

The e-Citizen Charter as a Tool for Measuring Citizen Satisfaction on the Basis of Life Events

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Abstract: Assuming that citizen satisfaction is more dependent on solving citizens' problems than on delivery of specific public services as such, measurement should be focussed on the delivery chain. That's why in The Netherlands a surveying method has been developed which measures citizen satisfaction about the handling of life events, taking the quality requirements of the e-Citizen Charter as the criterion. The first survey, carried out in 2008 counts as the baseline. The general conclusions can be summarised as follows. The survey proved the value of the charter for satisfaction measurement purposes. The average satisfaction score for the service delivery chain is 6.7 (i.e. below the political target of 7.0). The main reason is an experienced lack of communication and cooperation between the government organisations involved. To remedy this, organisations have to jointly redesign their service delivery processes. As of 2009 the survey will be repeated annually. This paper describes the methodology used for the survey, results, follow up and conclusions.

1. Introduction

Almost any public organisation is carrying out customer satisfaction surveys. However, this generally concerns evaluation of the delivery of certain services or products, the implementation of policy or the general performance of an organisation as such.

Assuming that customer satisfaction is much more dependent on the smooth handling of a certain life event, evaluation should be focussed on the delivery chain which coincides with all steps to be taken to solve a citizen's needs.

That's why in The Netherlands a surveying method has been developed which measures citizen satisfaction about the handling life events, taking the quality requirements of the e-Citizen Charter as the criterion (see Annex). This survey will be carried out annually. Moreover on the basis of this national model, an application will be designed for local or sectoral implementation. The first survey counts as a baseline and was published in May 2008. This paper describes the methodology used for the baseline, results, follow up and conclusions.

2. Methodology

The Dutch government's aim as set out in its policy programme, is for public services to score at least 7.0 during the present term of office. This ambition by the Minister of the Interior, responsible for e-Government, focusses on the perceptions (i.e. questions or problems) of private citizens. The baseline was measured in the spring of 2008. The survey [1] looked at the services provided in connection with 55 life events, ranging from 'having a child', 'beginning a course', 'starting a business', 'long-term illness', 'going abroad', 'changing

housing situation' and 'being fined' to 'death of a nearest and dearest'. These events had a high recognition factor for respondents, who were selected on the basis of actual experience of the various events. Over 10,000 persons were screened, leaving a final net sample of 1,400 to take part in the survey. The results are thus representative of Dutch residents who had contacts with government in connection with one of the life events during the past twelve months.

The respondents were questioned on the items in the e-Citizen Charter. This is a code of conduct consisting of ten quality requirements for the relationship between the public and government in the modern digital society. The quality requirements have been formulated as citizens' rights and associated government duties. [2] For the purpose of the survey, the requirements were formulated in single evaluation statements to which the respondents could reply to what extent these were met.

The survey looked at life events in seven main categories: Education & Training; Business; Health & Care; Going abroad; Family; Housing & Environment; Work & Income. Within these categories, clusters of life events were identified. Actually, for the baseline measurement it was decided to compile 28 clusters from the 55 life events on which to draw conclusions. The clusters are events within categories that are related in terms of subject matter, but differ in phase or seriousness.

'Government' and 'government services' are complex concepts. Government in The Netherlands comprises over some 1,600 government agencies and services comprise over 3,000 government products. From the point of view of the public it is not always clear which government body is responsible for what service. The distinction between government and parastatal organisations is often also unclear. A private citizen with a query or problem wants the best possible service from government, not to be pushed from pillar to post. Given this principle, it makes sense that the survey did not assess individual government bodies but the entire range of government services. It therefore included evaluations of organisations which are not regarded as government under the common definition, e.g family doctors and post offices.

The services were assessed at three levels, starting with government as a whole. Respondents were asked mainly about their general impression, not specific experiences. The second level is that of the service provided by the 'chain' associated with a life event, i.e. the service experienced from organizations with which people come in contact in that connection. This is not a specific product but a 'combination of different but related activities, products and services to meet the needs of particular customers'. Lastly, there is the level of the service provided by the individual organization: this evaluates the service experienced from an organization that in many cases supplies 'only' a particular product. The aim of the survey was to find out about the service provided by the chain of government bodies. It does not enable representative conclusions to be drawn on the performance of individual organizations, though it does provide information at a higher level of aggregation

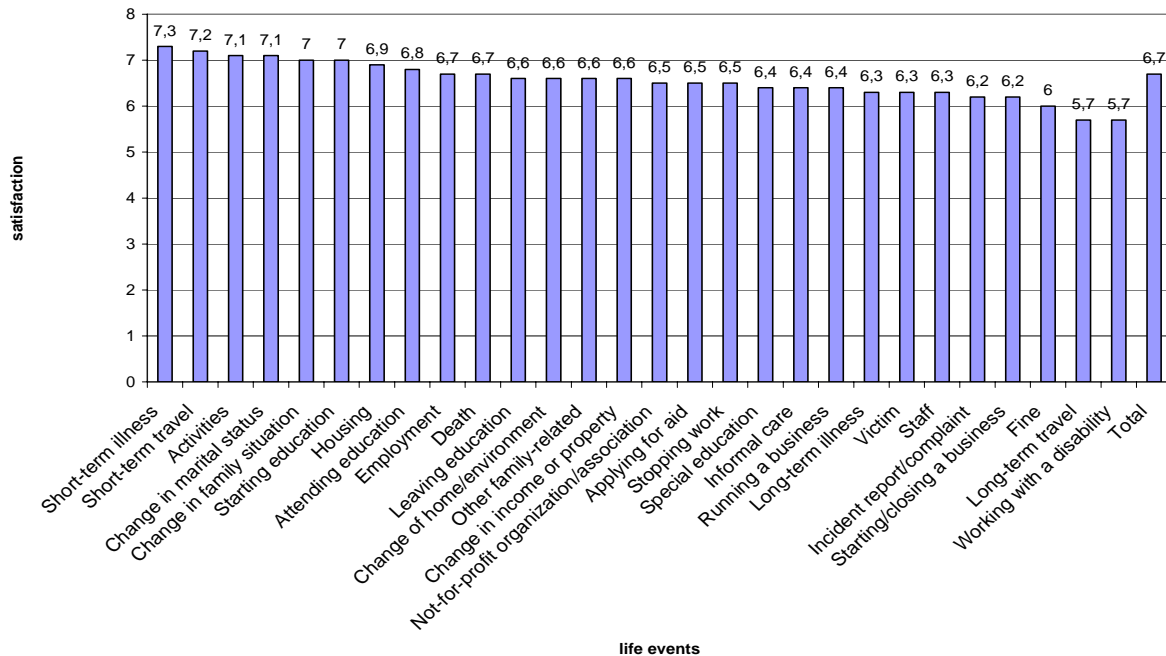
3. Results

3.1 Overall Rating

The individual organisations scored an average of 7.0 which tallies with the ratings these organisations (i.e. the main administering bodies and a number of municipal authorities) come up with in their own customer satisfaction surveys. The service provided by the chain however was rated only 6.7 and government as a whole just 6.4. We can conclude that government services are rated higher the more specific the level of service.

Satisfaction varies from one life event to another, as Figure 1 shows for each life event. There seems to be a strong correlation between the type of life event (how serious it is, how much it interferes with normal life, how long it lasts, and so on) and the evaluation of the government service provided.

Figure 1: Satisfaction Rates for Life Events (2008)



The people questioned had in general experienced 4 life events during the past twelve months involving contact with government (3 organizations on average). The composition of the chain varies substantially, depending on the type of event that the person has experienced. The survey shows that the performance of individual organizations is generally more than satisfactory, but something in the way they work together causes loss of quality. People who had contacts with more than one organization rated cooperation between the organizations concerned at 6.3. We find that these people often give a low rating for cooperation because they believe it is actually non-existent. They also say there is frequently a lack of communication between the organizations themselves or between the organization(s) and the private citizen, with the result that they have to keep filling in the same forms to provide information that the organizations already have. There is still a lot to be desired, then, from the point of view of the public.

3.2 Quality Requirements

The survey shows the value of the quality requirements for government services that it covered. Assuming that ratings for government services are determined largely by the extent to which people 'get what they wanted', we find they are also determined by the 'lead time' for the entire service process, the feeling of dependence, the possibility of choosing between organizations and the cooperation between the organizations. In particular, people not only gave a low rating for the 'active involvement' aspect (translated into the statement 'I was able to influence the way in which my problem was solved'), they also regarded it as an important criterion. Many of the comments made by respondents reflected a desire to be taken seriously, have their opinions listened to and be involved in decisions that at present are sometimes

taken over their heads. People may understand that they have to wait longer, but don't if it is not explained to them how long and, above all, why.

3.3 e-Citizen Charter Priority Matrix

The satisfaction about life events is based on the extent citizens experienced that the requirements of the e-Citizen Charter were met. The ten requirements got an average score on a scale of 1-5 points as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation of e-Citizen Charter Requirements (2008)

e-Citizen Charter Requirements	Rating by Citizens				Score 1 – 5
	% Good	% Neutral	% Poor	% N.A.	
<i>Contact</i>					
1 Choice of Channel	64	14	18	4	3,7
<i>Information</i>					
2 Transparent Public Sector	71	17	10	2	3,8
3 Overview of Rights & Duties	45	25	17	13	3,4
4 Personalised Information	65	16	12	7	3,7
<i>Transaction</i>					
5 Convenient Services	65	10	16	9	3,7
6 Comprehensive Procedures	47	21	18	15	3,4
7 Trust & Reliability	64	14	2	20	3,9
<i>Participation</i>					
8 Considerate Administration	42	18	10	30	3,6
9 Accountability & Benchmarking	28	28	15	29	3,2
10 Involvement & Empowerment	31	23	24	22	3,1

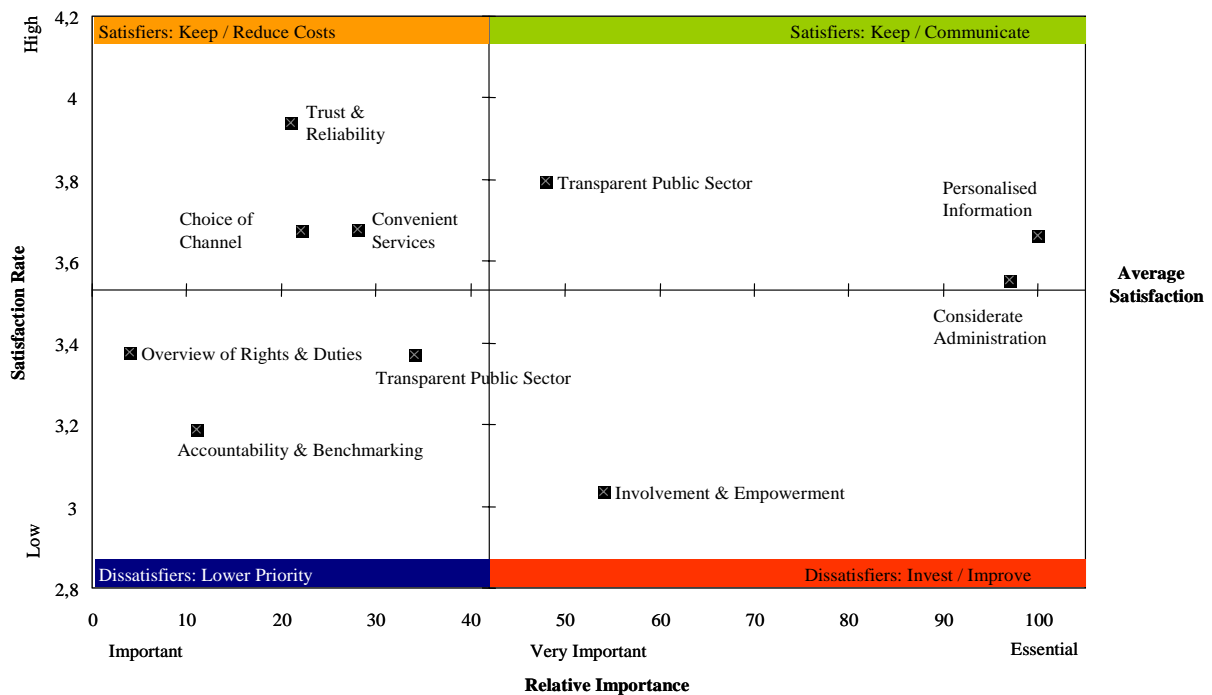
Table 1 shows that requirements number 3, 6, 9 and 10 scored rather low. But does this mean that these should be given special attention? Not necessarily so. The priority matrix indicates which requirements should tackled first.

A priority matrix (see Figure 2) is a graphical representation of a regression analysis. This explains to what extent a certain item (in this case one of the quality requirements) contributes to the overall rating of factor to be explained (in this case the life event under consideration). Thus the matrix shows which of the ten requirements have a high or a low impact on overall satisfaction. In the matrix the importance of the requirements is shown on the horizontal axis, whereas the rating is shown on the vertical axis. The requirements high on the vertical axis (i.e. 2, 7) are rated well, and the requirements to the right on the horizontal axis are considered to be important. Requirements in the lower right quadrant need to be given high priority (low rating, high importance). Requirements in the upper right quadrant should be seen as conditional: both considered important and rated well. If however its quality diminishes (e.g. when sensitive personal data are lost), this requirement will move to the lower left quadrant.

The priority matrix proves that requirement 4 (Personalised Information) is the most important: it contributes the most to the total score about the delivery chain. The rating is rather high (65% agrees). Therefore it doesn't need priority, rather attention for it should be continued, it should not be neglected. However, priority should definitely be given to requirement 10 (Involvement & Empowerment): the matrix shows a low rating for it, but at the same time citizens do consider this important. Requirement 8 (Considerate

Administration) is considered even more important, but the rating is average. Especially those who have strong opinions about this requirement, gave it much emphasis in their total evaluation of public service delivery.

Figure 2: Priority matrix e-Citizen Charter Requirements (2008)



3.4 Other results

People envisage different areas for improvement in each category. In the ‘Education and training’ category they regard a clear overview of rights and duties as an important area for improvement, and under ‘Family’ above all convenient services, e.g. only having to supply personal data once.

The first quality requirement in the e-Citizen Charter is ‘choice of channel’, i.e. people’s ability to choose how to do business with government, and the survey findings back this up. The channels most commonly used (counter and telephone) are also the ones that people like best. The digital channels (e-mail and Internet) are relatively popular. Letters are used (by government) more than people would like. The digital channel is developing rapidly (a growing number of services are provided by government through this medium) and a lot of people like to use it to communicate, though this is not so much the case with the less privileged target groups, i.e. the elderly and less well-educated. As these groups already make less use of government services than the better-educated and middle-aged, it is important to continue to provide the traditional channels (counter, telephone and letters).

The survey shows that people in their thirties and forties and households of three or more persons (generally families with young children) in particular use government services a lot. Heavy users (with eight or more life events involving contacts with government) are relatively well-educated, in paid employment in three-quarters of cases, and generally have an average or above-average income. They tend to live in the west of the Netherlands (in the provinces of North Holland, South Holland or Utrecht), outside the three major cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague). There are clear differences, however, between the ‘heavy users’ and those who rate government services as unsatisfactory. Those in the ‘dissatisfied’ group are on average older than the heavy users, less well-educated and tend to live in the south of

the country. They tend to be people cohabitating without children, or three-person households (mainly families with older children living at home).

4. Follow up

4.1 Citizenlink

The task to carry out the annual survey is entrusted to Citizenlink (Burgerlink). This is an initiative of the Dutch Government to improve the performance of the public sector by involving citizens. To that end Citizenlink promotes quality standards, measures citizen satisfaction and stimulates eParticipation. Citizenlink runs from 2008-2010 as part of ICTU, the Dutch implementation organisation for ICT and government.

Citizenlink continues the e-Citizen Charter (BurgerServiceCode) developed by the former eCitizen Programme [3]. This charter is a quality standard for eGovernment written from the citizen's perspective. It consists of 10 quality requirements for digital contacts, both in the field of information exchange, service delivery and policy participation. The charter has been adopted as a quality standard on all levels of Dutch government. How to implement the charter is explained in the eCC-Workbook. This is an instrument in an awareness and take-up campaign for politicians, managers and civil servants to stress the importance of:

- a common standard for quality requirements in order to support interoperability;
- cooperation between government agencies to guarantee integrated services;
- citizen centricity as a condition for take up and eInclusion.

The charter is not only the basis for the nationwide measurement of citizen satisfaction about service chain delivery in life events, but is also the evaluation criterion for the annual eParticipation Awards (www.epractice.eu/cases/clepa). The e-Citizen Charter is Winner of the European e-Democracy Award 2007 (Global e-Democracy Forum, Paris, October 2007) and Finalist of the European e-Government Awards 2007 (Ministerial eGovernment Conference, Lisbon, September 2007). Moreover it has received the EU Good Practice Label 2007. and is recommended by UN, OECD and Council of Europe. To date the eCitizen Charter has been translated in thirteen languages (www.epractice.eu/cases/ecc). Estonia has introduced its own e-State Charter based on the e-Citizen Charter. The National Audit Commission uses this charter to evaluate performance of Estonian government institutions.

4.2 Survey 2009

The results of this years' survey will become available in September 2009. In order to be able to compare results over time, the 2009 survey is identical with the 2008 one, except for two amendments. One consists of taking a larger sample per life event, which may better substantiate conclusions about certain less frequent life events. The other deals with an extra question whether or not a respondent was aware of the existence of, and if so did use, a specific portal on a life event. A number of government agencies have instituted a national portal on Bereavement which helps citizens to settle affairs with them by providing personalised information, including the assembling of a 'checklist' of things to do in this situation. It would be interesting to find out whether this kind service in cooperation is appreciated and leads to a higher level of satisfaction. Summary results of by the e-CitizenPanel indicate that this might well be the case. [4] The same holds for a portal on Care & Welfare which at present is being introduced on the municipal level in The Netherlands.

The approach on customer satisfaction measurement described has attracted attention from various sources. The User Satisfaction Survey EU27 singles out the Dutch method as a 'highly

interesting approach'. [5] Accenture's latest report on Leadership in Customer Service also calls the Dutch method a 'highly innovative and meaningful way'. [6]

5. Conclusions

The survey shows that loss of quality is caused particularly by lack of cooperation between government bodies when providing services associated with life events. The Ministry of the Interior and Citizenlink therefore aim to improve cooperation between government bodies based on the results of the survey.

The first step taken was singling out a life event with comparatively low level of satisfaction, i.e. Moving. Using the method of Customer Journey mapping, real life experiences with actual customers were 'mapped'. The results were discussed together with the most important chain partners, such as municipalities, the TaxOffice, the Cadastre, and a number of improvements to be implemented were agreed upon. [7] Subsequently another life event (i.e. Bereavement) is being tackled in the same way. Summary conclusions are that "life events" and "service chains" many times do not match because individual situations differ quite a lot. Moreover "chain partners" are not always aware of information provided or actions taken by others. And in many life events cooperation between public and private parties seems necessary.

Measurement of citizen satisfaction on the basis of life events discovers chain deficiencies and also provides solutions. The national survey 2009 will be used to go deeper into the possibilities of improving customer satisfaction by better cooperation and use of eGovernment tools. The method will also be made available to interested organizations wishing to survey 'their' part of the service delivery chain. In this connection a stimulus is also given to the development of web portals for life events.

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1. Choice of Channel

*As a citizen I can choose for myself in which way to interact with government.
Government ensures multi channel service delivery, i.e. the availability of all communication channels: counter, letter, phone, e-mail, internet.*

2. Transparent Public Sector

*As a citizen I know where to apply for official information and public services.
Government guaranties one-stop-shop service delivery and acts as one seamless entity with no wrong doors.*

3. Overview of Rights and Obligations

*As a citizen I know which services I am entitled to under which conditions.
Government ensures that my rights and duties are at all times transparent.*

4. Personalised Information

*As a citizen I am entitled to information that is complete, up to date and consistent.
Government supplies appropriate information tailored to my needs.*

5. Convenient Services

*As a citizen I can choose to provide personal data once and to be served in a proactive way.
Government makes clear what records it keeps about me and does not use data without my consent.*

6. Comprehensive Procedures

*As a citizen I can easily get to know how government works and monitor progress.
Government keeps me informed of procedures I am involved in by way of tracking and tracing.*

7. Trust & Reliability

*As a citizen I presume government to be electronically competent.
Government guarantees secure identity management and reliable storage of electronic documents.*

8. Considerate Administration

*As a citizen I can file ideas for improvement and lodge complaints.
Government compensates for mistakes and uses feedback information to improve its products and procedures.*

9. Accountability & Benchmarking

*As a citizen I am able to compare, check and measure government outcome.
Government actively supplies benchmark information about its performance.*

10. Involvement & Empowerment

*As a citizen I am invited to participate in decision-making and to promote my interests.
Government supports empowerment and ensures that the necessary information and instruments are available.*