SERVICE AUTOMATION FRAMEWORK®

Service Automation In Local Government

J.W.MIDDELBURG

Author, Service Automation Framework

APMG International

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INTRODUCTION

Service Automation is the concept of designing and delivering automated services to end-customers.

Service Automation is the concept of designing and delivering automated services to end-customers. Due to technological advancements and the way that end users have changed their behavior, interest in service automation has greatly grown in the last decade. Services such as transportation (Uber), hotel reservations (Booking.com) and insurance (Geico.com) can now be delivered to customers without any human intervention, i.e. the process is completely automated.

In this white paper, we explore the opportunity that service automation presents to local governments. As one of their many functions, local governments serve as service providers to their community of citizens. Local Government service departments deal with many different requests, ranging from very simple requests for parking permits, all the way through to more complex issues such as providing arbitration and dealing with appeals. Many of these services can be partially or completely automated, making local governments more citizen-centric as well as more cost efficient.

STUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THIS WHITE PAPER

- In this white paper, we will discuss the background and benefits of the delivery of automated services using the Service Automation Framework (SAF).
- Next, we will break down the service provider role of local governments in detail and explore the types of services citizens may expect from their local governments.
- We will subsequently break down one of these services in detail and showcase the methodology and tools with which this local government service can be automated.
- Finally, we will discuss the steps any local government can take in order to get started with the delivery of automated services.

BACKGROUND – WHAT IS SERVICE AUTOMATION?

> The core objective of service automation is to transition analogue (or manual) steps of the service delivery process into automated steps.

Service Automation – the concept of delivering services through smart technology – is a rapidly growing area of interest for most organizations. Companies such as Spotify, Netflix and Uber (who deliver 100% automated services) have proven that organizations can achieve rapid growth and gain a competitive advantage by relying on Service Automation.

The core objective of service automation is to transition analogue (or manual) steps of the service delivery process into automated steps. By making this transition, service providers are able to deliver their services instantly, cost-effectively and to a potentially bigger market. Taking the steps towards the delivery of automated services is however not straightforward. Many organizations struggle with the question which services to automate or where to start. The Service Automation Framework was developed in 2016 by a consortium of service management experts to provide an answer to this question.

The Service Automation Framework is not so much an internal process model through which organizations can organize their service delivery, but a business model that enables an organization to gain competitive advantage in the future. Organizations that establish automated services that are better, more efficient and more focused on user experience, have the potential to become tomorrow's leaders. A high level overview of the Service Automation Framework is depicted in figure 1:

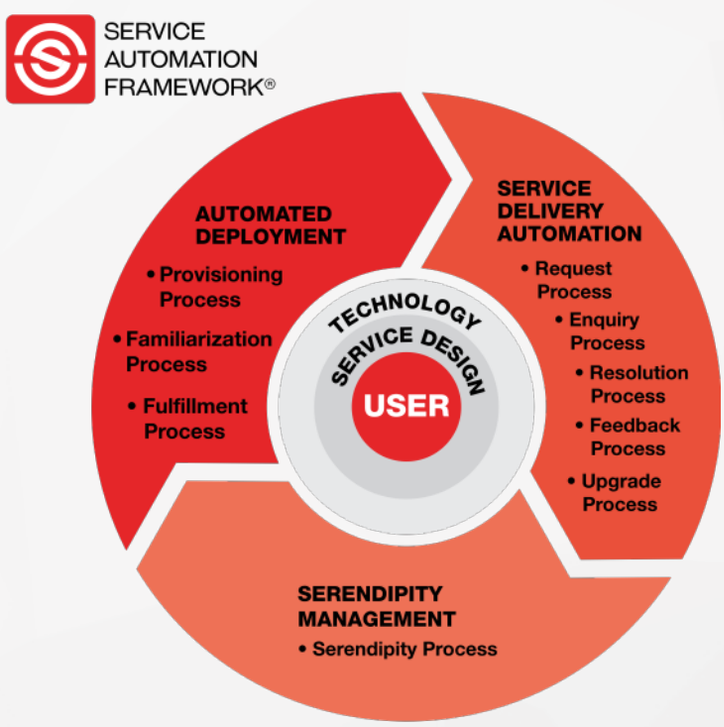

Figure 1: The Service Automation Framework – Copyright Service Automation Framework Alliance

> It is important to remember that all services in the Service Automation Framework are designed from the perspective of the User.

As can be inferred from the model in figure 1, the Service Automation Framework consists of six distinct building blocks that need to be considered for the design and delivery of automated services. For an in-depth discussion of each of the building blocks, we refer to the official Service Automation Framework book.[1] However, it is important to remember that all services in the Service Automation Framework are designed from the perspective of the User.

One of the most fundamental differences between 'traditional' and 'automated' services is that – in the latter – there is no human contact or interaction. With automated services, there is no one to talk to in case of queries, nor is there any person that explains how the service should be requested. For that reason, it is of fundamental importance that automated services are designed from the perspective of the user, and that the design of automated services is user centric. In the case of the local government as service provider, this means that services need to be designed from a 'citizen's' point of view.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

In any country, in any region across the world, there is a strong responsibility of local government to take care of its municipalities and citizens. Traditionally, the purpose of local governments is two-fold:

1. The first purpose is to represent and involve citizens in determining specific local public needs and how these local needs can be met.
2. The second purpose is the administrative purposes of supplying goods and services.

Clearly, in the rest of this paper, we will focus our attention on the way in which the Service Automation Framework can assist local governments to execute this second objective. Service Automation can help to make service delivery to citizens better, faster and cheaper.

The role of a local government as a service provider is not something new and many publications already exist that explain the 'digital transformation' of government, the benefits of 'E-Government' or even the concept of the 'Government-as-a Platform' (referred to as GaaP).[2] Many policy makers, if not all, will agree that the benefits of delivering government services are plentiful. Online platforms are easily accessible, fully auditable and, above all else, open 24x7 for any immediate assistance. The business case to extend a digitized service delivery model to local governments is easily made, and in many local governments this topic is already on the agenda.

We have found, however, that although many government leaders advocate for increased automation in the delivery of local government services, very little guidance is available that explains how this could be done. With the Service Automation Framework, we aim to provide local governments with a practical approach towards delivering automated services, as well as some tools (like service automation blueprinting) that can be used to design and deliver automated services.

1. Middelburg, J.W., 2016. Service Automation Framework. Van Haren Publishing.
2. The UK Government has some notable initiatives on E-Government and GaaP, which can be reviewed through this link: https://governmentasaplatform.blog.gov.uk/

SERVICE AUTOMATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In the previous paragraphs we have provided a brief overview of the Service Automation Framework and discussed the purpose of local government as a service provider. It is now time to merge these two together and provide an answer to following question: “How can local governments design and deliver automated services to their citizens?”

The approach outlined below has been built from a number of service automation projects in local government organizations. It includes experience and lessons learned from projects in mature markets such as The Netherlands and Singapore, as well as from more developing countries such as India and Malaysia. We found that, although individual services vary greatly per country, the process towards service automation is generally consistent.

Please note that – because of the scope of a white paper – we have deliberately chosen not to dive into the subject of local data-privacy and data exchange regulations. Although these are very important and need to be taken into consideration when designing any type of platform, the scope of this subject is too complex to cover in these pages. We have chosen to focus specifically on the practical steps that are required to automate local government services. We have illustrated these steps with relevant examples.

> The core objective of service automation is to transition analogue (or manual) steps of the service delivery process into automated steps.

To move towards service automation in local government, there are generally 6 steps that need to be considered, which are depicted in figure 2:

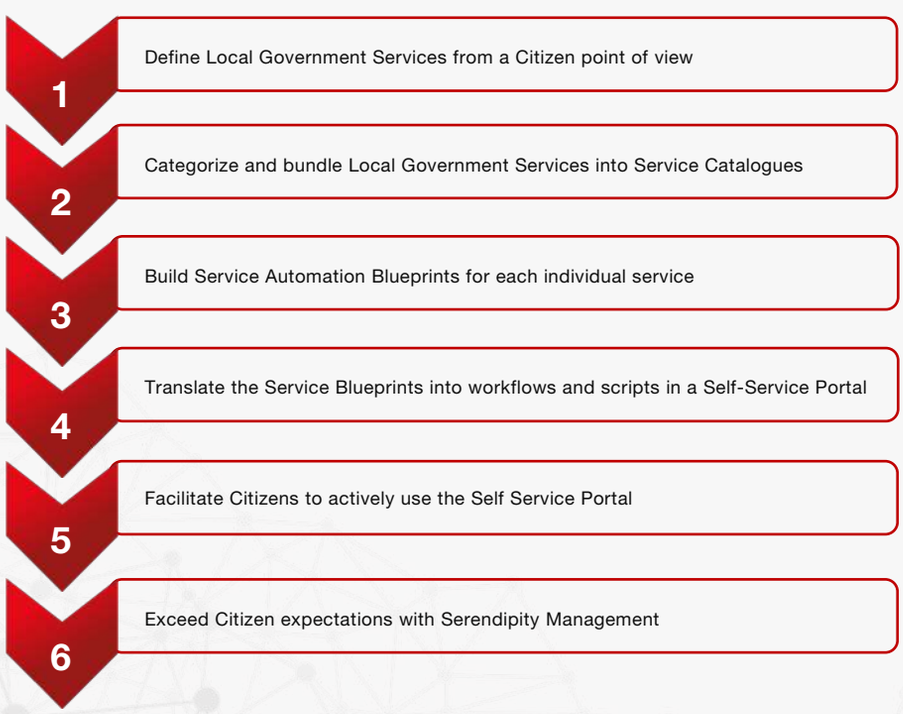

Figure 2: The 6 steps towards service automation in local government

> Standardisation of processes and integration of business and IT practices would not have been possible without attention being focused to the four domains

Each of the six steps outlined above are illustrated with some more specific examples in the paragraphs below. From our experience, each of these steps in equally important in order to successfully design and deliver automated services.

STEP 1 – DEFINE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES FROM A CITIZEN POINT OF VIEW

The first step toward the delivery of automated services is to define exactly which services a local government offers to its citizens. Depending on its purpose and the local rules and regulations, the service offering can vary greatly.

Although most local governments can adequately define which services they deliver, the other challenge is to define these services from a citizen point of view. Let us illustrate this with an example from a 'traditional' government service provider, versus a 'citizen centric' one:

Traditional service provider

- The city of [Metropolis] is responsible for the distribution and renewal of parking permits for its residents.

Citizen centric service provider

- As a citizen of [Metropolis], I would like to request and renew my parking permits, and have the ability to submit changes in the event I buy a new car.

Although both service descriptions are very similar in terms of their actual purpose, there is an important difference. The first description is clearly written from a provider point of view, whereas the second one is user / citizen centric. In service automation, services always need to be actively requested through a technology interface. The second definition clearly outlines the beginning of a workflow that starts with a clear trigger (I would like to request…).

The value of defining local government services from a user or citizen point of view, is that this service description clearly outlines the expectations that citizens have. On a more practical note, it is fairly simple to compose a list of all the services a local government should deliver by asking people what services they need to have or would like to request. People know that they would like to request a parking permit, or change their car license number. From their perspective, they don't mind that a local government sees this as part of their service catalogue as long as their requests are effectively resolved.

1. Middelburg, J.W., 2016. Service Automation Framework. Van Haren Publishing.

STEP 2 – CATEGORISE & BUNDLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES INTO SERVICE CATALOGUES

In step 2, we will build on the example of a local government office that provides parking permit services to its citizens. Many of the services that are requested from local governments fall into some sort of category of similar services.

Requesting a new parking permit clearly falls into the category of parking. As does extending an existing license or changing a car license plate. Similarly, other categories can be devised which constitute the 'main' activities of local government responsibilities. Each category can therefore be seen as separate service catalogue, which has different rules and permissions assigned to the catalogue. An example of a grouping exercise is depicted in figure 2.

CIVIL AFFAIRS OFFICE	LOCAL BUSINESS	PARKING
Report move or relocation	Report business relocation	Request a new Parking Permit
Report a short stay (<6 months)	Request catering license	Extend Existing Parking Permit
Report stolen documents	Request noise exemption permit	Special Parking Permit for Moving
Apply for passport	Request small business license	Parking Permits for Electric Cars
Apply for driver's license	Renew a business license	
Request marriage license	Request social business grant	
Dissolution of marriage license	Request street artist permit	
Request official document	Report business renovation	
Registration of birth	Request film or photography permit	
Registration of death	Request street advertising permit	

Figure 3: Categorizing and bundling services into service catalogues

1. Middelburg, J.W., 2016. Service Automation Framework. Van Haren Publishing.

Besides the clarity that categorisation brings for citizens (it makes things easy to find), there are some additional benefits in the next phases of service automation. One of the primary benefits is that each catalogue can easily be managed by a different team or department within a local government organization. The 'Parking' category, for example, can be managed by a local Transportation Authority, whereas the 'Civil Affairs' category can be managed by a completely different department.

STEP 3 – BUILD SERVICE AUTOMATION BLUEPRINTS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL SERVICE

After each service catalogue has been specified, the next step is to compose a Service Automation Blueprint for each individual service. The team responsible for delivering that specific service comes together to create the blueprint.

The key objective of the blueprinting exercise is to discuss the workflow of automated service delivery. The questions that need to be answered during the blueprinting workshop are as follows:

- What are the key characteristics of the citizens that use the government service?
- What are the steps that every citizen takes (or should take) when consuming the service?
- What kind of information should be provided back to the citizen so that he or she has a positive service experience?
- What are the underlying processes that are needed to ensure that the service can be executed properly?
- Who in the organization is responsible for executing, monitoring and improving the service and service delivery process?

Although most of these questions sound very simple, the reality is that they are often skipped or not properly defined. Lack of clarity in the blueprinting phase causes poor design choices, which may lead to a sub-standard service and user experience. Service Automation Blueprinting is a very structured and easy-to-use visualization tool which captures all aspects of an automated service experience.[3]

3. Service Automation Blueprinting is a structured approach. More information on how to compose a blueprint is available here: https://www.serviceautomation.org/service-automation-blueprint/

An example blueprint for the passport request process is displayed in the figure below:

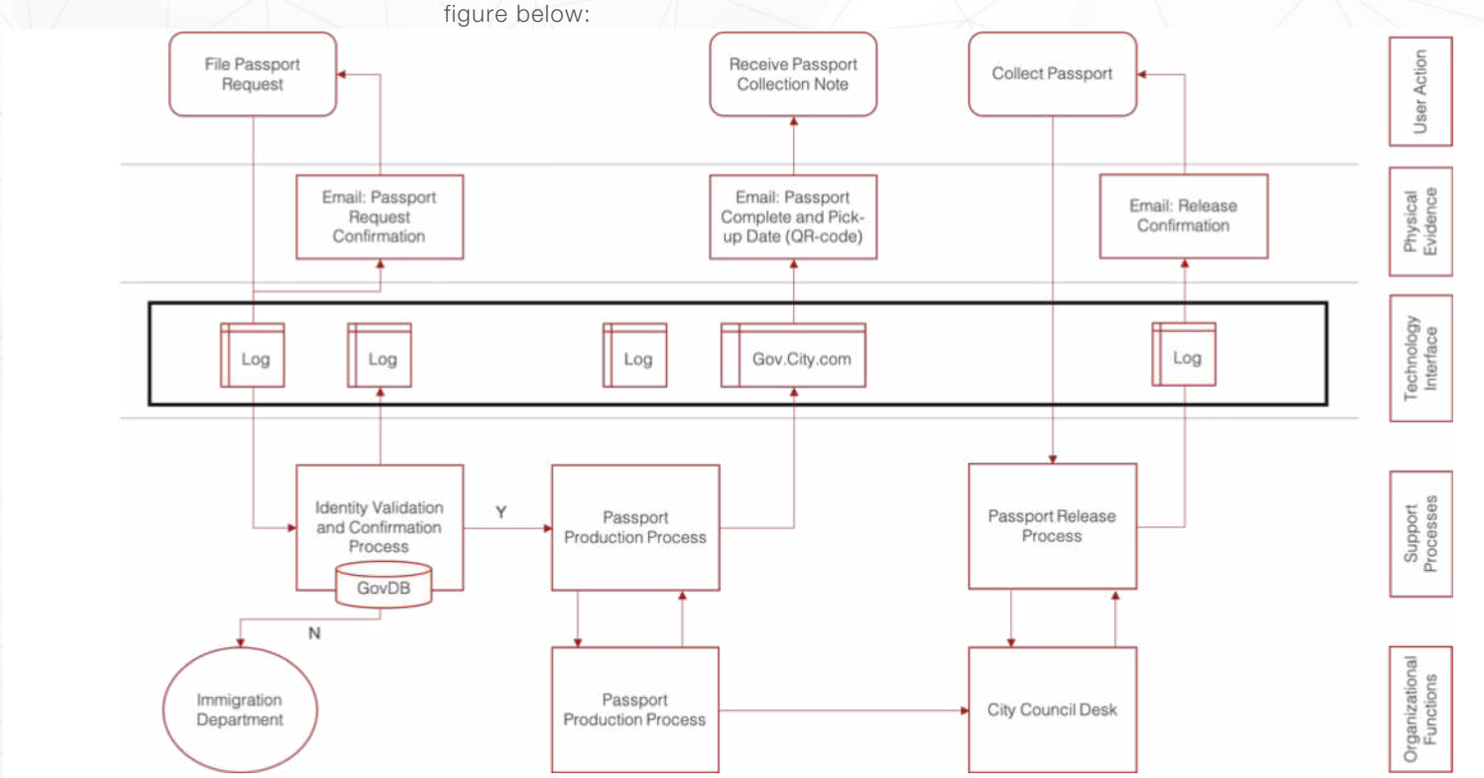

Figure 4: Example of Service Automation Blueprint (New Passport Request)

STEP 4 – TRANSLATE THE SERVICE BLUEPRINTS INTO WORKFLOWS & SCRIPTS IN A SELF-SERVICE PORTAL

After each individual service has been designed using the Service Automation Blueprinting approach above, the next step is to translate these blueprints into workflows and scripts that can be embedded in a self-service portal.

There are many good technologies available that can facilitate the delivery of automated services. Key criteria of a good technology tool for self-service portals include:

- The ability to set up multiple self-service catalogues
- The ability for end-users to set up their own accounts (back-ends)
- The ability to monitor which service requests are still in progress (i.e. which have not been executed automatically).
- The ability to easily develop and adjust workflows and scripts.

In the end, the self-service portal is the primary (and only) interface that a citizen has with the local government. If the automated service is designed well and functions properly, all activities will be conducted through this portal. An example of a self-service portal of the city of Amsterdam is depicted in figure 5.

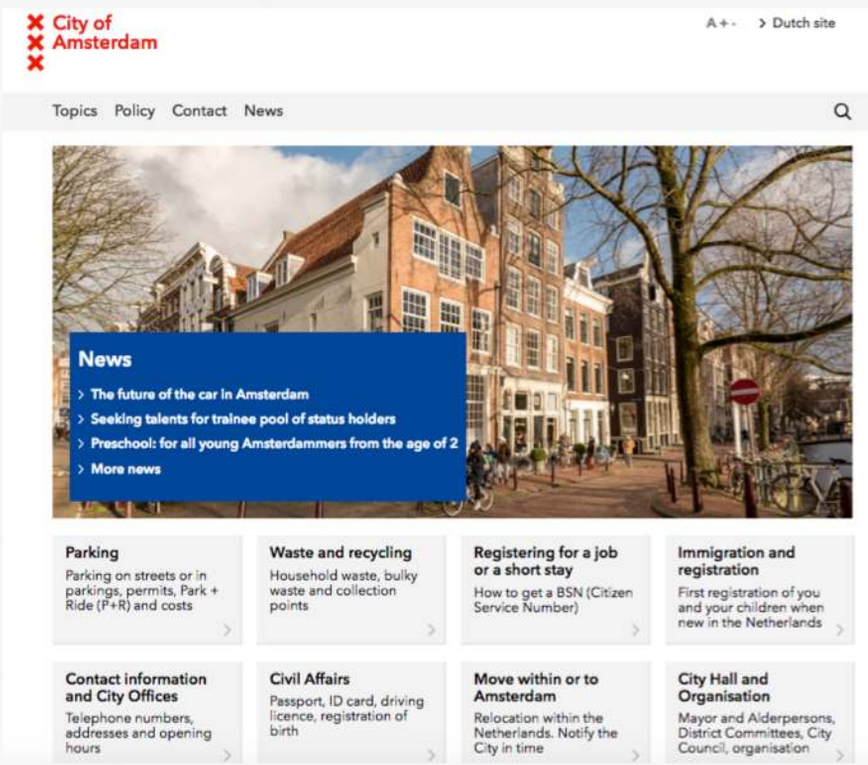

Figure 5: City of Amsterdam Citizen Portal, copyright by the City of Amsterdam

STEP 5 – FACILITATE CITIZENS TO ACTIVELY USE THE SELF SERVICE PORTAL

After the launch of a newly branded self-service portal, one of the most important criteria for success is that people also start to actively use it. This requires an awareness campaign, advertising or other forms of communication that will make citizens aware about the availability of automated services by the local government.

An effective way that we have found in previous service automation implementations is to direct answer machines to the portal, especially after regular office hours. Most people will understand that they cannot walk into a government office on Sunday to request a new passport or parking permit. However, if they are made aware that they can submit these types of requests through a local government self-service portal, a large number of people will automatically switch to this option.

STEP 6 – EXCEED CITIZEN'S EXPECTATIONS WITH SERENDIPITY MANAGEMENT

The last and final benefit of setting up service automation in local governments is that service automation gives organizations the ability to surprise in a positive way. We have labelled this serendipity management: something good that you did not expect beforehand. Because all services that are delivered through the portal can be actively monitored and tracked, local governments can now actively devise ways to make service experiences better for their citizens.

Figure 6: Definition of Serendipity by Dictionary.com

Consider the following examples of serendipity management:

- 2 month's before your driver's license expires, you get new notifications by email or SMS that you need to renew your documentation.
- You receive a message that your neighbor has requested a parking space next Saturday in your street for moving purposes.
- You receive live and updated information when your special garbage will be collected.

For each of the examples above, ask yourself whether your local government is currently doing this? If the answer is no, it might be that service automation and the Service Automation Framework might work to their benefit as well.

Find out more at: https://www.serviceautomation.org/

To find out more about training and certification see: https://apmg-international.com/product/saf

3. Service Automation Blueprinting is a structured approach. More information on how to compose a blueprint is available here: https://www.serviceautomation.org/service-automation-blueprint/

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 2017, J.W. Middelburg published his book The Service Automation Framework, a best practice guide for the design and delivery of automated services. The book describes the rise of the 'Self Service Generation' and the way service providers can adjust their service offering accordingly.

A pioneer and advocate for creating an international body of knowledge for Service Automation, J.W. Middelburg is also the Executive Chair of the Service Automation Framework Foundation.

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FIND OUT MORE

+44 (0) 1494 452450

servicedesk@apmgroupltd.com

apmg-international.com

facebook.com/APMGinternationalLTD

linkedin.com/company/apmg-international

@APMG_Inter