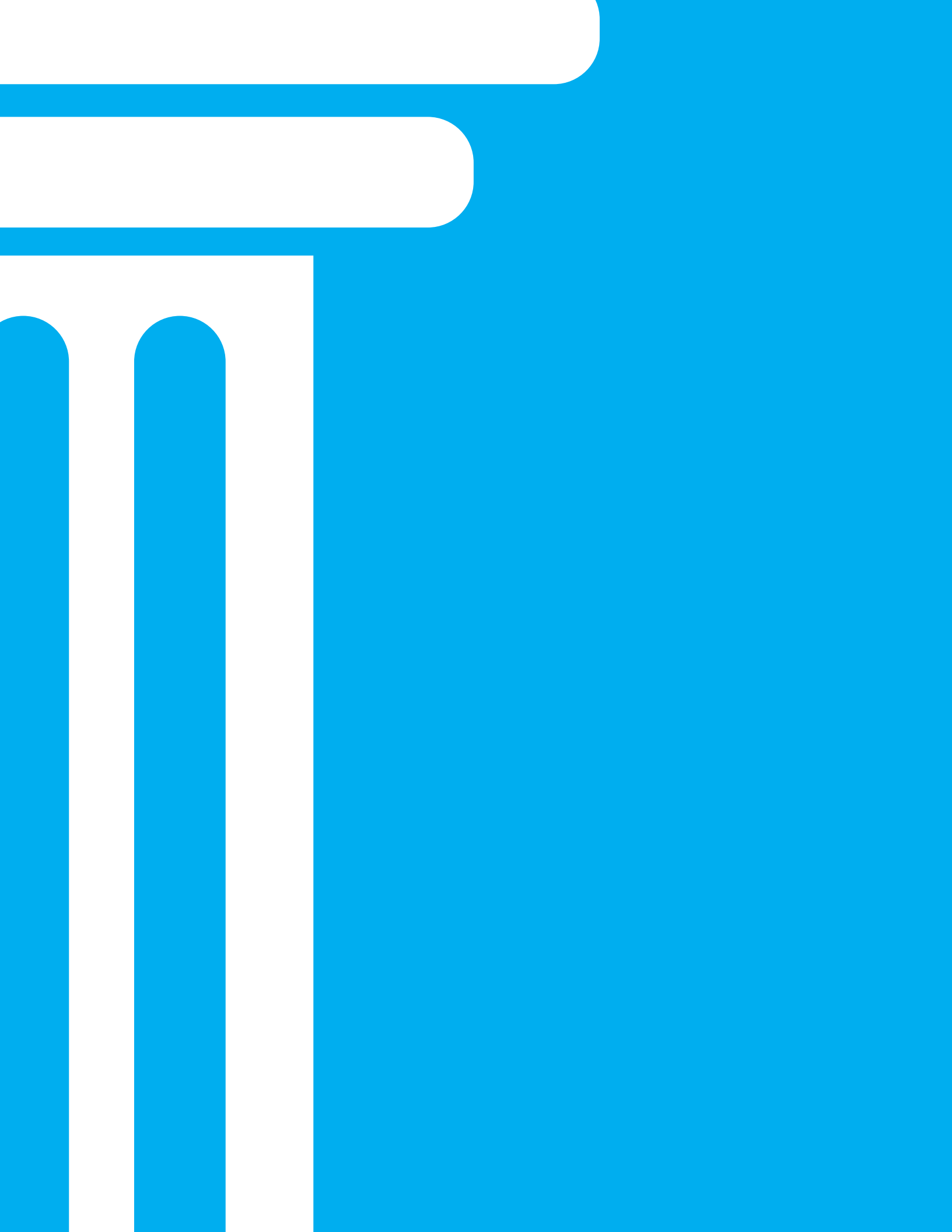


Implementing a citizen-centric approach to delivering government services

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Implementing a citizen-centric approach to delivering government services

When governments deliver services based on the needs of the people they serve, they can increase public satisfaction and reduce costs.

Delivering services to citizens is at the heart of what most government agencies do. Tasks like paying taxes, renewing driving licenses, and applying for benefits are often the most tangible interactions citizens have with their government. Services are therefore critical in shaping trust in and perceptions of the public sector.

Citizens today expect more transparent, accessible, and responsive services from the public sector. And those expectations are rising. Many governments have made efforts to improve service delivery through online portals or “one-stop shops” like centralized call centers, but find they are still unable to meet the public’s expectations. Citizens tell public-sector officials—and it’s been confirmed via a survey conducted by the McKinsey Center for Government¹—that they continue to feel frustrated by cumbersome or confusing websites and find it’s often still necessary to speak with multiple parties before their question is answered or their request is completed. As a result, governments face not only declining citizen satisfaction and eroding public trust² but also increasing costs associated with delivering services across multiple channels.

Part of the problem is that despite their best intentions, many governments continue to design and deliver services based on their own requirements and processes instead of the needs of the people they serve. But some government agencies—including at the local, state, and federal levels—have successfully implemented a customer-centric approach to service design and delivery. This article draws on their experiences to illustrate the four elements of implementing transformation efforts aimed at increasing citizen satisfaction and reducing costs.³

Measuring citizen satisfaction

Transforming service delivery begins with understanding citizens’ needs and priorities. Identifying which services citizens find most problematic and measuring the

extent of that dissatisfaction is one way governments can prioritize areas for improvement. There are three guiding principles to ensure that citizen satisfaction measurement efforts generate accurate, actionable insights.

Let citizens tell you what matters most, but avoid asking them directly

Asking people which aspects of service delivery are most in need of improvement—the time required to resolve a request versus the politeness of staff, for example—is unlikely to yield accurate results. Most people will say every aspect is equally important. So rather than asking citizens to rank the importance of different drivers of satisfaction, ask them to rate each service (for example, the overall process of applying for a parking permit) across the drivers. This method provides more reliable insights into users’ needs and priorities.

This technique has been used successfully for transformation efforts in the public sector. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Local Government Association undertook a project to measure how satisfied residents were with their local council’s performance.⁴ Their analysis showed that perceived value for the money—essentially, whether residents feel they’re getting a good return on their tax dollars—was by far the most powerful influencer of public satisfaction; it was far more important than the tax levels themselves.⁵ Further, perceived value for the money was determined largely by how well residents were informed about local services. Several councils used these insights to make specific improvements; one group launched a “cleaner, greener, safer” public-relations campaign that helped move the council from the bottom 40 percent of performance satisfaction ratings to the top 10 percent in less than five years.

Identify natural break points in customer satisfaction

Striving for zero wait times and one-click transactions across the entirety of government

services is likely to prove both unrealistic and costly. Government leaders can find a balance between delivering high-quality, responsive services and managing resources effectively by using citizen-satisfaction metrics to determine acceptable service levels. One way to do that is by identifying break points—the point at which delays or service shortfalls cause customer satisfaction to drop significantly.

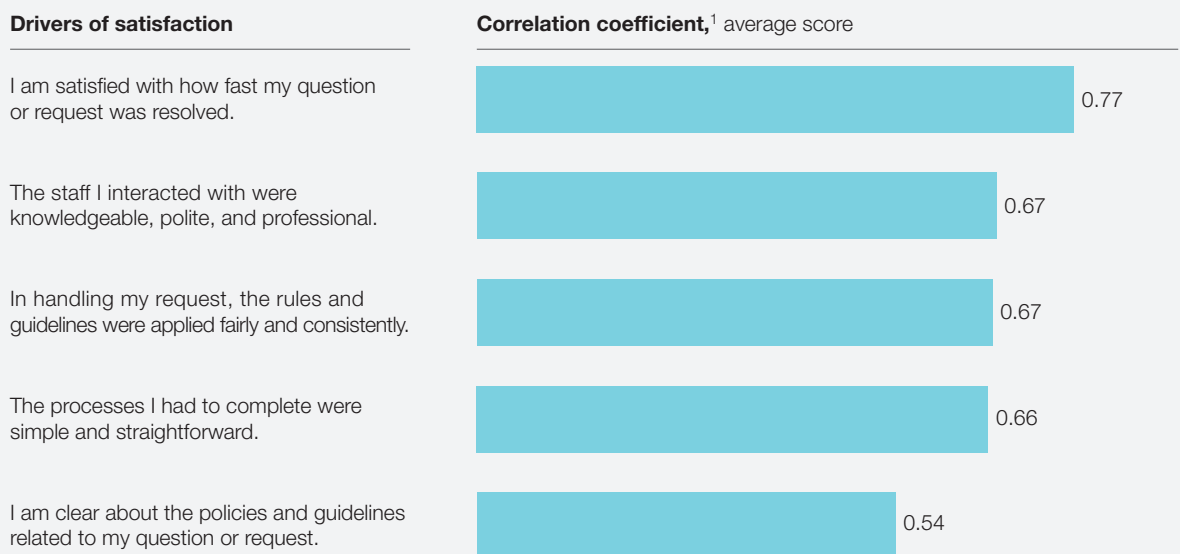
Public-sector organizations have already had success with break-point analysis. One agency used this technique to find optimal staffing levels across its call centers and paper-based processing facilities. Managers were able to identify, in real time, the trade-offs between staffing and citizen satisfaction for both of these channels. In turn, they raised overall citizen satisfaction.⁶

Combine public feedback with internal data to uncover hidden pain points

Combining customer-satisfaction information with operational data—call-center volumes

and number of in-person visits, for instance—can yield additional insights, beyond what citizens state explicitly via surveys and other feedback channels. The Australian Taxation Office, for example, combines insights gleaned from customer-service calls and customer-relationship-management records with more formal customer-satisfaction feedback to identify statistical correlations between the specific *areas* customers have identified as problematic and the *drivers* of their dissatisfaction. This approach has helped the agency identify areas for improvement within its interactive-voice-recognition (IVR) systems—specifically, the agency discovered that IVR staff needed additional training. Further, the office has identified customer-service “champions” to help train other customer-service representatives.⁷ A government agency in Asia has taken a similar approach to identifying why exactly citizens are dissatisfied with its services (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1 Statistical analysis can identify why citizens are dissatisfied with certain services.



¹The correlation coefficient measures the degree to which the change in one variable leads to the change in another variable; 1 is total positive correlation, -1 is total negative correlation, and 0 is zero correlation.

Source: McKinsey analysis

Employees can also be tremendously helpful in identifying pain points. Because they are closer to the front line and have extensive daily interactions with citizens, many employees are highly skilled at gauging public satisfaction and can often devise practical solutions. Employees are an especially important resource in circumstances that would make soliciting public feedback challenging.

Getting a detailed understanding of the entire citizen journey

A “citizen journey” is the entire experience that a person has when seeking a government service. The journey has a discrete beginning and end, and because it is typically multitouch and multichannel, it is also cross-functional in nature. A citizen journey is anchored in how people think about their experience, not in how government agencies do.

Government agencies that skillfully manage the end-to-end journey report higher levels of citizen satisfaction. Here’s why: assume a person has six interactions with an agency before his or her journey is complete. Even if there is a 95 percent satisfaction rate for each individual interaction—employee responsiveness, for example—up to one in four citizens will have a poor experience at some point during the licensing journey.⁸ This figure could be even higher if the journey is poorly planned or executed.

Rather than focusing on improvements at individual touch points, government leaders can view services through the eyes of the constituent—this means considering the entire citizen journey, from the time the person begins looking for the agency that is best suited to meet a need until the task is completed. A journey-based approach to improving citizen satisfaction has three parts.

Identify the journeys that matter most to citizens

To avoid spreading resources too thin, government leaders can focus improvement initiatives on what matters most to citizens. Identifying the most

pressing journeys can be done in a number of ways, including segmenting customers by need (it’s not uncommon for a small group of constituents to lodge the majority of the complaints) and identifying areas with the highest overall levels of dissatisfaction.

A large government agency in Asia used a simple approach to identify which journeys mattered most to its citizens: the department listed all the services it provided and then categorized them into specific journeys, such as “simple queries,” “applications,” and “appeals.” The agency ultimately identified more than 60 different citizen journeys across 20 services, eight population segments, and ten channels, and then combined customer-complaint data with interviews of frontline employees and senior leaders. This helped the organization develop a hypothesis about which journeys citizens found most problematic; it also suggested possible causes. The agency then used those insights to chart customer journeys across two dimensions: level of satisfaction and number of citizens affected. Transformation leaders could then focus their resources on the journeys with the highest levels of dissatisfaction as well as those that had a large number of users (Exhibit 2).

Develop a map of how citizens experience those journeys

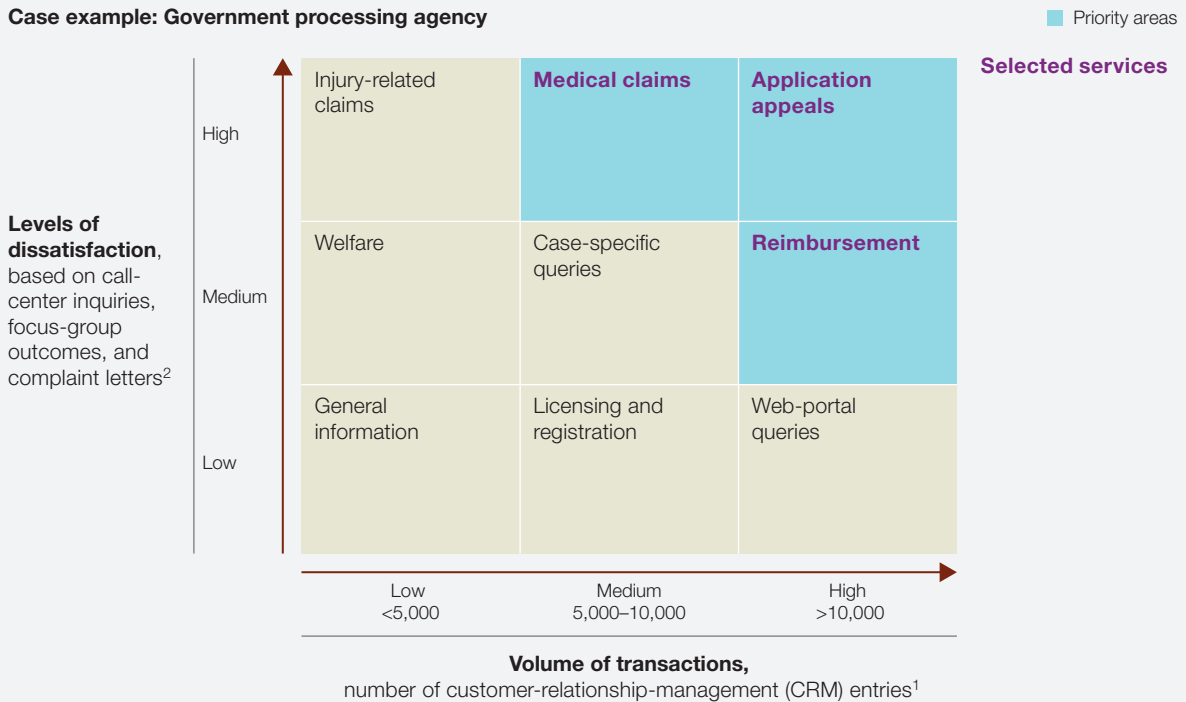
Once they have identified the journeys that matter most to citizens, leaders can create a map of each journey from the perspective of a citizen. Often, the process of creating these maps will reveal that a journey involves more steps—and more agencies—than leaders had realized. Different customers can experience the same journey in different ways, so it might be wise to create multiple maps to document the discrete needs of various groups.⁹

Identify the internal processes that shape those journeys

To develop actionable insights, government leaders can link citizen journeys to the internal organizational processes that affect them. Therefore, an important part of effective journey

Exhibit 2 Categorizing citizen journeys can help agencies prioritize those with the most users and highest levels of dissatisfaction.

Case example: Government processing agency



¹Based on about 250,000 customer-relationship-management-data entries over 5 months in 2014.

²Based on about 1,000 letters received over 5 months in 2014.

Source: Call recordings; complaint letters; focus-group outcomes; government-agency CRM data

mapping is defining the key operational activities and systems involved at each stage.

Mapping the citizen journey using the three guidelines we've discussed will help transformation leaders identify and prioritize pain points and examine their root causes. One government agency that processes grants, for example, used a citizen journey approach to very precisely scope the IT infrastructure needed to support its grant applicants.

Translating improvement opportunities into front- and back-end solutions

The third step is to translate opportunities for improvement into actionable initiatives.

Typically, these initiatives fall into one of three categories: managing demand better by preventing journeys that are unnecessary in the first place, cutting out duplicative steps along necessary citizen journeys, and improving the availability, usability, and accessibility of information.

Front-end initiatives have the most immediate impact on the citizen experience. Although leaders will want to tailor solutions so that they address the specific pain points they've identified through their mapping exercises, governments can consider using some of the following high-impact interventions.

Proactive notifications and status updates

Agencies that share information with citizens tend to realize greater levels of satisfaction while also reducing costs, in part because these communications divert demand from resource-intensive channels. The state of Indiana's Bureau of Motor Vehicles, for example, makes wait times at physical branches available online so citizens can decide whether to visit, thus smoothing demand throughout the day and managing customer expectations. In combination with increasing the number of services available online, this initiative has helped raise citizen satisfaction to 97 percent and reduce wait times at branches to less than ten minutes.¹⁰

Improved functionality of self-serve channels

Citizens are increasingly expecting multichannel communication options and show a strong and growing preference for self-serve channels, such as online portals. Although government agencies have made advances in expanding the availability of self-serve online channels, uptake is often low, and few people find they can complete their journey online. Satisfaction drops significantly when citizens are unable to use their channel of choice and are forced to switch channels.¹¹

New York City has handled this problem especially well. In 2003, it set up NYC311—a single call center representing about 300 city, state, and federal agencies offering more than 4,000 city services. The service has evolved greatly since then and now offers a more automated, multiplatform channel, including text messaging, apps, and social media. In fact, the online site, which launched in 2009, had nearly seven million visitors by 2013; between 2011 and 2013 the platform had supported more than 300,000 interactive text sessions.¹² These automated, dynamic channels ensure citizens are served efficiently and also achieve consistently high satisfaction scores.

Polite, professional, and consistent communication

In-person and telephone channels still account for the majority of citizen interactions with their government.

Staff who can provide clear, consistent, and courteous explanations and services are therefore critical to citizen satisfaction. Recognizing this, the Australian government's Centrelink program, which delivers a range of government payments and services, provides its customer-service employees with a variety of support, tools, and development opportunities.¹³ The organization has set up a virtual college, which offers accredited learning and technical training focused on developing competencies in areas like customer-service and call-center skills. Consequently, Centrelink wins consistent acclaim for its customer satisfaction—91 percent of customers agree that staff treated them with respect and 82 percent felt that staff had told them everything they had to know to get the service they needed.¹⁴

Back-office operations are an equally important part of improving the citizen experience. In fact, speed, simplicity, and efficiency—factors largely driven by the back office—are often the most powerful drivers of citizen satisfaction. Since most customer journeys touch different parts of government, agencies may want to reorganize themselves and their relationships with other departments to create cross-functional teams responsible for the end-to-end customer journey.

The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources in Oman offers a case in point. In 2008, the agency created Injaz Hall, which standardized application processes (for car licenses and building permits, for example) across 44 municipalities in nine governorates. This initiative went beyond creating the front-facing one-stop shop—it included more fundamental organizational and process changes, including an integrated IT system. (An integrated IT system across municipalities facilitates and improves the quality of not only front-facing services but also back-end administrative procedures.) In addition to setting the stage for improved customer satisfaction, this cross-cutting data-sharing approach has enabled the ministry to better plan for new infrastructure projects in each region.¹⁵

Thinking long term

Capability building is a critical part of any transformation program. In the case of citizen-satisfaction transformations, government leaders can use a citizen-centric approach to designing performance management and governance systems so they can continue to drive—and sustain—improvements.

Measure and manage performance

When government leaders measure entire journeys, not just touch points, they might want to consider adjusting their performance metrics and analytics accordingly. This means not just capturing top-line citizen satisfaction with each journey but also their satisfaction with individual factors that affect satisfaction along the way; for example, not just the process of obtaining a permit but also the time it takes to do so. These metrics can then be embedded into a performance-management system.

Of course, metrics and performance management are in many ways a means to an end—the ultimate goal is to promote continuous improvement. Citizen-care forums can help. These forums consist of small, cross-functional teams of employees who review decisions that affect the public. Each forum reviews performance-management results, escalates issues to higher-level managers, and also directs feedback downward. Frontline-level forums can take the form of daily huddles to discuss results and resolve issues. Leadership-level forums could be quarterly meetings to review overall citizen service performance or to approve resource allocations.

Build the right governance system

Although governance models for citizen transformation programs can take different forms depending on the context in which they are operating, most have three things in common. First, they don't just collect citizen feedback—they regularly aggregate and analyze this information, essentially “knitting together” a broad picture of the citizen experience. Second, because a single

citizen journey can require multiple handoffs among departments or agencies, effective governance models define clear accountability across each function that is involved. Finally, citizen transformation governance models separate governance policy and operations. Policy governance focuses on top-line metrics and monitors overall quality of service to design and maintain a unified, positive citizen experience. Operational governance tracks citizen satisfaction and metrics at the channel and journey levels and encourages improvements by designing and carrying out customer-care initiatives at a process level.

Change doesn't happen overnight. As with any transformation effort, leaders will want to encourage role modeling and will have to invest time as well as financial resources to build the skills and capabilities necessary to deliver and sustain change.



Transforming service delivery isn't easy, but there is a clear and proven road map to success. By taking a citizen-centric approach, leaders can better understand the needs of their citizens and translate those needs into targeted, effective service-delivery improvements. In doing so, they can increase citizen satisfaction and also reduce costs. ■

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² Edelman Trust Barometer, 2014, edelman.com.

³ For more on this topic, see Baig, Dua, and Riefberg, *Putting citizens first: How to improve citizens' experience and satisfaction with government services*, on mckinsey.com.

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⁶ Sebastien Katch and Tim Morse, “When citizens are your customers,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, August 2009, mckinsey.com.

⁷ *Managing Service Demand: A Practical Guide to Help Revenue*

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⁸ Alfonso Pulido, Dorian Stone, and John Strevel, "The three Cs of customer satisfaction: Consistency, consistency, consistency," March 2014, mckinsey.com.

⁹ *Customer Journey Mapping*, Smart Cities, Brief Number 12, smartcities.info.

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¹² "Mayor Bloomberg commemorates ten years of NYC311, the nation's largest and most comprehensive 311 service," City of New York, March 11, 2013, nyc.gov.

¹³ James Smith, "Australia's Centrelink: The agency for government service delivery," Asia Pacific FutureGov, April 7, 2003, events.futuregov.asia.

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