

Senior Service Delivery Officials Report on the Learning Event on Service Clusters

Halifax, Nova Scotia
December 6, 2000

Introduction

Service clusters defined
Governments are experimenting

What we are learning from our experiences

Evolving beyond prototypes
Service clusters are partnerships
Service clustering as a precursor to organisational change
Operating in a multi-channel universe
Measuring performance

Opportunities and next steps

Alternative Service Delivery Division
Service and Innovation Sector
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
January 2001

Introduction

Service clusters defined

1. Service clustering brings together related information and services across organisational and/or jurisdictional boundaries into groupings that make sense to the client according to use or need. It builds on an outside-in perspective, in other words, according to the perspective of the client who uses the service. Clustering gives citizens access to related programs or services regardless of which department, agency or government is responsible for the group of services the client needs at any particular time.
2. Service clustering is not channel dependent but rather is an option that can be implemented on a variety of channels, thus supporting citizens' interest in having a choice in the means by which they access services: telephone, internet, walk-in, kiosk, mail.
3. Service clustering is one of the strategies being employed by governments to respond to citizens' desire for improved service, in particular to address elements of service improvement related to access. Survey evidence and focus group testing indicate that citizens want services grouped together for their convenience, particularly when they require multiple services or contacts with governments.¹

Governments are experimenting

4. The learning event sponsored by the federal-provincial-territorial committee of Senior Service Delivery Officials (SSDO) provided several governments the opportunity to showcase specific service cluster projects. Through presentations, discussions and workshops, participants had the opportunity to hear about what works well, what works less well, to consider both resolved and unresolved issues and lessons learned.
5. The event illustrated that governments are experimenting, they are working together and are learning from each other. This paper synthesises the key observations and lessons emerging from the learning event to add to the collective understanding of how service clustering can be successfully implemented. It concludes with a list of next steps that could be addressed jointly by the various jurisdictions involved in service clustering.

¹ Citizens First, October 1998; Putting it all Together, presentation by Peter Oberle to the SSDO Learning Event, December 2000.

What we are learning from our experiences

Evolving beyond prototypes

6. Service clusters often start out on an experimental basis, as pilots or prototypes, particularly as many are exploring new and novel service arrangements. This results in both benefits and risks. The benefits of a pilot approach that participants noted include increased flexibility and independence, a greater opportunity to proceed on the basis of trial and error and a greater freedom to redefine the end point as the project evolves. (For example new and different opportunities may emerge as the project is developed or readjustments needed as a consequence of focus group research.)
7. While the case by case approach is instructive, this approach can work against the sustainability of projects. Funding is often ad hoc and short term; momentum is more difficult to sustain. Projects are often held together by “goodwill and bubble gum”. Insufficient corporate support can limit the ability to build on successes and to take advantage of time sensitive opportunities. Risk of failing can result from not “seizing the moment”²
8. A notable exception, presented at the learning event, is the Government On-line project of the Government of Canada, which has central leadership and coordination and is being implemented government wide.
9. Many jurisdictions expressed an interest in sharing successful strategies for longer-term funding and more stable management of cluster projects. Suggestions included funding models, phased development and methodologies for building strong business cases. It was also noted that while the Citizens First research has provided a broad basis for setting the general service improvement parameters, opportunity exists for jurisdictions to share research conducted in relation to their individual projects.

Service clusters are partnerships

10. The essence of service clustering is the creation of new working relationships or partnerships, either within a government, among different governments or sectors. While the overarching motivation is improved service, it is the more specific objectives that bring partners together, such as the need for a single directory of services, equitable service provision to minority language groups, streamlining transactions for small business.
11. Presenters attributed success in a large part to so-called soft skills such as relationship management. Among the success factors noted, many had to do with partner relations and operations: cooperation, communication, flexibility, committed team members, transparency, trust and mutual understanding of each others’

² Brian Ferguson, Access Canada for Seniors

corporate culture.

12. Other participants also noted the benefits of clearly articulated objectives, performance measures, formal partnership agreements and management structures. Joint understanding and ownership of issues with clearly defined problem solving processes raised the comfort level of managers who, by virtue of being partners, lose exclusive accountability and control over the project.
13. Capacity gaps were noted in managing effectively horizontally and interjurisdictionally. Proxies for horizontal management have filled the need in some regions, such as federal councils, but they lack resources and authority. An alternative structure is lacking.
14. Partnership was labelled a “new animal” which is neither recognised nor accommodated by a variety of laws, policies, funding mechanisms. This is particularly prevalent when different jurisdictions try to manage content and information, respect privacy laws, deal with identity and branding, manage shared resources, such as people, funding, technological infrastructure and real property. Even the merit awards systems lack flexibility to appropriately recognise each partner in an award winning initiative.
15. The partnering aspect of service clustering presents a number of opportunities for benefiting from lessons learned in order to address similar issues in future projects. These include managing identity and creating principles for branding, responsive policies or guidelines for partnering, best practices for accommodating partnership within existing policies and processes, templates for partnership agreements and model management structures.

Service clustering as a precursor to organisational change

16. Visible stitching was a metaphor used to describe how service clusters give the impression of integration, as experienced by the citizen, even though it may not exist behind the scenes. This is particularly true of electronic service delivery. It was noted that seamlessness is not an end in itself and must be balanced with good government.
17. While clustering may have the potential to be a tool to reorganise government around citizen needs, the case studies presented at the event had not led to machinery changes or organisational integration. They integrated services but organisations remained distinct. However, in some instances the process of clustering brought to light possible overlaps, duplications, repetitive processes and inefficiencies.

Operating in a multi-channel universe

18. The case studies illustrated that service clustering is achieved through different channels, often starting with one and then broadening access to others. As one participant noted, the multi-channel environment is here to stay. A number of factors contribute to the choice of channel for a service cluster, such as client preference, client usage patterns, community presence, equitable access.
19. Some questioned the current emphasis on electronic service delivery and whether availability of funding is driving the development of the e-channel over other channels. In part, this comment stems from the observation that channels are more appropriate for certain types of services, for example in-person service for more complex or mediated transactions such as counselling or dispute resolution.
20. Experience with multi-channel management and channel integration is still limited, and practitioners are interested learning more on channel management, specifically issues such as:
 - How to expand service clusters from a single channel to a number of channels
 - Whether and how to encourage the use of one channel over another
 - Understanding the links between channel preference and service transacted
 - How channels influence or determine clusters
 - Whether different approaches are required for self-serve channels (e.g. kiosk, Internet, IVR) and serviced channels (e.g. walk-in, phone, mail).

Measuring performance

21. Measures of success can be as various as the number of cluster projects, linked often to the demand for a specific service cluster. For example the AskSask site was created in response to client groups (NGOs, food banks, Friendship Centres) looking for a single directory of services available for aboriginal peoples.
22. The objective of Nova Scotia Business Registry project was to make processes easier for employers to understand and comply with. Each of the three agencies involved had business drivers and the project model provided a way for them to achieve their individual and collective objectives. A number of measurable results included a single set of rules, new harmonised forms, and harmonised deadlines, due dates and payment channels and efficiency gains. As well, a concrete measure of program effectiveness was achieved for the Workers Compensation Board through compliance gains increasing from 14,500 to 18,000 accounts.
23. Performance and results elements common to some case studies emerged through the presentations, some resulting simply through bringing people, processes and services together in new ways. Examples include the harmonisation of programs directed at a particular group, synergies resulting from service providers working together, reduced duplicative transactions or identifying gaps in service. A common methodology and framework for performance measure of service clustering has not

been developed.

Opportunities and next steps

Address the partnership issues

- Identify and address critical impediments to integrated federal/provincial service delivery
- Develop clear partnership guidance
- Develop principles for branding/shared-identity relationships

Replicate success through operational tools

- Business case methodology
- Partnership and/or service agreement templates
- Common framework for results and performance measurement
- Build inventory of strategies (e.g. Manitoba Bilingual Service Centres, job descriptions for shared personnel, description of business model, NSBR approach to FIP on partnership documents etc.)

Seek opportunity to pilot an interjurisdictional RFP for joint work

Continue life-event cluster work and use pilots to document strategies for funding, sustainability, performance measurement, evaluation and continuous improvement, management strategies. Assess pilot approach against need to ensure sustainability.