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FROM CITIZEN TO CUSTOMER

DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE USE OF HUMAN CENTRED DESIGN IN TRANSFORMING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CITIZEN

Abstract:

Around the world the modern government agency is required to rethink its relationship with citizens and to start treating them like customers. For some agencies this represents a radical shift in how it sees the citizen and how it sees itself as an instrument of government policy. It can be argued however that while moving from citizen to customer poses risk to traditional public sector operating models it is in fact more aligned to the way a contemporary Westminster democracy should work. Such a radical shift however can require a new way of thinking. Agencies are therefore turning to the principles of Human Centred Design (HCD) to better deliver to the needs of their customers and stakeholders. In doing so creative and innovative solutions are being developed to common problems from hospital design to safer public spaces. To support this a new *4E's©* model is proposed to help guide agencies through what is for some uncharted territory.

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THE CITIZEN IS SOVEREIGN

The modern, Westminster government is changing the way it relates to its citizenry. The fundamentals of governance remain the same – the separation of church and state, supremacy of the legislature, rule of law and the separation of powers doctrine are still (largely) intact.

The relationship between the government and the citizen, however, is changing and for the first time since the dawn of democracy governments are treating citizens as customers.

There are many drivers for this change:

- With education and literacy rates at record highs[1] increased education leading to a philosophical advancement of individualism in the west

- Greater government transparency through real time information being available via digital technology

- The deterioration of traditional patriotic boundaries due to greater cultural connectedness arising from globalisation and increased awareness of common challenges with democratic institutions

Whatever the reason the one thing that is certain is: there is greater pressure on governments to deliver to its commitments and provide real value to citizens. Just as in the private sector, governments are realising that if their 'customers' don't feel they're getting what they need from the current government - they will find one that will.

CITIZENS AS CUSTOMERS

- Governments are being held to account for customer service levels

- Government agencies are being rewarded/penalised based on quality of customer service

- Government agencies need to look at putting the **customer at the centre** of their service delivery model

OF, BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE

Abraham Lincoln's famous quote about the role of democratic government takes on a new dimension when considering the way services are designed and delivered. For traditional government agencies the statutory mandate is all there is but the contemporary agency understands that it is there to serve.

For even the most fundamental services which governments provide, however, customer service is now being considered when designing and operating related delivery systems. Even the most basic citizenry needs are now being subject to the forces of customer-centricity. A good example of this is the changing role of the water and wastewater regulator.

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[1] *Embracing Innovation in Government Global Trends, 2019*

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Sydney Water is Australia's largest water utility and provides water and wastewater services to over 1.8 million properties and 4.8 million people each day across an area of over 12,000 square kilometres.

It is undertaking a significant transformation program which puts its customer "at the heart" of what it does. In doing this it has recognised that modern style regulation "...ensures customers pay for the efficient costs of the business, and do not fund what the regulator deems to be imprudent".[2] They have proposed that the regulator "...could introduce stronger incentive-based schemes... to promote the long-term interests of customers."[3]

This proposal could lead to the water utility's funding being linked to customer outcomes which is a strong inventive to ensure customers are part of process for designing, building and operating critical systems that support their daily needs. This is a new way of thinking for this industry and yet is consistent with other water utilities around the world in both the public and private sector. Melbourne Water, Thames Water and American Water are all undertaking transformation programs in which customer centricity is playing a major part.[4]

This customer centric approach is not a passing fad and is becoming more and more apparent across a range of public sector agencies such as:

CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY IS NOT A PASSING FAD

- Citizens want better engagement for even the most basic services

- Even 'hygiene' services are now becoming subject to customer satisfaction measures

- Regulators are insisting customers have ' a seat at the 'design table'

— Australia's main electrical energy regulator, Australian Energy Market Commission, has stated clearly that one of its main objectives is to "...pursue energy market development that puts consumers first..."[5]

— The NSW Government's Department of Transport is unambiguous about its intent: "Placing the customer at the centre of everything we do is at the heart of all our transport service and infrastructure decisions."[6]

— In the health sector the government also states that "Australians want a health system which puts people first – giving more choice, control and transparency."[7]

— Both the Victorian and New South Wales government departments for customer service recruit based on customer service ethic and look for people " ...who are passionate about giving customers a great experience"[8] and who "...share our passion for working in partnership across government to find customer-focused solutions [which] is as important to us as technical ability."[9]

[2] Sydney Water p.71
[3] Ibid p.70
[4] American Water 2018, Melbourne Water 2019, Thames Water 2019
[5] AEMC Annual Report 2017-18, p.3
[6] Transport for NSW, p.4
[7] ADHA, p.3
[8] Service NSW 2019
[9] Service Victoria 2019

HUMAN CENTRED DESIGN

To embrace this new customer centricity government agencies are having to reconsider the way they design build and deliver core services to their customers. For some agencies this requires a complete rethink about what they do, how they do it and how they engage with their customers on a daily basis.

Governments around the world are recognising the need to engage with citizens as people and to adopt Human Centred Design (HCD) techniques which put the focus on"...the users, their needs and requirements...[that]...enhances effectiveness and efficiency, improves human well-being, user satisfaction..." [10]

A "...technology revolution is fundamentally changing how people live, interact and work, which inevitably affects their relationship with government..."

- OECD Report

HCD can be defined as "...a creative problem-solving process that puts the user (the target audience or a client) at the center of attention in order to arrive at novel solutions that deeply reflect the user's needs."[11]

The need to adopt HCD is apparent with different governments around the world and it is clearly not a passing fad as illustrated by the examples below:

- An OECD report noted that a global "unprecedented technological revolution ...is fundamentally changing how people live, interact and work, which inevitably affects their relationship with government and requires a transformation in the design and delivery of public policies and services."[12] This new way of thinking has led to "Governments...seeking to digitise human characteristics, senses and surroundings to deliver innovative services"[13]

- The Canadian government sees digital transformation as a way of meeting their citizens' needs for "...convenient, accurate, quick, one-stop service..." where the government will "...use information productively, in ways that will add value without compromising privacy, to support improved service, and to deliver better policy outcomes for their benefit."[14]

- While for some time the US Government has seen the need to adopt an "...information-centric approach [that] will add reach and value to government services by helping to surface the best information and making it widely available through a variety of useful formats."[15].

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[10] ISO 2019
[11] Milkowska 2019
[12] *OPSI 2019*, p.4
[13] Ibid p.7
[14] Canadian Government 2019
[15] US Government, 2019

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- The UK Government has recognised "the need to collaborate across traditional organisational boundaries…[and to]…build services that run seamlessly across government."[16]

- The Queensland government considers HCD so important that it offers dedicated training courses to its agencies to help promote this practice across the state.[17]

The principles of HCD are well established and there is a plethora of research and methodologies available to consider. For government services however where the profit motive is not 'king' the way HCD adds real value to the citizen as customer can take on a different perspective. In some cases the supply side of customer service may require an inherent need to allow services to be constrained or filtered to meet government funding constraints or statutory requirements. In some circumstances the definition of who the customer is and what 'good service' looks like might be more difficult to ascertain.

For example, some might argue that in some aspects of discretionary health care a more considered investigation into the patient's needs may be more important than the speed in delivering the service – it is estimated that up to "…30 per cent of health funds are spent on health care in the last year of life…"[18]. If options of reducing treatment costs by considering alternate options such as palliative are considered is this consistent with HCD principles?

Is a parent of a school student a customer and if so is providing more immediate and direct access to teachers 'good customer service' or even appropriate?

Are victims of crime customers? What about inmates of correctional centres?

CASHPOINT ART SAFETY ZONES

- HCD does not compromise functionality for aesthetics

- Hammersmith's innovative cashpoint machines address safety issues while providing citizens with a more spacious, user-friendly experience

- Design Out Crime, 2011

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[16] UK Government 2019
[17] Queensland Government 2019
[18] Rollins 2015

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THE LAW IS THE LAW

Every government service comes into existence via a legislative instrument: a statute, regulation or ministerial decree. Complying with the black and white letter of the law is the primary obligation of government agencies. *How* they comply however is where HCD can make a contribution to the quality of service delivery.

Innovative design ideas can range from specific items that benefit individuals to design that benefit an entire community, such as the following:[19]

−   anti-theft number plates developed for the UK's Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

−   anti-terrorist rubbish bins developed by the University of Technology, Sydney for New South Wales' train stations

−   a "no climbin" wheelie bin, developed by Griffith University, that reduces burglaries by preventing people from using them as an ad hoc ladder

−   a personal bag security device, developed by Design Against Crime Research Centre, to reduce batch-snatching in cafes and other venues

There is no one single set of design principles on which everyone can agree however for discussion purposes the following principles, adapted from a number of design experts' views[20], discussed below with commentary on how these might apply to government services:

Principle	Application to Government & Practical Examples
1. Get past your own idea and don't be restricted by your own knowledge	− Existing service patterns may be grounded in evidence based research and sound policy. So questioning existing ways of doing things which are well established and functioning 'as designed' requires a philosophical switch from 'what's good for the agency' to 'what's good for the customer'. − For example, the traditional approach to hospital security has been to maximise physical barriers and the use of surveillance technology. At Birmingham's Heartland hospital, however, a review was undertake of the risk of crime occurring in A&E[21] floorplans were overlaid with crime statistics to understand the link between the physical environment and the types of crimes being committed. This led to a principle of trying to improve "...wayfinding and signage, and promoting levels of natural surveillance rather than CCTV..." This led to a"...dramatic reduction in the levels of aggressive incidents..." and "...an 80% reduction in trouble and staff are very much happier and feel very much more secure,"[22]
2. Spend time with real people in real environments & design customer	− Getting to know customers in the context of the service provision requires direct contact with them as they access their service. − The delivery of community services to the people of the UK borough of Hackney is of vital importance as 39% of residential tenants live below the poverty line. An initiative was developed to provide a network of government agencies from family support and

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[19] Design Council 2011
[20] Tabrizi et al 2019, Townsend D 2019
[21] Design Council 2011
[22] Design Council 2019

Principle	Application to Government & Practical Examples
experience from the outside in	child care to disability and health. For this initiative to be successful it was recognised that the network design team were required to be "...talking directly with people about how to develop the network, rather than simply telling them what we thought was the best way to do it."[23]
3. Identify all users and follow their leads and needs	– Applying HCD techniques requires designers to look holistically at who receives, delivers and is affected by the service being provided. Designing services for one stakeholder can leave others adversely affected so a comprehensive stakeholder analysis is required to ensure design changes improve the overall experience for the majority of people affected. – The Canadian government recognised[24] that "...it needed to accelerate the design and delivery of 130 of the most commonly used services on-line..." and that to do this it needed to "fundamentally re-think how they used the e-channel to provide information and services to clients..."[25] – To do this a "..great emphasis was placed on polling and focus group research to determine how individuals and businesses would like to see government information structured and grouped based on their needs and preferences."[26]

4. Think about the whole journey of the product	– Government services can sometimes be seen as transactional based on the requirements to deliver a specific service to a 'generic citizen'. Looking at the whole customer journey can illicit ideas that may not be readily apparent when looking at transactions in isolation.
	– For example when considering the patient experience in UK accident and emergency wards[27] the journey was broken up into several steps such as pre-arrival, waiting and triage. In doing this several ideas were identified that may not have been considered if only the clinical aspects of the experience had been considered. For example:
	  = Building pedestrian crossings leading into the hospital
	  = Designing 'natural wayfinding' through the A&E area to avoid patients inadvertently accessing sensitive areas
	  = Availability of free drinking water to avoid dehydration particularly given the stress patients may already be under
	  = Nurses' station design that reduces walking and facilitates patient/visitor/staff interactions while maintaining staff privacy

5. Prototype and test your idea	– Testing ideas is sometimes seen as a process that happens after the design is complete and ready for deployment into a production environment. An HCD approach however requires customer interaction during the design process and will fail if left to the end. – The best way to ensure this is to test progressively with customers and other stakeholders throughout the process. This requires a shift in mindset that means the up-front planning needs to adopt a more nimble and incremental approach. – In the UK this has led a situation where the "...transformation community is advocating downplaying detailed initial planning and taking higher levels of risk, with active management of those risks supported by cycles of testing and learning."[28]

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[23] Woodroffe 2019

[24] Canadian Government 2019

[25] Ibid
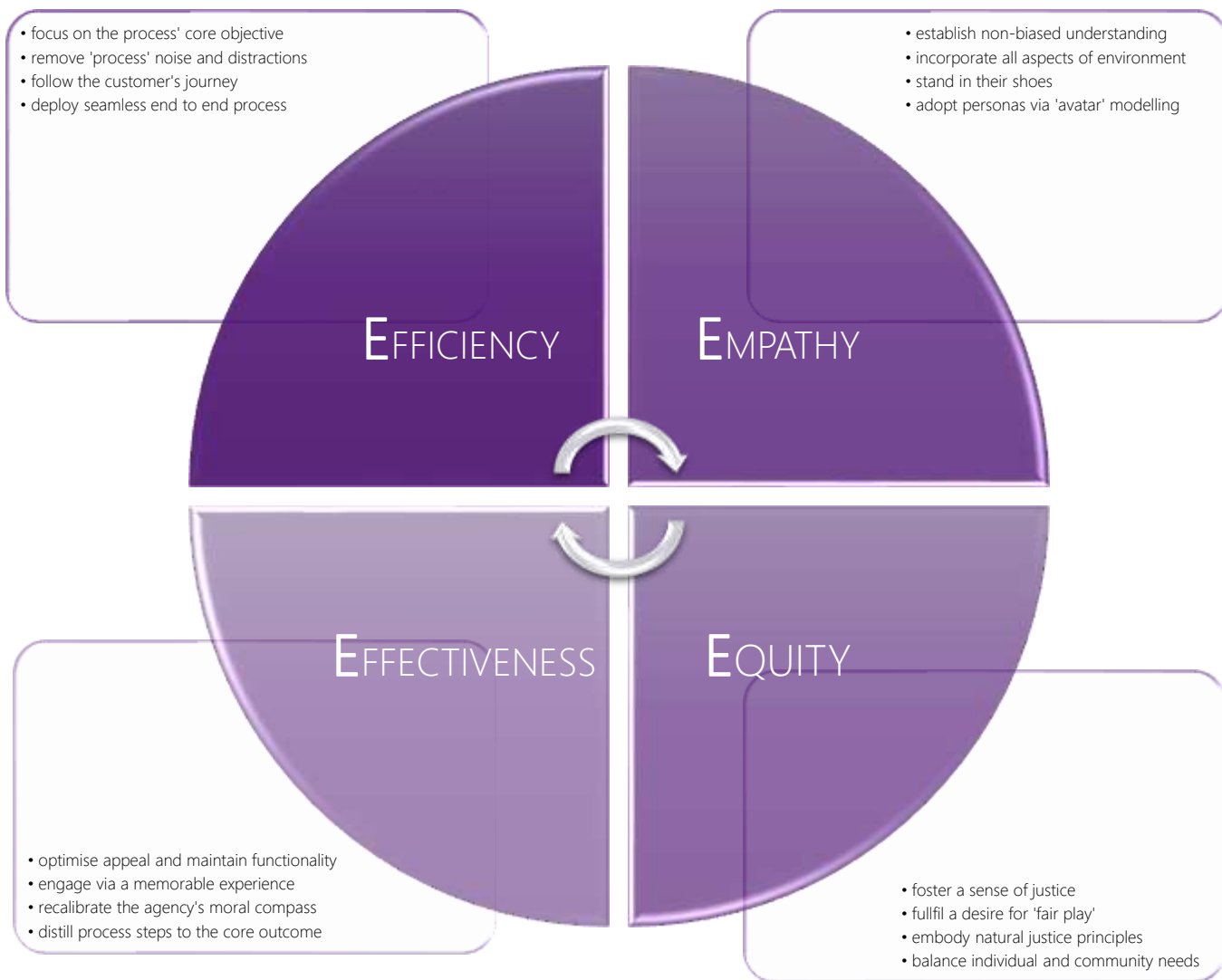
[26] Ibid

[27] Design Council 2014

[28] Howes & Bishop 2018

AN ENABLING MODEL

A review of leading research in HCD reveals a range of views about the principles to be followed so rather than create yet another set of principles the 4E's model has been developed. This model seeks to draw on the principles and case studies of HCD and present the four key characteristics of effective HCD experiences.

HCD is both a philosophy and a tool for engaging people in a more effective way so that the quality of outcome being sought is optimised.

The *4E's©* HCD model presents four enablers that can underpin best practice in HCD and are intended as perspectives that designers should consider when engaging with a design problem and with the people who will be using the design solution.

- focus on the process' core objective
- remove 'process' noise and distractions
- follow the customer's journey
- deploy seamless end to end process

- establish non-biased understanding
- incorporate all aspects of environment
- stand in their shoes
- adopt personas via 'avatar' modelling

EFFICIENCY   EMPATHY

EFFECTIVENESS   EQUITY

- optimise appeal and maintain functionality
- engage via a memorable experience
- recalibrate the agency's moral compass
- distill process steps to the core outcome

- foster a sense of justice
- fulfil a desire for 'fair play'
- embody natural justice principles
- balance individual and community needs

The 4E's© HCD Enabling Model

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CONCLUSION

Real time feedback presented on social media platforms means citizens' voices are being heard. The ability for a government agency to "respond to your letter in 21 days" is being replaced with a desire to proactively listen, predict and design for future human interaction.

The requirement to deliver to the customer as a real human being, as opposed to an anonymous citizen, is no longer a desirable ambition – it is a fundamental requirement of every government agency that provides front line services.

The long history of democracy has evolved (some would say returned) to the point where the citizen is truly in charge.

> "…Governments will make use of a broad gamut of solutions…in order to understand, empathise and engage with their people…"
>
> - OECD Report, p.123

The government agencies aware of this will be those that are better be able to deliver to their statutory mandates and will therefore have a more secure future. But as the OECD points out some governments seems to be "…locked in a game of catch-up, with citizen trust and business confidence in the balance….[while] Governments at the edge of innovation are pioneers in this context, using fantastic, novel solutions to harness today's opportunities for the collective good."[29]

Government agencies around the world are recognising that HCD techniques are a 'must have' when designing new or redesigning existing public services. The more traditional government departments which ignore these techniques may find themselves being integrated within or consumed by the more progressive agencies that appreciate this transformation. The agencies which understand this however may well be seen as the pioneers who help lead their public sector colleagues into a new world where the citizen is truly in charge.

For some agencies however this may require a complete shift in mindset in which a simpler yet patriarchal model of public service is replaced by a more democratic ideal. An ideal in which as Gandhi said "The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of heart.".

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[29] OPSI 2019, p.4

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FROM CITIZEN TO CUSTOMER

About the Author

Pat Guthrie is a management consultant who has spent over 20 years managing transformation programs in the public and private sectors across various industries from financial services, transport and airlines, through to sporting and not for profit organisations. Having seen industry trends come and go Pat feels Human Centred Design is an enduring philosophy that can best help the customer when it is embedded at the heart of the organisation's way of working. Pat believes that this approach is hardly revolutionary however but rather a natural return to the fundamentals of putting people first in the design function. Having worked with local, state and federal government agencies Pat sees the emergence of HCD in the public sector as a welcome return to a more respectful relationship between the executive government and its ultimate customer: the citizen. The citizen's voice is no longer just heard every few years at the polling station but every hour of every day 'loud and clear' on social media platforms and other emerging communication channels.

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