

As seen from Levin:

Improving government communication with citizens – a report
from the region

Report to State Services Commission

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**NZ INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH (INC.) and LAZAR ASSOCIATES
LTD**

Preface

The New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), based in Wellington, was founded in 1958 as a non-profit making trust to provide economic research and consultancy services. Best known for its long-established *Quarterly Survey of Business Opinion* and forecasting publications, *Quarterly Predictions* and the annual *Industry Outlook* with five-yearly projections for 25 sectors, the Institute also undertakes a wide range of consultancy activities for government and private organisations. It obtains most of its income from research contracts obtained in a competitive market and trades on its reputation for delivering quality analysis in the right form, and at the right time, for its clients.

Quality assurance is provided on the Institute's work:

- by the interaction of team members on individual projects;
- by exposure of the team's work to the critical review of a broader range of Institute staff members at internal seminars;
- by providing for peer review at various stages through a project by a senior staff member otherwise disinterested in the project;
- and sometimes by external peer reviewers at the request of a client, although this usually entails additional cost.

Lazar Associates Ltd is a more recent creation built around the experience and skills of its principles. Lazar Associates have undertaken a series of assignments related to organisational structuring, strategic positioning and IT implications.

Authorship

This report has been prepared by John Yeabsley of NZIER and Doug Bailey of Lazar Associates Ltd. The assistance of all those we talked to about e-government in Horowhenua and Manuwatu is appreciated greatly.

The assistance of Larry Holmes of the State Services Commission is gratefully acknowledged. The frank and helpful contribution of Grant Lenny, Levin Service Centre Manager, DWI and Kuresa Tiimalu-Falseuga, Central West Service Manager, CYF is also noted with appreciation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Services Commission (SSC) is charged by the government with developing an integrated strategy to employ the advantages of modern electronic communication techniques to improve the service offered by government to citizens. This “E-Government” Strategy has a number of facets, but the needs and capacities of ordinary New Zealanders are a critical part of the design work.

The SSC has commissioned NZIER to undertake an initial test of these by looking at the Levin community. This was seen as likely to illustrate interactions with government that could be regarded as broadly representative of the experience elsewhere in New Zealand.

The project scope has not allowed statistical sampling, as the objective has been to establish prevailing community perceptions with respect to public sector agencies and the services made available through them. The task was to look for the recurring themes and determine whether opinion is sufficiently consistent across the people and groups spoken with to be relied upon. We have targeted individuals and groups drawn from a range of community interests, social, governmental, youth and business oriented organisations. Reference has also been made to the findings of a similar review of regional opinion undertaken by Te Puni Kokiri in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty.

Levin is a small community of about 19,600 centred on state highway one and the main trunk railway line¹, in a rural setting. It has the headquarters of the Horowhenua District Council and the offices of several central government agencies².

We found a general attitude toward the government that was rather distant. There are possible explanations for this especially the way services have been curtailed and centralised over the last few years. While such attitudes have to be taken into account when thinking about all government services there are more immediate conclusions that can be drawn out as a possible basis for action. We divided these into the shorter and the longer term and included suggestions on their possible progress.

The shorter term ideas included: statutes on line; entitlements readily available; rules and manuals; brochures, pamphlets; application forms; follow up; data bases; responsive information service; directed outreach; and appropriate pricing.

While the longer term matters were: publicity of the sources; sifting of outward information; feedback; privacy issues; multi-channel communication; and match the appropriate delivery channel.

We noted that a key challenge for implementation was to achieve a degree of ‘joined up government’ at least as seen by citizens.

¹ The town was founded in 1889 due to the construction of the Wellington/Palmerston North railway.

² These are, Department of Work and Income, Department of Child, Youth and Family, and a part week representation from the ACC. In addition there is a Police presence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 The task

The State Services Commission (SSC) is charged by the government with developing an integrated strategy to employ the advantages of modern electronic communication techniques to improve the service offered by government³ to citizens.

This “E-Government” Strategy has a number of facets but the needs and capacities of ordinary New Zealanders are a critical part of the design.

The SSC has commissioned NZIER to undertake a small initial test of the need by looking at the Levin community.

I.2 This report

This report contains the result of that consultation.

The shape of the report is as follows:

- Description of the approach and method;
- Overview of Levin, in the context of the New Zealand setting;
- Picture of present pattern of communication with government;
- Potential for improvement – including the role of e-government strategy;
- Other salient results from consultation;
- Conclusions
- Annexes

2. APPROACH AND METHOD

2.1 Introduction

The effective implementation of the E-Government Strategy will rest in part on a comprehensive understanding on the part of government agencies concerning how, when and for what purposes the public interact with them. Citizen perceptions about the quality of that service and the reliability of the delivery channels are also key factors.

³ ‘Government’ in this context includes local and central government as well Crown-owned companies and other governmental agencies.

An understanding of what citizens think about how and what they get from government will help guide the development of useful channels of electronic communication. It will also assist in the development of integrated service delivery strategies across government agencies.

2.2 The setting

This report is a product of its scope and focus. We have set out in the next few sections some of the background to the way we approached the task.

2.2.1 Main focus

The focus of this report is on the potential and prospects associated with innovation in one particular facet of the wider service delivery transactions between the government and its citizens. For the purpose of the work here, we have distinguished the following aspects of service delivery:

- The “communication/delivery channel” used, which has, among other aspects, technical and locational features. So the channels choice will include the decision about where to have service centres, whether to have a call centre, and whether the centre will have automatic answering and sorting;
- The “delivery culture” of the government agency. This is the organisational setting, which surrounds and governs the delivery transaction. It includes the attitude of the agency to the type of transactions undertaken, the way discretion is administered, and, for instance, the particular mix of channels selected;
- The “policy” under which the service delivery takes place. This is the set of decisions and rules that have been approved by the government to establish intent, the limits and the funding implications of the particular service delivery transactions;

The focus of this report is on the first of these three, with an inevitable inclusion of aspects of the second. We have put the policy decisions themselves, to the greatest extent possible, on one side, as not being relevant to the exercise in hand.

2.2.2 Wider comparisons.

The New Zealand scene has changed markedly over the last 15 years or so. A major, but largely unremarked change has been in the quality of service provided by the private sector. As the local economy was opened up to greater degrees of competition, including from international firms, and there was a steadily increasing awareness of standards prevailing abroad, improved service has become one of the avenues firms have followed to success.

New Zealanders have noticed the ability to have pizzas and printing jobs delivered promptly, and with a smile. They have noted that these changes are reflected in the increased flexibility firms show in their dealings with customers. A natural extension is to apply the same broad expectations of standards of service to the public sector.

So public sector service standards are probably being assessed by citizens against a moving target – private sector norms. This is a challenge to the government delivery arms.

2.2.3 Variety

A common feature of transactions with the public sector is their differences. The transactions we heard about in Levin varied from simple (an OSH visit) to complex (discussions about how to accommodate the disabled with in a policy). They were one offs (drivers licences) or repeated (pensions). And they involved clients with differing degrees of communication ability and a variety of access to communication channels.

We believe (and it was reinforced by our work on this project) that most of us form our expectations and views rationally. That is, we have perceptions that are moulded by our experiences. And in the case of transactions with the government that is going to be a diverse set of occurrences.

So the feedback we are drawing on will have a flavour that can inevitably be traced back to the people we spoke to. But the whole point of the consultation we are engaged in here is to listen, gather together material and report it in a context that knowingly takes account of the way the data has been gathered.

2.2.4 Lightning rod

Another factor that needs mention is the inevitable result of being publicly involved in such a task as this one. We are, by the nature of the job, a potential channel of communication with people and agencies that some groups are trying to contact. So, for a subset of those we talked to the opportunity of sending a message was seized.

Nothing wrong with this, we were asking for people's time and they are able to use it as they see fit. To the extent that these involved issues outside the ambit of this task, we noted the specific concerns voiced in these sessions and reflected them to appropriate concerned people.

But the possibility that the general method we used, may have affected the information we received, for this specific reason, remains. We note it as possibility, but suggest it fits alongside all the other theoretical problems with gathering real data. To us, a consciousness of these weaknesses should carry into the way the information is presented and used, rather than force rejection of the information, or any conclusions from it.

2.3 The location

We have selected only one region, sufficiently remote from Wellington to have its own characteristics, identity and issues. Regard was had to the population demographic and the extent to which interactions with government could be regarded as broadly representative of the experience elsewhere in New Zealand.

The project scope has not allowed normal statistical sampling. That has not been its purpose. The objective has been to establish prevailing community perceptions with respect to public sector agencies and the services made available through them. The task has been to look for the recurring themes and determine whether opinion is sufficiently consistent across the people and groups spoken with to be relied upon.

To ensure as representative sample as possible we have targeted individuals and groups drawn from:

- Business (EDA, Chamber of Commerce)
- Voluntary agencies and provider groups (CAB, Salvation Army)
- Youth (Horowhenua College)
- Service Clubs (RSA)
- Local Government (Horowhenua District Council)
- Central government providers (DWI, CYF)
- Lobby organisation (Grey Power)

Feedback has been obtained using a combination of:

- Interviews,
- Questionnaires, and
- Discussion Groups.

The information gathered has been supplemented by demographics data drawn from the 1996 Census.

Reference has also been made to the findings of a similar review of regional opinion undertaken by Te Puni Kokiri in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty.

3. OVERVIEW OF LEVIN

Levin is a small community of about 19,600 centred around state highway one and the main trunk railway line⁴, in a rural setting. It has within its boundary the headquarters of the Horowhenua District Council and the offices of several central government agencies⁵.

A review of the information available on the internet produced a brief general picture of the area, with the following key points:

- The region is rural with the surrounding district being concerned mainly with market gardening (including many roadside stalls) and supplying whole milk to Wellington. These activities are supplemented by sheep farming on the Tararua foothills;
- The soil is alluvial, rich and the area has a mild temperate climate;
- Tuesday is 'saleday' with livestock passing through the saleyards to Wellington; and
- The area has a history of manufacturing, featuring a number of clothing factories.

An examination of the census data for 1996 (latest available) reveals that, when compared to the average for the rest of New Zealand, Levin has,

- a higher proportion of females (52 to 51%) and relatively fewer males (48 to 49%);
- lower proportions of prime age (15 – 50) and relatively more retired (over 60) females;
- low proportions of prime age (15 – 50) and relatively more retired males (over 60);
- relatively more New Zealand born and correspondingly less Pacific island and Asian born;
- relatively more European and New Zealand Maori, with correspondingly fewer Pacific Island and Asian ethnics;
- relatively more religious affiliates;
- lower median incomes (about \$16,000 to about \$22,00 for males, and about \$11,750 to about \$12,500 for females);
- a distinctly skewed income distribution, favouring the lower income bands;
- relatively more people with no educational qualification and correspondingly fewer with higher school qualifications, higher vocational qualifications and university diplomas;

⁴ The town was founded in 1889 during the construction of the Wellington/Palmerston North railway.

⁵ These are, Department of Work and Income, Department of Child Youth and Family, and a part week representation from the ACC. In addition there is a Police presence.

- relatively more of its workers in manufacturing, retail trade and health and community services, with correspondingly less of its people working in wholesale trade, accommodation etc, transport and storage, finance and insurance, government administration and defence, and property and business services;
- a slightly higher proportion of its people living in single unit houses and fewer in three or more flats/houses joined together;
- a lower rent bill with the majority of Levin rents being in the \$100 - \$149 bracket and virtually none over \$200;
- on average, slightly fewer motor vehicles per household;

In common with many of New Zealand's secondary urban centres, Levin lost population in the late 1990s. Recently it has been working to increase its tourist visits.

So the setting for this investigation was a community with its own identity; not sufficiently remote to be isolated, but far enough from several key government provided facilities like hospitals to be concerned about transport.

A limited range of central government agencies were represented in the area, but other means of contact were open to those living here.

4. NATURE AND QUALITY OF INTERACTION WITH GOVERNMENT

4.1 Preliminary

In the absence of scientific sampling, we are dependant for our conclusions on the responses of those interviewed and their particular views on the day we spoke to them. We are conscious also of some critical gaps in the categories of persons interviewed (e.g. prime age workers were largely absent from the survey). Nonetheless, the opinions synthesised in this section reflect a relatively uniform mood and can, we feel, be taken as a reliable indication of citizen views.

We are sure that readers will interpret our observations in the light of the way they have been developed.

4.2 Overview – “The Faceless Service”

Perceptions of the nature and quality of government services within the region vary quite markedly. The neutral to slightly positive feedback that characterised questionnaire responses, contrasts with the predominantly negative comments made during face to face interviews or in the focus groups. This is not unusual and reflects the way individual experience colours feedback.

Taken as a whole, however, the feedback suggests that the citizen relationship with government is a reluctant one, particularly in the areas of income support and social service delivery.

Common issues and concerns related to:

- Insensitivity on the part of counter staff,
- The lack of privacy in open plan settings,

- Inadequate access and responsiveness, and
- A perceived unwillingness to provide clients with information concerning entitlements, particularly in the area of discretionary payments.

Groups and individuals alike expressed a strong preference for dealing with third parties as intermediaries. Frequent emphasis was placed on the perceived lack of credibility and trustworthiness of government agencies.

Expectations of government services (in terms of outcomes), moreover, are not high. Citizens are aware of budget constraints and the need for frugality (where inputs are concerned). Once a service is announced, however, there is a high expectation concerning the accuracy and quality of the services (in terms of outputs) that are provided. Government is seen as having at its disposal more than adequate resources and full command of the latest technology. In the public mind, Government has no real excuse for getting it wrong. Indeed, there is a feeling of frustration among those with poor access to transport or limited resources, when arrangements that have been working well are changed.

Overall, there was a feeling of disconnection between the various government agencies and the local community. The Government was characterised as “the faceless service”.

4.3 Services Accessed

Consistent with the area’s relatively high levels of unemployment and numbers of people of retirement age, interactions with government appear to be clustered at the income support and social service end of the spectrum.

The chief points of contact with government, accordingly, include:

- Department of Work and Income (DWI)
- Office of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- District Health Board (MidCentral Health – MCH)

Other significant points of contact, or ‘moments of truth’ for the government agencies include:

- LTSA (driver licensing)
- DIA (Lotteries Board)
- IRD (all types of taxes)
- Immigration (typically in connection with students or relatives)
- District Council (Health and Building Inspection), and several strongly held views about
- OSH (hazards in workplaces)

4.4 Quality of the Interaction with Government

“I couldn’t get what [the information] I wanted at WINZ, so I went down the pub and got it there.”⁶

4.4.1 Interpersonal

Many respondents spoke of the difficulty of accessing and communicating with government agencies in the region. Phone contact was said to be often frustrated by the unavailability of

⁶ Small business person about the process of trying to obtain quality staff.

informed staff. One voluntary group reported that they usually found it more useful to walk to the relevant office to speak with staff members having a cigarette in the car park than they did in persevering with an unanswered call. Call centres were a related source of dissatisfaction; extensive delays and incompleteness of the information provided were cited as the dominant concerns.

Despite these fairly bleak perceptions, it was also clear that the quality of the transaction was subject to the particular individual on the other end. Some officials were clearly trusted above others. The issue was actually reaching them.

“They only tell us things if you ask the right questions.”

A perceived insensitivity and hostility to the public on the part of by some agencies was also noted. The information provided by DWI, for example, was often cited as seen as grudging and incomplete, particularly in areas involving discretionary payments. This, together with reported instances of rudeness, had received local media attention, a fact that may have served to reinforce the negative feedback received from respondents.

These perceptions and experiences appear to have contributed to a preference for dealing with government agencies through trusted third parties – people who can read and interpret policies and forms on their behalf. In addition, such people (frequently NGOs in the advocacy, or social helping, groups) are seen as better able to stand up for the inarticulate, the uninformed, or the shy.

One particular example drawn to our attention was the paucity of attention paid to the needs of the hearing impaired. The fact that this group often experiences literacy problems, means that communication can often only occur through limited media (e.g. signing). This is something that the agencies are seen as having ignored.

Despite the evident reservations expressed by respondents, it would be wrong to characterise the public interaction with government agencies in entirely negative terms. Where individual relationships exist with government workers, the quality of the interaction is well-regarded. DWI was a notable case in point. For those in business, moreover, interactions with the Companies Office and the Ministry of Economic Development were rated highly. The fact that Companies Office transactions can be completed online with a minimum of personal interaction, may be particularly significant.

These more positive evaluations, however, stand in marked contrast to the views of business people about some other interactions. Strong views were held that some agencies performed no useful purpose.

It might reasonably be concluded that some of this dissatisfaction relates, in part, to the compliance-based role exercised by several of the agencies cited. But some of the attitudes seemed to stem from the treatment people got as well as from the purpose of the interaction. In the terms defined above, the problem seemed to relate to the *delivery culture* that people encountered. Compliance and transaction costs (including time spent) were a major issue, and strongly resented beyond the business setting.

4.4.2 Current Electronic Transactions

We have already noted the uniform hostility to public sector⁷ call centres. We heard numerous accounts of unresponsiveness, and inability to talk to informed or accountable personnel. These observations serve to underscore the apparent isolation of government agencies from the community they serve.

⁷ Note though that many respondents were enthusiastic about such private sector services as on-line banking.

One example in this context is a local office of an agency. Head office policy means that anyone reporting to the office to initiate a contact was directed to use a phone in the foyer to ring a national 0508 number, rather than talk to an officer direct. This may have the benefit of ensuring that risk issues are nationally identified and allocated consistently, but the practice also contributes to perceptions of inaccessibility.

Where online access is provided there are still issues. The DWI jobline, for example, was said to be poorly maintained, while Government sites generally were seen as unexciting and difficult to search.

“What gets me is not being able to search their key word on their site!”

Significantly, too, there was widespread ignorance of New Zealand Government Online, even among IT literate groups.

This may have implications for any communications strategy associated with the establishment of a single government portal.

One comment was received concerning the failure of agencies to respond promptly to faxes or treat as a ‘valid’ form of communication.

4.5 Local Government Perspectives

“It’s not the absence of information, it’s the extent of it. We just don’t have the time to deal with the swathe of e-mails from Wellington.”

Within the Horowhenua District Council managers were uniformly concerned about information overload, particularly in respect of resource management issues. All were struggling with the sifting and interpretation of the many messages from Wellington and all saw a need for improved targeting and careful condensation of material developed by central government agencies.

Underscoring the point, Council managers also remarked on the extent to which central government seemed to assume the availability of specialist resources within councils to analyse and filter the information received. For the Horowhenua District Council, such resource as it does have on hand must be husbanded carefully. Given these very practical constraints, government material is, in most instances, simply shelved.

This lack of appreciation of the needs and situations of counterparties, by central government, was seen as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach that takes little or no account of local variables. The solution was seen as obvious. It was a matter of recognising the variety of entities being dealt with and the levels of information required.

There are two such levels:

- Summary information tailored to the recipients; and
- More detailed material, on request, for analysis and review.

This provides an ideal simple approach that could usefully be employed to organise communications strategies, particularly for matters related to the environment.

The local health inspector was able to compare the support and information flow he was receiving today from central government with that he recalled from the past. He saw his effectiveness hampered by not being able to keep in touch with developments in other parts of the country. For instance, he said he would welcome regular e-mail transmission of warnings about emerging trends in diseases and risks from a national perspective. He would appreciate an overview of the public health scene, perhaps once a quarter, and regular items of interest to allow him to keep on top of the evolving professional developments.

4.6 Some voluntary agency perspectives

The NGOs were often called upon to act as intermediaries with the social service agencies. This was a special need where individuals are shy or confused about their rights and needs.

The agencies saw a deliberate cost / burden shifting from local and central government onto them – epitomised by the approach of government agencies that the NGOs can download material from the web-sites rather than request to have brochures sent out. The cost of printing and paper they find a load for small struggling organisations.

We understood their concerns, but doubt that such cost shifting is a deliberate policy – the central government agencies are focused on improving availability. Nevertheless, there does need to be a choice offered to the NGOs, so they can still order brochures to be supplied in bulk if they so need, as well as access the information on line.

There is some concern about the shift from funding grants to service level agreements with government agencies, and the associated administrative burden placed on the smaller agencies.⁸ They saw this shift as making it hard to cover their overhead costs.

NGOs receive good hard copy information across a range of social services – including useful material from the central government departments. Moreover, each of the voluntary providers spoken to had head offices, which sift government policy information and recast the critical and useful material into a usable form for circulation to their regional representative.

Voluntary groups, and service clubs in particular, reported many of the national regulations as restrictive and characterised them as poorly administered. The perceived compliance costs are high, and they see little public benefit.

4.7 Concerns

4.7.1 Privacy and Security

There is a degree of worry about Internet privacy. We were given a series of examples by relatively sophisticated users that indicated a reluctance to sign on in their own names and repeated reference was made to the issue of identity theft. One businessman spoken to indicated that his concern was such that he had to maintain a database of his aliases to keep track of his Internet subscriptions and other interactions.

It was clear, too, that there are widespread concerns about the security of Internet based credit card transactions. Despite an awareness among respondents about the greater vulnerability to theft through other channels, the Internet is, perversely, treated with more suspicion. Even more perversely, certain 'respected' sites were seen as safe for electronic transactions, yet the stated criteria for what constituted a respectable site were vague and seem to rest largely on the familiarity and usefulness of the site to the individual user. Among teens, for example, there seems to be a ready willingness to abandon misgivings about security when it came to accessing entertainment. Music CDs and ticket bookings were cited as particular instances.

A further concern nominated by a series of groups were the many cases they saw of misapplication of the provisions of the Privacy Act. There was a deal of strong feeling about the seemingly unintended (and unwanted) consequences of this measure. At the least, it was believed that more publicity of the way that the Act actually works and the seemingly frequent mis-citings of its powers and constraints as excuses by public (and private) bodies, was called for.

⁸ Refer the Working Party Report on the Relationship Between Central Government and the Voluntary Sector.

4.7.2 Access to High-speed Communications

An issue in this area was of access to high-speed telecommunications. Several high end users had moved to satellite based service. Others were irritated by the selective availability of the improved connectivity of 'wider pipes.' This was mentioned both in Levin and Palmerston North, where the need to confine high capacity connections to intense clusters of users was not appreciated by those we spoke to.

4.7.3 Government Retrenchment

Consistent with the generally negative expectations of government, several respondents expressed the fear that, over the longer-term, the shift to Internet for delivery, will be used to enable government to further reduce face-to-face services in smaller communities.

4.7.4 Digital Divide

Significantly perhaps, there was little concern among respondents about the general accessibility of computers and the Internet. The increasingly wide spread nature of available access (work, social settings, such as the RSA, library, and cybercafes – present in both Levin and Otaki - and school, in addition to friends and relatives) was widely commented upon. Concern, where it was expressed, arose chiefly with respect to the affordability and limited rollout of Jetstream and other forms of high-speed access. Despite that caveat, there was no real perception of an income-based exclusion.

Such 'divide' as does exist, in the view of our respondents, seems largely to be generational in nature. Certainly the uptake of information and communications technology among persons of retirement age was significantly lower than among the current school generation. That position may, however, be changing.

Several references were made to the increased uptake by the elderly as a result of existing equipment being passed to the older generation by younger relations upgrading their machines. Encouragingly too, there seems to be limited fear of the concept of IT in general or the internet specifically, though there was a degree of age-related need for training and ongoing support. This support and familiarisation is, however, being made increasingly available through Senior Net and the service clubs. These existing social devices appear to be filling an important social gap.

Among Maori spoken to, the pattern of accessibility was similar, although the use to which personal computers and mobile devices are put seems to be quite variable. Te Runanga O Raukawa, for example, was reported to have invested heavily in IT. The Maori Women's Welfare League in Otaki, by contrast, admitted making limited use of the dated equipment that they did own, though a technically informed one of those we spoke to was involved in an e-commerce venture with children's clothing. So there is a degree of variety in approach and use within Maori.

In terms of the League, the absence of an Internet facility was notable, as was a lack of awareness of useful electronic sources of information. The express preference of the League members interviewed was for well-established, possibly less-efficient methods of information collection and exchange, including phone calls and face-to-face transactions. The potential value of the Internet was recognised, but, equally, there was an express wariness and lack of confidence among these respondents.

This lack of confidence was underscored by a perception that uptake of the Internet was hampered by a lack of computer training. This might be significant, the question then being whether this obstacle is real or simply self-imposed.

The lack of ability to use IT because of literacy failings was raised, but primarily in respect of the hearing impaired, for whom literacy is often an associated problem.

4.7.5 Agency co-ordination and commitment

Respondents from agencies and outsiders pointed to efforts being made to weave together the activities of national and local organisations. Structures seemed to be in place, and regular gatherings and discussions were held; what was indicated, though, was a sense of a lack of committed support.

One informant suggested that there were still issues falling between silos. And, perhaps more significantly, a lack of a clear response to this happening. Individual agencies were tightly focused on their national (Ministerially agreed) goals and these seemed not to allow naturally for the care and attention to local needs.

Central support for local effort and concern⁹ has been a problematic part of the New Zealand tradition (at least since the abolition of the provinces). The indications from Levin were that the heightened sense of accountability to detailed output statements in today's New Zealand public service has left little room for local representatives to take up a positive local support role that is pan-agency in effect.

The results of this lack seem to be apparent in the perceptions of the groups who spoke to us, even when they were not clear about the causes.

4.8 What's Wanted

There was a high level of agreement among respondents about desirable improvements to government service channels. These improvements included:

- Clear and readily accessible entitlement information;
- A single portal to government information and services (noted by business representatives) with clearly defined pathways to differing degrees of information detail;
- Better quality information and content architecture on government sites;
- Enhanced information access by putting handouts and material online;
- Statutes and regulations should be online;
- Having guidelines and manuals available
- A simple online guide to applications and forms;
- Better and more accessible advice about available services and programmes (health services/ ACC/ DWI/ services to small business)
- Improved agency attitudes to the public and friendlier approach to handling face to face interactions;
- Better targeted distribution of available information; and
- Pan-agency proactivity to address local issues and problems within a national framework.

⁹ We have looked at possible mechanisms – not, after all, uncommon in other countries – in work done for another purpose.

5. POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT

“Central government has the money and the resources; why do we have to change what we do?”

From our consultations we can identify a number of areas where the service delivery culture can be improved – at least to the viewpoint of the groups we talked to.

5.1 Identify the audiences

Different groups need different things. Many government services on and offline seem driven by narrow technical considerations and policy designers who are seen as removed from the ‘real world’ conditions of most citizens.

Many citizens that want to use the internet are at the end of ‘thin pipes’ – and will remain so. So their material needs to come carefully designed using structures that download well, despite the poor quality and capacity of the connection. This suggests a substitution of cunning and smart design for sheer of volume availability online.

There are many disabled people who could use the internet but the sites need to be designed so as to be readily accessible for their use.

5.2 Sort the messages

Overload means people want to be sent the messages of potential interest to them. Regular reviews of mailing lists and communication channels are required to keep material focused. Others spoke of the need able to overview material in summary before diving into the masses of detail. They saw the ability to access such detail as vital, but a matter that they should be triggering; it’s important that they still are able to find the detail when it’s required.

There seemed to be limited interest in ‘puff.’ Citizens do not want their expectations built up beyond what is going to be delivered. There seems to be a strong cynicism about service delivery, resulting in an attitude that was pervasive of believing what they see.

There are sites that will be mostly accessed by professionals but there still needs to be a “dummy’s version.” Many economically related sites will be like this with the predominant share of visitors perhaps clued up accountants or business people, but still rating a degree of attention from non-technicians who would thus require some smart simple (‘one touch’) directions.

Citizens have a vast array of transactions with government. They see the need for different communication types (phone call, letter, face to face, and internet) but they have a variety of dimensions to the selection of the appropriate channel.

These include:

- the type of client involved (shy, articulate, etc);
- the type of enquiry;
- the degree of interaction included; and
- the importance of the matter (“I’d never trust any reply on a tax matter that was not written down and signed”)

5.3 Blur the boundaries

Citizens do not all understand (or care about) the agencies of central government and the precise fall of their boundaries. They should not have to be limited by the existing silos.

Suggesting that the service sought is the responsibility of another agency is not necessarily the most helpful action. Smooth shifts to allow citizens to be transferred to someone who can deal with them would be an improvement.

Similarly their degree of seamless access could ideally be widened to include the appropriate local and non-government sites and related information where possible.

5.4 Proactivity

Citizens do not know – or care – about the way their issues are seen by the government; they just want to complete their business, so that the things that are important get solved. So, from their viewpoint, IT is one of the tools that should be employed by the government system to ask the right questions and make the right suggestions to them.

So ‘active marketing’ is needed. Most often likely service needs can be identified by requests for associated services. The equivalent of the notorious “would you like fries with that burger?” enquiry is to ask the Levin-based patient at Palmerston North hospital whether they have the mileage claim form.

Suggesting information to citizens - if done the right way – seems to be what they would like. Such material could cover the thrust of policies, citizen entitlements, manuals and programmes as well as easy and simple claim mechanisms.

5.5 Recognise the standard

Citizens deal with the private sector constantly. This is the benchmark for standards of service. We were struck, as mentioned, by the number of Levin dwellers who instanced the usefulness of internet/telephone banking as a means to use their time better. This sat uncomfortably with the universal loathing of government call centres.

Why the contrast?

It was not possible to resolve this issue. But the general picture was that the private centres (e.g. banking) were seen as working better. And why was that happening? Again, no resolution to the enquiry, but suggestions include, the lack of queues (or long waiting times); the seeming better training (quality?) of the staff at the private ones; and a simpler set of needs provided through this channel. The favourable views did, after all relate to a highly competitive business, aware that clients have a choice.

5.6 Some agencies are the front line.

A small sub-set of central government agencies form the ‘frontline’ of the public sector. They are the ones that are constantly involved in interactions with the public. As such they ‘set the tone.’ Many respondents referred to the LTSA as an agency they had recently dealt with. Usually the impression was reasonably positive; in many cases it was extremely favourable.

Other agencies that citizens reported regular contact with, were, on the other hand, uniformly discussed in negative terms. It was often hard to tease out the extent to which reported experiences were recent. We formed the opinion that certain agencies in the area had been “given a bad name” at one time. And this perception tends to persist in the public mind.

Whether they still deserved it we were not well placed to judge, but in the one case we looked at we certainly saw no evidence of any of the practices we had heard complaints about (Phones not being answered, lengthy delays at the counter and so on). Indeed, we arrived to talk to the manager while he was away, but there was no concern. The staff – without knowing why we were visiting - looked after us promptly, pleasantly and without fuss.

This points to the long lasting consequences of service delivery failure. We think also, based on the simple ‘gossip model’ (if service is poor each person involved tells many friends and acquaintances) of critical incidents, that even short periods of relatively poor service can create a negative impression in a location. If it is assumed too, as seems reasonable, that the impact of a bad reputation is to undermine, to some degree, the ability to carry out efficient quality service delivery, it further suggests that the costs of such incidents are high.

6. OTHER SALIENT RESULTS FROM CONSULTATION

6.1 Background

In the years since the commencement of major public service restructurings in the mid-1980s, there has been steady retrenchment of the physical representation of government in the regions – particularly the provincial centres such as Levin. This has moved sharply upward the effort involved in obtaining face to face consultations with a number of agencies, from a simple visit to a local facility, to a significant expedition.

This seems on the face of it to have been accepted as a fact of life – a number of respondents commented that they used the telephone (with cheaper tolls) to get through to Wellington, when they wanted information. But the perceived poor service via the telephone call centres has perhaps eroded this facility.

At the same time as the reforms in the shape of the services, there was a shift to a more complex approach to policy determination and thus services, involving more careful targeting for instance. Such an approach has its merits, but the joint set of decisions have meant that at a time when likely demand for public interaction has increased, the capacity to address that complexity locally (at the front-line) has reduced.

6.2 What we found

We were told on several occasions about the lack of flexibility that seems to be the character of service delivery today. It was difficult to make any judgements about these comments as there was no calibrated observations or natural comparitors to use. One instance related to the use of contractors for the testing of driving licences. They were said to be, at least initially, rather reluctant to use any discretion about the place the testing occurred and the way it would be conducted.

There was general set of comments that seemed to underline the distance of the government from the local communities. This was of mixed strength, and was strongest among several groups concerned about policy matters. The comment was made that community links were poor.

Overall, this recent history seems to have resulted in a overall lowering of expectations. Government is seen as important but unlikely to be very helpful. Solid middleclass citizens with a long period of dealing with real life problems, we met, were hardened to look for relatively small gains from their interactions with government.

Notwithstanding the positive nature or relationships with individual government workers the public will not, for preference, deal with the agencies. They cannot be assured they will be dealt with effectively. So “specialists” from the community and its social support groups (typically volunteers associated with NGOs) are being called on to act as agents. By knowing their way around, and having, normally, the support of a national body to allow access to areas of policy

that are unfamiliar, the number of these “go-betweens” seems to be on the rise. In the terms defined above, this is a product of an unliked service delivery culture.

This cuts across the New Zealand tradition that individuals are able to deal directly with the state without any need for intermediaries. It also interferes with the natural way agencies use the approach behaviour of the potential client as part of the sorting process in the transaction¹⁰.

It might be drawing too much from this specific experience, but we were concerned by what this said about the shifting nature of the government/citizen relationship. Perhaps more importantly, we wondered about its potential impact on the kind of public service New Zealand will evolve if these views persist.

Despite evidence of agency co-operation, (we were told of several organised co-ordination groups in the area) genuine pan-agency problems (e.g. Strengthening Families) are still addressed by individual agencies in their silos. This is compounded when citizens displayed an understandable degree of haziness about the structure and responsibilities of agencies. As might be expected, any potential misconceptions seemed to be more negative, the less were the dealings that they had had with the institution.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The e-government strategy is not an end in itself – it is taking advantage of a mechanism with potential to improve the way that the government functions in its various roles. In the terms developed above, it is related to the channel choice directly, and also has possible implications for the delivery culture.

Similarly, the impact of the attitude of citizens to e-government is not a matter that can sensibly be isolated from the attitude of the community to the government as a whole. So we start this section by making some wider remarks about the general setting for our investigations, and thus, where they might lead for e-government implementation.

7.1 Government and the region - 2001

The previous section suggests that, over the last few decades, the changing nature of government in the regions has been reflected in an alteration in the way citizens see the public service. While this has been the subject of both high level (service wide), and particular (relating to the individual services in question) comment, few generic conclusions seem to have been well-grounded in practical examples.

But drawing on our brief sampling of views in Levin, we consider that the events over the past two decades have seen a substantive reduction in agency capacity in the region. This has, it seems, flowed on into some of the key factors determining the success or otherwise of a long running relationship. The impact, as seen in terms of our respondents’ remarks, has not been entirely positive. They seem to have learnt to cope – as far as possible - without looking toward government services, except the (substantial) core, of education, welfare and health.

But this experience has conditioned their wider attitudes. A major finding of our consultation is that citizens’ expectations and wants from the government are relatively low. In terms of the direct e-government requirements, the main local demand expressed in Levin is merely for more central government information to be readily accessible.

¹⁰ For instance the fact that clients can be motivated to approach the agency at all signals a degree of concern more than trivial.

Beyond these basics, they would like summary information to be well tailored and presented to them, but to avoid brochure-ware. Some of the local representatives could see the advantages of locally managed content (perhaps along the lines that TPK has developed with regional front pages for its local offices). However it was to be achieved, though, having the capability to set national material in a familiar local context (e.g. who to talk to about this at the local office) was seen as worthwhile.

7.2 Broad concerns

On the negative side, the changing conditions have produced a climate of cynicism. In our experience at least, there are some grounds for general concern about the following broad areas:

- **Trust**; whereby citizens strongly believe that the government should be trustworthy, but are concerned that the government agencies they deal with frequently do not fully inform them of their entitlements, or provide advice that can be relied upon;
- **Credibility**; where it seems government assurances are not taken seriously unless delivered upon;
- **Expectations**; where there is widespread cynicism about the government's ability to deliver realistic relevant solutions, on the ground.

None of these are necessarily new; it was the extent and intensity of these beliefs that we found striking. What we found worthy of note was that in our discussions in Levin and district, we were facing many people who were drawing on their experiences to become questioning of the government's commitment to quality delivery. In other words, they were worried about more than the individual agencies' delivery cultures as they had experienced them – they were doubting the government's policy stance about such matters.

7.3 Origins?

We wondered whether this whole picture was merely the product of sample bias – possibly thorough an over representation of the radical elements. But, if anything, our contacts were slanted towards hearing from the conventional and the conservative. The sample had a degree of over-representation of older, retired folk. But the sentiments of the lively, still actively-engaged, business people were similar.

Then, we worried if the finding could have been produced through the way we asked our questions. But this outcome was not a result we sought. The way we tried to ask questions was open ended, to engage the informants in a dialogue. This provided the opening for the response we received, but was not driven by the enquiry as far as we could tell. Further, in terms of the project, we were not particularly interested in policy substance, as such, and actively tried to play down sustained engagement about policy matters.

Realistically, we expected a town, and a district like this to have a high level of concern about issues of work, and income, and probably retirement support. The respondents did not surprise us in occasionally referring to these matters. But their tendency to self-reliance, and rugged insulation from large portions of the government, was rather unexpected.

7.4 E-Government – so what?

We still consider that the e-government strategy can contribute to an improvement in the efficiency of government delivery in the regions. But we think that it would be most able to accomplish the result if coupled with some attention being paid to the wider matters identified here.

We note though that the real impact of an e-government strategy is on the choice of delivery channels. Much of the regional concern reflected here is related to matters extending well beyond the appropriateness of particular communication/delivery channels. It is about deeper aspects of the relationship the citizens have with central government – it extends at least to the matter of *delivery culture*. As already hinted, an e-government strategy might provide both the opportunity and the operational headroom to attack the full set of concerns outlined above, but this would be a decision with implications wider than IT issues and their efficiency of communication/delivery.

7.5 Viability of e-channels

Our investigations suggest that the citizens have clear ideas about the nature, and therefore most appropriate employment of e-channels, alongside existing mechanisms. They said, with little prompting, that different transactions with government were best carried out through different media.

For instance, there was a uniform belief that any personal or individual issue, such as seeking a discretionary decision, was likely to be best accomplished in a face-to-face setting - even if a go-between was actually used. In our discussions with the local health inspector, he suggested the use of e-mail for supplying up-to-date technical bulletins and regular professional insights. Other views are less well articulated in our interviews, but some preliminary tentative suggestions can be drawn out and presented.

It is beyond the scope of this project to complete the analysis of the characteristics, which determine the most effective channel selection, but some pointers are clear. These include:

- For general information seeking, e-government via the web – with the availability of well designed sites is well appreciated;
- For interactive (particularly preliminary) data searching, a well-functioning call centre is apt;
- To achieve a reliable determination on an important matter – such as tax or benefit related issues – an exchange of letters is vital; and
- For regular updates on general matters, and carefully selected and targeted information outreach, the use of e-mail would be appreciated.

7.6 Strategic implications

We are not well placed to advise here, in detail, on the precise makeup of the detail of any sort of comprehensive e-government implementation strategy. For instance, we are likely to be unhelpful about whether the best approach would be to give priority to the improvement of overall New Zealand government web-based performance, or to concentrate on building up further the established “classy” sites dealing with focused material. Our particular contribution is to have made a start on talking to “the fellows that cut the hay” and thus being able to suggest what we believe would best meet their stated wants.

To go further would require a deal of detailed information, for instance, about the relative pressures on the whole of government, the priorities that the system presently faces and the capacity of government agencies – jointly and severally – to address prevailing issues of trust and credibility. This is beyond the brief we have, and calls for specific information we lack.

So instead, we have sought to organise our findings to be useful as part of the e-government development and broad implementation process. In particular, we have thought about the inherent complexities of delivering the various elements.

Based on this, perhaps superficial, analysis we have oriented the report to an action focus, by dividing our conclusions into shorter and longer-term implications.

7.6.1 Quick Wins

There is a natural improvement in information flows possible. These are matters that can be addressed within existing mechanisms and that, while not simple, should be able to be accomplished within current systems and structures. The key obstacle will be willingness of a dispersed and diverse set of agencies to focus on the key elements of the task and work together. As part of the 'action focus' adopted here we have gone beyond the listing of logical conclusions from the findings to suggest potential responses.

We would suggest, on the basis of our discussions, that the following might be the logical starting places:

- **Publicity of the sources;** even well informed citizen groups were not aware of the full range of electronic sources that already exist. Most e-commerce businesses spend a high proportion of their budgets on publicising their content. The usefulness of the New Zealand government sites improves markedly as the use rate improves. Note that this involves reaching beyond those already electronically adroit, to reach the next group;
- **Statutes on line;** citizens want – and need - to be able to access up-to-date copies of the laws *and regulations* they live within. Authoritative interpretative notes would obviously be helpful. Coupling this action – which we understand to be in hand – with a series of contact points and e-mail addresses for further information would start to build an interactive advice source;
- **Entitlements readily available**¹¹; many of the groups we spoke to were resigned about the difficulty of having to know what to ask before they would be told about their entitlements. They were looking for the places to look. Compiling an 'entitlement register' for each policy, and then posting this serially to the web would improve citizen understanding. It could become as much part of the process of policy approval as preparing a press statement or a RIS;
Rules and manuals; once the entitlements are available, the next need is for access to the parameters and decision rules that determine eligibility. So the limits, boundaries, and interpretations that are used to judge whether citizens qualify, need to be publicly available. Again, interpretative notes and guidance would be helpful. Further improvement would come by including these as cross-referencing from the 'entitlements register' suggested above;
- **Brochures, pamphlets;** these and other written material should be available for reading, printout (as long as this does not encourage cost shifting), and definitely the ability to carry out ordering on line. The existence of massive economies of scale and scope in such an operation suggests the creation of a central facility to co-ordinate printing and despatch on behalf of all agencies;
- **Application forms;** these should be available for downloading and, possibly more vitally, filling in on line, where appropriate. This does raise some issues of authentication, but these problems can be addressed in a single centralised hit;

¹¹ Note that we recognise that any improvement in the ability to communicate to citizens about their entitlements has the potential to increase their uptake. But we believe that the New Zealand government does not deliberately try to conceal the existence of such entitlements. And indeed, that they would see a better take up as an improvement in the functioning of the state. There would, though, inevitably be a fiscal cost.

- **Follow-up** and “help” lines; these need to be responsive possibly with the “rules” (e.g., “all emails answered at least *pro forma*) within 2 working days”) posted. The citizens we met were consistently unimpressed by call centres and wanted prompt replies to enquiries. Would it be possible, for example, to have an e-mail response line that assured a prompt reply, even if some of the time it was merely, we have your enquiry and will be back to you within x days?
- Access to **data bases** already held; Companies office, Patents and Trade Marks data bases, to sit alongside land titles maps and so on. The ability to search such material, without having to leave home or office would be a real win for those in provincial situations. Again the important feature here is to couple such access with widespread publicity about the location and content. Merely including the material is helpful, letting citizens know where it is held is thoughtful;
- **Responsive information service**; what is requested is a service that could take the edge off citizens’ complaints that they cannot understand their taxes, and other regulatory interactions with government. This would be a positive information policy. Aside from the regulatory agencies that need to talk to their audiences, Statistics New Zealand could enhance its response rate with some positive effort;
- **Directed outreach**; this would flow from central government to their complements and associates in local government and the private (NGO) sector. There seem to be regularly circulated information sources that are still confined within the central government agencies. Under the Official Information Act, and in the interests of bedding central government firmly into the regions, there would be advantages in making many of these widely available. The sensible initial approach here would be to suggest that all agencies undertake an internal survey of available data sources that they produce and then review carefully why the material should not be posted to the web; and
- **Appropriate pricing**; groups could not see why the government would want to price services above marginal cost. They saw making information available as one of the functions of government, and were prepared to pay the direct costs they imposed, but not overheads. This was probably a reflection of a wider framework that citizens have. They see government as being a body to support their needs rather than exploit them. As modest as the public demand for reliable and accessible information might be – particularly in respect of funding and benefit entitlements - the above responses should heighten agency accountability for responsive service delivery. In isolation from a collective agency focus on service enhancement, however, they also have the potential to heighten frontline tensions as public expectations are raised. Failure to ensure that these initiatives do occur within the wider agency focus, can be expected to cast further public doubt on the credibility and trustworthiness of government.

7.6.2 Longer term:

Over the longer term, more consultation, improved systems and smartly designed architecture can be deployed to address matters that cannot be tackled quickly. It also allows more internal co-ordination and collective action to be designed and undertaken.

So the results of such actions could be brought to bear on issues including:

- Careful **sifting of outward information**, so it starts with sufficient crisp indicative material for the in tray browser to decide whether to proceed with the available further in-depth reading. While such organisation of information is really required to be driven by the writer and editors of the material, it can be assisted by prompting through the general design of the storage and dissemination medium. It can also be assisted by creating standard models

and samples to encourage imitation. A designated central co-ordination body could be selected to act as a champion and 'help desk' for this project;

- On-going **feedback** on information and other interaction; once an online community develops, the capacity is available for testing ideas, and drawing direct feedback in organised ways from the interested and affected group. Again careful design work would establish a base framework, from which different feedback experiments could be conducted and appraised. A central register and overview would be important aspects a drive to enhance quality control and spread best practice;
- Address **privacy issues** including concerns about the use and abuse of the Act. But some substantial attention must be paid to finding appropriate solutions to reassure citizen fears about identification and safe means of payment online. This is a serious problem with no simple solutions. But it has a general set of issues involved and is therefore amenable to a central approach. There are lessons to be learned from the false starts and confusions inherent in existing privacy issues, to flow into this project;
- Developing **multi-channel communication** methods to address the problems that groups such as the disabled have, in effectively addressing their interests to the government. This is a project that is appropriately organised by one of the agencies with the best links to the groups acting on behalf of the disabled. Common elements in their access could be sorted and attacked in a co-ordinated and prioritised way; and
- Increased ability to **match the appropriate delivery channel** to the need of the policy and the client. Thus, by allocating e-mail as a primary medium for the straightforward transactions, it should be possible to revisit the assignments of communication/delivery to other channels including face to face and telephone. Provided the resourcing is not too pinched, there could be room here to recover community support. The preparatory work that needs to be done to be able to implement this proposal is sketched above. It would require the preparation of a careful analysis of the character of the various communication/delivery channels now available, including electronic means, and also of the needs of the various policies. Once this is complete the assignment and monitoring of the channels is straightforward.

7.7 Implications for SSC and E-Government Implementation

If there is one salient observation to be made arising from the Levin experience it is that e-government - if it is to meet its strategic objectives – must not be allowed to develop as a simple 'bolt-on' to existing service channels. What is under consideration here is a whole new delivery/communication channel that requires rationalisation of information, services and activities across a wide range of agencies. It will have its own particular characteristics and, thus, its own advantages and disadvantages.

A proactive approach would involve an early and full identification of these costs and benefits. That analysis would need to take account of citizen attitudes and equipment, as well as their evolution. It would then allow a careful whole of government deployment of the channel, so as to use its advantages to complement and enhance the existing systems.

Any other approach would leave critical questions about what government does, how it projects into the regions and how well it engages with citizens, completely unanswered. Unfortunately, it is also the predominant risk in taking the e-government initiative forward.

The problem, we consider, derives in part from a tendency to isolate anything electronic within the operational ghetto of 'I.T', and in part from the apparently abiding difficulty that central government has in working across operational silos. An analysis of the incentives and

disincentives underpinning this is outside the present brief. The problem, however, is a real one and has significant implications not only for the high level aims of service rationalisation and integration, but also the more basic issues of pan-agency information design, co-ordination and management.

We believe accordingly, that the promotion of 'joined up government', rather than of technical standardisation, is one of the critical challenges facing the e-government unit. If the credibility and trustworthiness of government is to be enhanced in a cost-effective fashion, it is a challenge that must be addressed.

Beyond this major challenge, we have sorted out the possible implications of the attitudes and needs of those living in the Levin region that we spoke to. Their voiced requirements were not demanding. But their unvoiced attitudes were interesting.

We have organised the possible responses to the findings under two headings and made positive suggestions as to how these could be progressed. Many of the suggestions imply a degree of co-ordination, and even possibly control, that is unfashionable today

APPENDIX A: PLAN

Objective

The task here is to gather indicative ‘front line’ information that will inform the design and decision making associated with the whole e-government project. For the primary information gathering exercise, the target is a well-founded degree of understanding of customer/client preferences and capability. This (possibly initial) part of the exercise is to take a brief swing at the user interest and communication potential.

Questions – Fundamental

Given that the framework for the task is the development of e-government, the exercise is to gather information from the user viewpoint about the process of **communication** with government.

The big key questions (in addition to some demographic background to set the scene within Levin – as a prelude to setting Levin within New Zealand) are:

1. What Government services are accessed, and how?
2. What are the gaps?
3. What are the priorities?
4. What channels would improve access?
5. What blockages are seen to implementation?

Note the limits to the coverage imposed by the **communication** brief – not interested in actual schooling, or hospital stays, but are interested in enquiries about schooling, or hospital visits. Similarly, security advice from the Police is in; but being moved along in the main street is out.

Getting the information

These big questions are translated into a ‘pro-forma’ script to encourage a degree of comparability of the results for analysis (attached).

There is also a need for a standard sheet to keep the questionnaire notes – ready for coding and analysis.

People – who are we talking to?

There is a clear hierarchy of priorities:

1. Key players are users. Thus the interviews and focus groups will be the main priority.
2. Organisation reps and other stake-holders are next; and finally
3. Central Government representatives.

To select the participants we will be looking to local government, iwi, and local agency/organisation advice.

Central government representatives to be contacted on the spot – as want their views not the agency line.

Process plan

The steps involved at a relatively high level are:

1. Design and decisions
2. Desk research
3. Contact identification – who are the referral agencies?
4. Location work – where to interview?
5. Line up the interviews
6. Timetable and scheduling
7. Visits and interviews
8. Debrief
9. Processing and write up

APPENDIX B: INDICATIVE SCRIPT

Introduction

We are from Wellington (acting for the SSC) and have been asked to look at how government services are used, and how there could be better communication with those who live in the Levin region. These questions are intended to get the views of user groups and service providers about this, to feed into work on an e-government strategy (electronic delivery – e-service). As we are focusing on communication, we are not looking at all government provision. So we are omitting the regular delivery services (for instance, teaching in schools and patients in hospitals are outside our range) but we are interested in all other interactions (so tax enquiries and passport applications are in).

The feedback you give can be either objective (based on hard facts) or subjective (based on your opinions and impressions). Both types of feedback will be helpful in designing and promoting worthwhile services through the internet. They might also suggest the need for carefully designed regional and service specific communication variations that the SSC and Government can take on board.

This is a pilot survey and so is on a relatively small scale. We will be adding its results to other information already held.

Questions

- General demographic (sex/ age/ type of employment/ rough income/m size and makeup of household)

- What services are accessed – take the last 12 months?
- Frequency / Intensity (times per month / complex or simple interaction)?
- Particular user groups – that is, what drives the contacts?
- User characteristics (location/ transport/ technology access)?

- Thinking about those services, how is each service accessed (over the counter/ telephone/ post/ agent/ internet/ other)?

- Quality of access?
 - Coverage?
 - Convenience?
 - Timeliness?
 - Reliability (of information / of services delivered)
 - Other comments

- Quality of service

- Did it meet requirements?
- Other comments

- Think about the services you have accessed, or can envisage accessing, what are the priorities (benefits/ vital responses/ housing)?
 - Other comments

- What are the gaps in provision in the Levin region?
 - Service gaps?
 - Access/ channels?
 - Geographic/ coverage?

- Are there any obvious service overlaps?
 - In services delivered?
 - In agency activity?

- Do government agencies have local service delivery co-ordinated? .
 - In what areas?
 - How does this happen?
 - Any apparent benefit?

- Are changes necessary or desirable in the available service channels?

- What new or different channels would improve access?
 - Range?
 - Single point of contact?

- What services could be accessed electronically, e.g. via the internet and List (services starting with those used)
 - Likely uptake / frequency?
 - Credibility / reliability?
 - Advantages – specific groups?

- (a) Do you have access to the internet? (b) Where do you access the internet (see list below) (c) Is access to on-line services likely to be a problem locally (digital divide issues)?
 - Home computers (& friends/ work)?

- Schools
 - Community hubs (libraries / community centres)?
 - Quality of communications?
-
- What blockages are seen to creating an effective on-line service?
-
- Any other comments?

Thanks for your time.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE

The scope of the assignment did not allow for statistical sampling. Every effort, however, was made to ensure that the groups contacted and interviewed were representative of the regional demographic or were, by virtue of their role, able to provide informed comment on the service requirements and issues of the local community.

The sample consisted of a combination of individuals, interest groups, local government, and voluntary providers/service organisations. These contacts were complemented by a series of focus groups that drew on the wider community and ensured as wide a representation as possible within the parameters of the study.

Sample composition is as follows:

Individuals:

Tony Rush, Executive Director, Enterprise Horowhenua

Corrina McGregor, Manager Maori Economic Development, Enterprise Horowhenua

Margaret May, Associate Director, Vision Manuwatu

Captain. Alistair Irwin, Officer in Charge, Salvation Army, Levin

Bill Sterling, District Health Inspector, Horowhenua District Council.

Interest Groups:

Grey Power, Palmerston North

Chamber of Commerce

Local Government:

Greg Boyle, Chief Executive Officer, Horowhenua District Council

Senior Management Team. Horowhenua District Council

Voluntary Sector:

Salvation Army, Levin

Citizens Advice Bureau, Levin

Returned Services Association, Levin

Maori Women's Welfare League, Otaki

Agencies:

Grant Lenny, Service Centre Manager, Department of Work and Income, Levin

Kuresa Tiumalu-Faleseuga, Service Manager, Central West, Palmerston North.

Focus Groups:

Senior Accounting Students, Horowhenua College

Business, Vision Manuwatu

Elderly / Retired, Returned Services Association

Voluntary Sector, Citizens Advice, Family Support

These were the source of the questionnaire answers

APPENDIX D: DETAILED RESULTS

In the final focus group sessions (At the RSA, the CAB, the EDA and the Horowhenua College) we administered a simple questionnaire.

The results have been tabulated into the following tables:

Age	Gender	Eth'y	Emp't	Ac's	Where	Int't	G'vt	Agencies	Chann els	Qual'y
78	M	K	R	N			N			
72	F	P	R	Y	H	Y				
66	F	p	R	Y	H	N	N			
76	M	P	R	N		N	Y		P	3
73	M	E	R	Y	H	N	Y	IRD	P,T	3
82	M		R	Y	H	Y	Y	MoH, DIA, IRD, VetA	P,I, O	4
54	M	E	E	Y	H,W	Y	Y	DIA	P, T	3
72	M	E	R	Y	R	N	Y	DWI	C, T, V	4
70	M	C	R	Y	W	N	Y	DIA, IRD	C	3
76	M	E	R	Y	H	N	Y	LTSA	V	4
67	M	E	R	Y	H,O	Y	N			
48	F	Eng	E	Y	H,W	Y	Y	many	P, V, I	3
40 +	F	M	E	Y	H, W, L	N	Y	DWI, IRD, Courts, ACC, Police	P, C, T, V, O	3
67	M	E	R	Y	H	Y	Y	IRD, DWI,	T, I	4
67	F	E	R	N		N	Y	many	V	
67	F	E	R	N		N	Y	ACC, IRD	C	4
77	F	E	R	Y	H	N	Y	IRD	C	3
60	F	NZ	E	N	R	N	Y	CEG, DIA(Lott), COG, IRD	P, C	5
65 +	F	P	R	N		N	N			
65	F	NZ	R	Y	L	N	Y	CoO	P, O	3
65 +	F	K	R	Y	H, O	N	Y	DWI, IRD, MCH, Trans, Pol, +	P, C, T, V, O	Varia ble
66	F	NZ	R	N		N	Y	DWI, MCH	C, T, V	5
16	M	E	S	Y	H,W, S	Y	Y	ACC	V	4
16	M	E	S	Y	H,S	Y	Y	ACC, IRD	C, T, V	3.5
16	M	E/C	S	Y	H,S	Y	N			
16	M	E	S	Y	H,S	Y	Y	ACC	V	4
16	M	E	S	Y	H,S	N	Y	ACC	P	5
16	M	M	S	Y	H,R,S	Y	N			
16	M	NZ	S	Y	H, W, S, L	Y	Y	IRD,DWI	P, C, T, V, I	3

16	F	M	S	Y	H, R	Y	N			
16	M	E	S	Y	H, S	Y	N			
16	F		S	Y	S, L, O	Y	Y	IRD	P, C	4
16	M	NZ E	S	Y	H	Y	N			
16	M	C	S	Y	H, R, S, L	Y	N			
16	F	C	S	Y	H, R	Y	N			
16	F	M	S	Y	H, S, L	Y	N			
16	M	M	S	Y	H, S	Y	Y	LTSA, NZQA	V	3
16	M	NZ E	S	Y	H, S	N	N			
54	M	E	B	Y	H, L, O	Y	Y	SNZ, MED, INZ, FRST, MRST,	P, C, T, V, I	4.25
48	M	E	B	Y	H, R, L	Y	Y	MoE, SNZ, DWI, IRD, CYFA	P, T, V	4
38	F	E	B	Y	H, W	Y	Y	INZ, MED, +	I	5
60	M	M	B	Y	H, W	Y	Y	IRD, ACC	P, C	3
44	F	K	B	Y	H, W	Y	Y	IRD, INZ, StatsNZ, MAF, DWI	T, I	5
57	F	NZ	B	Y	H, W, O	Y	Y	MoHousing	I	0
38	M	NZ	B	Y	H, W	Y	Y	IRD, MoH, ACC	C, V	3
35+	F	P	B	Y	H, W	Y	N			

Keys

Gender

M = male
F = female

Ethnicity

K= Kiwi
P = Pakeha
E = European
C = Caucasian
Eng = English
C = Chinese

Employment

R = Retired
E = Employed
S = Student
B = Business

Access

H = Home
R = Relative

Agencies

MCH = Mid Central Health
Others according to usual abbreviations (IRD = Inland Revenue Department etc.)

Channels

P = Post
C = Call centre

Quality

5= great
4 = good

W = Work

T = local Telephone

3 =

S = School

V = Visit

reasonable

L = Library

I = Internet

2 = poor

O = Other

O = Other

1 = terrible

V = variable