing the server of the financial institution to pay the insured person or their nominated beneficiary.

In a further example embodiment, if the insured person reaches a predetermined age the financial protector amount is paid out to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary.

An example of the predetermined age may be a retirement age such as 65.

Thus the benefit described essentially implements a fund that pays out at age 65 or on earlier death or other insurance claim of the insured person and the funds build up if there are adverse financial events that could impact on the insured persons' financial wealth.

In addition, the compliance of the insured person with a wellness programme may be monitored and may play a part in the calculating of the further financial protector amount.

An example of such a wellness program is presently managed by the applicant that manages a traditional life and health insurance plan together with their wellness program disclosed in the applicant's South African granted patent number ZA 99/1746, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

In an example wellness program, members participate in approved related facilities and/or services. For example, members use gymnasiums, Smoke Enders™ and Weighless™.

In one example, members are awarded points and depending on the total number of points allocated to a member, they fall within one of five statuses. In the implementation of the wellness program, these statuses have been named in ascending order of value, blue, bronze, silver, gold and diamond. All members are placed initially in the blue status. Once a member has accumulated a predetermined number of points, his/her status is upgraded to the next appropriate level.

It will be appreciated that for purposes of the present invention the wellness programme could be operated by the insurer or could be operated by a third party that operates the wellness programme and then informs the insurer of the degree of participation of the insured person with the wellness programme.

This could occur by a third party transmitting data to at least one server operated by the insurer. The data is received by a monitoring module (not shown) at the at least one server 12 and stored in a database associated with the at least one server, typically database 10.

In one example the data will include at least an identity of the insured person and data identifying the status of the insured person, for example blue, bronze, silver, gold and diamond.

In order to determine the status, a monitoring of the compliance of the insured person with the wellness programme includes receiving insured person usage information associated with the insured person's usage of the wellness program and determining, based on the usage information, a status level associated with the insured person for the wellness program, wherein the status level indicates a degree of participation in the wellness program

The usage information received may include information associated with a plurality of separate and distinct occurrences of wellness program participation by the insured person.

In addition, the method may further include determining a status level associated with the insured person that further includes receiving the usage information from an information processing system and assigning a given point value to each separate and distinct occurrence of wellness program participation.

A total point value is determined based on an accumulation of each given point value assigned to each separate and distinct occurrence of wellness program participation

The total point value is then compared to a plurality of point ranges, each point range in the plurality of point ranges being associated with a status level and identifying a point range in the plurality of point ranges corresponding to the total point value.

Finally, a status level is assigned that is associated with the point range that has been identified to the at least one employee.

This status level is then used to answer the financial protector amount owing to the insured person whereby the higher the insured person's status level, the greater the financial protector amount payable.

One method of implementing the above described methodology is as follows.

The insured person selects between two options. In one example, the first option is 20% of their basic insured amount and the second option is 40% of the basic insured amount.

Using the second option as an illustrative example and using a basic insured amount of R1,000,000 for illustrative purposes. The insured person is provided with a table of options from which to select as follows:

	Debt Protector	Assets Protector	Currency Protector
Protector Combination*	3%	30%	20%
100% Asset Protector	0%	100%	0%
100% Currency Protector	0%	0%	100%
100% Debt Instalment Protector	7.5%	0%	0%

If the insured person selects the first option they will get a combination of protectors which in this example embodiment will be implemented as set out below. However, they have the option of selecting only one of the mechanisms available and then 100% of the allocation will be to that mechanism as shown.

Referring first to the debt protector mechanism, since in this example the insured person has selected the 40% option of a R1,000,000 basic fund, this equates to an amount of R400,000. 3% of R400,000 is equal to R12,000 and this is assumed to be the notional monthly debt instalment that the insured person is required to pay.

An increase in interest rate levels then uses this notional monthly debt instalment as follows:

Increase in prime interest rate	Percentage of insured installment paid	Example of monthly benefit of 20% on R1m Life Fund	Example of monthly benefit of 40% on R1m Life Fund
<= 0.5%	0%	-	-
[0.5%, 1.5%)	4%	240	480
[1.5%, 2.5%)	8%	480	960
[2.5%, 3.5%)	12%	720	1,440
[3.5%, 4.5%)	16%	960	1,920

[4.5%, 5.5%)	22%	1,320	2,640
[5.5%, 6.5%)	26%	1,560	3,120
[6.5%, 7.5%)	30%	1,800	3,600
[7.5%, 8.5%)	35%	2,100	4,200
[8.5%, 9.5%)	40%	2,400	4,800
[9.5%, 10%)	45%	2,700	5,400
>= 10%	50%	3,000	6,000
Max Total Accumulation		36,000	72,000

Thus, if the interest rate increases by 1% in a given month then R480 will be the calculated amount payable to the insured person for that month.

A record of this amount will be stored in the memory 10 and as each month goes by, if the interest rate is higher than the starting interest rate a further amount will be added to this amount and the total will grow.

The last row in the table indicates a maximum total accumulation which is an upper limit for this benefit.

Referring next to the asset protector, and referring to the first table above, in this example 30% of the R400,000 is allocated to the asset protector mechanism which is a total of R120,000. This amount of R120,000 is the amount that is assumed to be invested in a moderate fund and in a bank account with an interest rate according to CPI applying. If a financial protector amount as described above becomes payable due to the poor performance of the moderate fund, this will be the difference between the amount banked at CPI less the amount invested in a moderate fund which will need to be not performing for there to be any payout.

There may also be a limit applied to this payment based on age so that even if the moderate fund decreased significantly, the amount paid to the insured person would be reduced.

Referring to the currency protector, 20% of the R400,000 equates to R80,000.

The calculation model 18 converts this amount at the inception of the insurance policy to a dollar amount. For illustrative purposes, using an exchange rate of 8:1 this would equate to a dollar amount of USD 10,000.

This amount is stored in the memory 10.

At the time of an insurance claim, the calculation model uses the exchange rate at that time to again calculate the dollar amount equating to R80,000. If this amount is less than the original USD 10,000 then the insured person has suffered an adverse financial outcome and will be paid a further financial protector amount.

One example of how to calculate the amount is to pay the insured person the rand difference to allow them to purchase the USD10,000 so that they have suffered no loss.

In one example, the financial protector amount need not be linked to any premium payments. Alternatively, this amount may be linked to a premium payment so that the larger the premium payment the larger the amount payable as the financial protector amount.

In another example, the further financial protector amount can be linked to the compliance of the insured person with the wellness program described above so that the better the compliance with the wellness program the larger the financial protector amount.

CLAIMS:

1. A method of managing an insurance policy including:

   defining a plurality of mechanisms to protect an insured person from adverse financial outcomes;

   receiving a selection of at least one of the plurality of mechanism from the insured person and storing the selection in a memory;

   on the occurrence of an insured event, retrieving the stored selection;

   calculating a basic insurance amount to be paid to the insured person based on an insurance policy of the insured person;

   determining based on the stored selection of mechanisms if the insured person has suffered any adverse financial outcomes since the inception of the policy and if so then calculating a further financial protector amount to be paid to the insured person based on the stored selection of mechanisms; and

   paying the basic insurance amount and further financial protector amount to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the plurality of mechanisms include at least some of an asset protector, a debt instalment protector and a currency protector.

3. A method according to claims 1 or 2 further including:

monitoring the compliance of the insured person with a wellness programme; and

altering the further financial protector amount based on the insured person's compliance with the wellness programme.

4. A system for managing an insurance policy, the system including:

a memory for storing a policy inception interest rate level which is an interest rate level payable on debt of the insured person;

an interest rate determining module to determine after the policy inception an interest rate level payable on debt of the insured person at that time;

a comparator module to compare the determined interest rate level with the inception interest rate level;

a calculating module to calculate a debt protector amount to be paid to the insured person if the determined interest rate level is higher than the inception interest rate level; and

a payment module to pay the debt protector amount to the insured person or their nominated beneficiary on the occurrence of an insured event

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5. A system according to claim 4 wherein the plurality of mechanisms include at least some of an asset protector, a debt instalment protector and a currency protector.

6. A system according to any of claims 4 or 5 further including:

a monitoring module to monitor the compliance of the insured person with a wellness programme; and

the calculation module altering the further financial protector amount based on the insured person's compliance with the wellness programme.