

Citizen-Centred Service Delivery

by Martin Duggan



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Introduction

Governments around the world have, for many years provided service to their citizens through a programmatic business model. Service is delivered by program specific delivery channels owned by individual policy departments and duplicated at each and every level of government. The result, when viewed by department, looks logical. However, when looked at from the citizen’s perspective, it is complex, confusing and difficult to penetrate. When you overlay multiple departments, levels of government and community organizations there is clearly duplication, overlap and replication of services and channels that add cost, complexity and obscure the ability to achieve social outcomes.

According to research in Canada¹, citizens believe that government should understand their needs and circumstances and have a focus on finding ways to help them. Most have come to expect from government the same level of service they experience in the private sector and would prefer to use alternative models of access, if only they were available or as good as they are used to using.

This paper explores Citizen-Centred Service Delivery and concepts that provide government the opportunity to:

- Provide good service when it is needed;
- At a lower cost of delivery than is incurred today; and
- That achieves improved outcomes for the individual, their family and the country as a whole.

These concepts are not new. Individually they have been tried in various forms in different places around the world, with some success. However, to be truly transformational, they need to be implemented together with a deliberate focus on understanding the positive impact they can have on the citizen and their families. The four concepts are:

- 1. Integrated outcomes-based policy:** Looking at what outcomes are desired; how the current government offerings achieve that; and the opportunities to reduce overlap, duplication and address the gaps in the service offerings available;
- 2. “No Wrong Door” service delivery:** Looking at the design, availability and alignment of service delivery channels and optimizing the service delivery in each of them. No Wrong Door makes sure that wherever the citizen goes, they can get access to all the services they need;
- 3. Intelligent processing:** Understanding how to take account of priority, complexity and risk so that processing applications for services and benefits are automated where possible and only ask people to do the things that are truly required; and
- 4. Collaborative governments:** Understanding the overlap between departments, governments and non-governmental organizations and leveraging their collaborative nature to achieve the outcomes that government desires and citizens need.

Citizen-centred Service Delivery has four supporting principles



Figure 1: The four principles of citizen-centred service delivery

The remainder of this paper details each of these concepts and how governments can use them to achieve true citizen-centred service delivery.

Integrated outcomes-based policy

Today, government programs are mostly designed to achieve a specific purpose; for example, an income support program may be designed to alleviate poverty. When looking at programs on an individual basis, it is rare to see that there is not some need that is met or some output that has value.

However, when multiple programs from multiple departments from multiple governments are overlaid, rarely is the result simple, understandable or even achieving the core purpose of the programs. In fact, in many cases, the overlapping nature and complexity of the programs means that they have become counter-productive; creating a disincentive for the very people they were designed for in the first place and placing

an untenable burden on those that are most in need. In the UK, a recent report² highlighted the case of a woman with a disabled son who had to complete ten different application forms, containing over 1,200 questions, to apply for the benefits she needed.

Addressing this from a policy perspective is the ideal approach. However, many governments have tried this and have failed to deliver. This paper emphasizes that large steps can be taken at the service delivery level that move toward this ideal, while the policy reforms are addressed. They are:

Decide segmentation model

The first thing that citizen-centred service delivery needs to focus on is who are the people in need and what are the characteristics of the group. Without knowing these characteristics it is impossible to know how to respond. Segmentation in the private sector is a highly advanced science, yet its use by governments is generally simplistic at best. While age based segmentation is commonly in place (children and families, youth, working age adults, seniors), rarely have governments really looked into the depths of detailed sub-segmentation, group characteristics, behaviour modelling etc.. All too often the author has heard repeated stereotyping as the excuse for lack of service integration or channel enablement—the old do not use the Internet, the poor do not have access to technology, etc.. Often these stereotypes are not true or can be addressed by ease of use incentives³.

Developing segmentation models and the characteristics behind group behaviour is the first requirement of citizen-centred service delivery. Without it, it is impossible to design offerings, channel strategies and responses that meet the needs of citizens.

Articulate Outcomes

Governments have been using outcomes for many years. Unfortunately it is almost always the preserve of the finance department or those organizations responsible for government performance reporting. Rarely has it been used as a service delivery design tool. By expressing the government desired outcome in a series of tightly controlled statements, the existing services can be tested for their ability to meet the desired outcome. Getting these statements clear is a critical element of the design. In articulating the outcome, three elements need to be present:

1. What the core purpose of the outcome is;
2. The timeframe in which it is to be achieved; and
3. The Key Performance Indicator that can be used to track progress.

An example of this, that drove much service delivery reform during the Blair Government in the UK, is “Reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least a quarter by 2004, as a contribution toward the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020.”⁴ This outcome initially resulted in changes to existing benefits; in the medium term, to new in work benefits; and in the latter stages, to wholesale reform of the education system.

Integrate service offerings

One of the biggest test that governments can undertake in the early stages of citizen-centred service delivery programs is to test the alignment of ALL current services and benefits to the new outcomes that have been articulated. ALL refers to all departments, all governments and all nongovernmental organizations. Rarely do they line up well. Typically there will be significant overlaps of services and benefits all trying to “help”. In some cases there will be duplication as different benefits or services are sub-optimally addressing the same

issue. In other cases there will be gaps in offerings to address key policy outcomes. There are various techniques available for mapping these existing services and benefits to the outcomes, usually in private sector consulting organizations⁵. The best provide intricate detail modelling methods with clear and concise high level positioning.

In the author’s opinion, the best models have clarity on service delivery. The objective is to find the overlap that can lead to integration of service offerings and gaps where service offerings do not exist or are sub-optimal. These gaps can either be addressed with existing policy (such as re-assigning grant programs), or feed into the debate on new programming if there are sufficient gaps in important outcomes.

If one looks to the private sector and the concept of product management, the creation phase is very much separated from the actual delivery, or sales, phase. The experience in Canada⁶ and Australia⁷ shows that moving from programmatic service delivery requires a more commercial product management approach to the creation of service offerings. The definition of a service offering, that part of the program that delivers, needs to encompass the following:

- The mandate for the service offering and the supporting legislation and/or policy;
- The outcome that this service offering effects;
- The desired service experience
- The channels through which this offering will be delivered;
- The business processes that support this service offering; and
- The key performance indicators that will enable the success or failure of this offering to be tracked.

In the experience of the author, when presented with this approach, most governments think that is what is already being done by their department. In fact, experience shows that almost none of these service offering characteristics are done at the individual offering level. In the private sector, it would be rare for a product manager to not know the target market segment, the nature of how the product would be distributed, the service experience the clients would receive and how it was going to be measured. Once government knows its “products”, it can then address how they are provided.

“No Wrong Door” service delivery

The second concept of citizen-centred service delivery is No Wrong Door. Today, government services are usually available only from the government department that “owns them”. Citizens have no choice and are told where to go and how to apply for their service or benefit.

The concept of No Wrong Door is a simple one. Wherever you go to get help, you will get advice, guidance and support for your need and an outcome irrespective of who owns or provides the service offerings that are required.

As in the commercial world where there are general retailers, specialist retailers with different formats and channels depending on local requirements, the author believes that the world of government services will start to go the same way. There are three core characteristics that are behind this view.

Location independent

Traditionally, each government department had their own offices where citizens could apply for benefits and services. It was not uncommon to find three or more different departments and levels of governments, all with their own offices, all serving in the same geographic area.

Why do service and benefits have to be applied for at a specific office? If Levis’ can be bought at the Levi store, department stores such as Macy’s, or over the Internet, why not apply the same model to programs? For instance:

- Instead of expecting the elderly to come to the office, why not go to the homes of the elderly, or community centres, especially if old age programs are annually certifiable or if take up of support services is low;
- Why not enable different levels of government to integrate programs in different ways that meet the needs of their constituents. You can still provide your own programs in your own locations, but enable others to provide them also. Increase the availability and access by having more locations—more “no wrong doors”; and
- Why not make tools available to third parties so that they can develop complementary applications, not dissimilar to what is happening in many transport departments to enable the iPod and similar devices to have apps developed for them?

Often, government has run a monopoly on the distribution of services. While there are benefits for some of this to continue, the author believes that governments should also allow location independency to thrive so that other organizations and other governments can be part of the No Wrong Door network. So instead of having to go to multiple places, you only have one, but it can be any one.

Channel independent

The second characteristic is channel independence. But, before you can have independence, you have to have channels. This paper’s definition of a channel is “how citizens can apply for and receive government services and benefits”. The intent is quite clear; service delivery channels need to be designed to enable a citizen to either apply for or receive some service or benefit.

There are three primary channels that will be discussed in this paper:

In person

Some of the most common areas of focus for physical, in-person, presence are:

- **Making sure that the presence is known in the community.** Having an office in places where people actually go. This might vary by client segment depending on the community profile.
- **Increased points of access.** While some governments have closed offices, the general trend is to increase points of access. This might mean different points of access than a government owned office—such as mobile units, temporary locations (such as community halls) or other government offices.
- **Visible and liked brand.** The importance of branding and clarity of branding cannot be over-emphasized. Centrelink in Australia, Service Canada in Canada and the Jobcentre plus in the UK are all good examples of government rebranding that resonated with citizens.
- **A mixed model for complex and transactional cases.** In a multichannel environment the core purpose of the in-person office needs to be the complex cases and case management environments. In addition, they need to service the simpler transaction cases for people who are unable to use or still prefer other channels. In the best models, service for these transactions, would be more attractive to the majority on the phone or the Internet, but they will still need to be provided for in-person in order to address social exclusion concerns.

The role of the in-person office and the No Wrong Door concept is exemplified in the Community Link Offices⁸ in New Zealand. Sponsored through the Ministry of Social Development Work and Income service, other government and community groups are invited to share the office to address all the inhibitors of getting people back into work.

Web

For many people, but not all, they would prefer to deal with Government on the Internet. Unfortunately, even today, many governments think of the Web as a communications tool and not a service delivery channel.

Key characteristics of a Citizen-Centred Web Channel include:

- **Easy to find and easy to access.** Not just using a government domain name, but a range of domain names that citizens would use and expect. Using Web links and sponsored pages to appear as key words on search engines. Partner and promotional programs⁹ that attract client segments;
- **Single, accurate, definitive source of information.** It is not uncommon for Websites to have duplication or just high level information available for citizens. Best practice openly has detailed answers to questions that citizens ask¹⁰;
- **Self-service optimized through screening engines¹¹.** These screening applications hide the complexity of programs from citizens and help ensure that families are aware of all the services they might be entitled to;
- **Using a “My Account” model to personalize service.** Many private sector organizations have now optimized service around an account model to encourage personalization and regular usage. Few governments have implemented this successfully. Some governments are permitting people to pre-register for programs such as emergency aid and a good example of this is in Louisiana¹²; and
- **Fully automated processing.** Too many applications on the Web are still manually dealt with, leading to increased rework and potentially longer processing times than other channels. Putting the right services online and using risk management models (*see next section*) should enable fully automated or “no-touch” processing of applications.

Compared to the private sector, the Web is all too often under-utilized by government. Rarely are you able to easily find the right service; check if it is appropriate; apply for a service offering without having to re-enter all the information the government already has about you; be advised as to the amount or benefit or availability of services; and then track your application or payments in a secure area. Ideally, you would be able to do all of that, plus be told when new services are introduced that might be appropriate for you; warned of upcoming changes that might impact you; or sent a pre-authorized application for a benefit from a different department that you were unaware of, but clearly eligible for. All of these are normal practices that citizens are already used to in the private sector.

Phone

The phone is still a highly preferred channel by many citizens. It has the benefit of convenience and the personal factor of potentially dealing with a human being. However, the phone channel does appear to vary in usage among social enterprises to a surprisingly wide degree. These are the factors that the author believes should be incorporated into citizen-centric service delivery:

- **Clear brand strategy for all phone services.** Even though different services might be offered, to the citizen, it should be obvious where they need to call for what service. Having hundreds of numbers is clearly not comprehensible, but having a single number for all information and transactional services means that inevitably complex Interactive Voice Response (IVR) models are required. Neither extreme is right in the author's view. Further the author believes that the preferred approach is to use a small amount of numbers, including a general enquiry number and specialized transactional services¹³.
- **One call approach to service.** In many commercial organizations, the one call approach to service is generally used, with the exception of specialist services, where a single handover is generally accepted. Whichever model is used by social enterprises, citizens expect the person dealing with them to have the latest information available to them so they do not have to repeat their story.

- **Robust processing capability.** The ability to apply for benefits and services over the phone is becoming more prevalent, especially where complex screening and initial eligibility is involved. What might take literally hours on paper or with the Internet might be achieved in minutes with informed scripting.

Phone services can be expensive, but they can also drive high customer satisfaction if implemented well. The author is aware of several social security organizations that have realized that many of their clients phoning their help-lines had actually been to the Internet previously and were unable to find the information they required. This was driving high call volumes and low phone channel performance. This led to the complete redesign of the Internet channel before virtually any changes were made to the phone channel itself.

Program and organization independent

The final channel characteristic is that the channels are program independent. This is normal operating practice in much of the retail industry. The channel itself is designed and operated independently from the goods that are sold. Why do I need to go to a particular government office?

If a local government has an “in home” survey for newly disabled people to advise them on modifications, why not also permit them to go through the full range of services available for all governments and let them also start the application process? This concept is now fully exploited in Google “mash-ups”, so why not permit service providers the same flexibility?

A good way of characterizing this is through the concept of life events. These are the times of your life when events happen to you that cause you to reach out to government; the birth of a child, starting school, your first job, a new job, unemployment, sickness, the onset of a disability, retirement and ultimately death. By focusing on what matters to the citizen during that life event and using this as the interface to the channels

described above, can make the business of dealing with governments much simpler. Behind the life event itself, the government can focus on the outcome it is trying to achieve; starting an education savings program when a child is born; re-skilling the workforce when people lose a job; increasing savings to help reduce the likelihood of low income retirement; and reducing the overpayments of benefits after death. These are all examples of outcomes linked to life event triggers. Life events are important to citizens and are the proxy for government service offerings oriented around achieving outcomes.

Intelligent processing

The third concept of citizen-centred service delivery is intelligent processing. Today, almost every government in the world collects significant amounts of information that already exists somewhere else in the “system”. They do it for a range of reasons:

- It is too hard to find the information that already exists;
- There is a perception that privacy does not enable them to access it; and
- When delivering in a programmatic business model, so often found in government, there is little motivation to break this mode.

When they have collected the information, most governments use a single type of processing model to process the information for eligibility and entitlement purposes. This model has to cater for all circumstances, including the very real risk of fraud and abuse. What has resulted in many systems today is a process that is so burdensome and so complex¹⁴ that many steps are taken manually, and the consistency of decision making in those steps is lacking. The problem is that every person is treated the same and all are assumed to be trying to game the system. The low risk people are treated as high risk people so that the high risk people can be deterred or found out.

There are countries that have understood that designing the program system so that all people are treated as potential criminals is not the best approach. They are applying intelligence to their processing. They are taking the person’s circumstances into account when processing claims. Each claim is analyzed against existing data, using external input where appropriate and permitted. By comparing a person to pre-existing information, a lower threshold of evidence might be collected, or they might be permitted to use lower cost channels to undertake the claim.

There are three characteristics that make up intelligent processing.

Priority

The first characteristic is priority. This is about understanding what priority to put on an application or a family circumstance. In Child Welfare, formal decision making models, such as Structured Decision Making from the Children’s Research Center¹⁵, exist to support this prioritization.

Another example of this, relates to people who are claiming disability benefits and are obviously disabled and have to suffer processes designed for marginal disability claims. Different rules can be built to both fast track obvious claims and to get benefits to the claimant when they are most in need. This was implemented at the US Social Security Administration (SSA) and according to SSA Commissioner Astrue: “In practical terms, this means that this year 100,000 to 125,000 disabled Americans—those with the most severe disabilities—will be approved for benefits in about 10 days instead of waiting the three to four months it typically takes for an initial decision.”¹⁶

Complexity

The second characteristic is complexity. Today in many social enterprises the same process is usually used for all applications, irrespective of the relative complexity. In reality, a proportion of claims for benefits are relatively straight forward, yet they are usually treated in the same way as complex ones. The application from a repeat benefit recipient is usually treated the same as if they were seeing the system for the first time.

What intelligent organizations will do is look at the relative complexity of a claim and decide to permit the simple ones to be automated and route the complex ones to more intensive investigation or treatment. At WorksafeBC¹⁷ and WorkcoverSA, IBM Cúram has implemented systems that enable a significant proportion of all claims to be automated, enabling the case workers to focus on the cases that need the most help.

Risk

The third characteristic is risk. The approach that is often seen is to try to identify the most risky claimants and apply more controls to them. However, the reality of many systems is that they are designed to detect and prevent fraud and abuse already and that it is, as described earlier, part of the problem for the honest majority.

This paper emphasizes that risk should also be about focusing on those that are low risk and relaxing the stringent controls for those people that are known and have a proven history of good interactions. Good habits should be rewarded as well as applying penalties for bad habits. People who are lower risk should have relaxed controls so that costly processing overheads associated with them, can be reduced.

Collaborative governments

The fourth concept of citizen-centred service delivery is collaborative governments. If one accepts the premise that Integrated Outcomes Based Policy looks at all the services and benefits to achieve an outcome, and one accepts that No Wrong Door means looking at service delivery channels that are not just owned by the social enterprise that owns the service offering, then it is a given that governments and providers need to work together in new ways.

The traditional model of centralized or distributed government has historically not always been the basis for collaborative government. All too often differences have overwhelmed the similarities. However, several examples of good practice exist and these are highlighted below.

Contracted services

This model relies on a contract between governments and/or third parties; one that applies a fee for a service that is delivered and where some sort of service level is agreed. It is quite often used in contracting for services from Not-for-Profits.

Integrated services

This model looks at where different governments have integrated services that when combined bring about an even better experience for the citizen, a more affordable approach to service delivery and even better outcomes.

A good example of this is the integrated service in Ontario where when a baby is born and registered at the municipality, you can apply for the Provincial Birth Certificate at the same time and even apply for the Federal Social Insurance Number. Information is collected once and reused by three levels of government in an integrated, life event based, service.

Complementary services

This model relies on cooperation between parties. The reality is that there is no compulsion or possibly even formal agreements, but the services clearly complement each other and when provided in collaboration, achieve an even better outcome for citizens and their families and the wider government.

A good example of this is in New Zealand in the Community Link service. Here New Zealand Work and Income¹⁸ have opened the door to complementary government services (such as housing, justice and health) so that citizens who need help can get it all in one place. Barriers to work are easier to identify and resolve.

Networked services

This model looks at the service delivery network and utilizes the strengths of each of the actors in the network. In this model, information is accessed from each party—not copied, duplicated or replicated.

A good example of this is the Crossroads Bank in Belgium¹⁹ where over 3000 social enterprises are joined in one network that relies on information access across the network to eliminate information requirements where the information already exists in another party. In Belgium over 260 forms and statutory declarations were eliminated and savings to employers alone exceed one billion Euros annually²⁰.

Conclusions

In conclusion, citizen-centred service delivery is more than just providing service with a smile. It is about achieving even better outcomes at a lower cost of delivery and to do that requires:

- A wholesale look at the clients that are being served, their characteristics, the outcomes that governments are trying to achieve and a realignment of service offerings from all of government. This is the Integrated Outcomes-based Policy Concept;
- A new approach to the channels of service delivery and a focus on providing service that is location independent, program independent, channel independent and organization independent. You can then be in a position to better deliver on the concept of No Wrong Door;
- A focus on the priority, complexity and risk so that there is no longer a “one size fits all” approach to delivery. This is the concept of intelligent processing that enables efficiency to be achieved and resources focused on the people most in need; and
- A new approach to working with others. A new approach that leverages the collaborative potential across government and governments.

None of these concepts are new. All of them are implemented to varying degrees in the private and public sector. Individually they enable even better service to be provided at a lower cost. All of them together achieve citizen-centred service delivery.

Footnotes

- 1 Erin Research Inc. for the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service and the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, Citizens First 3
- 2 David Martin, *Benefit Simplification: How, and why, it must be done* (Centre of Policy Studies, 2009), p.5
- 3 A typical approach might be to introduce service improvements in new channels you would prefer people to use as an incentive to use the new channel while leaving the old channel open, but with the old level of service.
- 4 SR2002 Public Service Agreements, Chapter 15 at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Spending_Review/spend_sr02/psa/spend_sr02_psdwp.cfm
- 5 See <ftp://public.dhe.ibm.com/common/ssi/ecm/en/gbs03009usen/GBS03009USEN.PDF> for an example.
- 6 Service Canada. See www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/home.shtml
- 7 Centrelink. See www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/contact-us/
- 8 See www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/community-link/index.html
- 9 For instance, baby names at ssa.gov at www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/
- 10 See FAQ's at <http://ssa-custhelp.ssa.gov/>
- 11 Examples include New York City Access (https://a858-ihss.nyc.gov/ihss1/en_US/IHSS_homePage.do), North Carolina's electronic Pre-Assessment Screening Service (<https://epass.nc.gov/ePASS/cw/PlayerPage.do?>) and Alberta's Supports Eligibility Estimator (<https://eligibleforsupport.alberta.ca/GoAPortal/cw/PlayerPage.do?>).
- 12 See Case Study at www.curamsoftware.com/clients/case-study-louisiana-well-prepared
- 13 For example look at the following contact details. www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/common/contactus/index.shtml — this provides a single general enquiry number 1-800-O-Canada and 9 specialist contact numbers
- 14 A good description of the complexity in the UK can be found in the 21st Century Welfare consultation documents available at www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/21st-century-welfare.pdf
- 15 See www.nccd-crc.org/crc/crc/c_index_main.html. SDM is integrated in Cúram Children's Services solutions.
- 16 See SSA press release: www.socialsecurity.gov/pressoffice/pr/disability-fast-track-pr.html
- 17 A case study is available at <http://www.curamsoftware.com/clients/case-study-worksafebc-ciac>
- 18 See: www.msd.govt.nz/what-we-can-do/community/community-link/index.html
- 19 See: www.ksz-bcss.fgov.be/en/international/page/content/websites/international/aboutcbss.html
- 20 Source: http://www.ksz-bcss.fgov.be/binaries/documentation/en/cbss_2009.pdf

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