"FRAMEWORK FOR DESIGNING & DELIVERING INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS"

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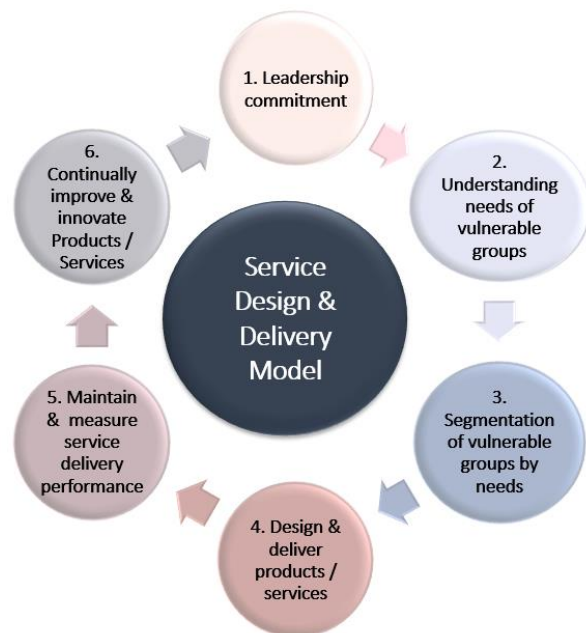
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Sadly, every society has vulnerable groups comprising of people living in extreme poverty, people with disabilities, children and youth with mental health issues, people affected due to natural or man–made disasters like wars and conflicts, homeless people etc. Vulnerable groups represent challenge to families, institutions and Governments. For Governments, the cost and effort to treat and care for people with vulnerabilities is high in terms of lost participation, lost productivity, high cost of social service etc.

As per Overseas Development Institute, UK[1,] 15 % of world's population i.e. about 1 billion people live with some form of disabilities. It does not have to be. People with disabilities have complex social, health and personal needs, which require innovative ways to design and deliver the services for them to ensure their development, growth and inclusion.

This paper proposes a holistic framework, with supporting tools and techniques, and real life examples to demonstrate the implementation and impact of proposed holistic framework. The proposed framework is comprehensive and developed based on proven global models, international standards and best practices. It includes how to better understand the needs and expectations of vulnerable people and use the information to design and deliver services meeting / exceeding their needs, expectations, and help, them grow and develop.

Governments around the world can consider adopting / adapting the proposed model for creating public service institutions (organizations) with a soul of service and deliver services to its citizen with a smile consistently in an efficient and effective manner.

Proposed Framework:

Figure 1 provides a simple and successful framework, deployed by all types and sizes of organizations to design and deliver services meeting / exceeding needs and expectations of customers on sustainable basis.
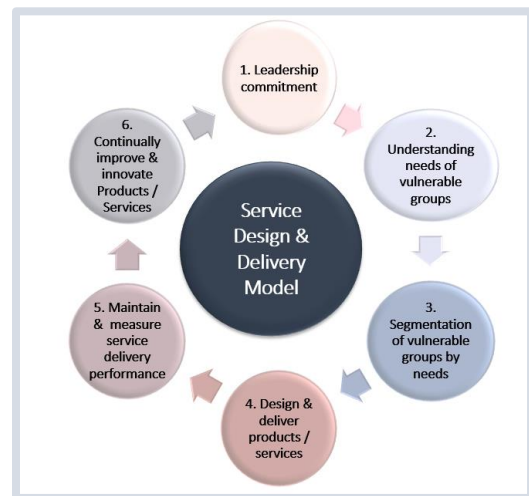

Figure 1: Framework for Designing & Delivering Innovative Public Services to Vulnerable Groups

1. Leadership Commitment

Customers (citizens), including people from vulnerable groups, expect high and specialized level of services from the government (Refer Figure 2)

- *To address their basic needs of social support such as shelter, skills, education, health care*
- *To help them become self-reliant*
- *To help them integrate into society*
- *To be treated with courtesy and respect*
- *To have more and easier access to government services*
- *To be serviced faster and in a timely and efficient manner*
- *Timely and user friendly communications throughout end to end customer journeys*
- *Services at lower fees*
- *Greater transparency, etc.*

Figure-2 : Citizens Expectations from the Government

Too often, citizens, including vulnerable groups, dealing with government feel left out / discriminated and experience high levels of inconvenience, inaccurate information, inconsistent delivery of services etc. leading to low levels of satisfaction, confidence and trust with Government. E.g. as per American Customer Satisfaction Index, satisfaction of customers with US Public Administration / Government[2] for year 2018 is 68.4, lowest as compared to all other industries such as   Retail Trade - 77.4, Finance & Insurance - 78.3, Manufacturing/ Non-Durable Goods - 81.1) etc. Similar performance trends exist over the last many years and satisfaction of citizens with the Government continues to lag behind private sector.

Leadership, at political and government department level, need to demonstrate personal commitment and visible involvement to champion and be role models for service. They have an important role in creating a culture of service and continual improvement and innovation in the public institutions. Some of the tools and techniques they can use are:

a) Establish a compelling vision and mission to serve vulnerable groups and enact laws supporting their vision and mission. E.g., UAE Government issued UAE Disability Act (Federal Law 29/2006) to protect the rights of People of Determination (People with Special Needs). This law stipulates that UAE's People of Determination (POD) have the same rights to work and occupy public positions. In addition, in year 2010 UAE ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

b) Create "organisation/ dedicated function" for serving vulnerable groups with a clear mandate: Establish a dedicated committee/ function within each Government department a clear mandate to develop policies, programs and services meeting the needs and expectations of people in vulnerable groups. E.g. Commander-in- Chief, Dubai Police, has established People of Determination (POD) Council reporting to him. In UAE, people with disabilities are called "People of Determination". Council is led by senior leader, a Colonel as Chairman, with 24 members from diverse functions within Dubai Police. POD

Council is complemented with five additional members comprising of two students (a boy and a girl) and three other members - one each from UK, India and UAE. This ensures a diverse and multicultural representation in POD Council. POD Council has a clear well defined mandate to focus on areas such as Health, Rehabilitation, Education, Employment, Social protection of PODs.

c) Establish and live values to create a culture of service excellence: As per Dr. Leonard Berry, author of book "Soul of Service", corporate values such as Joy, Innovation, Teamwork, Respect, Excellence and Integrity, are essential to create & sustain a culture of service excellence. However as per research study conducted by American Society for Quality & Forbes in year 2014, covering about 2300 executives & professionals, globally, 1 in 2 (50%) reported that values are not clearly understood throughout the organization. In light of this, it is very important that Leaders ensure values are understood by employees and leaders "Live them" by their actions and deeds and be role models for the same.

d) Define vulnerable groups: Ensure there is a clear definition of vulnerable groups such as people with physical and mental disabilities, homeless. Develop a database / central registry of PODs, provide them with unique identification system and have it integrated into Government Departments policies and programs E.g. UAE government have issued ID for People of Determination.

e) Develop Strategy using Balanced Score Card (BSC) / EFQM model: Leaders are in a way "Chief Strategy Officers" of their organisation and need to ensure strategy developed for serving the vulnerable groups is in line with their needs and expectations. Balanced Scorecard approach, developed by Dr. Robert Kaplan & Dr. David Norton, is very widely used technique in developing strategy and monitoring and reporting its performance. Another good approach to develop, communicate & monitor strategy is defined in criteria 2 "Strategy" of EFQM[3] model. People of Determination Council, Dubai Police developed it strategy 2016-2021 in line with UAE National strategy on POD with a focus on:

- Inclusion
- Protection
- Building capabilities
- Use of Smart services (Digital services)
- Collaborate

f) Provide resources: Leaders need to ensure required financial and non-financial resources are committed to execute strategy. Resources being scarce and must be utilized optimally as most of the countries use taxpayers money to deliver government services.

2. Understanding Needs & Expectations of Vulnerable Groups:

Needs of vulnerable groups of people are essentially a two-stage process: a) To address their basic needs. b) Become self-reliant once the basic needs are met. Governments can consider using well-established and proven tools as below (Figure 3) to better understand the needs and expectations of various segments of the vulnerable groups.

Tool	Purpose / Brief Details	Recommended Frequency
Market research studies	To understand the needs and expectations of vulnerable groups - current & potential covering all the segments.	A comprehensive study should be planned and conducted once every two to three years.
Focus group interviews	To receive service improvement ideas from vulnerable customers. It offers a fast and informal feedback on services by directed questioning of a small group (8-12) of customers focusing on specific topic.	To be done on a continuous basis say 4-6 times a year covering all segments of the vulnerable groups
Figure 3: Tools to understand needs & expectations of customers (vulnerable groups)		

3. Segment Customers as per Their Needs & Expectations

a) Identify different customer groups/ segments: Different customer groups have different needs and expectations. Using Market research technique Government departments can identify different customer groups. Customer segmentation will help service providers to group customers with similar needs into a "segment" so that service offerings can be customized accordingly. Sample segmentation of vulnerable groups can be Children, Pregnant women, Elderly people, Homeless people, People suffering disabilities, etc. Within a defined segment, sub segmentation is needed e.g. People with disabilities to be further sub divided by type of disability (vision impairment, deaf, hard of hearing, learning disability, mental illness, physical disability etc.). Design and delivery of service must consider the needs and expectations of each sub segment of specific customer group.

Market research studies should be done every couple of years, as customer needs are dynamic & service design and delivery needs to be aligned with customers' expectations.

4. Design and deliver services meeting the needs and expectations of various segments of customers

a) **Develop new and improved services:** Needs and expectations of different vulnerable sub groups should be considered in developing new or to improve current public services. It should focus on how the service will be availed / used by them. Such as bigger screens and use of bigger fonts in cell phones for people with vision impairment, ramps in public places and building for people with physical disabilities, buses with ramps enabling people using wheel chairs to board buses. To promote inclusion of POD, one of the innovative, interesting and successful initiative developed by POD Council, Dubai is to train PODs in Para Taekwondo. Objective of Para Taekwondo is to enhance the self-esteem of POD. This has helped increasing cognitive and movement abilities develop muscular and neurological harmony and visual movement harmony for people suffering from Autism / Dyslexia. This initiative has won several national awards.

b) **Use of latest ICT (Information Communication Technologies) to innovate:** To make it convenient and easy for vulnerable groups to use public services, ICT continues to play a very important role in

innovating the design and delivery of public services. Use of ICT has totally transformed the way public services are delivered. E.g., A Government Department has integrated its IT systems with several Government entities to access citizens' socio, economic data. It now enables citizens to register for social housing services in few minutes as compared to earlier times when it used to take weeks/ months. In addition, this process is totally paperless and highly efficient. In another example in 2017, Dubai Police opened world's first "Smart Police Station" with No Human Interaction. Smart Police stations are POD friendly offering 27 smart key services like reporting crimes, traffic incidents, and community services in six different languages. Sensor guides installed in all police stations guide blind people in seven different languages. This feature available through mobile App. and is connected automatically through sensor once any blind person visits police station. Parking signboards, with in-built features, have been placed in all Dubai Police stations for assisting hearing impaired, who connect directly with Customer Service Helpdesk.

International Quality Management Systems standard, ISO: 9001:2015 clause 8.3 on "Design and Development of Products and Services "provides a good guidance for designing new products and services for vulnerable groups.

c) **Using appropriate channels for delivering services**: In 2015, the International Telecommunication Union estimated about 3.2 billion people, or almost half of the world's population, would be online by the end of the year. With more and more people in the world having access to internet and using computers, cell phones etc., Governments are now adding new channels, such as Kiosks, Mobile Apps., Internet, and IVR for service delivery. This has brought lot of convenience, speed and comfort to customers, also enhanced efficiencies, and cost savings for the Government. In some cases, Governments are reducing / closing down face-to-face channels for service delivery.

Having said that, it is important to consider the needs and conditions of vulnerable groups while designing the delivery channels e.g. people living in extreme poverty do not have ready access/ capacity to use internet based channels of delivery or illiterate people cannot use internet-based channels.

Another perspective to be considered is to ensure use and design of delivery channel is appropriate to the conditions of the vulnerable groups e.g. web sites are accessible and user friendly for people with vision impairment or hard of hearing. Similarly, senior citizens seeking public services may not necessarily be technology savvy as compared to younger generation and hence senior citizens may prefer to use telephone or face-to-face channel of services rather than mobile Apps.

d) **Delivering services with excellence:** It is not enough to deliver services. Customers expect services are delivered with respect, care, attention, empathy, speed etc. For this, Governments need to create a culture of service excellence, customer focus and improvement in every Department. In addition, it is not easy as it calls are developing customer focused mind set among employees including leaders. Some of the important initiatives leaders can take are:
   - Establish policy statement vision for providing services to vulnerable groups, ensure it is well understood by all, and implemented effectively. Refer sample Figure 4.

> - *To consult regularly with disabled groups and individuals on the service provided.*
> - *To ensure that all front-line staff are trained in how to deal with disabled people*
> - *To provide and maintain equipment to make the offices/ customer service centers accessible to disabled people, including provision of disabled parking spaces, semi-automatic doors, disability pull cords in toilets, disable friendly toilets and changing facilities*
> - *To provide a safe and welcoming environment for people with disabilities*
> - *To ensure all future development of services and facilities fully comply with good practice, applicable codes and relevant guidelines.*
> - *All customer service centre will have trained staff to communicate with customers with hearing problems and visual impairment.*

Figure 4: Statement of commitment to serving vulnerable groups.

- Establish Service standards considering the needs of vulnerable people. Service standards should cover all service delivery channels such as Web site, Mobile App., Face to face, staff behaviour, service centre ambience etc. It should also include standards for vulnerable people e.g. How to Deal with People with Disabilities, dedicated parking spaces for special needs customers, Trained Customer Service Ambassador to communicate with people with hearing disabilities etc.
- Train all customer-serving employees in "How to Deal with People with Disabilities/ Vulnerable Groups". POD Council, Dubai Police has trained 800 of their Customer Service staff and about 80,000+ security staff in shopping malls and other establishments on "How to Deal with PODs".
- Listen to front line customer serving employees to understand customer issues and help address them. In 1993, when President Clinton announced a six-month review of the federal government and asked Vice President Gore to lead the effort. Vice President Gore spoke with workers at every major agency and at federal centers around the country to identify problems and seek solutions and ideas for savings.
- Empower people, especially front line staff customer services staff to serve customers better including taking decisions.

5. Maintain and Measure Service Delivery Performance:

5. Maintain and Measure Service Delivery Performance: To ensure services are delivered in a consistent manner across all delivery channels it is essential to continually monitor service performance, listen to customers, listen to employees, conduct service reviews etc. Mix of qualitative (e.g. measure customer's perception of experience of service received by them) and quantitative performance measures (Key Performance Indicators on time taken to deliver the service) should be established.

a) **Measuring customer's perception of service** is essential to maintain and improve services. One of the most commonly used tool is Customer Satisfaction surveys. Objective is to proactively obtain customer feedback while the service experience is still fresh and act on feedback quickly if negative perception / or negative patterns develop. Though many organisation's measure customer perception, Governments can adopt/ adapt best practice standards, SERVQUAL[4] model (Figure 5), a multidimensional research

instrument designed to measure service quality by capturing respondents' expectations and perceptions along the five dimensions of service quality namely Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness (Figure 6).
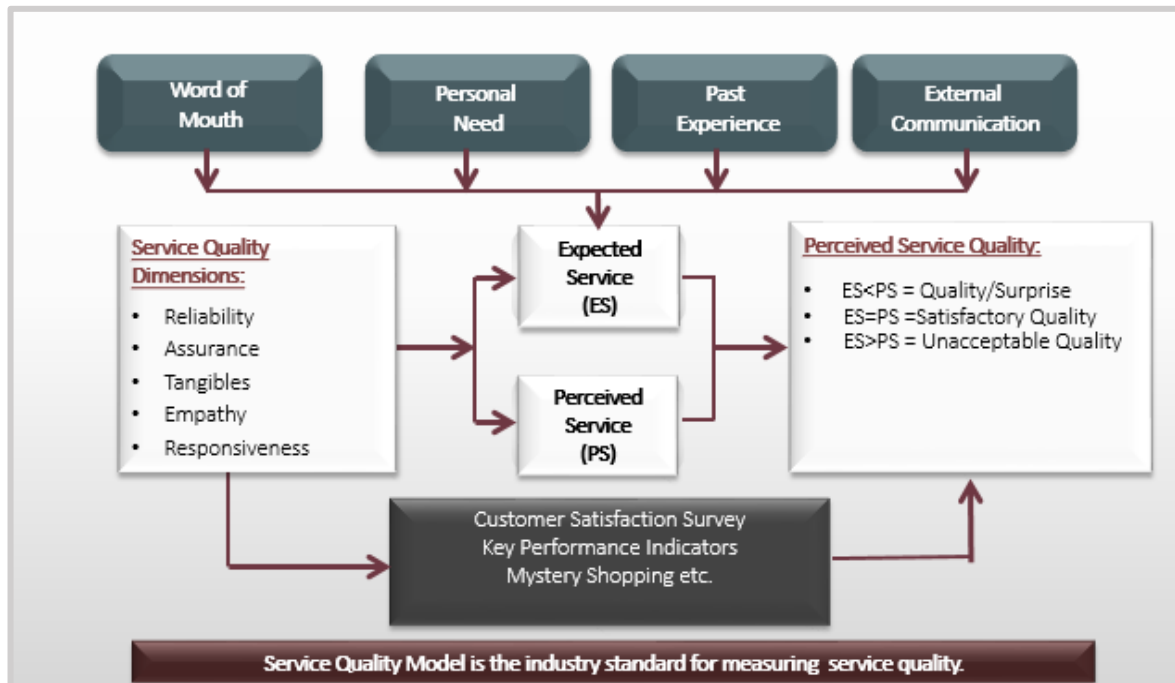

Figure 5: ServQual Model

Service Dimension	Definition
Reliability	The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Assurance	The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
Tangibles	The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials
Tangibles	The provision of caring, individualized attention to customer
Responsiveness.	The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service

Figure 6 : Definition of Service dimensions

Organizations using SERVQUAL model deploy a questionnaire that measures both the customer expectations of service quality in terms of these five dimensions, and their perceptions of the service they receive. When customer expectations are greater than their perceptions of received delivery, service quality is deemed low.

b) **Mystery Shopping** is another useful and commonly used tool where in Researchers pose as "customers" to experience and evaluate the quality of service delivered and to measure individual employee service

behaviour for use in coaching, training, recognition, rewards. This helps identify systematic strengths and weaknesses in customer contact service.

c) **Service recovery**: Services are intangible and service outcome depends on customers' expectation of services, their participation in services, employees' knowledge, behaviour etc. As a result, it is not uncommon that services do not meet customer's original expectations and customers feel dissatisfied. Therefore, the Government departments need to proactively establish Customer Feedback Management system including service recovery strategies and processes. If done well, the service recovery process should often result in improved customer satisfaction due to the customer feeling valued by the service provider. International Management Systems standard, ISO: 10002:2018, "Customer satisfaction -- Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations" is a best practice standard. Government departments can consider adopting it. If implemented effectively it will help resolve customer complaints in an effective and efficient manner while preventing re-occurrence of problems due to same reason.

6. Continually improve and innovate products and services

To keep abreast of continuing changes in the needs & expectations of vulnerable groups, ongoing changes in socio economic environment, to continually improve, and innovate products, services, processes, operating model etc. it is absolutely essential to establish a culture of continual improvement and innovation in the organization.

Improvement can be to increase customer satisfaction and/ or to address customer dissatisfaction or improve productivity, performance, efficiencies etc.

Based on the results of customer satisfaction studies, customer complaints, mystery shopping, performance measures, service reviews, leadership needs to ensure an organization wide culture of improvement and innovation is established. Some of the important steps it can consider are:

a. Establish innovation policy and process
b. Business plans at all levels to include goals for quality improvement and innovation.
c. Establish measures to evaluate progress against the improvement goals.
d. Use techniques like TRIZ, Benchmarking, Lean, etc. for making innovations and improvements.
e. Apply improvement process to all business processes.
f. Train all levels of personnel, including upper management, in their role for improving quality.
g. Empower the work force to participate in making improvements.
h. Establish recognition / reward programs for superior quality performance and improvement and innovation.

Conclusion:

To meet the 'leave no one behind' agenda of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – and to reach the furthest behind first – governments must commit to prioritizing outcomes for vulnerable groups. A comprehensive framework for delivering services, supported with strong leadership at all levels, political, government agencies with suitable legislation, ambitious policies and programs with needed investment, executed relentlessly and with speed is critical to ensure inclusiveness and development of vulnerable people.

Sunil Thawani is leading management professional, Fellow American Society for Quality, recipient of ASQ Lancaster Medal, 2015. He has authored book "Business Excellence - Strategies for Winning". He has served on several national & international committees and Boards. Currently he is Board Member, Dubai Quality Group. He is recipient of prestigious ASQ Lancaster Medal, USA. He can be contacted at contact@qualityindeed.com

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