

Customer Perceptions Study – Improving Service Delivery

Need detailed insight into customer perceptions

The situation:

Balfour Beatty Mott MacDonald (BBMM) delivers network operation and maintenance services for the Highways Agency in the south east and south west. Their relationship with the Highways Agency is complex, with interactions at many levels. Following an internal reorganisation they wanted to get under the skin of this relationship to understand how they were perceived and how they needed to change. I was asked to carry out this study.

Develop and run a study into client attitudes and opinions.

My work:

I put together a team of four people with extensive experience of the HA and their major suppliers. Our structured interview process was designed to break through interviewees' preconceptions and encourage them to think clearly and deeply about their relationship with BBMM. We interviewed around 25 senior HA managers, and I reported back a series of key messages and recommendations.

Evolve and extend it to produce more in-depth results.

The following year I led a follow-up study focusing on the HA Area Teams with whom BBMM work day to day. We used a more open, powerful set of metaphors to explore interviewees' perceptions. We quizzed into areas of particular significance to BBMM including the visibility and impact of their Service Excellence Programme. A new quantitative element provided a standard set of questions and a baseline score. I introduced formal qualitative analysis techniques to make best use of the huge volume of data gathered. The detailed report drew out the findings and recommendations, and included a management summary to be shared with the HA interviewees.

Highlighted tough issues and led to Service Excellence Programme.

The outcome:

The first study showed a very clear need for BBMM to change, and highlighted the key focus areas. The feedback process, through a series of presentations and lively debates, led to the development of the Service Excellence Programme, building an ethos of customer service into BBMM's work. The results of the second study showed that significant progress had been made since the previous year, but some issues remained unresolved and new issues emerged. I fed back to managers and key stakeholders, and held in-depth discussions with BBMM's bid team. This feedback was instrumental in structuring key elements of their successful bid for HA Area 10. I have also used the study feedback as a way of briefing new senior management appointees on the health of their HA relationships.

Shaped winning bid.

The Goldsmith factor:

Fresh, unorthodox, compelling

The value I added was to bring into the process the unbiased perspective my clients needed to generate real insight. They asked me to lead this work because they felt that I would approach it from a fresh angle, and challenge orthodox thinking. They trusted me to generate clear, actionable feedback from the study, to articulate the key messages compellingly and not to pull my punches.