

SERVING THE PUBLIC - – A BEST PRACTICE STUDY INTO CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR THE UK POLICE

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ABSTRACT

One of the current aims of the UK Government is to reform the way that public sector organisations deliver their service to their front-line customer, the public. This study, which was actively supported by seven UK Police Forces, sought to research, identify and implement the enablers of excellence the field of Citizen Focussed Service Quality.

A literature review led to the development of a research model based on a modified version of Johnston's model for Service Excellence (2001), the constructs of which include having a service culture, committed people, and being easy to do business with. The dependent variable was performance. Following a questionnaire that had 32 respondees, four organisations were selected as case studies. Analysis of these cases identified a number of common themes, which were supported by practical examples. The learning from this study is now being applied in police forces around the UK.

Keywords: Customer service, Citizen focus, Police

INTRODUCTION

To support the aim to improve front-line customer service, the Government has introduced a number of initiatives, which for the Police includes the concept of Citizen Focussed Policing and a new standard entitled the 'National Quality of Service Commitment' (ACPO (2005); Police_Reform_Unit (2005)). The 'Commitment' is a set of public facing service standards which the public can expect whenever they make contact with the police.

The principles behind the standards would not be out of place in other public sector organisations, or even private sector organisations. Where the police vary is that they are dealing with a very large customer base (everyone in the UK) and they provide a wide range of services (from protecting the public to providing advice). This study was actively supported by seven UK Police Forces, with the aim to '*Research, identify and implement the enablers of excellence the field of Citizen Focussed Service Quality*'. Four main areas of activity were defined, these being Contact management, Case management and Community/Customer consultation. The participating police forces also defined a number of questions for which they were seeking answers. These are given in Table 1.

After the scope of the study was defined by the participating police force representatives, building on the work of Johnston (Johnston (2001); Johnston (2003); Johnston (2004)) a framework was developed for the study from the literature. This framework is given in the next section. Data was collected through the use of both a survey and four cases studies, which had been selected on the basis of their responses in the survey. Two main pieces of analysis were conducted, the first analysing the survey results and the second the data collected from the case studies. These led to a

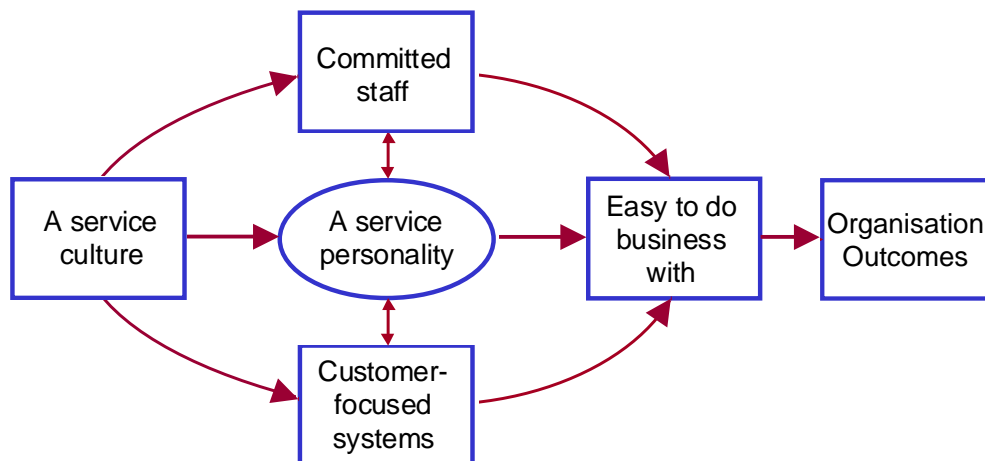
number of common themes being identified. Finally in this paper we cover a number of conclusions from our work.

Table 1 - Initial study questions

- How do organisations manage these areas of activity?
- How do organisations measure these areas of activity? Is there a link between customer service and performance criteria?
- How do you manage resource allocation?
- How do organisations create and sustain a culture and environment to deliver these activities? How long does it take to develop this culture? What are the behaviours that are necessary?
- What support do they offer their staff to help them deliver these areas of activity? What rôle do HR policies and procedures have in this?
- How do they keep at the forefront of these areas of activity?
- What rôle do partnerships have? What do your networks and partners do to help/hinder service commitment?
- How do you currently manage and measure the ‘big ideas’ and initiatives?
- How do you market your endeavours?

THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

The top-level framework for Quality of Service Commitment was based on Johnston’s model for Service Excellence (Johnston (2001)) as shown in Figure 1.



Adapted from Johnston (2001)

Figure 1 - Quality of Service commitment study framework

Johnston’s original framework was derived from five case studies that had been identified as delivering outstanding customer service. A literature review provided additional support for the framework as well identifying a number of other factors worthy of consideration. Table 2 summarises the contents with the additional items being given in italics.

Table 2 - Summary of study framework contents

Construct	Component	References
A Service Culture	Vision well-known and understood throughout the organisation	Simmons (1999); Calloway (2003)
	Values creating a culture and reputation for service excellence	Studer (2000)
	Leadership driving business success	Editorial (1999); Simmons (1999); Tanner (2004); Tanner (2005)
	Common leadership traits: In touch, Openness, No blame, Trust, Into the detail, Lack of complacency, Passion	Calloway (2003)
	Willingness and commitment to continuously improve	Oakland and Beardmore (1995); Simmons (1999); Studer (2000)
	<i>Developing a service culture</i>	Editorial (1999); Calloway (2003); Godin (2004)
	<i>Innovation driving change</i>	Milbourne and Haight (1998); Godin (2004)
	<i>Linking the vision to the customer</i>	Oakland and Beardmore (1995)
Committed Staff	Existence of adult relationships between staff and managers	No supporting evidence found
	Attitude towards customers: A 'Can-do' attitude and Going the extra mile	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994); Calloway (2003)
	Dedication to team working	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994)
	Creating a feeling of camaraderie and belonging	Editorial (1999); Simmons (1999); Studer (2000)
	<i>Employees commercial awareness</i>	Heracleous, Wirtz et al. (2004)
A Service Personality	A clearly articulated service promise	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994); Prokesch (1995); Muller (1998)
	Radical approach to service giving service with personality, for example, service with care or service with attitude and rapport	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994)
	Consistent yet personal service	Kandampully (1998); DeWitt and Brady (2003)
	<i>Gain the commitment of your customers</i>	Wipperfuth (2005)
	<i>Understand the requirements of the customer</i>	Prokesch (1995); Afors and Michaels (2001); Gupta and Lehmann (2005)
	<i>Building rapport with customers</i>	DeWitt and Brady (2003)
	<i>Promoting the service</i>	Editorial (2002); Keller and Berry (2003); Zaltman (2003)

Table 2 - Continued

Customer-focused Systems	Importance of internal communication systems as a means of delivering good service	Studer (2000); Solomon (2003)
	Systems for listening to staff and customers	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994); Chaplin and Akao (2003); Ricci (2003); Becker (2005); Goodman (2006)
	A dedication to training	Simmons (1999); Krompf (2000); Calloway (2003); DeWitt and Brady (2003)
	Appraisal, reward and recognition linked to customer satisfaction	Studer (2000); Gupta and Lehmann (2005)
	Measuring performance to improve the service to the customer (internal and external) and to deliver financial success to the organisation	Oakland and Beardmore (1995); Milbourne and Haight (1998); Studer (2000); Editorial (2002); Gupta and Lehmann (2005)
	Best practice complaint management systems	Hart, Heskett et al. (1990); Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994); Goodman, Ward et al. (2002); Stauss (2002); Goodman and Newman (2003); Goodman and Newman (2003); Parr (2003); Johnston (2004); Scriabina and Fomichov (2005); Goodman (2006)
	<i>Leadership development – changing the leadership focus</i>	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994); Studer (2000)
	<i>Product and service development</i>	Berry, Parasuraman et al. (1994); Oakland and Beardmore (1995); Saliba and Fisher (2000); Parr (2003); Ricci (2003); Heracleous, Wirtz et al. (2004); Becker (2005)
	<i>Linking the customer to the planning process</i>	Milbourne and Haight (1998); Gupta and Lehmann (2005)
	<i>Use of standards to promote consistency</i>	ISO (2000); Police_Reform_Unit (2005); Scriabina and Fomichov (2005)
	<i>Use of technology to support service delivery</i>	Ryan (1980); Wiersema (1998); DeWitt and Brady (2003)
	<i>Organising for service excellence</i>	Oakland and Beardmore (1995); Gupta and Lehmann (2005)
<i>Staff recruitment and promotion in line with service ethos</i>	Editorial (1999)	

APPROACH TAKEN FOR THE STUDY

The research approach was that proposed by Hair, Babin et al. (2003). Although the study had an academic foundation, it was a very practical project. The basic research design was therefore combined with a recognised benchmarking approach, the Benchmarking Roadmap (Tanner and Walker (2002)). This had the advantage of translating the research process into a simple to understand approach for participants as well as providing a range of well-proven techniques. The participants, the representatives from the Police Forces sponsoring the study, formed an extended project team.

Data collection was a two-step exercise. The first step involved a screening questionnaire designed around the study framework and in the second a number of organisations were site-visited in order to construct case studies. The extended project team generated a list as a foundation for a search for potential partners, which used a number of sources including organisations cited in the literature reviewed, conference presentations/ conference networks, and government contacts. The sample was in effect a convenience sample and all organisations in the sample were sent the questionnaire (Moser and Kalton (1971)).

Use was made of Churchill's eight step approach to design the questionnaire (Churchill and Iacobucci (2002)). The questionnaire was a structured undisguised questionnaire and it sought both qualitative and quantitative data. A pilot was conducted using the study as the participants. From a total of 280 invitations to participate issued, 34 responses were received from 52 organisations that agreed to participate, representing a response rate of 65%. At the Site Visit Selection meeting the results of the screening survey were presented to the participants in a blinded form so the organisations could not be identified. This was to minimise any bias. The organisations for site visit were selected based on their response to several critical questions, which had been identified by the participants.

In some cases, the presence of correlations was examined on an exploratory basis. The normality of the data was examined to ensure that skewness was within a plus/ minus 1.0 tolerance and kurtosis within plus/ minus 3.0 to protect against the violation of multivariate assumptions (Hair, Anderson et al. (1998)).

The site visits followed benchmarking best practice guidelines (Camp (1989); Codling (1992); Tanner and Walker (2002)). Site visited organisations received briefing documents reinforcing the aim and purpose of the study prior to the visit (Saunders, Lewis et al. (2003)). Arrangements were made through one contact person. Site visits were conducted on the organisation's premises in four out of the six site visits. In the other two cases, the site visit was held off-site. Prior to the majority of the site visits, the site visit team convened the evening before to discuss the plan for the day and to review the screening questionnaire respondents.

MAIN FINDINGS FROM SCREENING SURVEY

A service culture

Corporate vision statements were far and wide-ranging. Most focused on stakeholder needs, such as the customer, people and the organisation. Only in two vision statements was there a reference to Corporate Social Responsibility issues. The use of phrases such as *'world class'* and *'the best'* were common, and change or defining a future state was another theme. The statements varied in length. Some were very short and to the point, such as *'Working together for the good of all'*. Others gave an articulation of the organisation's strategy, mentioning things like growth in brands and growth through acquisitions.

It would appear that slightly more organisations (82%) have vision statements than mission statements (76%). Several of the mission statements were like vision statements, good examples being *'To satisfy our customers' needs and to value and develop our people, thereby to make more profit'* and *'To go further'*. Many mission statements were of a more practical nature, giving guidance on what the organisation actually did. Examples include *'..adding vitality to life Meeting everyday needs for nutrition, hygiene and personal care'*, *'.. best partner in maintaining safe, healthy and high performing facilities'* and *'To provide quality services that are punctual, reliable, accessible and offer value for money'*.

It was expected that organisation that had a vision and or mission would return a high score on employees sharing the values. This was only found in the case of the mission statement.

Senior leaders were expected to play a key role in employees sharing the values and that this leadership behaviour would be enable similar behaviour to be demonstrated at other leadership levels. The statistical tests indicated that this was the case, so leaders have an important role in

encouraging employees to share the values. They also have a positive effect on leaders at other organisational levels.

Committed staff

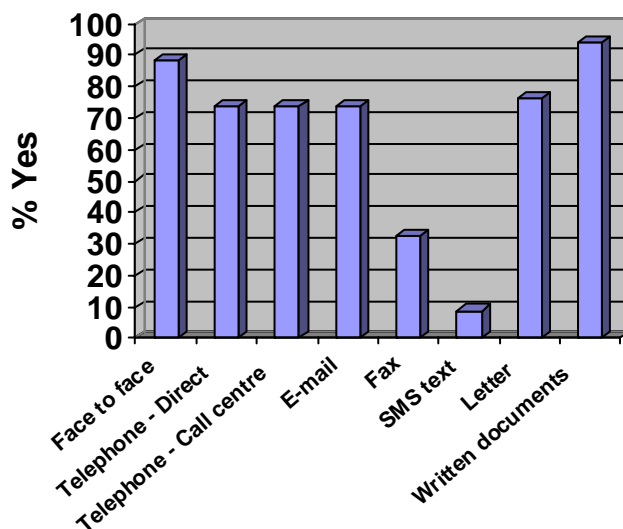
A key question for this element related to whether the organisations had particular features in common. So, for instance, did organisations where the level of ‘*commitment and pride of the staff*’ also ‘*strive to make a difference*’. This was found to be the case for all the questions asked. The only other question was whether committed staff correlated the other parts of the framework, for example, to having a service culture, being easy to do business and the organisations performance. An interesting finding was that no relationship was found between the commitment and staff and customer focussed system. This was surprising as the Customer Focussed Systems include a number of HR process, such as appraisal, training and rewards and recognition.

A service personality

Whereas around 80% of organisations have a vision or a mission statement, only 56% reported that they have a statement that supports their service promise. In examining the service promise statements given by the organisations, four were repeats of the vision or mission statement, and others described either the service or the way the service was delivered. The clearest statements of the service promise took the form of a customer charter.

In communication the service promise to customers, there was difference between how well organisations felt they defined their service promised to how well they communicate it, with communication being weaker. Several methods are used for the communication, and these are given in Figure 2. Of the techniques listed on the questionnaire, all were used to some extent, with Fax and SMS text being the least popular. An important point to note is that multiple communications are used by all organisations, with an average of 5.7 methods per organisation.

Several other forms of communication were given, the most popular one being communication through web sites and the internet. Marketing communications, contracts and statements on service level agreements, public or customer meetings, posters, and product and service related documentation such as welcome packs and explanatory prose on products, were additional methods of communication.



N= 32

Figure 2 - Approaches used to explain the service to customers and set expectations

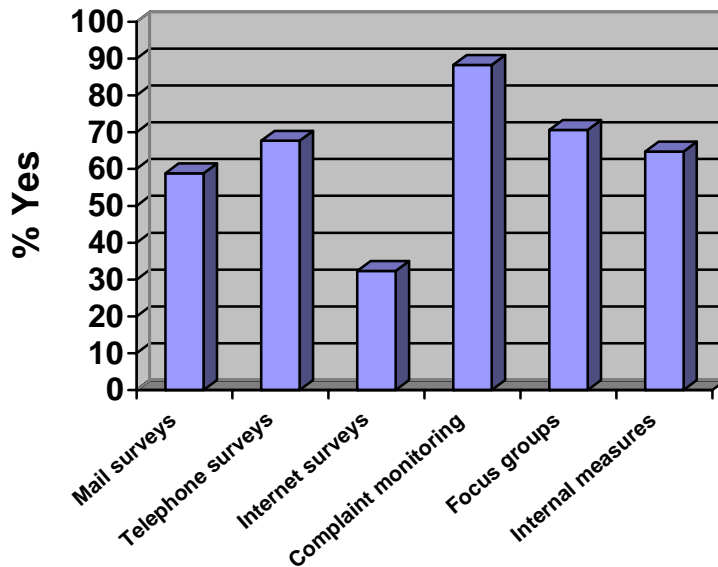
Customer focussed systems

The data was examined to see if the questions on the HR systems formed a single variable, and this was found to be the case. The difference between the individual items, for example, recruitment, training, appraisal, etc., was tested but the test was inconclusive. A statistical test was performed looking at the difference in the means between the various pairs of questions, but this showed no common themes either.

Easy to do business with

Organisations were asked what methods they used to measure customer satisfaction. The results are given in Figure 3. This showed that complaint monitoring was the most common method. Mail and telephone surveys were also popular, as were focus groups and internal measures. The least common was internet surveys.

Of the other methods used by organisations to measure customer satisfaction, personal contact through face to face contact or public meetings, staff surveys and external benchmarking were mentioned. On average, organisations use 4.1 methods to measure customer satisfaction.



N= 33

Figure 3 - Methods used to measure customer satisfaction

Performance

The final element was Performance. This is potentially the most important set of relationships as this indicates whether the elements of the model have an impact on performance. The results of the tests are given in Table 3. As may be seen, all the elements indicate a strong relationship, with the exception of Customer Focused Systems.

Table 3: - Relationships with Performance

Independent Variable	Strength of Relationship
A service culture	Strong
Committed staff	Weak
A service personality	Strong
Customer focussed systems	Weak
Easy to do business with	Strong

NB: No relationship (p = Not significant), Very weak relationship (p <0.3), Weak relationship (p = 0.3 – 0.5), Strong relationship (p = 0.51 to 0.75), Very strong relationship (P > 0.75).

COMMON THEMES IDENTIFIED

Throughout the study, a number of recurring themes became apparent. We identified these as the main factors for success and these were used to support the development of the customer services framework. We felt that these factors also provided a concise summary of main findings from the study and so have detailed them in this section.

Leadership driving the service culture

Each of the site visited organisations cited effective (some said inspirational) leadership as critical to delivering service excellence. People orientated, accessible leaders with an open leadership style, involving and empowering.

Use of a structured culture change programme

Each of the site visited organisations described their approaches to changing the corporate culture – all were focussed on pursuit of a vision of excellence. Two had used the EFQM Excellence model to provide a structure for the programme, while others used a customised approach built around Critical Success Factors. All of them took continuous improvement really seriously, seeing it as an integral part of business life.

Clarity of direction through vision, mission and values

Values played a prominent role in reinforcing culture, with posters used linking values to vision, and one organisation quoting staff definition of company values.

Outward looking in search of learning from others

Each of the site visited organisations recognised the value of the external influence, using benchmarking, quality awards, and networking within the Institute of Customer Service to keep abreast of current best practice and developing trends in customer service.

Recruiting staff with the right attitude

Recruitment, retention and training were seen as critical to success. Organisations put a very strong emphasis on recruiting the right people, who fit with the culture, are passionate about service, and see the job as a career, not a stepping stone. One organisations stated ‘we believe in recruiting on attitude, not skills – we can train the skills later, but attitudes are more difficult to change’. There is a noticeable increase in the use of assessment centres for customer service staff.

Providing training to develop customer service skills

Common to all organisations was a strong belief in training, both formal, 1:1 and ongoing coaching. One had a ‘customer service academy’, another a ‘corporate university’, and several used the Institute of Customer Service awards to assess and recognise customer service skills.

Understanding of processes and systems

Most organisations demonstrated a clear understanding of the key processes used in delivering service excellence, and managed those processes effectively.

Using performance management to reinforce customer service behaviours

Organisations took great care over the scope, mix and balance of the measures, and using these as a basis for reward, ensuring that they were linked to appropriate behaviours. Care was taken to assess the customer experience from the customers’ point of view, and derive appropriate measures. There was a strong emphasis on using performance measurement as a precursor to action and improvement.

Communicating with staff regularly and through multiple channels

Organisations made a point of reinforcing central messages to staff on a planned and regular basis. A comprehensive mix of media – printed, verbal, electronic, subliminal – was used to communicate and reinforce the vision, mission and values, and top level messages were constructed to include reference to these wherever possible. Bottom up and lateral communications were also seen as essential. One organisation had ‘communication champions’, elected by colleagues to represent their views to local and national management.

Communication with customers through multiple channels

There was extensive evidence of structured and proactive approaches to listening to and informing customers, including telephone surveys, stakeholder audits, focus groups, customer newsletters and senior executive liaison with corporate clients.

Utilising both lead and lag measures of customer satisfaction

Most organisations had a clear understanding of the relationship between service excellence and financial performance, and were willing to invest in one to achieve the other. They used a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures to monitor and measure service performance and customer satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was initiated to support the desire of several UK Police Forces to learn from role model organisation with a view to implementing improvements in the way that they interface with their public. Using Johnston’s Customer Service model as a basis, several main themes were identified. For the police in particular, the need to develop a customer service culture supported by their senior leadership, changing the way that police officers are recruited, and understanding the processes and systems used to deliver their services are example of three key insights from the study.

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