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Beyond Substantive Goals: A Framework for Understanding Citizens' Needs and Goals in Bureaucratic Encounters

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Abstract: This paper contributes to e-government research by presenting a conceptual framework of citizens' needs and goals, with regards to bureaucratic encounters and applying this framework to empirical data. The framework identifies four needs (process security, relational security, discretion, and efficiency/effectiveness) and three goals (substantive outcome, identity-related outcome, and justice- and fairness-related outcome). These needs and goals guide citizens' approach to bureaucratic encounters. The degree to which they are met may impact the efficiency of service delivery, as well as citizens' satisfaction with the authorities involved. The framework may be used to analyse citizens' strategies for bureaucratic encounters and their use of self-service systems, as well as to assess self-service systems, multi-channel strategies, and service designs to determine how they serve citizens' needs and goals.

Keywords: Citizen-government interaction, digitalization, theory-building, digital services, needs and goals

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1. Introduction and background

As citizens' interactions with government increasingly occur online (European Commission 2019), it is now more important than ever to understand what citizens look for in these encounters. Citizens' needs and goals may influence their approaches to these encounters, with significant implications for the design of government systems and services.

Citizens encounter government across a wide range of situations, for a variety of reasons. This paper focuses on what, Goodsell calls "bureaucratic encounters" (BEs) (Goodsell 2018, 1981, Katz et al 1975), defined as "the interaction of citizen and official as they communicate to conduct business" (Goodsell 1981 p. 4). These encounters are where most people have direct experiences with government authorities.

In the e-government literature, what citizens want and expect from BEs—their needs and goals—has primarily been studied from a channel-choice (CC) perspective (Pieterson 2009; Reddick & Turner 2012; Ebbers, Jansen, & van Deursen 2016; Lindgren et al. 2019). From this perspective, needs and goals are generally treated as independent variables for channel choice. However, there is a clear gap in the literature when it comes to examining needs and goals from a citizen's perspective, with the citizen—rather than the channel—as the unit of analysis (Madsen & Kræmmergaard 2015; Madsen & Hoffman 2019).

This study contributes to the e-government literature by presenting a conceptual framework of citizens' needs and goals, with regards to BEs and the actions and strategies they adopt to achieve them. It addresses the need for citizen-centric research (Reddick 2005; Scott, DeLone & Golden 2009, Meijer & Bekkers 2015; Lindgren et al 2019) and native theory development within e-government studies, which has repeatedly been advocated for in the literature (Gadamer 1975; Lenk 2009; Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014; Rose et al. 2015; Persson et al. 2017). This study also addresses the need for more theoretical work, to fully understand citizens' strategies and behaviours for BEs; such an understanding would aid in reviews and revisions of existing CC models and the development of new models (Scott, DeLone, & Golden 2009).

Scholars can use this framework to investigate the impacts of applying different technologies to BEs on citizens' experiences. Practitioners can use it in the design of self-service systems, service-delivery mechanisms, and multi-channel strategies.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2, describes the methods underlying the literature review and the subsequent empirical exploration. Section 3, develops the framework and presents a brief empirical exploration of each of its dimensions. Finally, Section 4, offers concluding remarks, reflections on the limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research.

2. Methods

This study employs a hermeneutic literature review, to develop a conceptual framework of citizens' goals and needs, with regard to BEs. The framework is used in the qualitative analysis of a large corpus of semi-structured interviews with citizens, in order to evaluate its applicability and usefulness.

2.1. Developing the framework

The conceptual framework is intended to provide a systematic and comprehensive tool for understanding citizens' needs and goals, with regard to BEs.

The framework is developed through a "hermeneutic literature review" (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014) in line with the principles of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer 1975), synthesizing theory and findings from previous research. Following Rose et al. (2015), I examine research from five different bodies of literature: 1, the public administration literature on BEs (e.g., Lipsky 1980; Goodsell 1981, 2018), 2, the e-government literature with a focus on channel choice (e.g., Pieterson 2009; Ebbers, Jansen, & van de Wijngaert 2016), 3, the private sector service encounter literature, which focuses on the "soft" needs in encounters between individuals and service providers (e.g., Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml 1988; Dasu & Chase 2010), 4, the literature on justice and fairness in citizens' BEs (e.g., Blader & Tyler 2003; Dworkin 2017), and 5, literature on the sociology of encounters (e.g., Goffman 1967; Mik-Meyer & Villadsen 2007). Each body of literature contributed unique perspectives that aided in the development of the framework.

The assessment of these five bodies of literature is based on a set of initial assumptions founded in both previous research and my career as a civil servant. These assumptions are not hypotheses to be tested; rather, they serve as sensitizers (Bowen 2006) for the search for, and selection of, relevant studies.

Table 1. Initial assumptions

Assumption	**Inspired by**
The trigger for initiating a bureaucratic encounter/set of encounters is typically a substantive need (e.g., benefit, permit, service) or the fulfilment of an obligation.	Godsell 2018; Lindgreen et al. 2019
BEs are asymmetrical encounters in which the citizen typically has less power, information, and resources than the authority. The assumption is, that citizens will have needs related to handling this asymmetry.	Godsell 2018; Lenk 2002
Much of the process surrounding a BE may be complex and opaque for citizens, resulting in uncertainty and ambiguity. The assumption is that citizens have needs related to handling this uncertainty and ambiguity—to feeling secure in their actions and their understanding of the process.	Pieterson 2009; Jarvis 2014
In BEs, citizens will often find themselves in unfamiliar situations with insufficient domain skills. The assumption is, that citizens will have needs related to establishing a sufficient understanding of what they can and should do and what is going on.	Skaarup 2020; Madsen & Christensen 2019; Grönlund, Hatakka, & Ask 2007

The hermeneutic literature review (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014) employed in this study entails the following steps: 1, reading, 2, identifying ideas and concepts of relevance for the research objective and placing them into the emerging conceptual framework, 3, critically assessing the literature, 4, developing and revising the framework as new concepts and ideas are identified, 5, searching based on references and new perspectives found in the literature, 6, identifying areas for further study and potential applications of the framework. This study applies these closely interconnected steps iteratively—not necessarily in the order presented here.

During this iterative process, I synthesized the framework through a series of revisions and elaborations, until saturation was reached, and no further dimensions could be identified (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014)

2.2. Empirical application

The framework is applied to a corpus of 332 semi-structured interviews with citizens at service centres, job centres, and benefits centres across four municipalities in Denmark between 2010 and 2014. The interviews varied in length from five minutes to 45 minutes with an average of 15 minutes. The goal of the fieldwork was not strict representativity, but to show the variation in terms of age, gender, profession, level of education, digital skills, and reason for being at the centre. Significant variation was achieved on all these dimensions.

Citizens' experiences, perspectives, and strategies with regards to BEs were explored through semi-structured interviews (Kvale 1997), with citizens onsite at the centres, as well as by phone with citizens who had recently engaged in a digital BE. The interviews were supplemented by observations of BEs.

The transcribed interviews were "reduced" through what Gee (1985) calls "poetic reduction," which draws on various aspects of spoken language. This approach entails dividing responses into verses and stanzas to emphasize their structure, rhythm, and intonation.

This approach allows for key aspects of sometimes long and rambling interviews to be presented in condensed form, including parts of the information contained in the prosodic features of speech, that would otherwise be lost in a straightforward textual representation of interview data. Poetic reduction does so in a more accessible and less time-consuming way than full-scale conversational analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). This not only highlights the core propositional content of the interview, but also the modal aspects of speech carrying information about attitudes and feelings, all of which I can then draw upon in my interpretations and analysis.

This reduction is not "innocent," even though it is based on "clues" in the spoken language. It is in itself an interpretation and frames the accounts in a particular way. The analysis itself, has therefore, been carried out on the reduced version, with continuous consultation of the full transcript, to ensure that this framing was faithful to the meaning of the full text. The interviews were coded using NVIVO. Initial coding was done based on the categories of the framework (the needs and how they are achieved). A second level of coding was done to establish a more detailed account of how the categories of the framework emerged in the interviews.

Each participant cited has been attributed a fictitious name. In addition, their age, occupation and/or level of education, is provided the first time each of them are mentioned. No other identifying information is given. This ensures respondent's anonymity while allowing them to be presented with a minimum of individuality.

3. Findings: Conceptual framework and empirical exploration

The result of the literature review is a conceptual framework intended to serve as a foundation and reference point for further investigation (Jabareen 2009). Table 2 details this framework. While the table format suggests order and linearity, any given BE may not include all the needs and goals in equal measure or follow the listed order.

The framework presents the needs and goals a citizen may have with regards to their BEs and how these needs and goals may be achieved.

The needs and goals presented in Table 2, cover two phenomena: 1, the process-related needs with regards to the encounter (process security, discretion, efficiency and effectiveness, and relational security; 2, the outcome goals, or what the citizen hopes to achieve through the encounter (substantive outcomes, identity-related outcomes, and justice- and fairness-related outcomes).

The needs and goals in the framework are not mutually exclusive. While they are sufficiently distinct to constitute separate elements, they still overlap and may sometimes, to an extent, be contradictory.

Table 2: Framework of needs and goals

Need	Achieved through	Description	References
Process-related needs			
Process security	A) A sense of understanding	Achieving frame-alignment and disambiguation and bridging different frames of reference, thus, reducing ambiguity to a level that allows citizens to proceed with a sufficient level of security.	Goffman 1974; Daft & Lengel 1986; Gubrium & Järvinen 2013; Webster & Trevino 1995
	B) A sense that the SLB / the authority is competent	Gauging whether the street-level bureaucrat (SLB) or the authority is competent in what they do to bolsters one's sense of security	Suprenant & Solomon 1987; Philip & Hazlett 1997;, Briggs, & Keogh 2001; Farrell, Souchon, & Durden 2001
	C) A sense of closure	A need for clarity and finality, a reduction of uncertainty. A sense of getting things done and knowing what is going to happen next.	Kruglanski 1990; Webster & Kruglanski 1994, Pieterson 2009; Ebbers, Jansen, & van Deursen 2016; Pieterson & van Dijk 2007; Madsen & Pieterson 2019
Efficiency and effectiveness	A sense that time and resources are	A minimal effort required to achieve your goals, a sense of self-efficacy, a sense of having a capacity to act, is supported by	Pieterson 2009; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml 1985; Alotaibi, Sabbahy, & Lockwood 2011; Maister 1985;

	being well spent	"ease of use" and includes "sense of convenience"	Davis 1989; Dimitrova & Chen 2006; Kolasker & Lee-Kelly 2006; Scott, DeLone, & Golden 2011; Gilbert, Palestrini, & Littleboy 2004
Relational security	A) A sense of respect and recognition	The ability to project the identity that you wish to project (typically a situationally relevant positive identity) and to be recognized as a competent individual and a valued member of society.	Goodsel 2018; Suprenant & Solomon 1987; Philip & Hazlett 1997; Goffman 1967, 1973; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml 1985; Gubrium & Holstein 2000; Sarangi & Slembrouck 2014; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2013; Honneth 2003; Lundberg 2012;
	B) A sense of positive intentions	The ability to establish a rapport and gauge the attitudes and intentions of the SLBs involved. This includes increasing the sense that your case is in the hands of someone with a positive attitude towards you and your needs.	Goffman 1967, 1974; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml 1985
	C) A sense of justice and fairness	The feeling that one is being treated justly and fairly in the process.	Tyler 1988, 2001, 2006; Lewicki, Wiethoff, & Tomlinson 1991; Sunshine & Tyler 2003; Blader & Tyler 2003; Yi & Gong 2008; Reisig & Chandek 2001
Discretion	Flexibility in the process, in interactions, and in the interpretation of rules	Allowing for flexibility in the process that leads to the outcome, even when the outcome is non-negotiable. Proving opportunity for the citizens to feel that they have influence in the process.	Lundberg 2012; Madsen & Kræmmergaard 2015; Lipsky 1980; Holstein 2013; Dworkin 2017; Derber 1982
Outcome Goals			
Substantive outcome	Process security and discretion	Achieving the substantive goals for the BE.	See process security and discretion above.
Identity-related outcome	Relational security	Feeling respected and recognized as a valued member of society and preserving a positive sense of one's situationally relevant identity.	See relational security above.

Justice- and fairness-related outcome	Relational security and discretion	Feeling justly and fairly treated by the authority regardless of the substantive outcome.	See relational security and discretion above.

Needs and goals may not always be met through a single encounter. In some cases, they may require several encounters with the same authority or different authorities. As already established, all of these needs and goals are not necessarily important in each BE. In many encounters, only a few are important; in others, all of them are important. Their degree of importance differs based on the individual and their unique situation.

Section 3.1 discusses all dimensions of the framework, applying them to the empirical data.

3.1. Process-security needs

Previous research (e.g., Pieterson & van Dijk 2007; Pieterson 2009; Ebbers, Jansen, & van Deursen 2016; Madsen, Hofmann & Pieterson 2019) indicates that there may be specific needs related to the course of the BE process. Process needs are those related to the experience of a BE and the ways in which outcomes are achieved. Three such needs stand out in the e-government literature: 1,sense of closure, 2, ease of use, and 3,efficiency.

In the literature on private-sector service encounters, focusing on what Dasu & Chase (2010) call the "soft side of customer service", the perceived competence of service personnel is seen as a source of assurance and security in the process.

In this framework, process-security is conceptualized as achieving a sufficient sense of understanding of the process, feeling that the SLBs, and the systems behind them, appear competent in what they do, and achieving a sense of closure (feeling that the process has been navigated successfully, and the uncertainty deriving from lack of prior experience and domain-skills has been reduced to an acceptable level.) Efficiency, is treated as a separate dimension in the framework, together with, ease-of-use.

In the interviews, process security is a matter of feeling safe in what the citizen does, what the citizen has done, and what the authority will do next. It manifests itself in the participants' accounts as assurances of 1, understanding, 2, competence, and 3, closure.

3.1.1. A sense of understanding through frame alignment and disambiguation

Establishing a sense that you understand where you have to go, what information you need, and what you have to do is important in achieving process security. In BEs, citizens often find themselves in unfamiliar situations with insufficient domain skills (Skaarup 2020) to properly plot a course and adapt it to new incoming information, searching for understanding, and evaluating information, and translating their problems and needs into something that fits the relevant bureaucratic framing (Gubrium & Järvinen 2013). As Daft & Lengel describes it (1986:560), "to overcome different frames of reference or clarify ambiguous issues and change understanding in a timely manner"

Frame alignment is necessary when two different understandings must be reconciled to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty. Highly ambiguous messages are open to interpretation; thus, a shared definition must be constructed through interactive communication (Webster & Trevion 1995: 1546). If no shared definition is agreed upon, conflict (if disagreement is acknowledged) and misunderstanding (if disagreement isn't acknowledged) may emerge.

Empirical exploration

If frames are not aligned, participants find it difficult to know what to ask to get the information they need:

"Online, you only get concrete answers to your questions
You may not be asking the right questions
but you won't discover that until you talk to someone
If you ask questions in the wrong way
you get a wrong answer, so to speak…
You get so much extra and can ask deeper about more things
when there is a person at the other end."
(Nana, 47, journalist)

It is important to many of the participants to have means of ensuring that they are being understood and that they understand the information they receive. They find such assurances difficult in text-based online encounters, while face-to-face communication facilitates greater understanding:

"I think it's because I can see the person,
see his or her reaction –
Okay, you understood my question.
You can be more specific,
and I can also sense where the other person is.
I am sure he or she understands what it is I am saying."
(Frederikke, 20, communications student)

3.1.2. A sense that the SLB/ the authority is competent

In order to feel secure in the process, citizens often need to feel certain that the organizations and people that they interact with, are competent. In BEs, there is a clear underlying power asymmetry (Lenk 2002; Mik-Meyer & Villadsen 2007). Service encounters in general and BEs in particular are thus, asymmetrical encounters, with one party possessing skills and knowledge that the other party (typically) does not (Philip & Hazlett 1997). Therefore, credibility and a sense of competence are highly important (Suprenant & Solomon (1987); Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1985, 1987). This can be achieved through the projection of competence by SLBs: understanding citizens' needs, knowing the relevant rules, procedures, and services, and performing effectively in the service process (Alotaibi, Sabbahy, & Lockwood 2011). As citizens generally lack the knowledge necessary to directly evaluate this competence, it may have to be assessed through surface-level or "proxy" indicators (Walker 1995; Black, Briggs, & Keogh 2001) linked to immediately ascertainable behaviour

(Farrell, Souchon, & Durden 2001), such as SLBs' body language, facial expressions, and tone. Such proxy indicators may be even more important when interactions are digitally mediated. One such proxy indicator in digital interaction may be "ease of use"(Davis 1989) of the digital system

3.1.2.1. Empirical exploration

Gauging competence is expressed as important in many of the interviews: "When I can see the [SLB], I can see whether I am talking to a competent person or some rookie" (Naja, 46, teacher). The indicators for competence can be divided into: A) professional knowledge, B) communication competence, and c) procedural competence.

A. Professional knowledge of the SLB

One of the reasons why citizens seek out assistance in the first place is the SLBs' professional knowledge. However, they have limited means of validating the SLBs' knowledge. Thus, they must (at least initially) evaluate professional knowledge, based on the certainty and self-assuredness with which it is delivered.
"I felt secure about my situation
I could hear that he knew his job exactly
and told me what I could do,
who I could call about the benefits
and then he said – come again on Monday,
and we will take it from there."
(Nete, 22, dropped out of school)

It is important that the SLBs deliver their knowledge with confidence and certainty – that they "know that they know."

"It's important
that they show that they know what they are doing,
and that they know that they know what they are doing."
(Rie, 21, high school)

In general, professional knowledge and competence may be evaluated after the fact, based on whether the SLBs' information turns out to be true (which the citizen may often never know) or useful (which they may ultimately discover).

B. Communication competence of the SLB

Good professional knowledge is worth little if it is not successfully communicated. Confidence in the process is increased when participants feel that SLBs are capable of understanding the issues, and communicating rules, procedures, and decisions in a way that is understandable and makes sense to the citizen. Both of the following accounts express a desire for SLBs to be willing to see things from citizens' points of view.

"[What gives me confidence is], generally,
that I can rely on [the fact]

that things will be taken care of
with professional competence
by a caseworker
who is capable of explaining to me
the things I don’t know shit about…
The only sensible person I talked to today,
she was competent enough to understand my take on it.”
(Brian, 40, paver)

“They have to tell me what to do,
explain it to me so I can understand it,
and if they can do that,
then I have no problems with them,
and they usually do explain it
so I can understand it.”
(Bo, 52, caretaker)

C. Procedural competence of the SLB

As with rules and laws, citizens typically have very little knowledge about the procedures and inner workings of the system. Thus, they must rely on, the procedural competence of SLBs and the system, of which they are a part of , the knowledge that the SLB knows her way around the system and that the system as a whole is sufficiently integrated and well-organised. Many of the participants found this not to be the case, and that had an impact on process security..

Below, Åse emphasizes the importance of SLBs knowing what they don’t know and knowing who does know these things, especially in a fragmented system, where those who do know may not be immediately accessible., and where SLBs know little of what goes on outside of their own departments. As Anne explains, the buck must stop somewhere.

“[What’s important is that] they have the time to help me,
and if they can’t, then say so
and direct me to others who might be able to.”
(Åse, 20, social/healthcare assistant)

“There is nothing worse
than being sent around in circles on the phone…
when they start to make many mistakes
I lose all confidence
that they can figure out how to do it...
then I find it difficult to take them seriously.”
(Anne, 28, M.A.)

3.1.3. A sense of closure

Ebbers et al. (2016) describe the need for closure as a need to reduce uncertainty by finishing a task as soon as possible.

The concept of the "need for closure" has its roots in social psychology (Webster & Kruglanski 1994, 1990). The need for closure can be defined as "the desire for an answer on a given topic, any answer … compared to confusion and ambiguity" (Kruglanski 1990: 337). Kruglanski considers it a personal trait. Different people may indeed vary in their need for closure, but the need for closure may also vary with the situation (Heatin & Kruglanski 1991; Webster & Kruglanski 1994). The need for closure may, for example, be stronger under time constraints or when the process is considered difficult, demanding, or unpleasant. And the need for closure may be stronger when a decision must be made. When the need for closure is strong, citizens may focus on behaviours that they believe are conducive to achieving closure (Kruglanski & Webster 1996).

Pieterson and van Dijk (2007) and Pieterson (2009: 188ff) talk about how citizens may need "uncertainty reduction" (which they treat as something separate from the "need for closure") or have "a need for clarity" and how these needs may influence their BE strategies. Ebbers et al. (2016) describe how this may be particularly salient in situations characterized by a high degree of uncertainty for citizens.

Empirical exploration

In the literature, the need for closure is basically a need to "get it over with", and reducing uncertainty to an acceptable level. However, based on the participants' accounts, it is also important to achieve a degree of certainty that something really is over – that things have been done correctly, that matters are in the right hands with someone who can be held accountable, and that you know what is going to happen next. This manifests as A) verifying (that things have been done correctly), B) delivering (e.g., getting applications in the right hands), C) anchoring (identifying an SLB to which you can return if necessary), and D) setting expectations (that matters will be resolved).

A. Verifying

While filling out the forms in a self-service system (especially once you are ready to press 'send') you may require assurances that you have done everything correctly. While the system may validate the presence of certain data, it likely will not validate the accuracy of the data. As a result, citizens may seek out validation from SLBs.

"There are so many questions you have to answer,
and I am not sure I have answered them sufficiently."
(Caroline, 31, physiotherapist)

This appears especially to be an issue in situations where something is at stake for the citizen::

"I don't think I have ever changed anything online [regarding taxes].
I have looked at it to get an overview,
but I wouldn't dare change anything

because – what if what I did was wrong!?
So, I call.

I don't change it
because if I make a mistake and change it
and they then say that it was completely wrong,
then it all may come tumbling down on you like I don't know what –
and I really don't want that"
(Martin, 23, student)

B. Delivering

The next step is getting the application or any other document safely into the right hands. Participants find that face-to-face contact may facilitate this. "You can make sure they pass it on … and I know that I have delivered it myself and no one else" (Houda, 56, ninth grade). Otherwise, "you don't know where it ends up and who takes care of it" (Lise, 33, student)

While most participants who talked about this issue found that face-to-face interactions constitute the safest way to ensure delivery, many also had alternative strategies. The most frequent one is to call or email to check on the delivery, as Freja (46, ninth grade, unemployed) explains: "I always call or e-mail to be certain they have received it as they are supposed to".

Some participants, such as Martin, have the opposite idea, finding online delivery to be the safest way: "When they get it online / then there is no more paper back and forth / which may easily get lost / then at least you are certain it reaches them." New experiences and changing habits may lead more people to this conclusion. However, this may not address the issue of ensuring that applications or information have reached their correct destination. The application may be delivered, but to whom? And (when) will they do something about it? As Olga reflects when comparing different modes of delivery:

"When I put it in the mailbox,
then I am sure that they get it.
And then again not
because it could disappear in the corridors, couldn't it?
When I go home and do it electronically and send it online,
Who gets it then?
And whom do I call to ask how long time will it take?"
(Olga, 47, porcelain-painter)

C. Anchoring and holding to promises

A further aspect of delivery is the matter of anchoring: Who is responsible for my case? Anyone? As Olga puts it, "I don't know who is looking at my case / and are they looking at it or, well – you feel sort of [lost]." This is also a relational issue – a question of the obligations (formal or informal, expressed or inferred) that are established during the BE.

From observations at the counter at the service centres where I conducted most of my interviews, I noticed that when a citizen returned to the service centre as a continuation of a previous contact, they often asked for the SLB with whom they spoke last time. This was the case with Nina (47, journalist), who thinks "it is important to have a face / or a name / a responsible person / who feels responsible for my case," and Jan, who would trust authorities more if she had "a contact person / rather than a team." Talking to the same person – "getting back to something I know" (Tone, 41, ninth grade) – may not only be efficient (for both parties), as you do not have to re-establish the context, but it also builds on an existing relation, making for a stronger foundation upon which to develop a sense of confidence.

"[I would like] a regular contact person
rather than being thrown around
to be able to meet a person.
[I would like to] put a face on [and]
feel certain that it is that guy there who has my [case]
rather than getting a call from ´Hanne´ all of a sudden
and thinking – who are you?
It's like friendships and other relations."
(Emilie, 22, high school)

Establishing an anchor also serves to assign responsibility to someone at whom you can point and say, "you said it," "you promised," or "you did it": "If anything goes wrong / I can say: well, you had glasses and hair like this / you can't do that [assign responsibility to someone] with a computer" (Morten, 37, ninth grade). This adds an additional layer of security:

"I really want to see
I want to know who takes care of my case
I want to be able to call that person and say –
'Listen! Something is wrong here'
Or 'Why has nothing happened?'
[Otherwise,] it's like a one-way communication.
They can answer when they feel like it."
(Nanna, 38, high school)

Face-to-face interactions are often seen as an efficient way to anchor responsibility and bind SLBs to their promises.

In face-to-face interactions, "it's more personal / and I can look the person in the eyes / and he can't lead me up the garden path" (Tone 41). SLBs keeping their promises is key to continued trust in the system, as it indicates some degree of empathy and positive intentions.

Keeping promises also has an element of 'noblesse oblige' – when the SLB has the power to control aspects of citizens' lives and compel them to act in certain ways, they are morally required to fulfil their own obligations.

"If they promise me something,
they damn well have to keep it –
'cause there sure ain't nothing like false hopes.
They have the power.
They are the ones who can push the button
and say 'so, no more social security for you.'
Really, we have to do everything they ask
and skip and jump and all that."
(Winnie, 33, ninth grade)

A display of empathy may be viewed as an indication that promises will be kept:

"I talked to her over there and she seemed quite friendly,
so I felt sure that she would see to it
that it would be fixed quickly,
and it probably will
now that she says so"
(Jimmie, 27, high school)

D. Setting expectations

Once you feel reasonably certain that you have done things correctly, and that your application or documents have arrived at the right place and in competent, identifiable hands, the final step in achieving process security is to have a feeling that action will be taken. As Freja puts it, "I am afraid they won't see it / afraid they won't read it / don't see it / and I don't get my money." Citizens wonder if they can be "certain that [the application] is not lying in a pile somewhere" (Leise, 57, clerk). For Karen and many others, the wait bothers them: "If I don't get an answer within two hours / and I hear nothing / I call and say: 'are you sure you got it?'" (Karen, 39, high school). As Frida (22, high school) explains, "when I do it online / I don't know how long it's going to take / and I don't know if it will be done."

The participants' worries over the digital process appear to be rooted in two aspects of digital self-service systems: 1, a lack of a "handshake" or a confirmation that everything is being taken care of by someone responsible and competent, and 2, the wait for a decision. Waiting breeds uncertainty and, in turn, a constant need to check up on things.

One of the advantages the participants find in delivering an application in a face-to-face setting is that it may speed up the process. This may be a tangible effect (e.g., an SLB starting the case at the counter while the citizen is present), or it may be a symbolic effect linked to the sense of embodied action.

3.2. Efficiency, effectiveness, ease of use, and convenience

Feeling that you have spent your time and resources efficiently, effectively, and in a way that suits your skills and preferences, can be considered a need in its own right. Efficiency (conducting the process with minimum time, cost, and effort commitments) and effectiveness (achieving one's established goals) are considered to be important in both the e-government and service-encounter bodies of literature (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1985; Pieterson 2009; Kolsaker & Lee-Kelley 2006; Alotaibi, Sabbahy, & Lockwood 2011; Scott, DeLone, & Golden 2011). However, efficiency may be less about objective time and resource figures and more about subjective feelings of efficiency linked to self-efficacy (Dimitrova & Chen 2006) and self-perceptions of one's capacity to act (Maister 1985).

Perceived ease of use is a key factor in the, often-cited, Technology Acceptance Model, defined as "the degree to which the user expects the system to be free of effort" (Davis 1989). For the purpose of this study, I would argue that this is an aspect of the BE experience that contributes to the feeling of being efficient and getting the sense that the relevant authority is competent. This also applies to the concept of convenience—receiving the service where, how, and when desired (Gilbert, Balestrini, & Littleboy 2004).

3.2.1. Empirical exploration

In the interviews, the participants often tied efficiency to (embodied) action, which may be preferable to inaction – even when doing less may actually result in them needing to spend less time on the process overall:

"I prefer to act
and make sure that I have understood and done things correctly."
(Emil, 29, scaffolder)

"I feel I am more efficient when I appear in person." (Naja)

"To be honest, I hate waiting in a phone queue.
It's only five minutes on my bike to get here.
If the trip is under 20 minutes,
I prefer the bike ride
rather than waiting on the phone."
(Anne)

This is related to a sense of having achieved a sense of process security and a sense of closure.

"I get all of it done at once
and it is easier for me to ensure that things reach the right person
and it's taken care of,
especially when it's something important,
as it often is with the municipality"
(Frida)

"It's over and done with,
and everything [is] in order when you leave."
(Lucas, 21, high school)

3.3. Relational security needs and goals

While process-security needs often pertain to internal processes, relational security may be viewed as both internal-process needs and "soft" outcome goals.

Relational security has to do with being able to project and defend a positive identity throughout the BE, feel recognized as a competent and valued individual, and feel like you are being treated fairly and with respect. As with process-security needs, relational needs contribute to a sense of security—a sense that the authority is acting fairly and taking all relevant aspects into account in order to make a fair and just decision on the substantive outcome. Seen as an outcome-goal relational security has to do with how the process affects citizens' sense of "citizenship" and their perception of fairness and justice in the way authority is practiced.

3.3.1. Respect and recognition

The needs and goals of respect and recognition are related to citizens' sense of identity. It has to do with being able to project and defend a positive identity and being recognized as a competent member of society (Goffman 1967; Honneth 2003). In the literature on private-sector service encounters, aspects of encounters related to respect, courtesy, responsiveness, empathy, helpfulness, and sociability play a significant role in customers' evaluations of encounters (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml 1985; Suprenant & Solomon 1987; Philip & Hazlett 1997; Alotaibi, Sabbahy, & Lockwood 2011). These all have to do with recognizing the customers as worthy individuals.

In the context of BEs, there is a clear asymmetrical distribution of power (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen 2007), which may lend additional weight to the need for recognition. BEs may, as Goodsell (Goodsell 2018) argues, constitute social exchanges that confirm or alter the status of citizens. BEs may involve the display, negotiation, confirmation, and/or rejection of individuals' identities (Mik-Meyer & Villadsen 2007; Lundberg 2012; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2013; Serangi & Slembrouck 2014).

The identity that citizens bring to BEs and, to some extent, attempt to project and defend, is a social self (Gubrium & Holstein 2000: 6–7) – a communicated self – created in social interaction. it is also, as Goffman argues, a controlled and situated self (Goffman 1973: 156). The conflict that arises between the institutional identities recognized by the authority and the social, moral selves that citizens wish to project and defend is described by Spencer (in William 2000) as a conflict between formal, standardized discourse on rules and resources and discourse on individuality and morality or, as Hopper puts it, a conflict between moral selves and legal selves (Hopper 2001). The discourse that citizens apply in their claim to moral selves may include information that is irrelevant to the construction of institutional identities (Carstens 1998).

Empirical exploration

Participants find that respect and recognition are expressed by SLBs when they act respectful, non-judgmental, honest, and careful in their interactions – when they make an effort to meet friendliness with friendliness.

Being respectful and non-judgmental

Paw: “There is a lot of prejudices when you apply for social security
a lot of prejudices towards people
[that] would be extremely unpleasant…

[But] the guy here
he was a pleasant experience…
more personal in a way.
He talked to us as persons not as applicants

We met another one previously where it was more ‘professional.’”
Petra: “–and had to be over and done with quickly.”
Paw: “Where we were customers rather than people in a way.
That was very unpleasant.”

Petra: “I have been here before
where I have bene really disappointed and repelled by it –
brushed aside in a way…”
(Paw, 20, high school / Petra, 23, high school)

Being honest and careful

“I talked to him [an SLB] on the phone yesterday,
and he didn’t hang up before he had told me what he had to do, you know?
And he took the time…
and explained things carefully
and put them in plain language
rather than trying to wrap it up…
it’s really important, at the first encounter,
that things are done properly.”
(Michael, 32, high school)

Meeting friendliness with friendliness

“If what I meet was a sour old hag,
that wouldn’t be cool, would it!?
it has a lot to do with who you are yourself.
I believe I am positive when I meet people
and I rarely get the opposite back.
If I did, it would feel,
well, I am just a recipient –
and that’s that.
It has to do with your self-worth”
(Freja)

3.3.2. A sense of positive intentions

Just as competence is often evaluated through proxy indicators, so too may one's sense of respect and recognition be reliant on more than just the substance of what is said and done. It may also depend in part on back channels that carry subtle "keyings" (Goffman 1974) with information about the modality of what is being said (e.g., humor, irony, good-naturedness). Understanding these subtleties requires a close and nuanced reading of intentions and attitudes (Goffman 1967). Empathy (Parasruman, Berry, & Zeithaml 1985) is about showing a willingness to understand the citizen and her situation, and a willingness to listen, and carefully explain things. Such displays of empathy and benevolence may be important proxies for the intangible, opaque aspects of the system, such as promises, intentions, and attitudes.

3.3.2.1.1. Empirical exploration

Table 3: Ways of describing basic empathy

Quotations
"Someone who smiles at you"
"An open person / who speaks nicely in a polite tone / who has a sense of the situation / and can put herself in the other's shoes "
"You get a sense that they care … a sense that they can do something for me / show that they are willing"
"That they are open, smiling, interested in my problem"
"Nice, present, attentive, positive"
"Friendly, personal, polite"

Basically, it is a matter of being "cheerful, forthcoming" (Rie, 21, high school), "friendly … warm" (Abbas, 55, boilermaker), and "open and committed" (Oscar, 66, machine engineer). It is a question of a manifest willingness to help others, of being "friendly and patient" in answering people's questions (Winnie), and, as Brian puts it, of a "willingness to understand (people's) situation(s)."

3.3.3. A sense of justice and fairness

Justice- and fairness-related needs have to do with, the feeling that authority is being applied in a way that is just and fair to the individual. In highly asymmetrical encounters like BEs it may be especially important for citizens to feel that they are being treated justly and fairly (Sunshine & Tyler 2003; Blader & Tyler 2003; Tyler 2006, 2001, 1988; Yi & Gong 2008). The literature on justice and fairness often distinguishes between three types of (perceived) justice (Yi & Gong 2008): A) distributive justice (the degree to which the outcome is considered fair in relation to what others are assumed to be receiving), B) procedural justice (the perceived fairness of practices, policies, and procedures), C) interactional justice (the fairness of how the encounter plays out, including friendliness, objectiveness, honesty, genuine interest, respect, and sensitivity) (Lewicki, Wiethoff & Tomlison 1991). The third type is identical to the framework's 'respect and recognition' dimension and is discussed in section 3.3.1.

Tyler and colleagues (cited above) show that 'procedural justice' (the way in which people are treated and their cases are handled by authorities) has an effect, independent to the impact of the decisions; one that may be even more important for citizens than the substantive outcome (for similar findings from the literature on private-sector services, see Reisig & Chandek 2001; van Dolen, de Ruyter, & Streukens 2004). Blader and Tyler (2003) show that the way in which decisions are made in concrete encounters, including the degree of citizen involvement and voice, and the quality of the treatment of citizens (respect, politeness, dignity) are key to developing a sense of procedural justice. While a product of the process, justice and fairness also constitute a soft outcome goal.

Empirical exploration

A. Distributive justice

In the interviews, distributive justice has to do with equity, with like cases being treated alike, with getting what you are due.

"They have to go by the rules and keep their promise
they can't make different decisions from one person to another"
(Abbas)

"I know many who have been on social security for eight to ten years.
The rest of us,
who have worked since we were 16,
now we are here with nothing…
We can't get help…
I have to fight for it,
unlike all the others who just say,
'I don't have anything' can I get something?'
'Yes, you can.'
I think that's unfair."
(Brian)

B. Procedural justice

In the interviews, procedural justice is often expressed through a willingness to help: "If I have a problem, the least they can do is to try and help me solve it" (Åse). It is also conveyed through simply listening to a citizen's story, even if the SLB may not be able to help: "All they say is that they can't help me with a place to stay – they won't wait and listen to my story; they just say that they can't help me" (Abbas). And it may follow from the citizen being given a chance to explain what the problem is: "in some situations you might feel... a little bit desperate... if you need to see the person and be with the person and be able to explain what your problem really is" (Mathias, 26, high school).

"If I was ever in a situation
where I wasn’t certain my case had been properly handled
or the person at the other end had understood the rules as I understood them...
then it would be highly frustrating
not to be able to talk to someone.
Because then you would feel
that someone was administrating without your involvement
or that you had no way of protesting."
(Susanne, 53, teacher on sickness benefits)

3.4. Discretion

Madsen and Kræmmergaard (2015) discuss how citizens’ wishes to affect substantive outcomes may lead them to choose channels that allow for a degree of negotiation—a degree of “discretion.”

Indeed, all the needs and goals outlined above, to some extent, imply a degree of flexibility or discretion, which can be defined as the power a public officer has “whenever the effective limits on his power leave him free to choose among possible courses in action or inaction” (Davis 2012: 166). As Lipsky (2010) described, discretion can be a tool for the abuse of power, as it allows SLBs to induce their own needs, prejudices, values, and interpretations of rules into their practice. At the same time, analyses of the law in practice suggests that any policy or rule needs to be modified to fit the circumstances in which it is implemented” (Holstein 2013: 207). Even Lipsky admits that “Equal treatment may require treating people differently to achieve equal results” (2010: 232). Lipsky describes discretion primarily as an aspect of the role of SLBs, but citizens themselves may play an active role in discretion (Lundberg 2012). Dworkin (2017) distinguishes between “weak” and “strong” discretion, the former allowing for a degree of technical autonomy (Derber 1982) with a focus on procedural and interactional control, and the latter allowing for a degree of “ideological” autonomy with control over outcomes as well as procedures. On this basis, and in line with the distinctions made in the discussion of fairness and justice needs, I distinguish between the following types of discretion. First, substantive discretion has to do with the determination of eligibility for benefits and services (the substantive goal of encounters). In BEs substantive discretion may be very weak due to strict objective criteria. Second, procedural discretion allows for flexibility in the process. In BEs procedural discretion is generally fairly strong but may be circumscribed by the IT systems used for casework and processing. Third, interactional discretion has to do with the way in which citizens are treated—whether citizens feel listened to and taken seriously. Citizens may appeal to discretion to affect the substantive outcome of their BEs. However, as the outcomes of BEs are often highly rule-based, the last two types of discretion may be more important.

Empirical exploration

The need for discretion takes many forms in the participants’ accounts. One approach is to achieve flexibility through empathy and understanding (a form of interactional discretion): It is important that SLBs "Understand the seriousness of (citizens’) problem(s)" (Sanne, 26, SOSU assistant). Paw expands on this, emphasizing that SLBs should deviate from a purely systems-oriented perspective:

"[It's important that] they can acquaint themselves with your case,
put themselves in your place,
and think more about us
than about so many other things."
(Paw)

Some participants feel that they can convey the importance of their issues more effectively in face-to-face encounters.

"I hope I can put more pressure on
When they get it face-to-face –
how much it means to you."
(Anders, homeless)

In a few cases, this personal insistence may take on overtones of (physical) intimidation.

"If you are really angry and show up in person,
it sometimes give a different kind of influence.
They are more susceptible [to] seeing you in person,
and if they see that you are not exactly small,
that may also have an effect –
all movement has an effect, you know!"
(Lars, 49, ninth grade)

In some cases, the key factor is the degree of flexibility in the role performance of the SLB: how free is the interaction? To what extent can they adapt to the individual and their circumstances?

"They have to follow the law, you know?
They are just people, having a job to perform,
[but] the woman I talked to this morning,
she was very understanding about my situation,
and the things I had pointed out in my complaint –
there was nothing she could do.
She is bound by the strict limits of the laws,
and you have to take that into account
before you scream your head off."
(Winnie)

As Sanne (26, SOSU assistant), "who has had her application for sickness benefits after an operation rejected" describes it:

"[If I had been rejected in person,]
I could have looked the other person in the eyes
and gotten an explanation
rather than over the phone:
'You have not been employed on those conditions, so you can't!' –

and that was that.
Then, maybe, I could have gotten an explanation,
which I could accept a little better"

In other cases, it is a matter of procedural flexibility. How strictly are procedures upheld? How much room is there for minor deviations? How much are they adapted to the individual? Brian puts it this way:

"Look at the individual.
Look at their life experience.
Tackle the 25-year-old who has never had a job
differently from the grown-up individual
who has been independent and working all his life."

However, participants also see discretion as a double-edged sword. It allows the law to be applied flexibly to real-life contexts but also allows for the SLBs to abuse that flexibility.

"Lots of things are decided by an individual evaluation
that you can't look up anywhere
that gives flexibility
because if everything had to be written down,
you would have a very extensive body of law.

But there have been some things lately
That they should sit down and define
so it will not just be a matter of individual judgment
based on the individual moral and ethical standards of the employee."
(Susanne)

(Susanne here is referring to a recent TV program about social fraud and how the "single" status of applicants for various benefits was determined)

3.5. Substantive outcome goals

Substantive outcomes have to do with the original goals of a BE – the fulfilment of a citizen's basic need(s). For example, they may need to get a benefit or permit, gain access to a service, or fulfil an obligation, like filing taxes. Assuming that citizens do not engage in BEs for the experience alone, there is arguably always a substantive goal behind them. Substantive goals appear so self-evident that they are not the object of much discussion in the literature. Participants focus on substantive outcomes when they talk about substantive justice or appeals to substantive discretion. However, as the substantive outcome is the reason for the BE in the first place, all needs and goals somehow contribute to this outcome.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This study sought to develop a conceptual framework with which to describe and analyse citizens' needs and goals, with regard to bureaucratic encounters, using a hermeneutic literature review and to assess its usefulness by applying it to empirical data.

As the literature review has shown, previous research on citizens' needs and goals with regards to BEs has been fragmented and inconsistent. Drawing on multiple relevant bodies of literature, this study presented a consistent and systematic framework, highlighting that several needs and goals, aside from those that "triggered" the BE, may be important for citizens. Through an application of the framework to a body of empirical data, this study demonstrated the usefulness of the developed framework and demonstrated that the needs and goals established in the framework are reflected through citizens' experiences and attitudes in different ways. In this way, it addressed the general need in the e-government literature for qualitative empirical studies.

All of the framework's needs and goals have some bearing on citizens' perceived chances of achieving their desired substantial outcomes. The fulfilment of process-security needs, increases the sense of having understood and done things correctly. Relational-security needs, may be important to citizens' sense of identity, sense of empowerment, sense of citizenship, and sense of being a valued member of society. The fulfilment of these needs also increases the sense that SLBs have positive intentions and will do what they can to help them achieve their substantive goals. The need for discretion and flexibility may also contribute to a sense of empowerment and citizenship—of being seen and treated as an individual. At the same time, a sense of discretion, even if purely interactional or procedural, may contribute to a feeling that the decision reached will be a proper one. Most of these needs and goals are "soft," meaning that they are primarily evaluated, based on feelings and experiences, rather than measurable aspects of BEs. This may even apply to efficiency and effectiveness needs, to the extent that these are not evaluated based on direct evaluations of time and resources spent.

Certainly, the importance of these needs and goals varies by individual citizen. It may depend on how much is at stake for each citizen, in terms of both substance and identity, or on each citizen's familiarity with the relevant situation and authority.

I would argue that the developed framework is essentially technologically neutral. All the needs and goals could, arguably be fulfilled to some degree, using any communication-channel, and all the channels could be implemented in ways that does not advance any of the needs or goals. The expectation would, for example, be that face-to-face encounters support most of the "soft" needs, the reality is that face-to-face BEs can be practiced in ways that offer limited support and sometimes even undermine citizens' needs and goals. Conversely, while we may expect BEs, conducted through self-service systems, to offer limited support for the relational and identity-related needs and goals, that may depend on the design of the service.

The developed framework and the empirical investigation indicate that BEs may have purposes beyond the immediate provision of information and fulfilment of substantive needs. They may also serve the broader purpose (for both citizens and authorities) of confirming, strengthening, or weakening citizens' sense of authorities' competence, fairness, and reliability. This dynamic may have implications for the citizens' general sense of the legitimacy of authorities' decisions and, in turn, their compliance with those decisions.

Thus, it is important for e-government researchers to look beyond the immediate goals and effects of BE digitalization and consider all the potential needs and goals of citizens, as well as the wider implications of e-government on phenomena such as justice, fairness and trust in government.

5. Suggestions for future applications and research

The developed framework provides a valuable tool for e-government researchers to study CC and e-government adoption from a needs- and goals-oriented perspective and, as well as, to assess authorities' strategies in the design of systems and services. The framework could also serve as a tool for practitioners in designing and evaluating systems, services, and strategies. For example, they could use it to investigate the importance of the different needs and goals to a given target group or situation before designing a new service or system aimed at addressing it.

The framework contributes to the e-government field by addressing the need for citizen-centric research, providing a clear understanding of users' needs and resources (Scott, DeLone, & Golden 2009; Meijer & Bekkers 2015, 2008), and engaging other theoretical fields to advance broad e-government theory building (Bannister & Connolly 2014).

I propose a research agenda for the further exploration of citizens' needs and goals for the BE, centred around the following research questions:

- How do needs interact with one another and with the outcome goals? Are the process needs, for example, primarily important for successfully completing the tasks contained in and around the encounter, or do they have significant implications for how the outcomes are evaluated?
- What features of citizen-facing IT-systems (and the user journeys in which they are typically embedded) contribute to fulfilling (or hindering) different needs and goals?
- What situational dynamics in a citizen's life that drive BEs contribute to the relative importance of the different needs and goals? Will unfamiliar situations, for example, increase the importance of certain needs?
- Are some needs and goals more important to some citizens than to others? Are certain needs, for example, more important for citizens with fewer resources or skills?
- What is the effect on the efficiency of service delivery of better addressing citizens' needs and goals? Will an improvement in process security, for example, decrease the need for contact via other channels?
- What is the effect of improvements in service delivery on compliance and cooperation between citizens and authorities?

6. Limitations and concluding comments

While I investigated a range of literatures in this study, my aim has not been to excercise an exhaustive investigation of each of these literatures. Rather, I sought, through an interpretive, hermeneutic approach, to identify the most salient perspectives on citizens' needs and goals with regard to bureaucratic encounters. Through this approach, I hope to have provided a framework that facilitates a more holistic understanding of citizens' needs and goals.

The results indicate that the dimensions of the framework manifest themselves in citizens' reported experiences and behaviours. However, more empirical work is necessary to prove that the framework has solid ecological validity.

The interview data was generated as part of the research for my Ph.D. thesis (Skaarup 2016). While this makes the data fairly old, especially given the dynamic nature of the e-government field, the needs and goals outlined in the model are basic and exist independent of system design, service delivery, and citizens' skills. Technological evolution would only impact how, and to what extent, citizens' needs and goals are being met.

Interpretive, hermeneutic approaches inevitably rely on the researcher's pre-understanding. However, as Dey (1999: 251) puts it, "There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head." What is important is to make these pre-understandings explicit, as has been done here with the establishment of my initial assumptions.

The initial assumptions also aided me in identifying alternative perspectives on BEs that are not typically represented in the e-government literature. At the same time, my selection of studies was limited by my assumptions. Other bodies of literature, such as those on service design and digital design, could have very well offered additional valuable insights. However, as already established, this study was never intended to be a comprehensive assessment of all potentially relevant bodies of literature. It simply sought to craft a framework that covers a wide range of citizens' needs and goals with regard to BEs. I hope that scholars and practitioners make use of this framework and, in doing so, contribute to its continued improvement and elaboration.

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