

Innovate Human Services

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Organisation: Department of Human Services

Country: Australia

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Communication, Digital, Methods, Organisational Design, Public Service

Launched in: 2015

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Innovate Human Services, was established in July 2015. It has successfully driven a sustained culture of innovation across all areas of the department, being grounded in tackling real challenges facing the departments' transformation journey with deliverable and actionable innovative solutions. Innovation has been driven through strong executive support, a national competition and a series of Innovation Forums. We received an overwhelming response to our national innovation competition and engaged all staff with some big ideas and challenges facing the department. Our Innovation Forums engage our staff across all public service levels and across Australia. These Forums achieved a two-fold purpose: building capability in innovation and creative skills; and developing innovative solutions to real problems facing the department through its transformation journey.

The Department of Human Services (the department) is committed to adopting a user centred, end to end design approach to improving and transforming business priorities. This is supported by a team of experienced staff with skills in strategic design, design facilitation, user-insights and research, behavioural economics, digital, information and graphic design. The Innovation programme was designed to drive innovation within the department by embedding innovative work practices into local business processes. The programme achieves this by raising visibility and supporting ideas, fostering a culture of innovation to ensure meaningful and positive change across the department, and by encouraging participation with other government agencies. The department has been a leader in the Commonwealth for design thinking and it's innovation programme and many other government agencies have approached the department for assistance in establishing their own programmes and design practice.

Why the innovation was developed

- A combination of factors led to the development of Innovate Human Services.
 - First, as a response to increasing comments from staff that innovative ideas were not being listened to or actioned through the previous innovation programme.
 - Second, the Secretary of the Department wanted a new way for leaders to engage with staff after the Secretary recognised a need for a more participative approach to foster and empower staff to drive improvements.
 - hird, as a response to a number of significant transformation programmes aimed at delivering improved services to customers and a clear recognition that greater staff involvement would only enhance and enrich outcomes achieved.
 - Fourth, Innovate Human Services is fully aligned to the Australian Government's national agenda on innovation and is our response to cross Australian Public Service departmental secretaries championing greater innovative thinking across public servants.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Enhance transparency, Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction

Main beneficiaries

Government staff

Results

Efficiency

- A number of ideas driven from the national competition have been taken up as projects to drive forward change. One example was an idea to track claims. This has become the Circumstance Change Monitor project. It is currently in its detailed design phase and will help customers track their claim. It includes: Online Tracking - to give customers the ability to view the status of their claim, upload documentation and track their progress through Online or App access without the need to call the department for this information. Phone Tracking - to further reduce phone contacts from customers regarding the status of their transactions with the department, this project will add new messaging to the phone self-service system. At the Innovation forums where teams tackled challenges all these ideas have been provided to local and national leaders.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- A number of ideas driven from the competition and the Innovation Forums have been taken up as projects to drive forward change. Another example which will improve the quality of service available was Down with Debt. This idea enables customers to self-manage repayment of debts owing to government. As a result of this idea, a series of new digital services are currently under way. Initiatives include: Online Debt Repayment Functionality - Enhancements to this service will enable a broader range of customer to repay their debt (in full) online, via a secure online payment facility and reduce the need for customers to call or visit a Service Centre. Online Debt Recovery Arrangement - will enable a customer to propose a payment arrangement to pay their debt off over a period of time. Vary Debt Recovery Arrangements Online - will enable a customer to vary their existing a payment arrangements to repay their debt without having to visit or call the department.

Development

Design

The design of Innovate Human Services was a fully collaborative process bringing together interested parties, including executive level sponsors, frontline-staff, internal designers, and our contracted partners. The design process involved significant stakeholder engagement through a process called 'sponsor meetings'. This process is a true co-design approach: with all participants having equal say in defining scopes and objectives as well as co-developing the actual design. The process ensures relevancy for all potential participants and increases ownership of the product across key decision-makers and those in positions of authority to make changes post any forum or event. This approach has fostered a leader-led approach of the programme and also enable an adaptive approach depending on audience across the programme. Design time: 8 month(s)

Testing

- The Sponsor process gave us great confidence that the approach and content of Innovate Human Services met the needs of our primary beneficiaries and our objectives.
 - We used the first Innovation Forum in Tasmania as a test case. This Forum was run in partnership with our contractors and we undertook an evaluative process during and after to consider where it needed to change.
 - Following this initial Forum, we ran the rest of the Programme without the support of our contractors.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- Innovate Human Services is grounded in design thinking and innovation in action. It is designed with human behaviours and adaptive learning styles at its basis to ensure that participants can get the optimum experience. Its format is grounded in the MG Tayler methodology of collaboration.

Resources used:

- Innovate Human Services as a whole programme was driven by a small team to oversee and administer the programme. Additional resources that were required to support the forums was sourced from an internal design team.

Implementation time: 1 year(s)

Diffusion

- Our Innovation Forum series will continue by encompass a broader audience. We recently ran an APS wide Innovation Forum as a showcase of our programme, exposing others in the APS to new ways of working by taking them 'out of the boardroom' and into a design space where collaboration and innovation are made possible
 - We have also run these Forums for external agencies at their request: e.g. Department for Veteran Affairs.
 - The forums will continue internally across organisation but they will be aimed at specific customer cohorts or staff groups. Second, our challenges will be based on those areas that are truly critical for our customers.
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Challenges and solutions

- Our challenge through Innovate Human Services is to embed the current energy and enthusiasm we have garnered over the past year within the department and share this with other APS organisations. We aim to grow a sustainable movement of innovators across the department and then these innovators share across their geographically states. This relies on us maintaining the intensity and keeping the programme 'fresh' and contemporary.
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Partnerships

The Difference

Private sector

We partnered with The Difference to consider how best to design the Innovation Forums to meet our intended outcomes. This was a full partnership rather than a delegation to The Difference. This partnership resulted in a comprehensive skills transfer of specialised design capability into the department as well as a product developed that matched entirely the cultural needs and the Department's approach.

Lessons Learned

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- What worked well 1: Taking a different approach to engage with staff from all levels - by taking them out of their daily environment and through a process that is alien to their normal way of working has engendered an enthusiasm for innovation that has not diminished since their return to day to day work
 - What worked well 2: The importance of champions and leaders in the innovation space. The simple act of seemingly providing authority or at least recognition of innovation's importance and has been fundamental to helping people change their mind set - that they as individuals can make a difference.
 - Lessons to be learned: Throughout the year, we have discovered that staff have great ideas but even better ideas when they are aware of changes or initiatives already under way. That knowledge enables them to build on the ideas and improve the effectiveness of the solutions. We are working on ways to improve this visibility in our next iteration of Innovate Human Services.
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Conditions for success

- Engaged leadership is fundamental to Innovate Human Services. Innovate Human Services has truly benefited on from ongoing leadership support not just from Secretary of the Department and our Innovation Champion but also across other Senior Executives across the Department. This support has enabled a greater focus on driving a sustainable culture of Innovation
- The right environment was also critical. We wanted to engender creative thinking and really move people out of their comfort zone and away from their day to day activities. The design of the programme emphasised this through the location of Forums and also through the style of the events: highly interactive, high energy and fast-paced days.

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