TrainingConcepts

CASE STUDY · CUSTOMISED TRAINING DESIGN

Service excellence for a *national water authority*

A two-day, scenario-based programme designed with PUB to equip directors, managers, supervisors and front-line officers with engagement and disengagement strategies for every public contact.

2 days
of facilitated workshop

4 levels
director to front line

5+
live role-play scenarios

WOG
whole-of-government focus

CLIENT
Public Utilities Board

PARTNER
Service Quality Centre

ROLE
Design and delivery



01 The brief

A public agency cannot choose its customers. PUB serves everyone who turns on a tap, and it must sometimes deliver an answer the customer would rather not hear — a bill, a charge, a decision that cannot be reversed.

PUB was operating under rising pressure: a more educated, better-connected public expecting transparency; climate change, urbanisation and a growing population; and the constant need to keep water affordable. Trust had to be earned in every interaction, and officers needed to be firm and fair without becoming defensive.

PUB asked for a programme that would do that across the organisation, not just at the counter. Training Concepts' lead trainer worked with PUB and partner organisation Service Quality Centre to design and deliver a two-day workshop for directors, managers, supervisors and front-line officers, built entirely on PUB's own cases.

"Service" does not mean acceding to all demands from all customers all the time. Public officers shall always do what is right and reasonable, with empathy and respect for the people we serve.

SINGAPORE CIVIL SERVICE CORE VALUES — THE PRINCIPLE THE PROGRAMME IS BUILT ON

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

- A populace that is more questioning, and expects PUB to explain its actions
- Higher public expectations set against climate change, urbanisation and affordability
- Officers who must say no, and still keep courtesy and mutual respect
- Complaints that cross agency lines and have no single owner
- Managers who shape the systems front-line officers have to work within



02 How it was designed

A contextualised design: the public service standard on service quality, expressed entirely in PUB's language, cases and constraints.

Co-designed with PUB

Built jointly with PUB and Service Quality Centre, so that the Board's own mission, values and cases set the content.

Anchored in ONE PUB

Framed around PUB's mission of a clean, safe and sustainable water supply, and its values: value consciousness, excellence, ownership, caring and innovation.

Whole-of-government by design

Built around the No Wrong Door policy and the First Responder Protocol, so officers know what to do when a case is not PUB's alone.

Real complaints, real cases

Every scenario drawn from cases PUB actually receives: leaking taps, blocked drains, flooding, billing disputes and multi-agency complaints.

All four levels in the room

Directors, managers, supervisors and front-line officers, so decisions about process were made by the people who own them.

Tools, not theory

Each session ends with something officers can use on Monday: a model, a phrase bank, an escalation route.

AT A GLANCE

PROGRAMME	Service excellence for PUB officers
DURATION	Two days, facilitated
AUDIENCE	Directors, managers, supervisors and front-line officers
ANCHORS	Public Service CARE · No Wrong Door · First Responder Protocol
VERSION	Version 4, August 2013

THE FIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Know the customer

Understand who PUB's customers are and what they expect of the Board.

Define public-sector service

Set service in the wider context of the challenges facing the Public Service and the Board.

Internalise the service vision

Serve the public with professionalism and empathy, building trust and confidence.

Act whole-of-government

Display the whole-of-government and ONE PUB attitude set out in the No Wrong Door policy and First Responder Protocol.

Apply Public Service CARE

Use the CARE principles — call, action, response, evaluate — as a service routine.

Own the system

Managers and directors examine whether the systems and processes actually support front-line officers.

03 The service mindset and the toolkit

FIVE PRINCIPLES OFFICERS TOOK AWAY

01	Firmness and fairness lead to willing compliance
02	Show empathy to win hearts and minds
03	Minimise inconvenience to maximise cooperation
04	Clear communication can manage unrealistic expectations
05	Frequent assurances and updates lead to trust

Alongside them, a shared vocabulary: what to say and what never to say, and how to transfer a call without losing the customer.

FOUR MODELS, USED ON LIVE CASES

CARE

The service routine

Call, Action, Response, Evaluate — a cycle officers can apply to any contact, from a counter query to a written complaint.

STARE

Before you act

Study the situation, Think of the approach, Act and adjust, Review and monitor, Evaluate afterwards and share what you learnt.

SIX THINKING HATS

For complex cases

White for data, red for instinct, black for risk, yellow for benefit, green for alternatives, blue for how the solution is operationalised.

TEA

On the telephone

Tell the purpose in one sentence, Explain briefly, indicate the Action to be taken — supported by a bank of helpful and unhelpful phrases.

CASE ESCALATION AND EXPECTED TIMEFRAMES

Simple, clear-cut case	Falls within one agency, with established processes in place	1 week
Complex case	Cuts across agencies, with few or no established processes, though precedents may exist	3 to 4 weeks
Very complex case	Tends to have no owner at all	4 to 6 weeks

04 Engagement and disengagement, rehearsed

The heart of the programme. Every scenario came from PUB's own casebook, with role cards for each player, so the pressure in the room matched the pressure at the counter.

ROLE PLAY

The leaking tap

A customer reports a leaking tap at an HDB car park wash point. Who owns it, what does PUB do, and how is the Town Council brought in? Played out with customer, counter officer, supervisor and Town Council staff.

ROLE PLAY

One linkway, how many owners?

A written complaint about stockpiled cardboard, blocked drains, mosquito larvae and a leaking linkway roof. PUB is the receiving agency: teams coordinate across agencies under the First Responder Protocol and draft the correspondence at each stage.

ROLE PLAY

Six wise men

A customer complains of flooding at home after heavy rain but will not say much. Officers have to draw out the facts before they can offer a solution.

ROLE PLAY

Case escalation

An angry customer disputes the waterborne fee while he is overseas, rejects the explanation and demands to speak to the Director. Played with counter officer, supervisor and director.

TELEPHONE SCENARIO

The call that explodes

A customer has been given the run-around trying to reach a manager, and takes it out on whoever answers next.

GROUP WORK

Common complaints

Teams categorise the complaints PUB actually receives into value turn-offs, system turn-offs and people turn-offs, then propose solutions for each.







05 Why directors and managers were in the room

Front-line officers can only work within the systems their managers design. Putting directors, managers, supervisors and officers through the same programme meant that when a process failed in a role play, the people who could change it were sitting at the table.

A reflective thinking model ran through the second day, applied to a real incident involving officers, members of the public and a rule that had to be enforced. Teams worked through four questions in turn.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

1. Given his role and the situation, how does an officer who means well continue to discharge his duties professionally? Was there a conflict of interest?
2. Where it is a first infringement, could we have shown more empathy and played the educator rather than the enforcer?
3. Are there systems and processes in place to support front-line officers — pamphlets, guides, clear routes — and what is the manager's role in shaping them?
4. What should our future rules of engagement be? What might work, what else is available, and are our ideas consistent with our mission, vision and values?

Directors Test whether policy and precedent give officers room to be reasonable.	**Managers** Own the systems, resources and escalation routes officers depend on.
Supervisors Step in when a contact escalates, and coach afterwards.	**Front-line officers** Carry the interaction, and the Board's reputation, in every contact.



06 What officers took back

A shared language across four levels of the organisation, and a set of routines that survive contact with a difficult customer.

A definition of service they can defend

Why a public agency cannot say yes to everything, and how to decline while keeping courtesy and respect.

A routine for every contact

CARE and STARE applied from the first word to the follow-up, so nothing depends on improvisation.

A way through complex cases

Six Thinking Hats for the cases that cut across agencies or have no obvious owner.

Telephone discipline

The TEA principle, a phrase bank of what helps and what inflames, and clean call transfers.

Escalation that is understood

Who handles what, and how long a simple, complex or very complex case should take.

Questions for the system

Managers left with the process questions the role plays exposed, and the authority to answer them.

Trust is earned in the ordinary contact, not the exceptional one.

The programme's working assumption: a national water authority is judged less on its engineering than on how it answers the phone, explains a bill and follows up on a complaint.

07 The lead trainer

Shareef Jaffar

International management and training consultant

Shareef led the design and delivery of the programme, working with PUB and Service Quality Centre. He has designed and delivered service excellence programmes for several Singapore public agencies, including the Singapore Police Force and the Singapore Civil Defence Force, and brings more than 35 years in management, training design and public service.

He holds three master's degrees, in education, strategic planning and law, along with certifications in curriculum design, instructional design and competency-based assessment.

PUBLIC-SECTOR PROGRAMMES

- Service excellence for PUB directors, managers, supervisors and officers
- Front-line service programmes for the Singapore Police Force, rolled out across all land divisions
- Programmes for the Singapore Civil Defence Force
- Training needs analysis and curriculum design for InWEnt's IT@Coop project in Thailand

DESIGN CREDENTIALS

- Advanced Certificate in Learning and Performance (ACLP), Singapore WSQ
- Certificate in Effective E-Learning Design, University of Oxford
- MA Education (Merit), University of Nottingham
- Certifications in facilitation and competency-based assessment

ALSO AVAILABLE

Crisis Prevention & Management · Building Relationships with Difficult Customers · Winning Telephone Techniques · Problem Solving Tools · Strategic Visioning. Any programme can be contextualised for your organisation in the same way.

DESIGN A PROGRAMME FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

Built on your cases, not someone else's.

Tell us who meets your public and what they face. We will design the programme around your own casebook, and put the people who own the systems in the same room as the people who work within them.

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