More than the process, exploring themes in Dutch public service design practice through embedded research

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Government service organizations (GSOs) link on the one hand the government and the law, and on the other hand citizens, via the delivery of government services. Based on the state of the art of standards, principles and processes of human/user-centered service design, we analyze the practices in Dutch GSOs. The basis for this are practices documented on a weblog by a practitioner-researcher reporting and reflecting on four projects over five years. Based on this online journal we identified five themes that influence human/user-centered service design in GSO-practices. 1) Tension between collective and individual needs, 2) Government services should be inclusive for everyone, 3) A top down, hierarchical culture prevents user focus, 4) User feedback competes with policy implementation and IT-changes, and 5) GSOs are part of a larger public service ecosystem. We conclude that to deliver truly human/user-centered government services, public service design should focus on more than just design process aspects and also take into account the law and policy making that precede the design and delivery of the service, as well as the institutional and (inter-)organizational perspective. For service design standards, principles and processes to be applicable to public/ government design contexts, these should be expanded or customized to be able to deal with the specific dynamics of GSOs.

Keywords: public service design; public services; public service organizations; reflective practitioner

1   Introduction

In western democratic countries it is the state's responsibility to ensure health care, education, justice, safety, and social security, and the resulting laws and policies are ultimately translated into so-called public services (Eggink, 2018). Traditionally, public services were delivered by street-level-bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1983), people who were in direct contact with the citizen. Nowadays these services are increasingly digitized which changes the nature of public services as well as public/government institutions (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; Zouridis & Meijer, 2004). Public service organizations (PSOs) are the institutions that deliver these digitized services for citizens. As such, PSOs are the medium between the government (and its laws and policies) and the citizens (with their needs and obligations).

PSOs can be fully governmental organizations (GSOs) or (privatized) non-profit organizations or even fully commercial organizations with public tasks. In this article the focus is mainly on GSOs.

Many GSOs ask citizens to interact with governments through online self-service portals (EC, 2021). This means that the quality of the relation between governments and citizens are to a considerable part defined by this human-computer interaction. Over the past decades many GSOs engaged in these digitization processes. They considered it a route to a more efficient public administration as framed by the new public management paradigm which emerged in the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Thatcher and can be characterized among other things by budget cuts, performance auditing and measurement, privatization, separation of politics and administration and the idea of citizens as rational customers (Gruening, 2001). However, more recently, this focus on efficiency has been challenged by new ways of thinking in public administration that put citizens more at the heart of government policy and services and put more emphasis on the effectiveness of these services in delivering policies to citizens and thus on the creation of value (O'Flynn, 2007; Osborne, 2018).

One established way to ensure that the delivery of public services leads to the creation of value for the citizens involved, is to practice human/user-centered service design (Downe, 2020). With the rise of digital services in GSOs, in these organizations a practice of service design emerged (Bason, 2010; Clarke, 2020; Greenway & Terrett, 2018; Mergel, 2019; Rodriguez et al, 2021). Setting up and executing projects to make digital public services human/user-centered, the design practitioners in these GSOs also invested in building service design capabilities in GSOs, but implementing this new competence is not without struggle (Downe, 2020; Greenway & Terrett, 2018).

In this article we explore what relevant themes are in the practices of GSOs when delivering human/user centered services. We will analyze four projects from the practices of one of the authors of this article, who worked for ten years as a user experience (UX) researcher in Dutch national government organizations while keeping an online journal about her activities and reflections. Through the analysis of and reflection on the data on this online journal, we explain the dynamics that come with working in a public and political context and the effect this has on the delivery of services by GSOs. By looking at this from a practice point of view we aim to contribute to the state of the art on public/ government service design and delivery.

2 State of the art of human/user centered service design

In this section we identify the characteristics of human/user centered services, and the current state of the art of the principles and process steps to design and deliver them.

The main characteristics of services are covered by the so-called IHIP definition (Zeithaml et al., 1985):

1. intangibility, meaning services are not tangible things that can be stored or displayed,
2. heterogeneity, as in everyone experiences the service in their own way,
3. inseparability, which means that value is produced by citizens by using the service(s), and
4. perishability, meaning services cannot be inventoried like products.

At the core of services are interactions between service deliverer and its receiver. These touch points are the tangible or intangible media through which service users encounter service providers, and vice versa (Mager & Gais, 2009). A core aim of service design is to orchestrate and align these individual

touch points (Mager & Gais, 2009). All these touch points can be mapped and made visible by a so-called customer journey (Ludwiczak, 2021) that shows how users reach their goal by using the service.

Users can simultaneously use several services that complement or otherwise influence each other. Multiple service organizations play a role in this so-called ecosystem of services (Trischler & Charles, 2019). Thinking in terms of this ecosystem, services can change drastically over time, for example because they are bundled into new services (Skålen & Gummerus, 2023).

To facilitate/stimulate the development of good services, standards for service excellence have been established (ISO, 2021; Downe et al., 2020). One of the most important proofs of quality is testing the service with users and seeing the effect that services have in the context of use (Nielsen, 1992). Therefore, a key characteristic of public services are their usability and user experience, the extent to which a service can be used with efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction, and how it is experienced (ISO, 2019).

An appropriate design process can stimulate the design and delivery of good services. The ISO standard for Design for Excellence in Services (2021) provides guidance for this, and relates to and builds on earlier work on human-centered design (Kelley & Kelley, 2013), service design (Stickdorn & Schneider, 2021) and the ISO standard for human-centered design (ISO, 2019). These design process models show many similarities, like the combination of divergent and convergent thinking, the iterative way of working, and user-involvement in the design process.

3   Aim

We can conclude that a considerable body of knowledge has been built up by both practice and academia, that describes quality standards and principles for services, including the human/ user centered design process to ensure the desired quality is met. However, the current body of knowledge was not developed specifically for government service design and delivery, and GSOs operate in a specific context with their own dynamics. Setting up a human/user-centered service design practice and delivering good government services in that context may in some respects require a differentiated approach. The aim of the paper is to explore what themes influence human/user-centered service design in GSOs. We set this aim to get a better understanding of the practice and context of GSOs and of factors that influence the design and delivery of government services.

4   Method

4.1   A weblog as a reflective journal

This article documents the experiences of the practitioner-researcher over a prolonged period of time while working in Dutch GSOs. In her work, the practitioner-researcher took a reflective learning approach (Schön, 2013), by keeping a journal on a weblog to capture the activities of her projects as well as reflections on these activities, also known as single and double loop learning (Argyris, 1976). The presence of the blogs provided the unique opportunity to retrospectively analyze issues in GSO-practice. The descriptions form the basic meaning data on which the analysis was performed, thus providing traceability (Malterud, 2001) and preventing retrospective sense making to a considerable degree. When participants featured in the blogs, the practitioner-researcher involved them as equally footed informants with co-agreement in the publishing process by doing a member check (Scaratti et al., 2018; Shenton, 2004). This was especially relevant in project two (see paragraph 6.2). Based on

the blog posts, for each of the projects a project description and identified learnings were synthesized, as explained in paragraph 4.3. Next, we performed a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify common patterns and themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) that emerged from the four projects. We define these patterns and themes as giving meaning to recurring behavior (Patton, 2002) and to know the possible why's of these (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The set-up for the 'layered' approach as described is shown in Figure 1.
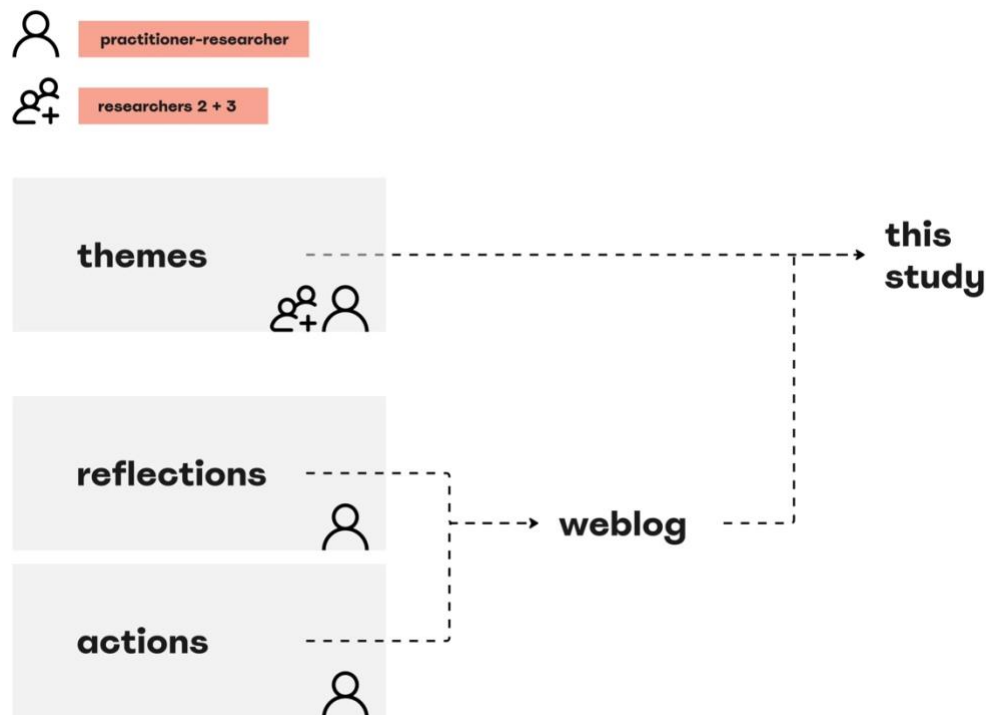

Figure 1. The layered approach.

4.2   Practitioner-researcher profile
It is recommended that in qualitative research one is open about the researcher's background, so that it is clear how previous experiences and motives impact the study. (Malterud, 2001; Shenton, 2004). The profile of the primary researcher, the practitioner-researcher, is provided here.

The practitioner-researcher started as a UX researcher and gradually moved towards a UX strategist role in the Executive Agency of Education (GSO1) in the Netherlands. Her background is originally in Journalism, and the second project was part of a master program in design research. When the Covid19-crisis started and the team for project three (the Covid-app) was assembled, because of the visibility of her practice via the weblog, the practitioner-researcher was asked to join the team by the Ministry of Health. The practitioner-researcher worked for the Executive Agency of Education while conducting the studies reported in this article.

4.3   Overview of projects and inclusion criteria
The projects were documented from 2017 to 2021 in a total of 95 blogs and are presented in chronological order. In Table 1 we summarize the four projects: showing the research question that initiated each project, the main insights and how this affected the strategy of the practitioner-researcher for the next project.

The first project is the introduction of a UX research practice in GSO1, which included both front-end user research and usability testing on services like student finance, citizenship loans and school funding. We selected this project because it shows what limitations can be for applying human/user-centered service design principles in a newly established design team in a GSO. A total of 38 blog posts documented from 2017 to 2020 cover the practitioner-researcher's reflections and are summarized in the blog post 'The structure of research'[1].

Project two, 'The compassionate civil servant', was also conducted in GSO1 and looks into the role of civil servants' empathy for citizens. The practitioner-researcher learned from project one that the user perspective should be considered much earlier in the process of service delivery. She worked in a GSO with over 3000 employees and was situated at the end of the service delivery process. Project two included mapping the GSOs processes and what role empathy for end-users can have in these. We selected this project because it gives context to the culture around service delivery in GSOs. Project two is documented in 50 blogs from 2018 to 2020, overlapping with project one, and resulted in nine reflective essays[2].

The third project is the development of CoronaMelder, the Dutch Covid contact tracing app. We selected this project as a contrast case to project one, as it is a unique example of applied human/user-centered service design in a public context (in GSO2), while common barriers were removed because of extraordinary crisis-circumstances. The project is documented in six blogs over a time span of five months in the summer of 2020, and the documentation of the process was open to the public[3].

Project four is a study at the end of 2020 where the practitioner-researcher mapped her own experience of interacting with public services for over a month on a timeline, including the organizational context. We selected this project because it shows the insider knowledge of the practitioner-researcher and it illustrates the political context of GSOs and their relation to other PSO's. This project contains one blog which has been edited after publication incorporating traceable feedback by other practitioners working in the Dutch government[4].

Table 1. Summarizing the four projects, the research question underlying them (what the practitioner practitioner-researcher wanted to know at the time), the main insights and how the projects are related.

Project	Research question from the second order perspective	Main insight(s)	Which led to new research focus
1. Setting up a user research practice	How to grow a UX research practice within a GSO?	There is little room for user involvement in the way of working of the GSO. Listening to customers is fragmented throughout the organization. Users'	For the UX practice to grow, quality management, a research culture, research operations and sharing insights are important. Overall: it has to be

[1] The structure of research, klipklaar.nl (February 4, 2021).

[2] The essays are on Debegripvolleambtenaar.nl (May 2020).

[3] All the documentation of CoronaMelder is on Github.com/minvws.

[4] My relation with the government, Klipklaar.nl (December 12, 2020).

		perspectives should be considered earlier in the process to deliver user-centered services.	strategic and not only operational.
2. The compassionate civil servant	How do civil-servants consider citizens' perspectives in the process of transforming policy into services?	Civil servants feel they cannot work user-centered, because responsibility between government and citizens is complicated, they feel stuck with their own morals and beliefs, the service overview is lost, and they fear becoming too political.	The organization needs a culture change to enable working human/user-centered which includes user feedback loops in the organization.
3. The CoronaMelder app	The Covid crisis created an urgency for a user-centered approach. How does this approach prove itself in practice, combined with great design capabilities?	From the micro perspective of the app it was successful: a very accessible, usable and privacy friendly app. The design process was exemplary. But due to inter-organizational dynamics within the service ecosystem a more effective path for the app to help manage Covid19 was not implemented.	The success of a (digital) service is highly impacted by the total service ecosystem it is part of, and whether the organizations providing (parts of) the service interact well.
4. Practitioner-researcher maps her own relation with government for a month	What does the relationship between citizen and government look like, from a total service ecosystem point of view?	For the government, services are bulk processes, but for citizens they are personal. Stress from one service experience influences the next for citizens. There is no joint organized responsibility for this within the government.	Organizations operate as individual monolithic entities, there is no 'designed' service relationship between government and citizen, nor between government organizations.

5   Case context: Dutch national GSOs

Public services in the Netherlands are delivered by PSOs including GSOs, who execute laws and policies that are made at ministries together with Parliament. The Netherlands is a West-European country with 18 million citizens and is part of the European Union. It has a combined central/de-central form of government, services can be delivered on a national level (like student finance) as well as on a municipal level (like income support). Regional, local and sectoral government organizations have considerable autonomy. GSOs have been around for decades and have the nature of static administrative organizations, and do not have much experience with or a way of working that aligns well with service development. Generally, GSOs are highly focused on the legitimacy of implementing policy, more than on the quality of their service provision (Willink, 2017). This has been influenced by the large-scale automation of nation-wide public services (Zouridis & Meijer, 2004) which was mainly focused on making government more efficient, and up until recently the digitization trend in Dutch governmental organizations was accompanied by significant budget cuts for GSOs (Willink, 2017).

This started to change when the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy warned the government to not overestimate the capabilities of citizens to perform certain actions which can be inhibited by their social context, life-changing events, personal circumstances, etc (Keizer et al., 2019). In the same period the daycare benefit scandal broke (POK, 2020): citizens were unknowingly and unjustly placed on fraud lists which led to exclusion of services (Peeters & Widlak, 2023). The inquiry by the Dutch Parliament (POK, 2020) concluded that the provision of information, like customer feedback, in the organizations involved was poor. The scandal caused a shift in the attitudes of politicians and policy makers which led to criticism of the new public management's efficiency paradigm and a desire to better connect with the needs of citizens. The topic of the 'human dimension' rose on the government's agenda. It led to a government-wide change program 'Work on Implementation' that all governmental organizations, national and municipal, are part of (ABD, 2020). An expression of this attitude change is that Dutch executive agencies increasingly call themselves public service organizations.

6   Insights from the four projects

This section provides an overview per project on 1) how the practitioner-researcher approached the project and 2) what insights emerged.

6.1   Setting up a UX research practice, project one

The practitioner-researcher started as the first UX researcher in GSO1, and grew the team to six researchers at the end of the four year time span. On her weblog she reflected on this growth. In several UX research projects, the practitioner-researcher noticed that the impact of the UX insights remained low in the organization. "The process was already finished when the user research was performed, the website was already sort of done, the system could not be changed, and policy took precedence." Practicing UX research did not fit in the way of working of software development teams, they were not open to changes if they came from UX research, even though the Agile way-of-working puts 'working software for users' first and has 'welcoming change' as its principle. In the reality of everyday, backlogs were already packed with policy changes and IT-maintenance issues. There was neither an overarching product management role overseeing development, nor were customer journeys used to give development teams focus for their sprint scheduling, so product owners did their own prioritization.

Besides the focus on development teams, the team also focused on collaborating with other teams in the organization, like the customer contact center, the communication department, and others. 'Listening to users' was fragmented across the entire organization. To change this bottom-up was a huge undertaking and it became apparent that management had other priorities than to better structure the governance for this. Figure 2 shows a mapping of the position of the UX research team in context of the organization.

Wanting to have more impact with UX insights, the practitioner-researcher took an iterative and learning approach within four different themes that turned out to be important to scale-up the UX research practices in the GSO, namely:

1. the role of UX researchers and a UX research culture in the organization;
2. how to organize UX research properly, securely and scalable;
3. the quality, innovation and standardization of UX research methods, and
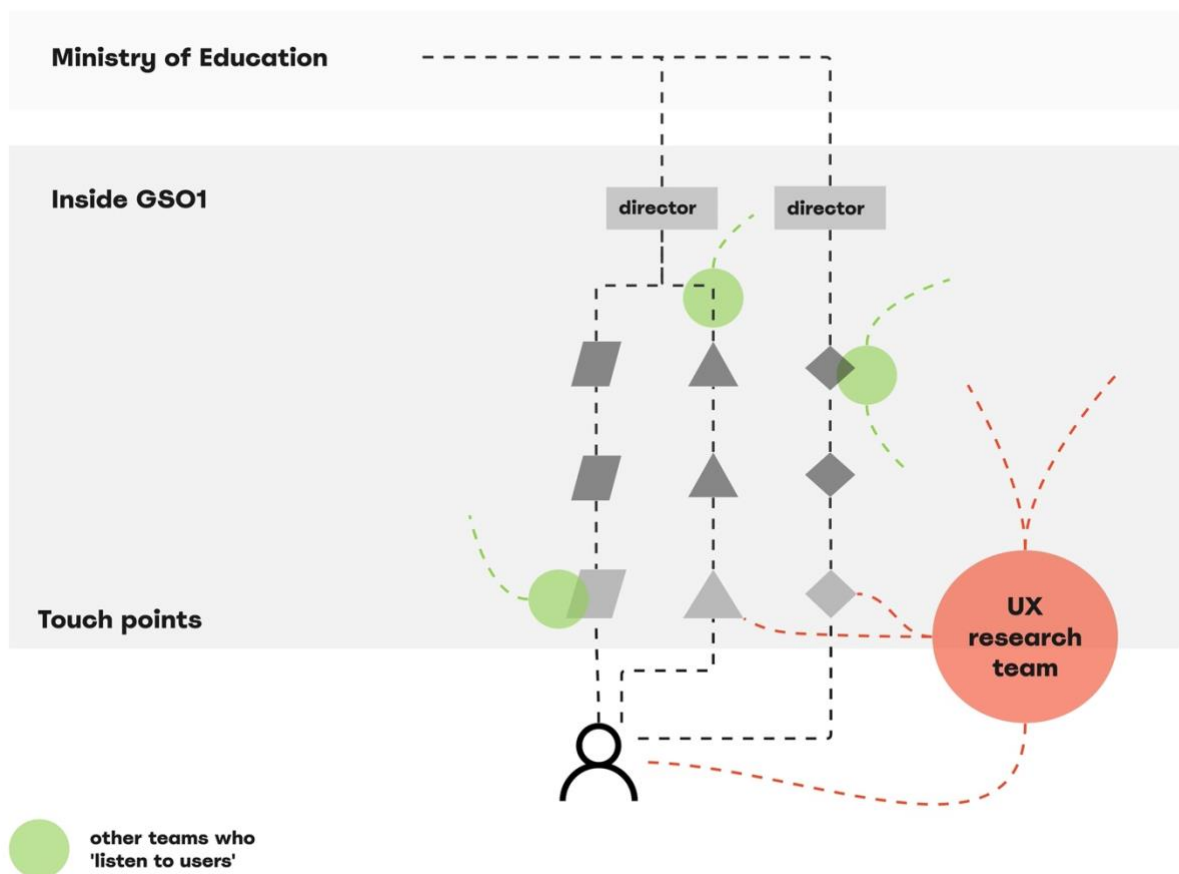4. analyzing and sharing UX research insights with impact.

Figure 2. Mapping of the position of the UX research team in the organization.

With this, the UX research practice matured from a limited and operational role of doing small usability tests on the self-service portal in the end of the development cycle, to claiming a more strategic role by advising different departments on users' perspectives of the organization's services. However, this was not how the UX research team was positioned in the organization. The practitioner-researcher noted that for delivering services that meet user needs, the users' perspectives should be considered much earlier in the process. That is how the next project emerged.

6.2 The compassionate civil servant, project two

The project started with a mapping of the GSO's process of how the student finance law was translated into services. This evolved into a series of so-called photo-interviews by the practitioner-researcher with colleagues from different roles in this law-to-service process and the way they saw themselves as 'compassionate civil servants'. In other words: what role citizens' perspectives had in their work within the delivery of policy to services. The mapping and the political context is shown in Figure 3, as well as where the four insights emerge in this system.

Four insights as to why empathy for citizens only played a minor role in the making of digital public services by civil servants in GSO1 were identified.

Firstly, informants did not know where citizens' responsibility ends and where that of the government begins. Students' feelings about student loans and debt were hard for informants to relate to. Student finance being a loan rather than a gift, is a collective austerity to the disadvantage of the individual. As a result, civil servants encountered difficult dilemmas in their work, like: "should applying for a student loan be easily accessible or have some hurdles for young students?".
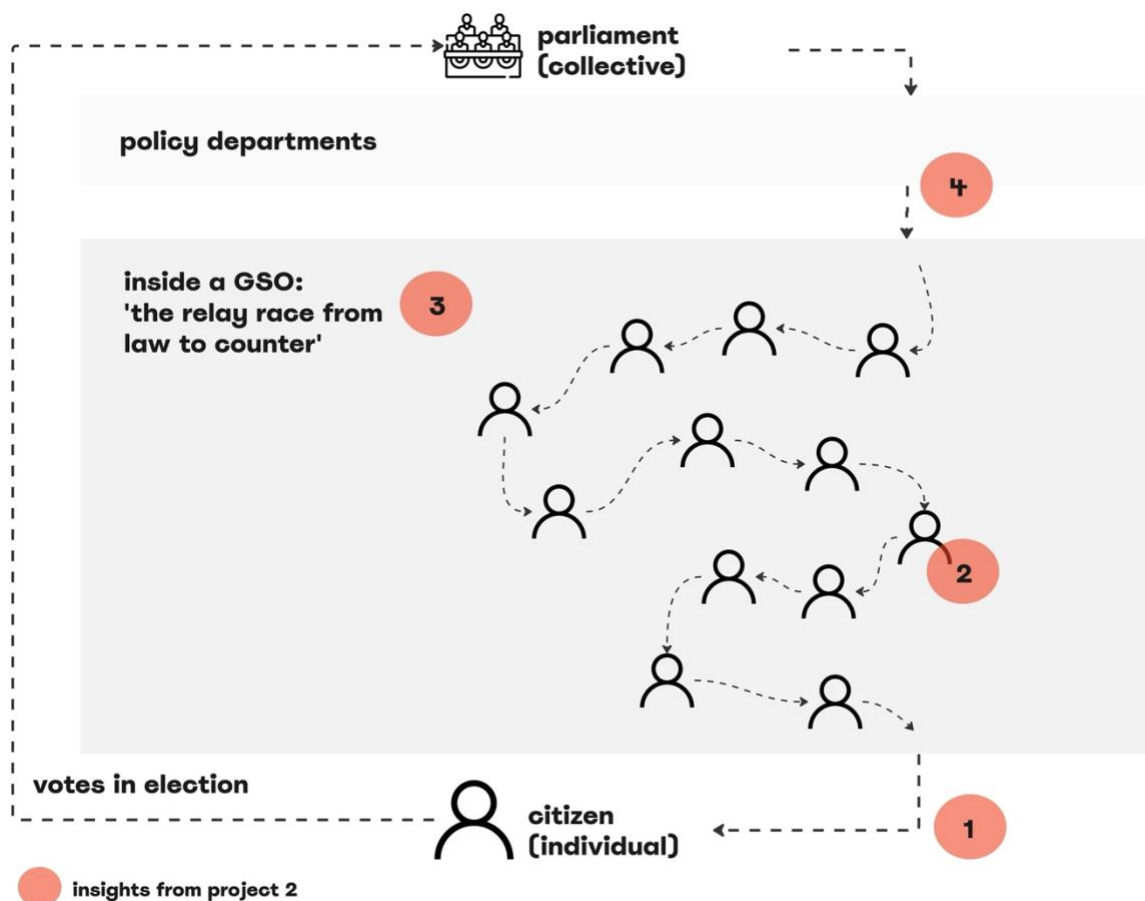

Figure 3. Civil servants in the 'relay race from law to counter'.

Secondly, the civil servants felt stuck with their own morals and beliefs as civil servants should be objective and 'just execute the law'. They did not always experience room to be themselves but felt they should be an anonymous civil servant, due to reorganizations, political interests, unclear communication, or their own insecurity. This led to the underdevelopment of reflectiveness in the GSO.

Thirdly, the informants had little overview of the service experience because departments, processes and responsibilities were cut up and divided. Everyone did their part and passed the baton, but did not see the impact of their choices further down the road which made it hard to take responsibility for it. The civil servants were busy with output, but not outcome.

And lastly, the civil servants did not have the capabilities or did not feel the freedom to act on users' feedback because they believed they worked for the minister and were afraid things 'might get political'. The hierarchy within governmental context had traditionally been top-down: the ministry devises the law, it is assessed by parliament, and the GSO carries it out.

These insights partly concern organizational issues, but also relate to individuals' attitudes and to the organizational culture and process. To become human/user-centered, the organization needs a culture change, or as one of the participants, Jean, a business analyst, puts it: "Traditionally, my work is oriented towards the organization. And not towards the customer. We model business processes. How do I get a product or service from A to B as efficiently as possible? Employees adapt to this, but do citizens do the same?" The GSO staff seemed focused more on the political context than on their end-users, which may explain why the UX research team from project one had a hard time introducing UX insights on a strategic level.

6.3   The CoronaMelder app, project three

When the Covid-crisis started, a societal discussion about digital support for contact tracing caused the Dutch ministry of Health to ask experts to develop a contact tracing app with a great emphasis on accessibility and privacy by design, to aim for a high adoption rate. The practitioner-researcher's role was to map out the processes of the regional health organizations (RHOs). The design team worked in weekly sprints with a visit at an RHO (by the practitioner-researcher), a usability test with users, a call for feedback to the involved open community and a meeting with a scientific advisory board on usability. The team had a lot of design freedom which led to an app that was very well received by the privacy-minded community, that was accessible for a great part of society and had an effect in managing the covid19 pandemic (Ebbers, e.a., 2021). The design team had over ten iterative design cycles before the launch of the app. Many barriers from earlier projects were lifted because of the extraordinary Covid-circumstances: the design team was involved from the start, policy was developed alongside the design process (and not before), and the team had high human/user-centered design capabilities because of the unorthodox way of bringing the team together (they were some of the biggest critics of an earlier open tender procedure). The open way of working with users and stakeholders enabled the design team to truly work user-centered which contributed to the success of the CoronaMelder app (Adviescollege ICT-toetsing, 2022).

However, when we see the app as one of the touch points within the larger contact tracing efforts, the success of the project comes in a different light. Responsibilities to fight Covid19 were divided between the national Ministry of Health and 26 RHOs with low trust towards the Ministry and vice versa. This hampered the effectiveness of CoronaMelder. For example, the best moment to activate the app is when one gets a covid test and has its first contact with the RHO. However, implementing this was non-negotiable due to the enormous pressure that the RHOs were under to scale-up their testing and so 'that ministry-app' was not welcome at that moment in the process. This led to an added delay in contact tracing by two or more days and made the app less effective to stop the spread of Covid19. This example shows how the effectiveness of the service was dependent on the way the Ministry and the 26 RHOs worked together to design and deliver the service.

The practitioner-researcher learned from this project that even when there is design freedom and a team with high capabilities including a great design infrastructure which leads to a great usable app, such an app is still part of a much bigger service and ecosystem (in this case of fighting the Covid19-crisis), as Figure 4 shows. Even though at the start it seemed a project with little constraints with regard to the design, and because of the crisis situation conventional organizational boundaries could be ignored, interorganizational dynamics within this ecosystem still played a restrictive part. Which brings us to the fourth project.
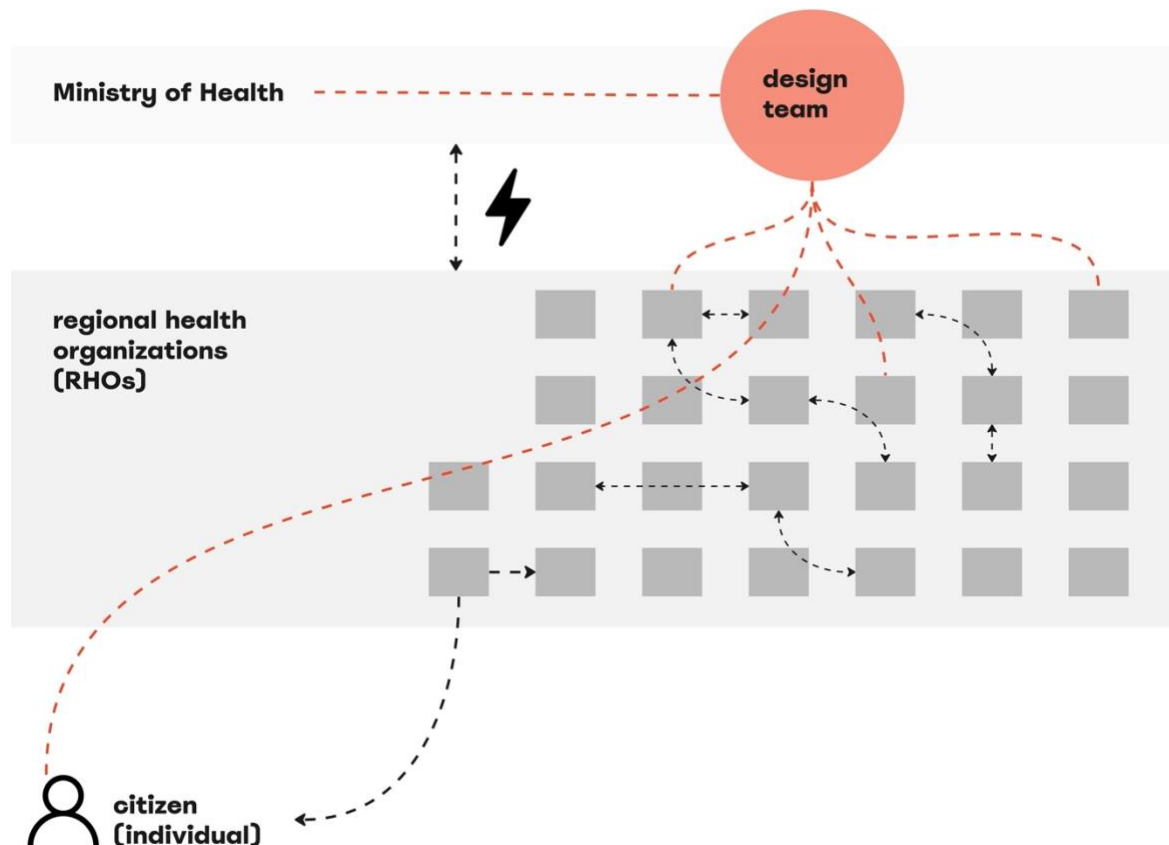

Figure 4. The design team within the context of (a part of) the service eco-system for contact tracing.

6.4 Practitioner-researcher maps her own relation with government for a month - project four

Using her inside knowledge of public/government context, the practitioner-researcher connected her own interactions and experiences with P/GSOs to the organizational sides and showed how services (don't) interlink with each other. She mapped whether these touch points (letters, visits to web portals, phone calls, searches for information, bank transactions, etc.) were automated or not, and which organizations and policy departments were involved including legislation and underlying social values. A simplified and abstract version of this timeline can be seen in Figure 5.

Three findings about the relationship between government and citizens became clear. Firstly, for the government, laws and services are always for the masses, they have a collective character and are 'for everyone'. Whereas for citizens it is always a personal and unique interaction. Secondly, stress adds up and citizens lose the overview. As they don't have an overview, they lack an action perspective (Keizer et al., 2019) to manage the spaghetti because every strand comes to them on its own. P/GSOs

don't take this into account when delivering their services, as you can see in Figure 5 by the almost absence of bundling the 'spaghetti strands'. Thirdly, there is no joint responsibility with the government, everything is compartmentalized and has its own counter. P/GSOs have their own processes, organizational structures and their own funding stream. Concluding, this project gave the researcher an overview to see how P/GSOs operate as single monoliths and how overwhelming and time consuming this can be from a user's perspective.
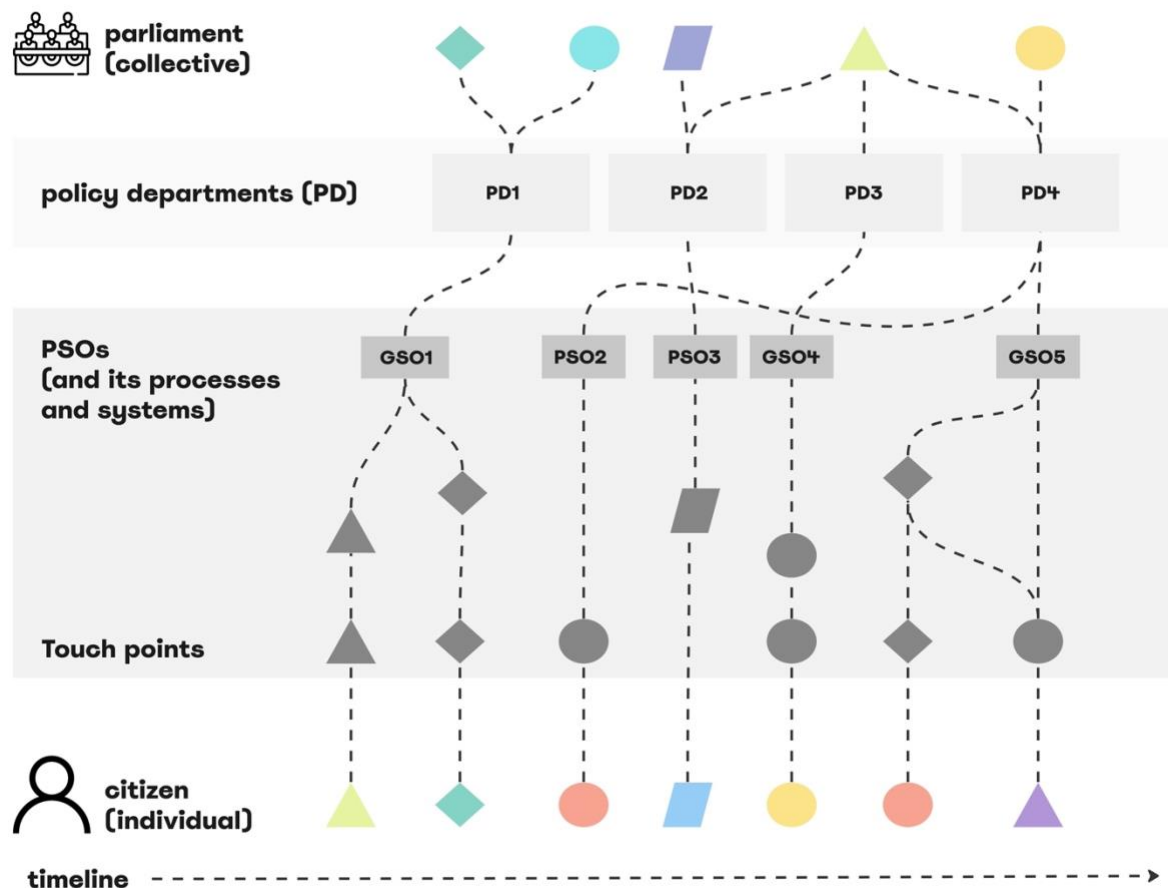

Figure 5. Simplified abstract timeline of practitioner-researcher's relation with government in November 2020.

7   Themes

Combining the insights from the four projects, five themes were synthesized from the practice of service design and delivery by GSOs.

7.1   Tension between collective and individual needs

What constitutes societal value is defined and discussed by political parties, politicians, in public debate, and in parliament. But as we can see in project two and four, the notion of how this value should be delivered to the individual citizen is often less clear. This leaves it up to GSOs to translate the collective value perspective into value for the individual, without having the capabilities or guidelines to do so.

7.2   Public services should be inclusive for everyone

Not every citizen has the same ability to organize their life and to interact with services and organizations. Although commercial organizations also strive to be inclusive, they do not have the full

obligation to be accessible for everyone. However, for public/government services there is no alternative for users. To design for inclusion is to involve a wide variety of users in the design process, but as project one shows, this is not standard practice. In contrast, project three shows that when a design process includes user involvement with a wide variety of users, this stimulates the delivery of an inclusive service.

7.3   A top-down, hierarchical culture prevents user focus
As the studied GSOs operate in a politicized context (with political reckoning), they often have the top down culture of predominantly working for the minister and less for citizens. Project one shows how UX insights and efforts were only allowed on an operational level and did not have impact on strategic decisions of the GSO. This dynamic is further illustrated in project two. However, project three shows, because of the team composition and the nature of the Covid-crisis, that this politicized culture element played a smaller part in the development of the app.

7.4   User feedback competes with policy implementation and IT-changes
The studied GSOs prioritized policy changes and life cycle management of IT before feedback from citizens about their service experience. In project one this translated to little room for user feedback in the GSOs' way of working. This is further stimulated by the focus on the legal aspects of policies, as shown in project two. Again, in contrast, project three demonstrates that with the right capabilities and priorities in the GSO, user feedback can play an essential part in the way of working of a team.

7.5   GSOs are part of a larger service ecosystem
GSOs are not alone in the service ecosystem but are part of an interplay of policy departments and other GSOs, sometimes parts are even privatized (PSOs). The GSOs do not take each other's roles and services into account when delivering services to citizens, as is illustrated in project four. Every GSO does its own translation of the law (or parts thereof) into services and does not take responsibility for how the law as a whole impacts citizens. This culture is explained in project two. In project three this dynamic is visible within the inter-organizational dynamics between the ministry and the RHOs.

8   Discussion
Comparing the results with the state of the art, we find that human/user-centered service design seems to answer the Dutch government's call for a more 'human dimension'. However, the themes that we identified from the four projects indicate that this is easier said than done. Making excellent services as described in the ISO-standard (2021) is unruly in the practice of GSOs. Although the ISO-standard says that it is applicable to P/GSOs, from the practice of our practitioner-researcher the political dynamic that impacts GSOs' culture and way of working, plus the obligation to be utterly inclusive makes it difficult to apply the common service standards and principles, as well as corresponding design processes to the context of public/ government services. For example, the political hierarchy that affects GSOs contradicts with the first principle of service excellence (ISO, 2021): manage the organization from the outside-in. One might suggest a 180-degree culture change in GSOs, but that does not do justice to the democratic nature of public/ government organizations. For GSOs the challenge is to both manage the organization from the outside-in as well as be accountable within the democratic context, and thus listen two ways.

GSOs are strongly focused on their policy department, but have little regard for other PSOs in the same service ecosystem. Policy departments do not act as an orchestrator, but approach the GSOs as

separate entities, and so they operate as silos, not dissimilar to siloing of departments in commercial organizations that can hinder human/user-centered design (De Lille et al., 2012). The GSOs not aligning and collaborating leads to monolithic behavior and neither to service bundling (Skålén & Gummerus, 2023) nor to an orchestrated experience for citizens when dealing with multiple PSOs (Mager & Gais, 2009; Trischler & Westman Trischler, 2022).

To a certain extent, the existing standards and principles provide many tools for setting up a GSO for service excellence with associated work processes, but a more integrated and strategic approach within and across P/GSOs is needed to create service excellence for individuals and for society as a whole. Efforts should also be scaled to the inter-organizational level of government as a whole (Trischler & Charles, 2019), as illustrated in Figure 6.
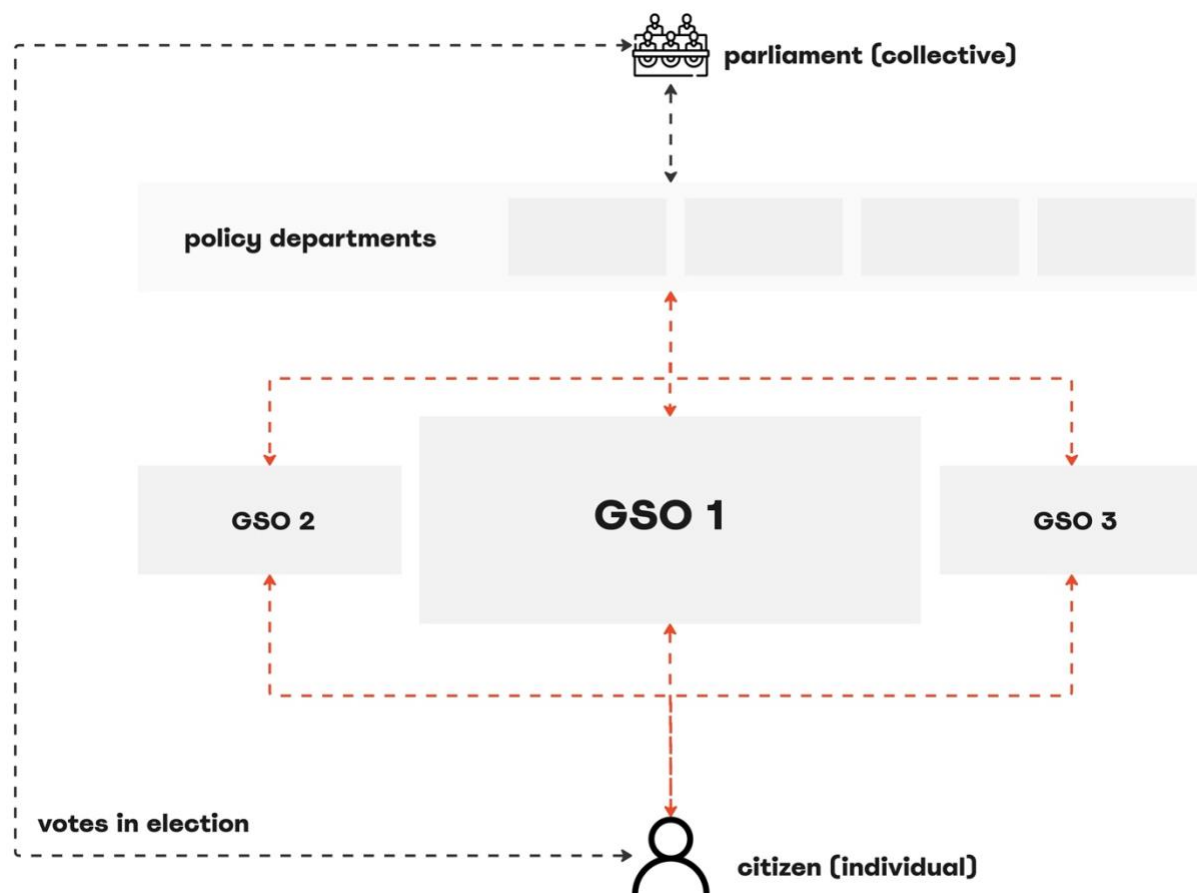

Figure 6. The inter-organizational level of government as a whole including GSOs.

A limitation of this study is that the practitioner-researcher did not start her weblog with this study in mind. She did, however, apply some key quality attributes of qualitative/ action research while writing on her blog, such as the use of journaling as a reflection tool, a way to document learnings and the iterative learning cycles that are so familiar within action research (Coghlan, 2019). During the research the practitioner-researcher became more reflexive and her work and writing became more strategic. Although the early blogs contain little analysis and reflection, they are clear about what happened, and later blogs build upon that documentation.

Special about this way of journaling was that it happened on an open-for-everyone weblog. Informants sometimes referred to one another as they had read the other's interview before

participating (project 2). A benefit of this is that blog posts were not mere journal posts, but also interventions within the context of the study, and the open nature of this stimulated the emerging culture change within GSOs. A limitation is that the practitioner-researcher was at the time not yet fully equipped as an action researcher to assess these changes and incorporate them back into the study.

Implications for further research are to expand and deepen the theory on services and human/user centered service design to incorporate the political dynamics that play a part in GSOs. We recommend academics to study the practice of PSOs, in particular of GSOs, and to find solutions to incorporate the standards, principles and design processes on both an intra- interorganizational level. We encourage practitioners to focus not only on the operational design process itself but on the strategic way the organization implements service standards and principles, and to introduce human/ user centered design principles in the way laws and policies are made.

9 Conclusion

To sum up, the four projects teach us that to ensure the delivery of digital services that meet quality standards, GSOs need to embrace human/user-centered service design on a strategic level and not only on an operational level (project one). Organizational culture to enable such a human/user-centered approach in delivering public services is key (project two). However, even when a GSO has the required capabilities in place (project three), this still does not mean the entire service is human/user-centered as GSOs operate in an ecosystem of inter-organisational dynamics and politics (project four).

Based on an analysis of a practitioner-researcher's practice of working on human/user-centered public service design, as documented on her weblog for a period of five years in four projects, we argue that truly human/user-centered public services need more than a service design process to be delivered. The perspective of law and policy making processes as well as the institutional and (inter-)organizational perspective need to be incorporated as well when designing and delivering public/ government services. It's not just making the design right, in GSOs, making the right design might be just as hard, maybe even harder (Buxton, 2010).

For service standards, principles and service design processes to be applicable to public/government design contexts, these should be expanded or customized to be able to deal with the specific dynamics of GSOs. This will hopefully enable GSOs to help citizens achieve their goals in life even when they need several services from different PSOs. The government as a whole must start thinking and working beyond silos, and start orchestrating the service experience for citizens and, with this, their own efforts to design human/user-centered services.

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