Digital government and the citizen journey

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A smart nation requires a digital government

A recent survey conducted by Deloitte on digital transformation in the public sector, which gathered information from more than 1,200 government officials in over 70 countries including Luxembourg, found that digital technologies are having a major impact on government. Nearly all the respondents (96 percent) claimed that the disruption brought about by digital technologies is having a significant impact on their domain.¹

One of the key drivers identified by Deloitte in its GOV2020 vision, and which is a factor that is changing the context in which government operates, is “empowered citizen-consumers.” This new kind of citizen, brought about by the internet, is proactive, connected, collaborative, and aspires to contribute to a better society.²

The rise of this new type of digitally-driven citizen and the growing impact of digital technologies on governments require a change in the approach government organizations use to deliver their services to society. This change needs to take on the form of a shift within government organizations from a more inward focus (on processes, efficiency, cost-saving, etc.) to one that is more outward-focused on citizens and their experience while interacting with specific services. Already in 2014, the Luxembourg government presented its “Digital Lëtzebuerg” initiative with the aim to strengthen and consolidate the country’s position in the ICT field in the long term. The guiding principle behind the initiative is to diversify the economy for the benefit of citizens and all socio-economic sectors. Digital Lëtzebuerg is therefore intended to be the assertion of a new image of the Grand Duchy as a “smart nation”—a modern, open, highly connected nation ready to cope with a digital society. In 2017, the first results of this initiative could be seen, as Luxembourg holds a strong fifth position in the European Commission’s Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), a composite index summarizing relevant indicators on Europe’s digital performance and tracking EU member states’ progress in digital competitiveness.

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The journey toward digital begins with the citizen
The impact made by the new type of digitally-empowered citizen-consumer, whose preferences change constantly, is not limited to government organizations. Private organizations around the globe have already come face-to-face with these “enhanced” consumers and understand the importance they should place on customer experience. This is evidenced by the dedicated roles such as Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) and, in some cases, Chief Experience Officer (CXO), which are uncommon, if not unheard of in the public sector. The stats suggest that the effect on private organizations will only increase:

- By 2020, customer experience will overtake price and products as the key brand differentiator
- 89 percent of marketing leaders expect to compete primarily on the basis of customer experience as compared with 36 percent four years ago.

It is clear that understanding and managing the customer experience is becoming vital and it should be a top priority for government organizations as well, since citizens used to digitally-enabled, customer-centric experiences provided by private organizations are sure to experience a disconnect if the same approach to service delivery is not present when they interact with government organizations.

Key principles to consider when defining the vision and developing the organization’s digital strategy include the following:

Digital by default – create straightforward and convenient services that will be used by those who have the ability to do so, but won’t exclude those who don’t.

Once only – ensure that citizens do not have to supply the same information more than once, e.g., information provided in an online form or questionnaire is saved and can be revisited and updated later.

Transparency – share information in a format that is useable, i.e., open and analyzable, enabling people to look up, work with, and manipulate data. This is more than just paperless, it also precludes simply uploading and sharing PDF or Word files, since these are not machine-readable.

Single point of contact (SPOC) – provide one online portal, e.g., Guichet.lu in Luxembourg, which citizens can use to access government services or to pull relevant information. The SPOC should interlink complimentary services and guide users to the most appropriate services based on their needs.

Once the strategic foundation for a citizen-centric approach to service delivery has been laid, the focus should shift to service design. Service design is an activity that is gaining traction in the move toward creating digitally-driven citizen experiences. It encapsulates the planning and organizing of the people, infrastructure, communication, and material components of a service in order to improve its quality and the interaction between the service provider and its customers, in our case citizens.

Service design embodies the idea that in order to successfully deliver the outward activities that make up a great user experience, what we call the Front Stage, a whole host of internal aspects and activities need to align internally, or Back Stage. A lot happens “below the surface,” that citizens are unaware of, but which can, within a single moment, significantly affect their experience.

It would be a smart move by government organizations to start thinking about and defining what they want citizens to experience while interacting with their services.

4 Walker Info Differentiator
5 Gartner Customer Experience
6 https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2012/11/06/assisted-digital/
The primary way of gaining a better understanding of the citizen experience and designing a service accordingly is through a citizen journey map. Mapping a citizen (or user) journey depicts the citizen’s end-to-end experience while interacting with a product, service, or system. This provides a unified picture of a citizen’s engagement from beginning to end,[10] illustrating, in visual form, the interactions between the citizen and the organization from a citizen perspective.[11]

Creating a citizen journey map starts by identifying the service that needs to be digitally (re)designed and the definition of citizen personas. Citizen personas, as with customer personas in the private sector, are fictitious characters created to represent the major citizen types within a targeted demographic that might use a product or service. They describe real people (their backgrounds, goals, frustrations, motivations, and preferences), outline their major needs and expectations and provide a clear picture of how they would like to interact with the organization. Citizen personas help facilitate better strategic decision-making and reinforce citizen centricity.

With the citizen personas created, the current citizen journey(s) should be evaluated and the target citizen journey(s) should be defined. When mapping out a user’s journey, a solid foundation on how the insights related to user behavior are articulated. Once the research has been done, the next step is to categorize events chronologically and group insights into three basic buckets: activity, emotion, and touchpoints, which help to identify the moments of truth that can make or break a citizen’s experience.
Figure 3: Key aspects that provide insight into the citizen experience

**Activity**
What your customers are doing, regardless of whether they are interacting directly with your brand or not. Activity forms the skeleton that understanding can be grafted onto. Activity also defines the start and end point for the narrative being crafted.

**Emotion**
As humans, our behavior is often driven by an emotional state, which can have a direct impact on brand perception. Understanding how customers are feeling and what they are thinking while engaged in an activity is the only way we can truly understand their motivation.

**Touch Points**
A touch point is a moment of interaction between customers and your brand. They serve as the connective tissue that ties one activity to another. Touch points can cross multiple channels, from website to app to in-person dialogue between customer and employee.

**Moments of Truth**
These are the interactions to which customers have a higher than normal emotional attachment. A moment of truth can significantly differentiate the experience in either a positive or negative manner.
Two main benefits are derived from citizen journey maps. They ensure effective decision-making by focusing efforts on the most important interactions, and they communicate citizen strategy by visualizing the target end-to-end citizen experience. The process of mapping out a user’s experience (journey) helps key stakeholders and production teams align their goals in an effort to better support positive citizen experiences.

In the end, successful service delivery comes from the ability to find the “sweet spot”—the area of common overlap between an offering’s desirability, its feasibility, and its commercial viability (Figure 5). To achieve this balance between the essentials of service delivery, an approach that is user-centric, multi-disciplinary, iterative, and agile is required.

13 Commercial viability can refer to a number of things: it could mean a service is profitable, if linked to revenue-generating activities, e.g., enabling citizens to apply for and renew licenses, permits, and registrations, or it could mean a service is cost beneficial from the point of view that by digitalizing the service, the costs of running it are reduced compared to before its digitalization. It could also refer to benefits that may be more difficult to quantify financially, e.g., the amount of time saved by citizens using the digital service as opposed to before, or the increased reach of a service as a result of its digitalization.
**Overcoming challenges along the digital journey**

Approaching service design and delivery from a digital perspective and with a citizen focus is not something that happens overnight, and some significant challenges exist for government organizations that want to provide digitally-driven service offerings.

**Culture**

Existing cultural norms within any organization can challenge the effort to instill the values and characteristics of digital technology. This resistance to change is perhaps stronger within government organizations compared to their private counterparts, since more than 85 percent of government organizations surveyed point to culture as a significant challenge faced in their transition to digital.

A culture founded on innovation and collaboration is required for an organization to become digitally mature. A digitally-oriented mindset, characterized by open functionality, co-creation, a user focus, and an agile way of working is required. The ideal is for these characteristics to become deeply rooted within government organizations’ respective work cultures. Steps can be taken to encourage this, such as changing the work environment to stimulate innovation and collaboration and by appointing people with the right mindset to key positions within the organization.

**Leadership**

Having the right people in key positions of influence, who are able to provide a digital vision and possess a strong awareness and appetite for digital, can make a big difference. This is an area where there is still much room for improvement, since according to our survey only about 46 percent of government organizations have a clear and coherent digital strategy—an important starting point for any digital transformation. This can severely limit an organization’s effectiveness, because a properly defined and executable digital strategy equips organizations to better respond to opportunities and threats. Additionally, evidence suggests that the presence or absence of a digitally-savvy leadership plays a big role in whether the organization upskills its workforce.

**Talent (workforce skills)**

One of the main obstacles to transformation is a lack of digital workforce skills. According to respondents in our public sector survey, only 34 percent of them said their organization had sufficient skills to execute its digital strategy. An integral part of any organization’s digital transformation is a “tech-savvy” workforce, with tech-savviness meaning more than just possessing the technical skills. Skills required include business acumen, willingness to work collaboratively, and an entrepreneurial streak. Based on our survey results, the skills relating to digital transformation that seem to be the most lacking are agility, entrepreneurial spirit, and technology.

**Procurement**

Effective digital transformation requires access to a robust and innovative technology marketplace; however, it would seem that most government organizations’ capabilities are too limited to facilitate this. More than three-quarters of the public sector leaders surveyed believe that in order to facilitate digital transformation, fundamental changes to their procurement and commercial strategies are required.

By nature, digital technology requires organizations to be user-focused and agile, but the prevailing approaches to procurement, focusing on the effective spending of public money, mean that long-term supplier contracts are favored and cost-saving processes are established, which could lead to entrenching static business models. In order to be more digitally-oriented, organizations should simplify their procurement processes, reduce the size of contracts, or break large contracts into smaller parts and maintain a flexible and agile approach.

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The journey's end – mission accomplished!

Government services are the links between the government and its citizens, and their proper functioning supports the proper functioning of society as a whole. The digitalization of government organizations and the focus on citizen experience when delivering services should not become ends in themselves. Citizen experience is more than just making sure the citizen has a great experience; by improving the experience, government organizations are better able to execute their missions.\(^\text{19}\)

Focusing on citizens and their experience does not diminish or detract from the organization’s mandate; it rather fulfills it. Those rare organizations that truly “get” digital and have an ingrained digital mindset operate with a different approach to thinking about stakeholders and launching products and services.\(^\text{20}\)

Those who understand and embrace digital realize that it is more than just implementing technology—it is about seeing old problems and old processes with new eyes. It starts by looking at citizens, and their journeys with governments, with new eyes.

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