

Co-Design: Toward A New Service Vision For Australia?

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of Australia is planning a major initiative to upgrade its aging service delivery infrastructure and practices.¹ As a first step, three major departments — Human Services, Centrelink and Medicare Australia — are being integrated into a single department with some 40 000 employees, who will spearhead much of the reform.²

It is worth noting that a decade ago Australia was a world leader in service delivery reform. Centrelink, in particular, was internationally recognized as a trend-setting organization in the field. When it was created in 1997 (about the same time as Canada’s Service New Brunswick³), it was based on a clear separation of policy, which stayed with line departments, and service delivery, which was assigned to Centrelink. The model helped shape a whole generation of new organizations around the world, including Service Canada.

While much of Australia’s current plan for reform follows best practices that were established during that period, it also embraces the new and emerging idea of **co-design**.⁴ A government fact sheet defines this as ‘more than asking for feedback or undertaking consultation or satisfaction surveys. It means engaging with individuals and groups from the beginning to the end of the process’.⁵ It also recognizes that co-design capability needs to be developed in the area of human services.

If there is still some uncertainty about what this means in practice, the basic premise seems clear: Traditional service delivery treated the public as passive recipients of government programs and services. The ‘citizen-centred’ revolution gave the public a clear voice in service improvement by tying it to client feedback, such as satisfaction surveys. Co-design is intended to extend the role of the public and invite them to contribute to the design of the services. It can lead to further involvement with the public also participating in the production of services in the future.

Interest in a partnership approach has been percolating though Australian governments for some time. For example, local governments in the State of Victoria are widely recognized as world leaders in community planning.⁶ In 2009, the Government of Western Australia published a massive report on

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community partnerships — the latest in a series of such works — which aims to make working together a standard approach to problem solving for that government within five to ten years.⁷ The federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has released *The National Compact*, a framework document for a new partnership with the Third Sector.⁸

The goal of this paper is to clarify the concept of co-design, and how, where and why it fits into ongoing work on service delivery reform, in Australia and elsewhere. It is primarily a think-piece that leaves many of the practical questions around implementation for another day. The article also links co-design to work on public engagement now underway at the Public Policy Forum, an independent research organization in Ottawa, Canada.

The first half of the paper sets up our analysis of co-design by reviewing key developments in the service delivery revolution over the last decade. This period culminates in the vision of integrated, single-window service, which Canada, the UK, Australia, and many other countries have endorsed. The paper then considers some of the limitations of the model, which have become increasingly apparent in recent years. In particular, single-window service has focused largely on transactional services. However, many government services are not transactional — or, better, not *only* transactional. They involve long-term, interactive relationships, which are based on trust, not customer satisfaction. Reflecting on this in the second half of the paper leads us to conclude that, for the purposes of service delivery, these relationships need to be redefined as service partnerships, that is, as interactive relationships where both the client and the service provider have a key role to play in realizing the goals of the service. The concept of co-design captures this view quite nicely. The remainder of the paper is devoted to a discussion of why the opportunity for co-design can help to support the shift to stronger public engagement.

From the perspectives of Medicare Australia and the Public Policy Forum, exploring the links between public engagement and co-design is a first step and promising exercise. Governments across Canada and Australia are actively engaged in service reform. If co-design is the signal for a shift in government thinking, and if it has lots in common with public engagement, maybe service organizations elsewhere in Australia and Canada are natural launch pads for public engagement initiatives, based on co-design. For example, they could aim at transforming services in key areas like health through community partnerships.

Is there a window of opportunity here? This is a question we think our two countries could benefit from exploring together. We therefore hope the paper not only serves our respective organisations well, but provides a starting point for a larger conversation.

THE CITIZEN-CENTRED PRINCIPLE AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Over the last two decades much work has been done to make government programs and services more responsive to citizens. This is part of a huge wave of reform we can call **citizen-centred government**. Its basic principle is that government policies, programs and services should be organized around the needs and priorities of the people, businesses and organizations they serve, rather than those of governments. As a landslide of studies and surveys has shown over the years, all too often this is not the case.⁹

Citizen-centred government is closely connected to performance measurement. Performance measurement is a key tool for making government services (or programs) more effective. In practice, this means, first, leaders are supposed to set clear, measurable service standards (or program goals). Second, they must develop clear plans for how to achieve these standards. Finally, they must identify appropriate measures to assess progress towards them.

The UK Government's Charter Mark is a good example of how performance measurement has been applied to service delivery.¹⁰ The program was developed 15 years ago to guide government ministries and agencies in making their services more citizen-centred. At bottom, it was designed to promote service quality from a citizen-centered viewpoint, based on six principles:

- Set standards and perform well
- Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff
- Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice
- Continuously develop and improve
- Use your resources effectively and imaginatively
- Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities you serve.

Public agencies that met the program's standards in these six areas were awarded the right to display the prestigious Charter Mark logo.

In March 2008, the UK's Minister for Transformational Government announced a successor to, or next iteration of, Charter Mark: the Customer Service Excellence standard. This new version of Charter Mark involves

a more rigorous framework for measuring customer satisfaction in five key areas, based on a decade of research:

- Delivery of promised outcomes and handling problems effectively
- Timeliness of service provision
- Accurate and comprehensive information, and progress reports provided
- Professionalism and competence of staff and treating customers fairly
- Staff attitudes – friendly, polite and sympathetic to customers' needs.

If Charter Mark was essentially a set of guidelines for improving service, customer service excellence is first and foremost a diagnostic tool. The ultimate aim is to encourage, enable and reward organisations to develop a genuine understanding of the needs and preferences of their customers and communities, then work to deliver their services in ways that build on the learning. The basic approach of customer service excellence, with its roots in the citizen-centred philosophy of Charter Mark, is shared by many governments around the world. In Canada, Australia and New Zealand, for example, there is broad recognition and acceptance of the citizen-centred principle; and Canada's Common Measurement Tool is based on a set of 'drivers of satisfaction' that have much in common with customer service excellence.

EVOLUTION OF THE SERVICE DELIVERY REVOLUTION

While the service revolution has been driven by a variety of forces, from fiscal pressures to public frustrations, the single biggest driver likely is new information technologies. Over the last two decades, they have played a critical role in reshaping the thinking and practice around delivering government services.

Accenture has been tracking the evolution of e-government for almost a decade. Over this period, it has identified a number of 'highest performing' governments; that is, governments whose improvement has been consistent and who have been innovators and/or early-adopters of best practices since the beginning. Based on studies of these highest performers, in 2006 Accenture published a study that resolved the evolution of the service revolution into four basic stages:¹¹

1999–2000: Building online capacity and making services available: During this initial stage high-performing governments were focused on creating basic e-infrastructure and getting some services online. At first, these services amounted to little more than posting information, such as transit schedules or government office locations. Later, they began to include basic

transactions, such as the ability to pay a parking ticket or register a vehicle.

2001–2006: Getting citizens to use these services: As kiosks, websites and portals multiplied, the main challenge in this second stage was to get the public to go online and use the new channels.

2005–2006: Establishing the four pillars of customer service: In this third stage, the highest performing governments framed and articulated their approach to e-government through four basic principles:

- 1 A citizen-centered perspective: all the necessary information is organized around the citizen. Government frontline agents have access to this information and use it to tailor interactions to each citizen's needs and circumstances.
- 2 Cohesive Multi-Channel Service: Service that is fast, cohesive and convenient, regardless of the channel. Interactions that involve more than one channel are seamlessly coordinated.
- 3 Fluid Cross-Government Service: Government agencies work together at the local, regional and national level to provide integrated services to the citizen.
- 4 Promoted through proactive communication and education: Active outreach and communication with citizens to ensure they are informed about government services.

2007–the present: Building trust between government and citizens: In the future, leadership in customer service will be defined by service that builds an implicit trust relationship between citizens and their government.

This framework provides a useful way of viewing the evolution of citizen-centred services. Not only does it give us a bird's eye view of what's happened over the last decade; it helps us see what stage particular governments are at and what steps they need to take to move forward. For example, as we will see shortly, Australia's interest in co-design appears to be moving into this fourth stage and, wisely, it seems ready to invest resources in building the new knowledge, skills and capacity it will need to succeed.

However, in many ways that government is still struggling with issues around Stages 2 (increasing citizen uptake) and 3 (the four pillars of customer service). Appropriately, it also appears poised to invest the majority of its available resources in conventional single-window service delivery, such as co-location and channel alignment. This makes sense. After all, as we shall see, each of these stages builds on the one before it. Governments therefore need to be careful not to go too far too fast in building Stage 4, if they are still working on single-window service, which provides part of the platform for success in that new stage.

In fact, single-window service is still a work in progress just about everywhere. Canada, the US and the UK are no different from Australia. Although real progress has been made in all these countries — with many lessons learned and best practices established — there is still a long way to go to complete the project.

The real value of Accenture's framework thus lies in its recognition that the service delivery revolution is proceeding in relatively well-defined stages, which build on one another. Seeing things this way helps governments plan for their future needs, while responding to their present ones. Accenture has continued to track this evolution and in its 2009 article, *From e-Government to e-Governance*, further documents the growth of this next phase.

In the next section, we use the example of the Government of Canada to show how many governments around the world have been using online tools and a citizen-centred approach to make progress on single-window service.

SERVICE CANADA AND SINGLE-WINDOW SERVICE

Service Canada officially began operations in September 2005 with a mandate to provide Canadians with a single point of access to a wide range of government services and benefits either in person, by phone, by Internet, or by mail. Service Canada's origins, however, date back to 1998 when the Government of Canada began developing an integrated citizen-centred service strategy based on detailed surveys of citizens' needs and expectations. In addition, it currently has well over 500 in-person offices and over 200 mobile-outreach service units that operate in remote and isolated areas. Since its launch in 2005, Service Canada's main goal has been to provide an integrated, one-stop service network for Canadians.¹² This vision was adopted in response to complaints about the Government of Canada's fragmented services, delayed processes, and the difficulty in finding information. The strategy to realize the vision involves three key tasks:

- consolidating channels
- ensuring consistency across various channels
- integrating services.

Consolidating and Aligning Channels

When Service Canada was launched, the Government of Canada was using 135 1-800 numbers and 23 call centres to respond to enquiries. Service Canada's initial task was to simplify the system, first, by consolidating its telephone service; and, second, by aligning its channels.

By integrating the services of its 1 800 O-Canada line and the call centres Service Canada was quickly able to reduce the 1-800 numbers to 12. This, in turn, allowed for standardized hours of delivery and the answering of one million more calls with the same resources.

A second task was to ensure that the information it delivered across its four service channels (internet, telephone, service counters and email) was consistent. Satisfaction surveys show repeatedly that citizens expect reliable, consistent and timely information, whatever channel they use. Moreover, if they are free to choose between these channels, consistency will be an essential condition for further progress toward such goals as the deeper integration of services or more personalized services.

Ultimately, ensuring consistency comes down to a basic point: all service providers must have access to the same information, both about the services they are offering and the clients they are serving. Service Canada's strategy was straight-forward: develop an integrated, online presence that allows employees to access information from the same sources, whatever channel the client is using.

The Internet thus provides the unifying link that makes consistency across channels possible. It is, of course, critical that the sources available to service providers through this link are integrated, the content is up-to-date and accurate, and service providers know how and where to access it. Management of its information resources thus is a critical concern for Service Canada. It requires effective and ongoing efforts to work together across the organization, and with other departments and governments whose services it may be delivering.

Integrating Services

The more challenging task in achieving Service Canada's vision lies in integrating services. Broadly speaking, there are three stages in the evolution of integrated services: **co-location, streamlined access and personalized service.**

Co-location is when multiple services can be accessed from a single point of contact, such as a service counter, portal or telephone. For example, many people who are applying for employment insurance also want to upgrade their skills. At a Service Canada office they can apply for EI and speak to a service agent about opportunities for available training programs, rather than going to separate offices and dealing with different people.

But co-location is only the first step toward integration. Step two focuses on **streamlining access** to services.

Consider again a person who is applying for employment insurance, but also wants to upgrade his or her skills. Ideally, government sponsored training programs would anticipate this connection by making the process ‘seamless,’ in the sense that clients looking for both services wouldn’t have to provide the same information more than once, fill out multiple forms to get related services, or deal with different service providers. The key to making this possible is better information-sharing between programs, departments and governments.

Finally, as a third step, services would become flexible enough to allow service providers to create **personalized services** by tailoring a package of services to meet the particular circumstances and needs of the client. Thus someone who was applying for employment insurance and wanted to upgrade his or her accounting skills, but who lived in a rural community where the course was not offered, might be able to take the training online or through a distance education facility.

Something like this vision of citizen-centred service has been adopted by high-performing governments around the world. Many of them have made significant progress by consolidating and aligning channels, and co-locating services, but the goal of integrating services has proved unexpectedly challenging in at least four ways.

INTEGRATING SERVICES: ISSUES AND OPTIONS

Clustering

Service Canada’s key strategy for achieving integration is based on ‘clustering’ or ‘bundling’ services for specific client groups. Service Canada now clusters services in a number of key areas, including:

- families
- youth
- workers, the unemployed, and employers
- seniors
- official language minority communities
- newcomers to Canada
- Aboriginal people, with particular emphasis on urban Aboriginal people
- people with disabilities.

Questions have been raised about how accurately these clusters reflect real and reliable patterns in how the public uses services. While there is a certain common sense appeal to the approach, there are also concerns that many services that get clustered under a theme such as Youth are only rarely accessed together by young people, while others get left out. In short, there are concerns that the content of these clusters is often arbitrary. Supporters reply that these concerns can

be addressed through further and better research on clients’ habits and needs.

Information-Sharing

If access to services is to be streamlined, information should be required only once. Yet this goal has been elusive. One problem is the incompatibility of legacy systems, many of which are simply unable to share information. However, this issue can and is being solved through investment in new technology. The bigger issue is around privacy regulations, which often prevent officials from sharing personal information across program boundaries, to say nothing of departments or levels of government.

Governments have discussed the issue for years, but a breakthrough may be near. In Canada, a pan-Canadian Task Force was recently established to develop a strategy for identity management and authentication. The goal was to clear the pathway for the development of more seamless, cross jurisdictional, citizen-centric, multi-channel service delivery.

The Task Force’s final report, titled *A Pan-Canadian Strategy for Identity Management and Authentication*, was submitted in 2007.¹³ Recommendations include a set of Pan-Canadian IdM&A guiding principles; a framework that would lay the foundation for development of interoperable standards, guidelines, models and architecture; a proposal for an interim governance structure; and an action plan for moving forward.

This work, particularly the framework, is now being incorporated into various projects across the country. For example, Service BC’s Electronic Identity Information Management program has used the new tools to allow healthcare workers in different regions of the province to share patient health records. Projects like this are setting the stage for a much wider application of the tools across public sector organizations in BC and elsewhere.¹⁴

Bureaucracy

Efforts to advance integration often get bogged down in process. Typically, officials from Service Canada might meet with their counterparts, say, from programs related to seniors, to discuss ways to streamline services or make them more flexible. Once they agree on some proposals, they return to their respective departments to get approval. This, in turn, means the proposals now have to move up the chain of command within the various departments. However, by the time they come back (often months later), significant changes may have been incorporated. As a result, when officials return to the negotiating table to compare results, all too often they have to start over again. In short, integrating programs through intra- and intergovernmental negotiations has

proved to be a formula for endless process, often with little real progress.

As a result, over the last few years there has been considerable interest in using case managers and ‘system navigators’ as an alternative to such negotiations. In this view, the challenge is to train people who:

- can interact with the client to assess their needs;
- are familiar enough with the range of programs that they can help clients find the ones that best meet their needs; and
- help assemble the right services into the right package and help the client access them.

This approach can result in a major improvement in how services are delivered and many governments are showing interest in it. On the other hand, it does little to make services more flexible or streamlined. They remain in their silos. As long as this is the case, ‘personalisation’ will be limited to finding services that can be taken ‘off the shelf’ and put together to form the best possible package, given the client’s needs. The more ambitious idea of integration as a way to make particular services mesh with one another in ways that would better respond to the client’s needs thus recedes.

Service Relationships

The fourth and biggest obstacle to integration arises from what we can call service relationships. In fact, government services fall into two very different categories, which should be clearly distinguished when it comes to integration. We can call the first class ‘transactional’ services. This is where government is making some discrete thing available to the public, such as a license, a passport, a bit of information, or a process for paying a parking ticket. The relationship is not unlike that between a customer and a shopkeeper. The customer enters, chooses what he or she wants to buy, pays the shopkeeper, and leaves. Once the transaction is completed, the service is finished.

Much of the work on citizen-centred service focuses on transactional services, which, it is now clear, have been the ‘low-hanging fruit’ of the service delivery revolution. They are good candidates for service improvement because there is broad agreement among the public on how to improve them. From a service delivery perspective, what the public looks for in such services are things like timeliness, affordability, accessibility, reliability, courteousness, and so on. As we saw above, initiatives like the UK’s Customer Service Excellence program or Canada’s Common Measurement Tool have put much effort into researching, testing and establishing these ‘drivers of satisfaction.’ As a result, we now know that they are a reliable guide to improving

service quality. Officials can use them to assess where and how a cluster of services will be improved, say, by streamlining access or making the services more flexible. In short, when it comes to transactional services, officials often have a pretty good idea what they need to do to advance citizen-centred service, even if obstacles such as privacy or bureaucracy prevent them from doing it.

But many government programs and services involve much more than transactions. Services such as the rehabilitation of young offenders, training and skills development, patient-doctor relationships, career counseling, education, or family support, usually involve long-term relationships, which can have high levels of personal involvement between the client and the service provider. We can call such relationships **client relationships** to distinguish them from transactional ones. Client services do not follow the same logic as transactional ones. In such cases, the drivers of satisfaction are not an authoritative guide to quality service.

Consider a counselor who deals with troubled youth. Suppose the overarching goal of this service is to help such young people become autonomous and productive members of society. Approved methods for achieving that goal may require changes in how the service is ‘delivered’ over time. For example, if the client shows signs of insecurity or self-doubt, the counselor may need to respond with support and encouragement. At other points in the relationship he or she may need to challenge the client in order to motivate him or her to assume a new level of personal responsibility or commitment. All this may be done with the sincere and well-founded aim of meeting the client’s needs and achieving the goal. Nevertheless, at times the client may disapprove of the approach, perhaps intensely. Still, this does NOT mean that the quality of the service is bad. Nor should the counselor just cede to the client’s wishes. Sometimes challenging him or her is exactly the right thing to do, even though the client disapproves. In short, the client’s judgment about the quality of the service is not the final authority because he or she may be misinformed about the service; he or she may not fully understand or accept the goal of the service; he or she might be mistaken about his or her best interests or needs; or he or she may simply dislike or distrust the service provider. All of these will influence the client’s view of the quality of the service, perhaps dramatically.¹⁵

The key point here is that client-relationships are dynamic and interactive in a way that transactional ones are not. As a result, they are often also intimate and personal in a way that transactional ones are not.¹⁶ Clients’ views about the quality of this interaction and intimacy will critically affect their level of satisfaction with the service. However, as the example shows, their satisfaction should not be

regarded as an authoritative test for quality. Indeed, client satisfaction is often a very poor guide to improving client services. In client relationships, a whole range of other criteria come into play.

This brings us back to the idea that a new stage in the evolution of service reform is emerging and that it is primarily about building public trust. According to Accenture, in this new stage the service agenda will be defined by service that builds an implicit trust between citizens and their government. ‘The implications of building trust can be seen as a virtuous circle: trust in government builds a more connected populace, whose true needs inform the development of more effective policy, implemented via excellent service, resulting in a strengthening of trust. And the cycle repeats’. Accenture’s picture of the service relationship between governments and the public as a virtuous circle based on trust draws on earlier work by Heintzman and Marson on the public sector value chain, which asserts that people, service and trust are linked.¹⁷

In the three years since Accenture speculated about a new stage, the limitations of the existing service delivery model have become increasingly apparent. In particular, the model does not lend itself to client-services. A tool like the UK’s customer service excellence may do a good job of testing for transactional aspects of, say, a doctor-patient relationship, such as how long the patient has to sit in the waiting room before seeing the doctor, or how long he or she must wait before getting an appointment, but it tells us little if anything about how to test or improve the interactive aspect of it. On the contrary, it treats all service delivery as essentially transactional.

This does not mean we should abandon the existing model in favour of some new one. When it comes to transactional services (or transactional aspects of a client service), tools like customer service excellence are reliable and effective; and there is still much good work to be done applying them to government services. The service delivery revolution is hardly over—even at the transactional level. The challenge is to enrich or broaden the model in ways that recognize and accommodate the special character of client services. What sort of criteria do we need to guide us in this task? Is there some equivalent to customer service excellence’s ‘drivers of satisfaction’ that applies to client relationships? In fact, the idea that the next phase of service reform is about building public trust points us in just the right direction.

A CO-DESIGN APPROACH TO CLIENT-SERVICES

The place to focus our attention is on the interactive nature of client relationships, which is what makes them different from transactional ones. Client relationships

are, as we say, a two-way street. By contrast, a transactional relationship is essentially a one-way street. It is a means to the end of *delivering* something to the customer. We could almost say that, in such a relationship, the less interaction, the better. The customer has no special interest in the service provider beyond getting the service. In a client relationship, however, the relationship with the service provider is an integral part of the service. The quality of the service is therefore deeply affected by the nature of the interaction.

To put this differently, in a citizen-centred approach, the relationship must be balanced. Neither the client nor the service provider should have too much influence or control. We have already seen why it is wrong to let too much turn on client satisfaction; but nor should we let too much turn on what the service provider thinks. Indeed, this is precisely the kind of paternalism that client-centred approaches seek to overcome. For example, ‘patient-centred’ approaches to medical care emerged in response to the traditional, paternalistic relationship between doctors and their patients. They aim at building a more interactive and balanced relationship by starting from the assumption that the patient has a major role to play in promoting his or her own healing and wellness. Helping patients recognise and assume this responsibility is an important part of the doctor’s role. This, in turn, means the doctor must treat the patient’s views on his or her health and wellness with respect, rather than dismissing or ignoring them on the grounds that the doctor is the expert. A client-centred approach to client services rests on the same basic principle:

Both the client and the service provider have a role to play in, and a contribution to make to, the achievement of the goals of the service.

Are there some ground rules for how such a relationship should be managed? The answer is yes, and, in fact, they are well known. In everyday life we manage these relationships all the time. Indeed, most of our relationships involve mutual responsibilities and require give-and-take, including family relationships, working relationships, friendships and membership in the community. One of the most important tools for managing such relationships is dialogue and deliberation. When things are uncertain or tensions arise, we seek to clarify and resolve them by questioning one another’s views (and our own). We look for evidence and benchmarks to test competing views. We expect consistency in one another’s reports and stories. When differences arise around more subjective things like values or priorities, we seek agreement through compromise or we make trade-offs. In short, we have all kinds of time-honored tools for testing, evaluating and adjusting the goals and practices that define our relationships. If we didn’t, we couldn’t function in a social setting.

A citizen-centred approach to client-relationships would build on this basic human skill. It would aim at establishing a meaningful dialogue between the service provider and the client. On the client's side, the dialogue must get beyond just an expression of wants and opinions. He or she must be ready, willing and able to listen, reflect, consider options, and accept change. On the service provider's side, the relationship must be more than a display of power or authority. He or she must be responsive to the client, respectful of their views, and flexible in his or her approaches. Ideally, it is a genuinely interactive relationship — a service partnership — which, in our view, is based on four critical success conditions:

- Trust
- Mutual Respect
- Openness
- Personal Responsibility.

As Accenture notes, trust is the starting point. Without it there will be no willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue and the relationship will stall. But trust is not the only condition needed to build and maintain a high-quality client relationship. Mutual respect ensures that there will be give and take. Openness encourages self-examination, the weighing of evidence, the willingness to compromise and the search for new opportunities and solutions. And a sense of personal responsibility is necessary to ensure that the dialogue is not just about talk; but that both parties will seek to understand their roles and fulfill their responsibilities. As we have already seen, in a client relationship, both parties have a role to play in achieving the goals of the service. Finally, these four factors are mutually reinforcing and, as the relationship evolves, strengthen and enhance one another.

In a citizen-centred approach to client relationships, a key goal of the dialogue is thus to help clients understand their role in making the service work, say, by making them more aware of their own situation and needs, clarifying the purpose of the service and the role of the service provider, or articulating issues in new and enlightening ways. In services such as counseling or family support, such dialogue can promote greater self-awareness, new perspectives and ideas, the development of new skills and relationships, and new sources of motivation for change. In short, the dialogue is an important learning — and even healing — experience that helps clients to recognise and accept some personal responsibility for their well-being and that of their community. Finally, through this dialogue, answers to questions around the objectives and scope of the service, or the methods of delivery, are adjusted over time and worked out by the service provider and the client together. In other words, in this model, integration is not something governments do on their own through intra- and intergovernmental

negotiations. It is something that happens naturally through dialogue with the clients.

To help us move to this new conception of citizen-centred service, **co-design can start to build trust and more effective relationships between government and its customers/clients.** As we will see in the next section, if co-design is the basis for a new stage in the service delivery revolution, the next big step is to develop a service delivery model that can bring about the kind of realignment of the relationship between government and citizens needed to make it work.

INDIVIDUAL VS. COLLECTIVE

We have been talking about client-relationships as though they are always between individuals, but many client-relationships are between groups or communities who are the clients, and organizations or governments who are the service providers. Further, many — perhaps most — of these relationships are acted out at both the individual and collective levels at the same time. Healthcare is a good example.

On the one hand, all governments have a long-term, client-relationship with their publics on health services. Thus when the minister of health gives a speech on the future of health services, or answers questions in Question Period, he or she is interacting with the public who, as the users of the system, are the minister's clients. It is widely recognized that this is a relationship of trust, even if the quality of this relationship is sometimes in doubt. At the same time, individual members of the public also interact directly with the government (or its agents) as a service provider, say, by receiving specific benefits under Medicare, such as drugs or hospital care.

By the same token, if we are persuaded that co-design can help to conceptualize how client relationships should be managed — i.e. as a partnership — we will also accept that the concept applies at both the individual and group or community levels.

However, when it comes to implementing co-design, some may pause. Perhaps they will find it easier to see how this would work at the individual than the collective level. It may also be easier to limit co-design to designing arrangements for new ways to deliver services, without providing scope to engage in co-design of policy issues. After all, in areas such as health or community and correctional services, service providers have been experimenting with co-design for years. For example, a patient-centred approach to the doctor-patient relationship is now widely accepted. Most doctors agree that patients have a critical and authoritative role to play in promoting their own health.

But is this approach practical at the collective level? In particular, is it practical for governments?

It's worth noting that, historically, governments have given very little thought to the interactive nature of client services. They certainly have not viewed them as a partnership. Indeed, as the citizen-centred revolution makes clear, governments barely even concerned themselves with the quality of transactional services, which explains why citizen-centred service really was a revolution.

So why does this need to change now? Why do we need to focus attention on interaction and begin developing service partnerships? The answer lies in something we can call **the holistic turn** and the new policy environment that it has created.

THE HOLISTIC TURN

It is now commonplace to view policy from a holistic perspective. A striking example is found in work around the determinants of health. When policy experts talked about health 25 years ago, they focused mainly on the role the health system played in curing illness and healing injury. At some point, experts began to recognize that, instead of waiting till people were sick or injured before taking action, it would be better to put more emphasis on **preventing** illness and **promoting** wellness. Prevention, as the old saying goes, is worth a pound of cure.

What the experts didn't realise was that this apparently simple shift in thinking would transform how we think about public health. It raised all sorts of new questions about what it means to be healthy:

- What is the difference between wellness and health?
- Is wellness more than a physical condition?
- How is it related to other factors, such as stress in the workplace, cultural background or income levels?
- Who is responsible for promoting wellness?
- How should governments marshal their resources to promote it?

Over the last two decades, questions like these have linked wellness to the discussion of issues in many other policy fields. Analysts have identified how a wide range of social, cultural, environmental and economic factors interact to influence public health. For example, we now know that there is a connection between health and income, so that people with low incomes have higher rates of diabetes. Two decades later, policy fields that used to be viewed as essentially distinct from Health are now seen as connected to it in all kinds of ways. Policy analysts refer to this interconnectedness as **complexity**. In essence, to say an issue is complex is to say that its causes and solutions involve a variety of links to other

policy fields. These are often hidden from view and surprising in their origins.

Of course, the holistic turn in policy thinking is not confined to health policy. Most policy fields now look at issues holistically, including training, skills development, and education, transportation, crime prevention, economic development and the environment. Moreover, this shift in thinking is now pushing governments to draw some far-reaching conclusions about the nature of the policy process itself, three of which should be noted here:

- **Good Policy is Comprehensive:** Good planning and policy development in major policy fields should be comprehensive, in the sense that it should take important links to other policy fields into account.
- **Real Progress Requires Public Participation:** Complex problems are bigger than government in the sense that their solution requires effort and action on the part of stakeholders and citizens. Consider safe streets. This takes more than good laws and police. It takes an informed and engaged citizenry who work together to report crime, discourage drinking and driving, and monitor their children's whereabouts. The public has a significant role to play in solving a range of issues, from literacy to climate change. In order to meet this condition, contemporary policy-making aims to engage the public more fully in all stages of the policy process.
- **Every Community is Different:** Issues that look similar on the surface are often very different below the surface. For example, research shows that the profile of homeless people in the Canadian cities of Winnipeg, Vancouver and Toronto is different. As a result, so are the causes and solutions of the problem. While this does not mean there is nothing useful to say about homelessness at a state/provincial or national level, it does mean that good policy making must allow for real flexibility in solutions and implementation at a variety of levels.

Recognition and acceptance of these three principles is growing. As it does, the interest in new ways of developing and delivering both policy and programs and services is also growing. In general, the trend is to make both the policy process and service delivery more 'bottom-up' or collaborative.

For the purposes of this paper, the principal lesson here is that, if governments fail to move to a partnership approach to client services, they will become increasingly ineffective at achieving the goals of those services. As we have just seen, goals such as safe streets, a healthy population, sustainable development, life-long learning, or a highly skilled labour force all require **working together and alignment** between government(s), citizens, communities and stakeholders. Governments cannot

achieve them on their own. Everyone has a role to play. Co-design can encourage and provide an opportunity for this participation to begin.

Yet the traditional model for delivering client services actually discourages the public from assuming its share of the responsibility for the goals. Indeed, the very idea that government **delivers** client services already positions government as the principal decision-maker, problem solver and service provider. In this relationship, there is little room for the kind of dialogue that is necessary for real interaction or a real partnership. In short, the relationship is conceived as transactional. If the next phase of the service delivery revolution is about client services, co-design and partnerships in delivery, the primary challenge will be to realign the relationship in a way that rewards the public for working together with service providers, both at the individual and collective levels. For its part, government must learn how to engage the public as a partner, rather than treating them as passive consumers of its programs and services.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AS A MODEL

At the Public Policy Forum, our work on public engagement focuses on developing dialogue processes that can support the movement towards partnership relationships, including using co-design as a step along the way.¹⁸ In our view, public engagement is a new way of thinking about how government works together with stakeholders, communities and ordinary citizens to achieve societal goals and/or solve complex issues. Co-design encourages stakeholders, communities and ordinary citizens to get involved in the design process. It can provide a primary stimulant to working to build deeper engagement and true partnership arrangements.

In the public engagement approach, empowerment and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. Exploring them together is a critical part of the dialogue process. Rather than just asking clients to give their views on a particular issue, the process is designed to encourage them to reflect, discuss, challenge, and be challenged; to weigh competing priorities and to decide which ones are really most important; to make trade-offs with others who receive the same services; and to identify their respective roles in achieving the goals of the service.

Government is a full participant in this process, not just an observer. It seeks to work with citizens to help them resolve issues. It therefore must be flexible in its approach and willing to consider new ways to do things, as they come up with new solutions. In practice, this means the process should terminate in a *plan of action* that assigns responsibilities to both government and the

public. By getting government to commit to actions the process links the dialogue directly to decision-making. By getting the clients to commit to actions, it invests them with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the solutions. The goal is thus to build a real partnership by working together. This is an iterative process, which, over time, will lead to an ongoing realignment and integration of the policies, programs and services within government departments.

Traditional consultation processes fall far short of this. They aim at little more than getting citizens to provide feedback to government. It is then up to government to decide how to act on the findings. This only reinforces the paternalism in the existing service culture, which tends to view government as the primary owner of the problem, and the primary problem solver.

So in public engagement government gradually assumes the role of enabler and partner, while transferring some of the responsibility for finding and implementing solutions back to citizens. This is NOT about absolving government of its responsibilities or off-loading them on the public. It is about finding a better balance between the respective roles of government and the public in solving issues, one that gives citizens a real sense of control over the programs and services they receive in exchange for a willingness on their part to take on more responsibility for solving issues. Co-design can help to begin this journey.

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that not every relationship is a client-relationship; not every service requires public engagement. Our public engagement framework recognises that many services are transactional and that traditional government decision-making, supported by tools such as customer service excellence, provides the right approach to service improvement. The Public Policy Forum Framework provides a rule for deciding when public engagement is appropriate and when traditional decision-making will do.

A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO CO-DESIGN AND ENGAGEMENT

This approach to public engagement and service delivery reform places a big emphasis on intergovernmental cooperation and community partnerships. This is a natural consequence of a co-design and partnership approach. When governments call on citizens to discuss issues in areas like public health, job creation or protection of the environment, citizens usually pay little attention to jurisdictional boundaries. Nor do they want to be engaged two or three times by different orders of government on issues they see as interconnected. When

they propose solutions and/or make plans to take action on such issues, they rightly expect all governments to work together with them. Indeed, if governments are talking about the need for greater alignment between stakeholder groups, and greater involvement from citizens, it is hard to see how they can avoid the conclusion that they must learn to work well together, themselves.

When it comes to client services, we think local governments may have a special role to play. In particular, they are often well positioned to assume a lead role on public engagement, for at least three reasons. First, their proximity to the public, and to community-based organisations, positions them as the most effective platform from which to launch engagement processes. Second, the public's strong sense of membership in and commitment to their communities is often a powerful incentive for citizens to participate in dialogue and, ultimately, commit to action.

Third, as we saw in our discussion of the holistic turn, every community is different and effective solutions must reflect such differences. The public has first-hand experience and knowledge of how the issues are connected at the local level. They are able to speak authoritatively about how these connections are at work in their personal lives, families, businesses and communities, which, in turn, makes an invaluable contribution to finding the right solutions, and to mobilizing community members around them. An effective engagement process that aims at building real, sustainable solutions must probe and capture the lessons from the community level, as well as state/provincial and national ones.

Public engagement could become the basis for a new working relationship between local governments and state/provincial and federal ones. Many local governments have been experimenting with public engagement for years, at both the political and public service levels. For example, many municipalities, such as the Canadian City of Hamilton, Ontario, have long-term visions based on robust public consultation exercises. In the Australian State of Victoria, all communities are required to have community plans, which, for some, like the Golden Plains Shire, are already ambitious public engagement processes.¹⁹

Federal and state/provincial governments in Canada and Australia could build on this existing capacity by collaborating with local governments on public engagement in key policy areas, such as health or the environment. In this arrangement, local governments would act as a kind of 'gateway' to the public, serving as intermediaries between the public and federal and/or state governments. This 'single-window' approach could lead to better policy outcomes in a wide range of areas, from reducing rates of preventable diseases

through healthy living to reducing carbon emissions through more environmentally friendly lifestyles. This, in turn, could yield significant savings for federal and state/provincial governments.

In particular, many of the issues facing Australia's Human Services Portfolio would fit well with this approach and, indeed, interesting steps have already been undertaken by some departments, such as The National Compact from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. As this paper tries to make clear, the Department of Human Services' interest in a co-design approach is a natural fit with a community approach.

Finally, it should also be clear from this paper that recommendations in the APSC's Blueprint document, such as more co-location or a national survey to assess citizens' satisfaction with government service delivery, are to be highly encouraged. Nevertheless, it should also be recognised that, for the most part, such measures remain focused on the reform and improvement of transactional services. They will do little to build new capacity, knowledge or culture-change to support co-design. Progress on this front requires a willingness to move discussion and practice to a new stage of the service delivery revolution. While much work remains to be done on traditional, single-window service, we hope this does not prevent effort and experimentation from beginning on co-design as well.

CONCLUSION

The Welsh report *Beyond Boundaries*²⁰ has been praised as a comprehensive, thoughtful study in the development of effective, citizen-centred service delivery models. It is a useful guide to some central issues and current thinking in service transformation. Commenting on the overall findings of their study, the authors arrive at the conclusion that 'the public sector is in the midst of a sea change: a fundamental transformation from the model inherited from the post-war years to one sustainable in the early twenty first century.'²¹

This sea change, they go on to tell us, is about the changing relationship between services and the public. Increasingly, the public not only expect services to be more accessible and reliable; they expect them to meet their personal needs. Citizens are moving out of their traditional role as 'passive recipients to that of engaged consumers' and service delivery models can and should evolve to meet this. 'Increasingly complex social goals, especially preventive measures, cannot be achieved by doing things *to* people, as opposed to doing things *with* them'.²²

This article arrives at much the same conclusion: Governments are in a state of transformation. Co-location and the consolidation and alignment of service channels

to support single-window service delivery are important, but they are only one stage in an ongoing process. Co-design brings us to the threshold of a whole new stage. While this paper takes a step toward defining it, in the end we can do little more than scratch the surface. Making co-design work will require all kinds of new knowledge, structures, and practices, from multi-disciplinary, cross-departmental teams, to Web 2.0 technologies, to new approaches to budgeting and performance management.

And then there is the question of the sorts of skills, knowledge and training public servants will need to do their jobs effectively in this changing environment. Whether we think of government's access to and control over personal information; the critical role government service providers will play in advising and supporting citizens as they personalise the services they need; or the facilitative role they will play in helping the public assume a more active and engaged role in decision-making, it is clear that the public's trust in government and government officials will be an increasingly critical success factor in the future. While public services must change to meet these challenges, in the end, the public must be confident that the changes are fully consistent with the public services' traditional commitment to professionalism, neutrality and service to the public.

With that said, let us bring this discussion to a close by saying that, if, as we believe, co-design and public engagement are destined to become a central part of governance practices in the 21st century, Canada and Australia would be natural allies in developing the ideas, building the capacity, and moving the project forward. Our two countries have much in common, from federalism and parliamentary government, to our colonial backgrounds, heavy reliance on agriculture and natural resources, and indigenous peoples. We look forward to the opportunity to work together as we go.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration* available at www.apsc.gov.au.
- 2 See, for example, 'Service Delivery Reform: Designing a system that works for you,' a speech to the National Press Club, Canberra, by the Hon Chris Bowen, Minister for Human Services. Available at: <http://www.mhs.gov.au/media/speeches-transcripts/091216-service-delivery-reform.html>.
- 3 Service New Brunswick was established in the late 1990s as part of a merger of the land registry duties of the New Brunswick Geographic Information Corporation, and various other public services provided by functional departments within the provincial government. SNB provides virtually all direct public services on behalf of the Government of New Brunswick as a single point of contact. SNB was the first public-sector, multi-service agency to be established in Canada. Many governments in other jurisdictions have adopted a similar model.
- 4 A similar idea is now being debated in the UK around the term 'co-production.' See, for example, *The Challenge of Co-Production: How equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services*, by David Boyle and Michael Harris, available at: http://api.ning.com/files/J0uEkmYcLy-3NedIv4w-V6sXDU---EfxbnadhW11DynRo9IeaL24X6H9DctfqFZlp*ITFS0mFpKhvESdAWy-vvivEj2hmjGP/nefTheChallengeofCoproductio.pdf.
- 5 The government fact sheet 'Co-Design: Delivering 'Easy, High Quality, Works for You' Services' goes on to say that a co-design approach will ensure:
 - genuine partnerships are built with the community
 - the community has a real and ongoing voice at the table
 - change delivers a balance of what the Australian Government, the Human Services portfolio, and the community want to achieve

- the end user is involved in the planning, development and implementation of solutions,
 - outputs are user friendly and meet the end user's needs
 - changes and new products integrate smoothly with existing systems.
- 6 Golden Plains Shire, for example, sees community planning as 'enabling communities to identify, find solutions and implement projects that address social, environmental, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, cultural and economic goals, issues and opportunities. The key point... is that planning is not done by Council for its communities, but by communities themselves.' From *Community Planning – The Golden Plains Experience*.
- 7 See *Putting the public first - partnering with the community and business to deliver outcomes*, at <http://www.dtf.wa.gov.au/cms/content.aspx?id=3243>.
- 8 See <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/communities/proserv/nationalcompact/Pages/default.aspx#10>.
- 9 The term 'citizen-centred' may suggest this movement is focused only on services directed at individuals as private citizens. That would be wrong. It is equally focused on businesses and non-governmental organizations, who also receive government services. The word 'citizen' can be used interchangeably with 'client,' and, in this paper, often is.
- 10 For information on Charter Mark, see:
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/new_standard.aspx
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/207649/tg08_part1.pdf
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/corp/assets/publications/reports/chartermark/cm_review.pdf.
- 11 See http://www.accenture.com/xdoc/canada/acn_2006_govt_report_FINAL_sm.pdf.
- 12 See http://142.236.154.112/eng/about/reports/ar_0506/introduction.shtml
<http://www.innovations.harvard.edu/cache/documents/6879/687992.pdf>.
- 13 The final report includes an overview of identity management in Canada and is available at: http://www.cio.gov.bc.ca/local/cio/idim/documents/idma_final_report.pdf.
- 14 See http://www.microsoft.com/casestudies/Case_Study_Detail.aspx?casestudyid=4000007158.
- 15 This point is effectively explored in the film *Good Will Hunting*, where the counselor, played by Robin Williams, alternatively strokes and cajoles his brilliant but troubled young charge, played by Matt Damon.
- 16 The word 'intimate' feels a bit awkward here, as it has overtones of romantic involvement, but a better substitute is hard to find. For clarity, as used here, it indicates significant levels of personal trust that go beyond what is usually involved in transactional services.
- 17 See <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rp/pstc-eng.asp>.
- 18 For a discussion of the Forum's approach to public engagement, see *Rethinking the Public Policy Process: A public engagement framework*, at: <http://www.ppforum.ca/search/results/Rethinking%20the%20Public%20policy%20process>.
- 19 See Endnote 6 above.
- 20 See: <http://newydd.cymru.gov.uk/dpsp/strategy/boundaries/beyondboundaries.pdf?lang=en>.
- 21 Beyond Boundaries, page 6.
- 22 Beyond Boundaries, page 3.