

A Citizen-centric Public Sector

Why citizen centrality matters and how to obtain it

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Abstract—The paper discusses the concept of a citizen-centric public sector. Citizen centrality is often promoted in policy papers and political speeches, but is often overlooked in practice. Reasons are discussed, and practical examples are shown, to show failures and success stories. Information and communication technology may be a significant measure to enhance citizen centrality. The latest digital agenda of the Norwegian government emphasizes the use of information and communication technology to make a simpler everyday life and increase productivity. The agenda is ambitious, and the paper discusses some possible pitfalls and how to overcome them.

Keywords - citizen centrality; eGovernment; digital agenda; organizational identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses citizen centrality in the public sector. A citizen-centric public sector implies putting the citizens in the center and building services around the citizen. Now, some readers would think “This is obvious, why write a paper about it”? But the fact is that the public sector is often implementing services that are not favorable to the citizens. Some reasons are:

- The public sector thinks about its internal efficiency, not taking into account the additional effort required by the users to achieve this efficiency.
- The public sector is complex and it is not able to simplify the complexity for its users. The citizens see a lot of disconnected government entities and have to navigate by themselves.

Berntzen [1] showed the increasing government awareness of citizen centrality rooted in “New Public Management”. The government should see citizens as customers and provide the same service level as experienced when dealing with private companies.

In November 2005, the UK Presidency of EU held a Ministerial Conference in Manchester. The adopted declaration from the conference [2] moved citizen centrality high on the political agenda. Based on the declaration, Blakemore et al. [3] were asked by the European Commission eGovernment Unit to do a two-year study on citizen-centric eGovernment. The project, called cc:eGov, conducted a number of workshops and produced a set of “think papers” to discuss different aspects of citizen-centric eGovernment. The final outcome of the project was a handbook [4]. The study did not emphasize user involvement in the development of

services, but was more concerned with transformation of government to be more attentive to the needs and wishes of the citizens.

The European Commission also initiated other projects to explore citizen-centric eGovernment, e.g., OneStopGov [5]. The project was started in January 2006, and was a three year EU-funded research and development project that aimed at specifying, developing and evaluating a life-event oriented, all-inclusive, integrated, interoperable platform for online one-stop government.

The next Ministerial Conference on e-Government held in Lisbon, September 2007 declared that member states should “deliver eGovernment services that are easier to use and of benefit to all citizens by increasing user centrality, improving accessibility, convenience and user experience” [6].

User involvement in the whole lifecycle of eGovernment services received focus in 2010, with the establishment of the NET-EUCEN thematic network [7]. One of the activities of this network was to develop a framework for measuring user-centrality at all stages of the service lifecycle.

In spite of this increasing awareness, we experience that citizen centrality is more often talked about than implemented.

Citizen centrality is not primarily about technology, but technology can help building better services. Later we will show some examples of how government on different levels failed to consider the needs and wishes of citizens, but we will also show some success stories. Our examples are from Norway, and are partly based on our own experiences and discussions about citizen centrality. Our ambition was to find examples that are easy to explain and understand. We will then discuss the role of ICT in citizen centrality, and provide some guidance on how to use ICT in a meaningful way. We argue that citizen centrality is about mindset; public decision makers on all levels need to understand the importance of including citizens when developing services and products.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted following a qualitative research design and an interpretive epistemology. The objective of qualitative research is “understanding...by investigating the perspectives and behaviour of the people in these situations and the context within which they act” [8]. This fits well with our objective of discussing citizen centrality, as citizen centrality requires a thorough understanding of citizen needs and contexts.

The case study research design is suited for research on phenomena where the experiences and interpretations of the actors and the wider context are important factors [9]. Thus, we use example cases from Norwegian public sector as the empirical basis of our paper. We have chosen the cases as representative examples of the citizen-related challenges facing public sector modernization.

Data is analyzed using a model developed by Ødegård [10] – “a learning model” and shows how public organizations might respond to increasingly need for developing citizen-centric services. The model shows that decisions are often made and carried out because they provide legitimacy for the decision maker rather than effective solutions benefitting the citizens. Thus, effectiveness and efficiency are secondary factors when decisions are made. On the other hand, decision makers also tend to make decisions based solely on organizational culture hindering the organization members in realizing the «changing citizens need» – the focus of the culture is primarily on internal needs and professional technical service standards without paying particularly attention to changing external (citizens) needs without paying attention to changing stakeholder demands and expectations, like changing citizen needs. Thus, organizations seem captured by the culture and past traditions without paying sufficient attention to future needs and expectations from the citizens. In other words, the organizations might make decisions regarding citizen centricity within the cultural frame “*the way we have always done things around here*”. We apply this model in order to test if this could be the reason why Norwegian public sector still struggles to become citizen-centric, even though several plans exist that state this as a primary objective.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY ON THE MOVE IN PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS

The concept of organizational identity has received increased attention in the past decades. Albert and Whetten’s [11] classical definition of organizational identity focuses on features such as central, distinctive and enduring as key elements of organizational identity. However, a more dynamic perspective on organizational identity is increasingly common. Organizational identity consists of an ongoing dynamics between culture and image [12] and thus emphasizing agency and the possibility for organizations to reconstruct their identity. However, this demands a long-term perspective and involvement of both internal and external stakeholders. Schultz and Hernes [13] offer a framework for how the past traditions connect to future aspirations and thus influencing identity construction – a temporal perspective on organizational identity. Accordingly, the time – the past, present and the future – constitutes organizational identity through tangled processes evolving in time.

Organizational identity is constructed through four processes of mirroring (in the mirror of others), reflecting (culture, embedded in history and traditions, meanings and understandings), expressing (the way culture is being expressed) and impressing (leave impression on others) [12]. Accordingly, organizational identity consists of the two concepts of image and culture. Culture represents the past, the

roots and thus the core identity. Osborne [14] describes culture as the DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) of an organization. Radical organization transformation requires cultural change through behaviors, values and basic assumptions [15]. We consider culture change as crucial in order to develop an organization culture in accordance with a citizen-centric public sector culture in which the citizens are in the center of all activities.

Due to demands for transparency, the introduction of New Public Management and increasing stakeholder expectations there seems to be a need for public organizations to work purposely on the matter of reconstructing their identity. Organizations express themselves through identity claims, telling “who they are”, “where they come from” and “who they are going to be” in the future. Thus, the past and the future are closely interconnected. However, as the cases reveal, there seem to be a lack of connection between the culture part of public organizational identity and the image part. It seems that public organizations give great attention to different activities and projects which are nearly exclusively connected to the past and existing culture. This is done without having taken into account how a citizen-centric organization ought to be organized in order to fulfil the increasing expectations from the citizens. On the other hand, the cases expose the opposite tendency of uncritical focus on legitimacy and image without necessarily connect the projects through involvement and engagement with the existing culture.

Two dysfunctions might occur when culture and images become disassociated [12]. When organizational identity is rooted nearly exclusively within the culture, a type of organizational narcissism might evolve, losing interest and support from external stakeholders. Accordingly, as shown in the cases, efforts of citizen centricity might fail due to overemphasizing of the past traditions and culture of the organization without really paying attention to the need and expectations of the citizens. On the other hand, when identity primarily is occupied with external stakeholder images and legitimacy, ignoring cultural heritage and the past, the risk of losing the sense of “who we are” and “where we come from” emerge. According to Hatch and Shultz [12], this is called hyper-adaption, or “*loss of culture*”. As shown in the cases, the efforts of citizen centricity might also fail due to overemphasizing on external stakeholder images and legitimacy. Thus, the organizations are occupied with gaining legitimacy, making an impression of being a citizen-centric public organization without necessarily emphasizing effectiveness, the needs and the expectations of the citizens.

Organizational culture is a conservative force within organizations, developed over time ensuring stability [15]. Thus, strong cultures seem hard to change. In an increasingly more turbulent and complex world there seems to be a need for organizations to develop flexibility and learning capabilities. Hence, a learning culture characterized by a stabilized flexibility seems crucial. A learning culture featured by processes of learning, adaption and flexibility might be a key for public organizations to meet increased complexity, transparency and expectations from both internal and external stakeholders. In order for public organizations to succeed in being a citizen-centric organization, we claim that developing

a learning culture seems necessary. Otherwise a tendency of failures and lack of citizen centricity, which is showed in this paper probably, still will appear. We suggest that a strong learning culture will foster innovation and adaptation to an increasingly more complex and dynamic world of stakeholders for public organizations.

IV. EXAMPLES OF BEING NON-CITIZEN-CENTRIC

The following examples illustrate some of the typical problems of forgetting about the needs and wants of citizens. Each case illustrates a specific problem, and it has been the intention not to find pure information technology related examples, just because citizen centricity is relevant to all products and services delivered by the government.

A. The train sets the customers did not want.

In 2012, NSB, the Norwegian railroad operator (government owned) put 23 new train sets into service. The next day, customers started complaining about the seats being too narrow and uncomfortable. Due to massive complaints, NSB decided to change the seats for a cost of 51 million Norwegian crowns (almost 5 million Euro). The upgrade of the seats was finished in 2014 [16].



Figure 1. The Flirt train

The initial seat configuration was chosen to get maximum number of seats in each wagon. In a citizen-centric approach, the seat configuration would have been tested with real users. This case illustrates how important it is to involve users in the design and development of products and services.

B. Why do we need a driving license?

As a proof that you have passed the necessary test to show that you are a competent driver one needs a driver license. But, the driving license is a physical card, and you need to bring it with you. If you cannot produce your driving license while driving, you can get fined. But, when you produce the driving license, it is checked towards a database for validity. In fact, the driving license is just an ID, so why not accept any valid ID when in fact the validity is not in the card, but in the database. Fines bring money to the government, at the cost of irritated drivers that have to pay because they left their driving license at home or in their second car.

This example above shows how the governments, sometimes, are locking up in old ways of thinking, without taking into account the real needs and wants of the citizens.

United Kingdom had a driving license consisting of a photo card and a paper counterpart. The paper counterpart was abolished June 8th 2015 to save motorists' money, reduce red tape, and make sure that employers are not relying on potentially out-of-date paper [17]. The information is now stored online, and the holder may share this online information, e.g., with car rental companies that requires information about driving history [17].

C. The parking ticket machine

One of the authors was about to pay for parking in a municipal parking space, when he discovered a credit card left in the payment station. This payment station used the following routine: You put in the credit card, select parking time, get the parking ticket, and then remove the credit card. The card was returned to the unfortunate citizen. But, in later discussion we found that many users had the same experience. You are most concerned about getting the parking ticket, and therefore, it is easy to forget the card. In other parking stations, the sequence is different, you insert the card, select parking time, retrieve the credit card and then you get the ticket. Again, user testing with real users would have exposed this problem. In this case, it was not about internal efficiency or old ways, it was just about bad design.

The user experience (UX) of parking ticket machines has also been discussed by several bloggers on the Internet, e.g., [18].

There are probably enough other examples to prove the point that not all products and services are citizen-centric. The examples are just examples of what happens when citizen centricity is not taken seriously, and show the importance of involving citizen, not only when new services or products are planned, designed and developed, but also to accept that "what we always have done" is not necessarily in line with the needs of the users.

V. EXAMPLES OF "BEST PRACTICE"

While there are many examples of lacking citizen-centricity, we have also seen several examples of services that are truly citizen-centric. Again, we have tried to find examples that are not technology-oriented:

A. Cancer Treatment Coordinator

One vulnerable group is patients diagnosed with cancer. Earlier, patients had to relate to many different persons and institutions. This may not be a big problem under normal circumstances, but when you get a possible terminal diagnosis, you may not be able to carry out the tasks you are expected to. The Special Health Services Act imposes a duty to appoint a coordinator for patients requiring "complex or long-term and coordinated services" [19]. Many hospitals have created designated cancer coordinator positions. The coordinators are responsible for coordinating the fastest possible assessment and treatment for patients, ensuring the

provision of information about the treatment process for the patient and relatives at an early stage [19].

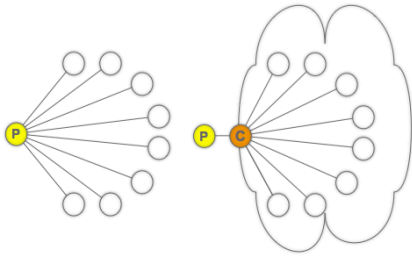


Figure 2. The coordinator hides the complex organization behind

Outside the hospitals, many municipalities have created their own designated cancer coordinators. The patient now only needs to relate to one single person who knows the system, the processes, and what needs to be done. The municipal coordinators collaborate with the hospital coordinator but also with other stakeholders to provide the best possible services for the patient [19].

B. User-Controlled Personal Assistant

Citizens with physical disabilities often need support to get around. The non-user centric approach is to tell the citizen that he/her will get help at certain times. “Lisa” is offered a walk in the park in the middle of the day, but what she really wants is to be with friend in a café on Friday evening. The user-managed personal assistant is the citizen-centric answer to such problems. The patient is given a certain number of hours a week, but the patient is in charge of how and when the hours are used. This empowers the patient.

Many municipalities have implemented user-controlled personal assistants as a service. In their political platform established on October 7th, 2013, the two parties of the current government agreed to establish access to user-controlled personal assistance as a right [20]. This was implemented in the Health and Rights Act on January 1st, 2015 [21].

These are two real life examples on citizen-centric approaches to service provision. What conclusions can we draw from these examples?

- The service is built around the user
- The user is empowered, and gets more control

We have chosen these examples on purpose. They are not related to ICT, and they show that citizen-centric is more than making better ICT solutions.

VI. CITIZEN CENTRICITY

It is now time to discuss the concept of citizen centricity in more detail. As we have already seen, citizen centricity is not obvious. The main idea is to learn from the users of products and services in order to make them better. This involves the users in design, development and implementation of the products and services. In order to do that, systematic collection of user input is needed. Users may and should be

co-creators of the products and services, not just consumers. They may add their wishes and expectations, but also their competence.

We argue that citizen centricity is mainly about the collective mindset of public sector employees and decision makers. Citizens should be involved in all phases of product or service development. The user involvement should be sufficient, not superficial. It is necessary to pay close attention to wants and wishes in order to succeed.

Citizens can be involved on different levels. On the policy level, user organizations can speak on behalf of the users. At system level, some users can speak for the rest. And on the individual level each user speaks for him/herself. On this level we talk about customization of products and services.

A. ICT and Citizen Centricity

Most services provided by government on different levels are depending on human resources. Teachers teach our children, healthcare personnel take care of those with medical problems, and manual work is needed to maintain roads. But, ICT plays an increasing role in the service provision. The teachers are using ICT to communicate with parents, those with medical problems may book consultations online. Prescriptions are sent from the general practitioner (GP) to the pharmacy through electronic communication. Drivers may get updated information on road construction work through the Internet. Therefore, it is fair to say that electronic services play an important role in public service provision.

B. Digital Agenda Norway

In April 2016, the Norwegian government issued a white paper “Digital Agenda for Norway – ICT for a simpler everyday” [22]. One of the two key objectives of the white paper is a citizen-centric and effective public sector. It would be reasonable to say that the ambitions of the government are high.

The users (citizens, public and private entities and the voluntary sector), and their needs shall be the central starting point. Public services shall be seen as coordinated and complete, independent of which public sector entities are providing the services. The public sector should reuse information instead of asking users for information already acquired.

The government wants (among other things):

- Real user participation to ensure that users views and needs is taken care of in development of digital services.
- Stimulate more trials by using service design to contribute to more good user centric services.

VII. BARRIERS TO CITIZEN-CENTRICITY

Studies of barriers to eGovernment adoption often take a very broad or high level approach, by examining policy documents, interviewing project managers etc. While citizens are in focus, and citizen-centricity is promoted as a principle, existing research has put too little emphasis on the individual citizens’ needs [23].

One exception is the study by Van Veenstra, Klievink and Janssen [24], who performed a literature review and also examined barriers in three case studies of eGovernment. They

found barriers to be related to three broad areas: Governance, organizational issues and technical issues. Several of these are relevant when discussing citizen-centric government. Table 1 lists these issues, explains their relevance and their resolutions.

TABLE 1. BARRIERS TO EGOVERNMENT IMPLEMENTATION

Issue	Relevance	Resolution
Public sector structure, Fragmentation in service areas and/or decision-making responsibility	Public sector often structured so that responsibility for a specific area is scattered across several departments and government levels. This makes collaboration difficult.	Identify citizen needs in key areas, for example following life-cycle logic: "As a graduating student I need the following services"
Lack of communication/ collaboration/ coordination	Related to previous issue	Using citizen needs, identify which areas need collaboration
No relation/ alignment between organization and technology	Organization and IT areas are not cooperating fully, creating a gap between what is needed and what is possible.	Project teams should have at least one person who is equally proficient in technology and organization, acting as a bridge between the two.
Insufficient understanding of users	User needs are inferred, IT follows internal government logic rather than focusing on citizen needs	Involvement of citizens in planning, life-cycle based scenario planning. Searchable web sites.
Security and privacy not addressed	Lack of security and privacy makes many citizens hesitate to use the online service, and can lead to lack of trust in government, especially in countries where trust is low from before.	National eID-solutions needs to be in place, as well as clear and understandable privacy policies.
Lack of standards, Complexity and interoperability of legacy systems, Basic infrastructure underdeveloped	Legacy systems, different system vendors and a missing common infrastructure for eGovernment makes it difficult to create services that work across organizational silos, and also makes user interfaces complex and changing between one service and the next.	While difficult, government should strive for a common eGovernment infrastructure, life-cycle based services and a common, standardized user interface across all services.

While Table 1 lists important barriers, we need to extend this list with some observations from our own work on eGovernment projects.

A. Data quality and open data

Public sector managers are not very eager to share data, since they also feel responsible for the quality of the data shared. Government data has been collected over many years, and old data often has some quality issues. While the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (DIFI) has set up a good portal for open data, the available data sets are often outdated or incomplete. In many cases, one or two municipalities will upload something that could be interesting if you had access to the same data from all the municipalities, but which is useless as long as only one or two municipalities have uploaded it.

B. Benchmarking using non-citizen-centric indicators

Web sites of Norwegian municipalities are rated every year according to a set of indicators created by DIFI. While the indicator set is tweaked every year, and constantly improving, it still relies heavily on technical indicators, ignoring or downplaying the actual usefulness of the site for citizens. The municipality who was rated top in 2011 is a good example of this. Technically, the site is flawless, but within the Norwegian user experience community it is a running joke, as the site has very poor usability. When one attempts to search or browse for something (for example building permits), you are led through a loop of pages suggesting to click for more information. None of the pages actually contain useful information about what one is looking for; at best, one can find the phone number of someone they can call to get more information. This does not translate only into a waste of citizens' time, but also into lost opportunities for the municipality to get businesses to relocate in the area or new business to start. Even municipalities that are good at publishing content tend to do so following a public sector logic. In order to find documents related to a case, you need to know the case number, the committee(s) that have handled the case etc.

C. Public sector autonomy

Norway has 428 municipalities, all with their own web site. The quality of the web sites varies. The Norwegian Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (DIFI) has done yearly assessments of municipality web sites, awarding grades. The maximum is six stars; the minimum is one star. The yearly assessment shows big differences in the quality. Citizens, at least in the more densely populated areas, often live in one municipality, work in another, shop in a third and attend cultural events in a fourth. In practice, the citizen must relate to four web sites with different structure and content.

D. Lack of semantic interoperability

Public administration is not very good at integration across institutional borders. Even if we have had projects addressing semantic interoperability, it will still be years to handle the complexity. This is because words have different semantic meaning in different areas.

While we outline some possible resolutions, none of these barriers are easy to overcome. Technical barriers such as infrastructure, legacy systems and security are very challenging. Creating a common basic infrastructure has been on the agenda in Norway for years, but is still not in place as this is a complex technical issue. The cost of development is also a barrier in some cases. However, these barriers are not impossible to overcome as long as the organizational barriers are addressed first. Public agencies need to collaborate and coordinate their efforts, and involve citizens in the process using the tools of user-centric design.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE CITIZEN CENTRICITY

The following suggestions are based on our own experience with the development of eGovernment solutions:

A. Build organizational identity

It seems that public organizations are struggling in developing a core organizational identity grounded in both the culture and the traditions from the past and the future aspirations and expectations from both internal and external stakeholders. We suggest a strategy balancing the past and the future – the culture and the image part of organizational identity. The past plays a crucial role in bridging the history, competence and tradition in the past to the future aspirations for public organizations. Hence, the past representing the culture and the future representing the image are connected in a constructive relation in which a citizen-centric public organization may prosper.

B. Involve the citizens

Citizens should be involved at all stages of design, development and assessment of services. The citizens may contribute to better solutions, by providing their needs and wants. Widespread adoption is probably the best measure of success. Citizen involvement may secure the construction of services that will be used by the target group.

C. Share data

Data should be shared with other public sector entities, but it should also include the necessary information about the quality of the data. This will help other public sector entities to assess if data can be used or not. Semantic information should be added to make linking of data easier.

When privacy is not at stake, data can be released as open data sets. This will bring opportunities for third parties to develop new innovative applications that may serve citizens better.

D. Reuse data

Reuse data whenever possible. Citizens should not be required to fill in data that government already possess. With an electronic identity infrastructure, it is possible to connect the citizen to his/her personal profile.

E. Collaborate on web site structure and content

For the citizen, different web site structure and content is a source of confusion. Therefore, efforts should be made to at

least provide some common elements on public sector web sites.

F. Spend less time on web site structure

Do not be too concerned about web site structure, but make efforts to make the web sites searchable. Most citizens get frustrated when navigating a complex web site without knowing the structure of the municipality or government entity. Citizens use Google and other search engines. Efforts should be made match the user requests. “I want to build an annex to my house” should be recognized and the citizens should be directed to the relevant web page providing the requested information. This is one reason to work on semantic interoperability.

G. Improve readability

Improve the readability of public sector web sites. Actually, the government has established a program to make content more readable, but still, many government web pages are referring to regulations and rules that can be hard to be understood by most citizens. Make easy-to-understand introductions, and include links to the actual regulations or rules.

H. Protect privacy

Protect the privacy of the citizen. Privacy is important for trust. Privacy statements are common in the private sector. The public sector should explain what the data will be used for, and if it can be shared with other entities. Regulations and procedures should be easily accessible, and appropriate technology should be used to protect the data.

IX. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, we have discussed the concept of citizen-centricity in a public sector context. We have shown that being citizen-centric has been an objective for governments for some time, but that in most cases public services are still designed from the point of view of the government entity providing the service, following the logic of government operations and processes. We have discussed how organizational identity can act as a barrier for government becoming truly citizen-centric. We have presented examples from several cases, which show some of the consequences of this failure to be citizen centric. Through the examples of cancer treatment coordinator and user-controlled Pas, we have shown the benefits for society if government is able to become more citizen centric when designing services. Finally, we have presented a set of suggestions that could help government to become citizen centric.

Citizen centricity is not obvious, as shown in several examples in this paper. But there is hope. The examples of cancer coordinators and personal user managed assistants show best practice from the public sector service delivery. The cancer coordinator relieves the patient of the burden of keeping track of all facets of the medical system, and reduces the patient’s perception of the complexity of the public sector. The personal user managed assistant provides freedom of choice and empowerment for citizens with impairments. ICT provides great opportunities for creating citizen-centric

services. We have provided some suggestions to improve the citizen centricity such services. This paper opens up several new possibilities for research. While we have shown how organizational culture might help explain the lack of citizen-centricity, there is a need for further research in the form of in-depth case studies and action research to uncover exactly how this affects change, and how to change cultures. Further, there is a need for more research, preferably action and/or design-based, in order to create a more comprehensive set of guidelines for citizen-centric government.

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