



SmartCities

Creating Customer Contact Centres

A guide for municipalities from Smart Cities



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A woman with short dark hair and glasses is shown in profile, talking on a white mobile phone. She is wearing a white lace-trimmed top. The background is blurred, showing other people in a public setting.

Introduction: Providing better customer services

“The public sector is facing important challenges and needs to re-think how public services can be oriented towards the creation of public value and user empowerment. There needs to be a strong move towards ensuring that e-government serves the needs of society rather than government.”

Jeremy Millard
European Journal of ePractice, 2009

Customers or citizens?

Who does the municipality serve? Firstly there are the people who live within its geographical jurisdiction. These residents play a dual role: they are consumers of many services and products – from waste collection and paying taxes, to using parks and public transport – but they also have voting powers; as citizens they participate in the democratic process, electing local representatives and decision makers.

Local businesses also pay for and consume the services of local government. They pay their taxes or business rates and are subject to various regulations which fall under the remit of the local authority. They may also benefit from initiatives to stimulate and promote local businesses and support economic growth in the municipality.

In this publication we use the term 'customer' to indicate the users of local services – be they individuals, local organisations or businesses. Where appropriate, we differentiate between businesses and residents.

We only use the term 'citizen' in the context of democratic participation, where people vote, participate in consultations, or use other methods to express their political views.

Across Europe municipalities are facing a wide range of challenges as businesses and citizens demand better, more efficient and more flexible services. Municipalities are working hard to become more customer-driven, and to change how they deliver services to respond better to their customers' demands.

This guide has been produced by partners in the Smart Cities¹ project (<http://www.smartcities.info>) to show what municipalities need to do to establish a customer contact centre. It includes many practical examples and case studies highlighting the experiences of staff in seven municipalities from across the North Sea region. The guide was written by people who are currently working to improve customer services in their municipalities, and it is written for the growing number of people who want to do the same.

What is a customer contact centre?

This is an important question. For us, a contact centre is the organisational unit in the municipality that serves citizens across a range of different channels (desk, telephone, paper, internet, etc.). The customer contact centre of a municipality is the place where citizens and businesses can get their questions answered. Municipalities often design their contact centres so they can answer 80% of citizens' questions at the first point of contact – without having to involve other municipal departments or other municipal staff.

We found that the issues that municipalities faced when trying to set up customer contact centres (and the factors which affected their success) were remarkably similar across municipalities in the North Sea region – be they small towns or large cities. The challenges municipalities face when trying to deliver this sort of systemic change cannot be ignored: the need to put customers first, and to develop a demand-driven approach to delivering services, often requires significant changes in how municipalities work – a transformation that many have struggled with.

For many, this guide will just be the starting point in a much larger process of service improvement. Establishing a customer contact centre is just one part of a wider process of service delivery and service improvement which increasingly involves the digitalisation of municipal operations and interactions with citizens. **Once they have been established, customer contact centres need to continue to develop and adapt as organisations, customers and services change.**

¹ Smart Cities is partly funded by the Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme of the European Union.

“The proposition is simple: governments that want to serve their people... need to serve them efficiently. We must get the most out of every euro we invest... e-government is not a niche; it is the main game in public service delivery.”

Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner for the Digital Agenda, December 2010

We believe that the first step to improving municipal services is to develop a **strategic approach to service improvement**: how services are delivered and how they can be improved services must be carefully planned and based on realistic aims and objectives. This strategy must be supported by senior management within the municipality; it must be process-oriented, and should exploit ICT and knowledge management systems where possible. The key task for organisations isn't to find a 'perfect' system or set of technologies, but to develop an approach that 'fits' their organisation. This will only happen if you get 'buy in' from front line staff and managers to the service improvement process, so they will adopt new systems and new ways of working.

The key task for organisations isn't to find the 'perfect' system, but to develop an approach that 'fits' the organisation.

This publication brings together what the partners in the Smart Cities project have learned when they developed their contact centres in a practical format that clearly identifies the key issues that managers and staff who are planning the creation of a customer contact centre will have to tackle. Taken together, these building blocks will make a firm foundation for the development of a customer contact centre. Each chapter includes case studies from across Europe which highlight the practical lessons we have learned.

E-services for Europe

The European eGovernment Action Plan (2011-2015) sets out the European Commission's ambitious programme to work with Member States to expand and improve the services which they offer via the internet. It focuses on four key areas:

- User empowerment
- Fostering the internal market
- Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public administrations
- Putting in place the pre-conditions for developing e-government.

The aim is to increase the use of e-government services so 50% of EU citizens and 80% of EU businesses will be using e-government services by 2015.



Chapter 2 Working together – lessons from Smart Cities

The transformation of local authorities and municipalities into more customer-focused organisations is spreading across Europe – in the North Sea region it is hard to find a municipality that is not working hard to improve the services it offers. There are great variations in how customer contact centres have developed in different towns and cities. Municipalities which pioneered centralised customer contact more than a decade ago usually now have well-oiled operations where the customer contact centre is at the hub of a customer-centric service delivery approach. On the other hand, many municipalities are still toying with the idea of developing customer contact centres, and are unsure and hesitant about how to implement such radical changes in work patterns, business processes and in service philosophy.

The Smart Cities project brought together staff from seven municipalities in the North Sea region to share their experiences and ideas about how they developed their customer contact centres. This guide brings together this knowledge for other local government employees who need to develop and improve their municipality's customer contact operations.

This is not a how-to manual, nor do we offer a check list of 'do's' and 'don'ts' for establishing or developing customer contact centres. While we have identified a number of basic principles that underpin successful customer contact centres, there is no magic formula or approach that you can follow that will guarantee a smooth running, seamless customer contact centre that delivers services across a wide range of delivery channels. Your local context is key – you need to develop and implement solutions that are appropriate for your organisation and for your customers. This will lead to very different approaches and solutions and development pathways in different municipalities.

In Norway and Sweden for example, the desire to create customer contact centres has come from within individual municipalities, and is often a logical 'next step' after the development of large web portal projects that try to make all of the organisation's publicly available information accessible online. These municipalities have set their own individual agendas and timetables for change and transformation.

In other countries – such as the UK – this stimulus has come from national or central governments, through service improvement programmes and through large e-government initiatives. In Belgium, municipalities are collaborating at regional levels to develop jointly their customer contact infrastructure.

Smart Cities partners who worked to improve their customer contact centres



CITY OF KARLSTAD





Ton Schroor

“Delivering a high level of customer service for the citizens of Groningen is our highest priority. Despite cost-cutting, which is unfortunate, our goal is to improve the quality of our public services. This means working more efficiently with a greater sense of customer friendliness. A reduction in the number of redundant regulations is also a top priority. We are exploring ways in which clever ICT applications and innovations can improve our services and help us to achieve our aims.”

Ton Schroor, Alderman for Human Resources & Organisation, Groningen municipality

Change management

The most remarkable similarity we found across the different project partners was the importance of the human factor. Again and again we discovered that the biggest challenge of all for most municipalities was the problem of change. The desire to improve services was there; the desire to become a demand-driven, customer-centric organisation was there. The similar ways that such diverse and varied municipalities approached improving customer contact was striking. But they all struggled with the internal changes that are necessary to create a truly effective customer contact centre. This is the real story and the real challenge facing organisations that are trying to develop customer contact centres – not the technical details of how a service was implemented, but the people details – of how organisations and processes need to change. This guide highlights these challenges and will help other municipalities to address them as they develop their contact centres.



Mark Francis

“You might think that a customer contact centre is merely the friendly face of the council, a communication channel, but we are so much more. Our direct contact with customers puts us at the heart of the council’s vision of customer-centricity. In so many ways, the work that we do is also driving internal change and service improvement.”

Mark Francis, manager of the City of Edinburgh Council's customer contact centre

Learning lessons from each other

This publication brings together what the Smart Cities partners have learned while developing customer contact centres over the course of the three-year project (2009-2011).

At the beginning of the project it was important for project partners to get to know each other, what each of us did, and how we did it. Our initial meetings involved lots of discussion as we worked to establish how each partner municipality had developed their customer contact strategies and services. We worked to define a common terminology that made helped to avoid misunderstandings.

The Smart Cities project held regular workshops and meetings to share knowledge and experiences. At a meeting in Osterholz in September 2009 we reviewed the Dutch ‘Answer[®]’ model on how to establish a contact centre, and found that this model provided a useful framework for understanding both the differences and the similarities between the different customer contact initiatives among the project’s partners.

Smart Cities partners

Intercommunale Leiedal, Belgium

Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland

BIS GmbH, Bremerhaven, Germany

City of Edinburgh Council, Scotland

Gemeente Groningen, Netherlands

Jade Hochschule, Germany

Karlstads Kommun, Sweden

Stad Kortrijk, Belgium

Kristiansand Kommune, Norway

Lillesand Kommune, Norway

Mechelen University College (MEMORI), Belgium

Norfolk County Council, England

Stadt Osterholz-Scharmbeck, Germany

Porism Ltd., England

¹ "Answer[®] The CCC of local councils as the front office for the entire government." Utrecht, 2007

<http://www.antwoord.nl/binaries/antwoord/pdf/gemeente-heeft-antwoord-english.pdf>

The Answer[®] Model¹

The Answer model has been developed by the Dutch national government to help with the development of customer contact centres by municipalities in the Netherlands. The model identifies five interrelated themes which must be addressed when developing a customer contact strategy: products, services and channels; processes and governance; systems and information; leadership and employees; and measurement. This model can be applied to municipalities of different sizes (from 30 000 to half a million people) and can be used both by those who are already working on customer contact centres as well as by those who are just thinking about getting started. Since society and the demands of customers are always changing, even established customer contact centres need to continue to develop and improve if they are to be truly customer-centric.



Figure 1. The Answer model

The Answer model sets out five interrelated building blocks which create a foundation for the development of an effective customer contact strategy:

1. **Products, services and channels:** the way the municipality offers its services and provides information to customers through different channels (email, web, telephone, helpdesks, etc.).
2. **Processes and governance:** the way in which the municipality organises and manages the workflow and procedures that link the front office contact with customers to the back office administration and service delivery.
3. **Systems and information:** providing a robust and secure IT infrastructure (hardware and software) to support the flow of data and information within the organisation.
4. **Leadership and employees:** municipalities must have competent and motivated front office employees and managers, and leaders who are willing to drive through changes to embed the customer contact centre within the organisation.
5. **Measurement:** the effect of the customer contact centre must be measured, although the choice of indicators depends on the local context and objectives of the centre.

These five factors combine to deliver measurable results – greater customer satisfaction, higher productivity and more efficient, effective and customer-centric services.

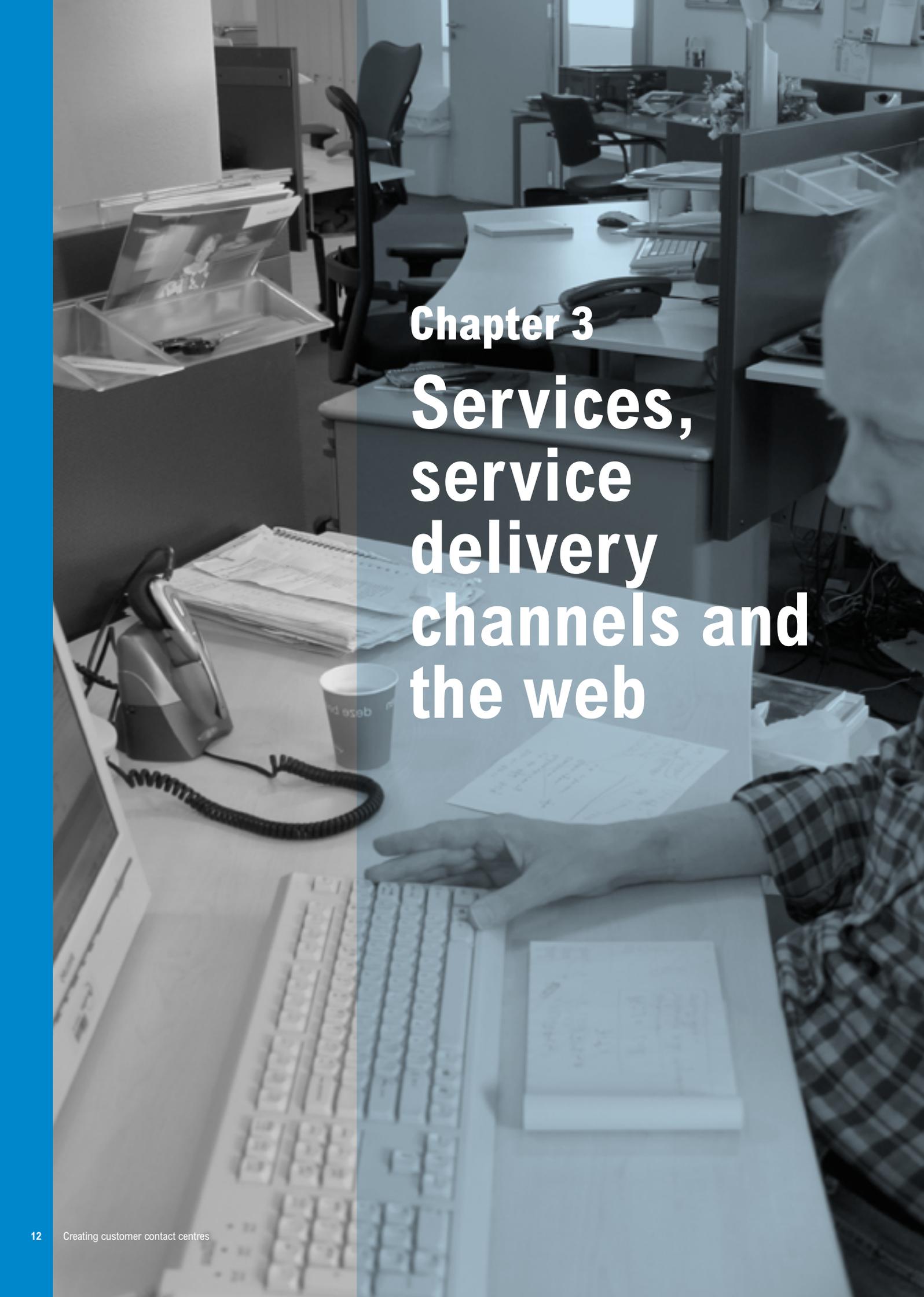
“I know I’ve done a good job when I see that I have met a customer’s needs.”

Torgunn Lie, DuViTo, Kristiansand

Each of these building blocks is covered in turn in chapters of this publication. One key theme links them all: people. We have learned that what makes customer contact centres successful isn’t IT systems or business processes – it is people: people with vision and an eye on the future; people who know how to steer large projects across an organisation; staff who are motivated, who can motivate others, who can celebrate small successes and anticipate stumbling blocks in advance; experts in ICT, knowledge management and change management; and above all customers who are also ready to play their part and engage with government.



Staff from the DuViTo customer contact centre in Kristiansand, Norway.



Chapter 3

Services, service delivery channels and the web

Developing a service list

The average municipality offers between 200 and 300 different products and services to its citizens and businesses. Large cities may have as many as 700 distinct products and services, ranging from citizen's advice services to commercial waste collection.

The Belgian municipality of Zwevegem in the Kortrijk region of Belgium recently catalogued all the services it was offering to its local residents and businesses. The cataloguing task was coordinated by Tomas Bulcaen. "We might not be a commercial organisation, but we still need to make our services as visible and accessible as possible," Tomas explains. "We wanted to identify and prioritise which services we should make available over the telephone, online and via the Bibus, our mobile library that tours the rural communities. But first we had to find out exactly what services we provided."

Tomas had to compile a catalogue covering all the town's services – a list covering everything from social care, housing and the environment to administrative functions such as ID cards. "We thought we provided 50 to 60 services," he confesses, "but in the end we ended up with a list of 300!"

Each service was described in a structured format that set out the service's name, a description of the service, any costs associated with delivering the service, and the protocol that customers would have to follow to access the service. This mapping exercise also looked at the relationships and links between services, their target groups and the channels through which they could be delivered (e.g. online, home visit, helpdesk, etc.).

The Belgian municipality of Wevelgem has also catalogued the services it provides. Municipal employees were asked to use an internal website where they could provide all the details about the services they were involved with, tagging them against various criteria. Lisa Yserbyt, the municipal quality coordinator, led the project and helped out staff members when they needed support. She visited each department to explain the project and to provide information on how to describe each service (although she had final editorial control of the descriptions, to ensure that they were consistent across the full catalogue).

"We decided that employees should describe their services in their own words, based on their experience and expertise,"



Tomas Bulcaen



Lisa Yserbyt



Mike Thacker

says Lisa. “This approach helped to capture subtle information that might have been missed by an external consultant; it also gave employees greater ownership of the catalogue, which was particularly important because these employees would be responsible for keeping the catalogue accurate and up-to-date.”

The internal catalogue of 300 service descriptions, is currently being prepared for publication on the municipal website. “I think that getting back office staff involved has also begun to embed the idea of customer-centricity among these employees,” Lisa adds.

Building on existing service lists – using the UK’s esd-toolkit

As Zwevegem and Wevelgem have discovered, the task of compiling – not to mention maintaining – a comprehensive and exhaustive catalogue of products and services is extremely time consuming. But there are tools available to make this task much easier. In the UK, for example, almost every local authority uses the esd-toolkit, which provides a standard list of products, services, descriptions and process maps. These ‘off-the-shelf’ lists give UK municipalities a head start in identifying the services they offer and in creating service catalogues.

The toolkit provides standard lists of local government services; these lists identify every service that is provided by local authorities to residents and business communities. Standard services range from “abandoned shopping trolleys” to “welfare rights – advice”, and each has a brief description of the service on offer (for example “information and advice about entitlement to welfare benefits, other allowances, grants and general financial difficulties”).

It is relatively straightforward for a local authority to work through the esd-toolkit’s service list, occasionally tweaking descriptions or titles, to build a comprehensive and web-compatible product catalogue for staff and customers.

The esd-toolkit also provides process maps which describe all the standard processes and procedures which municipalities generally follow, from a customer’s initial request for a service to its final delivery. These standardised service descriptions are published as interrelated, linked lists which are modified and updated quarterly after discussion and agreement between local authorities.

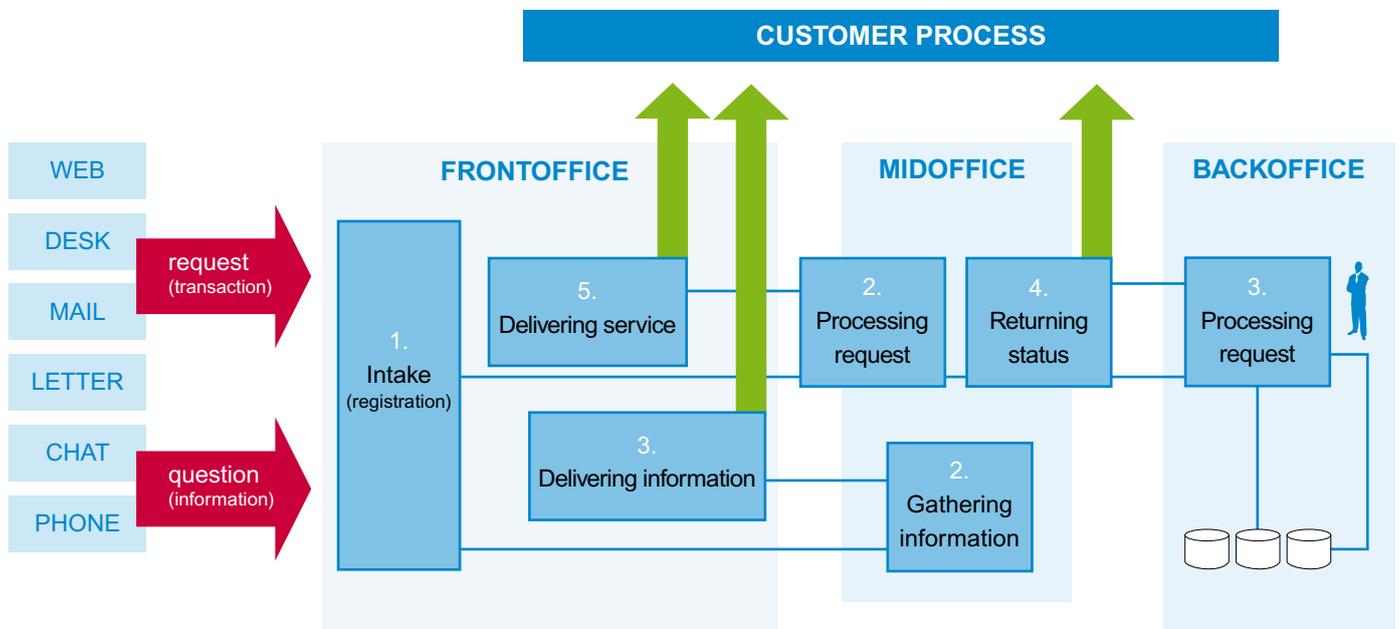


Figure 2. Customer process

“Without a list every council would have to compile its own catalogue of services; now they don’t have to go through a laborious process to gather information and intelligence,” explains Mike Thacker, director of Porism Ltd, the esd-toolkit’s technical partner. “The esd-toolkit provides a single reference list which really helps to generate efficiencies in a lot of council work, whether building a website or running a call centre.”

Mike says that the use of standard lists can make it much easier and quicker to set up efficient and automated processes in a customer contact centre. “An agent will assess a customer’s needs. Using the information that a customer provides, the agent will be able to filter and select relevant services from the council’s list. The process list then comes into play and makes it possible to route requests automatically or highlight manual steps that must be completed within the back office to give the customer access to the service they need.”

Through the Smart Cities project the esd-toolkit’s service lists are now being expanded, adapted and translated to cover European municipalities. “Our ultimate goal is to produce a standard list of services that could be applied across Europe,” says Mike. “Local government and municipalities tend to think that many of their services are unique, but experience shows that most services they offer are the same from Spain to Scandinavia, just with some minor local tweaks and variations depending on national law and the local context.”

The esd-toolkit's service lists have already been used successfully by the 13 municipalities of the Kortrijk region in Belgium to compile service lists and power the navigation in their websites. Mike hopes that a standard European service list will jump start service improvement programmes and customer contact centre initiatives across Europe.

"By categorising services in the same way across the EU it will be much easier to gather data on service provision at a European level," Mike remarks. "This will open up opportunities for benchmarking service quality and thus drive innovation and best practice across Europe."

Delivering consistent service quality across different delivery channels

Once the municipality has its service list, it must then decide which services it will provide through different communication channels (telephone, web, face to face, etc.). Some services can be automated and made available online, while others may require face-to-face interviews. Which services can a customer contact centre handle by itself, and which require the involvement of departmental or back office experts?

Tomas Bulcaen has used a simple yet effective ABC classification system for Zwevegem's services. 'A' category services are the highest volume, easy-to-deliver services or products that account for a significant proportion of the enquiries at the town's front desk – such as questions about opening hours or how to apply for a new ID card. They can be delivered by any municipal employee, including Bibus staff.

'B' class services – such as how to apply for a building permit – need some specialist, back office expertise before they can be delivered to the customer. However, any employee is able to provide customers with more information and explain to them what needs to happen next to get the service.

The most complicated 'C' services – such as passport applications and some permits and licences – require a lot of professional input and back office involvement. For these, customer service agents can do little more than point a customer to the relevant department.

Customers expect to receive the same level of service and customer care, no matter which delivery channel they choose to use. Conversations on the telephone should be able to provide the same level of information and service as an email exchange or the municipality's website.

But providing this seamless integration of customer services across different channels is a big challenge, as the city of Groningen in the Netherlands recently discovered. Groningen receives high volumes of email correspondence, but had no quality systems in place for email handling. In 2010 the municipality conducted a mystery email survey. “The results were not good,” admits Renske Stumpel, project manager. “We found out that although we replied to emails quite quickly, the quality of our responses wasn’t great... We realised we needed some quick action to remedy these problems.”

Groningen is now running workshops for the customer service agents who reply to emails. “We are just offering good advice, really,” says Renske, “like asking them to reread their responses before pressing send. We are giving them simple rules and practical tips on how to improve mail messages.”

“In the longer term, we will reduce the number of public email addresses. On the web channel we only use web forms. This will help us to monitor the email channel much better,” Renske continues. “We need to streamline it, so we can track what is going on and ensure that customers are getting a good service.”

Understanding how your customers want to access your services

In the early days of a customer contact centre, it is enough to know exactly what services are available and how you are going to deliver them to your customers. You need to decide what level of service the customer contact centre can provide, and when it should call in more specialist staff or refer questions to back offices or other departments. But what are these ‘basic’ questions which anyone at the customer contact centre should be able to answer?

You will quickly discover that understanding which channels customers use to contact you is very important. Do you know which channels customers use to access which services? Do you know which channels they would *prefer* to use?

In 2010 the municipalities in the Kortrijk region of Belgium commissioned MEMORI (Mechelen University College) to perform a large survey of the region’s residents. The survey asked residents how they got information from the municipalities, and the channels and methods they used to request municipal services.

From the survey the municipalities learned:

- **There was still a digital divide.** Four out of five people surveyed had internet access, but it was clear many people would still not use online services. Six percent of the respondents said they had no digital device, and 20% did not use the internet.
- **Citizens are used to online transactions.** The survey shows that people use the internet for communication, for news and for finding information. Over half of the people questioned used the internet for buying and selling and one out of five said they had submitted requests to their local authority online. More than three quarters of people already use the internet for 'serious' transactions (e.g. banking), so would probably be happy to interact with their municipality online.
- **Municipalities needed to improve their online contact systems.** Residents were generally pleased with the service they got over the phone, but were disappointed with the online contact options. They said they wanted to receive a rapid and personal response where their request or query had been correctly understood and processed.
- **Services needed to be marketed better.** Residents felt the online services available from their municipalities were poorly advertised. Although many online forms were available, most residents do not know about them.
- **Municipalities needed to develop a channel strategy.** The municipalities provided general information on their websites and in information magazines, but the survey found that the reach of the newsletters could still be improved. People found out about sport and leisure activities by using the web or by picking up leaflets, but they preferred to talk to counter staff about more complex tasks, like finding out about benefits or to apply for permits. Citizens tended to use the phone to report problems like fly-tipping and graffiti.

The survey provided evidence to the municipalities that they should communicate and interact with citizens in a more demand-oriented manner – they need to cater actively to the demands and needs of citizens and to provide a suitable range of services that are targeted at the right people and delivered through the right channels.

This is the essence of a channel strategy: making life easier for customers while being smart and efficient within the organisation. Recent studies in the Netherlands have shown the significant differences in the cost of providing a service across different channels (see Figure 2). It makes sense for municipalities to develop and promote digital channels which can handle much larger volumes of enquires and requests and which cost a fraction of what telephone or face-to-face service delivery costs. Many customers clearly like the convenience and ease of online transactions and interactions, and they are happy to use digital channels, particularly for simple tasks and questions. The municipalities of Groningen and Kristiansand are even experimenting with online chat systems that allow customers to interact online with customer service agents in real time – a bit like having a telephone conversation in text.

Channel	Cost
Desk	€27.50 per contact
Phone	€10.00 per contact
Web	€0.50 per contact

Figure 2. Example costs for different service channels

It is difficult to join up the various communication channels a municipality uses and to offer consistent, high quality contact through a customer contact centre – it is always a tough task to improve things for customers within an organisation. Without strong leadership, a clear vision, and support from senior management, a customer contact centre will almost certainly have limited success.



Online chat connects Groningen's website and customer contact centre

Case Study



Hilary Coyne

Will you wander to the web side?

The web offers municipalities a great opportunity to provide customers with a wealth of information and access to services at minimal cost. But how can they encourage citizens to go online? Hilary Coyne, Web Services Project Manager, explains the City of Edinburgh Council's strategy to shift customer contact to the web.

What is channel shift?

It depends who you ask. For some it is about getting customers to use the web which is a much cheaper channel for communication and transactions. But for me it is about choice: giving people access to services using their preferred methods of communication.

Why so much focus on the web?

For customers and for the council it is the cheapest channel for finding out information and getting answers to questions. It should also provide a better customer experience – easy access, fast service, relevant information and quick transactions, with no waiting around or having to explain.

Don't you need an expensive automated back office before you can put everything online?

The idea of e-services is to help customers with self-service. Ideally the back end of the website should all be automated because that way you can complete transactions without the expense of human resources.

But that is not to say you cannot put services on the web without this level of automation. Many of Edinburgh's online services and forms look like self-service from the customer's perspective, but still involve manual steps at our end in the customer contact centre, perhaps entering data into another system or calling the customer back to arrange a pick up time. Obviously there is room for efficiencies at our end, but the customer is still getting a great online service.

So how do you encourage people to use the web more?

A good customer experience is essential. They have to be able to complete a specific task really quickly and easily, without any frustration. That way they'll use the web again, and shift to this channel.

Our new website, for example, uses dynamic e-forms. Previously we had 12 different forms online and you had to choose the right one and fill it in correctly. Now our forms use decision trees and the questions adapt as a customer fills in answers.

We've also put new forms online, for instance our library membership form. This wasn't available before, but is now one of our most popular website services.

Our customer service agents also have a role to play; they explain to customers on the phone where they can access the information or forms they have requested online. If they give information to a customer from a website page, they will email the page to the customer too. This makes customers see that they could have used the web, and where exactly the information was located, so they start to understand how to use the site too.

Our call centre welcome and exit messages also promote the website.

Have you seen a drop in telephone queries since you launched the new website?

At the moment we are still doing a lot of the back office processing of website transactions, so we still need the same number of staff to deal with this online activity.

Even before the website launched, most of our enquiries were related to bookings, for example repairs in a council property, which is still not possible online. Perhaps the real shift won't occur until we can offer automated booking functionality via the website. It is important to divert as much traffic onto the web for its cost savings, but we must never forget that if we are going to be customer-centric then our motivation for doing this should be choice and convenience, not savings.

A person wearing a headset is shown in profile, looking at a computer monitor in a call center environment. The background is blurred, showing other workstations and office equipment. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Chapter 4

moving from ICT services to customer services

The importance of ICT infrastructure

Governments across Europe have spent the last decade pushing the ICT agenda: IT for business, IT in education, IT at the heart of government. Most organisations and municipalities are now digitalised, but often in a rather haphazard and fragmented way.

The latest e-government initiatives often include an emphasis on standardisation and integration. Processes, systems and information must be standardised or integrated across an organisation – and even between organisations – so that resources and information can be shared and exchanged.

The implementation of new technology and new ways of working often proves to be difficult in practice, because each organisation's information infrastructure is often made up of a number of legacy systems – often set up independently by different departments – that operate autonomously.



Rachel Goud

Standardisation and integration

The municipalities of Karlstad, Groningen and Kristiansand have recognised the importance of standardised systems and integrated information management, and are working to establish guidance on the 'i-architecture' that is required for effective customer contact and information management.

In Norway, a consortium of the 10 largest municipalities has realised that integration standards are so important that they have agreed to establish a common approach when dealing with software suppliers. The municipalities now insist that all software products use standardised Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), which will allow different software packages to 'speak' to each other.

The City of Edinburgh Council has got around this problem by developing its own information management tool for its customer contact centre. "Our belief is certainly that there should be one system across the entire council where we can log every interaction and conversation with individual customers," acknowledges Rachel Goud, a contact centre team manager. "But it has not been possible to get the business case to stack up against the cost."



Luk Van Beneden

Still, what Edinburgh does have – an in-house system called *Capture* – is a good alternative. The council uses *Capture* to log every enquiry to its contact centre along with formal complaints, freedom of information requests and reports of road and street lighting faults. *Capture* contains contact details for each case and stores all the conversations or emails between customers and service agents.

“By combining *Capture* with access to other administrative systems our customer service agents can see what their colleagues may have previously advised a customer,” says Rachel. “They will be able to see the entire case history, and any contact from the customer in the past. This knowledge helps them to add value to their conversation.”

The principles behind *Capture* and the i-architecture policies being developed by the Smart Cities partners are all geared around a single overriding aim: getting the right information to the right people at the right time. Consistent and integrated information management is fundamental if you are to provide efficient customer service.

The results that this level of integration can deliver are becoming apparent in the Kortrijk region of Belgium. The region is the first in Belgium to introduce a single contact and customer information database that is shared by the region’s 13 municipalities.

Luk Van Beneden, IT director for the city of Kortrijk, is keen to point out that this database is far from a fully fledged customer relationship management (CRM) system. “A CRM is like a souped-up contact system with integrated work flows and [which is] accessible by everyone involved in customer contact within the organisation. What we have here is really a simple contact management system. But it is still a pretty good start in terms of joined up thinking and data exchange.”

Kortrijk is taking an innovative, customer-centric approach to this data management process, giving residents access to the data it holds in the database through personalised pages on the Kortrijk website that customers may access using a personal login. “We are giving citizens control of their own data,” explains Luk. “They own it and can ensure it is accurate and up-to-date.”

ICT relies on people, not technology

But Gjill Smit, programme manager in the Dutch city of Groningen in the Netherlands, should have the last word. He warns that an effective information architecture is not just about clever technology. “People tend to think that architecture is about bolting together lots of IT kit so that you can input something at one end and something happens at the other,” he says. “Architecture is about setting a path which an organisation can follow to grow in a controlled manner so that it can cope with the complex world outside. It is about creating a framework with inherent flexibility and creativity so that you do not have to keep reinventing and bolting on components. All the necessary components of the architecture are in place and known to everyone. But organisations are made of people, and it is the people factor that often makes standardisation and integration hard.”

By his own admission, Gjill was no professional information architect when he was given the job of building the architecture for Groningen. So he was quite happy to get a head start by referring to the Dutch e-government architecture NORA (NederlandseOverheidReferentieArchitectuur - www.e-overheid.nl/onderwerpen/architectuur-en-nora). “But Dutch municipalities tend to think that they are special and different from everyone else,” he says. “Most municipalities perform the same functions as each other, they are not unique. Still, this sense of autonomy cannot be ignored. People wanted to design a bespoke architecture, so that is what I had to do, basing it on the principles of the NORA standard.”

“Everyone is very satisfied with the end result,” Gjill concludes. “And everyone now understands that all future IT purchases must be approved by the architect. We have everything mapped out, so it is crucial that we control all new software to ensure that it will fit into the framework we have developed and meet all our requirements for functionality, data sharing and compatibility.”

Gjill was careful to consult with people across the organisation and communicate with them the importance of creating a ‘reference architecture’ for the contact centre’s ICT and information management. By doing this he has given everyone a sense of ownership of the process; people are beginning to understand the benefits of central information management and exchange. The result is a firm foundation for the on-going development of the customer contact centre and improvements in customer service.



Gjill Smit

Find out more

Read the Smart Cities Guide to ICT architecture

Making the most of your ICT

Use your existing technology

Before you start buying fancy new equipment and software that you think will transform information flows within the municipality, first check to find out if your organisation already has a solution you can use. Are you making the best use of your existing tools? Perhaps you can combine existing software, rather than spending scarce funds on bespoke data integration solutions.

Only buy products that clearly add value

ICT and software procurement requires a certain amount of technical experience and ICT know how, but the purchasing processes should not be left entirely in the hands of an IT officer or an IT departmental head. Good software purchases are often the result of broad consultation – a dialogue between people with different skills who can all make contributions to the process. If you can't clearly and briefly outline the benefits of a new product you shouldn't buy it.

Involve end users

Don't just ask the person who will use the software or new ICT system, but involve customers and end users as well. Such bottom up involvement may seem strange, but a customer-centric organisation must embrace this approach. Customers will look at a purchase from their own perspective and may ask questions or raise issues that may never occur to employees.

Share data

With every new ICT purchase or project, look carefully to see how and whether your customer and service data can be shared across your organisation. Check whether the new system can access or use legacy or existing data sources. And work to convince everyone that data sharing is in everyone's interests.



Sabine Rotthier

“ICT and business processes go hand in hand and have to be designed together as part of the IT architecture. But you tend to find there are the IT guys who have lots of ideas – some relevant, some not – about what you can do with technology. And there are the business managers who don't really understand the IT issues. True e-government only becomes possible when these two sides work as one towards the common goal of improving customer service.”

Sabine Rotthier, researcher, University College Ghent

Smart Cities partners have found that developing an ICT architecture model is an important step in making our municipalities more efficient. The Netherlands has a national IT architecture, while Sweden does not – so the city of Karlstad is developing its own municipal IT architecture model. The increasing complexity of the application landscape within organisations, and the complexity of the underlying infrastructure, means that organizations have an increased need for IT models to help them understand how their systems work together. IT architecture models enable organisations to develop this insight and should help them deliver better services internally – for themselves – and externally – for their customers.



Chapter 5 Putting people first



DuViTo contact centre

Putting people first – developing more customer focused services

It's the people who do it that are the most part of customer services: this is something that all the Smart Cities partners have learned. While systems and technologies are important, it is the personal contact that customer service agents and other municipal employees have with customers that has made the biggest difference in providing a good customer experience and delivering good services.

“Of course, most customers were delighted by the extended opening hours of our city library. But the staff were subjected to major changes in their working conditions. It is incredibly important for them to understand why changes are necessary.”

Carol Vanhoutte, Chief Librarian, Kortrijk

At the DuViTo customer contact centre in Kristiansand, Norway, employees are highly engaged with customers and everyone treats each other with respect. DuViTo opened in April 2003, and provides the 'front office' for Kristiansand's health and social services. The DuViTo team also handles email and telephone enquiries.

A large proportion of customers come into the centre to talk face-to-face with a member of staff. “The face-to-face contact we have with customers is actually very important,” says Anny Hofseth, DuViTo's head, “that's why we went for an open plan office design. The office layout improves the interaction between staff,” says Anny, “but it is also more inviting for customers who would previously have found themselves cut off from the people they were talking to by closed-off counters. Now when someone comes in they can immediately see if an agent is busy on the phone or talking to another client.”

The two desks nearest the door deal with the steady stream of customers who want to meet with a service agent, while the rest of the team members are seated around the edge of the office and deal with telephone and email communications. The customer service agents rotate desks so everyone takes their turn at the front desks, which makes sure everyone gets to broaden their knowledge and skills.

DuViTo's success and the enthusiasm and commitment of its staff owe a lot to the leadership of the centre's head, Anny Hofseth (see case study).

Anny Hofseth

Case Study

Anny Hofseth was recruited from the private sector by the municipality of Kristiansand in Norway to run DuViTo, the municipality's contact centre for health and social care.

"I joined the DuViTo project in 2003, quite early in the project to head up the creation and running of DuViTo. This contact centre would handle all the customer contact for health and social care in Kristiansand, from enquiries about housing benefits to advice about mental health services.

"One of my first tasks was to recruit the DuViTo team. I wanted a team that would be knowledgeable about all the different back offices. But I didn't want to transfer people to DuViTo from the health and social care departments. My team certainly had to be knowledgeable, but more than anything I wanted people who were enthusiastic about directly dealing with clients and solving their problems. After all, our name says it all: DuViTo is a play on words which conveys our desire to 'work it out together'.

"So I set up a rigorous recruitment procedure where staff had to apply for a position on the DuViTo team. I put them through a full interview process. I looked at their personality, team work and their ability to serve customers.

"The motivation of my new team was exceptionally high – they really wanted to make this work. I told them that they were privileged because they had a rare opportunity to be in at the very start. They owned the place and could make it their own.

"I also worked with my team to plan our office layout so that it would be friendly, welcoming and feel safe for staff and customers. Our open plan design improves the interaction between team members and fosters our self-help culture.

"I think one of my strengths as a leader has been to build a motivated and committed team that wants to be even better at what it does. We have a culture of support, an openness where people share their knowledge and skills and support one another to improve."



Anny Hofseth

Change management

Customer contact centres need champions because radical, transformational change to embrace a new vision of how to deliver customer-focused services takes time and effort. A wide range of organisational structures, procedures, work practices and attitudes and behaviours of staff and managers must all shift to support new service delivery approaches and structures.

People tend to resist change unless they can clearly see the benefits to themselves, or until they have bought into the organisation's new vision. Quite often employees only look at where an organisation is *right now*, without thinking about the wide range of issues that may shape their organisation's medium- or long-term future. This general lack of vision can dramatically reduce an organisation's potential for change.

When the Smart Cities municipalities reviewed the issues they had faced when setting up new customer contact centres, they identified five key issues that have to be addressed if you want to facilitate the smooth and rapid development of a customer contact centre. These are:

- **Leadership styles** – too much top-down management leads to discontent, while too much laissez-faire management means nothing changes
- **Shifting priorities/lack of consistency** – this makes it hard to make progress and confuses employees about the purpose of their work
- **No integration** between top managers in an organisation can lead to departments continuing to work independently in existing organisational silos
- **Communication** between employees and managers is disturbed - clear communication is key so everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing and, most importantly, *why*
- **Poor leadership** at lower management levels can be a problem – it is essential that the entire workforce is motivated, has been consulted, and feels that they are part of the process.

Change needs time: organisations do not change overnight. Change takes effort and costs money – the whole change process must be managed and steered consistently by the project managers and the process must have the active endorsement of the organisation's senior managers.

The City of Edinburgh Council employs the ProsciChange Management methodology to help deliver major change within

the organisation and to increase the success of its change programmes and projects. The approach recognises the need to have strong project management, change management and executive sponsorship to successfully deliver change and to achieve objectives. The methodology uses five change management tools, which are tailored to each project. The aim is to move any groups which are affected by changes through the phases of **awareness, desire, knowledge, ability** and **reinforcement** of the change process (the ADKAR model). The five change management tools that are used to take teams through this process are: a communications plan, a sponsor roadmap, a coaching plan, resistance management and a training plan.

Smart Cities has found that most organisations are involved, one way or another, in changing both what they do and how they do it in order to provide better services for customers. But the local context makes a big difference to how this is done: **approaches that work in one organisation may fail in another.**

We have found that employees at all levels must be involved in the change process, and should be given opportunities to contribute their thoughts, their ideas and their experience. The layout of the DuViTo office was designed with the customer service agents, who also wrote their own office 'code of conduct'.

In Kortrijk, the new 1777 Kortrijk helpline team was formed by inviting existing helpdesk staff to transfer to the 1777 team. Staff would work part-time on the 1777 helpline, and would spend the rest of their time in their old departments working on back office tasks. "We closely involved the front desk employees as we selected which services they would be able to offer over the phone," says Hans Verscheure, customer services officer for the city. "They also identified the kinds of tools and support they would need to do their work. This dialogue gave the new 1777 team greater ownership of their work and a real desire to do the best for their callers."

"We took a lot of time just to talk to all the staff affected by this. Everyone tends to think they are an expert and indispensable, that their work is special. You have to respect that, and reassure them that their service will be improved and will not deteriorate through the involvement of a customer contact centre."

Hans Verscheure, Kortrijk



Hans Verscheure

Case Study

Leading the charge for change



Renske Stumpel

“It is not that organisations do not have the skills or tools,” says Renske Stumpel, project manager in the municipality of Groningen, “but the integration and coordination that you need for a good customer contact centre needs a change in culture. You need effective leadership and careful change management.”

And that is why it can take so long to get a contact centre up and running. In Groningen, for example, the eight municipal departments generally worked independently from one another, even though customers see the municipality as a single entity providing a wide range of services.

Department heads, who are all on the steering committee for service improvement initiatives, wear two hats: they are responsible for their own departments, but also responsible for the municipality as a whole. Sometimes these two responsibilities conflicted.

The steering committee tried to make sure that everyone who would be affected by the changes in processes was consulted and that everyone was well informed. The departmental heads each appointed a key person within their departments to implement the project, and these key people worked directly with senior management.

Even more importantly, there were meetings every six weeks between the front office managers from the different departments. This was quite a departure from the way departments used to work – these managers had not worked together before. These front office managers were able to focus on the practicalities of implementing the new service vision, and what had to be done to improve customer services.

These meetings were an essential part of the process to translate the strategic plans from senior management into the practicalities of frontline delivery. One way to foster change is to ensure that each department takes ownership for its part in the initiative – in Groningen each department comes up with its own plans and ideas about how to implement the municipality’s master plan. This gives the departments more ownership of the work they are doing and improves their motivation and participation.

Still, Renske admits that Groningen has struggled to implement new approaches to service delivery and customer contact due to the internal culture and autonomy of the departments. “In other municipalities the concept of a single contact centre has been accepted without discussion,” she says. “Lately, the budgetary cuts are beginning to add extra impetus to our work: there is less room for opinion, we now have no choice. Separate front desks for each department is simply too expensive. Cuts will force through more centralised services.”

Learning how things work

There is no perfect solution or standard roadmap for establishing or expanding the work of a customer contact centre. But the task can be made much easier by keeping an open attitude, and by encouraging dialogue between staff and by encouraging the development of a learning environment. Mistakes are inevitable, but they should be used to help you learn lessons about how to improve in the future.

The city of Groningen takes its customer contact strategy so seriously that front and back office employees are obliged to attend central training workshops to ensure that they all follow the same procedures and that they all put customers first. The workshop helps back office staff to 'get into the heads' of their front office customer contact colleagues, and to understand how the work of the back offices fits into the bigger customer service picture.

At the same time, the front office customer contact agents get to see all the activity that goes on 'behind the scenes' to process service requests and to deliver a service to a customer. This knowledge helps the front office agents follow the correct procedures and to explain to customers the steps that must be followed before they can receive a particular product or service.

By bringing front and back office staff together, Groningen has encouraged its employees to learn from each other, to work together, and align their work activities so that the needs of customers always come first.

“Municipalities are working to deliver high standards of customer services. Employees and especially those working in the front office are critical to this process of business improvement. That’s why permanent training on skills and capabilities are essential in achieving our goals and targets. Citizens will value front office workers who operate professionally.”

Jaap van der Laan, project manager, municipality of Groningen



Jaap van der Laan



Mark Fitzgerald

The relatively mature contact centre in Edinburgh also embraces this grass-roots approach to learning with a comprehensive coaching programme for its agents. Edinburgh monitors the quality of the output from its contact centre agents using a 'balanced scorecard'. A quality assurance team listens to six recordings per month for each service agent, and marks each call according to a standard set of criteria, including the time it took to answer the call, the call length, and whether the caller's issues were resolved. The scorecard also includes other aspects of an agent's performance such as their attendance and punctuality.

"We introduced a coaching model for agent training because we thought this would help agents to improve," explains Mark Fitzgerald, employee development officer in the contact centre. "Previously a team leader would sit down with an agent, look through the scorecard and point out this or that which needed to improve. But with our coaching approach there is an on-going feedback from the quality assurance."

"There is now a dialogue between agents and team leaders about how to improve," Mark continues, "and it happens on a very regular basis, perhaps once a week with a more formal review on a monthly basis. Coaching empowers agents to take control of their own improvement, but does not shirk responsibility from team leaders and managers to ensure that employees are also given the tools to improve."

Edinburgh also recently introduced its own *KnowledgeBase* as a way to gather and disseminate information and expertise among its contact centre staff. "Staff in our contact centre were hoarding information – telephone numbers, contacts, all sorts of information gathered in notebooks or pinned to the partitioning walls of their desks," says service development manager Rachel Goud. "Some

people would be following old processes, others were more up to date, but it was all inconsistent, often it was actually wrong. We decided to establish a central electronic database which would be accessible for our call centre staff, but also for front desk teams in local neighbourhood offices.”

Whenever back office departments become aware of any changes in services or other information that may affect customer contact – from new telephone numbers, opening hours or major changes in service delivery – they contact a *KnowledgeBase* ‘champ’ and ask for the information to be updated.

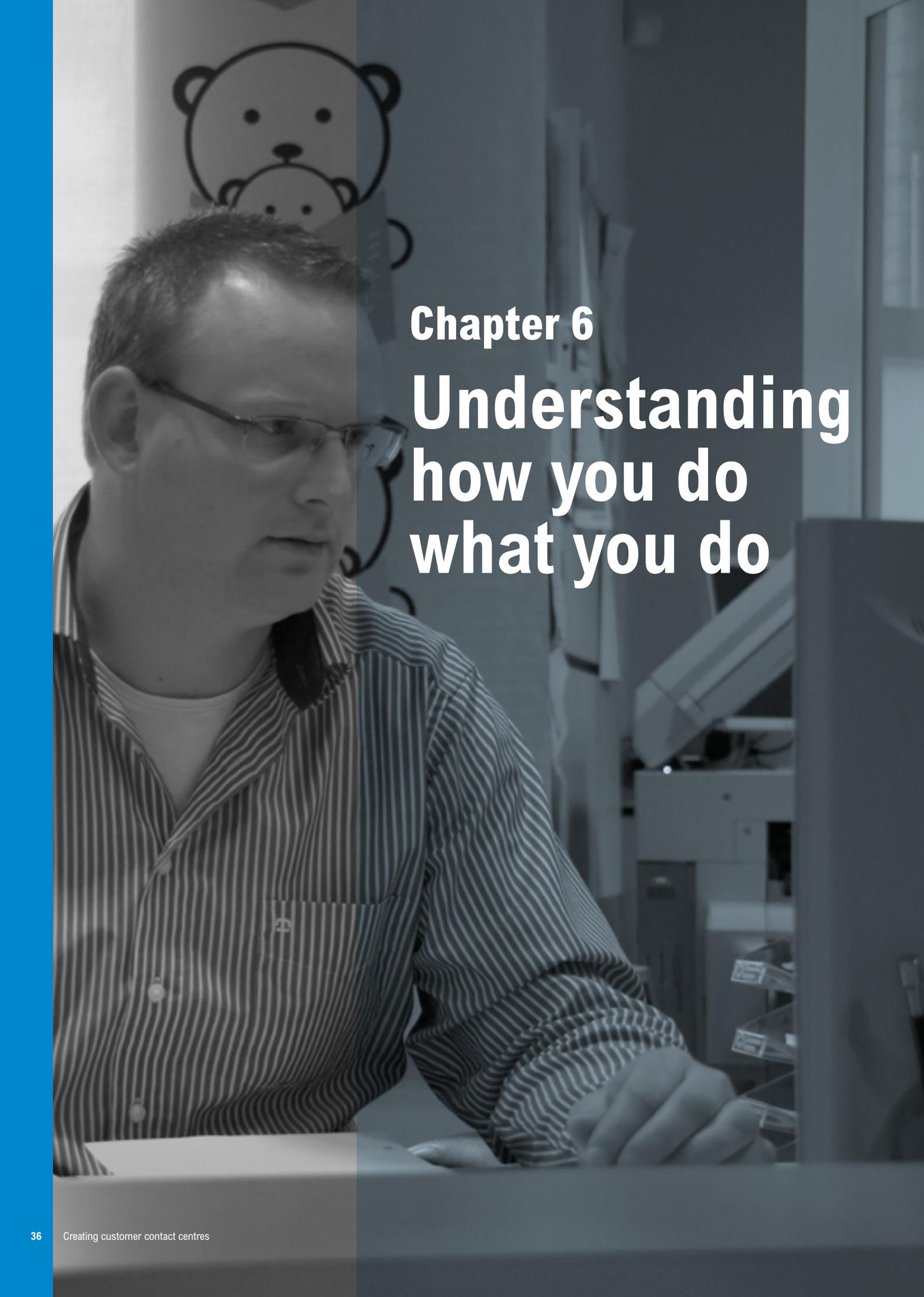
The *KnowledgeBase* is updated up to 10 times a day, so keeping on top of all of these changes is a challenge. Nevertheless, customer service agents are expected to know about all of these updates, as the *KnowledgeBase* application alerts them whenever updates go live.

“The development of the *KnowledgeBase* is part of our on-going programme to become more customer focused,” says Rachel. “There are still some departments that do not want to publish certain information, but we are getting more and more transparent. Our focus is always on the customer.”

With open communication from management, a clear and well planned change management programme, and plenty of opportunities to get involved, employees will understand why it is important to develop a customer contact centre. But a customer contact centre is just one small part of a much bigger picture. The Smart Cities project has discovered that that when it comes to service improvement, every single employee has an important part to play.



Edinburgh's customer contact centre

A man with glasses and a striped shirt is sitting at a desk, looking at a computer monitor. The background is a contact center with a cartoon bear logo on the wall. The text 'Chapter 6 Understanding how you do what you do' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Chapter 6

Understanding how you do what you do

Business processes and service visions

Local authorities have grown organically over many, many years. Today they are typically large and complex organisations, and are often sub-divided into a number of different functional, hierarchical and often semi-autonomous departments.

These operational silos may have made it easier to manage particular services, but they also make it much harder to implement a centralised customer contact centre and to make sure that customer-focused strategies align across the municipality.

As we have seen, the task of cataloguing all of a municipality's products and services can often begin to break down the walls and barriers between departments. Departments begin to discover where their work overlaps (or sometimes is even duplicated), where they are servicing the same customers, and how they can get a much better picture of their customers by exchanging information between themselves. Cataloguing services is the first step in developing cooperation between departments, and is an essential ingredient for developing a successful customer contact centre.

Reorganising working practices and business processes is a big challenge. The first step is to understand all of your existing business and service processes. The Belgian municipality of Waregem, for example, has spent more than a year drawing up an inventory of all its internal and external processes. One employee was made responsible for writing the process descriptions and mapping out how they were related and linked to each other, and then assessing where and how procedures could be simplified. A number of processes have now been simplified, and a number of informal processes which were discovered during the service mapping process have now been abolished.

This preparatory work has given the municipality a head start in several of its other organisational projects. The process analysis work made it much easier for the municipality to identify which products and services it should offer in its new city shop.

The city's process inventory is recorded in its *Process2flow* software, which is also used to register all customer service requests and reports to the municipality. By combining customer case files with the business process map, it is possible for municipal employees to see the status of a case file and view how it is progressing along the value chain. Employees can quickly find out why a case file may be held up and who they should contact to intervene or provide authorisation.



Edinburgh's customer contact centre

Case Studies

I-scan

The University of Ghent has developed a methodology to assess the 'e-readiness' of municipalities

Over the last few years University College Ghent has analysed a number of Flemish municipalities with its I-scan methodology. I-scan uses interviews and questionnaires with key personnel to get an insight into e-government practices within local authorities to see whether their internal organisation, structures and culture is 'e-ready'.

"Delivering e-services is not just about plugging together loads of IT kit," remarks researcher Sabine Rotthier. "At the end of the day e-services still rely on people. If an organisation is not correctly geared up for e-government, then anything they build on the IT side will not work as well as it should."

From her I-scan research Sabine has found that many local government departments have viewed e-government as a form of automation – using ICT to automate tasks that are currently performed manually. "But that is not really what e-services are about," she states. "E-government means a sea change in the very way we do government. It requires a complete re-engineering of organisational structures and internal processes. It involves a lot more than putting a few forms online."

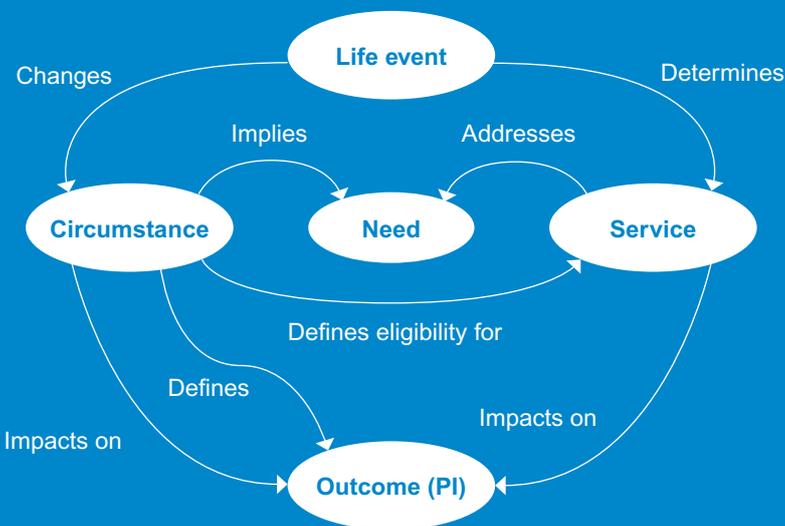
The need for back office re-engineering to make e-services effective is also true for customer contact centres – you can't really present a single municipal face to the customer unless there is some level of joined up thinking within the organisation. Many municipalities, having been convinced by the logic of creating a contact centre, are now discovering the work of the contact centre is providing a big stimulus for radical internal business transformation.

Life event model

The esd-toolkit's 'life event model' can be used by councils to target citizens with particular social or demographic characteristics, and to help them to access the appropriate services as quickly as possible.

The model identifies all the relevant services that a person might need in the event of bereavement, unemployment, becoming a parent, etc.. These events are then matched against a list of available services.

Using these mappings it is possible to develop an intelligent website navigation system that reacts to users to provide a form of self service, targeting the website's content to specific audiences in particular circumstances. The model can also be used to power dynamic input forms on the web or as a basis for 'decision trees' for customer contact agents to use when working with citizens.



Life event model

Case Study

The e-office

Karlstad in Sweden has set up an 'e-office' to spread best practice in its e-government projects and to help steer their implementation.

Karlstad hasn't built a customer contact centre, but that is not stopping Per-Erik Karlsson, project manager for the municipality's e-office, from planning ahead. "There is a lot of talk among senior management and elected leaders about creating a customer contact centre, but we are still in the planning phases. At the moment, we do have one central number that people can call, but this just goes to a switchboard from where the customer will be redirected to the relevant service officer. The receptionists are able to answer very basic questions, but that doesn't mean we have a customer contact centre. Email, the web, the telephone and our town hall helpdesks are not joined up."

Karlstad sees the deployment of a customer contact centre as part of its wider e-government strategy and its efforts to move as many of its services online as possible. "The e-office is there to support this effort," explains Per-Erik. "It is really a toolbox to make it easier for the municipality to build e-services." The e-office provides expertise where it is needed, and helps to develop a single organisation-wide perspective on e-government. The involvement of the e-office in European projects has given it access to solutions from other countries and allowed it to tap into other experts' knowledge and best practice.

"You can imagine we are very involved in working on the contact centre project because it will work across many departments and will have implications for the way the whole organisation does business," Per-Erik notes. "Our office has a good overview of all the developing e-services in different departments, so we have a good idea of the bigger picture and how the work of different departments fits in with a wider strategy. We can see that to have a customer contact centre we will need to make a lot of information from different departments available so the centre can answer people's questions."

The Swedish city of Karlstad has developed its own methodology for municipal process mapping and business process re-engineering. Working with Karlstad University, the municipality has drawn up a process-modelling framework that helps employees to do business process mapping and to use their process maps to identify where and how improvements can be made.

Karlstad's 'Common Process Model' is based on research, best practices and the experience of municipal employees. "It is really important to understand exactly how the municipality ticks," explains Per-Erik Karlsson from Karlstad's e-office. "Unless you know what has to happen to get from the point where a customer requests a service to when they actually receive it, there is no way you can improve the process and make it more efficient and customer-friendly.

However, if you are going to start talking about business processes then it is crucial that everyone who is involved in process mapping or business re-engineering speaks the same language. The concepts and symbols that are used to describe and develop business processes must be consistent and understandable by all internal and external stakeholders. "This is what our model tries to do," says Per-Erik. "It uses explicit directives, guidelines and templates to provide a common base for people to analyse, describe and work towards process improvements."

Formal process mapping is an important task in updating how municipalities work. But sometimes the processes that are required for a functional customer contact centre are simply based on common sense. When the city of Kortrijk set up its 1777 central telephone number it already had some good centralised customer contact processes in place. "Before 2002 we had several complaints from residents that they were bounced between departments with their queries," explains Hans Verscheure, customer services officer for the city. "It seemed like no-one actually wanted to deal with the customer directly."



Per-Erik Karlsson



City of Edinburgh Council website

As a result the city set up departmental helpdesks to handle all incoming queries to each department. The next logical step was to combine these helpdesks into a single customer contact centre that would handle all municipal enquires. In January 2010 the service launched with a single short code telephone number – 1777. By merging a number of departmental helpdesks Kortrijk has made it easier for citizens to communicate with the municipality. The single helpdesk/helpline system has also made the organisation's operations more efficient, needing fewer staff and providing standardised helpdesk working hours across the organisation.

How to get website content right

The City of Edinburgh Council established its customer contact centre almost a decade ago. It now handles around 1.5 million phone calls a year, and deals with complaints and enquiries from other service channels – including the municipal website and email. While it is well established, the contact centre is still refining its processes to improve the service it provides.

As part of its channel strategy, Edinburgh recently launched an updated city website, which has given the contact centre an opportunity to review and to tighten up its processes to ensure that information on the web is accurate and up to date.

There is now a three-step procedure for writing and updating website content. First the text is written or amended by expert back office employees (or in some cases customer service agents from the contact centre) who have been trained to write about their services for the general public according to the website's style guide.

The text is then automatically sent to an appropriate editor. This editor will work in the same department as the original author, so should have reasonable knowledge about the material they are reviewing. Editors can check the revised text for accuracy, consistency and style.

Finally, before the content can go live, it must be approved by a high level web master, who may make final edits so the content complies with style and layout restrictions.

A team of web champions within departments and the contact centre manages the page authors, and also helps develop the council's web strategy. The team identifies new content, updates text and ensures that the website helps to deliver the council's channel and customer service strategies.

Buying into a vision

Calling these people 'champions' is highly appropriate, because developing enthusiastic and inspirational leadership and ensuring 'buy-in' from staff – especially from top management and departmental heads – are critical success factors. Managers in particular must work to steer the change process, to embrace cooperation across the organisation and help to embed customer-centric approaches and behaviours in their departments.

A clear vision of what customer service standards are wanted can help staff understand why change is necessary and how it will be implemented. Groningen's five-year customer vision document took some time to develop before it was published in 2009. Far more than a set of vague ideas about service provision, it sets out targets for service levels, quality measures and priorities for action. "The key message of the Groningen vision can be summarised by just three principles that fit onto a sheet of A4," explains Renske Stumpel. "First, we recognise that our services should be provided in ways that reflect what our citizens want. Second, we need to continue to make as many services self-service and accessible online, which frees up more resources to invest in target and vulnerable groups who may not be able to use the web. Finally, Groningen is committed to quality, carefully monitoring our service levels and feeding our findings back into an improvement process."

"The vision drives our organisational changes."

Renske Stumpel, project manager, municipality of Groningen.

Renske says that the hard work in developing this vision is beginning to pay dividends. "This has become our ultimate reference manual. We are gradually working towards a customer contact centre as we begin to break down barriers between departments and to organise our work in a more efficient and customer-friendly fashion. Our vision document is our roadmap for what we want to achieve; it makes it clear to citizens and employees where our priorities lie and why customer service is so important to us."

Find out more

To find out more about how to develop the necessary processes for a successful customer contact centre please read the Smart Cities publication 'Improving business processes and delivering better e-services – a guide for municipalities from Smart Cities'

www.smartcities.info/business-processes



Chapter 7

How good is your service?

Quality control and measurement

“It is easy to misjudge people’s expectations. You may think people want a faster service, when really they want a more accurate service. Or it may be the other way round. Or project managers may think that their personal preferences reflect those of everyone else – so someone in IT may think that mobile web access to municipal services is important whereas residents may just want better telephone access. The only way to find out what people really want is to ask them directly.”

Bart Noels, project manager, Intercommunale Leiedal

The aim of any company or government is to deliver products and services to its customers. For municipalities these aims may include having satisfied customers, being able to give customers a prompt service, or the efficient implementation of legislation or regulations.

But you cannot really claim the success of these efforts – and therefore the success of your work – without being able to measure success in some way. This is why it is important to track indicators which help to build up a picture of the effects of your work. By measuring, you can collect and link real data, analyse the numbers and assess whether you are delivering the service you want, or whether there may be bottlenecks or problems with some of your processes. If you don’t have any way to measure delivery, you are left with subjective and fragmented insights, such as sporadic, spontaneous feedback from customers, or the gut feelings of employees.



Bart Noels

The COPC Standards

COPC Inc. is a leading call centre consulting, certification, training and benchmarking company. The company has developed a family of standards for customer contact and call centres which provide users with a set of global best practices and benchmarks for call centre operations. The purpose of the standards is to help call centres simultaneously increase service quality and customer satisfaction while lowering costs.

The Dutch Answer model for local government contact centres incorporates COPC standards within its framework for contact centre deployment and development.



Bjørgulf Bergh Torjussen

There are many indicators that a customer contact centre may wish to monitor and track, so the selection of performance indicators depends heavily on the municipality's vision for customer service and the role its contact centre plays. For example, Groningen's vision document states that when a citizen or businesses calls the municipality by telephone, they should "immediately get a municipal employee on the phone. There is no menu or answering machine, unless it is outside opening hours. The employee answering the phone should usually be able to answer the caller's question. If the caller needs to be put through to a back office or to an expert, they should be available or should contact the caller within 24 hours." This clear and concise statement about the level of service a caller should receive also provides a number of service indicators which could be measured: how long it takes to answer the call, what percentage of issues were dealt with in one call, the number of calls put through to back offices, etc..

Measurements – if well done – give an objective picture of how services are working and provide a strong basis for service improvement (see ICE model figure). The City of Edinburgh Council's customer contact centre has added an automated quick-answer survey, which customers can take at the end of their calls. The questions vary, but are generally related to the politeness and helpfulness of the staff and their satisfaction with the service they have just received.

“Improved customer service does not come with a big bang – lots of small changes, slow and sure, make the difference. Above all it is the attitude of staff, that they are always working to improve what they do to satisfy customers.”

Bjørgulf Bergh Torjussen, project manager, municipality of Kristiansand

Improving the customer experience (ICE)

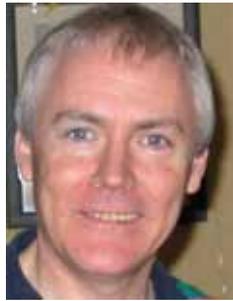
Edinburgh's customers are also given the option to leave longer verbal feedback. Callers often take this opportunity to thank the particular agent who took their query. This praise is fed back to the agent: quotes from customers are pinned to the staff notice board to highlight and promote excellence within the team.

Data from the telephone satisfaction survey are analysed on a regular basis, and used to identify specific problems (perhaps with an underperforming agent) or areas that require on-going action to improve the service. The telephone satisfaction survey has been so successful that questions are now being asked about the council's wider customer service strategy.

The link between measures and management, targets and responsibility, and organisation development and competence building is a continuous circle. Survey results and performance indicators should feed back into management and improvement programmes, like those in Kristiansand's DuViTo contact centre where customer surveys have triggered some changes in the office. While most of DuViTo's surveys showed very high levels of customer satisfaction, one revealed that some citizens had some concerns about the office layout. Some customers said that they did not like the open plan design, saying that they felt uncomfortable about being overheard during sensitive discussions about their personal circumstances.

These concerns were quickly addressed. The office already had a side room where people could go if they wished to speak in confidence with an advisor. All it took was a few prominent signs around the office to tell customers that they could ask to use this room if they wished to speak in private. Now survey questions to customers about the office layout consistently score top marks.





Tim Anderson

Benchmarking performance

It is clear that measurement is an essential part of the establishment and development of a customer contact centre – indeed measurement should begin even before a contact centre goes live. An important part of centralising customer contact services is establishing a baseline that measures the performance of your service and which can tell you what the quality of your service is, before you open a contact centre or implement a new initiative.

Benchmarking can be conducted internally, using internal data sources to extract the data you require. Local authorities usually also have access to a wealth of data that are collected – typically by their national governments or by inter-municipal collaborative programmes (like the esd-toolkit) – to compare performance between councils.

Although customer surveys and focus groups are two obvious ways to collect data, Smart Cities partners have also discovered the impressive insights into customers that can be revealed by using customer profiling techniques. Customer profiling collates and combines data from a wide range of sources (e.g. your customer contact database, plus geographic/demographic profiles from commercial agencies) to build up a picture of the characteristics, behaviours and socio-economic profiles of typical customers of a particular service.

Norfolk County Council, for example, found out from customer profiling that most of the people who joined its adult education classes were typically well educated and well off. Their customer profiles indicated that these students were very likely to have internet access, and would probably have preferred to register for their course online.

“Once we knew the characteristics of our customers, we realised that it was important to prioritise online enrolment,” explains Tim Anderson, Norfolk’s former e-services officer. “Now our entire adult education catalogue is available online and people can register and pay for a course over the web. The customer gets better information and this saves them a lot of time. We have seen big savings in the back office, too, because the adult education staff do not have to handle and process cash payments.”

See the *Customer Insight Profiling and Service Design Guide* from Smart Cities – <http://www.smartcities.info/customer-profiling>

Borrowing time

Case Study

The library service in the Belgian city of Kortrijk used its database of borrower transactions and a GIS system to find out who used the library, when they visited and where they lived.

In 2009 the library service in Kortrijk was challenged to cut its budget whilst improving its service to citizens. “It sounds like an impossible task,” says Carol Vanhoutte, chief librarian for the city. “But all you have to do is analyse the borrowing database and you quickly get a very clear picture of library usage.

“For each person you can track when they come to the library. You also have their date of birth, so you can get an age profile of users in different time periods. And if you use the addresses of users you can map where they come from or combine this information with commercial profiling sources to get an idea of the sorts of people who use the library at different times.”

The study revealed that very few people used the library for the first half hour in the morning, but it was very busy during the 30 minutes prior to closing at 5.30pm. The analysis also revealed that elderly people did not come to the library in the morning – conversations with older users suggested that by the time it opened elderly people would not want to come out because it would disrupt their normal lunchtime.

Armed with this knowledge, the library service decided to close a small suburban library not far from the city centre, but extend the opening hours of the central library. It now opens earlier at 10am and does not close until 6.30pm, giving workers plenty of opportunity to use its facilities before going home.



Carol Vanhoutte

However, it is important for employees to understand and feel comfortable about this process and that they do not view data collection/analysis as a 'Big Brother' style process: fear is dangerous and will undermine even the best designs for customer care. As the example of DuViTo demonstrates, the best customer care is delivered when agents genuinely care for customers and are committed to solving their problems.

Creating quality

Customer contact centres can be the people's champions, pushing municipalities to provide customers with higher quality, better value for money services, which meet and satisfy customer demands. The monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs) enables a customer contact centre to demonstrate how well it is doing and its ability to meet the vision of the municipality.

Even service quality can be measured, once you have defined what quality actually means to you. There are a number of well developed models for measuring quality, based on research into customers and services. When you choose a quality model, you can then buy in a range of tools, techniques and external expertise to help you measure your quality, and to use your findings to improve and embed a culture of quality awareness and on-going improvement into your organisation.

Most quality models originate from the private sector – everything from ISO through EFQM to CAF. But although they are often in English and many have strict methodologies that may initially seem inappropriate for the public sector, the majority of these models are simply trying to systematise common sense. Of course, most quality models will require some tweaking, but if customer focus is important to you then it is essential that the municipality gets to grips with the concept of quality and applies quality measures to all of its services.

The City of Edinburgh's contact centre takes its quality control extremely seriously. A dedicated quality assurance team monitors agents and marks their calls against standardised quality criteria. This information is used to guide agent training and coaching.

“Our quality control measures have made a clear improvement on the quality of our performance,” says Mark Francis, head of the contact centre. “We have been able to identify and disseminate best practices and to highlight our top performing agents. We’ve also identified several business issues that have affected our performance. And most importantly, we are able to isolate any issues which may contribute to customer dissatisfaction and focus our attention on eliminating them.”

ISO = international organisation for standardization.

EFQM = European Foundation for Quality Management (nowadays known as the EFQM Excellence Model).

CAF = Common Assessment Framework.

Customer satisfaction and effectiveness

“Customer satisfaction is an indicator of the effectiveness of e-government services.”

Jeremy Millard, Danish Technological Institute

Satisfaction is the goal. Customers are certainly demanding – they know what services they want and how they want to access them. But if municipalities wish to take customer-centricity seriously then the final verdict on their success must come from the customers themselves. The ultimate question to ask any customer is this: are you satisfied with how we have served you today?



Chapter 8

The challenge of change

Local authorities, municipalities and local governments across Europe are busy trying to transform themselves into more customer-focused organisations. This guide is a starting point for what many organisations will find to be a much longer journey; where building a customer contact centre is just one part of a process of local service delivery, of change management, and of service improvement.

Investments in ICT and digital services have traditionally been the focus of service improvement efforts, but municipalities and local governments have realised that to deliver real improvement in customer services requires a more radical change in how they work and how they organise themselves.

This guide has introduced you to the basic principles that you should follow to develop a customer contact centre, but there is no magic formula that any organisation can use to guarantee a successful contact centre. Everywhere really is different – you will need to identify and develop solutions that are appropriate for your organisation and for your customers.

People are your greatest asset – and your employees will be at the forefront of efforts to transform how you work and the services you deliver. While systems and technologies are important, they are just enablers; it is your people and your organisational culture that will make or break your service improvement efforts. When you are able to bring together staff and services from disparate parts of your organisation, then you will have taken a significant step towards being able to offer services as an organisation, rather than as a collection of departments.

Customer contact centres need to continue to develop and adapt as organisations, customers and services change. You will need to monitor how well you do the work that you do, and to identify new ways of simplifying processes, of working together, and of re-defining how services are delivered.

Customer service is a process that never stops developing – and neither should your organisation.

Acknowledgements

The Smart Cities project would like to thank all the staff from project partners who helped with this guide, by providing text, answering questions, and giving advice and support.

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Smart Cities Guides

The Smart Cities project has produced a number of guides for municipalities and governments to help them design and deliver better e-services.

1. Customer Insight Profiling and Service Design Guide - <http://www.smartcities.info/customer-profiling>
2. Creating Customer Contact Centres - <http://www.smartcities.info/customer-contact-centres>
3. Creating Municipal ICT Architectures - <http://www.smartcities.info/ict-architecture>
4. Improving business processes and delivering better e-services - <http://www.smartcities.info/business-processes>
5. Using Co-design to design and deliver better e-services - <http://www.smartcities.info/co-design>
6. My City Online – making the case for municipal web portals - <http://www.smartcities.info/web-portals>
7. Using Geographic Information Systems to provide better e-services - <http://www.smartcities.info/gis>
8. An introduction to Municipal ICT Architectures for Managers - <http://www.smartcities.info/ict-architectureSmart>

Cities Research Reports

1. Comparing levels of internet access, internet use and e-government use in the Smart Cities countries
2. Customer profiling to target service delivery
3. Measuring levels of supply and demand for e-services and e-government: a toolkit for cities
4. An introduction to Process Modelling
5. Standards for classifying services and related information in the public sector
6. The Transformation of City portals
7. The Community of Practice as a virtual organisation
8. The Community of Practice as a virtual organisation: innovation seeking and knowledge creating
9. A Systems Perspective on Security Risk Identification: Methodology and Illustrations from City Councils
10. Making customer groups real – using personas
11. Using Customer Profiling and Activity Based Costing to inform channel shift and to increase service take-up – A practical guide
12. Customer Journey Mapping
13. What is a service list?
14. Ten reasons to use a service list
15. Evaluating e-services
16. Understanding web accessibility
17. Using email to deliver e-services
18. Edinburgh's Library App – a case study
19. BusTracker – bus information on the go
20. Using geolocation in e-services

These reports can be downloaded from <http://www.smartcities.info/research>

