



DRIVING INNOVATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

How to encourage bright ideas that make the most of IT

Introduction

Consumers have access to advanced communications technologies, including smartphones and super-fast broadband, with a wide array of on-demand applications and services. Itemised transactions that measure consumption on a per-unit basis have become the norm for any such service. And this demand for greater speed and more transparency in service delivery is now expected from the public sector as well as consumer services.

Citizens are ready for a change from a hierarchical model of receiving public-sector services in person to innovative delivery of services through the use of technology, diverse channels and more agile delivery practices. That includes mobile apps, websites, self-service portals and kiosks, automated IVR-based payment systems, and integrated payment services (e.g. tax and utility payments at post-office counters).

Many public-sector organisations across the world are now working towards this transition from paper-based, bureaucratic, top-down transactions to a single-window, Internet-based, and digitally integrated service model – providing new ways in which citizens can interact with the state.

The purpose of this white paper is to explore ways in which governments can provide innovative services to citizens and to analyse some success stories from countries around the world to see how their approaches could apply to others.

Approach to public-sector innovation

Public-sector organisations must tread carefully when introducing and implementing ideas that fundamentally change how citizens interact with them due to the sheer costs to the taxpayer of implementing these changes and the possible disruption to vital services.

It is no surprise then, that the public sector can be resistant to innovation.

We believe that this temptation must be resisted. Any opportunity of introducing innovation in the public sector that helps reduce the burden on the taxpayer and also provides better and more effective services to citizens should be explored. One of the most effective ways of achieving this is by using technology in service delivery channels and leveraging data that is available across government ministries and departments.

Developing a model for sustained innovation

The following components provide an iterative model for how the public sector can foster continuous innovation while including technology as a key driver.

- **Systemic approach:** when introducing or upgrading a service, a conscious decision must be made to introduce planned and systemic innovation across all public-sector processes and initiatives. This could include cross-referencing a national framework to define how a service must be delivered, using this framework as the standard, and continuously revisiting current services to identify which of these can be transitioned to the new framework.

What can be done in practice?

Have a systemic approach – adopt a national policy towards channel transformation to avoid conflicting political interests

Enable co-creation – involve stakeholders in design, including engaging people on the platforms they use most often

Encourage entrepreneurship – provide public-sector funding and support innovation through small businesses

- **Orchestration by co-creation:** this relies on involving stakeholders across various groups in the co-creation of innovative public-sector services. The process of co-creation helps governments to bring together different parties such as ministries, departments, citizen work-groups and the general public in order to jointly develop and produce a mutually valued service and deliver the optimum service to citizens.
- **Building capacity:** by increasing the capacity of innovators, ideas can be generated on a larger scale, benefiting a greater number of government services, thereby allowing inclusive growth of innovation capacity and preventing prescriptive innovation. This can be achieved by growing entrepreneurship and crowd-sourcing ideas which have the potential to benefit services to the public.

Examples of these ideas are explored in the following section.

Examples of fostering innovation

Systemic increase in online service delivery channels

Countries that already have some form of online portal for e-government should make efforts to convert such channels to the default operating model and to use other modes of contact (walk-in centres, mail etc.) as back-up channels.

Creating new services and consolidating old services comes with high set-up costs, and it is likely that take-up for some services might be slower than anticipated. Furthermore, new services may incur costs and generate dissatisfaction associated with the removal of existing service delivery methods (e.g. walk-in centres) at other government bodies.

A national operating policy might be required to manage this transformation at a political level to ensure there is support from other ministries and departments to enable this transformation.

The Government Digital Service (GDS) in the United Kingdom moved all government websites and related services onto a single government portal, www.gov.uk. In doing so, the government expects to save valuable government funds in the development, management and operation of its public-facing services and to transform government workers into value-generating resources.

Digital co-creation and presence

Government agencies across the world are increasingly using digital tools and techniques to engage with citizens, to share and acquire information, and to deliver services and information to citizens faster and more efficiently than ever before. Efforts to introduce similar digital channels can be explored to provide a wider range of services.

Transferring non-emergency helplines and information collection and dissemination activities (e.g. weather forecasts and alerts, roadworks and detour notices, crime and policing alerts, events and festival information etc.) to social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other similar tools helps to push information to citizens where they spend most of their time without the need for them actively to make efforts to pull information from disparate sources. Not only is this essential for increasing citizen satisfaction, it is also an important tool for ensuring transparency and fostering a culture of inclusion.

A social media strategy developed by government will ensure a consistent and controlled service is presented to citizens across all social media channels. Such a strategy would help to develop the public communications strategy, ensuring all communication is vetted, professional language is employed, images and media licences are acquired and all communications are monitored.

The DigitalGov initiative run by the US government provides guidelines, tools, references and information to various public-sector bodies on laws and regulations when providing information and services to the

public across various social media channels.

Engaging in a conversation with the public provides an avenue for governments to strengthen relations and helps them to be more personal, approachable and inclusive.

Building capacity through entrepreneurship

Promoting innovation through entrepreneurship would not only bring new ideas into the fray, it could also lead to wider capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship across the country. Governments should use all channels available, such as partnerships with universities and public-sector entrepreneurship funding to promote innovation ideas.

Not all innovation ideas can lead to direct benefits for government. Considering a joint goal of fostering entrepreneurship (in order to stimulate economic development) and promoting small and medium-sized businesses could have indirect benefits where some of these businesses could introduce and support innovation in the public sector as well.

Public-sector funding has sometimes driven substantial innovation even in the private sector. For example, the US National Science Foundation helped to fund the Google search algorithm, and early funding for Apple and Intel came from the US government's Small Business Investment Company. Moreover, the Internet, wireless networks, GPS, touchscreen displays, and voice-activated personal assistants are some examples of public-sector funded innovations.

Systems and likely gains

In order to enhance or progress the implementation of some of the components mentioned above, we believe that the following systems could help initiate the process.

Open 'centralisation' of data

Open government data is key to integrating multiple government processes and systems from an operational perspective. Integration of citizen datasets, such as personal information,

healthcare records and energy usage statistics, to a centralised data store would allow easier and quicker processing and dissemination of data across all government services.

Benefits from centralisation of data provision and processing include a substantial reduction in costs, reduced service delivery time and efficient service development (such as development of applications, user interfaces, integration of databases and related activities).

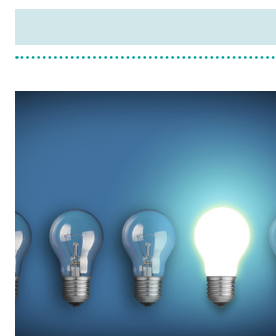
Centralisation of data presents new challenges in terms of securing and monitoring this data, including maintaining its integrity by constantly updating and cleansing the information, providing continuous oversight, and managing and securing access to the data. These risks can be mitigated by ensuring a central government body has authority for total management and maintenance of the confidentiality, integrity and availability of the data. Governments should also consider the development of a set of rules, specifications and governing principles to access and publish the contents of the datasets.

Multi-agency support centres

To support newer delivery channels, cross-agency support centres (in the form of multi-channel contact centres using voice, email, SMS, social media etc.) have been used to support the transition of core service delivery methods. For example, the Abu Dhabi Government Contact Centre is a 24-hour single point of contact for all government bodies providing feedback, first-line support, instructions on how to access required services, and high-level information such as application status and similar information to citizens.

Promoting a single window for information enhances citizen satisfaction, promotes faster complaint resolution, and allows better management of citizens' issues and concerns.

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Conclusion

Many governments have taken steps to bring innovative services to the public by enhancing their online presence and creating a one-stop resource for accessing government services and information. The success of these initiatives provides the impetus for continuing to drive innovation across services provided by other ministries and departments. This can be achieved by adopting the three key steps proposed here: a systemic approach, orchestration by co-creation, and building capacity. This means increasing the ability to generate innovative ideas by promoting entrepreneurship across a wider range of sectors, standardising existing and new services by using single-window, one-stop delivery channels, and encouraging use of these services by reaching out to the public and connecting with them on the channels they actively use.

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Mason Advisory offers something a bit different from the traditional consultancy model: our clients know they'll get experienced teams where every member can quickly add value to an assignment.

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