

Public sector services – fit for the future?

Covid-19 has driven many changes but the same underlying challenges may still remain

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Public sector organisations are at the forefront of the Covid-19 pandemic: all citizens rely on their services to help stay safe, remain resilient, and ultimately emerge from the crisis.

In responding to the initial outbreak public sector organisations were called upon to act rapidly. This included formulating new policies, implementing new processes and ways of working, and devising approaches to address emerging threats. This had to be done with speed in a dynamic environment with constant adjustments to ensure follow through on a range of initiatives.

As a result, Covid-19 has served as a critical stress test for public sector organisations everywhere. Whilst there have unquestionably been significant success, challenges remain in fulfilling the underlying needs and wants of citizens in service delivery. Whether it relates to major challenges like the pandemic or simply accessing day to day services, citizens expect efficient access and engagement, easy to understand methods of interaction, and high levels of responsiveness.

To that end public sector organisations need to leverage what has been achieved in their responses to the pandemic thus far, making sure the underlying benefits become “business as usual”. Yet they also need to continue to drive improvements and focus on what citizens expect from the public sector going forward, taking into consideration that they fund the services with their taxes.

Here are three areas public sector organisations can look to focus on:



Citizen-Centric Services

Now more than ever it is essential to design service delivery around citizens based on what matters most to them, as opposed to what best suits the service provider.

The key is to engage with citizens through effective interactions to ensure a positive experience to enable access to public services in ways that are most relevant from the user perspective.

1. Gathering accurate insights on service satisfaction Gather structured feedback on whether citizens feel they are getting value, relative to the services provided and outcomes delivered.

- Seek inputs on how they compare the performance of different services to their return on investment from their taxes. This can often yield important insights beyond detailed questioning on specific interactions. Coupling this with internal perspectives from personnel directly involved in delivering services can create a more comprehensive picture.
- Understand what level of service citizens want. Beyond a certain level of service, it may not matter as much, but below it may be a substantial concern. Be detailed in the analysis of the data, looking at the volume of feedback provided and the level of intensity or strength of feeling with each input.

2. Analysing the end-to-end service provision from the point of view of the citizen Every public service can be defined by utilising a journey mapping approach. Work through the end to end process from the citizen's point of view, piecing together every step and every touch point, be that via a physical location visit, human engagement, or digital platform. Use customer satisfaction insights to evaluate the experience of citizens along their journey, deriving insights around what works well for them and what does not, and looking for core themes.

- Analyse what is really driving their satisfaction or dissatisfaction along the journey, and to what extent that indicates an area for further investigation or new solutions.
- There will undoubtedly be different categories of users; look for variances in behaviour and needs amongst different citizen personas for effective segmentation.

3. Focusing on what matters the most Work out which touchpoints along the journey (physical locations, citizen/employee interactions, or digital) to focus on to create the most impact for citizens and meet the vision of the organisation. It may mean focussing on a combination of direct interactions as well as ways of working internally that are not apparent or visible externally. Adapting internal processes may well be a key part of the solution.

- Evaluate if there are areas that span across different services and especially whereby different public sector agencies may be impacted.
- In some cases, interactions may be viable for streamlining, suitable for self-service via digital platforms, or even eliminated, allowing teams to focus on what drives most value for citizens.

Organisation Development

Developing employee talent not only benefits citizens through the enhanced service they can provide, but can support the organisation itself to achieve its own objectives and create a positive working environment.

1. Developing capabilities and adaptability Build the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances, quickly developing and re-aligning skills to meet changing citizen needs. Allow sufficient autonomy and authority for managers to quickly and decisively address these changing needs.

- Identify the skills and competencies needed to enable employees to transform political vision into value-added services.
- Invest in employees, arming them with new, necessary skills and capabilities through the right combination of coaching, mentoring, training and work experience.

2. Planning effective career progression Recruit, select, and promote candidates through transparent, open, and merit-based processes to ensure fair, effective and equal treatment.

- Utilise internal moves into different disciplines and roles to foster greater understanding between departments, especially for high performers. Look for fresh perspectives and skills that can be introduced through agency partnerships and training.
- Demonstrate a clear pathway from entry level to executive positions and for technical mastery careers as well as recognise the difference. Ensure that career progression is also connected to providing services and outcomes valued by the public in either case.

3. Fostering employee engagement Both public and private sectors organisations with engaged employees can be far more productive than those without. For public sector organisations, the challenge is to foster engagement amidst frequently constrained budgets, rapidly changing citizen needs, and increasing scrutiny.

- Provide employees with appropriately challenging work that is not only meaningful to them but is valued by society more broadly. Instill a sense of purpose in employees and focus them on the organisation's core mission while providing them the means to fulfil that mission.
- Ensure that managers clearly communicate the organisation's mission, vision, and direction to foster a sense of purpose which can boost satisfaction and engagement. Equally ensure that managers clearly communicate the experience and perspective from their personnel to establish an effective link back to policy makers.

Successful organisations in every sector cultivate a culture that embraces change while motivating employees to meet novel challenges by adopting new ways of working.

Driving Performance

In the volatile and rapidly changing Covid-19 environment, it is increasingly important that organisations strive to increase productivity and drive improved performance.

Combining the expertise of service delivery together with how to effect organisational change in an efficient way is the basis for driving performance.

1. Focusing on driving continuous improvement Effective organisations ensure that they focus on doing the right things and that they establish a collaborative and dynamic continuous improvement approach to how those things are done. They ensure that they design and deploy new ways of working to deliver on government mandates, while remaining focusing on citizens.

- Design and establish methodologies and capabilities to develop a case for change and subsequently design and implement improvements. Support improvement objectives with appropriate internal processes, governance, or analysis mechanisms.
- Deploy talent to high-demand areas, ensuring that the organisation can adapt to changing needs by upskilling employees and designing out redundancy and repetition where possible.

2. Managing change to deliver value Transformation to achieve greater productivity and efficiency is not only a one-off project but a continuous process of change. There is a constant evolution of demands, technologies, government priorities, and environments that require adaptation. Effective transformation requires rigorous programme management and people-oriented change activities to be delivered simultaneously for specific step change improvements.

- Identify realistic steps that will positively impact the organisation while not exceeding its capacity for change. Maintain a clear focus on the objectives and rationale for the transformation.
- Establish formal programs with clear timelines, metrics, and success criteria. Ensure the right capabilities are available to understand and manage the risk of delivery be that internal or external. Leverage each success to establish transformation as a continuous process.

3. Leveraging shared services Shared services across different functions and processing centers can provide public sector organisations with service delivery improvements, process efficiency, cost reductions, and scalability opportunities. While the benefits are clear, the proper set up, management, and delivery can be a challenge in ensuring successful development of shared service provision.

- Pay attention to people, processes, and technology when establishing shared services. These aspects must be aligned for effective delivery of the prescribed services at the desired performance levels.
- Shared service operations should have a clear mandate and service agreement, with a definitive focus on how they will improve services. This may be via improved response times, reducing duplication, or increasing interactivity. Agreements should include ongoing performance improvement targets linked to clear incentives for all parties involved in the process, not just those within the shared services organisation.



There is no doubt that the public sector has had to re-examine how it provides services in light of challenges from Covid-19. Successes and even some setbacks in the response have provided a wealth of learning while demonstrating how changes can be made quickly and effectively.

Focusing on systematic ways to develop more citizen-centric services can and should result in improved levels of satisfaction and ultimately trust with the public. Recognising that public sector workers are key to success, means prioritising their time on the right things and ensuring they have the skills and working environment to succeed. Establishing efficient and productive ways of working that support citizens and motivate teams, along with a continuous improvement capability and mindset, will sharpen the focus in achieving the most important public service objectives.

Leveraging the learnings from the Covid-19 response, linked with a continued focus on driving forwards an effective citizen-centric organisation can mean a bright future for all.

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