

Using design thinking to encourage takeup of online services

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Organisation: Employment and Social Development Canada

Country: Canada

Level of government: Central government

Sector: General public services

Type: Data, Digital, Public Service

Launched in: 2015

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

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Description

As the government looks to modernize itself by offering services online, the ESDC Innovation Lab used a design thinking process to see how the department can increase the takeup of online applications for one of its biggest statutory programs: the Canada Pension Plan (CPP).

Why the innovation was developed

- Processing the high volume of paper applications for programs like CPP is costly. As a result the government is looking to offer more services online both to reduce costs and to meet the growing expectations citizens have in the current environment.
 - However, shifting clients online has been proven difficult. This called for the department using innovative practices such as design thinking to understand where the bottlenecks are and generate solutions.
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Objectives

Improve access, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve user satisfaction

Main beneficiaries

Elderly people, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

Existing similar practices

design thinking lab

In other countries' public administrations

MindLab (Denmark)

MindLab is a cross-governmental innovation unit which involves citizens and businesses in creating new solutions for society. The group covers broad policy areas including entrepreneurship, digital self-service, education and employment. In a similar case study on digital self-service, MindLab used the design thinking approach to investigate and generate solutions for why young people were not submitting taxes electronically. <http://mindlab.dk/en/ommindlab/>

Results

Results not available yet

- Preliminary results are based on in depth interviews with end users. Since there was already a web platform in place before this project began, we were able to get user feedback on the existing system.
- Some high level results include: older people are comfortable on the internet, people are looking for key information such as benefit amounts, the current website is difficult to navigate.
- We are expecting the new web platform to be released in 2017 where we can begin to prototype and iterate based on end user feedback.

Development

Design

Senior officials in a policy committee on innovation supported the creation of an innovation lab similar to Denmark's MindLab. The ideas for the project were generated using a combination of insights and evidence from front line staff, policy staff, program staff, end users, and regional offices. Design time: 4 month(s)

Challenges and solutions

- IT system challenges infrastructure was not nimble enough to allow for certain ideas to be implemented. We looked for quicker solutions that required minimal changes to the web platform.
 - It was also challenging to amalgamate different policy, program and legislative perspectives. Once the end user perspectives were reported back to the working group and members had a chance to hear challenges first hand from front line staff, it was easier to develop solutions that were meeting the needs of users than just our institutional requirements - this led us to challenge organizational assumptions about what end users want.
 - We were also challenged with privacy legislation when requesting to interview end users, something that the department has not traditionally been involved in. We worked collaboratively with colleagues for a privacy impact assessment and opened up a door to do more of this type of work in the future.
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Partnerships

service centers, internal branches of the department

Other Public Sector

The innovation could not have happened without the presence and input of the various branches involved in the design and delivery of the CPP program, especially since the department is one of the largest in Canada. There was a representative from each area of the program in the working group. The nature of the partnerships were very collaborative.

Lessons Learned

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- Collaboration is key although it may be difficult at times to find consensus, it is essential for moving forward with ideas.
 - Leverage internal expertise and build in-house capacity: our experience had ripple effects in other parts of the department dealing with similar issues.
 - Involve affected parties from the beginning; we encountered challenges in bringing new individuals up to speed, which could have been avoided if they were part of the working group from the start.
 - Interpretation of rules and guidelines are sometimes unclear, we need to challenge our understanding.
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Conditions for success

- Supporting infrastructure (in this case web-based) is key to delivering an optimal website for self service.
 - Guidelines and rules that are more flexible to allow for innovation are important.
 - Leadership and senior official support is needed, but also the trickling down of that message of support to working level employees.
 - Human resources are necessary this project was intensive and required team members to be away from their day to day tasks (management support was important).
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Other information

The intended users of the system consist of both front line staff and Canadians applying for their benefits. With respect to the front line staff, the project team made multiple visits to service centres and conducted in depth interviews with staff. Some staff were also invited to the national headquarters to take part of the ideation and early prototyping sessions with the working group. The group also conducted one on one interviews with Canadians about their knowledge of the CPP program and their experiences in applying for the benefit which fed into the early prototypes. The innovation could not have happened without the presence and input of the various branches involved in the design and delivery of the CPP program, especially since the department is one of the largest in Canada. There was a representative from each area of the program in the working group. The nature of the partnerships were very collaborative.