Tech & Public Administration

Discussion Week 7

Discuss the consequences of poorly designed digital government services by reflecting on personal experiences or those you've observed or read about.

Poorly designed digital government services have consequences and can impose significant administrative burdens on government employees, businesses and citizens, affecting the ability to access essential services efficiently. Administrative burden refers to the difficulties individuals face in navigating the bureaucratic processes, or the burden of following the administrative rules and requirements which results in increased time, effort, and frustration.

The example I am exploring for this discussion as it relates to a designed government service is the 'Government-to-Citizen' (G2C) e-services. This can create significant administrative burdens, making it difficult for citizens to access public services efficiently. One example is the healthcare marketplace website launched under the Affordable Care Act in 2013. The website struggled with technical issues, including slow response times, crashes, and a confusing user interface. This resulted in, millions of people who were trying to sign up for health insurance faced repeated disruptions, which resulted in long delays and frustrations.

To highlight administrative burden in this case, we look at the components of learning, compliance and psychological costs. The citizens had to devote significant time and effort, or learning costs, just to navigate the system and figure out how to complete basic tasks. Many users encountered unclear instructions, vague error messages, and a lack of guidance. All of this increased compliance costs as it was a struggle to fulfill necessary requirements, which included uploading documents and completing applications, adding to the administrative burden. The psychological costs were elevated as people experienced stress and anxiety, especially due to health insurance being a critical need. Therefore, any delays in securing coverage could have serious consequences.

The design issues of this G2C e-service undermined the trust in the government and also led to widespread dissatisfaction. Citizens were left feeling that their needs were not being met efficiently and this illustrates how poorly designed G2C services can exacerbate administrative burdens, discourage participation, and reduce the overall effectiveness of government programs. The simplification of interfaces, to improve usability, and provide more clear instructions are key strategies to reduce these burdens and improve citizen engagement with digital government services.