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Service excellence — Principles and model for public service organizations

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National foreword

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 312, *Excellence in service.*

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

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Introduction

The purpose of public service organizations is to fulfil essential societal needs and provide services that contribute to the well-being, development, and progress of communities, and customers and citizens. These organizations are typically government/public services or semi-government entities established usually by statute to serve the public interest and promote the common good.

Public service organizations are responsible for delivering a wide range of essential services to citizens, such as healthcare, education, transportation, public safety, social welfare and environmental protection. They play a crucial role in a functioning society, ensuring that the needs of citizens are met, resources are efficiently managed and communities progress in a safe and supportive environment.

At the same time citizens and the society at large, expect public service organizations to be committed to the idea of consistently providing high quality services all the time, not only meeting but exceeding these expectations. More importantly citizens expect public services to provide protection as well as improvement of the way of life and at the same time addressing a multitude of challenges such as demographic shifts, shifts of economic power, accelerating urbanization, the climate crisis/resource scarcity and technological breakthroughs but also crisis due to geopolitical changes that have a more immediate impact.

It is no longer enough for public service organizations to deliver the basic services expected by customers/citizens resulting in customer/citizen satisfaction at its most. Public service excellence describes an approach that enables the creation of outstanding customer/citizen experiences by public service according to citizen/societal needs and surprising service provision, resulting in the creation of trust so that societal challenges are addressed through innovation. Consequently, public service excellence leads to addressing future societal challenges.

This document describes the principles, elements and sub-elements for creating outstanding customer/citizen experiences. The basic foundations of implementing service excellence are the two lower levels of the public service excellence pyramid (see Figure 1). These are described in standards such as ISO 9001:2015, ISO 10002:2018, ISO/IEC 20000-1:2018 and ISO 18091:2019. This document deals with the upper levels which are:

— public service according to citizen/societal needs (Level 3);

— surprising public service provision (Level 4).

Public service according to citizen/societal needs (Level 3) results in service that is perceived by customers/citizens as warm, genuine and value-creating. The customer/citizen experiences an emotional reaction by feeling valued as his/her needs are being addressed.

Surprising public service provision (Level 4) results in service that is tailor-made and leads to emotions of surprise and joy. It is delivered by exceeding customer/citizens expectations. This can be achieved by delivering unexpected outstanding customer/citizen experiences.

The public service excellence pyramid should be used to explain to managers and employees why a public service organization must focus on both: fulfilling the promises (Levels 1 and 2) and exceeding customer/citizen expectations by delivering excellent services (Levels 3 and 4).

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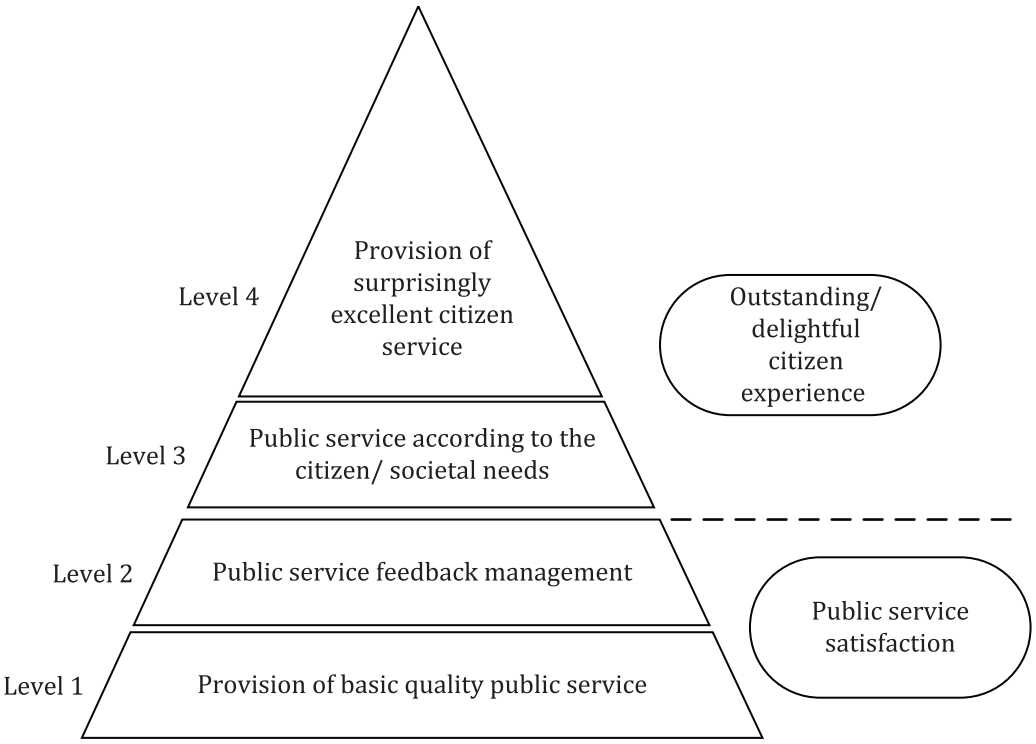

Figure 1 — Public service excellence pyramid

This document defines the essential terms, describes relevant principles and establishes a model on public service excellence. It provides guidance for use by public service organizations wishing to achieve public service excellence.

The recipients of services from a public service organization are typically the members of the public or the community that the organization serves. These individuals or groups benefit from the services provided by the organization, which can cover a wide range of offerings depending on the specific mission and scope of the organization.

This means that in different circumstances the recipients of the public service can be the citizen, a customer or the consumer. For this reason, for the purposes of this document, the term “citizen/customer” refers to the recipient of the public service organization output unless otherwise specified.

The term “public service excellence” in the context of this document can take a number of different attributes such as outstanding public service, exceptional public service or high-quality public service.

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Service excellence — Principles and model for public service organizations

1 Scope

This document establishes the principles of public service excellence and gives guidance on a public service excellence model.

This document is applicable to public service organizations that deliver services and aim to provide an outstanding experience to their key stakeholders, such as the society (the citizens) they serve, and other partner organizations for the purpose of delivering excellent service.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at https://www.electropedia.org/

3.1
co-creation
active involvement of stakeholders in service design, delivery and innovation

[SOURCE: ISO 23592:2021, 3.3]

3.2
customer/citizen
person or organization that can or does receive a product or a service intended for or required by them

Note 1 to entry: A citizen is a person having a naturally or legally conferred status to belong to a nation with basic or fundamental rights and duties as defined in the national constitution or other decree by law. Citizen rights can include justice, equality, freedom of expression, freedom of association, protection and security, ownership of property and franchise. Citizen duties can include allegiance, and protecting the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.

Note 2 to entry: In the context of this document, a citizen is a natural customer of services provided by the state.

Note 3 to entry: "Product or service" relates to the output of the public service processes and can be in many different forms. The types of products and services are outlined in 3.9.

Note 4 to entry: In the context of this document, a customer of a *public service* (3.9) can be a citizen, a non-citizen, such as visitor from another nation, an organization and a society representing a collective of citizens.

Note 5 to entry: The term "customer" can sometimes cause controversy in public administration and even in public international law. However, due to its wide adoption and usefulness in the standardization of service excellence, the use of the term "customer" has been adopted in this document, and is used in combination with "citizen".

[SOURCE: ISO 18091:2019, 3.2, modified — Notes 1 to 4 to entry replaced Notes 1 to 2 to entry. Note 5 to entry (previously Note 3 to entry) revised in the context of service excellence.]

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3.3
customer/citizen experience
perception by a *customer/citizen* (3.2) about their interaction with a *public service organization* (3.14), its products or services

Note 1 to entry: An interaction is related to a *customer/citizen journey* (3.4) or the whole relationship with a public service organization, its products, systems, services or related networks. Interaction can be directly related or indirectly related to the public service organization.

[SOURCE: ISO 23592:2021, 3.6, modified — "customer/citizen" replaced "customer" and "public service organization" replaced "organization". The last sentence of Note 1 to entry deleted.]

3.4
customer/citizen journey
series or sum of *customer/citizen experiences* (3.3) when engaging with a *public service organization* (3.14), and its products or services

Note 1 to entry: "Series" is based on processes; "sum" is based on results.

3.5
employee engagement
extent to which employees are committed to the *public service organization* (3.14), feel enthusiastic about their job and put discretionary effort into their work

Note 1 to entry: Engaged employees are motivated to go above and beyond what they are expected to do for *customers/citizens* (3.2) and the public service organization.

3.6
outstanding customer/citizen experience
services that are significantly better than the level that creates *public service* (3.9) *satisfaction* (3.8)

Note 1 to entry: As shown in Levels 3 and 4 of the public service excellence pyramid, see Figure 1.

3.7
service provision
delivery and management of a service

[SOURCE: ISO 41011:2024, 3.1.7, modified — "service provision" replaced "internal service provision" and "in-house service provision" as the term. "by staff employed by the demand organization" deleted.]

3.8
satisfaction
perception of the degree to which expectations have been fulfilled

3.9
public service
service provided by an organization, established, appointed or approved by the government, to *customers/citizens* (3.2)

Note 1 to entry: Types of public service include the following:

a) services provided for the protection of citizens, such as defence, law and order, justice, and cyber security;

b) services provided to cater for societal governance through regulatory measures, such as taxation and other revenue collection, central banking, environment protection, labour market regulation, immigration control, food safety, and other licensing and approvals;

c) services provided for the conservation of culture, arts, heritage, forests, land and water resources, and biodiversity;

d) services provided for citizens' welfare, such as infrastructure development, healthcare, basic education, social security and shelters;

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e) services provided on commercial basis, such as airport and postal, and public utilities such as water, electricity and gas.

Note 2 to entry: Services provided by international organizations established under multilateral intergovernmental agreements can also be deemed to be public services.

Note 3 to entry: A public service can be provided for free or on payment of charges.

3.10
public service excellence
capabilities of a *public service organization* (3.14) to consistently deliver *outstanding customer/citizen experiences* (3.6) to achieve customer/citizen delight

Note 1 to entry: Capabilities reflect the four dimensions and twelve elements of the public service excellence model and their interplay (see Figure 3).

3.11
public service excellence mission
general expression of what a *public service organization* (3.14) is committed to do to achieve the *public service excellence vision* (3.13)

[SOURCE: ISO 23592:2021, 3.13, modified — "public" added to the term and definition. "general expression of what a public service organization is committed to do" replaced "commitment of an organization on how".]

3.12
public service excellence strategy
translation of the *public service excellence vision* (3.13) and *mission* (3.11) into sound principles, objectives and actions in order to realize the envisaged goals

[SOURCE: ISO 23592:2021, 3.14, modified — "public" added to the term and definition. "envisaged" added to the definition.]

3.13
public service excellence vision
future aspiration of a *public service organization* (3.14) for achieving *public service excellence* (3.10)

[SOURCE: ISO 23592:2021, 3.12, modified — "public" and "public service" added to the term and definition.]

3.14
public service organization
institution, service organization or system, which is under the policy direction of and controlled by a government (national, federal, regional or local)

Note 1 to entry: Public service organizations can include organizations that deal with development of policy and enforcement of law, i.e. matters that could not cannot be regarded strictly as services whose activities influence public interest at large.

[SOURCE: CAF 2020[8], Glossary, modified — "elected" added in the definition. "whose activities influence public interest at large" added in Note 1 to entry.

3.15
accountability
duty to be answerable for assigned responsibilities, including the responsible use and oversight of allocated resources

Note 1 to entry: Those who assume accountability are tasked with providing explanations and updates regarding the management of resources and operations within their purview to those who require accountability. Therefore, both parties have distinct roles and responsibilities in this process.

[SOURCE: CAF 2020[8], Glossary, modified — "obligation to answer for responsibilities that have been conferred and accepted, and to report on the utilisation and management of entrusted resources." replaced by the definition. "Those who assume accountability are tasked with providing explanations and updates regarding the management of resources and operations within their purview to those who require

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accountability. Therefore, both parties have distinct roles and responsibilities in this process." replaced by Note 1 to entry.]

3.16
transparency
visibility of policies, strategies and decisions, and actions of an organization provided to its stakeholders through open access to information, proactive communication and/or responses to queries

Note 1 to entry: In the context of *public services* (3.9), transparency can include providing information regarding the processes deployed to arrive at the policies, strategies and decisions.

Note 2 to entry: *Public service organizations* (3.14) can be protected by law from divulging information that is sensitive, such as matters affecting national security, oath of secrecy and privacy of individuals.

Note 3 to entry: Some of the methods adopted to ensure transparency include voluntary disclosures of accounts, statutory provisions guaranteeing the right to seek information, creating forums for interactions with citizens, audits and reviews.

3.17
governance of organizations
human-based system by which an organization is directed, overseen and held accountable for achieving its defined purpose

Note 1 to entry: Governance is the framework and the top-level processes involved in:

a) setting the strategic direction of an organization;

b) the development of vision, mission, values, policies and strategies;

c) the deployment of strategies through the delegation of authorities, responsibilities and accountabilities;

d) monitoring and control of processes;

e) reporting of information and compliances

Note 2 to entry: Attributes of effective governance include establishing mechanisms for reporting achievements against goals and targets, ensuring that stakeholders are informed regarding decision-making processes and management actions, requiring people to be responsive to stakeholders' needs, and managing resources effectively and efficiently.

[SOURCE: ISO 37000:2021, 3.1.1, modified — Note 1 to entry added.]

3.18
integrity
adherence to a code of values that entails the continuous upholding of the organizational value system and principles, exemplified through the words and deeds of both the leadership and all members of the organization

Note 1 to entry: Particularly in *public services* (3.9), integrity stands as a pivotal element in ensuring *accountability* (3.15) and in preserving the public's trust and confidence in the organization.

3.19
service standard
definition of requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that services are fit for purpose in order to achieve customer/citizen *satisfaction* (3.8)

Note 1 to entry: ISO/IEC Guide 76:2020 provides guidance on how to meet the needs of consumers in the development of service standards.

3.20
public service excellence purpose
clear direction provided by a *public service organization* (3.14) towards *public service excellence* (3.10)

Note 1 to entry: It provides clear direction for strategic planning and the formulation of a *public service excellence strategy* (3.12).

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4 Relevance and benefits of public service excellence

Increasingly public service organizations are facing a number of key challenges. These challenges stem not only from mega trends such as demographic shifts, shifts of economic power, accelerating urbanization, the climate crisis/resource scarcity and technological breakthroughs, but also from crises due to geopolitical changes that have a more immediate impact.

In addition, there is not only regional competition within a country, but also global competition between nations for talents, visitors, investors, companies that create jobs and growth, events and recognition in the global society. Public service organizations must operate within this challenging environment and at the same time deal with the growing demands and expectations of customers/citizens. As customer/citizen needs and expectations expand, public service organizations should concentrate on optimizing the experience, using innovation at all touch-points in customer journeys. Services should be continuously and consistently improved, in co-creation with the customer/citizen and all other interested parties.

Public service excellence describes an approach that enables the creation of outstanding customer/citizen experiences by public service according to citizen/societal needs and surprising service provision, resulting in the creation of trust so that societal challenges are addressed through innovation. Consequently, public service excellence leads to addressing future societal challenges.

This cause-and-effect chain is shown in Figure 2. This chain can be seen from the perspective of customer/citizens and employees.

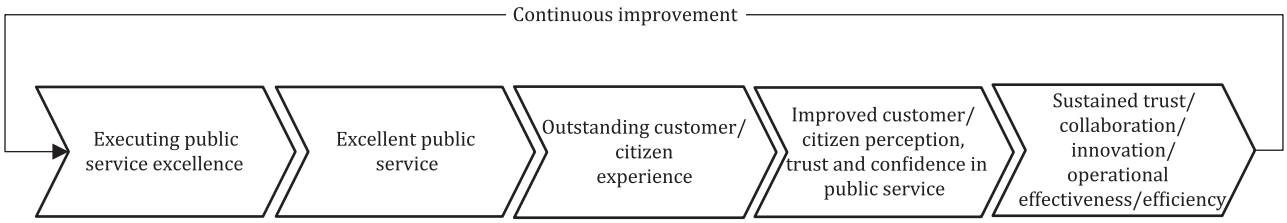

Figure 2 — Public service excellence effect chain

Public service excellence is a continuous process and requires investment in people, infrastructure, systems and research. The organization can benefit from this investment in a number of ways, for example:

— higher reputation as a customer/citizen centric organization;

— establishing and strengthening of long-term customer/citizen relationships (leading to co-creation);

— cost-saving potential in the long term (e.g. lower failure costs, productivity improvement);

— an excellent public service brand (leading to improved recruitment opportunities, higher levels of staff engagement, higher brand awareness);

— improved customer/citizen co-operation and engagement;

— better management of networks with subcontractors;

— enhanced organizational efficiency and performance;

— higher agility to respond to changes;

— potential to develop innovations that would address societal challenges;

— providing convenient access of public services to customers/citizens.

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5 Principles of public service excellence

5.1 General principles of service excellence

5.1.1 Managing the organization from outside-in

The organization should design the desired experience from the customer's/citizen's perspective. Once designed, resources and processes should be aligned to sustain customer/citizen centricity on an ongoing basis.

5.1.2 Deepening customer/citizen relationships

The organization should strive for a superior level of individual personalization and be focused on the customer/citizen needs and expectations throughout the relationship. A strong relationship can be fuelled by continuous communication, which should reflect the customer's/citizen's desired level of interaction.

5.1.3 People make the difference

The engagement of everyone in the organization, including partners, in achieving customer delight/citizen delight is of key importance.

5.1.4 Balanced attention to customers/citizens, employees, subcontractors and other stakeholders

Customers/citizens, employees, subcontractors and other stakeholders are important, and the organization should give a balanced focus of attention to them all.

5.1.5 Cross-functional management approach

The organization should work through customer/citizen journeys with an integrated cross-functional approach.

5.1.6 Leveraging of technology

Appropriate technology should be used to create outstanding customer/citizen experiences, for staff, customers and partners.

5.1.7 Create value for stakeholders

Implementing service excellence leads to additional sustainable value for stakeholders. Co-creation with stakeholders should be used to create enhanced value. Value can be monetary as well as non-monetary.

5.2 Specific principles of public service excellence

5.2.1 Public interest

Public services are provided to serve the larger public interest that may include diverse purposes and objectives such as societal, ecological, economic and security. A measure of excellence is the ability to effectively manage conflicts of interest among citizen groups that ensures that precedence is always given to the larger public interest against the interests of individuals or smaller groups.

5.2.2 Equitable approach

The public service should be provided to everybody with the utmost fairness and impartiality to all service recipients, irrespective of their gender, social status, level of literacy, influence and background. Special focus should be given to ensuring that the underprivileged, marginalized segments receive the full benefit of the public service.

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