TRANSFORMING GOVERNMENT SERVICES IN THE UAE
Establishing a Service Factory using World Class Practices
Abstract

The purpose of this paper is twofold: firstly, to take a brief analytical look at the way in which public service delivery is undergoing transformation through customer-centric approaches to service design; and secondly, to summarise the initial work accomplished by the UAE government in adopting new innovative forms of service delivery, both for existing citizens and for people who wish to come to live and work in the UAE.

Section One sets the context for the Service Factory initiative in the UAE, referencing similar work that has already been undertaken in other parts of the world, as well as techniques used by the private sector that have been adopted by the public sector to bring about a global citizen-centric approach to service delivery.

Section Two examines and summarises the work done to date on public service delivery in the UAE, and describes how this work has developed. Under the Service Factory initiative eight bundles of public services have been designed and developed to give both existing citizens and those who wish to live and work in the UAE a substantially better service experience than that currently available. All eight bundles now exist in a prototype pilot form.

Section Three presents some general conclusions on improvements in public service delivery, as well as some specific conclusions concerning the Service Factory initiative; it also gives some recommendations for the future.
# INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SECTION 1 - A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF GCC CITIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SOME PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>THE PRIMARY CHALLENGE FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PUBLIC SERVICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER - LIFE STAGE ANALYSIS AND SEGMENTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>TOUCHPOINT ANALYSIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPPING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>SERVICE DESIGN AND CO-CREATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>SECTION 2 - 8 UAE PUBLIC SERVICES BUNDLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>SUMMARY OF SERVICE FACTORY INITIATIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>SECTION 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recent years have seen an increasing demand for improved efficiency in the public sector and in the delivery of its various services. Citizens are more aware of their rights as a result of improved access to information, which has nurtured higher expectations of levels of service.

Modern companies in the private sector that have shown an aptitude for customer-centric service have also highlighted the shortcomings of various public services. Citizens now expect the same standard of service that they receive when purchasing a product as customers. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, improvement to public services can be addressed with five core principles: listening to your customers; breaking down the ‘silos’; enabling a multi-channel service; continuously improving through customer feedback; and setting customer-centric standards (PWC, 2016).

Improvements to public service delivery using these principles have been shown to be effective in the past; this paper will briefly explore some of these and examine how they can potentially improve citizens’ levels of happiness and satisfaction.

Since the 1990s various government and public service providers have been aware of the necessity to improve standards. The end-goal appears to be a common one: to provide a ‘one-stop shop’ for delivering public services to citizens.

The UAE government, under the auspices of the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), has embraced the view that customers should be co-creators of value and become involved in the analysis and design of public service delivery systems (for the purpose of this paper a ‘customer’ refers to any UAE citizen or expatriate resident). To enable this approach to move from an idea to reality, the UAE has embarked upon the development of the Service Factory initiative, which uses world-class techniques in transforming public service delivery to improving its customers’ lives and experiences. This is, as with many of the world’s top private-sector brands, driven by a strong and aspirational vision – that of ‘UAE 2021’.

This vision ‘aims to make the UAE among the best countries in the world by the Golden Jubilee of the Union. In order to translate the Vision into reality, its pillars have been mapped into six national priorities which represent the key focus sectors of government action in the coming years.’ (Vision 2021, 2016). The six national priorities are: a cohesive society and preserved identity; a safe public and a fair judiciary; a competitive knowledge economy; a first-rate education system; world-class healthcare; and a sustainable environment and infrastructure.

The Service Factory initiative is driven by the PMO and strives to bring into focus how the UAE can deliver more innovative, customer-centric services to enhance people’s lives. In order to become effective at doing so, it must overcome some of the conventional challenges of public service delivery.
Historically, there has been a disconnect between public services and the people utilising them, which has accelerated in the 21st century as customers look for more than just the quality of services – they now also want to have some control and autonomy in the ways in which these services are delivered. As the commercial world has changed, largely through advances in technology, people have become accustomed to receiving goods and services at speed, designed with their needs and wants in mind. They expect high-quality interactions with public services and no longer see them as commodities to be received; instead, they are more emotionally involved and vocally critical of any deficiencies in the ‘customer experience’ they encounter.

This has raised expectations at all levels across all public service experiences, but the public sector has not changed as quickly as people would like. The main reason for this can be traced to one main challenge faced by governments in delivering public services.

This challenge is the complex way in which services are provided. One service provided to customers can often involve interactions with several different departments and agencies, and can even involve the local government and outsourced delivery processes. This complexity is compounded by the fact that many services are delivered by unrelated government departments that do not work together to provide them. In other words, there is a large degree of fragmentation in public service delivery. And when customers require more than one service the complexity encountered rises, as do levels of dissatisfaction.

It is currently the case that ‘the citizen who needs multiple services is left to join up the various islands of service to meet his or her needs. As departments do not appear to accept each other’s identification of the citizen, the citizen has to validate his or her identity at each service transaction.’ (Varney, 2006).

Companies have to compete for their customers’ loyalty by giving them great experiences, and failure in this regard results in their defection; in contrast, if customers are unhappy with public service delivery, it is difficult if not impossible for them to find those services elsewhere. But they can, and do, make their unhappiness evident via social media and other means of voicing complaints.

Improving public service delivery is important, especially considering ‘global trends such as rising expectations, budgetary constraints, global competition for investment, public sector reform programmes and changing demographics’ (PwC, 2007). Research conducted by Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute found that ‘people are keen to be treated by the State as customers’ and that ‘customer expectations include speed and authenticity. They expect services to be personalised to more diverse life-styles, allowing flexibility and choice’ (PwC, 2007).

This view reflects the general consensus put forward by much of the literature readily available in this area, and we can thus conclude that the primary challenge
for public service delivery is its complex, fragmented and decentralised nature. The result is that customers who are wanting, or have to receive, public services can often be subject to a great deal of frustration, delays and disappointment, as they are forced to deal with several government departments or agencies. In other words, conventional public service delivery has not been equipped to succeed in the ever-changing customer-centric environment in which it operates.

Some underlying reasons behind this challenge are that nearly all public-sector organisations ‘have hierarchical structures’ and that ‘within these structures, independent vertical units (or “silos”) are a common feature’ (PwC, 2007). Moreover, the primary challenge is underpinned and reinforced by secondary challenges such as the inability or unwillingness to change structures, processes and behaviours; it has been noted that ‘in many vertically structured organisations, individual employees may have little incentive to change their behaviours’ (PwC, 2007).

Subject to these pressures and in an effort to transform public services from the conventional form of delivery, many governments have, over the last ten years or so, redesigned service delivery to become much more customer-centric, removing the obstacles mentioned above.

It has been observed that ‘public services are traditionally delivered through a plethora of government agencies via programs that are not connected with each other …. In the midst of this decentralized fragmentation, there is a global movement in both the public and private sectors to be more citizen- or customer-centric in the design and delivery of services’ (Roy & Langford, 2008).

They have done this by rethinking their view of service delivery as a set of transaction-based activities, and instead looking at customers as people who undergo encounters and journeys during a complex delivery process. ‘Services need to be understood as a journey or a cycle – a series of critical encounters that take place over time and across channels’ (DEMOS, 2006).

This shift in thinking has led to major initiatives designed to make the customer experience better and to employ departmental resources more efficiently. It is now the case that ‘the leading edge of the new service economy that has emerged is much slicker, more immediate, more convenient to the citizen and less intrusive on the busy citizen’s time. The focus is increasingly on the totality of the relationship with the citizen’ (Varney, 2006).

Some cases that demonstrate this attitudinal shift are briefly summarised as follows.
EXAMPLES
OF INNOVATIVE PUBLIC
SERVICE DELIVERY

Case Study 1:
Canada’s Service Canada

Canada is often cited as a country that has responded to the challenges posed by traditional public service delivery. The emergence of its customer-centric philosophy and network model of service delivery means that it ‘has been a pioneer in adopting a network approach to delivering integrated services’ (Roy & Langford, 2008). The government’s efforts began in the late 1990s with its Government On-Line initiative, followed by the Modernizing Services for Canadians in 2002. These two initiatives paved the way for the launch of a third broader service integration initiative in 2005 named Service Canada, which aimed to ‘provide a one-stop point of access for Canadians with respect to all federal programs and services’ (Roy & Langford, 2008) in response to customer dissatisfaction with public services. A 1997 survey found that 44 per cent of people complained of difficulty in accessing services and 25 per cent said they didn’t know where to find the service they needed (Maziade et al., 2003).

Case Study 2:
Karnataka’s Bangalore One

Citizens in Karnataka had become frustrated with the inconvenience they experienced with touchpoints that were limited in number, inefficient, geographically fragmented and only operated/staffed between fixed hours; for example, ‘the bill payment services of public utilities functioned between 10am [and] 2pm on working days’ (Shahaida et al., 2007). Therefore, by establishing Bangalore One (B One), ‘the Government of Karnataka (GOK) responded to the long-standing demand of its citizens for a “one-stop shop” for dealing with various government departments and public utility services’ (Shahaida et al., 2007).

B One aimed to provide a 24-7, 365-days-a-year citizen service centre. Another objective was to provide services without any relation to the jurisdiction of a particular office. Essentially it was to be an anytime, anywhere service.

By September 2006, 14 B One centres had been set up in different parts of the country. A number of difference services were now possible under one umbrella, such as making payments for public service utilities, electricity, telephone, water supplies and sewerage services. A tangible outcome by the end of September was that G2B (government-to-business) services were now relatively dormant. B One was offering ten G2C (government-to-consumer) services and five B2C (business-to-consumer) services.
Case study 3: The UK’s Transformation Programme

The UK government set out in January 2013 its intention to transform 25 major services in 400 days. The overarching aim was to make these services ‘digital by default and simpler, clearer and faster to use’. This was called the Transformation Programme. Eight departments across the government began the process of redesigning these major services ‘based on the needs of users, not the needs of the government’ (UK government, 2016).

One specific example documented on the GOV.UK website is the work the Ministry of Justice did to transform the civil claims service. An official blog post written by a designer at the Ministry of Justice Digital Services working closely with the research team, gives real insight into the customer research process, which was based heavily around customer journey mapping.

The team first ‘needed to understand the bigger picture’ and ask ‘what are the greatest challenges that individual users face across all civil claims?’ The researchers ‘wanted to see what their [users’] experience looked like as a journey from end-to-end alongside the decisions they took to go down different paths of the process’. The research team started by conducting a workshop and inviting domain specialists to help draw the map, then conducted rounds of fact-checking to ensure that everything was accurate. Next they plotted the ‘user pain points’ after conducting interviews with frontline staff and support groups.

The Civil Claims digital service went live in August 2014. The latest user data shows that during 1–29 February 2016, 70 per cent of all transactions were completed using the new online service (Sheldrake, 2014).
Case Study 4: Australia’s Centrelink

Established in 1997 as a ‘one-stop shop’ for the integration of numerous human services and social support payments, Centrelink is internationally renowned for its cutting-edge approach to service delivery, its mission being ‘to provide easy and convenient access to high-quality government and community services that improve the lives of Australians, their families and the community’ (Halligan & Wills, 2008). Centrelink evolved over a number of years and stages:


In the third stage Centrelink aimed to transform service delivery by ‘implementing the idea of a life-events service delivery model’ (Halligan & Wills, 2008). As part of this approach, government services would be tailored to ‘points of transition or crisis in people’s lives (e.g. leaving school or becoming unemployed)’ (Halligan & Wills, 2008). This approach was not unique to Centrelink, however; Canada’s ‘Citizen First’ initiative and the UK’s reworking of government service arrangements used similar methodologies.

In terms of ensuring the programme had longevity, Centrelink set up a virtual college, which offers accredited learning and technical training focused on developing competencies in areas like customer-service and call-center skills. Consequently, Centrelink wins consistent acclaim for its customer satisfaction – 91 percent of customers agree that staff treated them with respect and 82 percent felt that staff had told them everything they had to know to get the service they needed’ (McKinsey, 2015).
Case Study 5: Scotland’s Public Value Management

In 1999 Scotland was permitted to reconstitute its own Parliament, and in doing so it re-established responsibility for its public services in a manner comparable to that of a province. In 2006 the Scottish government launched an initiative with the aim of transforming these services, and after a high degree of consultation with its citizens, it established two cornerstones of reform: to become user-focused with personalised services, and to drive quality and encourage innovation by setting high standards as well as tackling poor performance, thus allowing for continuous improvement.

By consulting the public, the Scottish Parliament was able to ascertain its citizens’ priorities, which included: being able to hold public services to account; being involved in designing and deciding services in their area; and being told when changes were being made to services. This willingness by the government to act beyond simple rhetoric removed the focus from transactional outcomes, allowing for something that felt more democratically legitimate, as well as personal. This approach has come to be known as Public Value Management (PVM), and is built on a dialogue between a government and its citizens.

This case study demonstrates that an effective use of customer feedback can refocus services and make them more citizen-centric. Scotland’s citizens were made to feel involved in the process, which meant that services became more in line with their needs. It is worth noting that PVM is dependent on a ‘robust and shared knowledge management infrastructure’, with established unity between the public and government (Roy & Langford, 2008).

The above cases are representative of what is happening globally to improve public service delivery. The basis of recent advances in public service design is the search for a better understanding of what citizens feel about the interactions and journeys they undertake, and whether their needs, wants and expectations are met. A short review of the main techniques used is presented as follows.
CUSTOMER-CENTRIC PUBLIC SERVICES
DESIGN BUILDING BLOCKS

The natural starting point for the design of customer-centric public service delivery is a true understanding of the needs, wants and feelings of customers and their service interactions. It is important to focus on ‘insights, segmentation, touchpoints, channels, environments [and] journeys. It is these, not data, functional institutions and episodes that constitute the building blocks of services from a user’s perspective. If the commitment to user-centred services is going to add up to more than hollow rhetoric, then service organisations need to become experts in the methods, tools and ways of seeing service that ensure they can genuinely make the journey to the interface, and see their services as users do’ (DEMOS, 2006).

The main techniques used to develop consumer insight for public service design include life-stage analysis, touchpoint analysis and customer journey mapping. These are explained as follows.
Life-stage analysis is one way of identifying meaningful segments and important needs by looking at what events happen to people as they progress through their lives; this leads to different services being specifically designed for these life stages and events.

Understanding the Customer - Life-stage Analysis and Segmentation

Unlike in the private sector, the challenge in identifying meaningful segments for the public sector is that an extremely wide range of diverse segments and needs exist that have to be provided for. Also, whereas decisions regarding the choice of consumer segments in the private sector depend largely on the consumer’s ability to pay for products and services, the public sector often has to provide services for and meet the needs of all segments in society. For most governments this is a massive undertaking, and as a result there is often no attempt to streamline all services provided to customers; they simply do not have the resources to do so. Some of the most crucial segments of society therefore have to be identified according to their importance to people, whose needs and expectations must be met through the successful implementation of specific measures.

Life-stage analysis is one way of identifying meaningful segments and important needs by looking at what events happen to people as they progress through their lives; this leads to different services being specifically designed for these life stages and events.

Life-stage analysis has been used in the private sector for a long time. For example, financial services organisations often use this technique to gear product and brand development to the needs and wants of consumers as they move through their lives. Examples include married people who are ‘full nesters’ (with more than one child living at home) and those who are ‘empty nesters’ (where the children have left the family home). Specific products are then targeted at each group of consumers: educational loans and mortgages or home improvement loans are offered to ‘full nesters’, while pensions, savings accounts and insurance products would be of more interest to ‘empty nesters’.

Another variant of life-stage analysis is to look at key moments in people’s lives. For example, one key moment could be getting married, and another is having a child. This is the method selected for Service Factory prototype development, as it fulfils the criterion to identify some of the most crucial and meaningful segments of society.

When any public service is delivered to any segment there are many ways in which people will have to interact with government departments in order to benefit from that service. These interactions are called touchpoints, and they are vital for identifying and improving the customer experience.
Touchpoint Analysis

Touchpoint analysis is used extensively in the private sector, and is a term used to describe every point of contact consumers have with a product or service throughout the duration of their experience. A touchpoint can be any point at which a customer interacts with the providers of a service. They can be websites, advertisements, leaflets, reception or front line staff, phone conversations, building spaces and many other interactions. In public service delivery this can involve many similar touchpoints across many channels and departments.

Touchpoints have often been labelled ‘moments of truth’, as they create either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Some touchpoints may be more important than others in the sense that they have a greater impact on the customer during his or her overall journey. These would be regarded as key moments of truth, ‘pain points’ or ‘hot spots’, where customers can be highly impressed or greatly disappointed.

Analysing the drivers of levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction at touchpoints and identifying the key moments of truth is critical if the overall consumer experience – the customer journey – is to be improved. Once all touchpoints have been traced and key moments of truth are identified, actions can then be taken to redesign the service and improve what really matters to customers. This process is called ‘customer journey mapping’.

“Touchpoints have often been labelled ‘moments of truth’, as they create either satisfaction or dissatisfaction.”
Customer Journey Mapping

Customer journey mapping sequentially plots all the interactions or touchpoints a customer has before, during or after delivery interactions. But equally important in this process is the emotional response that each touchpoint generates with customers. This can be summed up as: interactions + feelings = experience (moments of truth). Customer journey mapping provides a means of tracking and describing not only the experience that customers receive at each interaction but also how they actually feel about the interactions and the overall service afterwards.

In the private sector this methodology is used extensively and all parts of a customer journey are measured, often against competitors, to ensure that customers receive the best possible brand experience. In the public sector, for reasons mentioned above, providing customers with a great overall service experience can be difficult unless the various departments involved in providing a service produce seamless delivery and avoid a ‘silo’ mentality. This essentially means shifting from a department-centric approach to a customer-centric approach that involves joined-up thinking, departmental co-ordination and customer co-creation.

However, there is a growing demand and body of evidence suggesting that providers of public services view and include users or consumers as active value co-creators (Trischler & Scott, 2016).

Service Design and Co-creation

Public service designers are now using methodologies that begin with people, not departments. By talking to customers and understanding customer journeys from their perspective, and by involving departments in workshops, a process of co-creation has been built into improved, innovative service design.

The Service Factory was created to put these techniques and attitudes into action in a prototype format and to assess their impact on customers’ experiences for future possibilities and roll-out. Over a six-month programme 80 government officials were offered the opportunity to create new ways of designing services around moments in people’s lives, which meant including customers in a co-creation of these designs. According to the Emirates Government Service Excellence Program, the Service Factory ‘focused on integrated services across government entities to maximise customer happiness’.

Section two provides a summary of the eight bundled service design initiatives that have been created in this way.

“Over a six-month programme 80 government officials were offered the opportunity to create new ways of designing services around moments in people’s lives, which meant including customers in a co-creation of these designs.”
Section 2

8 UAE PUBLIC SERVICES BUNDLES
AN OVERVIEW

The UAE’s PMO intends to launch an initiative that will see it adopt the Service Factory model for its public services, with specific solutions planned for its various departments. Below are a few examples that demonstrate change in the customer’s experience of each service, and how it will ultimately affect their levels of satisfaction. All examples are planned, and have yet to be fully actioned.

Coming to Work in the UAE

The Service Factory has identified that people immigrating to the country in order to work have a fairly arduous process to go through before being admitted. Approximately 600,000 people from abroad come to work in the UAE every year, with 20,000 sent back for failing health and security checks. The current customer journey requires the new employee to visit several departments, including the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation and the Ministry of Interior among others, in a process that seems disconnected, without a linear purpose. The employee is required to go back and forth between the departments in a process that takes several days.

With the proposed changes to this process, the employee will still be required to visit several departments but only once each, and these entities will be co-located in one building for ease of access. The employee will be required to go back and forth between the departments in a process that takes several days.

Processes will save costs for them and the UAE government while giving employees a better and less stressful experience.

Having a Baby

Approximately 40,000 babies are born each year in the UAE. When assessing the experience of having a baby in the UAE, it was noted that an unnecessary level of bureaucracy requires the new parents to visit several departments and provide documents such as personal IDs, original family books and passports. The current model includes six visits to service centres as part of its customer journey, and it takes four days to register the baby’s birth; parents are generally left feeling confused, frustrated, unhappy and upset about having to bring repeated documentation to different agencies.

In the proposed update to this customer journey, the need to visit several departments will be removed, and all of the data input will be done online, starting with a link that is texted directly to the new father’s mobile phone. Following this, the new parents will only need to visit the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to receive all the necessary documents and to add the baby to their family book. All the required processing will be performed ‘behind the scenes’, removing the responsibility from the new parents. This proposed customer journey involves just three steps.

Getting Married

Before people get married in the UAE medical checks are necessary, a process that involves visiting the health clinic in a non-private setting. Customers often do not know what to expect in the pre-marriage health check and this causes anxiety and fear. The lack of flexibility of the service and time delays through waiting plus the lack of privacy can cause distress, and couples also have to provide duplicate information to agencies that do not share that information efficiently.

Solutions to this unhappy experience include the creation of a process that allows customers to book a clinic visit, a website to give them information and advice, and a (payable) home service that avoids the lack of privacy and is more customer-friendly.

Dealing with Emergencies

In a medical emergency the average waiting time in hospitals across the UAE is 4 hours and 30 minutes from the point of the emergency to the patient seeing a doctor.
Citizens in stages of panic must wait and processes for requesting help are not clear.

Through the use of an App and a specified Emergency Cases Centre, the UAE PMO intends to reduce the waiting time during emergencies to just ten minutes, and therefore save lives.

Looking for a Job

Approximately 18,000 young people leave college and cannot find a job. Currently, when jobseekers begin their search, there are several distinct issues that they will encounter: one is the lack of a support network (including insufficient support from universities, and unhelpful careers websites, which although plentiful are daunting and require a specific profile in order to use); another is substantial competition within the job market, which means that each jobseeker applies for an average of 50 jobs before finding employment. There is also a disparity between the types of jobs available and the current workforce: less than 5 per cent of positions are aimed at young adults, despite the fact that they have a high rate of unemployment (25–30 per cent).

Planned changes to this public service customer journey address both cultural and practical challenges. On a practical level, the careers websites will be made to feel more coherent and less daunting for those looking for work. Crucially, the systems in place will become more integrated. This will result in less repetition of tasks for the users and an increased likelihood of someone being recommended for a suitable position that he or she may otherwise not have been aware of. Over 650 private companies have already joined this network, proving that the market is ready and willing to meet this change. Other innovations include a personality test to aid people (particularly millennials) in finding a career path that will satisfy them.

Applying for a Scholarship Abroad

Young people are currently not aware of the different types of scholarships and grants available to them. Parents are also concerned about their children going to study abroad and need to find out from parents of successful students what their experience was like.

The solution proposed is to make scholarship and grant information available online, and to connect students and parents so they can discuss their experiences. A concierge service is envisaged to help match young people with the best scholarship for them.

Running a Business

In 2015 around 370,000 new businesses were registered in the UAE. To register a business customers have to visit different government entities up to 14 times, and there is a lack of readily available information on the process in its entirety. This is not only a huge cost to the government; it also causes feelings of frustration and uncertainty to applicants.

The solution is to make registration much simpler and create an online one-stop shop for customers covering all the necessary stages, including the payment of fees.

Retirement

Around 20,000 people retire each year, and there are 2,000 complaints regarding this process per year. Retirement is a somewhat traumatic episode for many customers. People worry about not working and can feel that they are no longer valued. Sometimes retirement is not planned for and comes as a shock, pension payments can be delayed, and ‘being retired’ is not seen positively by families who expect a financial burden. All of this can have a negative effect on the health of the newly retired.

The solution is to help future retirees think about this in advance, speed up pension payments and help them feel valued. They can be helped to look for community or other work and be provided with a ‘thank you’ support service through the retirement process.
Summary of Service Factory Initiatives

From the documented research information provided regarding the Service Factory initiatives outlined above, it is clear that a great deal of work has gone into developing customer journey maps for significant moments in customers’ lives, involving both customers themselves and government departments and agencies in a world-class co-creation design process. All the eight bundles of services have as their aim the welfare and enhanced experience of the targeted customer groups. As they all also appear to be streamlining and transforming government activities in public service delivery there is no doubt that there will be substantial savings in government expenditure, thus ensuring a win-win situation.

The UAE Service Factory is intended to act as a major launch pad for the UAE government’s overall strategy, with the aim of achieving its UAE Vision 2021 and the ‘government objectives of fulfilling citizen needs, improving government performance, achieving sustainable development, and strengthening UAE’s global standing’ (UAE Cabinet, 2016).

The eight bundles described in this paper are the prototypes for many more initiatives to come, and demonstrate the intent of the government to make its Vision 2021 happen. For example, the target set by the Service Factory of reducing the response time to emergency calls to a record time of four minutes, is mentioned as a National Agenda Target (UAE Cabinet, 2016). This shows a strong intent to deliver some carefully thought-through approaches based on world-class practice, which are now firm plans and ambitious targets for the future.

Measurement of Success

In measuring the success of public service delivery it is important to focus on what matters to customers, and in this respect, ‘end-to-end customer journeys, not individual touch points, are the unit to measure when setting priorities for your customer-experience investments’ (McKinsey, 2015). However, looking at individual touchpoints as a part of the overall journey assessment allows for any measurement to discover the ‘pain points’ (areas of most disappointment in a journey resulting in failed expectations), areas for improvement, and opportunities to innovate. A holistic approach to this is essential, using deep structured interviews to find pain points for citizens; this can be achieved through focus groups with citizens who have undertaken these journeys in recent times, plus interviews and focus groups with front line service providers.

As the Service Factory work is still in its formative prototype stage, no data-driven assessment has been made as to how effective the new service designs and streamlined journeys are or might be in the future, and the use of formal metrics has yet to be employed. However, there is some positive qualitative, anecdotal evidence from customers and departments that enables some judgments to be made.
Conclusions

1. Conventional public service delivery, as demonstrated in many countries of the world over previous decades, is not equipped to succeed in the ever-changing customer-centric environment in which it operates, due to its fragmented and decentralised nature. Essentially, citizens receiving or requiring these services have been subjected to processes involving multiple government or quasi-government departments or units. This has been exacerbated by a lack of ‘joined-up’ thinking and communication between service providers, often referred to as a ‘silo’ mentality. This has given rise to frustration, anxiety, delays and disappointment among customers.

2. With this in mind, in more recent times public service delivery has been viewed through a different lens by governments who, for political and humanitarian reasons, have recognised their citizens as customers to be given great experiences and not just people to be served.

3. This attitudinal change has been undertaken by public service institutions after studying the power of brands, especially in terms of significantly high levels of satisfaction, trust and loyalty achieved by the world’s top private-sector companies, who understand customer needs and wants, give customers what they desire, and manage their experience consistently at every interaction or touchpoint.

4. This shift in thinking has been embraced by the government of the UAE with its Service Factory initiative, which is a commendable and substantial start to improving the lives of citizens of the UAE, and of those people wishing to live and work in the UAE.

5. A concerted effort over several months has produced eight bundled prototype sets of service designs that have been well thought-through, based on conversations with sample groups of customers and relevant departments, and on service design workshops for multi-channel service providers.

6. The Service Factory has demonstrated the use of world-class techniques aimed at enhancing the ‘customer experience’, such as touchpoint analysis, customer life-stage analysis and customer journey mapping.

7. Anecdotal evidence from many groups of customers has proved that the Service Factory’s eight bundles of public services have been both appreciated and valued. Further measures of effectiveness are scheduled to take place.

8. Some of the eight bundles of services are already in the process of application design and development, and are beginning to work on multi-channel experiences for customers who utilise digital technology.

Recommendations

1. The Service Factory should continue its work and continue its pilot study of all eight bundles of services currently under development.

2. Every attempt must be made to evaluate the effectiveness of these eight initiatives using both qualitative and quantitative data, derived from existing customers and other people who currently or may in the future require these services, and also from all departments involved in delivering them.

3. Measures of ‘customer satisfaction’ or ‘happiness’ should be introduced as a continuous process.

4. Readiness for change should be assessed across all government departments that are likely to be involved in current or future Service Factory initiatives.

5. Plans for changing systems and the breakdown of departmental boundaries should be drawn up as part of the UAE government transformation programme.

6. Plans for training staff in change management should be included in the transformation plans, starting with the Service Factory departments involved.

7. The PMO for the UAE public service should develop a brand strategy and carry out a brand audit. The strategy would include establishing a brand identity (how the government would like the public service to be seen by customers/citizens), and the audit would track brand image (how the public service is actually seen). Any perception gaps found would provide good data for further improvements. Following a process of strategy development, the audit could begin with Service Factory initiatives.
**Bibliography**


Emirates Government Services Excellence Program <www.egsep.ae>

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