

FROM ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT TO COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

From its very beginning, Dutch eGovernment policy has aspired to be citizen centric. Over the years several approaches have been followed to induce citizen centricity. By far the most effective way turned out to be formulating quality requirements for eGovernment. The so-called eCitizen Charter has gained national support and international recognition. The charter has been used as tool for measuring satisfaction and stimulating participation.

eGovernment has contributed to public sector reform by digitizing and simplifying procedures for a mainly passive customer. However, web 2.0 assumes an active citizen who wants to be engaged in increasing government performance. In order to cope with these expectations, we need a new paradigm (Collaborative governance) and corresponding Rules of Engagement (Citizenvision 2.0)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Cooperation

During the last 15 years, almost every country has adopted a kind of eGovernment strategy. Although these strategies differ according to nation and culture, there is a remarkable similarity. Not surprisingly most governments have been preoccupied with efficiency, since it will save costs for the supplier and reduce administrative burdens for citizens and businesses. Also there is much emphasis on digitization.

However, by now every one knows that eGovernment is not about technology, but about organization (workflow and process) and about people (skills and attitude). So the main task ahead is procedural change and business redesign. This means designing new ways in which to serve the customer, instead of automating existing products and processes. Moreover government agencies can't change separately. Both the challenge and the benefit lie in cooperation, within and between public organizations.

1.2. The Citizen

Although most eGovernment strategies claim to take the citizen into account, many strategies are rather supply oriented. This is not only so because of the focus is on infrastructure, but also since it is the administration that selects and decides on the projects. Moreover there is a tendency to focus on service delivery, whereas this is only one area of contacts between citizen and government. This neglects the fact that the citizen is not only a customer, but also or even more an inhabitant or a participant.

eGovernment should take this wider, multipurpose relationship into account. Moreover citizens should be given more opportunity to present their views on topics like quality, satisfaction and involvement

2. INTEROPERABILITY

2.1. Interoperability

Many public organizations strive to improve their services by trying to make them citizen centric. The good news is that they are discovering the customer. The bad news is that each organization is inventing this on its own, forgetting that each of us is a customer of many organizations.

An organization's drive to improve its own performance is not enough or can even be counterproductive. It may very well result in transforming the paper bureaucracy of the past into a virtual bureaucracy in the future. Chain service delivery is the road to citizen satisfaction. So the real option is to design modular solutions which can be combined and connected according to the needs of the customer. Common solutions based on standards are needed.

Interoperability is both necessary and helpful. Without it there is no eGovernment in the real sense of the word. This will lead to the realization that each government official is not the one and only person having to cope with all changes. His or her counterpart in different organizations and other countries is dealing with the same problem. Together they can solve it better and only together they will succeed. This is both a comforting and challenging thought.

Interoperability should be at the basis of any policy for modernizing government. In the wider context of the European Union and its Member States, it is a method of harmonization that combines the advantages of integration without the disadvantages of centralization. Seamless or joined up services are not feasible without agreements on interoperability.

2.2. Citizenlink

From its very beginning, Dutch eGovernment strategy has aspired to be citizen centred. Actually the first initiative, started in 1996, was the one-stop-shop service delivery program called OL2000 (Overheidsloket 2000 / Public Counter 2000). It promoted the concept of "Thinking and working from the citizen's perspective". At the end of the 1990's it was accompanied by several other programs dealing with other aspects of government reform. [Poelmans 2001] [Bongers/Holland/Poelmans 2002]

In 2001 it was decided to merge the then existing 20 separate programs into ICTU, a joint implementation organization for ICT in the public sector. In ICTU all tiers of Dutch government (state, provinces, municipalities and water boards) have pooled their efforts and resources for research & development in the field of eGovernment solutions. During 2002 the minister responsible for Government reform conceived the idea of an independent forum which would look critically into these developments from the

citizen's point of view. To that end the eCitizen Program was started in 2003 with the task of being a critical evaluator of eGovernment solutions. For 5 years it acted as the "Conscience of eGovernment". [Poelmans 2008]

Beginning 2008 it has been succeeded by Citizenlink, an initiative of the Dutch government to improve public performance by involving citizens. This program has run for three years as part of ICTU with the following tasks:

- Promote Service Quality (Adoption of eCitizen Charter & Quality Codes)
- Measure Customer Satisfaction (Conduct Annual National Survey about Life Events)
- Stimulate Citizen Involvement (Organize an annual eParticipation Award and develop eParticipation Instruments).

3. SERVICE QUALITY

3.1. eCitizen Charter

Almost every organization will tell you that it wants to improve its quality, but what exactly is good (or rather excellent) quality? Usually a selection of ambitions is made, resulting in a random number of goals. However, since cooperation is the name of the game, organizations have to agree on one quality standard in case they are going to provide integrated services.

The Dutch eCitizen Forum has developed a so called eCitizen Charter. This charter consists of 10 quality requirements for digital contacts, written from the citizens' perspective. Each requirement is formulated as a right of a citizen and a corresponding obligation of government. The charter is meant for both citizen and government. It allows citizens to call their government to account for the quality of digital services. Government can use the charter to examine external quality of its public performance. The requirements are based on research into existing quality systems and several surveys of citizen's expectations. [Poelmans/Thaens/Boogers 2004]
See Annexe for the full text.

3.2. Implementation

The charter is not mandatory, but was adopted as a common standard for public service delivery by a so called Administrative Convention between all tiers of government: national (the ministries, agencies), regional (provinces, waterboards) and local (municipalities). The majority of these administrations have implemented the charter in one way or the other. Moreover it was incorporated in the national eGovernment Interoperability Framework. A workbook explaining the idea has been widely used for training purposes of civil servants.

To be meaningful for customers, the ten requirements actually have to be made specific and formulated in a Quality Code. Each public organization in the Netherlands is supposed to have adopted in the year 2012 such a code containing concrete promises about service quality and an offer to provide for compensation in case of non compliance. [Poelmans 2006, 2007]

The Dutch charter was spontaneously copied by other countries in their policies for public sector reform. After receiving the European eDemocracy Award 2007, Citizenlink has been invited all over the world to present the charter. In the same year it was nominated for the EU eGovernment Awards at the ministerial conference in Lisbon. Estonia took it as an example to base its eState Charter on. France used it in the Administrative Modernization Program. The EU Institute for Public Administration (EIPA) uses it for eGovernment seminars in Greece and trainings in the Balkan. OESO recommended implementation it in their reports and in 2011 the UN Convention Against Corruption selected it as an instrument to enhance social accountability in developing countries. To date the eCitizen Charter has been translated in 22 languages.

4. SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT

4.1. Life Events

It doesn't suffice to proclaim quality requirements without monitoring and measuring adherence. Citizen satisfaction however does not only result from digital or quick delivery of individual products or services. According to several surveys, the main complaint about government is that people don't know what the solution is to their problem and if they happen to know, where to apply for it.

In order to assess citizen satisfaction about government performance as a whole, in the years 2008 - 2010 a national survey was conducted in which satisfaction was measured by asking citizens about real experiences with solving life events. Evaluation was based on the ten criteria of the eCitizen Charter. [Poelmans 2009]

The survey differed from traditional systems in that it does not look at the delivery of a separate service or the performance of a single organization. Instead it looked at covered life events and measured whether or not the citizens having experienced those situations were satisfied about the way they were treated. The reference was the extent to which the 10 requirements of the charter were fulfilled. Some interesting conclusions are: the longer the service chain (i.e. the greater the number of organizations involved), the lower the satisfaction rate. And when citizens do have a choice in the way their problem is solved, their satisfaction rate is higher. It must be noted that there are big differences in rating between the life events.

4.2. National survey

The Dutch Government's aim, as set out in its policy program, is for public services to score at least 7 (on a scale 1-10) during its term of office. The baseline was measured in the spring of 2008, when people were asked about the services provided in connection with life events.

The survey covered all services provided in connection with 55 life events, ranging from 'having a child', 'beginning a course', 'starting a business', 'long-term illness', 'going abroad', 'changing housing situation' and 'being fined' to 'death of a nearest and dearest'. These events had a high recognition factor for respondents, who were selected on the basis of actual experience of the various events. Over 10,000 persons were screened,

leaving a final net sample of 1,400 to take part in the survey . The sample was raised to 3000 in subsequent years in order to gather more specific data on each life event. The results are thus representative of Dutch residents who had contacts with government in connection with one of the life events during the past twelve months. They were asked to rate the service provided by the 'chain' associated with a life event, i.e. the service experienced from organizations with which people come in contact in that connection. This is not a specific product but a 'combination of different but related activities, products and services to meet the needs of particular customers'.

People who had contacts with more than one organization rated cooperation between the organizations concerned at 6.3. We find that these people often give a low rating for cooperation because they believe it is actually non-existent. They also say there is frequently a lack of communication between the organizations themselves or between the organization(s) and the private citizen, with the result that they have to keep filling in the same forms to provide information that the organizations already have. There is still a lot to be desired, then, from the point of view of the public.

Satisfaction varies from one life event to another. There would seem to be a strong correlation between the type of life event (how serious it is, how much it interferes with normal life, how long it lasts, and so on) and the evaluation of the government service provided. For each life event, and for all of them together, a Priority Matrix was drawn that indicates the relative importance of the 10 requirements and the rating these received. See Figure 1.

[Figure-1: Priority Matrix eCitizen Charter Satisfaction Rating. Source: Citizenlink/TNS-NIPO, 2010]

4.3. Customer Journey Mapping

The survey actually measured the satisfaction on three levels: about the individual organizations involved, the service chain for a given event and government as a whole. In the 2010 survey the aggregate marks were: 6.9, 6.7, and 6.4, meaning that there is a "loss" of quality perceived when collaboration is required.

The figures about the performance of a single organization have been compared with the outcome of already existing measurement frameworks. These turned out to be roughly the same. That the mark for the chain is lower than the one for the single organization is mainly due to contradictory information and lack of cooperation.

Since the rating of single organizations being part of the service chain differs quite a lot, "the good ones suffer from the bad ones". This very outcome created consensus for the next step: how to improve performance together. The Customer Journey Mapping approach does exactly what it says: mapping step by step with people from both supply and demand what happens to the "victim". In this way chain deficiencies were discovered which until then were unknown. In order to remedy these, a number of life events were selected that were deemed critical (low rating or high exposure) such as Bereavement, Unemployment and Moving. Lessons learned (also from successes) were subsequently applied to other life events. [Citizenlink 2010b]

5. ePARTICIPATION

5.1. Participative democracy

Because of its origin in administrative reform, eGovernment until now has very much concentrated on service delivery. But supposing the new virtual infrastructure is in place, how can it enhance citizen involvement? What can it add to democracy and inclusion?

eParticipation is conceived of as using the new media to involve citizens in improving service delivery and democratic decision making. There are those who expect a breakthrough in involvement, where as others stress the fact much remains to be seen. As for democracy, some basic issues have to be considered.

Democracy in modern nation states is representative democracy. Although there is much talk about the democratic deficit or gap, there are not many advocates for direct e-democracy. Before looking into promising ways of revitalizing representative democracy, a word of warning might be appropriate. For also when applied in this area there are some concerns.

First of all, the present state of the technology is far below what is necessary. Internet is inherently unreliable, chip cards can simply be hacked, and identity fraud is easily committed, to name just a few problems. Because of this vulnerability, all e-voting projects in The Netherlands have been abandoned. Actually as of 2010 all elections have been - again - a paper ballot!

Secondly, among the general public sufficient e-skills and awareness is lacking and accessibility is not guaranteed. Several surveys in The Netherlands show that a large number of people cannot find basic information on their rights and obligations or file a complaint. So access and inclusion is not only a problem for handicapped, deprived or disabled people, but also for ordinary citizens. [Poelmans/Van der Linde 2009]

Thirdly, data protection that is already a hot issue in service delivery, is more sensitive in political participation. Issues of data retention, data mining, preventing infringements and misuse have not been properly identified.

Finally, politics basically is about solving conflicts of interest or bridging different views. This means that informed decisions have to be made and politicians have to meet the consequences of their behavior. Ordinary citizens who may have wise opinions can be invited to share these, but cannot be held responsible for their choices in policy issues. Whatever the criticism of political parties and how necessary a role change might be, there is yet no alternative to this model.

5.2. Standardization

These basic issues have to be discussed and these problems have to be solved, before large scale operational e-democracy services can be introduced. In the meantime there is room for experiments and pilots.

The present state of affairs in eParticipation can be characterized as "Let many flowers blossom". Looking at the maturity cycle that is common in innovation, in due time a number of feasible projects will survive. The Citizenlink approach in The Netherlands

consisted of modeling and standardizing promising instruments in the field of information, services, politics and cohesion. Some examples are briefly described. These address the goals of increasing transparency, reducing complexity of decision-making and supporting involvement. [Citizenlink 2010a]

5.2.1. Issuefeeds

Government is generally able to collect information about popular opinions and preferences as they are published or distributed in the analogue world. In order to be able to do the same in the digital world, an instrument is designed that helps civil servants to find the relevant information about issues in the “second society”.

5.2.2. WeEvaluate

Copying the example of rating websites who gather information about commercial services (like restaurants) and thereby create (or destroy) reputation, a website has been started on which citizens can evaluate public services. They can design their own rating system or they can use a simplified model of the National Citizen Satisfaction Survey mentioned before.

5.2.3. TrackYourCouncil

One of the Dutch successes in using the internet during election time has been the Voting Assistant. This provides a comparison between the programs of political parties on the basis of 30 main issues. It helps voters to make their choice. At the recent national elections about 5 million voters used the assistant (almost half of those eligible to vote). Since it is more helpful to make your electoral choice on actual behavior than on future promises, another instrument is being developed: a Voting Tracker which assembles the voting record of parties and politicians and thus makes transparent what their positions have been on certain issues.

5.2.4. e-Petitions

According to Dutch law, citizens are entitled to start a ‘citizen initiative’. If enough people support the issue, it can be tabled with a representative body like a city council or the parliament, which has to discuss it. This is similar to the right of petition. The internet can be quite a help to gather the required number of signatures, so a website to this end has been started. A number of Dutch municipalities have created their own portal on this website.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Performance Improvement

Recent Dutch surveys about progress in e-Government show a wide gap between the availability and the actual use of e-Services. Even though the number of e-Services increases over time and broadband penetration grows, take up does not accordingly. There remains an unused potential of about 50%. International comparisons show that all countries face this problem. Actually in the top ranking countries in e-Government this very gap is even wider. Although there are indications that getting used to e-Services may induce more people to use them, one cannot assume that this will

eventually bridge the gap. Real take up will be dependent on the introduction so called user driven services.

Burgerlink (Citizenlink) is an example how this is done in the Netherlands. Its integrated 3-step approach for standardization of quality requirements, measurement of customer satisfaction and stimulation of citizen engagement helps public organizations to perform better. This is necessary to stay reliable and remain trustworthy.

In order to reap the benefits of citizen centric eGovernment, public organizations need to adopt an integrative and iterative approach. The “Citizenlink Performance Improvement Incentive” recommends public organizations to take the following steps (by the appropriate group):

- Adopt the eCitizen Charter as the Standard (City Council)
- Specify a Quality Code for all Departments that serve Customers (Executive Board)
- Measure Citizen Satisfaction regularly (Departments)
- Involve Customers (Citizens)
- Account annually for Improvements (Mayor).

6.2. Collaborative Governance

eGovernment as we know it tries to improve the working of the existing public infrastructure. As such it is a change process in administration, and a tough one at that. However, when only conceived of in this way, such an approach lacks the necessary vision to create a new relationship between society and government. Even when in the best of his interests, the citizen “is being put in the centre” by government, the question arises: Shouldn’t it be the other way round?

We need a new paradigm in which eGovernment is being reinvented according to the future needs of an e-society. This is not about convenience but about creating public value. To give just an example. A building permit is not a “product” which should be delivered as easily as possible to the applicant, but a guarantee that my neighbor doesn’t act against my interests by building a monstrous roof vault that takes away my sunshine. So the question is not how to implement a digital transaction, but to design a new model for implementing the “social contract” that government is to guard in the common interest.

Therefore eGovernment needs first of all to shift focus from service delivery to other public tasks, such as political decision making and societal inclusion. Secondly it should be reinvented from the point of view of what is erroneously termed the end-user but essentially is the begin-user: the eCitizen.

6.3. Citizenvision 2.0

The Dutch citizen (and for that matter any citizen anywhere) has to deal with a lot more public organizations than he or she is aware of. Someone may not go the City Hall or visit the municipalities’ website very often, but when it comes to living, healthcare, education, transport, safety, etc. one is left in the hands of the public services of the various governmental departments. This isn’t any different for companies and social institutes either.

Fortunately, all of these governmental organizations are busy with improving their service delivery. They do get results, however, a real breakthrough has yet to come. The main reason for this is that they do many things by themselves, from their own perspective. They also insufficiently get structural feedback from their customers. In order to change this, joint vision and action are necessary.

Past eGovernment strategies and their subsequent revisions have remained very much focused on internal Public Sector Reform. So we need a new “citizen vision” that helps to redefine the relationship between citizen (including business and institution) and government from a Society 2.0 point of view.

Developments like Web 2.0 do provide citizens new ways to communicate and contribute to their neighborhood, city, country and the world. This is a major challenge for the public sector as a whole. Representative bodies, public managers and civil society organizations have to create a joint platform for interaction.

The eCitizen Charter covers all aspects of the relationship between citizen and government (information, transaction and participation) and does not consider the citizen as a passive customer, but as an active member of society. So it is still applicable today in the field of web 2.0 and social media. Therefore it can play an important role in the transition from Electronic government (public services) to Collaborative Governance (public value).

The charter deals with 4 major topics, which have to be reconsidered from a new angle in the light of new developments:

- Website becomes Platform: The website is no longer the default channel, a variety of delivery channels should not only be available to the choice of the citizen, but also a platform for permanent interaction on the initiative of the citizen.
- Information becomes Open Data: Apart from providing information upon request, all kind of public Sector Information (PSI) will be voluntarily released, to be used for applications and other purposes.
- Transaction becomes Cloud Computing: Apart from delivering a number of pre-designed services, government facilitates third parties to solve problems perceived by civil society (Government App store?).
- Participation becomes Social Media: One-way participation on the initiative of and under the conditions set by government will be supplemented by permanent interaction (interference?) initiated by society.

A Citizen vision 2.0 acting as the successor to the eCitizen Charter should describe these “New Rules of Engagement” for the next phase.

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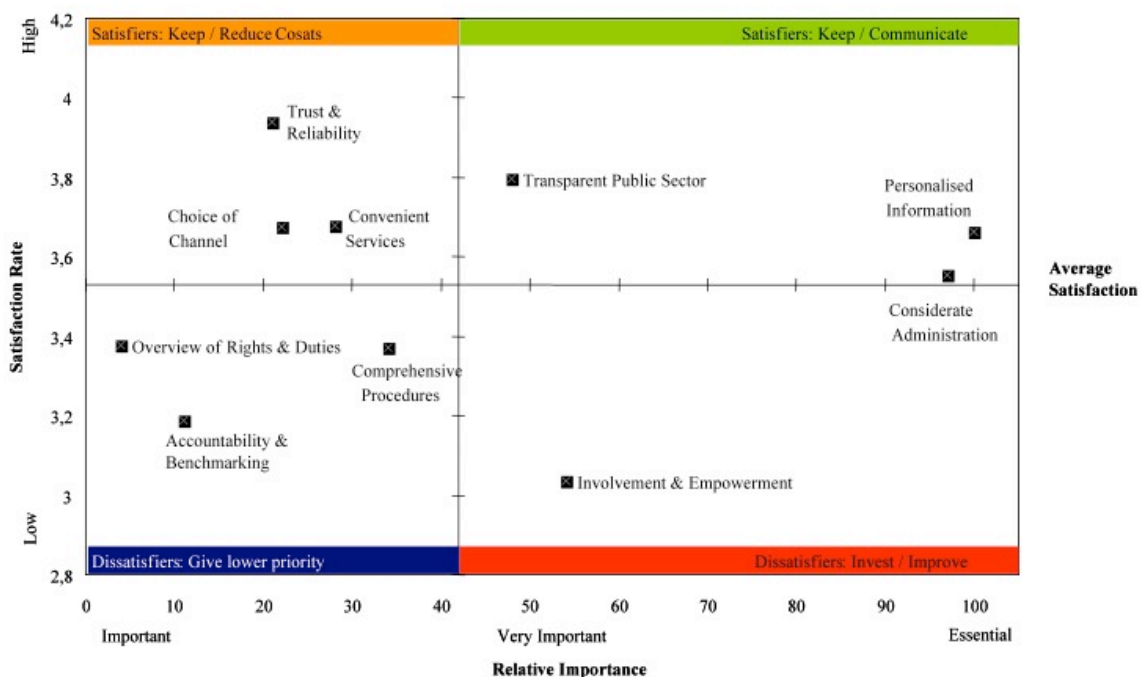
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More publications to be found on: www.mattpoelmans.nl

BIOGRAPHY

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PRIORITY MATRIX 2010



ANNEXE: eCitizen Charter

1. Choice of Channel - As a citizen I can choose for myself in which way to interact with government. Government ensures multi channel service delivery, i.e. the availability of all communication channels: counter, letter, phone, e-mail, internet.
2. Transparent Public Sector - As a citizen I know where to apply for official information and public services. Government guaranties one-stop-shop service delivery and acts as one seamless entity with no wrong doors.
3. Overview of Rights & Obligations - As a citizen I know which services I am entitled to under which conditions. Government ensures that my rights and obligations are at all times transparent.
4. Personalized Information - As a citizen I am entitled to information that is complete, up to date and consistent. Government supplies appropriate information tailored to my needs.
5. Convenient Services - As a citizen I can choose to provide personal data once and to be served in a proactive way. Government makes clear what records it keeps about me and does not use data without my consent.
6. Comprehensive Procedures - As a citizen I can easily get to know how government works and monitor progress. Government keeps me informed of procedures I am involved in by way of tracking and tracing.
7. Trust & Reliability - As a citizen I presume government to be electronically competent. Government guarantees secure identity management and reliable storage of electronic documents.
8. Considerate Administration - As a citizen I can file ideas for improvement and lodge complaints. Government compensates for mistakes and uses feedback information to improve its products and procedures.
9. Accountability & Benchmarking - As a citizen I am able to compare, check and measure government outcome. Government actively supplies benchmark information about its performance.
10. Involvement & Empowerment - As a citizen I am invited to participate in decision-making and to promote my interests. Government supports empowerment and ensures that the necessary information and instruments are available