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IMPROVING

CUSTOMER ORIENTATION THROUGH SERVICE CHARTERS

A HANDBOOK FOR IMPROVING QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES



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 Service Point

Preface

IN THE PUBLIC SECTORS of Central and Eastern European countries not much attention has traditionally been paid to quality of public services. Indeed, many citizens have been the victims of what has sometimes been called ‘unobtrusive service’ (so unobtrusive that it is almost completely invisible!). At its worst, this can result in a self-perpetuating vicious circle – citizens have low expectations, so service providers don’t try very hard, so expectations stay low, and so on.

However, the situation is now changing. Many governments in Central and Eastern Europe have taken an active approach in promoting quality management in the public sector. This has certainly been the case in the Czech Republic where the Ministry of Interior launched an international seminar on quality management in April 2005 which was financed by SIGMA. This seminar gave rise to a one-year pilot project during 2006 on the “improvement of customer services through service charters” for public agencies in the Czech Republic. The training programme was co-ordinated and hosted by the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic and financed by SIGMA. It involved 7 public agencies¹, including the following sectors:

- environment
- social care
- transport
- culture and leisure
- audit
- communities and associations

¹ Environment Department of the City of Pelhřimov, Internal Audit of the City of Chomutov, Social Department of the City of Chomutov, Transport Department of the City of Chomutov, Public Library of the City of Brno, Community Chest of the City of Vsetín, Old People’s Home of the City of Luhačovice.

Consequently, the training material and methodology used in the training programme has been tested in a variety of contexts. Therefore, SIGMA feels it is now timely to make available the experiences of the pilot to other agencies in the Czech Republic and to other Central and Eastern European countries.

The purpose of this Handbook is to encourage and to support public agencies in Central and Eastern European countries to become more ‘outward-looking’ and improve customer orientation through the effective use of charters. Of course, the Handbook may also be useful to public agencies in Western European countries, even though it has been drafted with a particular focus on the legal framework and administrative cultures of Central and Eastern European countries.

We do not claim that service charters are the ‘best’ tool to improve the quality of public services. Depending on the needs of a public agency, other instruments may be more adequate. However, service charters may be a powerful tool to improve the customer orientation of public agencies if they are applied properly.

The Handbook has been written with the aim of giving the reader a ‘How To Do It’ guide, with lots of examples and illustrations of service charters. We intend that it will help readers to make a well-informed decision on choosing service charters as a quality improvement tool and to understand the necessary steps in drafting and using service charters effectively. In this way, we hope that the ideas in the book will help readers to make a greater contribution to their agency and to its key stakeholders.

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Europe

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**Why introduce
a service charter?**

Box 1: The Structure of the Handbook

Chapter 1 will help you to decide whether a service charter is an appropriate quality improvement tool for your agency at this moment of time. Chapter 2 will set service charters in a wider service quality improvement context and explain why service charters do not replace the need for a strategic management system, which involves defining a shared vision of quality, strategic objectives and quantitative and qualitative targets.

The effective use of charters as a quality improvement tool also implies the commitment of managers and staff after the publication of the charter. Therefore, Chapter 3 will focus on how to run consultation with staff. At the same time, international experience shows that purely internally drafted charters may be meaningless to service users. Chapter 3 will also show you how to consult with service users as well.

Obviously, the implementation of some quality improvements may incur extra resources but without achieving improvements a service charter will have little credibility inside and outside your agency. Therefore, Chapter 4 will explain how to deliver service improvement plans.

Last but not least, the drafting and use of charters must be based on team-work and cannot be just delegated to technicians. Chapter 5 will show how you can ensure that quality improvements are sustainable.

THIS CHAPTER WILL DESCRIBE the benefits of a service charter and will also outline its limitations. It will set out what conditions have to be in place for the effective use of a service charter as a quality improvement tool.

A. Service charters and other quality management tools

Who can be against 'quality' in public administration? Indeed, improving the quality of public services has become a major theme on the public sector reform agenda all over Europe and beyond. Most public agencies are nowadays looking at how to get started on the quality journey or how to develop existing quality management projects further. **But which is the best quality tool to use?**

In this situation, your agency may want to look into the tool-box of quality assurance with a view of 'implementing a specific tool'. But which is the best quality tool to use?

Graph 1: Quality Assurance Tools



1. Why introduce a service charter?

Actually, we believe that there is no best tool for all situations. Rather, all quality assurance approaches have value in particular contexts, depending on what your priorities are for improving public services. That's why advanced public agencies use a mix of tools in order to deal with different problems. As the arrow in Graph 1 shows, all the quality assurance tools are compatible with each other.

... all quality assurance approaches have value in particular contexts ...

At the same time, we can observe a certain sequence in the introduction of various quality assurance tools in most organizations. When getting started on service quality, public agencies are often concerned to show that quality management is 'objective' in its methods. In particular, engineers tend to be very fond of the ISO 9001 approach, which seems to be the ideal tool for making quality water-tight and saving it from accusations of being 'subjective'. As quality approaches evolve in public agencies many public managers become comfortable with inviting their staff to debate the 'soft' issues in quality, as well as the 'hard' process issues, e.g. by using self-assessment tools such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) (go to 'Projects' at www.eipa.nl) or the EFQM model (www.efqm.org). Self-assessments are very valuable in winning ownership for quality improvement from staff but outside the organizations they have little credibility. This is where service charters come in because service charters are addressed at external stakeholders and give staff a clear picture of what kind of service standards customers expect. Agencies may also seek information on how different groups of stakeholder perceive the way in which services are provided – which is what the GI Governance Model is about.

... service charters are addressed at external stakeholders and give staff a clear picture of what kind of service standards customers expect.

However, the sequence outlined in Graph 1, although it is found in many public agencies, does not mean that your agency MUST introduce quality assurance tools in this specific order. The chart is simply to help you to see more clearly how various quality tools relate to each other and where service charters have their place.

B. Benefits and limitations of service charters

When deciding whether your agency should introduce service charters or not, you should not only be aware of how they relate to other quality tools already being used in your organisation but you also need to know what benefits they have.

In general, a service charter may be defined as a public document that sets out basic information on the services provided, the standards of service that customers can expect from an organisation, and how to make complaints or suggestions for improvement.

... a service charter may be defined as a public document that sets out basic information on the services provided, the standards of service that customers can expect from an organisation, and how to make complaints or suggestions for improvement.

Box 2: Benefits of service charters

- Help public agencies to manage the expectations of service users
- Provide a framework for consultations with service users
- Encourage public agencies to measure and assess performance
- Make public agencies more transparent by telling the public about the standards they can expect – and how agencies have performed against those standards
- Push public agencies to improve performance where promised standards have not been achieved
- Increase satisfaction of service users

Traditionally, public agencies in Central and Eastern European countries often have been facing the problem of continued low expectations of service users. While some staff may consider this as a good thing – citizens with low expectations are unlikely to com-

plain – this also means that an agency has no incentives to improve quality. And is it not nicer to receive thank you letters or gratitude from service users than to deal with disillusioned citizens? By the way, another positive side-effect of service charters is that they constrain politicians not to make unrealistic promises.

Moreover, since the 1990s many private companies have invested in Central and Eastern Europe countries. They have often brought higher service standards than before, to which their customers have become accustomed. During this period, the public has perceived that public agencies have not changed fast enough. Citizens are beginning to ask the question: If private companies can deliver quality services, then why can't public agencies do the same?

Charters will provide a good framework to bring about a cultural change towards better customer orientation.

In Central and Eastern European countries, the administrative culture is very inward-looking. Service charters give your agency a good excuse to consult with service users. It is still the case that many professionals believe that they know best what is good for their users. However, we often find that what users expect and what public officials think they expect is rather different – this is typically referred to as the 'expectations gap' (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 2000, p. 37–39).

“Listening to citizens is the key to quality improvement”.

Vice President Al Gore at the 3rd Quality Conference for Public Administration in Rotterdam 2006

Charters will provide a good framework to bring about a cultural change towards better customer orientation.

Case Example 1: Giving children and young people a voice – the charter for young service users in the public library of Brno

Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic with over 500,000 inhabitants. Brno's Jiri Mahen Public Library, with 36 branches, is the second largest library in the Czech Republic.

When asked what was the main reason for choosing 10–15 years-aged children and young people as the key target group for the charter, the director, Ms Libuše Nivnická, says: There are several reasons for this choice:

- We began to think about our work from an external point of view, from the viewpoint of users.
- Consultation with this target group gave new directions to our work, we got feedback and the consultation process naturally raised the curiosity of the people we asked – it even subsequently increased their interest in our library.
- From the feedback, we began to be aware of our users' perception of our services and that led us to make substantial changes to the text of the charter – we tried to use language that would be understandable by our target group. Now we also describe our services in many different ways and more clearly and we also simplify the way they can use our services.
- Creation of the charter has influenced our work in other ways, too – for instance we have developed performance indicators. We plan to buy a larger book stock aimed at these young people. We have improved the way we communicate with them – for example, we now send emails only to specific addresses. From our users we now collect not only complaints, but also suggestions for improvements and we tell them what we have done to deal with their complaints. And we have now got name badges for all employees, so no member of the staff is anonymous any more.

1. Why introduce a service charter?

- Although not everything is implemented yet, we have already introduced a some new procedures and established staffing and budgets for them.
- Within the Library we repeatedly presented the charter to all employees (even to those not working directly with children and young people because in most of the libraries any employee can meet children in one way or another). We try to instill in all our staff the principles of proper behavior towards children and young people, e.g. that they are equal partners, and try to ensure that this principle is maintained in everyday contact and while planning further development of our services.
- To improve the visual presentation of the service charter we approached high school students (Department of Art and Advertising) because their ideas are closer how a young person thinks – we believe that good visual presentation can have a big influence on young people.

At the same time, service charters will encourage your agency to assess and monitor performance. A service charter without a performance measurement system will always remain a paper tiger.

At the same time, service charters will encourage your agency to assess and monitor performance. A service charter without a performance measurement system will always remain a paper tiger. The development of a performance measurement system will not only help you to set meaningful service standards but also give you hard evidence when you carry out self-assessments with tools such as the CAF or EFQM. And most importantly, they will help managers to understand whether strategic objectives are being met.

Furthermore, service charters make agencies more transparent by communicating standards – and performance against them – to the public. Even though we all like to pay lip-service to transparency, public managers and politicians often perceive transparency as

a threat. Yet, when service users are informed about their entitlements and they know what they need to bring to receive a specific service, this actually reduces work for your agency. Of course, your agency may be reluctant to publish some performance information – in particular, when standards have not been achieved. However, public exposure will reinforce the need to act upon under-performance and to deal with issues which would not be tackled otherwise.

However, public exposure will reinforce the need to act upon under-performance and to deal with issues which would not be tackled otherwise.

Most importantly, effective use of charters will help your agency to increase user satisfaction, even when user expectations are rising – which implies that your standards have to rise, too. The important thing is to identify together with stakeholders “what is important and possible at a particular time and place” (Gaster and Squires, 2003, p. 89) but to be conscious that this will change over time. This is the only way to improve.

1. Why introduce a service charter?

Case Example 2: Service Charter for Cashier

The contact address is:
Cashier Services Manager
Civic Cash Hall
London Borough of Sutton
Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way
Sutton
Surrey, SM1 1EA

First contact number: general enquiries:
020 8770 5495

Comments or complaints:
Janette Garlick - Customer Services Manager
020 8770 5317



UP TO STANDARD

Introducing you to the
London Borough of Sutton
Cashier Services




The Key Services we provide are:

To correctly enter all payments received over the counter and those sent in by post.

To provide an efficient service in a helpful and polite manner.

The following services are our 'promises of the services that you, the customer, have the right to expect from us.'

You will always receive a friendly welcome.

You can identify us by our name badges.

If there are more than three people waiting to be served, another cashier will open a bill if possible.

We aim to serve you within five minutes. However, queuing times may be longer at periods of peak demand.

If English is not your first language, we can use Language Line Interpreters to help with any queries.

Level of satisfaction for our service standards are:

- 100% for appearance and welcome.
- 95% for speed of dealing with payments.
- 100% for access to the counter.
- 95% opening counter positions.
- 95% length of time waiting.
- 82% of calls answered within 5 rings.

Methods of payment:

Post:
By cheque or postal order, please remember to include your account details.

At the Cashiers:
By cash, cheque or credit / debit card.

24 hour telephone payments:
By ringing 020 8770 7887. Remember to have your account details to hand.

Internet:
By connecting to www.sutton.gov.uk and select the payments section.

You can also buy from the cashiers:
Stamps, black sacks and garden sacks.

Further information:

Our opening times are 9.00 - 4.00 except on Wednesday when we will open at 9.30 so staff can receive training.

We welcome comments and suggestions on the services we provide, we will conduct regular customer surveys to gain information on how we can improve.

We have a focus group which meets every three months to discuss service improvements and welcome new members.

This leaflet gives you our promises about the services you can expect from us. We have a commitment to put things right if they go wrong and we welcome suggestions for improving any part of our service. If the service is not as good as we have promised, or if you feel that we have done something wrong, not done something we should have, or treated you unfairly or impolitely, please contact us.

We will confirm that we have received your complaint within three working days and respond to you within seven working days.

Services in the London Borough of Sutton

Clearly, these benefits do not come about by sticking a piece of paper on your office wall which has been drafted by a consultant or some technical quality expert. As Chapters 2 and 3 will explain to you the process of developing the charter is as important as the contents of the document itself.

At the same time, service charters are only a quality assurance tool. Watch out for the risk that the 'tool becomes the objective'. This is evident, for example, when organizations focus on 'implementing charters'. However, we want to suggest strongly that service charters are only valuable if they are used to bring about quality improvements – it is NOT enough simply to implement them. Otherwise, your agency could well focus mainly on applying service charters, however inappropriate, rather than on making sure that it achieves results which matter to your customers.

... we want to suggest strongly that service charters are only valuable if they are used to bring about quality improvements – it is NOT enough simply to implement them.

C. Conditions for introducing service charters

If service charters are to improve the customer orientation of your agency, certain conditions have to be met. If these conditions do not exist at the start of a service charter initiative, the project is likely to come to a halt when the charter has been drafted, without producing any visible results.

If service charters are to improve the customer orientation of your agency, certain conditions have to be met.

Box 3: Conditions for introducing service charters

General conditions that have to be in place

- Commitment of the director of the service covered by the charter – he or she has to support the initiative and be willing to implement service improvement plans
- Ownership of front-line and back-office staff who are responsible for delivering the standards set out in the charters
- Team-working by staff members responsible for the service covered by the charter

Specific conditions applying to service charters

- Your agency should already have had some experience with consultation of service users by running user surveys, user panels, focus groups or using other consultation methods.
 - Your agency should have some basic performance information available in the service area concerned by the charter.
-

In particular, we would like to emphasize that the introduction of charters cannot be run as a 'one-man' or 'one-woman' show but requires the engagement a team with staff members from different units and hierarchical levels in the organisation.

Case Example 3: Teamwork to Improve Customer Service in the Housing and Regeneration Unit in the London Borough of Sutton

CHARMIT is a diverse group that includes staff from a variety of services and grade levels who have volunteered to come together on a regular basis to discuss and contribute ideas to improve services. The group's main focus is to ensure ongoing improvements within its day to day working practices. This imaginative and effective initiative for involving staff ensures ownership of the improvement ethos within the Housing and Regeneration unit.

The team has organised staff focus group meetings; held information sharing sessions in the form of '*coffee and croissant*' mornings, facilitated question and answer sessions with the Senior Management Team and helped to set up and run the past two annual staff conferences.

Through staff and customer consultation the team has devised and implemented the following customer service improvement initiatives:

- Publishing and displaying performance information in reception
- Introducing mystery shopping for stakeholders to monitor customer service standards
- Ensuring that excellent communication processes with customers are maintained
- Encouraging staff and customers to comment on services provided, through regular surveys and focus groups.

Source: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/case_studies/, as of 12 December 2006.

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How to draft a charter



THIS CHAPTER WILL GUIDE YOU through all the steps and phases in the implementation of the charter and provide examples from the service charter pilot programme in the Czech Republic and elsewhere.

A. Define the concept of quality of your organisation

If your service charter is to bring about quality improvements in service quality, it needs to be embedded in a proper quality management system. As we mentioned before, the introduction of a quality assurance tool is no replacement for a quality management system. If your organisation already has a clearly defined vision of quality, a sound set of strategic objectives and a well-developed performance measurement system you can skip the following four sub-sections (A–D).

it is essential to have ONE definition of quality in your organization.

Otherwise we strongly recommend that your agency should design a quality management system first, before you start drafting the charter. The following steps may take some time but they will be invaluable for making your charter project successful.

First of all, it is essential to have ONE definition of quality in your organization. By doing so, all staff in your organisation will talk the same language, helping to avoid confusion. As you will find out, service quality is difficult to define but easy to recognize by its absence.

Task:

Try to identify ONE definition of quality by discussing with staff representatives from all units and hierarchical levels in your organisation

While you are identifying different concepts of quality in your organisation, and are trying to structure them to find a common denominator, it may be useful for you to be aware of some key concepts of quality which are used in the literature. **there are several ways of defining quality**

According to the ‘quality gurus’ there are several ways of defining quality:

1 Quality as ‘conformance to specification’ – here a product or service is said to be of quality if it conforms to technically specified norms and standards. This approach is typical in engineering and contract management contexts. From this perspective, quality consists of a list of technical characteristics (Crosby, 1979: 17) that have to be met. In this case, quality inspection has the role of filtering ‘good’ from ‘bad’ products. This is, of course, the logic of the ISO 9000 and ISO 14000 approaches. Another example is that, in all countries, products and services have to meet health and safety standards, which are often set out as a list of technical requirements.

2 Quality as ‘fitness for purpose or for use’ (Juran, 1988) – here a service is said to be of quality if it meets corporate and social objectives. As Juran pointed out, even if a product or service meets the technical specification (e.g. it is safe to use) it may be regarded as poor quality by the customer because it doesn’t fulfill the purpose that the purchaser had in mind. For example, a contractor who mows the grass verge along a road but doesn’t remove all the litter first will just spray bits of paper all over the roadside – technically the contract specification has been fulfilled but the end result is not at all what the local authority intended.

3 Quality as ‘meeting or exceeding customer expectations’. This definition derives from consumer psychology and is well exemplified by the work of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990). Of course, expectations normally rise over time, especially when they are met, so this probably implies a rising standard of service

over time. This approach becomes even more demanding when the definition becomes ‘exceeding customer expectations’ – e.g. when a customer turns up for an appointment at the tax office and is offered a cup of tea! (Of course, next time, the customer might expect a cup of tea to be offered, so to exceed expectations the tea would have to be hot this time!).

4 Quality as ‘bringing about a passionate emotional involvement between the customer and the service’ – this derives from social psychology and is suggested by the work of Pirsig (1974). Here, the customer is so convinced of the quality of the service that he or she identifies strongly with it – e.g. may be prepared to act as a volunteer to help the service or to carry out fundraising for it or to join the ‘Friends’ organization (e.g. the ‘Friends of the City Museum’ or the ‘Friends of the Village Hall’). Interestingly, Pirsig suggests that quality cannot be defined – it lies beyond the reach of language or numerical measurement. Rather, we can only detect quality because of its SYMPTOMS – the emotional involvement which the service arouses in those who experience it.

In general, the level of aspiration tends to rise as we move down the list of definitions given above. Indeed, most organisations start with an objective definition of quality and then gradually adopt more subjective concepts of quality. Clearly, the choice of the quality assurance tool must be in line with the definition of quality adopted. For example, *ISO approaches* are particularly relevant for assuring processes and suggesting process improvements, which means that they often fit well with a definition of quality which focuses on ‘conformance to specification’.

The *EFQM* and *CAF approaches* are most powerful for assuring the ‘enablers’ of an organisation, which means that they usually fit well with a definition of quality which focuses on ‘fitness for purpose’. Service charters are more adequate for definitions which focus on ‘meeting or exceeding customer expectations’.

...the level of aspiration tends to rise as we move down the list of definitions ...
...the choice of the quality assurance tool must be in line with the definition of quality adopted.

Subjective definitions of quality may be more difficult to accept in administrative cultures which are characterised by a strong legal tradition. Again, civil servants with an engineering background may find it more comfortable to work with more objective definitions. You will have to decide, based on the current situation, for which stage in the quality journey your organisation is ready.

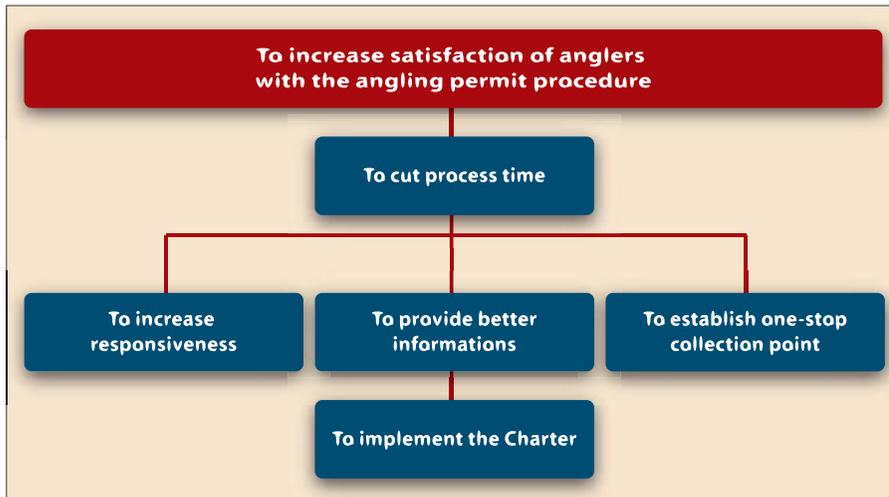
B. Establish a hierarchy of objectives

Once you have established a common vision of quality it is useful to think how your organisation as a whole – its units and individual staff members – can work towards making this vision a reality. Typically, it is helpful to define a hierarchy of objectives at this stage. This means establishing a visual hierarchy of ends-means-relationships. Of course, the objectives should match the agreed definition of quality. If the agreed definition of quality is to satisfy the customers of your service the hierarchy of objectives should reflect this.

In a hierarchy of objectives, you have different levels of specificity. In particular, there are

- high-level objectives, at the top of the ‘tree’
- mid-level objectives, in the middle of the ‘tree’, and,
- low-level objectives, at the bottom of the ‘tree’.

Case Example 4: The Hierarchy of Objectives of the Environment Department of the Municipality of Pelhřimov



Task:

Form a working group with staff from all units and hierarchical levels of the organisation and try to draw a hierarchy of objective based on your agreed vision of quality. This exercise will take several sessions but make it transparent to all middle-managers and staff members how their activities fit into the overall objectives of your organisation. So this exercise is not just useful for your charter service project – your organisation will benefit from this transparency in many ways.

Some golden rules when drawing a 'tree' of objectives:

- Use post-its when drafting the 'tree' and write only ONE objective on each post-it. (This is because you will usually want to change the position of the objectives quite often during the design process – the post-its give you flexibility).
- Formulate the objective as actions, i.e. use an infinitive to describe the ends and means (see example above)
- Never use the word 'and' on a post-it because this means that you have included more than one objective on a post-it. Also do not use any other conjunctions with similar meanings (or even commas!), using them would imply that some other objective is on the same level.
- Do not forget to fit your service charter into the 'tree'. Since it is only a tool it cannot be at the top of 'tree' but somewhere in the middle or lower branches since it must contribute to a higher objective.
- Ask outsiders to check the logical consistency of your 'tree' and to give you comments. Obviously, you may not agree with all suggestions but outsiders may spot ends-means-relationships which do not add up and need to be changed.

C. Defining performance indicators and targets

The objectives in your 'tree' are general aspirations. In order to know whether you have achieved your objectives you need to define performance indicators and targets.

Box 4: Definition of performance indicators and performance targets

A performance indicator explains how to measure the achievement of an objective.

A performance target specifies a quantified level of a performance indicator to be achieved with a specified period of time.

This means that

- Performance targets MUST always relate to objectives (which is why we asked you to draft a 'hierarchy of objectives' before you define performance indicators and targets.
 - A target is always a number which refers to a period of time.
-

Task:

Each member of the project team should choose an objective in the 'tree' and define 2–3 performance indicators and targets for the objective. The other members in the project team have the responsibility to check whether the proposed indicators and targets are formally correct.

Some of our participants in the Czech pilot programme on service charters wondered why it is necessary to define targets, given that legal regulations already provide standards. It is correct that legal norms often define minimum standards for public services. However, your organisation may choose to go beyond the minimum standard or define targets for less-regulated services in order to drive service improvements. Legal standards can therefore sometimes be viewed as the lowest acceptable standards.

Of course, the challenge in practice is to decide at what level to set a target. Ideally, targets should be ambitious, i.e. push your organisation to improve but still be realistic.

Ideally, targets are set by comparison, usually either between time periods or across organisations. So when you are in the position to have a baseline in your organisation for this year, you should increase the target for next year. But for some objectives you may have no baseline so you need to experiment and set a provisional target which you may have to correct upwards or downwards when you have performance information.

Finally, before finalising your performance indicators and targets you may want to test how 'fit for purpose' your definitions are. This test is commonly known as the SMART test (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely). It is widely used to check the quality of performance targets (see below).

... your organisation may choose to go beyond the minimum standard or define targets for less-regulated services in order to drive service improvements. Legal standards can therefore sometimes be viewed as the lowest acceptable standards.

... the SMART test is widely used to check the quality of performance targets ...

Box 5: The SMART test to check the quality of performance targets

This check-list provides guidance on setting targets. In particular, it states that targets are:

- S** = specific: clear, unambiguous, straightforward and understandable
 - M** = measurable: quantity, quality, time, money
 - A** = attainable: within the control and capability of the organisation, the unit or individual staff member
 - R** = relevant
 - T** = Timely: to be completed within an agreed timescale.
-

Specific targets are those which answer in a precise way the questions of what, who, and where. For instance, consider that you want to improve examination results of school students in the secondary school system. If you propose the following target (to *improve secondary school examination results*), it is unspecific because it does not specify how much improvement you want to have, over what period. A specific target here would be along the lines: *to increase the proportion of students leaving secondary school with matriculation to 80% by summer 2010.*

A *measurable* target means that there is the possibility of measuring the action(s) associated with the objective. It is not enough to give a figure in the objective to make it measurable. You should consider what procedures will help you to monitor, measure and record actions. If you cannot quantify the actions, the objective is likely to be wrongly formulated. For instance, you might put a figure in an objective, which cannot be really quantified (*increase to 60% the smiles among staff delivering services directly to the public*). You do have a figure, but how would you define, measure and record a smile? The procedure for measuring the target of the previous paragraph (*to increase the proportion of students leaving secondary school with matriculation to 80% by summer 2010*) would

be, for instance, the annual collection of the matriculation results of all students in their last year at school.

An *attainable* target is one which can be achieved within the time frame and within the means, resources and capabilities of your team and those associated with you, which includes not only other departments of the organisation but also external stakeholders. In many public services it is not sensible to set targets which require very rapid achievement, especially if partners are involved. For example, if you set a target such as “*to reduce obesity among teenagers at schools by 50% within one year*), you will soon find out that your campaign, however well designed, is fighting against not only the physiology of current teenagers but also their psychology and the advertising budgets of fast food chains. Such a target is likely to be unrealistic, which can demoralise those trying to achieve them and lay them open to derision in the media. Therefore, you might consider a rather less ambitious target. (On the other hand, if you set a very unambitious target, say *increase the number of fishing permits issued from an office on the day of application to 85% within two years (baseline 2006: 84%)*, it is likely to be demoralising for the opposite reason – it suggests either that the achievement is unimportant or that the organisation is considered too inefficient to do any better. So the happy medium is to set ‘stretch targets’ which are indeed likely to be achievable but still pose a challenge to the current practices of your organisation.

The *relevance* of a target (or, more appropriately, of the objective behind the target) is a more relative concept than the previous SMART features. The first key question is to find out for whom an objective is relevant and the second issue is what is the meaning of ‘relevance’ in this context. Relevance is easier to define by what it is not than by what it is. For instance, the target *to reduce the number of deaths from traffic accidents on national roads to 15% by December 2007* is not relevant for municipal police in some countries because they do not have authority over behaviour on national roads. A relevant objective for an organisation or unit means that they can do at least something about it. Further, the degree of relevance increases for that unit or organisation if the objective is part of their core business. Finally, the relevance of objectives should be

checked against the targeted beneficiaries of the measure by asking them or related stakeholders. For instance, *to reduce obesity among teenagers at schools by 50% within one year* may well not be seen as relevant for many of the obese teenagers if you ask them, but it is for their parents or health authorities or teachers because obesity has implications for health, health care costs, classroom behaviour, etc.. So it is important to decide which stakeholders you most care about and then ask them about which objectives are most relevant to them.

Finally, a *timely* objective implies a clear timeframe of when it should start or when it should end. Most examples of targets given in this section include a date by which a specific value of a performance indicator relevant to an objective should be achieved.

D. Map your stakeholders

Once you see how your service charter project is related to other projects and activities in your organisation you have to determine for which kind of service and stakeholder you want to draft a charter.

Actually, many public officials are unclear who their customers are. Furthermore, customers are not the only important group to your organisation. As you will quickly find out, many organisational objectives cannot be achieved without the co-operation of other public agencies. For example, the Social Services Unit in the City of Chomutov faces the problem that not all eligible service users know about their legal entitlements or have the courage to make use of them. Therefore, the unit requires the co-operation of carers, social workers and other professionals who are in touch with socially and economically disadvantaged people to inform them about their rights.

All of these individuals and groups are referred to as stakeholders. The concept of stakeholders originally just included people who have a stake (or share) in a particular issue, service or organisation. This stake essentially means that they are *affected* in some way by the actions of the organisation. However, the concept of stakeholder is nowadays usually widened to cover also people whose actions *affect* the organisation concerned. Stakeholders can be groups of people, organisations, or individuals. (Note that laws are not stakeholders!)

Customers of a service are considered a group of stakeholders, as they have an interest in how the service is delivered. However, interests may differ depending on age, gender, ethnicity and the like. This means that you may have to segment your customers into different groups. However, there are not only current customers but there

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may also be potential customers which are customers which your organisation does not reach for various reasons. This is where the concept of a 'service delivery gap' between legal entitlements and use of services comes in. Clearly, the fact that 100% of citizens may be entitled to a specific service does not mean that your agency is able to deliver the service to all citizens who are entitled.

“We have no non-users, since each citizen is part of the public social security system in our country”.

A civil servant in a Baltic country.

Task:

Go back to your hierarchy of objectives and determine 1–3 key services which are provided by your organisation. Undertake a stakeholder analysis for each key service by using the matrix shown below. This entails the following steps:

- Make a list of all possible stakeholders who have a stake in the service concerned (do not forget to think of potential customers)
- Allocate each stakeholder into one of the 4 quadrants by determining
 - A** Their influence on the organisation (Are they powerful enough to do your organisation harm? Or are they so weak that your organisation does not care much what they think about your organisation?)
 - B** The importance of the stakeholder to your organisation (Does your organisation need the co-operation of this stakeholder to achieve its objectives?)

Table 1 A stakeholder matrix

		Interest of stakeholder in your organisation	
		High	Low
Influence of the stakeholder on your organisation	High	A	C
	Low	B	D

Target group of service charter

The stakeholders in quadrant A have a high degree of influence on the organisation and are also have a high interest in it. This implies that you will have to develop good working relationships with these stakeholders, e.g. by consulting them on a regular basis or working in close partnership with them. Those are the **key stakeholders** for your service charter.

The stakeholders in quadrant B have a high interest in your organisation but they have little influence on your organisation. For example, the parents of school children have a high interest in what happens in your schools but typically have little influence over the managerial or teaching decisions made in the school. Nevertheless, your organisation may wish to give such interested people a greater voice e.g. by allowing parents to elect a high proportion of the school governors, a practice which is now common in many schools in the United Kingdom. So action can be taken to move interested but powerless service users from quadrant B to quadrant A.

In quadrant C, stakeholders have a high influence on your organisation but they may have other interests, so they will probably not be easy to involve in your organisation. For instance, the Finance Ministry of your country would often fit into this quadrant for many public sector organisations, since the funding of those services depends on resources allocated by the Finance Ministry

but the Ministry has too much to do to pay much attention to most of the public organisations which get funds from it. Nevertheless, such stakeholders pose a risk to the service and it is therefore wise to have in place appropriate consultation and communications to keep them aware of what you are doing, to make it less likely that they will suddenly decide to take arbitrary decisions.

Finally, stakeholders in quadrant D are not a primary target group for your organisation.

E. Draft your charter

Now that you have based the choice of the key service and target group of your service charter on a well-informed decision, you can start to make a first draft of the charter. Again, the task should not be undertaken by one person but by a project team with staff from different hierarchical levels of the unit which is mainly responsible for delivering the service concerned.

The charter should be brief and written in a clear language. In particular, you should avoid technical jargon and references to legal sources, since these are of no interest to service users. Sometimes it is necessary to reformulate complicated legal or bureaucratic descriptions into language which can be understood by non-specialists. For some administrative traditions clarity of communication is often a difficult challenge.

While the specific contents of a charter may vary, it is important that the project teams make sure that the following key elements are included.

The charter should be brief and written in a clear language. In particular, you should avoid technical jargon and references to legal sources,

Box 6: The key elements of a service charter

The service charter should describe:

What the organisation does

- organisation's name and logo;
- what the organisation or programme covered by the Charter does;
- who the clients or potential clients are;
- relationship to parent organisation.

Contact and communication with the agency

- relevant contact details; postal or street address, phone, fax, email and web site;
- hours of opening;
- online services (where relevant)

The standard of service users can expect

- the quality of the *relationship* with the client (compliance, advice, staff manner);
- the quality of the *services* provided (responsiveness, clarity, accuracy, appropriateness)
- the *timeliness* of service delivery (speed and availability of service).

Clients' basic rights and responsibilities

- the **right** to review, appeal and complain; to privacy, confidentiality, and to see information related to the service or user
- the **obligation** to treat organisational staff with courtesy; to attend scheduled appointments punctually; to respond to requests for information by the organisation accurately, thoroughly and in a timely manner.

How to make a complaint

A service charter *must* contain information on the feedback and complaints processes. (with attention to the following aspects)

- procedure
- ease of use
- instrument for service improvement

Source: Department of Finance and Administration (2000), pp.9–12.

Last but not least, the authors of the charter should pay attention that the charter follows the specific order of elements as shown above. You may be tempted to be clever and start with the specification of service standards, as a number of participants did in our training seminar in Czech Republic. However, this is confusing from a users' point of view – users want to know first of all what kind of services are provided and how they can get access to those services.

... the authors of the charter should pay attention that the charter follows the specific order of elements as shown above.

3

**Finalising your
draft charter**

THIS CHAPTER SHOWS YOU how to gain ownership for the service charter inside and outside your organisation by consulting with staff and service users on your draft charter. It also gives you a check-list to improve your complaints and suggestions system. Last but not least, it gives you proposals how to communicate your service charter to its target group(s).

A. Consulting effectively with your staff on the draft charter

Even though staff consultations take time, your service charter team will find out that this is time well invested.

There are numerous examples of service charters which are absolutely meaningless to staff since they had no input to the development of the charter.

There are several very good reasons for consulting with your staff on the draft charter:

- The charter has to be owned by front-line staff – they are the ones who will have to make the charter real for users so they need to have a say.
- Middle managers also have to buy into the charter and support changes which will be necessary to meet the targets and commitments of the charter.
- Top managers have to understand how the charter project contributes to the strategic objectives of your organisation (hence the importance of a clearly defined hierarchy of objectives).
- Change management always brings fear and anxiety, therefore staff (and unions) have to understand what the charter project is about.

Depending on the size and organisational culture of your organisation the consultation may be

- **Informal**, e.g. a presentation of the project and discussion with staff in a staff meeting
- **Formal**, e.g. organisation of a written survey.

Given the hierarchical culture in many public agencies in Central and Eastern European Countries, we recommend a written staff survey, which guarantees to staff full anonymity and honest feedback. It should include all members of staff and give them the chance to voice their views.

However, in order for a survey to be successful it should have a response rate of at least 50 % (indeed, if surveys are to have the full trust and ownership of staff, it is even better if the response rate is above 70%). Even with a return rate of 50%, it is necessary to check the statistical representativeness of the sample (e.g. the profile of the respondents according to gender, age, rank).

Such response rates are only possible when the questionnaire is “fit for purpose” as far as the length, wording of the questions and contents of the questions is concerned and when the survey is prepared and organised properly. In particular, it is absolutely necessary to build up an atmosphere of trust. Some of the ways in which this can be achieved include:

Box 7: Organising the employee survey the right way

Awareness raising within the local authority:

- Letter of announcement (or announcement in the staff journal) should be disseminated approximately 14 days before the questionnaire is distributed
- Organisation of a staff meeting as a kick-off event immediately before the questionnaire is distributed

Visible and credible commitment of the leadership:

- Endorsement of the announcement in the staff journal

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→ Attendance and a supporting introductory statement at the staff meeting

Clear support from the middle-management:

- Middle managers should explicitly state their expectation of a high participation rate in the staff survey at staff meetings following the circulation of the announcement
- Explanation of the survey whenever necessary and underscoring of its importance
- The middle-management should show concern regarding the completion of the questionnaires:
 - > Exercise gentle pressure (ask about progress, etc.)
 - > Shelter employees from external pressures while they fill out the questionnaires
 - > Arrange a time/date for everyone to fill out the questionnaires simultaneously (this is highly recommended: it reduces friction to a minimum and guarantees maximum participation).

Raising employee expectations that the survey will be impartially undertaken and that the staff suggestions from it will be implemented:

- Set up an Employee Survey Project Team for preparing and conducting the survey and for the announcement of the survey results
- Introduce the Project Team at the staff meeting
- Disseminate a clear and strong assurance from the leadership in the letter of announcement and at the staff meeting that the results of the survey will lead to changes

Clear, and if possible, active support from the staff council(s) and trade unions:

- Co-endorsement of the letter of announcement
- Clear commitment to the survey at the staff meeting, an emphatic call for participation, and stress on the

importance of the survey and the guarantee of anonymity (see below)

Credible guarantee of anonymity:

- Involvement of a neutral third party (whenever possible with competence in all phases of the employee survey), e.g. an academic institution
- Mention the involvement of the third party in the letter of announcement/announcement in staff journal
- Presentation by the third party at the staff meeting, to demonstrate their standing and their ability to achieve neutrality in the process
- Clear presentation of measures taken to secure anonymity when announcing the survey
- Guarantee a “water-tight” set of anonymity measures:
 - > No names on the questionnaire, no numbering or hidden coding of the questionnaires
 - > Ensure an unobserved location for the completion of the questionnaire
 - > In the data processing, limited break down of the answers (as a rule: limit the scope to include one socio-demographic characteristic each, such as sex, age, salary or career profile group, or the division of all the material along the lines of the organization's departments, divisions, etc.)
 - > Destruction of the questionnaires after completion of the analysis
 - > Flexibility in the decision-making process of the project team concerning the selection of the best way to follow-up in the case of an insufficient response rate (e.g. a letter of reminder or oral request to all employees or to the middle-management; formal request in the staff newspaper)
 - > When necessary, decisions need to be made about extensions of dates/times. It must be ensured that changes are communicated to all employees.

Source: Klages, Helmut and Löffler, Elke (2002), Giving Staff of Local Authorities a Voice: A Checklist of Success Factors for Staff Surveys, Local Governance, University of Birmingham, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 13–22.

Case Example 4: How the old people's home in Luhačovice organised a staff survey with a response rate of 95 percent

In 2006, the director of the Old People's Home in Luhačovice, Ms Semelová joined the pilot project on service charters. At the time, the project team had produced a first draft of the charter and the agency was also confronted with a new National Quality Standard of Social Care (NQSSC) to be introduced in the agency in 2007. Therefore, Ms Semelová decided to carry out a staff survey both on the contents of the service charter and on the new quality standard. The problem was that the new quality standards were quite general because they had to apply to different kinds of social care institutions. Therefore, the charter was seen as a useful tool to define their own targets to raise the quality of social care in the Old People's Home in Luhačovice while at the same time, ensuring that the organisation's targets are in line with future legal obligations.

The survey was conducted in two steps: First, several round table discussions with staff were conducted which helped to build trust and interest. After the first round of consultation, staff were asked to fill out a written questionnaire which focussed on both the charter and the new quality standard. The questionnaire was administered in such a way that no one could identify the respondents. The director Ms Semelová thought that the anonymity of the questionnaire was a great benefit because it ensured reliable information to inform further work on the charter and the introduction of the new national quality standard.

B. Consulting effectively with the target group(s) of your charter

Consultation with staff is only the first step in finalising your charter. In most cases, it will be very beneficial to consult with your service users as well.

Consultation with service users on your draft service charter will help you

- to judge quality from the perspective of service users
- to check whether the language of your charter is user-friendly
- to set ambitious targets and not just targets which are easy to achieve by your agency
- to design new services which matter to service users and improve their quality of life (see the case example below).

Case Example 5: The consultation of the UK Passports Agency

'We have got much better at asking our customers what they want,' says Christine Nickles, Head of Communication for the UK Passport Service. The service carried out a survey of customers in 2000 to see if the usual turnaround time of ten days satisfied their needs. The survey showed there was a demand for a special, faster service, and that people were willing to pay extra for it. As a result, the UK Passport Service now offers a one-week and a one-day service. 'People want a fast and responsive service,' says Christine. 'Some people will need their passports particularly quickly, and by asking them we discovered a demand for two time spans, a week and a day, and we were able to develop the service to meet those needs. People were prepared to pay extra for this, which means other customers aren't subsidising the faster service.'

Source: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/case_studies/, as of 12 December 2006

Are the promises made in your charter really what your service users want? You may think that professionals know best what their users need and what is good for them. However, typically, “there is a fundamental difference of perspective between service providers, who are asking ‘Am I providing a good service?’ and that of service users who are asking ‘What needs to happen to improve my quality of life?’” (Harding in Gaster and Squires, 2003 p.177). For example, in the United Kingdom, there has been a lot of concern about the quality of medical and nursing care that many older people receive but what most elderly people want is ‘help, not care’. Another example, where professionals misjudged what customers want is presented in the box below.

Case Example 6: Setting the wrong targets

Many UK agencies believed initially that it is important to answer the phone quickly. Therefore, many agencies set the target to answer any phone call at the latest after 6 rings.

However, consultations with the public revealed that this is not important to citizens. What citizens care about most is that the person who answers the phone is competent and can help them effectively or at least pass them to another person who can deal with the request.

We hope that we convinced you of the benefits of asking the opinion of users on your draft charters. But how should you organise the consultation?

There are several elements to take into account when deciding on the appropriate approach:

- the resources available for the consultation
- the timescale you have available
- the capacity of the respondents.

The overview of consultation tools and methods may help you to judge which approach best fits to your situation and context.

Box 8: Strengths and limitations of consultation methods

Surveys

- **Positive:** useful to assess satisfaction of users with services, in particular if survey is repeated
- **Positive:** results have high legitimacy if sample is representative
- **Negative:** surveys are costly and require staff who are familiar with survey analysis
- **Negative:** surveys give a passive role to respondents and make it difficult to trigger qualitative information (the number of open questions has to be limited)

Citizen panels

Representative sample of about 1000–2000 people whose views are sought regularly on different issues

- **Positive:** Panel only needs to be constituted once (1/3 of the participants are renewed every two years)
- **Positive:** Panel allows quick consultations, in particular if done on-line
- **Negative:** Typically, there is no interaction between the agency staff and the members of the panel.

Focus groups

Focus groups consist of a small sample of users who may or may not be representative depending on the design of the focus group.

- **Positive:** focus groups allow the discussion of more complex issues, the interaction between focus group participants can be used to produce constructive ideas for improvement
 - **Positive:** focus groups do not cost much, even though a small financial reward should be given to the participants
 - **Negative:** The facilitator of the focus groups has to be independent and familiar with interview techniques
-

Case Example 7: The consultation of the Department of Environment in the City of Pelhřimov on its draft charter.

The Department of Environment in the City of Pelhřimov in the Czech Republic, headed by Mr Josef Slavětínský, decided that they want to improve services for fishermen, who are represented by Český svaz rybářů (Czech Fisherman Association). The Czech Fisherman Association became the single the most important stakeholder and were always consulted during the preparation and finalization of the charter. Their input was crucial and resulted in many substantial changes of the charter. Consultations were initiated by Mr Slavětínský, in the form of roundtable discussions. The most important change was development of another three service points in three different towns where fishermen could pay the fee and obtain fishing permits, shortening the waiting time. Fishing permit applications were also allowed in a foreign language (German) for foreign tourists because the southern part of the Czech Republic (where the City of Pelhřimov is located) shares a border with Austria.

Of course, consultations are never easy. In particular, this applies to consultations with hard-to-reach groups such as disabled people and young people. Even though there is no blue-print for reaching out to hard-to-reach groups one basic success factor is to contact them through people they trust. Therefore, a service manager or mayor may not always be the best person to call a meeting or to sign the cover letter of a survey. In most cases, it will be much more effective to speak through the voice of others, e.g. by asking the president of a self-help group to convene a meeting or work with a young staff member who organises youth activities. In brief, imagination and ... consultations are never easy.

creativity will be more important than hierarchy in reaching out to service users, in particular when it comes to potential users who do not come to your agency.

Furthermore, there may be hesitation among staff to pay much attention to the views of service users. Therefore, it is important to establish from the very beginning the objectives of the consultation and to explain both to service managers and service users:

- What information you want to find out
- What you are going to do with the information.
- How you will give feedback to the consultees.

The issue of **feed-back to the people consulted is most important**. Most consultees certainly don't expect that all of their views and wishes will be accepted by the agency – but **they definitely want to have confirmation that they have been listened to and that their view has been taken into account**. Yet, the need for

the need for this simple feedback is often forgotten.

this simple feedback is often forgotten. Typically service users hear much later about a decision taken by the managers or elected members, with no reference to the results of the consultation exercise and no explanation of the decision itself.

Again, 'it doesn't have to be like this'. Whatever form of feedback you consider as appropriate, at the very least a thank you and a brief summary of what proposals have been taken on board and which ones could not be considered in the service charter will satisfy most consultees, increase their trust in your organization encourage them to believe that the exercise has been worth while.

C. Implementing a complaints and suggestion system

Before you decide to publish your charter you should check whether your complaints system works properly. It may well be the case that the number of complaints increases after the publication of the service charter. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the service concerned does not live up to the standards promised – the very existence of a service charter may give service users the feeling that they are taken seriously and being listened to, encouraging them to complain when previously they would have assumed it was not worth the effort.

The following quote of a leaflet for staff of a local authority in Scotland gives you an idea of the importance of complaint management for an organisation.

Box x: The importance of handling complaints

Aberdeenshire Council have produced a leaflet for staff called *Handling Complaints: a procedure for employees*. The opening paragraph summarises the importance of complaints:

Complaints can be a useful source of information about how others see us, and how we are serving our customers. Whether the complaint is justified or not, the person making the complaint feels aggrieved with the council. Dealing with complaints courteously and effectively can do much to restore the person's confidence in the council for the future.

Contact: Dr Vilma McAdam, Policy Officer (Quality and Improvement), Aberdeenshire Council.

Source: <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/1998/complaint/>, as of 12 December 2006.

Therefore, once service users decide to speak up and give you feedback it is important that your agency has a functioning complaints and suggestions system in place. Of course, the way you have to handle complaints may be regulated by legal provisions. Nevertheless, there is always scope for improvement.

In particular, we recommend that you not only encourage users to make complaints but also to give you their suggestions on how your agency should improve the service concerned.

Case Example 8: The complaints and suggestions system of the City of Chomutov

~~Rüdiger: the contents of this box will be sent to you separately.~~

Nevertheless, complaints do make staff feel nervous, and often they are not sure how to behave when complaints are made. Therefore, you may consider it worthwhile to have some staff discussions on how staff should deal with complaints.

It may be helpful to provide staff with a list of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' how to behave properly when customers make a complaint.

Box 9: How to handle complaints

Dos about handling a complaint

- give your name
- take the person who complains seriously
- tell the person what will happen next and the stages of the procedure
- act quickly once the complainant has left
- get their details, e.g. names, addresses, telephone numbers, dates
- listen, get the facts and make notes
- stay calm even if the person gets angry
- be sympathetic and honest
- whenever, possible use the telephone instead of a letter

Don'ts about handling a complaint

- argue with the complainant
- get into a blame conversation
- accept abuse from a complainant, e.g. swearing
- deter people from making a complaint (asking them not to do it, to do it in writing, in person or coming back later)
- consider the complaint as a personal criticism
- use jargon when writing back to the complainant

Source: <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/1998/complaint/>, as of 12 December 2006

Of course, dealing with complaints is never easy, in particular, when you work in an agency where conflicts with service users are quite common. In such cases, it may be useful to train all front-line staff in conflict management.

But complaints are not always voiced in an aggressive tone. Even though we all attach a negative connotation to complaints, they actually provide useful feed-back from service users, provided that the agency manages to put things right. Therefore, service users should be encouraged to voice complaints and suggestions. Indeed, more and more public agencies are starting to recognise that complaints are a valuable source for learning and improving. Some local authorities even encourage citizens to complain as in the case of the City of Arnsberg in Germany.

Case Example 9: Active Complaints Management in the City of Arnsberg in Germany

In 1994 the City of Arnsberg (80,000 inhabitants) in North-Rhine-Westphalia introduced active complaints management. The objective was to encourage citizens to complain in order to obtain a clear picture of the views of citizens on the quality of life and the quality of public services in Arnsberg.

So far there tend to be around 1800 complaints, suggestions, accolades and messages of thanks each year, with an increasing tendency towards telephone and e-mail contacts. The contents of complaints tend to vary seasonally: in winter, snow clearance of roadways and sidewalks are typical subjects, whereas during spring and summer, maintenance and cleanliness of public parks and communal areas are more common. Complaints also often refer to issues like benefit payment, environment and waste, administrative fines, planning and building permissions, asylum, drainage, cemeteries and funerals. The majority of complaints are related to situations where

citizens feel their rights are being infringed. They disagree with decisions taken by the municipality, or they complain about the unfriendliness of the civic employees, or that the decisions were insufficiently explained.

This led to the establishment of a central unit in the local administration to which citizens can address their complaints. The Complaints Unit is directly supervised by the mayor, with a view to achieving short processing times of citizens' complaints and to analysing the complaints in a systematic way. The Complaints Unit also seeks citizens' complaints through adverts in local newspapers (which is why it is **active** complaint management). In the mayor's view, complaints are not an unnecessary administrative burden but rather a kind of "free" consultancy for the town hall – consulting services offered by the citizens in relation to their own affairs.

Results in the City of Arnsberg suggest very positive achievements from active complaints management process. The evidence suggests that it:

- reduces communication barriers,
- enables fast problem-solving,
- allows activation of citizens,
- creates pressure towards citizen-orientation at all levels within the local authority.

In spite of these benefits, it was evident from interviews with staff in Arnsberg that active complaint management was very controversial in the local administration when it was first introduced. Many employees saw it as a control instrument which might lead to punishment and delay promotion. The head of the staff council described the conflict situation in the following way:

"Staff thought that we might now have bloody-minded managers 'who will use the complaints to dump on us'. They have watched this happen to someone else and thought 'I could be set up the same way'. For example,

some experienced engineers who were soon to retire felt put under pressure by street-level colleagues.”

Nevertheless, the mayor learnt quickly from these difficulties. Employees were extensively informed about the objectives of active complaint management. The mayor also made an agreement with the staff council which ensured that the analysis of complaints did not take place at the level of individual employees. Since then, employees have viewed this participatory instrument much more positively, as recent interviews have shown.

Source: Bogumil, Jörg and Vogel, Hans-Josef (2002): The “citizens’ community” Arnsberg in Germany: empowering and enabling citizens, in: Bovaird, Tony, Löffler, Elke and Parrado Diez, Salvador (eds.), *Developing Local Governance Networks in Europe. Local Governance in Europe*. Nomos Verlag, Baden-Baden, pp. 29–40 (out-of-print).

D. Promotion and communication of the charter

Once you have completed the consultations and finalised the text of the charter and made sure that your complaints and suggestions system works, it is time to publish the charter.

Clearly, this step will require cooperation with communications experts inside or outside your organisation, depending on your resources. International experience shows that charters will only be effective if the way in which the charter is presented corresponds to the needs of the target group(s) to which it is addressed. For example, leaflets which are not readily accessible to service users and are only handed out by front-desk staff upon request will not be a very useful communication tool. Again, charters which are printed in a small font will not be read by many elderly people who have difficulties reading small print. Service users will also be little pleased if the charter is printed on bad paper so that they get black fingers when reading it.

You may also consider translating the charter into other languages if your target group includes foreign citizens. For example, the Environment Department of Pelhřimov not only deals with fishermen of Czech nationality but there are also quite a large number of German tourists who apply for a fishing permit each year. Therefore, it is appropriate to make the service charter for applicants of fishing permits available in both languages. However, if your agency deals with many nationalities it may be too resource-consuming to produce multiple translations of a charter. In these cases, it may be sufficient to make the offer to translate the charter upon request. The back page of the service charter for customer contact of the London borough Sutton in the UK shows how the needs of other language groups or service users with disabilities may be addressed. (In the UK, it is estimated that over £200m is currently spent in translating the documents of public sector organisations for the different language groups who live in the UK – and central government is currently discussing if this needs to be significantly increased to ensure getting to everyone who should be able to read these documents).

charters will only be effective if the way in which the charter is presented corresponds to the needs of the target group(s) to which it is addressed.

Case Example 10: The Customer Contact Charter of the London Borough of Sutton (back-page)

Internet:

By connecting to www.sutton.gov.uk and select the payments section.

You can also buy from the cashiers:

Stamps, black sacks and garden sacks.

Further information:

Our opening times are 9.00 - 4.00 except on Wednesday when we will open at 9.30 so staff can receive training.

We welcome comments and suggestions on the services we provide, we will conduct regular customer surveys to gain information on how we can improve.

We have a focus group which meets every three months to discuss service improvements and welcome new members.

This leaflet gives you our promises about the services you can expect from us. We have a commitment to put things right if they go wrong and we welcome suggestions for improving any part of our service. If the service is not as good as we have promised, or if you feel that we have done something wrong, not done something we should have, or treated you unfairly or impolitely, please contact us.

We will confirm that we have received your complaint within three working days and respond to you within seven working days.

However, placing leaflets on customer reception desks is only one way of informing service users about their rights and responsibilities. As the Box below points out, you may consider using a mix of communication channels to raise awareness amongst your target groups about the availability of a service charter. As all communication specialists always stress, you can never communicate too much.

Box 10: Methods of communicating the service charter to service users

Depending on the target group(s) of the charter the marketing strategy may consist of:

- Advertising the charter in the media (local newspaper, radio, TV, local council newsletter...)
- Sending a letter/email from your organisation to households/service users
- Posting the charter on the website of your organisation, ideally in HTML, and downloadable, so that it is easily accessible
- Placing the charter on reception desks in offices and other venues attended by the target group(s) of the charter
- Advertising the service charters on highly visible posters in offices/buildings frequented by service users

In particular, when you introduce the charter you may think of imaginative ways to attract the interest of your target group(s). For example, you may consider organising a quiz about the contents of the service charter, where entrants can win a prize. You may also communicate the charter through intermediaries such as NGOs and leaders of youth clubs. In some cases, it may be useful to organise meetings with your target groups. For example, if you intend

to introduce a service charter for applicants of building permits, your agency could set up a meeting with architects and builders to inform them about their rights and responsibilities when applying for a permit. Last but not least, you may consider a high-profile launch by a mayor or minister or another dignitary to achieve maximum exposure (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000, p. 14).

While you devise your marketing campaign for the target group of your charter, it is important that you do not forget to communicate the final version of your service charter to the staff concerned.

TASK:

The service charter project team should get together with some communication specialists to design a marketing strategy for the service charter. The marketing strategy should be directed to the target group(s) of the charter and staff.

Obviously if you have carried out a staff consultation beforehand, your staff will show much more ownership and openness towards the service charter.

Box 11: Methods of communicating the service charter to staff

Again, it is advisable to use a mix of communication channels to make your staff aware of the introduction of the service charter. This may include:

- Staff meetings with officials who are directly or indirectly affected by the introduction of the charter
 - Sending information by email to staff members
 - Informing staff about the initiative on the intranet/ staff newsletter/other journals addressed to staff
-

4

**How to use a charter for
service improvements**

THIS CHAPTER WILL EXPLAIN HOW TO EVALUATE the performance of public agencies against the promises set out in the charter and how to develop and implement service improvement plans.

A. Monitoring service and quality standards

In many public agencies, the service charter initiative is considered to be completed after the launch of the charter. However, just because your service users are now better informed about what to expect from your agency does not automatically improve the services provided. And if your service users get the picture that your agency does not live up to its standards, and does nothing about it, cynicism among service users and staff will only increase.

Therefore, it is important that the service charter project team continues to meet after the launch of the charter and monitors service and quality standards on a regular basis. In order to make informed judgements how well your agency is doing you should draw information from several sources. Ideally, you should have both objective and subjective performance information.

Bovaird and Löffler (2003) give some examples of both objective and subjective performance indicators in relation to quality of life of users and citizens and achievement of objectives/targets/standards in relation to outcomes (see Box below).

Box 12: Objective and subjective performance indicators

Objective improvements to quality of life of users and citizens

- Improvements in health status
- % of immobile elderly who have increased visits from mobile service providers (e.g. hygiene assistants, chiroprpodists, library staff)
- % of citizens living within five minutes walk of a field, park or other open space

Subjective improvements to quality of life of users and citizens

- % feeling less pain than before
- % of frail elderly people who believe that their level of social interaction with family and friends is improving
- % believing that the quality of their overall environment is improving

Achievement of objectives/targets/standards in relation to outcomes

- % of citizens with lower than WHO recommended levels of obesity –
- % of people with disabilities who are able of living independently (as defined in social care standards)
- % of citizens living in areas where air pollution levels are below EU maximum standards

Source: Bovaird, Tony and Löffler, Elke (2003): "Evaluating the quality of public governance: indicators, models and methodologies", *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 69 No. 3 (2003), pp. 313–328.

4. How to use a charter for service improvements

... a comparison which combines both time series and different organisations will yield most information.

In order to collect objective performance information, the project team must measure performance against the service standards on a regular basis. Depending on whether the performance changes much over time or is rather stable, performance measurement may be undertaken on a weekly, monthly or quarterly basis. The performance data may be compared either between time periods or across organisations. Time series analysis compares past performance with current performance. Cross-section analysis compares the organisation with other organisations. Naturally, a comparison which combines both time series and different organisations will yield most information.

Performance measurement involves the development of an easy-to-use, electronic performance measurement system. If you agency needs to set up a performance measurement system the following template may be helpful in providing a framework to your data collection.

Case Example 11: Performance monitoring system for the service charter for young people of the library of Brno

Area of public sector and public service activity	Key Performance Indicator	Example of a target	Notes on scope of PI	Collection method	Stakeholders likely to be interested	Range of Deviation in the PI during the past 3 years
Library and information services	> % of events for 10–15 age group	>30 % of all events for class 4–9 at each library	per year	statistics	Children 10–15 years Teachers Parents	48.3 % of events 17.5 % of visitors 13 % readers in the 10–15 age group
	> % of participation in the library activities	> 30 % of visitors of this age group				
	> % of readers in the 10–15 age group	> 20 % of readers in the 10–15 age group				
	> % of items purchased suitable for 10–15 age group	increase purchase volume of books for youth from 10–15 years of age group	per year	statistics	Children 10–15 years Teachers Parents	21.7 % of books 34 % of periodicals
	> books, > periodicals	> 25 % purchase of books > 36 % purchase of magazines				
	> number of free internet spaces available	increase the number of PCs for the public by 10	per year	statistics records	Children 10–15 years Parents Schools	110 PCs
		distribute new information to e-mail addresses, both individuals and schools – 75 % of 10–15 year-old readers	per year	Management information system	Children 10–15 years Parents Schools	new form of service
	% of employees who take part in a training programme on children and young people services	58 % of employees in services	per year	records	Employer	48 % of employees in services
% satisfaction with the library services by users of 10–15 age group	75 % of users should satisfied or very satisfied	Every two years	Survey	Staff Children	(does not apply yet)	

As the performance measurement framework of the library in Brno in Czech Republic shows, performance indicators may refer to different parts of the management cycle (inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes).

Box 13: Typology of performance indicators

Input indicators are those indicators that measure the extent of resources which an organisation has available or commits to meet its objectives. Personnel, infrastructure, finance and premises are typical inputs. For example, one such performance indicator in the example above is: % of employees who take part in a training programme focussing on children and young people services.

Activity indicators measure the extent or volume of the processes which convert resources into outputs: e.g. % of events which are designed for 10–15 year old library users.

Output indicators refer to the results of activities: e.g. percentage of young people aged 10–15 years of all library users or the number of free internet stations available in the library.

Finally, *outcome indicators* refer to the impact of the service or programme among service users and the wider community: e.g. satisfaction of young library users with the services provided; increase of school performance of young people in the City of Brno. It is evident that outcome indicators are the most ambitious ones. First, it may take quite a long time until the desired impact becomes visible or measurable. Second, the impact will be influenced by other organisations and the external environment as well. In other words, your organisation alone cannot control the impact alone. Therefore, **outcomes are often not measured**. However, politicians, the media and the wider public will always be most interested in outcomes and not in specific performance information of individual services.

Typically, when public agencies develop a performance measurement system most performance indicators will focus on inputs and activities initially. As public managers become more self-confident with performance measurement, they tend to make more effort to focus on results. However, the fact that outcomes cannot be controlled by one agency alone should not lead you to the conclusion that outcomes are not relevant. Desired levels of outcomes should be agreed between the various public agencies involved, which should then take joint responsibility for achieving them.

It is not a good strategy to provide as much information as possible to all stakeholders.

So when you report performance information you should be aware that different stakeholders are interested in different dimensions of performance. It is not a good strategy to provide as much information as possible to all stakeholders. As emphasised in sub-chapter 3 D, communication must be target-group oriented. Furthermore, the attention span of most target-groups is quite short. So the performance reports should be short (maximum 2 pages) and reader-friendly. It is not important to report every detail but to show major trends, changes and outliers.

Task:

The project team should devise a basic performance measurement system which may be based on the template provided in the case example. If a performance measurement system already exists in your organisation it is best to integrate the performance indicators and targets relating to the service charter in the existing system.

Once you have specified the performance indicators, you should define the **target** as explained in sub-chapter 2C. Some of the targets you may have set to deliver the promises made in the charter may be written explicitly into the charter (e.g. maximum waiting

or process times). However, there may be other targets which are of less interest to service users (e.g. unit costs).

As mentioned before, determining targets is not an easy task. In particular, in the initial development stage of a performance management system it is quite common – as occurred in the case of some of the participants of the pilot project in Czech Republic – to set 100% as a target for many indicators. The reasoning was that their agency had a legal obligation to deliver a specific service. Therefore, it was assumed that the agency had no other choice than fulfilling the legal obligation at 100%.

However, international experience in performance measurement tells us that 100% achievement of a target typically means that a target has been set too low so that it is easy to fulfil but does not drive performance improvement. Once you have reached the 100% benchmark in two or three consecutive years, you might consider changing the standard, the performance indicator or both. For instance, if you say that the **post system will deliver 100% of the letters in ten days**, this will not help you to get a) a standard that is of relevance for customers as ten days is too much to wait for a letter to come; b) failures of the service and problems related to speed. Therefore, it would be helpful if you start by saying something like **the post system will deliver 75% of the letters in two days**. The 75% figure will be a starting point from which you can set targets for incoming years according to performance. You are likely to increase it by a few per cent each year. On the other hand, if you set a 100% target but it is never reached, it may mean that the target is unrealistic, which is likely to mean that it will have demoralising effects on staff and lead to cynicism on the part of users – then it should be set lower.

Apart from objective performance information, we also need to analyse subjective performance information. Ideally, several data collection methods should be used (see the following sub-chapter).

B. Collecting subjective performance information

Quality assessments help you to know what obstacles and drivers of quality can be encountered in the organisation. In the last decade, many different tools have been launched to assess quality and performance of organisations: self-assessment (partly EFQM (European Foundation of Quality Management) and CAF (Common Assessment Framework), Charter Mark Self-Assessment Tool; inspectors and external auditors (ISO (International Standard Organisation, and partly EFQM); peer review by similar organisation and 360° appraisal by relevant stakeholders (Governance Model of Governance International). All these approaches could serve the purposes of assessing the progress achieved by the service thanks to the implementation of the service charter.

However, we have selected the Charter Mark Self-Assessment Tool because it specifically focuses on the results obtained through the service charter. Before examining the main features of the Charter Mark Self-Assessment Tool, other instruments will be critically examined.

Self-assessment approaches develop ownership of reforms within the organisation, but at the same time they can be myopic and self-deluding. As self-assessment is undertaken by the same persons that work and have introduced changes in the organisation, their assessment of the organisation performance might be too much influenced by their daily experience. The results of such an assessment might not be trusted by users and other stakeholders, because they may have the temptation to paint a too rosy picture of the organisation. Therefore, many organisations decide to have an external assessment (ISO and EFQM are examples of this).

External assessments require the site visits of 'auditors or inspectors', who question the design and the implementation of services and the organisational fit. They use their outside view and different experiences to ask 'hard questions' to the organisation. Their questions ought to help managers, but inspectors are not always trusted by the agency for several reasons – e.g. because they have little understanding of the context, or they are superficial or too costly in relation to the results they come up with in the assess-

ment. Besides, the results are not necessarily of importance for external actors.

Peer review by similar organisation might be of help if there is a structured approach (see the peer review process of Improvement and Development Agency in the UK). It might also create more expectations than real results, because peers tend to identify with the problems faced by the audited organisation and, although they are independent, they might become more polite than critical. It is not clear whether the results of the assessment are of relevance for different stakeholders.

Finally, the 360° appraisal by relevant stakeholders is also an independent source of assessment that relies mostly on judgements of managers of the organisation and other stakeholders. There is a triangulation of the views from different relevant actors on a service or a policy and its results. The results of the assessment are likely to be considered relevant by the agency as well as by different stakeholders. Furthermore, these results can be embedded into ongoing learning relationship between the agency and its stakeholders

None of the previous approaches should be undertaken by themselves for ever. A combination of two or more approaches (depending on the nature of the service) could help the organisations on the road to improvement. As it will be suggested here, you could start with self- assessment (for instance, the Charter Mark Self-Assessment Tool) but should not rely solely on repeat self-assessments because the capacity to learn will diminish each time, if a fresh outside view is not brought in. After a while, you should invite professional external auditors (e.g. certified EFQM assessor or similar) that can help you to uncover black spots that you and your team might have overlooked. From time to time you should initiate a 360° appraisal by asking your stakeholders (actual and potential clients, politicians, business, etc.) about their perceptions of service quality. Finally, try to get organised in your field with other agencies or municipalities so that peer reviews can be carried out and discussed in order to identify common problems and solutions.

The Charter Mark Self-Assessment Toolkit (www.chartermark.gov.uk) helps organisation to improve their customer service and to decide whether and when to apply for Charter Mark. The Charter Mark is a standard of customer service and also an instrument to improve quality in the delivery of services to users. The self-assessment toolkit is devised for beginners and for those who are familiar with the Charter Mark.

Task:

Evaluate the customer-orientation of your organisation against the criteria of the Charter Mark Self-Assessment Tool. Check the points you get at [web site] and write down those weaknesses that you have identified

C. Drafting service improvement action plans (SIAPs)

A SIAP specifies how to implement improvements for priority services after analysing strengths and weaknesses in the way in which your agency has implemented your service charter. The diagnosis should be based on several sources of information:

- A self-assessment carried out by the service improvement team (e.g. based on the tool of the Charter Mark Unit in the United Kingdom)
- A user survey which should be carried out once a year
- Complaints and suggestions received by service users
- Consultation with a standing user panels, focus groups etc.

The SIAP has several elements that help you to plan the improvements needed by the service (see the box below).

Box 14: The main elements of SIAP

1. The **introduction** explains why you have decided to draft a SIAP for a specific priority and relates the priority chosen for service improvement to the service charter.
 2. The key **stakeholders** which are relevant to the service improvement concerned should be identified. Your organisation should also try to identify external stakeholders such as partner organizations and service users.
 3. **Specific proposals** with stages should be outlined for the next 6 months, medium-term (6 months–5 years) and long-term (5–30 years).
 4. Your organization should describe the **support system** (individuals, organisations and groups will be engaging, how and at what stage).
 5. An analysis of how current ways of working or **business processes** have to change to develop better services for your service users (and enable current non-users to use the services they are entitled to)
 6. **Organisational development** outlines staff training which is necessary to help them to provide better services. Also outlines what other investments in the service may be necessary (e.g. ICT or other equipment or premises).
 7. **Performance Management and Accountability** sets out a range of key indicators to measure the success of the plan and defines who will be responsible for monitoring progress of the implementation of the SIAP.
 8. **Financial implications** – this analysis sets out how much the service improvements will cost and how they will be financed
-

4. How to use a charter for service improvements

Case Example 12: The Service Improvement Plan for Legal Services of the London Borough Barking and Dagenham (excerpt of one priority area)

	Improvement Required	Priority	Key Actions	Timescale	Outputs demonstrating progress	Outcome	Resources	Lead
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Example: The delivery of these actions will result in: Provide Members and officers with clear knowledge and understanding in relation to governance arrangements, their role and responsibilities

16	Improved understanding of Governance issues by Members	Short	Prepare information pack	June 2006	Improved understanding by Members of Governance issues	Greater understanding of Legal/ Monitoring Officers Role	Existing	LMT
17	To facilitate the provision of identified training for Members and Clients	Short	Enable Members and clients retraining delivery	On going	Members and Client Departments empowered to improve legal understanding	Improved issue understanding and awareness by Members and Client Departments. Produce a structured plan and liaise with Rossana Kendall	Existing	Business Unit

Example: The delivery of these actions will result in: Consideration being given to a partnership approach to service delivery with options for delivery considered and implemented

18	Explore the possibility of working in partnership with the public sector to improve service provision/effectiveness	Medium	SWOT analysis Business viability	January 2007	Analysis of information from SWOT decide if cost-effective, viable and value for money.	Decision made as to whether or not cost effective, viable and VfM To do a market testing study	Existing	LMT
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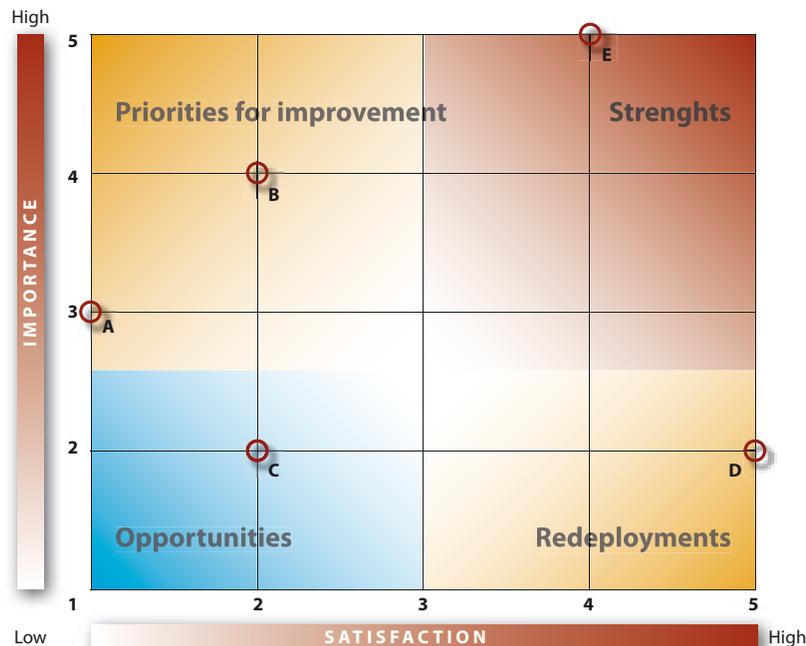
Example: The delivery of these actions will result in: Alignment of service and financial planning through case management systems, ensuring resources can be redirected as service priorities change

19	Explore the pros and cons of a case management system, including cost and benefit	Medium	Consider information required, outputs, costs & functions. Prepare a business case	(<6-9 months)	SWOT analysis completed and decision made	Decision made as to whether or not cost effective, viable and VfM	Existing	LMT
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4. How to use a charter for service improvements

In particular, in the first year of applying the service charter in your organization, the analysis of performance information may point to many areas which need improvement. So where to get started? Obviously, it is always a danger to start up too many 'building sites' in an organization or to start with those improvements which are easy to achieve but not necessarily valued by service users.

Therefore, it is important to focus first on 1–2 priorities for service improvement. A service improvement matrix can help you in this. The matrix allows you to visualize potential areas for service improvement based on satisfaction surveys. By plotting the two different ratings on a two-dimensional grid, it can be quickly determined which improvements are both necessary (low satisfaction ratings) and important for service users (high importance ratings) (see the graph below).



Source: http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/si-as/tools-outils/tools-outils04_e.asp, as of 12 December 2006.

The four quadrants of the matrix help you to identify the priorities for improvement.

Priorities for Improvement. Service elements here have low satisfaction levels, but are the service dimensions which are also the most important to clients. These are the service elements that require *immediate* attention.

Strengths. This contains those service elements that the client considers as important and has a high level of satisfaction. *No improvement* is required on this element.

Redeployment? Elements in this quadrant have high satisfaction levels, but are not important to clients. No improvement is required to these service elements, or *the opportunity may exist to reallocate of resources* in support of other improvement priorities, although the high satisfaction levels may be useful for marketing purposes.

Longer-term question marks. Clients have low levels of satisfaction with these elements, but they are also not important. Improvements on these elements are *not a priority* at the moment. There may again be opportunities here for redeployment of resources away from these services.

5

**How to make service
improvements sustainable**



THIS CHAPTER WILL MAKE YOU AWARE of some pitfalls to avoid when implementing your SIAP(s) and show you how to go beyond a one-time service improvement.

Even though the SIAP will give the organisation to become clearer as to who is supposed to do what by when, the existence of a SIAP does not guarantee implementation. In practice, there are many obstacles to the implementation of a SIAP. Box 15 shows ten common reasons why this happens. It is worth noticing how each of these reasons for failure is connected in some way with a failure to co-operate.

Box 15: Ten ways in which quality improvement projects sometimes fail to be sustainable

1. They are political pet projects (sometimes launched to gain publicity at some significant time such as an election). Being identified with a particular politician or party, they are ditched when that individual moves on or that party loses power.
2. They run up against the sensitivities of the upper level officials when the latter realize that quality methods involve co-decision-making (with rank-and-file staff, clients, stakeholders) in ways that apparently reduces their hierarchical authority.
3. Similarly to 2 above, in highly professionalized organizations such as hospitals or universities, quality schemes wither away if they appear to be separate from or rivals to existing professional procedures for ensuring standards. The other occupational groups may use the new methods but the top professionals ignore them or actively resist participation.
4. The initial choice of technique is inappropriate for the particular organizational context. For example, an

elaborate, form-filling approach is chosen for a group of staff who have traditionally enjoyed high discretion, or a system that depends on exact measurement is suddenly applied to an organization which has previously used few if any quantitative measures.

5. Improvement schemes are launched with special, additional/earmarked staff and/or money, and when the additional support disappears, the project fades away
6. Those launching the initiative make great claims for it early on, promising 'transformation' 'empowerment' etc. When the actual results are much more modest other staff lose trust in the leaders, and it becomes very difficult to 'embed' the initiative. This is particularly likely to happen when a project is visibly led by consultants from outside the organization.
7. They rely on trained staff but the training is once-only, and the trained staff subsequently move on to other posts or organizations. Gradually there is no-one left who knows how to do it.
8. They never manage to spread from the enthusiastic minority to the unenthusiastic majority. So they don't take root, and once the (originally enthusiastic) minority gets busy with other things they gently fade away.
9. Schemes are succeeded by another, newer reform fashion. This often happens in high-intensity reform countries such as the UK or the USA. The result has often been 'reform fatigue'.
10. Last, but not least, schemes become bureaucratized. They become box-ticking, formal exercises, only loosely coupled (if at all) to actual results. So they do survive, but only as organizational deadweight. This has happened to some public sector annual appraisal systems.

Source: Pollitt, Christopher; Bouckaert, Geert and Löffler, Elke (2006): Making quality sustainable: co-design, co-decide, co-produce, co-evaluate. Report produced for the 4th Quality Conference for Public Administration, Tampere, Finland.

Some of these obstacles may sound familiar to you. Therefore, your service charter project will require a lot of ownership within and outside your organization if you want to avoid that the publication of the service charter is the end of the service charter project.

In particular, service charters will only drive improvements and produce benefits for service users if ...

- Your managers and staff look at services from the point of view of service users.
- Your agency works with service users (e.g. through establishment of permanent user panels, regular focus group sessions, user surveys etc.)
- Your agency works with its partners, using their expertise and mobilising their resources
- Managers change the present hierarchical culture and encourage INDEPENDENT thinking by their staff and team work.

Having said there is no particular virtue in the continued use of a service charter 'for the sake of continuity' – when the context and problems to be solved change, the leaders who are needed are also likely to change and the appropriate tool may therefore change as well. Indeed, there are now many public agencies in the UK which no longer use service charters but are seeking for national accreditation of the customer service through the Charter Mark Scheme. So service charters are not a tool "for all seasons".

Therefore, it is important that the choice of a service charter as a quality improvement tool is based on a sound analysis of the needs of your organization and not by what are perceived fashions and trends in your country or in Europe. At the same time, we would like to encourage you to learn from the pilot initiative in Czech Republic and to get in touch with the pilots. Only by doing so, it will be possible to avoid mistakes which have been made elsewhere and to increase the standards of public service quality in Europe. Our motto in European public services should be 'Look, learn, improve!' and we wish your organization good fortune in its commendable efforts to do this.

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Recommended Literature

Gaster, Lucy and Squires, Amanda (2003): Providing Quality in the Public Sector. A practical approach to improving public services. Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, 292 pages.

The book is very good at explaining a citizen-centred approach for improving the quality of public services. In particular part II of this book will give you further guidance in how to develop a quality management system.

Cabinet Office (1998): *How to deal with complaints.* <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/1998/complaint/>

This site which is no longer updated offers a practical guide of how to set a complaint system. It also has many examples of organisations that have implemented this powerful tool. Each example offers you a tip on how to organise the system.

Department of Finance and Administration (2000) Client Service Charter Principles for the Australian Government. <http://www.apsc.gov.au/charters/>

The document sets out very clearly the different parts that a service charter should have. The text is divided into four parts: what a service charter should contain, how to develop a charter, how to maintain and review a charter, what to monitor and how to report. However, the guidelines are written for public agencies in Australia and do not always fit the context of public agencies in CEE countries.

Oldham city council (s.d): *A Guide to Better Consultation* www.oldham.gov.uk/consultation_guide.pdf

The guide has been produced for the officers of the city council for undertake effective consultation exercises. The text helps you to plan a consultation and decide which technique will suit your purposes.

Zeithaml, Valarie A., Parasuraman, A. and Berry, Leonard L. (1990): *Delivering quality service. Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations.* The Free Press, New York and Toronto, 226 pages.

Building on seven years of thorough research on service quality, this book presents a practical model to improve service quality. By comparing customer perceptions with customer expectations the authors enable quality managers to understand potential causes of service quality shortfalls and to deal with those gaps. The SERVQUAL tool of the authors' is widely used in the public and private sectors across Europe to improve customer satisfaction.

