Rethinking e-Government Services
User-Centred Approaches
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Chapter 5

Improving User Take-up: Some Cross-cutting Trends

Governments recognise that providing e-government services is not enough: these services also need to be used by the public. Making the public sector more efficient and effective, and at the same time providing services that citizens and businesses want to use, has over the years been seen as two diametrically opposed goals, but this is not necessarily the case. The goals are complementary in nature and are each their own prerequisites: this is the essence of the paradigm shift from a government-centric to a user-centric service delivery approach.

Looking at service delivery from a user's point of view suddenly puts new demands on the public sector as a service provider. Some OECD countries have grasped this and have transformed – or are in the process of transforming – their public sectors accordingly to enable the delivery of integrated services. This demands strong political and managerial leadership, and a will to change traditional administrative and cultural thinking within the public sector as a whole and among civil servants.

Other cross-cutting experiences show that successful user-focused e-government programmes include: organising government websites simply; creating the same "look and feel"; focusing on "killer applications"; ensuring relevance of services provided; and engaging in inclusive service design. The focus on becoming user-centric and innovative in service delivery suggests the need for governments to set up frameworks for designing, developing and delivering innovative and fully integrated services, whether on- or offline – an issue to be further explored in the future.

Governments recognise that providing e-government services is not enough: these services also need to be used by the public. Making the public sector more efficient and effective, and at the same time, providing services that citizens and businesses want to use, has over the years been seen as two different goals pulling in opposite directions. Today, governments have learned that this is not necessarily the case. The goals are in fact complementary in nature and have each their own prerequisites: efficiency and effectiveness cannot fully be achieved without citizens and businesses using e-government services; user focus and improvement of service quality and delivery cannot be achieved without optimising efficiency and effectiveness within the public sector as a whole. This is the essence of the paradigm shift from a government-centric to a user-centric service delivery approach. E-Government has also proven here to be a key enabling tool in the necessary transformation of the public sector that many OECD countries have been striving for in recent years.

The result of the paradigm shift is an increased focus on users' needs and demands (see Chapter 1). By adopting a user-centric approach to service delivery, the perspective on service development and delivery shifts 180 degrees: it is no longer a success criterion for the different authorities and institutions to individually deliver services to the public. A service has to address specific user needs, regardless of who delivers the service and how many authorities are involved and to what extent.

User-focused service transformation trends

Looking at service delivery from a user's point of view puts new demands on the public sector as a service provider. Some OECD countries have grasped this and have transformed – or are in the process of transforming – their public sectors accordingly to enable the delivery of integrated services. This demands strong political and managerial leadership, and a will to change traditional administrative and cultural thinking within the public sector as a whole and among civil servants. The country cases illustrating approaches to addressing lagging user take-up shown in Chapters 1 and 3 are all examples of transformational processes in progress (see Table 5.1). One of the outcomes of the public sector transformation is improved public service delivery, which addresses individual users' needs. Better services addressing user needs subsequently lead to higher user take-up and satisfaction.

Table 5.1. **Approaches to user-focused service transformation**

Type of transformation	Country case examples
Organisational transformation	
Simplification of service organisation (*e.g.* service delivery integration making it easier to find services and to access them through for instance portals.)	● Box 1.1 Australia: eCensus 2006. ● Box 1.2 Canada: Service Canada – a one-stop-shop for public services. ● Box 3.4 Denmark: The Danish Citizens' Portal – *borger.dk*. ● Box 3.5 Hungary: The Government Portal – *www.magyarorszag.hu*. ● Box 3.6 Mexico: The Mexican Citizen Portal and the Stockholm Challenge. ● Box 3.7 United Kingdom: Directgov. ● Box 3.8 United States: The federal portal – *USA.gov*. ● Box 3.31 The Netherlands: Multi-channel strategy of the IB-Groep (Agency for Educational Grants Administration). ● Box 3.32 Denmark: Mandatory use of digital channels through proactive channel management.
Service integration (*e.g.* organisational integration of services according to specific user situations – such as life events.)	● Box 3.3 Italy: "Reti Amiche" – the "friendly networks" of service providers. ● Box 3.9 Belgium: Transforming the social security sector. ● Box 3.10 Germany: German Administration eServices Directory (DVDV). ● Box 3.13 Turkey: Reducing administrative costs in the Social Security Organisation. ● Box 3.16 Italy: A "life event" approach to service delivery. ● Box 3.17 Slovenia: State Portal with "life-event" organised services. ● Box 3.18 United Kingdom: Customer journey mapping – transforming Free School Meals. ● Box 3.19 United States: Improving disaster assistance through a one-stop-portal.
Cultural transformation	
Cultural harmonisation (*e.g.* horizontal collaboration and co-operation resulting in the development of coherent common views, understanding and approaches.)	● Box 1.3. United Kingdom: Shared services – making e-government service cost-effective. ● Box 3.1 Denmark: Empowering the local level to deliver better services – local service centres. ● Box 3.2 Portugal: Creating coherent service delivery through simplification. ● Box 3.11. The Netherlands: Reducing administrative burden by 25%. ● Box 3.12. Mexico: Increasing transparency and accountability with e-government. ● Box 3.26. New Zealand: Web 2.0 social networking tools. ● Box 3.27. Malta: Targeting user take-up and user participation.
Awareness raising – winning hearts and minds" (*e.g.* pro-active marketing of –or "campaigning" for – a coherent and common view of public sector service provision within the public sector.)	● Box 3.15. Belgium: Accessibility, the disabled and e-government. ● Box 3.20. Hungary: Improving user take-up through digital divide policies. ● Box 3.21. Mexico: Targeting the digital divide through the e-Mexico initiative. ● Box 3.22. Germany: E-Government 2.0 – a user-centric e-government strategy. ● Box 3.23. Denmark: E-Engaging citizens in political processes. ● Box 3.24. Germany: User-centric approach to e-participation and e-inclusion. ● Box 3.25. Hungary: eGames for public engagement. ● Box 3.28. Korea: Awareness raising – a priority in its new national plan (2008-11). ● Box 3.29. Germany and the United States: Marketing e-government. ● Box 3.30. United Kingdom: Increasing user take-up through "Connect to your council" take-up campaign. ● The Dutch eGovernment "WebWise" Awards (see Annex A: Netherlands).

Source: OECD 2009.

Table 5.1 shows that countries are using user-focused transformation approaches in order to achieve higher user take-up. Organisational transformation are seen by many countries as an easier way towards improving service quality and performance,* but countries are also recognising the importance of pursuing in parallel a cultural transformation – both within the public sector as a whole as in society at large.

All countries are using a transformation approach that includes simplifying the public service organisation. Some countries (*e.g.* federal organised countries) have legal or constitutional challenges for moving towards integration of services due to, for example, different legal responsibilities or organisational and technical barriers (*e.g.* fragmentation of service delivery across the public sector and lack of interoperability and standardisation) that makes service integration challenging.

Cultural transformation is a challenge that can be seen in the country cases listed in Table 5.1: organising service delivery in a whole-of-public-sector perspective demands firm political and managerial leadership and a strong focus on the important change management challenges (*e.g.* resistance to change, clear communication, motivation of staff, etc.) that often emerge in mature organisations, such as the public administrations of most countries. Successful cultural transformation is seen in countries where strong political and managerial leadership is present and often also where the sense of need for change within the public sector among civil servants and among external stakeholders (citizens and businesses) is significant.

The importance of being able to track user take-up and satisfaction has increased significantly since the early 2000s as governments need to know more about the users in order to improve the performance of the public sector. Measurement frameworks are being set up to provide governments with evidence of the outcomes of their e-government investments. However, the few results from the limited measurements in many OECD countries show, generally speaking, that there is potential for improvement in user take-up.

Cross-cutting take-up measures

The cross-cutting user take-up measures seen in the different peer reviewed OECD countries (see also Annex A), show that coherence and simplicity across the public sector are important general learning points to take note of if national e-government programmes are to be successful with high user take-up of e-government services. Successful e-government programmes should from the start have their target groups as the focus: who is the programme going to benefit and how can the impact be maximised?

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* The report *E-Government as a Tool for Transformation* (GOV/PGC(2007)6), 28 March 2007, shows that the impact of public sector transformation is experienced mainly as organisational and business process changes. (See Chapter 1.3 and Table 4 of the report.)

Looking at the experience of OECD countries, elements of successful user-focused e-government programmes include:

- **Simple organisation:** A single government website acting as a one-stop-shop for e-government services makes it easier for users to find and access those services. Creating a simple organisational hub for e-government services, bundling them in a few (rather than many) portals has simplified users' overview of and access to services. Such an approach underscores the importance of having a fully integrated back-office where connectivity and inter-operability are secured for cross-organisational service solutions. Examples of countries pursuing a simple organisation of services are: Canada (Box 1.2. Canada: Service Canada – a one-stop-shop for public services), Denmark (Box 3.4. Denmark: The Danish Citizens' Portal – *borger.dk*), Hungary (Box 3.5. Hungary: The Government Portal – *www.magyarorszag.hu*), Mexico (Box 3.6. Mexico: The Mexican Citizen Portal and the Stockholm Challenge), the United States (Box 3.8. United States: The federal portal – *USA.gov*), and the United Kingdom (Box 3.7. United Kingdom: *Directgov*).
- **Recognisability and marketing:** A strong brand for e-government services which is used proactively in targeted marketing efforts has proven to be an important prerequisite for increased user take-up. One of the recurrent challenges seen in a number of different national surveys is that users are often not aware of the available services. Examples of countries pursuing a pro-active marketing effort in order to raise the profile of their e-government services are: Korea (Box 3.28. Korea: Awareness raising – a priority in its new national plan [2008-11]), Germany (Box 3.29. Germany and the United States: Marketing e-government), Portugal (Box 3.2. Portugal: Creating coherent service delivery through simplification), the United Kingdom (Box 3.30. United Kingdom: Increasing user take-up through "Connect to your council" take-up campaign), and the United States (Box 3.29. Germany and the United States: Marketing e-government).
- **Same "look and feel":** Ensuring that common navigation and search architectures are used across all content and services heightens recognisability and improves usability. Countries do recognise the need for pursuing a goal of same "look and feel", but none of the OECD reviewed countries has yet, on a whole of public sector level, implemented an integrated front-office for the e-government services provided to citizens and businesses.
- "**Killer applications**"**:** A focus on high-volume, high-frequency transactional services – use of high-impact and high-demand applications to drive take-up and usage – is necessary to capture as many e-government users as possible. Some OECD countries combine this with targeted channel management, including making some e-government services mandatory. Examples of countries are: Belgium (Box 3.9. Belgium: Transforming the

social security sector), Denmark (Box 3.32. Denmark: Mandatory use of digital channels through proactive channel management), the Netherlands (Box 3.31. The Netherlands: Multi-channel strategy of the IB-Groep [Agency for Educational Grants Administration]), and Turkey (Box 3.13. Turkey: Reducing administrative costs in the Social Security Organisation).

- **Relevance:** Ensuring that targeted user context and topics are used at all levels of navigation around which government services are packaged to meet specific user demand, will improve the perception of relevance of the services to users. This is particularly important when governments use a "life-event" approach to service organisation. Examples of countries are: Italy (Box 3.16. Italy: A "life event" approach to service delivery) and Slovenia (Box 3.17. Slovenia: State Portal with "life-event" organised services).
- **Inclusive service design:** Inviting users to participate in and contribute to service design will ensure (on- or offline) services a focus on user needs and demands. This approach is not broadly used in OECD peer reviewed countries even though the use of participative tools is slowly emerging as a way to engage citizens in consultations (*e.g.* New Zealand's use of Web 2.0 tools – Box 3.26. New Zealand: Web 2.0 social networking tools).

To be truly user-focused, services should be organised around a holistic rather than an agency or service-specific view of the user. This requires increased collaboration and co-ordination among government agencies. It also has numerous benefits such as increasing the take-up of e-services, providing a higher-quality "experience" for users, and creating greater efficiency gains.

Towards an innovative citizen-centric public service delivery?

The paradigm shift in e-government perspective is caused by the limited impact of government investments in developing and implementing e-government services over the past ten years. Now that many services have been put on line, governments want to reap the full benefits of e-government implementations. The limited impact on user take-up is now targeted on focusing the attention on user needs of and satisfaction with public service delivery, and by systematically tracking users to better understand their needs. Initiatives addressing the latter have only been taken up by OECD countries since the mid-2000s.

Countries have moved towards rethinking not just their Internet-based service delivery, but their service delivery in general without regard to delivery channel – to meet the users with services on their terms. The goal is to provide services that fit each individual user, whether the user is a citizen or a business. Experience from peer-reviewed OECD countries shows that there is a need to rethink the division of responsibilities and organisational structures, and to change the historically bound administrative cultures in the public sector which are yet to adopt a whole-of-public-sector service delivery view. Trends from country experiences have been identified to raise users' awareness of access to and use of e-government services.

As OECD countries increasingly focus on the use of e-government by citizens, it is necessary to further explore how governments can set up frameworks for designing, developing and delivering fully integrated and innovative services, whether on- or offline. One of the recurrent challenges experienced by OECD countries is the necessity to have an integrated front- and back-office that supports and enhances integrated service delivery without regard to which authorities have the formal responsibility for the services provided. The importance of being able to provide these integrated services in balance with respecting privacy and data protection laws and guidelines in the public sector as a whole, is on the political agenda of many countries. In summary, countries are struggling to strike the right balance between efficiency and effectiveness, service quality and delivery, user-friendliness (including privacy and ICT security considerations) and increasing public welfare, among others.

It is clear that the discussion on public service delivery is not focused on e-government tools, processes and procedures but on outcomes – that is, on users and their needs, and how governments can meet these needs. The paradigm-shift from government-centric to a citizen-centric view of innovative public service delivery making everyday life easier, is a reality and will need to be explored further in future research.

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