

NLGN Innovation Network Seminar

Customer Insight: Showcasing the next phase of local customer service

16 March 2010, London

Event synopsis

Chair: Nigel Keohane, Head of Research, NLGN

Speakers: Lindsay Murray, Martin Machray, Graham Cadle, Ruth Hasnip

Outline of topic

With falling expenditure but rising demands and increasing focus on delivery, local authorities across the country are looking at how best to deliver high quality customer-centred services in an environment of reducing resources. Key to this drive for better and more efficient service delivery is customer insight. Indeed, customer insight is one of the three strands of the 'Total Place' proposition - using data and information about clients and residents to better understand their needs, wants, expectations, behaviours and experiences, tailoring services accordingly.

Lindsay Murray, Director of Policy and Improvement, Gateshead Council

Role of Customer Insight in South Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland pilots

- The importance of maintaining a customer focus and being responsive to place whilst maximising the advantages of working across Local Authority boundaries
- Political considerations of working across Local Authority boundaries, and incorporating the local leadership role in to sub-regional working
- Extensive customer insight to develop services, based on:
 - case studies
 - Analysis of data provided by communities (eg Place Survey)
 - Community profiling and mapping
 - Citizen engagement
- The need to understand data from the perspective of both people and place
- Sub-regional working allowing the ability to address differing levels of service in different areas so that users have a consistent experience if they move across Local Authority boundaries

Martin Machray, Head of Communications & Engagement, NHS Islington

Experience of Islington in working with partners to change service design and improve customer service

- Learning lessons from the private sector, using customer insight to get to the 'nub' of issues
- Making better use of the data that local partners have available to them. Cross referencing data from different sources to establish deeper insight, accurate patterns and trends
- Balancing qualitative and quantitative data for more detailed insight and correlations

Graham Cadle, Director of Customer Services, LB of Croydon

Understanding customer needs to improve services in Croydon

- 'Insights' based on a combination of factors
- The importance of gathering information about service users and 'non-users' to identify how provision can be more effective

- Using ethnographic research:
 - engaging people in way that they are comfortable to stimulate rich feedback
 - Developing the skills of staff to gather insightful feedback
 - making links between whole services based on the whole person / family
 - tapping into the resource and skills of customers

Ruth Hasnip, Designs of the time National Programme Director, Design Council

View on the future of local government service design. How should local government be designing customer services and what does the future look like for customer service?

Key points:

- Incorporating principles of design to address challenges facing Local Authorities such as poverty and sustainable development
- Understanding people and the complexities of human behaviour based on anthropology and ethnography (people don't always need what they say).
- Prototyping rather than piloting – recognising this as an iterative cycle that is continually developing and evolving
- Citizens as 'part of the story' as opposed to consultees, involved in:
 - diagnosing
 - discovering
 - designing
 - developing
 - delivering

Discussion points

With reference to ensuring a rich and valuable evidence base centred around customer needs, the following comments were made:

- it is important to engage with people on 'their terms' and in a an environment that is comfortable for them to overcome reluctance to engage
- Tactical and strategic use should be made of tools such as Mosaic. At present it was felt that this was more of an ancillary tool and was too one dimensional. Opportunities should be taken to use it as a 'spring board' and link with other data sources for a greater depth of information. This will help to ensure that intelligence data chimes with experiences on the ground. Doing so requires making a distinction between operational and strategic use of data
- Follow up on customer feed back to gather more rich data (eg the use of focus groups for areas of concern arising from the place survey to get to the heart of problems)
- Recognise the influence that 'old fashioned' methods such as mystery shopping and video diaries can have
- Understand and interpret under-used resources to gather insights and inform service design, such as complaints procedures
- There is a need to ensure that evidence bases are robust and persuasive to be of value to councillors to influence decisions about services and resource allocation
- There is a need to build the capacity of staff to gather and interpret customer insight

A robust evidence base centred around customer insight can help to address risk aversion and the lack of confidence that can exist to embed prototypes.

Service re-design should be built into work programmes, whilst maintaining a degree of flexibility to enable a rapid response to emerging issues.

The role of communications should be considered to bridge the gap between perception and reality (eg in relation to crime).