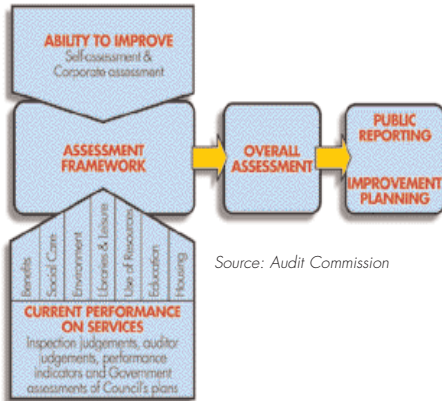




# CPAs test your potential for Continuous Improvement

Just when, in District Councils, you thought you had your BVPIs licked, along come CPAs (Comprehensive Performance Assessments) to add to your woes.



Source: Audit Commission

True, the CPA is informed by your BVPIs and other current assessments, but it is far more subjective. In fact judgements will be made upon your ability to improve, as much as your current performance.

Happily, preparation for your first assessment by the Audit Commission is not a shot in the dark. You can draw on the

experiences of the County Councils and Unitary Authorities, and, possibly more importantly, there are direct comparisons with the private sector where these kinds of assessment have been going on for years!

In fact a parallel can be drawn between the old ISO9000 quality measure and the more comprehensive European Excellence Model, and maybe the Balanced Scorecard.

The key characteristic of all three of these "super measures" is the testing of the engagement and focus of your staff, from a customer perspective. Looking at the Assessment Framework diagram opposite, you can see that the word "improvement" features heavily.

Comprehensive Assessment is a judgement about the council's ability to improve services to local people, and deliver positive change for its communities. This judgement is based partly on a 'self assessment', which requires councils to answer four simple but challenging questions about their own performance:

- *What is the council trying to achieve?*
- *How has the council set about delivering its priorities?*
- *What has the council achieved to date?*
- *In the light of what the council has learnt, what does it plan to do next?*

ValueAdding have worked in authorities undergoing CPA, and we are qualified to work with the European Excellence Model - which we have used in the private sector as well as in the Probation Service. We are experts in coaching and facilitating your staff in the methods and processes for achieving improvement, resulting in an environment of continuous improvement.



Chris Fegan, at a workshop, helps Canterbury C. C. staff to map their own process.

One *New* Website instead of two

**ValueAdding.com**

Our new web-site is designed for easier navigation. Please tell us how you find it.

## E-PROCUREMENT

All the experts will tell you that E-procurement will deliver significant savings to your organisation, both by improving internal efficiencies and by reducing external purchasing costs, through better assimilation of purchasing knowledge.

Based on these promises many Local Authorities are introducing e-procurement systems. Their challenge is to deliver all of the benefits.

Most of us have bought something over the Internet. Books, groceries, financial services and household items are all readily available. The process is significantly easy; simply point and click. However, it does involve some changes to the way you personally do things, and you need to overcome some initial concerns.

Firstly you cannot see the items. Secondly, you may worry over the security of your payment. Thirdly the goods are delivered to your door, one, three or five days later - as long as you are in to receive them.

At least at home the software required to do this is installed on your PC when you buy it.

Now, although the software for replicating this process in your organisation is widely

*Continued...*

...Continued

available, the changes in process required are often tortuous, and involve more than just you or even your department.

Understanding your overall procurement process is important at this point. Under the existing process internal audit requirements often create the first obstacle. How can you be certain that the goods to be ordered are properly authorised, checked on receipt and paid for accurately, never mind the question of whether or not they are really needed in the first place? These considerations are often used as an excuse for making no changes at all - "We have to do it like that - audit requirements."

Naturally, you will have some form of purchase order at present, almost definitely a supplier's invoice and a goods received note and if you have to match these before paying the bill, what benefits will you gain from simply ordering electronically?

One answer lies in understanding whether these pieces of paper add any value to you at all and then conducting an effective process redesign exercise to eliminate their use. The cost of buying paper is not simply the purchase price. Consider how much it really costs you to buy it when you add in the time

of your buyers and storemen, to name just two, not to mention the inevitable cost of paper-based order books. Equally it is an unwritten law that because you have a piece of paper you will check it and the actions it refers to. Finally the paper needs filing, thereby taking up space. If you are lucky or well organised, the paper build-up in your office will not detract from the day-to-day operations of your staff but we know of many situations in which that is not the case. "The order is under here somewhere..."

So, one target may be to eliminate the use of unnecessary paper. For inspiration look at how low-cost airlines now operate. Many passengers now book their flights on-line, pay by credit card and receive confirmation by e-mail. On arrival at the airport presentation of identification at the check-in desk is all that is required to allow the staff to print your boarding card. It's the end of travelling using the mantra "Money, passport, tickets"!

E-procurement processes will support any authority's drive to implement the 2005 E-Government directives but they are not simply a way of ordering on-line. Properly implemented, they lead to service delivery improvements.

In summary, E-procurement is not just about installing software or joining an Internet portal arrangement, nor is it simply a "tick in the box" or a way of satisfying your drive towards E-government. It is about improving service delivery.

We have helped Kirklees Metropolitan Council to take the first steps in redesigning their procurement processes so that they can



gain benefits from their recently-installed Roses Marketplace systems. As the

software gains acceptance and more staff are experiencing the benefits of ordering on-line, the Council recognises that there are benefits to be gained from simplifying the processes. Once fully implemented they will be able to use the information gained to develop alternative purchasing strategies that will deliver other benefits in terms of price and service. Although this work is at an early stage the commitment of staff to improving their current working practices is high, as all can see the obvious improvements that this methodology will bring.

## Contact Centres in Local Authorities

Although a lot of people contact their council by phone, a significant number still like to walk into an office and speak to someone face-to-face. Others prefer to write. While Internet users are currently in the minority, their numbers are growing fast, as the e-enabled generation shows a preference for the medium's speed and efficiency.

No matter what medium of communication is preferred, however, everyone now has greater expectations of their first point of contact, resulting in a lot of dissatisfaction with the traditionally fragmented responses that councils believed were adequate in the past.

Under pressure from CPAs, e-Government and specific BVPIs, most councils are firming up their plans to install centralised contact centres of one sort or another, if they have not done so already. However, these have many pitfalls, ranging from the purely technical (choosing the right telephony and CRM solution) to the personal (retaining good staff in call centres).

Successful implementation relies upon the project having been set up in the right way. The first thing to do is to make sure every stakeholder group knows why a contact centre is the answer. This involves writing a comprehensive set of objectives, backed up by a Requirements Document. When this thinking process has been completed it is time to communicate with everyone in a way that they understand and give them a chance to provide feedback.

It is essential to migrate seamlessly from the current way of working to the new one-stop-shop approach, with no loss of performance.

Once up and running, the efficiency of the contact centre can only be ensured if the back office processes fit with the new front office systems. This calls for careful process-mapping, data-gathering and redesign prior to implementation, so that the benefits of the new way of working can be apparent from day one, without customers experiencing poor service and confusion.

ValueAdding have been helping a number

### Competencies

At ValueAdding.com "We help clients to respond to customer requirements by improving their processes and costs through the skills of their people."

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##### BENCHMARKING/MARKET ANALYSIS

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of councils to map and redesign their back office processes in preparation for the installation of a contact centre. Simple, understandable process maps give everyone the chance to get involved in improving the way they will work once a contact centre is up and running.

We have found that the key to success is the involvement of staff from each department potentially affected by the changes. Apart from the fact that they will know the processes better than we will, given the relatively short time we have in which to analyse them, their involvement builds commitment to the change programme. It is human nature that if you are asked for your opinion, you are much more positive about change.

The majority of innovative changes are suggested by staff who use the processes, and the best of these ideas can be designed into the new process. Good facilitation by external consultants, who know the subject, not only liberates these suggestions but combines them with technical input and expert process-analysis techniques. Software suppliers can also be involved, to ensure their design meets the requirements of the departments and that these requirements are feasible.

When planning for a contact centre process analysis needs to start early. It takes a lot of time to recover from the bad press you'll get if all hell breaks loose in the first month. The message is - you can't plan enough if you are introducing a contact centre. If you 'fail to plan, you'll plan to fail!' Get those Back Office Processes sorted!

*In short... Get those Back Office Processes sorted!*