Interim and Consulting Services for

# Local Authority & Service Providers



## Case Study #4
**Call Centres**

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Visualising Transformation ™

# Local Authority & Service Providers

# INTRODUCTION

## They have their Pro's and Con's, but do they add value?

SSD have been directly involved with multiple call centre projects, either during creation and when they were developing or maturing. We have found that generally speaking they fail to deliver the benefits imagined when conceived.

**PRO's**
- They provide a professionally trained interface for communications with the Public
- They can have powerful IT solutions to manage call progression (CRM)
- They can have longer availability times than individual services
- There can be flexible levels of staffing to match forecast demand peaks
- Waiting times for calls are 'Managed', and failure rates are 'Managed'

**CON's**
- They create a disconnection between the customer and the service provider
- They reduce the flexibility, strength and influence of the back office
- They usually add to overall costs
- They usually monitor the wrong stuff
- They can add to the Contractor costs, by instructing the wrong actions
- They can make services gradually get worse, and yet have a powerful CRM to show control

**A case study from our experience follows;**

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# Call Centres

## Summary

Following a BV audit at a London Borough, customer handling and call monitoring performance was under scrutiny in a Call Centre (CC) which had been set up 9 months earlier. It was considered successful as an early part of an integrated reorganisation to create better services for customers.

The CC was bright and airy, had a very good CRM, and performance was largely judged against call handling statistics. The initial training plans were sound, and all PI's were being met.

However the service to the Customers was getting worse.

The rationale provided by the leadership team was that the contract for Refuse was in its last year, seeing poor contractor commitment deliver a 50% drop in performance by comparison to results posted in the previous year.

In addition, it was 'common knowledge' that the Borough had upset the contractor.

Talking to the contractor, it was obvious they were completely committed to doing a good job. The contractor was ISO 9001 registered, with a commitment to continuous improvement. They recorded the same data as the Borough, but reported vastly different results. Their data looked sound, and so did the CC's CRM, yet they were different. No-one involved had identified the difference in reported results and no-one had an explanation for it once highlighted.

Performance criteria within the contract were clear. For example, a missed bin reported prior to noon required 'same-day' rectification. After midday, a missed bin had to be rectified by noon the following day.

The data mainly showed differences in the following:
- Time of receipt
- Numbers of properties affected

Both parameters affected the reported performance.

The data entered by the CC was transferred by an automatic fax, directly to the Contractor. There was no involvement of the Refuse 'Client Managers'. The Contractor dealt with urgent stuff straight away, and recorded all transactions on a spreadsheet. They had actually increased admin resources to handle the imposing pile of paper (two A4 sheets faxed for every fault).

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## Challenges

The 'errors' in the system were numerous:

- The CRM only polled to the Contractor hourly. This meant jobs raised with Borough after 11.00 were not logged by the contractor until after noon.

- Service fault reports were often entered into the CRM system later than they were received. The contractor therefore received notification of the case with a response time which had been significantly reduced or had already elapsed. Borough assessed performance against the time the complaint was called in by the public, the contractor assessed performance against the time they received the fax; because the fax was automated, human error had been incorrectly ruled out.

- If a call related to whole Street, a note would go in the text file, but only the property associated to the person calling to make the complaint would be identified in the contractor fax. Thus, the single property would be collected from, quickly followed by ten additional complaints from the remaining residents.

The CC focus was on handling calls quickly. Performance was undermined by customer dishonesty. For example; two customers down one street had reported missed collections 17 times between them. This was three times more than the rest of the residents down this very long street combined, over the same period. The properties of these residents were standard for the street, making it doubtful they would be missed.

Contractor feed back about 30 sacks a week identified as non domestic waste languished in the CC without being addressed.

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## Results

SSD worked to restore communications between Client and Contractor.

Once restored, the issues were investigated.

- The domestic waste issue saw many properties converted to Trade Waste customers, decreasing the costs of Domestic Waste, and increasing income.
- The high level of reporting from two properties saw The Refuse Management team and the Contractor team work together to check for 'waste not out' prior to collection. Within five weeks both residents had been found to be regularly filing false claims of missed collections. In each instance it could be shown the resident hadn't put their waste out in time.
- A hit list of suspect properties was generated for the CC, and the number of false reports started to diminish across the borough.
- Actual 'Missed collection' levels were improved by 40% within a few weeks.
- Levels of rectifications within contract times dramatically increased.
- Contractor costs reduced.
- Client income increased.

All in all, this project provided SSD an opportunity to deliver impressive results in short time-frames. However, more could have been done, had SSD been provided a broader remit from higher up the chain of command.

The attempts our team made to get the CC to monitor causes of failure, and volumes of 'Repeat Calls' unfortunately turned into a lot of effort for little result. This turned out to be a 'Target driven behaviours' issue deeply embedded into the 'Reporting Upwards', fear based culture common across the public sector. PI's stubbornly remained about speed and delays and call drop outs, rather than adding value and identifying root cause as SSD closed the project.