

How is Public Satisfaction with Local Government reducing when CPA ratings show improvement?

This paraphrases a comment made by Sir Michael Lyons (Chair, Lyons Inquiry into Local Government) at the Local Government Association's "Driving Improvement" Conference earlier this year.

SHOULD THERE BE A CORRELATION AND WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF THIS MISALIGNMENT?

So, public satisfaction and voting patterns going one way and "internal" measures of performance going another! Does it really matter? Well yes, if you believe, as we do, that true focused improvement comes when there is clear alignment between internal measures of performance, outputs and outcomes and customer requirements. Without this alignment, staff and managers are pulled in too many directions and there is no strategic, operational or improvement focus.

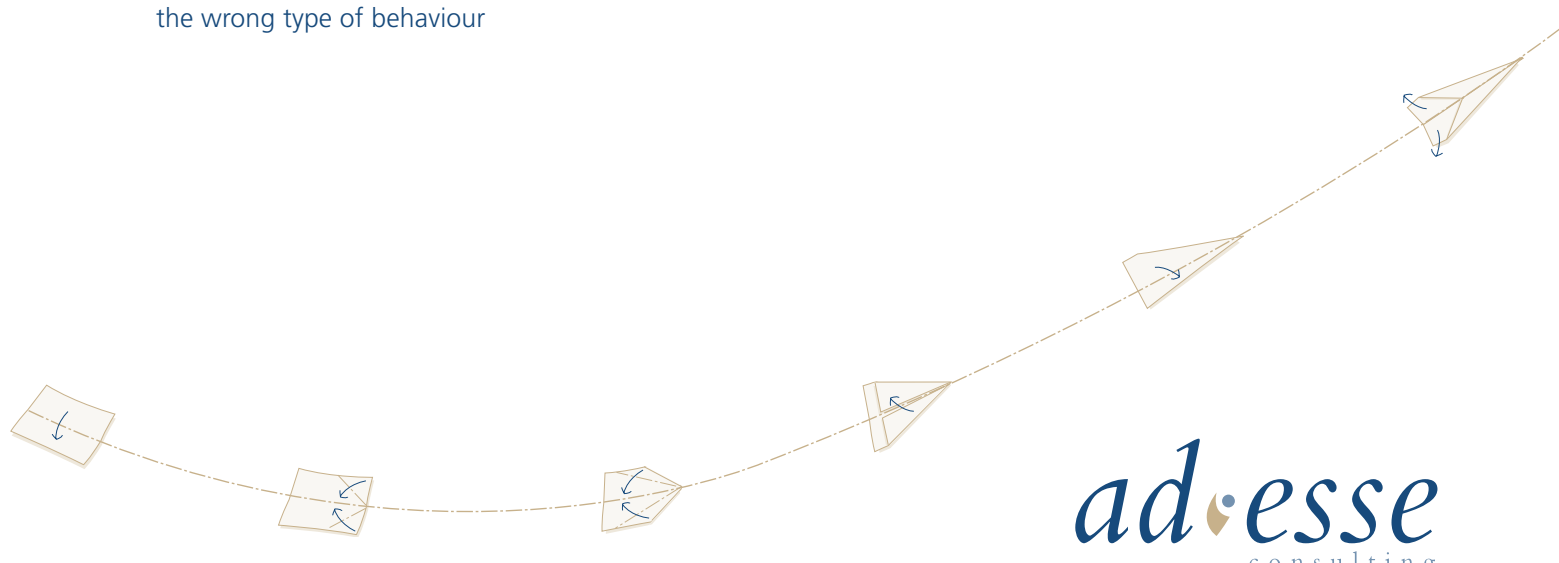
Put simply, if the CPA examines issues and measures which mean nothing to local people then you will clearly get a mismatch (and the direction of travel of the measures would suggest more effort is focused on improving centrally dictated measures than locally driven public measures of satisfaction).

ARE LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS AN ANSWER?

Like any approach, they could be, but only if the approach is developed and implemented correctly.

There are three immediate concerns as you scan the guidance on creation of your "LAA" and the type of measures suggested:

1. The link to locally driven needs can be tenuous and there appears to be no systematic process for ensuring "customer input"
2. It's not always clear what processes a local authority would have in place to deliver many of the targets and what level of influence they have over the target
3. Some of the targets are so poorly defined they'd struggle to drive any type of behaviour, or they would drive the wrong type of behaviour



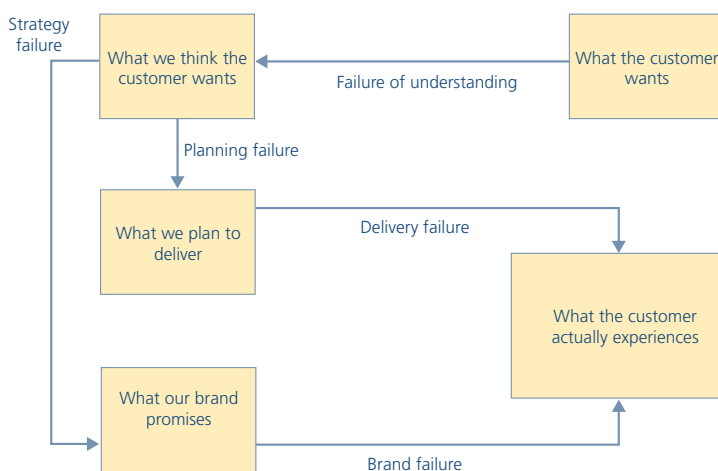
NATIONAL PRIORITIES VS. LOCAL COMMUNITY NEEDS – MIND THE GAP!

As customers, it's often easy for us to spot the gaps that exist between the promises that organisations make and the service we actually receive.

Sometimes the gaps are caused through the capability of the organisation's people, some are due to processes that clearly aren't "joined up", and some are more simply that the organisation doesn't understand the customer's needs!

There's also a huge difference between customer satisfaction surveys (are you happy with x) and customer research (would you like x, y or z?). How well do your performance measures focus on the issues that are important to the community and customers and what is your process for identifying gaps?

We use a simple model to help us identify and diagnose the nature of these gaps:



The first gap is the organisation's failure to understand what the customer actually wants, so that the interpretation of requirements is then flawed. This might be caused by a simple lack of customer requirements analysis, or lack of community research. Getting this wrong may cause two further failures; firstly, developing strategies and making organisation (or political) promises that don't align with the customer's needs, or secondly, developing internal plans to produce "the wrong thing".

We're probably all familiar with examples of inappropriate promises, or delivery plans, such as the banks who advertised that they will answer your 'phone call within 3 rings, when what you really want is error-free statements; or the railway operators who painted their stations and trained their staff in customer care, when what customers actually wanted was on-time train services.

...or the LAA which measures the percentage of individuals consuming five portions of fruit and vegetables a day when the community actually wanted ?????

The other two gaps are a) failing to deliver what you planned to deliver and b) failing to live up to your brand promise(s). Either of these are seen as actual experiences by the customer and are the two areas where customer complaints may arise, or where customer satisfaction and loyalty are destroyed.

The causes of these failures are, however, rooted in the other three gaps.

Whilst it would be overly simplistic to suggest you simply need to ask customers what they want then deliver it, if you do not understand needs and why gaps in perception remain, then you will never truly balance national vs. local requirements.

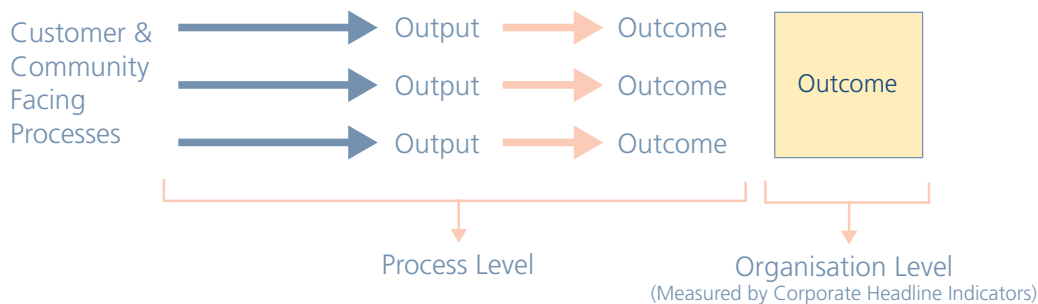
However, even if you completely understand local community needs and are able to balance with centrally driven targets, you still need you make it all happen! Setting the right targets and measures is only the first step...

MEASURING ISSUES YOU HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE OVER AND / OR NO PROCESSES IN PLACE TO DELIVER

Outputs and outcomes are only delivered by people and processes. We've worked with several Local Authorities and partnerships which had measures and targets in place, but with no process to deliver!

The gap between delivery and "rhetoric", or political promises, in the longer term has to damage the democratic process.

Processes, Outputs, Outcomes



We use some basic principles to ensure alignment and delivery:

- Outcomes are about "Desired Performance"
- Outcomes can therefore have "Metrics" associated with them (e.g. Corporate Headline Indicators, or some high-level BVPIs)
- Processes deliver "Outputs" (to "Customers")
- The Quality, Timeliness and Quantity of Outputs contribute to Outcomes
- The Quality, Timeliness and Performance of Processes contribute to Outcomes
- There may be "one-to-many", or "many-to-one" relationships between Processes and Outcomes

The following shows an example of some possible linkages:

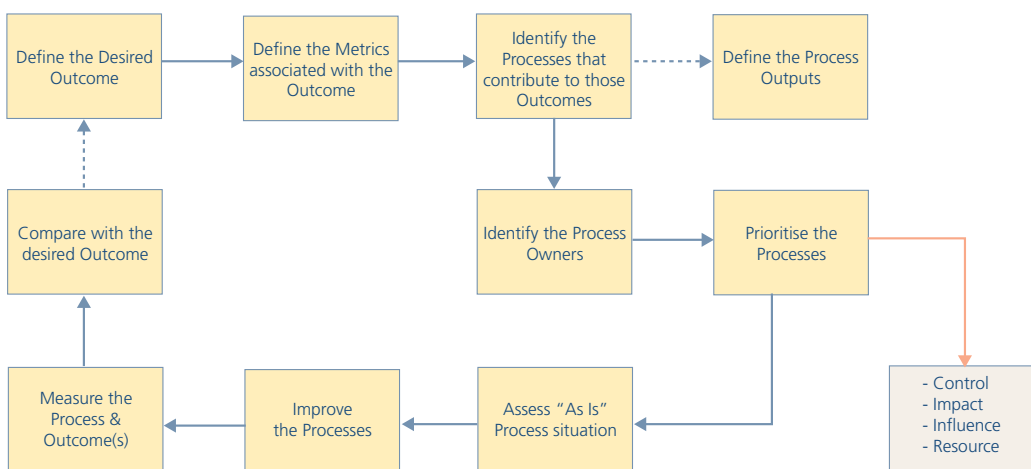
Corporate Strategic Objective – To reduce crime and improve the safety of the community
Outcome – A sustained reduction in road accident casualties
Measure - Fatal / serious road accident casualties per 100,000 population
Level of Influence Rating – High
Processes:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Record and analyse road accident casualty information (to assist with identifying service priorities) 2. Issue traffic orders 3. Introduce safety cameras on roads (to reduce excessive speeding) 4. Undertake educational programmes (with children on the importance of road safety) 5. Introduce local schemes (to improve the safety of the community) 6. Operate a school crossing service (for children travelling to and from school)

You cannot achieve the outcome unless you have processes in place to do so! We'd love to see the processes in place to achieve some of the possible LAA targets suggested in the guidance!!

...such as the LAA which measures the number of emergency unscheduled bed days occupied by a person aged 75 or over.

You need a clear approach to ensure outcomes drive measures, which in turn drive processes and improvement.

POORLY DEFINED MEASURES WHICH DRIVE NO CHANGE, OR THE WRONG TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR



It's essential to have processes in place, but processes are operated by people. If we accept the principle that "what gets measured gets done" then it's essential that we measure the right things.

Poorly defined measures may drive no change, or worse still, the wrong type of behaviour.

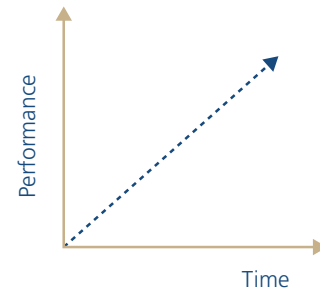
...such as the LAA which measures the increase in percentage of people who feel informed about what is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour in their local area

You could actually get 100% of people who feel informed about what is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour in their local area...all of whom feel the answer is nothing is being done!

Driving the wrong type of behaviour is even worse. An example of this was the revelation that the Governments target to be seen by a GP in 48 hours had driven surgeries to advise people who were happy to wait for an appointment in a few days, to ring back on the morning they were able to see the doctor, as they couldn't do advance bookings due to the target. If you set simplistic targets you get the wrong behaviours. Measuring "time" is a popular process measure set by government, which on its own can only ever drive the wrong type of behaviour.

As a minimum you should aim for three types of measure: internal, output or outcome and satisfaction:

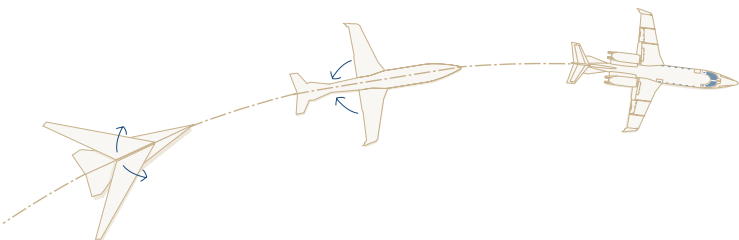
- Internal Measures - Time, Volume, Cost
- Output / Outcome Measures - Quality, Delivery, Success
- Satisfaction Measures - Perception



So, Until LAAs, BVPIs and CPA measure the issues which matter to customers, drive the development of processes and are balanced between internal, output / outcome and satisfaction measures, we will continue to see performance charts going up when public satisfaction is going down. Which might explain the following

“Voters were little influenced by councils’ CPA scores at the Local elections, despite the system’s objective to provide the public with a simple guide to their performance.” LGC 11th May 2006

Whilst directly linking public satisfaction with voting patterns is a “**cause and effect**” leap too far (not least due to low voter turn-out), the limited correlation would worry me if I were an elected member!



ad•esse
consulting

FURTHER INFORMATION

To receive regular case studies and articles like this one, you can subscribe to our newsletter 'Actualty'. Contact us at Ad Esse Consulting Ltd.

PHONE: +44 (0) 870 458 6162 EMAIL: seriousfun@ad-esse.com WEBSITE: www.ad-esse.com