

Bringing the Public into Public Services

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Background

Public services are generally considered essential for modern life, and are provided to citizens by a Government. Public Services normally include –

- Education
- Public Transportation
- Broadcasting & Communications
- Electricity and Gas
- Fire Service
- Healthcare
- Police Service
- Waste Management
- Water Services

For several decades public services have unfortunately been provided with the primary focus on convenience of service providers rather than on service receivers. Various factors like complex regulations, complicated forms, lack of information, absence of performance standards, lack of accountability, corruption and incompetence have left recipients of public services, or ordinary citizens, helpless, dissatisfied and frustrated. Democratic Governments have now realized that public services need to be increasingly citizen oriented if they wish to remain in power because a major factor influencing election success is satisfactory delivery of Public Services. Such thinking is aptly reflected in our Prime Minister's address to the National Development Council: *'People often perceive the bureaucracy as an agent of exploitation rather than a provider of service. Corruption has become a low risk and high reward activity. While expecting discipline and diligence from the administration, the political executive should self-critically review its own performance. Unless we do this, we cannot regain credibility in the eyes of the people who have elected us to serve them.'*

Study Issues

The idea of this study originated from the need to improve public services through customer orientation. Customer focus has been the backbone of marketing and management thinking in the last few decades. While its adoption has been widespread in the private sector, customer orientation has been somewhat limited in the public sector. Customer orientation in public services means changing the entire services delivery chain from policy making to frontline activities and implies rethinking strategy, organizational design, business processes, information systems, and performance feedback systems. Obviously adopting this customer – centric model to the public sector is rather difficult because of various practical issues like:

- There are many public services where customers (citizen) have no choice – such as getting a passport.
- There are many public services, which are not directly paid for by customers (citizen), such as security or road maintenance.
- There are many public services like tax collection which are imposed rather than sought by customers (citizen).
- There are many public services, which do not interact with customers (citizen) but provides input to other departments, like finance, planning etc.

The concept of 'citizen' as a customer may therefore not seem appropriate at first sight. Customer is however a useful term in the context of improving service delivery because it embraces certain principles which are as fundamental to public service delivery as they are to the provisions of private services.

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The complex role of public service providers also complicates the adoption of customer-oriented practices, because

- Various central and local authorities are involved in delivery of Public Services.
- The Government has not only to deliver essential Public Services, but also manage numerous commercial and development enterprises, apart from designing and implementing policies.
- Most planners and policy makers face resource constraints as key barrier to improvement of Public Services.
- They have insufficient time to develop consistent policy.
- Policy makers focus on day-to-day demands and on satisfying short-term Ministerial requirements.
- Ministers in contrast sometimes feel that they are outsiders, driven by the day-to-day requirements of the administrative machine.
- Engaging stakeholders is seen as a luxury which time rarely affords.

Study Objectives and Approach

To address the various issues introduced earlier a Macro-level Research was undertaken to understand –

- Perceived importance of various public services by customers (citizen) in India.
- Levels of satisfaction of customers (citizen) for different services.
- Based on the above, research was carried out with service providers in specific region to identify bottle-necks in service delivery, and
- Identify possible action steps for improving service delivery.

The primary survey on citizen perception was carried out in the four metropolitan cities through a structured questionnaire. The sample breakup was as follows:

<i>ZONE</i>	North	East	South	West
<i>RESPONDENTS</i>	54	104	48	50

The specific services covered in the Citizen summary are indicated in Table –1 below.

Table 1. List of Public Service

▪ Education: Primary	▪ Public utility: Library
▪ Education: Secondary	▪ Public utility: Park
▪ Education: Higher	▪ Roads
▪ Electricity	▪ Social security measures
▪ Fire Service	▪ Tele-communication
▪ Healthcare: IPD	▪ Transport: Bus
▪ Healthcare: OPD	▪ Transport: Train
▪ Healthcare: Emergency	▪ Pollution control: Waste collection
▪ Law and Order: Legal System	▪ Pollution control: Waste treatment
▪ Law and Order: Police	▪ Water
▪ Media like AIR, Doordarshan	

Based on survey data, the perceived importance of individual public service and satisfaction level with each service was identified. This was followed by a limited number of in-depth interviews with service providers, to understand the practical issues in bringing about service improvements. Respondents included middle and senior level bureaucrats from different public services located in the North-East region of India.

Study Findings

Analysis of citizen perception was analyzed and Index scores were given to various services on:

- Importance of the service to the citizens
- Satisfaction in Service delivery

The scores are provided in Table – 2

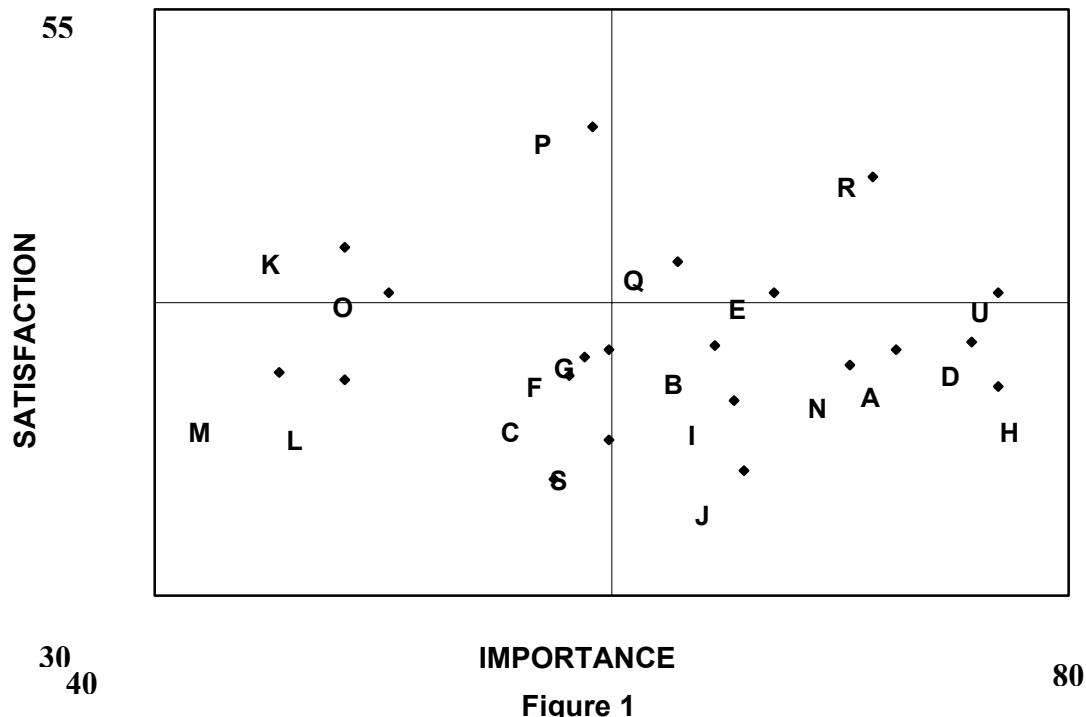
Data in Table – 2 was further divided into 4 clusters

- Cluster 1 High Importance – Low Satisfaction
- Cluster 2 High Importance – High Satisfaction
- Cluster 3 Low Importance – Low Satisfaction
- Cluster 4 Low Importance – High Satisfaction

The result is shown in Figure – 1

Table 2. Importance and Satisfaction in Public Services

<i>PUBLIC SERVICES</i>		<i>INDEX OF IMPORTANCE</i>	<i>INDEX OF SATISFACTION</i>
Education: Primary	A	72.46	40.49
Education: Secondary	B	64.52	40.66
Education: Higher	C	58.14	39.38
Electricity	D	75.76	40.82
Fire Service	E	67.11	42.92
Healthcare: IPD	F	58.82	40.17
Healthcare: OPD	G	59.88	40.49
Healthcare: Emergency	H	76.92	38.92
Law and Order: Legal System	I	65.36	38.32
Law and Order: Police	J	65.79	35.33
Media like AIR, Doordarshan	K	48.31	44.85
Public utility: Library	L	48.31	39.21
Public utility: Park	M	45.45	39.52
Roads	N	70.42	39.84
Social security measures	O	50.25	42.92
Tele-communication	P	59.17	50.00
Transport: Bus	Q	62.89	44.24
Transport: Train	R	71.43	47.85
Pollution control: Waste collection	S	59.88	36.64
Pollution control: Waste treatment	T	57.47	34.97
Water	U	76.92	42.91



It is obvious that future course of action for government should be to provide

- Priority 1 – Drastically improve services in Cluster 1
- Priority 2 – Maintain and gradually improve Cluster 2
- Priority 3 – Improve cost efficiencies in Cluster 3 and 4
- Priority 4 – Improve delivery of Cluster 3 gradually

While the customers' perspective provides some clue for improving public services it was decided to check on the perception of service providers and validate the earlier observations. A series of discussions were held with bureaucrats from the North-East. Importance scores provided by bureaucrats from different North-East states are shown in Table – 3 (The classification of services by bureaucrats was slightly different from the citizen questionnaire).

Table 3

<i>PUBLIC UTILITY SERVICES</i>		<i>IMPORTANCE WEIGHTAGE</i>						
		<i>A</i>	<i>AP</i>	<i>ME</i>	<i>MI</i>	<i>MN</i>	<i>TR</i>	<i>SI</i>
Healthcare	MI	60	60	65	75	70	60	75
Fire	I	60	30	30	25	30	50	60
Education	MI	55	60	60	90	60	80	80
Road	VI	40	45	70	60	50	60	60
Train	VI	70	0	0	10	10	20	----
Broadcasting	VI	80	30	50	25	30	60	60
Electricity	VI	60	30	80	60	50	70	60
Industrial Development	VI	60	10	30	30	40	40	30
Gas	I	60	20	30	50	30	70	60
Police Security	VI	55	45	65	75	50	60	65
Water	MI	70	40	70	70	60	60	65
Waste	I	50	25	80	10	10	50	50

Note – A – Assam , AP – Arunachal Pradesh, ME – Meghalaya, Mi – Mizoram, MN – Manipur, TR – Tripura, Si - Sikkim

It is interesting to note that the citizen perception and bureaucratic perception closely resemble each other (Table – 4).

Table 4

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>CITIZENS</i>	<i>BUREAUCRATS</i>
Most Important Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary Education ▪ Electricity ▪ Healthcare ▪ Transportation ▪ Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Healthcare ▪ Education ▪ Water
Very Important Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher Education ▪ Fire ▪ Legal ▪ Police ▪ Waste ▪ Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transportation ▪ Broadcasting / Communication ▪ Electricity ▪ Industrialization ▪ Police
Important Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broadcasting ▪ Library ▪ Parks ▪ Social security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fire ▪ Gas ▪ Waste disposal

Subsequent In-depth discussions with bureaucrats highlighted various issues affecting public service delivery. These problems were summarized into broad categories, and are shown in Fig. 2

POOR PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Figure -2

CUSTOMER

- Delay in making payments
- Weak in accessing rights
- Lack of information and skills to deal with problems
- Pay bribes and use influences

FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT

- Lack of technical know-how
- Lack of trained manpower
- Limited internet access
- Poor infrastructure

PRODUCTS

- Delay in fund sanction
- Delay in processing of projects
- Untimely project inspections
- No prioritization of projects
- Absence of prompt & systematic billing system
- No customer satisfaction survey
- No feedback about performance
- Hierarchical information delay

- Lack of mechanism and updation system
- No grievance redressal system
- Political pressure
- Frequent transfers
- Closure of projects in between

OTHERS

- Long delay in getting HRD approvals
- Delayed work
- Late arrival
- Low accessibility to customers
- Corrupt practices
- Excess paper work
- No monitoring and follow up system
- Excess manpower
- Low salaries
- Lack of proper performance evaluation

PERSONNEL

- Neglect of maintenance measures
- Lack of quality control
- Inefficient utilization
- Inefficient & irregular supply
- Sub standard material services

MATERIAL SUPPLIES

Considering a range of services and cases—such as ITC’s *e-Choupal*, Madhya Pradesh’s effort to decentralize teacher management, Karnataka’s road transport corporation, Andhra Pradesh’s eSeva, and Tamil Nadu’s success in improving human development outcomes—the study draws lessons that can help improve service delivery across sectors and facilitate the transplanting of success stories to other settings. It highlights the efficacy of six instruments to improve service delivery—fostering competition, simplifying transactions, restructuring agency processes, decentralization, building broad political support for program delivery, and strengthening accountability mechanisms.

Based on our research we have come up with some suggestions which will help to improve quality of public services.

Environmental aspects

More competition: Replacing public monopolies with private monopolies is not likely to lead to significantly lower corruption level. Our in-depth analysis of Electricity service shows that private run utilities are only marginally better than Government run utilities. However, there is need to facilitate greater competition in provision of services where ever possible.

Allot funds on outcome basis: Funds allocated to various departments should be linked to outcomes. For example, in schools various indicators like enrollment rates, absence of children, dropout rates, results in board exams, can be used. Similarly indicators can easily be worked for other departments. The Departments should work to improve performance on these indicators by holding the institutions accountable.

Barrier between Government and Economy to be lowered: Due to the monopoly enjoyed by the civil services, excellence is no longer fostered and the public sector is denied the best talent and expertise. We must recognize that the complex challenges of a modern economy and society can’t be faced merely by some intuition and conventional wisdom. The barrier between government and the rest of economy and society must be lowered, allowing free movement based on competence and leadership qualities.

Internal system

Simplify procedures: This study shows that irrespective of the educational background, the citizens are unable to fill forms and complete procedures on their own. This calls for simplification of procedures, documentation and more education to the users. This will reduce dependence of the users on middlemen and touts.

Performance based incentive to staff: In order to improve service delivery, there should be fixed and variable component in the Staff salary. The variable component should be linked to objective and measurable outcomes. For example in Electricity and many other services, incentives can be linked to Customer Satisfaction.

Users Committees: Merely setting up users committees is not enough. Studies in the past have shown that there is need to provide them with certain powers (like report card of teachers, recommend fines for poor service etc) to make departments accountable to them. There are various successful experiments of users committees like Parent committees in case of Schools, Patient committees in case of Hospitals.

Outsource certain services (wherever possible): Public service departments should be purchasing outputs rather inputs where ever possible. For example in hospitals instead of buying X ray machines they should buy reports. This will help eliminate several opportunities for corruption like buying of X-ray machines, purchase of spares, procurement of X-ray films, hiring of Radiographers, his transfer etc. Instead hospital could ask an entrepreneur to operate and provide X-ray services in the premises of the hospital etc. A detailed Service Level Agreement (SLA) should be worked out to ensure required quality of service is provided. This experiment has already been initiated in some hospitals in Delhi.

Expectations from Public Services

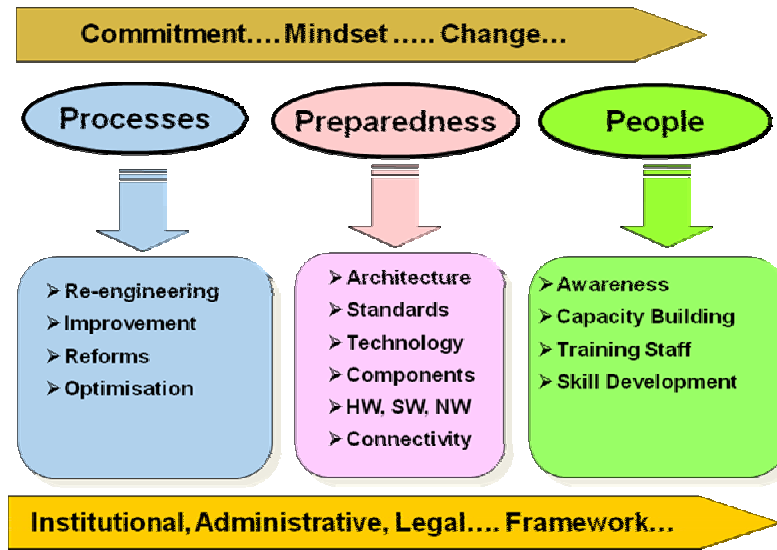


Figure – 3

Greater Transparency: Citizen’s do not know as to how much money was received, on what purpose it was spent. Research has shown that there is lesser corruption if the allocation and spending are made public. Right to Information is one tool which could facilitate greater transparency in public spending.

Recruitment of Specialists: government functions are increasingly complex. Policing, justice delivery, education, healthcare, transportation, land management, infrastructure, urban management— demand domain expertise, specialization, sector experience and deep insights. The colonial practice of recruiting an all-purpose generalist service and entrusting any sector at any time to any civil servant without adequate expertise is both archaic and dysfunctional.

“Make Government Business Like”
~~Not Making Government like Business~~

Strategy for Citizen Service

<p>Capture the private sector profit motives-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Customer orientation ✓ Efficiencies ✓ Management Practices ✓ Financial Resources ✓ HR Talent ✓ Entrepreneurship 	<p>While keeping Govt.’s Social responsibility-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Public orientation ✓ Equality & Justice ✓ Affordability ✓ Accountability ✓ Objectivity ✓ Transparency
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Ultimately Financial Motive is the Single Biggest Success Driver

Box -1

Citizen interface

Active Citizen Charter: Citizen Charters should be drafted in consultation with various stake holders like service providers, users etc. The Charters should have realistic and measurable action standards, and not just statement of intent. The Charters should have penal provisions if the department fails to deliver service in the time frame mentioned in the Charters. The Charters should be prominently displayed and easily available to users. An independent agency should survey periodically to prepare a report card of the department.

Faster grievance redressal mechanism: This survey shows that the confidence of the users on the Grievance redressal mechanism is low. The grievance redressal mechanism has to be faster. In order to improve confidence the public services should clearly display information on complaints received, solved and pending. There should also be information on whom to approach in case the grievances are not addressed in the normal course.

Public hearing: There should be periodic public hearings so that service providers are accountable to users. The Government may institutionalize a system where in prominent Citizen with unquestioned integrity hold periodic hearings. The public hearing should be well publicized so that there wide and active participation by various stakeholders. An action taken report should placed by the department in the next public hearing.

Satisfaction surveys: Independent surveys should be undertaken at periodic intervals to benchmark, measure and track quality of service. The findings of the survey should be made public. Some regulators like TRAI & State Electricity Regulatory Commission (SERC) are undertaking periodic satisfaction surveys.

Public awareness: There is need for generate greater awareness about services, procedures and initiatives.

Finally, we have created a delightfully vague system of accountability. Authority almost never goes with responsibility. As a result, we have only victims of misgovernance, but no villains! Fusion of authority with accountability requires a complete re-engineering of public institutions and practices. A system of risks and rewards, strong and independent anti-corruption agencies, innovative measures for direct citizens' participation, stake-holder empowerment and complete transparency are vital ingredients of good governance.

We do not exist in a vacuum. Our own experience, best practices in India and abroad, and constant innovations offer us a guide to improving our public service delivery. What we need are fierce determination, unrelenting focus on goals, and the strength to withstand pressure from status quoits'.

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