

The Right Servicing Approach to Social Services Delivery

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Introduction

Social services are traditionally delivered using a standardized approach to meet the needs of the whole population. In a typical social service delivery system, potential recipients enter the system on a uniform, first-come first-served, appointment-based approach for determination of eligibility for the service followed by a uniform intervention assistance if eligible. The underlying philosophy of this approach is that the needs of the majority can be satisfied through uniform sharing of services by distributing social costs (or risks) across the entire population. Taking into account individual needs and risks may introduce an element of instability into the equation and there are inadequate resources or capability to address such issues. Ignoring differences in individual needs, however, may result in gaps in social service provisions from what clients actually need or expect to receive.

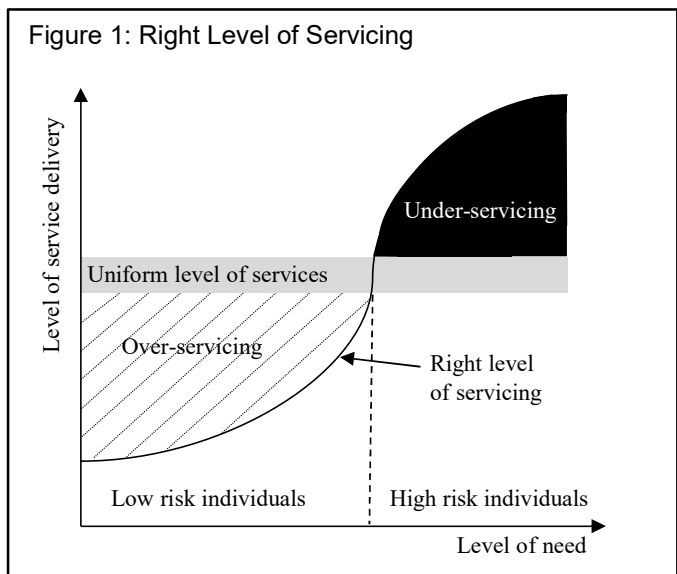
This supply-oriented approach to social services delivery is not viable in the light of rising costs, higher consumer demand and expectations, and changing cohort demographics with differing needs. This research note discusses a framework based on IBM Cúram Research Institute's RightServicing conceptual approach that facilitates differential service delivery and assessment for non-profit organizations that provide a social service. The model, termed *right servicing model*, developed here identifies a service level that is 'just right' for the 'right' individual at the 'right' time, one that is neither over-servicing the majority nor under-servicing the minority in achieving a socio-economic outcome. It seeks to identify gaps between the demand and supply of service provisions, taking into account organizational attributes, resource availability and client needs, and permits continuous assessment of service delivery over time.

Summary

- ▶ The right servicing model developed here offers an alternative framework to the traditional uniform, first-come-first served, appointment-based approach to social service delivery. It provides a method of differentiating response to service delivery for organizations that provide a social service by identifying gaps in service delivery with respect to client needs and preferences, and organizational resources and targets at any point in time.
- ▶ The right servicing model is a practical framework that aims to assist not-for-profit organizations that serve a social objective to achieve right servicing, i.e., a level of service that is 'just right' for the 'right' individual, one that is neither 'over-servicing' the majority nor 'under-servicing' the minority.
- ▶ The model takes into account the complexity of heterogeneous public-private-people relationships in social service delivery.
- ▶ It permits continuous assessment of service delivery for evolving organization-specific objectives, resource availability and client needs, and provides support for sustainable outcomes of social programmes and reforms.

Right Servicing Model

The right servicing model is a practical framework that aims to assist organizations to achieve right servicing, that is, rather than a uniform level of service provisions distributed across all individuals regardless of their level of need, the model takes into account heterogeneous combinations of service delivery relationships and needs to deliver a level of service that is neither 'over-servicing' of low risk individuals that do not need a high level of intervention, nor 'under-servicing' of high risk individuals that do need it (Figure 1). It is a dynamic framework that seeks to identify gaps between the demand and supply of service provisions, and permits continuous assessment of service delivery for evolving organizational objectives, resource availability and client needs, and provides support for sustainable outcomes of social programmes and reforms.



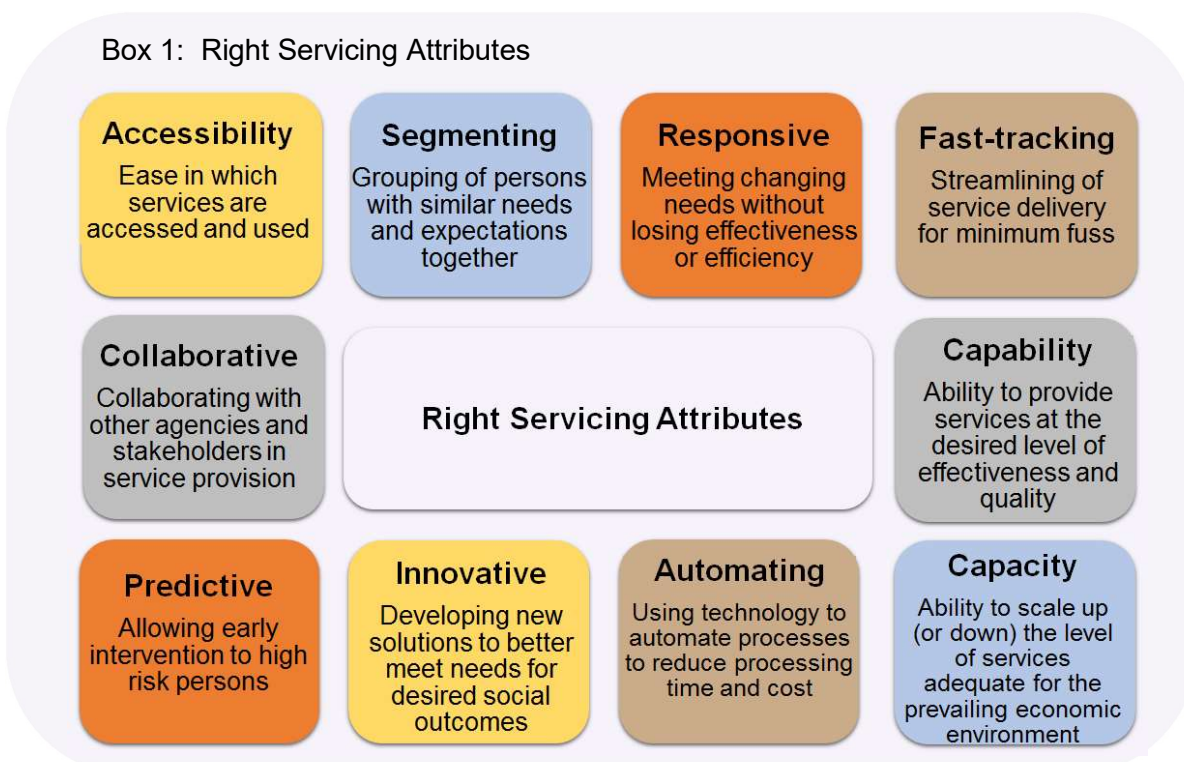
Right servicing attributes

The RightServicing conceptual framework identifies several attributes of organizational capability necessary for right servicing of social services. These attributes were determined through interviews, workshops and consultations with officials from social programme management organizations from North America, Europe, Oceania and Asia, and multi-lateral agencies operating in these regions. The attributes were validated with supporting evidences from real life examples.

Adapting from this framework, the right servicing model operationalizes the approach for practical application and assessment for any non-profit organization with a social objective. The model identifies ten organizational attributes, or *right servicing (RS) attributes*, that can serve as measures of assessment of the right level of service delivery. These attributes are segmenting, fast-

tracking, responsive, accessibility, predictive, automating, innovative, collaborative, capacity and capability (Box 1). They correspond closely to the original conceptualization of the RightServicing approach, with a differing emphasis on practicality of adoption for measurement and assessment.

The right servicing model is amenable to modification according to organizational needs. Organizations characterized by fewer or different attributes may choose to adapt the model accordingly. For example, the RS attribute fast-tracking may not be appropriate for long term care patients and may be deselected as an organizational characteristic necessary for right servicing.



For attributes identified as appropriate for right servicing, an assessment of the supply of and demand for the level of service delivery permits the determination of the appropriate level of service provisions for given organizational service delivery targets, resource availability and client needs. These considerations are discussed below.

Supply Considerations

Social service organizations may differ in their emphasis placed on the RS attributes and may vary the service delivery target for each attribute.

The *target gap* for a particular service can be expressed as the difference between the actual level of service delivered and the target level (Box 2). This difference can be said to reflect the extent of over-servicing or under-servicing with respect to the target level. A larger weight may be assigned to service providers that have provided the service for a long period of time or have a larger client base.

A target gap may arise as a result of factors such as inferior resource quality, inefficient service delivery or corruption. A congruence of target and actual service levels indicates that the level of service delivery has met the target level for the RS attribute at given organizational resource constraints. The sum of target gaps for all RS attributes measures the extent to which an organization's overall level of service provision falls short of or exceeds the target level of services.

Demand Considerations

Clients may perceive a different level of service from the actual and target level of service delivery. Perceptions of service delivery are influenced by expectations and preferences about the service delivered. The *perceived supply gap* between the actual and perceived level of services delivered can be said to measure the level of services delivered that is perceived to have fallen short of (or exceeds) the actual level delivered, that is, the level of needs that is perceived to be unmet (or exceeded). Additionally, there may exist a lack of information or misinformation about a service if there are non-negligible 'transaction' costs in obtaining information about a service. Under these circumstances, the perceived supply gap would diverge further by the amount of transaction costs.

The perceived supply gap for a particular service provision can be expressed as the difference between the perceived and actual level of service delivered (Box 2). To accord a larger voice to 'high risk' or more vulnerable persons, a larger weight may be assigned to them. The sum of perceived supply gaps for all RS attributes represents the extent to which an organization's overall level of services delivered falls short of or exceeds the perceived level of services.

Box 2: Gaps in Service Delivery

The **target gap** measures the extent of over- or under-servicing relative to the target level of service.

$$\text{Target gap} = \text{Actual service level} - \text{Target service level}$$

The **perceived supply gap** measures the perceived over- or under-servicing from the actual level of service.

$$\text{Perceived supply gap} = \text{Perceived service level} - \text{Actual service level}$$

The **perceived target gap** measures the perceived over- or under-servicing from the target level of service.

$$\text{Perceived target gap} = \text{Perceived service level} - \text{Target service level}$$

There may also exist a divergence between the perceived level of services by clients and the target level for a particular service provided. The *perceived target gap* measures the divergence of the target level of services from client needs. If there exists a lack of information or misinformation about a service, the target level of services may further diverge from the incorrectly perceived level of services by the amount of transaction costs.

Right Servicing Score

The right level of servicing can be determined by minimizing the gaps in service delivery. The *right servicing score* measures the extent to which service delivery approaches or deviates from the 'right' level in meeting client needs within given resource constraints. The following discusses the derivation of the RS scores.

First, for each item in the menu of service provisions under each RS attribute, identify the actual level of services, perceived level of services and target level of services delivered to clients.

Second, compute the gaps between the target, actual and perceived level of services (Box 3):

- ▶ The *target RS score* for a particular RS attribute is obtained by computing the (weighted) mean score of all target gap values for that attribute.

$$\text{Target RS score} = \Sigma \text{Target gaps}$$

- ▶ The *perceived supply RS score* for a RS attribute is the (weighted) mean score of all perceived supply gap values for that attribute.

$$\text{Perceived supply RS score} = \Sigma \text{Perceived supply gaps}$$

- ▶ The *perceived target RS score* measures the (weighted) mean score of all perceived target gap values.

$$\text{Perceived target RS score} = \Sigma \text{Perceived target gaps}$$

Third, compute the total target RS score, total perceived supply RS score and total perceived target RS score:

- ▶ The *total target RS score* is the (weighted) mean target RS scores of all RS attributes.

$$\text{Total target RS score} = \Sigma \text{Target RS score}$$

- ▶ The *total perceived supply RS score* is the (weighted) mean *perceived supply RS scores* of all RS attributes.

$$\text{Total perceived supply RS score} = \Sigma \text{Perceived supply RS score}$$

- ▶ The *total perceived target RS score* measures the (weighted) mean *perceived target RS scores* of all RS attributes.

$$\text{Total perceived target RS score} = \Sigma \text{Perceived target RS score}$$

Note that certain RS scores should be reverse ranked where less is better or weighted to accord higher scores to service provisions that are scale measures, such as speed to placement of job seekers, or patient waiting time for consultation at hospitals. Alternatively, weights can be assigned by identifying the strength of relationships between variables through regression or other statistical techniques.

Box 3: Right Servicing Scores

RS scores measure the extent to which service delivery approach the actual, perceived or target level of service.

The **target RS score** for a RS attribute is the (weighted) mean score of all target gap values for that attribute.

$$\text{Target RS score} = \Sigma \text{Target gaps}$$

The **perceived supply RS score** for a RS attribute is the (weighted) mean score of all perceived supply gap values for that attribute.

$$\text{Perceived supply RS score} = \Sigma \text{Perceived supply gaps}$$

The **perceived target RS score** is the (weighted) mean score of all perceived target gap values.

$$\text{Perceived target RS score} = \Sigma \text{Perceived target gaps}$$

Box 4: Right Servicing Index

The **Right Servicing Index** measures the level of right servicing over time for a fixed basket of services of all RS attributes.

$$\text{Right Servicing Index } RSI = \frac{RS \text{ score }_i}{RS \text{ score }_{i_0}} \times 100$$

where i = current year and i_0 = base year

The total RS scores can be tracked over time by means of the *Right Servicing Index (RSI)* which measures the level of right servicing over time for a fixed basket of services for all RS attributes (Box 4).

$$\text{Right Servicing Index } RSI = \frac{RS \text{ score }_i}{RS \text{ score }_{i_0}} \times 100$$

where i = current year and i_0 = base year.

APPLICATION TO PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

As an illustration, the right servicing model is applied to public employment services (PES) delivery (see Box 5). Clients of PES comprise employers and job seekers, while service providers include all partner organizations. Interviews and focus group discussions are conducted to determine the relevance of each RS attribute, and appropriate instruments are identified and tested for implementation. The actual level of services delivered is indicated by the assessment made by service producers on the level of services delivered for items measuring a RS attribute, while the perceived level of services is measured by the assessment made by clients on the level of services received.

The following assumptions are made: clients are intra-group homogenous and inter-group heterogeneous; service providers comprise a public sector organization and its coproducers that deliver homogenous services; for simplicity of exposition, perfect market conditions are assumed to exist with negligible transaction costs; clients and service providers are rational and seek to maximize satisfaction and minimize costs in the use of the services; and the government and socio-economic institutions are stable with an absence of corruption or other unaccountable deadweight loss.

In practice, it can be difficult to implement a measure for the level of services delivered that is commonly understood. To overcome this difficulty, proxy measures are used to determine the level of services delivered or perceived to be delivered, e.g. the proportion of clients out of all clients that agree that a particular service has been delivered, and the proportion of service providers out of all providers that agree that a service has been delivered. To avoid misinformation due to unawareness, only clients that have used the service respond to the questions. The questions may be implemented through a survey on a representative sample of service providers and clients.

The mean response of clients is then computed to obtain the perceived service level for each RS attribute (column II, Table 1). Similarly, the actual service level is obtained by computing the mean response of service providers (column III). Next, for each RS attribute, the target gap is computed by taking the difference between the mean actual and target service levels (column V), while the perceived target gap is obtained by the difference between the mean perceived supply and target service levels (column VI). The perceived supply gap for each RS attribute is the difference between the mean perceived and actual service level (column VII). The total RS scores are obtained by computing the overall mean of RS scores for all RS attributes.

In this example, the target level of service delivery that is in accordance with available organizational resources is assumed to be 90 out of a maximum of 100 for all RS attributes (column IV). The actual level of service provisions falls short of target levels for all RS attributes (column V). Clients perceive a gap in services or 'underservicing' for all RS attributes (columns VI, VII). The total perceived target RS score and total perceived supply RS score for clients are -27.2 and -23.8 respectively.

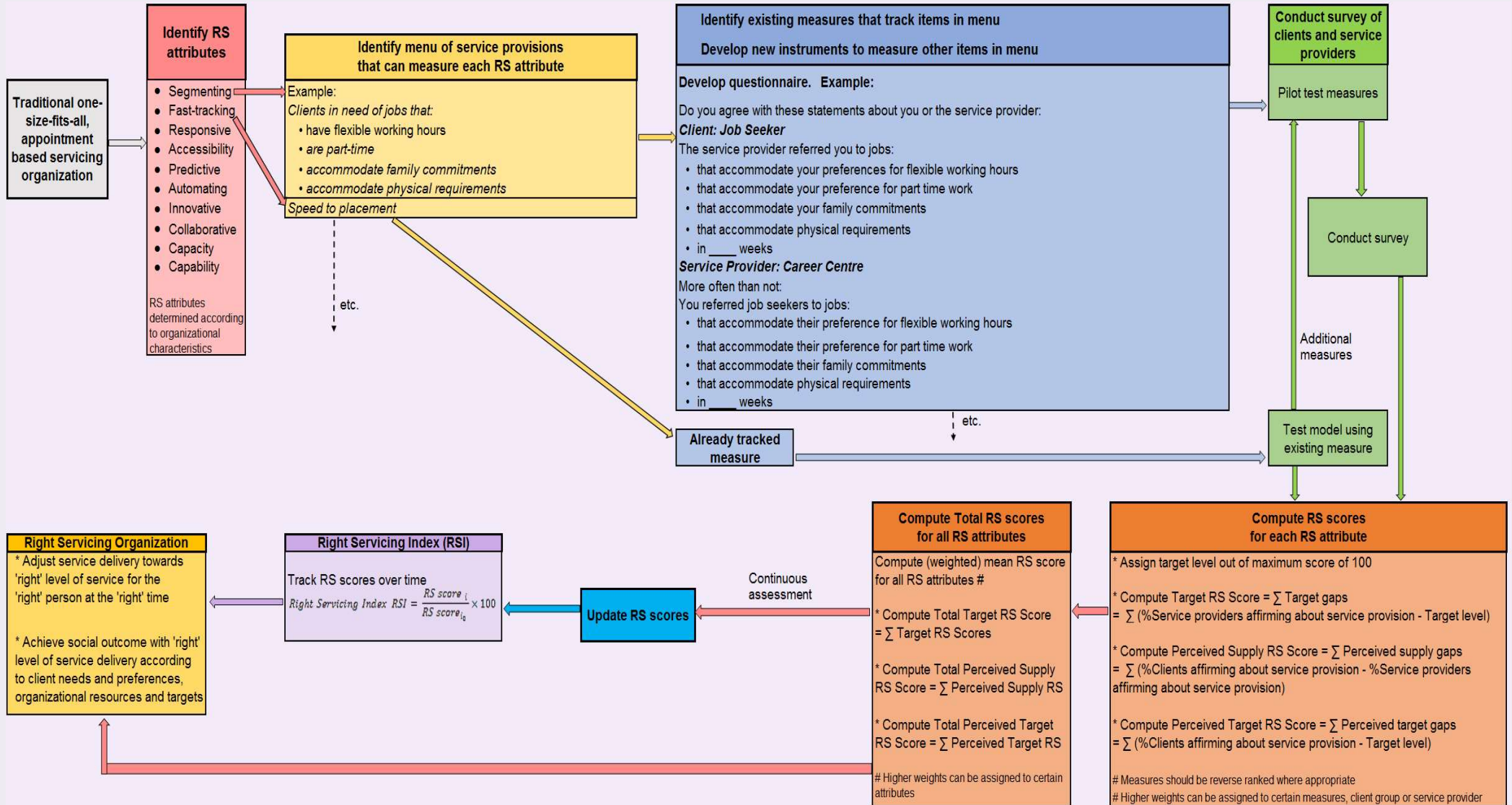
If the organization decides to allocate greater importance to segmenting, it can double the weight for the corresponding perceived supply RS score, to obtain the resulting total perceived supply RS score that is 9.2% lower than before (column VIII). On the other hand, if the organization encounters a tightening of available resources, it may wish to lower its target level in column IV for some or all RS attributes.

Table 1: Illustration of RS Score Computation

RS Attribute	Clients	Service Providers	Target	Target RS Score	Perceived Target RS Score	Perceived Supply RS Score	Perceived Supply RS Score High Segmenting
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Segmenting	61.9	84.2	90.0	-5.8	-28.1	-22.3	-44.6
Fast-tracking	59.7	88.5	90.0	-1.5	-30.3	-28.8	-28.8
Responsive	51.3	89.3	90.0	-0.7	-38.7	-38.0	-38.0
Accessibility	67.1	83.0	90.0	-7.0	-22.9	-15.9	-15.9
Predictive	54.3	89.8	90.0	-0.2	-35.7	-35.5	-35.5
Automating	71.3	89.4	90.0	-0.6	-18.7	-18.1	-18.1
Innovative	66.6	78.9	90.0	-11.1	-23.4	-12.3	-12.3
Collaborative	61.2	88.7	90.0	-1.3	-28.8	-27.6	-27.6
Capacity	62.2	89.0	90.0	-1.0	-27.8	-26.8	-26.8
Capability	72.0	85.0	90.0	-5.0	-18.0	-13.0	-13.0
Total	62.8	86.6	90.0	-3.4	-27.2	-23.8	-26.0

Note: Table contains synthetic data for illustrative purpose only.

Box 5: Illustration of Right Servicing Model



Conclusion

By identifying appropriate gaps in service delivery, the right servicing model helps service providers to narrow gaps in service delivery to approach a level that is 'just right' to achieve a social outcome, one that is neither over-servicing the majority nor under-servicing the minority. As a dynamic framework that takes into account the complexity and evolution of public-private-people relationships in service delivery, the model is amenable to changes in organizational service delivery objectives for different organizational attributes and is sensitive to variations in resource availability over time.

The right servicing model is not suitable for organizations that have weak access to objective data, limited data analysis capability, or possess corrupt management systems. It is also inappropriate for organizations that are unable to provide differential servicing either because of prohibitions in segmenting clients (e.g. due to non-discrimination policies) or because the population is largely homogenous in their needs. Successful application of the model necessitates the consideration of the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which an organization functions, and the availability of data sharing between interconnected agencies.

The right servicing model is not intended to serve as nor replace performance measures traditionally used to determine the effectiveness, efficiency, satisfaction and quality of service delivery for an organization. It does not seek to evaluate the right servicing model vis-à-vis other social service delivery systems.

An organization may choose to initiate the right serving model with a trial on a small scale using just one RS attribute that it is familiar with and one major service provider. It can then be promulgated to encompass other RS attributes and service providers.

It is worth noting that, in addition to the gaps discussed above, a gap may exist between a service expected to be provided but not being provided (that is, actual level is nil). It is important, therefore, to determine if an expectation gap is not erroneous due to a lack of awareness or misinformation about an existing service. Understanding such gaps is useful to determine if a new service should be provided, either at the present moment or in the future.

Reference

Lee-Archer, B. (2012). *RightServicing: A New Business Approach for Enabling a Differential Response in Social Program Management*. Dublin: Cúram Software.

CSPP

Centre for Skills, Performance and Productivity (CSPP) is a research centre of the Institute for Adult Learning. CSPP specialises in skills research in relation to workplace performance and productivity. The approach is interdisciplinary employing both quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

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