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# Beyond Substantive Goals – A Framework for Understanding Citizens Need 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 for bureaucratic encounters. The framework is developed through a qualitative hermeneutic approach involving several different literatures. The framework goes beyond the prevalent focus on substantive needs. It identifies four needs related to the BE process: process-security, relational security, discretion and efficiency and effectiveness; and three outcome-goals: substantive outcome, identity-related outcome, and justice- and fairness outcome. These interrelated needs and goals may guide citizens' approaches to the bureaucratic encounter and their choice of channel(s) for the encounter. The degree to which these needs and goals are met may have consequences for the efficiency of the service delivery seen from the authorities' perspective as well as for the citizens' satisfaction and sense of a fair and just application of authority. The framework can be a useful tool for analysing citizens' strategies concerning the bureaucratic encounters and their use of self-service systems and the effects thereof for both citizens and authorities. In addition, the framework can be used by researchers and practitioners alike to analyse self-service-systems and multi-channel strategies and service designs to identify how they take the different needs into account.

**Keywords:** Citizen-government interaction, Digitalization, Theory-building, Digital services, Needs and goals.

## 1 Introduction and Background

As more of citizens' interactions with government occur online [1], it becomes important to understand what citizens seek from these encounters. Citizens' needs and goals may affect their approaches to the different mediations of the encounters and have implications for the design of systems and services.

Citizens encounter government in a wide range of situations and for a wide range of reasons. In this paper, the focus is on what Goodsell calls "bureaucratic encounters" (BE) [2, 3]. This is where most people have direct experience with government authorities. Goodsell's work focuses on face-to-face encounters. As Nass and Moon have

shown [4, 5], people unwittingly apply social and human attributes to interactive systems such as self-service systems. Thus, interactions with self-service systems may qualify as encounters with proxies for humans and the organizations they represent. In this paper, “Encounters” covers all types of “bureaucratic” interactions between citizens and authorities, no matter what channels are used.

What citizens want and expect from BEs (their needs and goals) has, in the e-government literature, primarily been studied from a channel-choice (CC) perspective [6-9]. In the CC literature, goals and needs are often treated as independent variables for channel choice. However, a gap exists when it comes to examining needs and goals as the focus of the analysis and analysis from a situated, citizen perspective where the citizen and not channels are the unit of analysis [10, 11].

The need for citizen-centred research has been stated repeatedly in the literature [9, 12-14], and not understanding the citizen perspective may have consequences for the authorities as well as for citizens. As Kolsakker & Lee-Kelly [15]:73 puts it, “if the needs of the citizens are not understood, provision will be designed around the needs of the state”, which often implies the dominance of an economic/administrative rational [16, 17].

The present study contributes to the e-government literature by presenting a conceptual framework of the needs and goals that are important for citizens and their actions and strategies regarding bureaucratic encounters. Thus, the study answers the repeated call for native theory development within e-government studies [9, 18]. Scholars can use this framework to investigate the effects for citizens of applying different technologies in the BE. Practitioners can use the framework in the design of self-service systems, the organizational designs of BE service delivery, and in the design of multichannel strategies.

The paper is structured as follows: Section two outlines the research approach. Section three describes the framework that has been derived from this review. Section four provides a discussion of the framework’s implications for different mediations and outlines an agenda for future research.

## **2 Method**

The framework presented here is an artefact developed through a “hermeneutic literature review” [19], based on the principles of the hermeneutic circle [20], synthesising theory and findings from previous research. Following Rose et al. [21], I examine literature five different literatures which can shed light on citizens needs and goals for their BEs: 1) the public administration literature, 2) the E-government literature, 3) the private sector service encounter literature, 4) literature from the legal field on justice and fairness in citizens encounters with authorities, 5) Literature on the sociology of encounters. Each field of research contributed with perspectives on goals and needs which could be relevant for the framework.

The selection and search of these literatures is based on a set of initial assumptions. These assumptions are founded both in previous literature readings and on my career as a civil servant with extensive experience serving citizens at the frontlines.

**Table 1.** Initial assumptions

	<b>Assumption</b>	<b>Inspired by</b>
1	The trigger for initiating a bureaucratic encounter/set of encounters will typically be because the citizens have some substantive need (benefit, permit, service) or must fulfil some obligation.	Godsell 2018 [3], Lindgreen et al 2019 [9]
2	The BE is a highly asymmetrical encounter, where 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, maintain a sense of control and project and protect a positive identity), and feel that they are treated fairly by those in authority.	Godsell 2018 [3], Lenk 2002 [22]
3	Much of the process in and around a BE may be complex and opaque for citizens resulting in uncertainty and ambiguity. The assumption is that citizens will have needs related to handling this uncertainty and ambiguity, to feel secure in their understanding and actions, and in the functioning of those elements of the process that takes place in back-offices or are inscribed in IT systems.	Pieterse 2009 [6], Jarvis 2014 [23]
4	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 [24], Madsen and Christensen 2019 [25], Grönlund, Hatakka, and Ask 2007 [26]

The process included the steps outlined by [19]: 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 were identified 5) Identifying areas for further study and possible applications of the framework, 6) searching based on references and new perspectives found in the literature consulted so far. These steps were applied iteratively and not necessarily in the order presented here. Searching, reading, analysing, and framework development were closely interconnected.

During this iterative process of searching, reading, and analysis, I synthesise the framework through a series of revisions and elaborations. The process stopped when saturation was reached, and no further dimensions for the framework were identified [19].

### 3 Conceptual Framework

The result of the literature review is a conceptual framework intended to serve as a foundation and reference point for further investigation [27]. The framework identifies relevant citizens' needs and goals for the BE. Table 2 presents this framework. Note that the distinctions here are analytical. While the table format indicates a certain order and linearity, a specific BE may not include all the needs and goals in equal measure or follow this order.

The citizen's needs and goals presented in Table 2 covers two phenomena. (1) the process-internal aspects of the encounter (needs): process-security, relational security, discretion, and efficiency and effectiveness. (2) the outcome goals, i.e., what the citizen hopes to achieve through the encounter: substantive goals, identity-related goals, and justice- and fairness goals. Each need and goal can be achieved through one or more aspects of the encounter.

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

**Table 2.** Framework of needs and goals

Need	Achieved through	Description	References
<b>Process-related needs</b>			
Process-security	A) A sense of understanding	Framing the problem or task in a way that fits the bureaucratic conceptualization and organization of information and services in order to search for information, plot a course, find the right authority(ies), etc., and reducing ambiguity to a level that allows the citizen to proceed with a sufficient level of security.	[28], [29], [30], [31], [32]
	B) A sense of SLB competence	Gauging whether the street-level bureaucrat (SLB) or the authority appears competent in what they do - to bolster the sense of security further	[33], [34], [35], [36], [37], [38]
	C) A sense of closure	Need for clarity about what the citizen has done and what is going to happen next.	[6], [8], [39], [40], [41]
Relational security	A) A sense of respect and recognition	Being allowed to project the identity you wish to project (typically a situationally relevant, positive identity) and being recognized as a competent individual and member of society.	[3], [33], [42], [43], [35], [44], [45], [46], [47], [48], [49], [50], [51], [52], [53]
	B) A sense of positive intentions	Establishing a rapport and gauging attitudes and intentions of SLBs involved increasing the sense that your case is in the hands of someone with a positive attitude towards you and your needs.	[42], [28]
	C) A sense of justice and fairness	Feeling that one is being treated justly and fairly in the process.	[54], [55], [56], [57], [58], [59]; [60], [61], [62], [63]
Discretion	Flexibility in the process, in interaction and the interpretation of rules	A process that to some extent can be adapted to you and your situation, allowances for interaction that goes beyond the strict needs of the authority for data, and some flexibility in the interpretation of rules where grey areas exist or can be construed.	[64], [50], [65], [66], [67], [68]

Efficiency and effectiveness	A sense of time and resources well spent	Procedures and systems that fit the citizens' preferences and skills, investing what the citizen considers a reasonable effort. Providing a sense of self-efficacy, including ease of use and a sense of convenience.	[6], [43], [45], [69], [70], [71], [72], [73], [74]
<b>Outcome goals</b>			
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 situationally relevant identity.	See relational security above
Justice and fairness outcome	Relational security and discretion	Feeling treated justly and fairly by the authority, regardless of the substantive outcome.	See relational security and discretion above

These needs and goals are fundamentally technology-neutral, but fulfilling them may require different strategies and skills and be provided different affordances in different channels used for the encounter.

Needs and goals may not be fulfilled and reached through one encounter. It may, in some cases, take several encounters with the same authority or several different authorities using different mediations. Also, all of the needs and goals are not necessarily important for a specific encounter and a specific citizen. In many encounters, only a few of the needs and goals may be important, while in some encounters, most of them could come into play. What goals and needs are important would presumably depend on the individual and the circumstances of the situation.

### 3.1 Process-Security Needs

Process-security needs focus on the course of the BE process as a means for achieving a sufficient level of certainty or security that everything necessary has been done, and done correctly, and to optimize the chances of achieving the desired outcomes, with an effort that feels manageable and appropriate for the task.

Research by Pieterse, Ebbers, and others [6, 8, 39, 40] indicate that the course of the BE process may involve its own needs. Process needs are related to the encounter experience and to the way outcomes are achieved. Three such needs stand out in the e-government literature: "sense of closure", "ease of use", and "efficiency", in other words: the process has to be easy, efficient, effective, and provide a sense of security that the task is done, and everything is OK. Similar process needs are described in the private sector service-encounter literature. This literature also has a focus on what Dasu & Chase [75] call the "soft side of customer service": emotions, perceived control, and trust, and it has a focus on the perceived competence of the service personnel as a source of assurance and security.

#### *A. A sense of understanding – through frame-alignment and disambiguation*

Establishing a sense that you understand where you have to go, what information you need, understanding the information you find or receive, and what you have to do, is important for fulfilling a need for security in the process. In BEs, citizen will often find themselves in situations that are unfamiliar to them, with insufficient domain skills [24] to assist them in plotting a course, searching for, understanding, and evaluating information, and translating their problems and needs into something that fits the relevant bureaucratic framing [30], and to “overcome different frames of reference or clarify ambiguous issues and change understanding in a timely manner” [29]:560.

A “frame” is “a perceptual matrix that systematises experience and helps one define a situation and make it understandable and to some extent predictable” [31]:150. Frames usually only become visible when non-alignment is discovered and acknowledged [28]:39. Frame alignment is necessary when two different ways of understanding or structuring the issues exist and have to be reconciled, giving rise to disambiguity and uncertainty. If agreement on framing is not reached, we may get (potential) conflict (if disagreement is acknowledged) or misunderstandings (if unacknowledged). Highly ambiguous messages are open to interpretation, and a shared definition must be constructed through some form of interactive communication [32]:1546.

#### *B. A sense of authority competence*

In order to feel secure in the process, it may be important for the citizen to have a sense that the people he or she interacts with (directly or indirectly) are competent and know what they are doing. Service encounters in general and BEs, in particular, are asymmetrical encounters where one party possesses skills and knowledge the other typically does not [35]. In the BE, there is also a clear underlying asymmetry of power. Credibility and a sense of competence, therefore, become important [33]. This can be achieved through a projection of competence by the SLB: understanding customers’ (citizens) needs, knowing the rules, procedures, and services involved and performing effectively in the service process [45]. As the citizen usually does not have the knowledge necessary to evaluate this competence directly, it may have to be assessed through surface- or “proxy”-indicators [36, 37], often connected to immediately ascertainable behaviour [38] such as the assuredness with which the SLB performs and cues in body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.

#### *C. A sense of closure*

Having a sense that you have done things correctly and that your application is in the right hands and will be taken care of within a reasonable timeframe may be important for fulfilling a need for security in the process. Pieterse and van Dijk [39] and Pieterse [6]:188ff talks about how citizens may need “uncertainty reduction”, “a sense of closure,” or “a need for clarity” and how this may influence their strategies for the encounter. Ebbers et al. [8] describe how this need may be particularly salient in situations characterized by a high degree of uncertainty for the citizen. The “need for closure” is also recognized in the private sector service literature [41].



Vermeir (ibid.) highlights the informational aspects of achieving a sense of closure when he defines it as "an individual's desire for clear, definite, or unambiguous knowledge that will guide perception and action, as opposed to the undesirable alternative of ambiguity and confusion." (ibid.:xvi).

### **3.2 Efficiency, Effectiveness, Ease of Use and Convenience**

Feeling that you have spent your time and resources efficiently and effectively in a way that suited your skills and preferences could be considered a need in its own right. Efficiency – conducting the process with minimum use of time, cost and effort, and effectiveness – the process achieving its goals are important process needs in both the e-government and service-encounter literatures [6, 43, 45, 72, 73]. However, efficiency may not so much be a matter of the objective amount of time and resources spent, as a subjective feeling of being efficient often connected with a feeling of being able to act [69], and of being capable and competent to act – a sense of self-efficacy [71]. This is also related to the need for respect and recognition (see below).

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" [70]. For the purpose of this study, I would argue that this is an aspect of the encounter experience that contributes to the feeling of being efficient and the sense of competence on the part of the authority. This also applies to the concept of convenience - receiving the service where, how, and when desired [74].

### **3.3 Relational Security Needs and Goals**

While process-security needs are process-internal, relational security can be seen both as process-internal needs and as "soft" outcome goals.

Relational security has to do with being able to project and protect a positive identity throughout the encounter, feeling recognized as a competent and valued individual, and feeling treated fairly and with respect. As process-needs, they contribute to a sense of security, a sense that the authority is acting fairly, taking all relevant aspects of the individual and his or her situation into account, thus contributing to a fair and just decision on the substantive outcome. As outcome-goals relational security has to do with how the process has affected the citizens' sense of "citizenship" and sense of fairness and justice in the way authority is practiced.

#### *A. Respect and recognition*

Needs and goals of respect and recognition are related to the citizen's sense of identity. It has to do with being treated with respect, being able to project and defend a positive identity, and being recognized as a competent member of society. [42, 48]. In the private sector service-encounter literature, aspects of the encounter related to respect, courtesy, responsiveness, empathy, helpfulness, and sociability play a significant role in customers' evaluation of encounters [33, 35, 43, 45]. These all have to do with recognizing the customers as worthy individuals.

In the context of the BE, there is, as we have seen, a clear asymmetrical distribution of power which may assign additional importance to the need for recognition. Bureaucratic encounters may, as Goodsell [3] found, besides their instrumental goals (providing benefits and services), also constitute “social exchanges which confirm or alter the status position of clients.” BEs may involve the display, negotiation, confirmation, and/or rejection of identities [46, 47, 49, 50].

The identity citizens bring to the encounter and, to some extent, attempts to project and defend is a social self [44]:6-7, a communicated self, created in social interaction it is also, as Goffman argues, a controlled and situated self [51]:156. The conflict that arises between the institutional identities recognized by the authority and the social, moral selves the citizens wish to project and defend is described by Spencer [52] as a conflict between a formal, standardized discourse of rules and resources and a discourse of individuality and morality or, as Hopper puts it, between moral selves and legal selves [76]. The discourse citizens apply in their claim to moral selves often includes information that is irrelevant to the construction of institutional identities [53].

A successful social encounter must allow for “the projected claims to an acceptable self” [42]:105. The individual can only maintain this positive identity and a positive self-relation with the help of the accepting or confirming feedback [48]:85.

#### *B. A sense of positive intentions*

Just as competence is often evaluated through proxy indicators, so a sense of respect and recognition may rely on more than the surface of what is said and done. It may depend to an extent on the back channels, which carry the subtle “keyings” [28] that contain information about the modality of what is being said (humour, irony, good-naturedness, etc.) and facilitates a close and nuanced reading of intentions and attitudes [42].

Different mediations of the encounter may allow for “unnecessary” information, confirming feedback and “keying information” to varying degrees.

#### *C. A sense of justice and fairness*

Justice and fairness needs have to do with the feeling that the power of the authority is applied in a manner that is just and fair to the individual. In highly asymmetrical encounters, such as BEs, it may be especially important for citizens to feel that they are treated justly and fairly [54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60]. The literature on justice and fairness often distinguishes between three types of (perceived) justice [61]: distributive justice: the degree to which the outcome is considered fair, also in relation to what others are assumed/perceived to get; 2) procedural justice: the perceived fairness of practices, policies and procedures; and 3) interactional justice – the enactment of the encounter such as fair treatment, friendliness, objectiveness, honesty, genuine interest, respect, and sensitivity [57].

Tyler and colleagues find that “procedural justice”, the way people are treated and their cases are handled in relation to authorities, has an effect independent of any impact on the decisions made and may even be more important for citizens than the substantive outcome (see also [62] and [63] for parallel findings from the private-sector service

literature). Blader and Tyler [59] show that how decisions are made in concrete encounters, including the degree of citizen involvement and voice, and the quality of the way citizens are treated (respect, politeness, dignity) is key to the production of a sense of procedural justice (just as it is key to customer satisfaction). While a product of the process, I would argue that justice and fairness is not so much a process-goal as it is another soft-outcome goal, parallel and related to respect and recognition.

### 3.4 Discretion

Madsen & Kræmmergaard [64] talk about how citizens' wishes to affect the substantive outcome may lead them to choose mediations that allow for some degree of negotiation of the outcome – that is, some degree of discretion.

And indeed, the needs and goals outlined above all, to some extent, imply some degree of flexibility or “discretion” in the process. Discretion has been 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” [77]:166. As Lipsky [65] described, discretion can be a tool for the abuse of power, as it allows SLBs to induce their own prejudices, values, and interpretations of rules and policies into their practice and decision-making. At the same time, many 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” [66]:207, and even Lipsky admits that: “Equal treatment may require treating people differently to achieve equal results” [65]:232. Lipsky describes discretion as primarily an aspect of the role of SLBs, but citizens themselves may have an active part in the negotiation of discretion [50]. Dworkin [67] distinguish between “strong” and “weak” discretion. Weak discretion tends to allow for some degree of technical autonomy [68] – focusing on procedural and interactional control, while strong discretion tends to allow also for “ideological” autonomy, with more control of procedures and outcomes. On this basis, I will distinguish between 1) Substantive discretion, which has to do with determining eligibility for benefits and services – the substantive goal of encounters. Here discretion, especially in BEs, may be very limited (weak) due to strict objective criteria for eligibility. 2) Procedural discretion, which allows for flexibility in the process. Procedural discretion in the BE has traditionally been fairly strong but may be circumscribed by the IT systems used for casework and processing. 3) Interactional discretion, which has to do with the way citizens are treated, whether the citizen feels listened to and taken seriously. Citizens may appeal to discretion in order to affect the substantive outcome of the encounter, but as this, in BEs is often highly rule-based, discretion in the other two areas may become important, even when it does not actually affect the substantive outcome. Depending on the citizen's expectations and experiences with authorities, discretion maybe something one seeks to avoid because of the risks it entails, or it may be something one actively seeks out and engage in because of its possibilities.

### **3.5 Substantive Outcome Goals**

The substantive outcome has to do with the original goals for the encounter, that is, the fulfilment of some basic need(s) the citizen has outside of the encounter. This may, for example, be to get a benefit or permit, be afforded access to a service, or fulfil some obligation, like filing taxes. Assuming citizens rarely enter into BEs for the experience, there will arguably always be some substantive goal that triggers the encounter(s). Substantive goals appear so self-evident that they are not the object of much discussion in the literature.

### **3.6 Summing Up**

Based on this review of several literatures, I have identified five interrelated types of needs and goals for the bureaucratic encounter: (1) Process -security: achieving certainty in understanding, in the competence of the SLBs, and of having completed the process correctly; (2) Relational security: achieving a sufficient sense of respect and recognition, of positive intentions of the SLB, and of being treated justly and fairly in the process.; (3) Discretion: a sufficient level of flexibility in the process; (4) Efficiency and effectiveness: a feeling of self-efficacy and time well spent; (5) outcome goals: achieving the substantive goal, feeling recognised and accepted and feeling that the substantive outcome has been achieved in a fair and just manner.

The importance of these goals and needs will arguably not be the same for every citizen in every situation. It may depend on how much is at stake for the citizen – substantially or identity-wise. Or it may depend on the citizen’s familiarity with the situation/service/authority and his or her domain skills.

## **4 Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper set out to establish a conceptual framework for describing and analysing citizens’ needs and goals for bureaucratic encounters, thorough a hermeneutic literature review. The resulting framework shows that several needs and goals besides the substantial goals that usually “trigger” an encounter may be important for the citizens. Most of these needs and goals are “soft,” relying mainly on feelings and experiences. All of the needs have some bearing on the perceived chances of achieving the substantial outcome: fulfilment of process-security needs increase the sense of having understood and done things correctly. Relational security needs may be important to the citizen’s 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 the SLB has positive intentions and will do what he or she can to help the citizen achieve the substantive goal. Needs for discretion and flexibility may also contribute to a sense of empowerment and citizenship, and of being seen and treated as an individual, at the same time as a sense of discretion – even if “only” interactional or procedural, may contribute to a feeling that the decision reached will be a correct one. These needs are primarily evaluated based on feelings and experience rather than on measurable aspects

of the encounter. This may apply even to efficiency and effectiveness needs to the extent that these are not evaluated based on strict measurements of time and resources spent.

I would argue that the framework is, in essence, technology-neutral. All of the needs and goals could arguably be fulfilled to some degree through any mediation, and all mediations could be implemented in a way that did not support any of the needs and goals well. The expectation would, for example, be that face-to-face encounters would be good at supporting most of the “soft” needs, but face-to-face BEs may indeed be practiced in ways that offer limited support to these goals and needs and even in ways that undermine them. Conversely, we might expect BEs conducted through self-service systems to have limited support for the relational and identity-related needs and goals, but that may depend very much on the design of the service.

The framework indicates that the bureaucratic encounter may have purposes beyond the immediate ones identified by Goodsell “to exchange information, provide public service, or control or constrain citizens.” They may also have the broader purpose – for citizens and authorities alike – of confirming/strengthening/weakening the citizens’ sense of competence, fairness, and reliability of the specific authority involved in the encounter and even of authorities in general. This, in turn, may have implications for the citizens’ sense of trust in the authority, for the sense of the legitimacy of their decisions, for compliance with the decisions, and their general support of the authority.

Thus, it is important for e-government researchers to look beyond the immediate goals and effects of digitalization of the BE and take citizens’ needs and goals as well as the wider implications of the practices of e-government into account.

#### **4.1 Suggestions for Application and Further Research**

The framework provides a valuable tool for e-government researchers to study channel-choice and e-government adoption from a needs- and goals-perspective and for studying the authorities’ strategies and choices in designing systems and services. The framework could also serve as a tool for practitioners in designing and evaluating systems, services, and strategies.

The framework contributes to the e-government field in addressing the need for citizen-centred research and understanding the users’ needs and resources [13, 14, 17], and in engaging other theoretical fields to advance e-government theory building [78, 79].

To bring the field further forward, I propose a research agenda for the e-government community with the following research questions:

1. How do needs interact with each other and with the outcome goals? Are the process needs, for example, primarily of importance for successfully completing the tasks contained in and around the encounter, or do they have significant implications for how the outcomes are evaluated?
2. What features of systems and user journeys in which they are typically embedded contribute to fulfilling the different needs and goals – or do the opposite?

3. What features of the situation in the citizen's life that gives rise to the encounter contribute to the relative importance of the different needs and goals? Will unfamiliar situations or significant consequences of the outcome, for instance, increase the importance of certain needs?
4. Are some needs and goals more important to some categories of citizens than others, and how can these needs best be met or lowered for these citizens? Are certain needs, for example, more important for citizens with fewer resources or lower skills?
5. 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 on other channels during or after a self-service encounter?
6. What is the effect of improvements in the way needs and goals are met in delivering a service on compliance and, for cases that require contacts between the citizen and the authority over a longer period of time, on cooperation between the citizen and the authority during that process?

Apart from answering these specific questions, such research could also contribute to further refinement and elaboration of the framework through its application to empirical data. Practitioners could also apply the framework as a tool in the design of services and systems. They could, for example for investigating the importance of the different needs and goals for a given target group/situation before designing a new service/system as input to a multi-channel service design or for evaluating existing systems and services.

## 4.2 Limitations and Concluding Comments

While I have investigated a wide range of literatures in this paper, my aim has not been an exhaustive investigation of them all, but through an interpretive, hermeneutic approach to identify salient and important perspectives on citizens' needs and goals for the bureaucratic encounter. Through this, I hope to have provided a framework for a more holistic investigation and understanding of citizens' needs and goals.

Dahler-Larsen [80] establishes four criteria for the quality of qualitative research: 1) craftsmanship – applying suitable methods in a proper way, 2) transparency in the way the methods are applied, showing how the data (in this case, the literature) lead to and supports the conclusions (in this case the framework), 3) communicative quality – presenting the work that makes it open and accessible for investigation and discussion with others, and 4) the “heuristic criterium” – that the analysis leads to new insights and perspectives. All four criteria are ultimately subjective as they rely on the reader's assessments.

An interpretive, hermeneutic approach will always and unavoidably rely on the researcher's pre-understanding. As Dey [81]: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 initial assumption.

The initial assumptions have also served to seek alternative perspectives on the encounter that are not usually represented in the e-government literature. At the same

time, the selection of literature has been limited by these assumptions. Other literatures, such as the service-design and digital-design literatures, could have provided additional insights. However, the intention of this study has not been to conduct an exhaustive survey of all relevant literatures but, through a limited search of selected literatures, to provide a framework that covers a wider range of citizen's needs and goals for the BE. I hope that the use and applications of this framework by scholars and practitioners will contribute to its improvement and elaboration.

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