

GETTING TO EMPATHY:
**Fostering Innovation and End-User Focus in the Canadian
Public Service**

Danny Holmes and Brandon Krauthaker
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Carleton University

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY MINISTER

GETTING TO EMPATHY: Fostering Innovation and End-User Focus in the Canadian Public Service

SUMMARY

- The Canadian Public Service is hampered by a risk-averse culture, and a lack of a human-centric focus.
- Empathy mapping provides a proven approach to spur innovation in the Public Service by providing sophisticated end-user behavioural insight to better understand and tailor policy solutions to the needs of citizens.
- The public service should develop an empathy mapping exercise toolkit for managers, trialled in the PCO's Innovation Hub, that will provide training to managers to practically and effectively utilize this technique.
- The trial period should highlight the benefits of the approach, making buy-in from potential dissenters more likely, and providing the potential for meaningful citizen engagement in the policy process.

Issue

The Canadian Federal Public Service has made a commitment to adopting innovative processes and solutions as exemplified by their commitment to the Blueprint 2020 project. The public service has been hampered by a culture of risk aversion and a lack of collaboration between government departments. Initiatives like the Innovation Hub are attempting to de-silo federal departments, and provide an incubator for new ideas to be trialledⁱ; however, the Deputy Ministers' Committee on Policy Innovation Playbook (DMCPI) identifies that there is a continued need to expand toolkits with practical applications and exercises to foster innovation.ⁱⁱ

Furthermore, the Government of Canada faces a need to re-focus its efforts on providing services that are tailored specifically to citizens. The 2016 Message from the Auditor General of Canada echoes this call for government create "government services built around people."ⁱⁱⁱ Providing practical solutions that integrate an end-user focus into the policy process should be a prime concern for Deputy Ministers in a Public Service that seeks to provide superior services to citizens.

'We see government programs that are not designed to help those who have to navigate them—programs where the focus is more on what civil servants are doing than on what citizens are getting.'

- Auditor General of Canada, 2016

Recommendations

We have heard the call from the Auditor General and propose a specific practical toolkit to address the need for user-focus. *Empathy Mapping* presents a cost-effective, innovative approach to reforming the way the Public Service approaches policy problems and leverages behavioural insights. Behavioural Insights imply designing programs and services in ways that are likely to improve outcomes for citizens based on how they behave in real-life situations and is a top priority for the innovation hub. Further, government policy is about solving problems, and

empathy maps shed light on which problems to solve, and how. An empathy mapping exercise takes place at the early stages of the policy process, and in this sense can be viewed as a co-creation exercise. Policy team members are gathered (along with citizens and stakeholders should the manager deem it appropriate) and answer questions in order to fill out various empathy maps for different 'personas'. Each persona is intended to represent a subsection of the country that would be affected by a specific policy field.

The idea of the exercise is to have team members empathize with the situations and feelings of the personas, and to "see through their eyes". Once the team can see through the eyes of another, they can begin to identify policy problems facing the personas, and potential areas not before considered where government policy may have to change. As the prospective policy recommendations move on to later stages in the policy process, they continue to be grounded by these empathy maps as a form of quality control. Analysts can look back to the personas they generated in an effort to ensure the policy is actually addressing a problem faced by the personas. For a sample empathy map see Appendix 1.

Implementation Map

1. **Build:** Create a practical toolkit for empathy mapping tailored to the public service. The team developing the toolkit should seek out best practices from the private sector where there is a wealth of knowledge and experience on design thinking.
2. **Trial:** Establish a pilot project in the PCO's Innovation Hub (which is intended to be an incubator for creative policy approaches). Several months of trial with different policy spheres is ideal as an experimental phase.
3. **Refine:** Establish a feedback loop where qualitative data measures are gathered to assess whether or not the public servants using the exercise found value in it.
4. **Diffuse:** If the trial is successful the toolkit should be published for use by managers across the public service, with the option of tailoring the exercise to different departments.
5. **Train:** Train Public managers on how to run an empathy mapping exercise

Analysis

The Public Service is at a critical intersection between talking and action on implementing design thinking and user-focused policy processes. The PCO has recognized this need in calling for practical solutions to the aforementioned problems with Blueprint 20/20.^{iv} Empathy mapping represents a low risk trial exercise that can be quickly implemented and can be considered a strategic first step to incremental adoption of innovative design thinking. Integrating empathy mapping should be an easy sell as there is a large collection of research highlighting the benefits of design thinking exercises.

Major firms in the private sector have already integrated design thinking and empathy mapping into their product strategies because they recognize the value this approach can bring. IBM in particular considers empathy mapping the "cornerstone of their overall design thinking process".^v Ivy league Universities have drafted courses on these methods for students across multiple disciplines (eg. Stanford School of Design, Harvard). The Government of Canada has yet to provide public servants with the tools and insight needed to integrate empathy mapping into government processes.

Our suggested implementation is the best option going forward as it leverages existing infrastructure (the Innovation Hub) for trial incubation, which is actively seeking innovative approaches and toolkits.^{vi} Trialing the technique in the Innovation Hub first, before moving to larger-scale implementation, will mitigate the potential risks that pursuing this approach might entail. This trial period should help in getting buy-in from experienced managers in the Public Service who might be resistant to change by providing evidence of the benefits the approach can provide in the policy making process.

Strengths/Opportunities

- **Human-Centric**: End-user focus in policy development.
- **Flexibility**: Empathy maps are easy to revise as assumptions based on real data change.
- **Meaningful Citizen Engagement**: Possibility of integrating citizens in the Empathy Mapping process provides the opportunity for increased citizen engagement.
- **Shared Understanding**: Allows policy teams to collectively understand how the policy is going to benefit the lives of the end user because they began to think about the policy with the end user specifically in mind.
- **Low Opportunity Cost**: - The exercise takes between 30 minutes and an hour.
- **Interdepartmental Coordination**: Opportunity to improve coordination between different policy teams and departments.
- **Private-Sector Expertise**: There is a wealth of knowledge and best-practices from the private sector that the Public Sector can draw upon.
- **Easy to Understand**: Simple conceptually for teams. Easy and straightforward.
- **Alternative Problem Identification**: Seeing through a “different set of eyes” may lead to discovering new problems or policy options not considered beforehand.

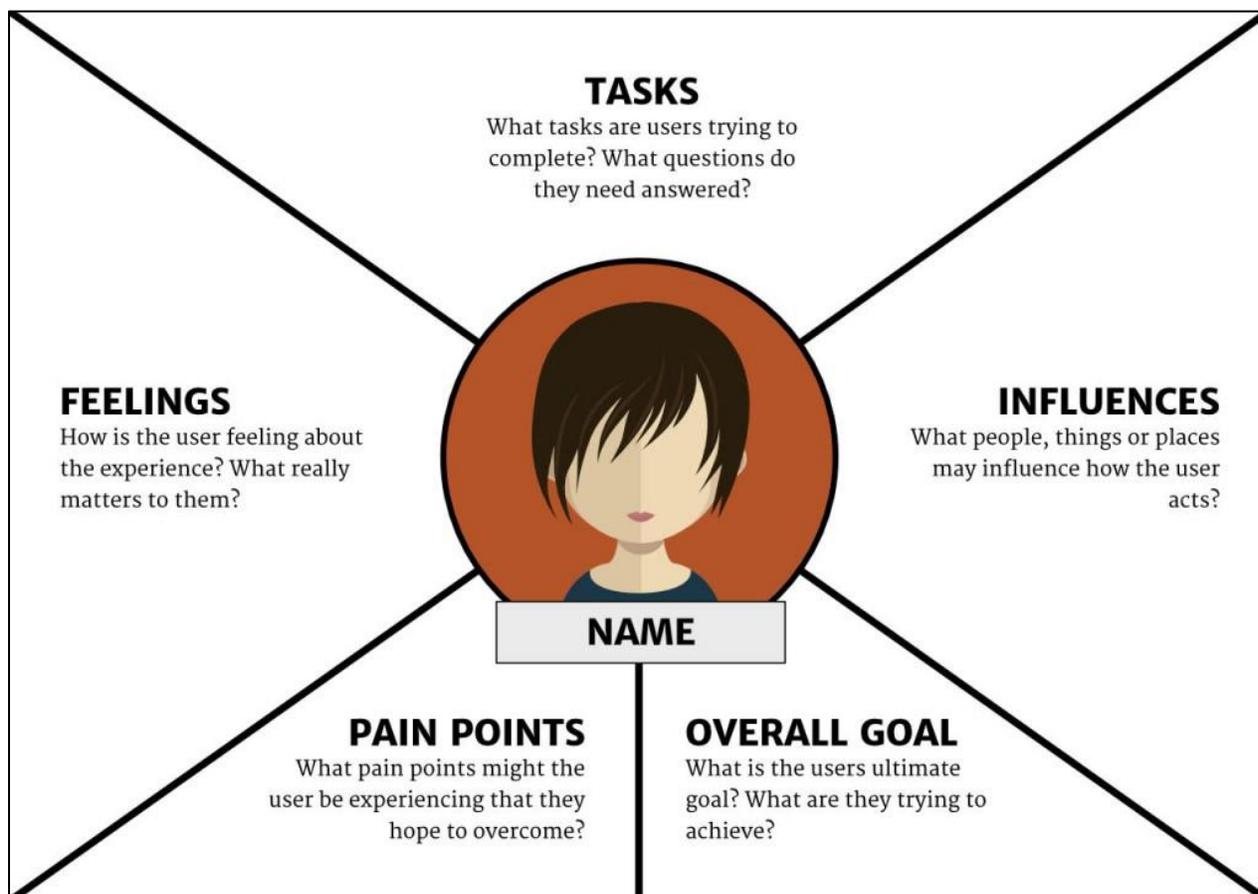
Weaknesses

- **Applicability**: Empathy maps can be great for some policy realms, while not as applicable to others.
- **Effective Questions**: Need accurate questions to ensure the exercise is meaningful and worth the time investment.
- **Garnering Buy-in**: Risk of skepticism from experienced public servants who may be resistant to change.
- **Measurement**: Efficacy measurement can be difficult. Need to set up accurate qualitative and quantitative metrics for performance measurement.

Conclusions and Further Considerations

Empathy mapping is an opportunity for the Canadian Public Service to address the lack of innovation and end-user focus that has proven elusive. While we believe the PCO’s Innovation Hub provides the ideal infrastructure to trial and implement this idea, which could then be diffused throughout the Public Service by training managers through workshops and training sessions, there are other options to implement this solution. First, the public service could start multiple pilot projects in different innovation hubs in government, such as NRCan’s IN-spire, to trial the toolkit in different environments. Second, the Public service could skip the piloting phase of the toolkit, and opt for widespread use immediately, and opt for refining the technique over time. While there are merits to both of these alternative approaches, we believe having a single, focused pilot would provide important revisions and risk reduction to the toolkit.

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Appendix 1^{vii}

Appendix 2^{viii}

Sample Empathy Mapping Exercise

STEP 1: 5 MINUTES

- Introduce activity and prepare teams
- Break workshop participants into teams of 3-4 people.
- Assign one persona per team if there are multiple personas, otherwise have each team work with the same persona.
- Pass out worksheets or have each team create a large Empathy Map by drawing a stick figure in the center of a large piece of paper and blocking out three sections (Think, Feel, Do) around it.
- Give each team a copy of the questions asked and scenarios faced by their developed personas.

STEP 2: 30 MINUTES

- Complete Persona Empathy Maps
- For each extreme situation, have a facilitator read it out loud to the workshop. Tip: Convey emotion as you introduce the scenario to empathize the strain/stress.
- Give each team 5 minutes (per government policy faced for each persona) to flush out how their persona thinks/feels in relation to that scenario. Tip: Teams can use one worksheet per situation or one large paper for all situations (use a different color sticky note for each situation).

STEP 3: 10 MINUTES

- Reflect on results and activity
- Give each team 5 minutes to reflect on the following questions: What surprises you? What did you learn about your persona? What aspects of your persona do you want to learn more about? What aspects of your persona will impact or influence your designs the most? What policies can you implement/change to affect a desired outcome? Are there other problems discovered that merit further exploration? How did the personas respond to the different scenarios?
- 5 minutes: Have each team share their reflections with the larger group.

ⁱ "First Annual Report, March 2016." *Privy Council Office*, 2016. Accessed Nov 29, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=innovation&doc=rpt3%2Findex-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱ "The Deputy Ministers' Committee on Policy Innovation Playbook." *Governemnt of Canada*. 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Message from the Auditor General of Canada." *Office of the Auditor General of Canada*, 2016. Accessed December 1, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201611_00_e_41829.html

^{iv} "First Annual Report, March 2016." *Privy Council Office*, 2016. Accessed Nov 29, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/index.asp?lang=eng&page=innovation&doc=rpt3%2Findex-eng.htm>

^v Plantenberg, Sarah. "Empathy Maps." *IBM Bluemix Garage*. Accessed Dec 1, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.ibm.com/devops/method/content/think/practice_empathy_maps/

^{vi} "The Deputy Ministers' Committee on Policy Innovation Playbook." *Governemnt of Canada*. 2014. Section 2A.

^{vii} Cao, Jerry. "The Practical Guide to Empathy Maps: 10 Minute User Personas." *UXPin*. Accessed Dec 2, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.uxpin.com/studio/blog/the-practical-guide-to-empathy-maps-creating-a-10-minute-persona/>

^{viii} Knox, Nikki. "Persona Empathy Map." *Cooper*, 2014. Accessed Dec 2, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.cooper.com/journal/2014/05/persona-empathy-mapping>