Are You Planning to Make a Difference?

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About me

- Scottish Office

- Cleveland County and City of York Councils

- National council of the Local Authorities Research & Intelligence Association (2002-04)

- Many research, consultation and engagement projects, working with elected members, senior managers, service managers and their teams

- Consultancy, enabling clients to hear what their customers are saying and then do something positive about it

Today

- What's in a title

- The BVPI Planning Survey

- Lessons for those who want to make a difference

- Concluding thoughts

This is a talk about…

- 'Planning'
  - ➤ A scheme, program, or method worked out beforehand for the accomplishment of an objective
- 'Difference'
  - ➤ A noticeable change or effect

The BVPI Planning Survey

- Statutory user satisfaction survey for planning applicants
  - One of five surveys repeated every three years since 2000/01
  - Prescribed questionnaire with 14 questions and one comments box

- BVPI 111
  - Percentage of applicants satisfied with the service received

Central government says…

- **User satisfaction surveys**
  - ➢ Integral part of the performance framework
  - ➢ Vital role in understanding what people think about services
  - ➢ Valuable data on how views change over time
  - ➢ Crucially, can help councils to shape, deliver, and improve local services

Google says…

- Unscientific 'Google Sample' of 10 BVPI Planning Survey reports
  - ➢ Produced in-house and externally
  - ➢ Ranged in length from 2-28 pages
  - ➢ Some had asked supplementary questions
- Not one single recommendation as to how improvements might be made

Consider

- If 'every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results it gets', what lessons can be learned from the BVPI Planning Survey for the local government researcher who plans to make a difference?

No. 1 Know your purpose

- What business are we in?

The object of taking data is to provide a basis for action.

W. Edwards Deming

York BV Review

- Monitoring   50%
- Prioritisation   20%
- Horizon scanning   10%
- Options decisions   10%
- Service improvement   10%

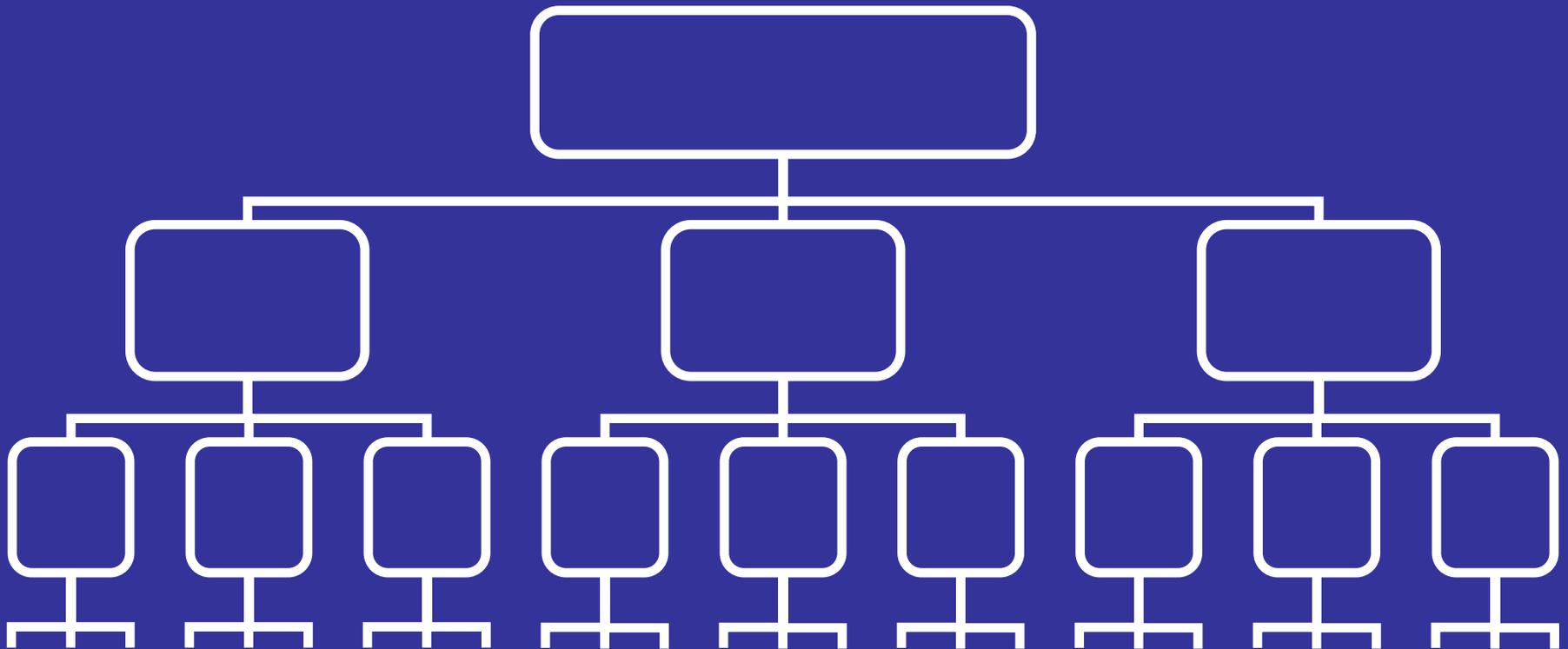# No. 2 Think about relationships

- Who is it for? Where will it be used? And how do things work now?

> *It's important that we begin by looking at issues of purpose and experience and relationship rather than at our preferred interventions.*
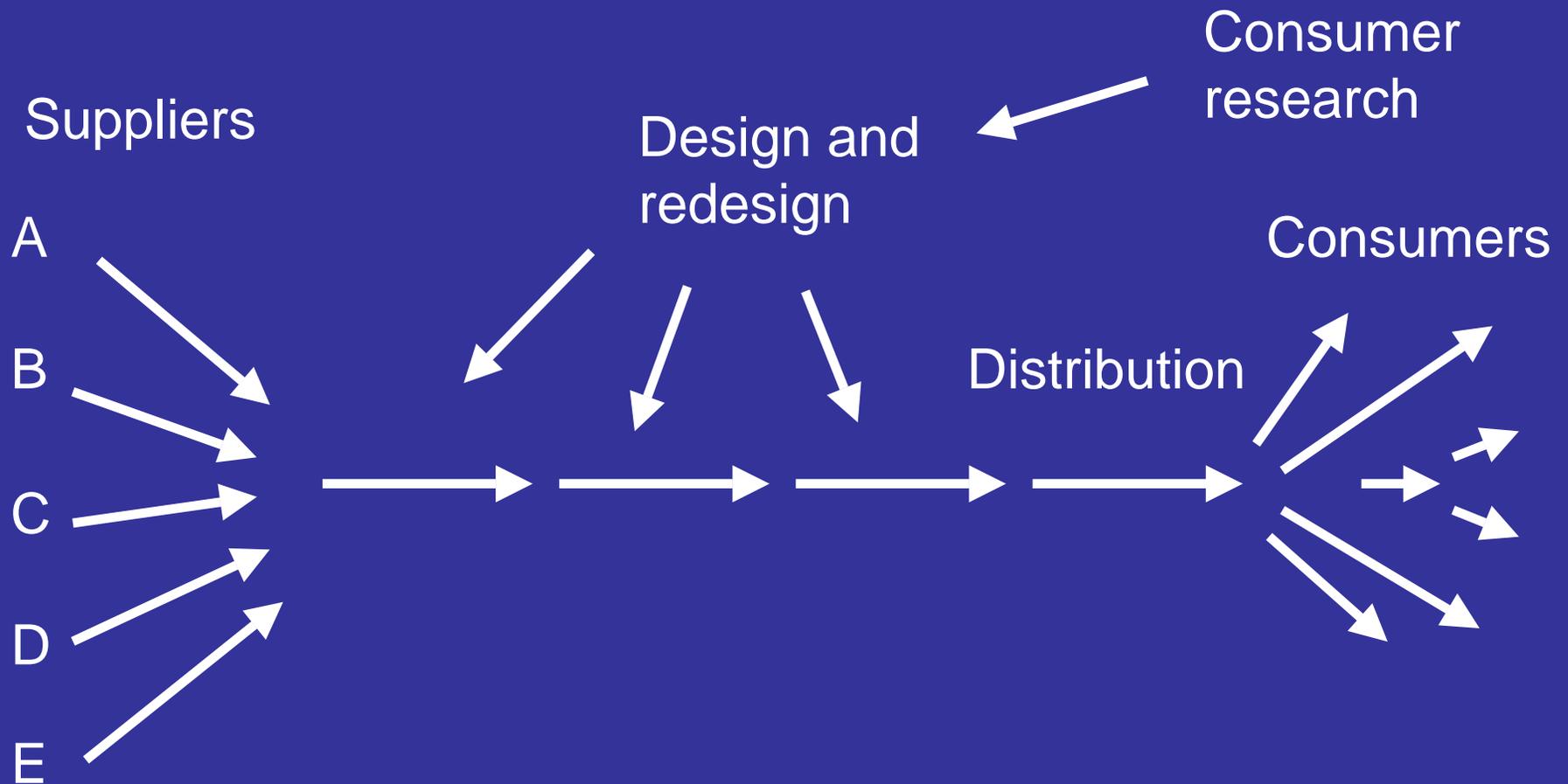>
> *Peter Block*

Hierarchical view

Deming's Systems View

Suppliers

Consumer research

Design and redesign

Consumers

A

B

C

Distribution

D

E

No. 3 Don't do anything useless

- It is not enough to ask questions well
- We must ask the right questions

> *The test of a good measure: Does this help in understanding and improving performance?*
>
> *John Seddon*

The BVPI Planning questionnaire

- Questions you know the answer to already (or might reasonably be expected to know the answer to)

- Questions that don't help you to understand and improve performance

- Questions that are pointless

Questions we know the answer to

- *When you made your recent application, in what capacity were you acting?*

- *What type of application were you submitting?*

- *Have you applied for planning consent previous to your most recent application? How many times?*

- *Was your most recent application granted or refused permission?*

Questions that don't help us to understand and improve

Agreement statements

- *I was given the advice and help needed to submit my application correctly*

- *The council kept me informed about the progress of my application*

- *The council dealt promptly with my queries*

Questions that don't help us to understand and improve (cont.)

Agreement statements (cont.)

- *I understand the reasons for the decision made on my application(s)*
- *I felt that I was treated fairly and that my viewpoint was listened to*

Questions that don't help us to understand and improve (cont.)

- *Setting aside whether any individual application was successful or not, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the council in processing your application?*

Questions that are pointless

- *For each of the following elements of the planning service provided by [authority] please indicate whether you think the service has got better or worse over the last three years, or has it stayed the same?*

- *Demographics: Gender, age, socio-economic status, limiting illness or disability, ethnicity*

The best BVPI Planning question

One question that allows the customer to say something about what matters to them

Do you have any comments?

- None of my Google sampled BVPI reports contained analysis of comments, just one contained verbatim quotes

North Cornwall DC comments

- 99 comments
- Three out of four negative
  - Insufficient/ misleading information at the outset, poor form (13 people)
  - Slow service, missed deadlines (10 people)
  - Poor communications, difficult to contact, lack of correspondence (8 people)

No. 4 Know the limits of your tools

- Surveys are best for enumeration and description

- They are not a good analytical tool that helps you understand 'why?'

> *If your only tool is a hammer, all problems look like nails.*
>
> *Mark Twain*

Better Planning Survey questions

- The 'What?' and 'Why?' of performance
  - ➢ What matters to the customer
  - ➢ 'Factual' questions before 'opinions'
  - ➢ 'Process' questions before 'results'

Better questions

- *What, if anything, should we have told you about early on, before you put in your application?*

- *Were there any parts of the application form which you found difficult to understand? Which parts?*

- *Were there any parts which you found difficult to complete? Which parts?*

Better questions (cont.)

- *Did we send you a letter to say that your application form was either incorrect or incomplete in some way?*

- *Did we make it clear to you in our letter what exactly was wrong with your application, or not?*

- *Did you understand what needed to be done to put it right, or not?*

Better questions (cont.)

- *Did you contact us during the time when we were dealing with your application, or not?*

- *What did you contact us about?*

- *Were we able to tell you what you needed to know, or not?*

Better questions (cont.)

- *Did we give you a deadline date when we would tell you whether your application had been successful?*

- *Did we meet that deadline, or not?*

- *Did our failure to meet that deadline cause you any problems? What kind of problems?*

Better questions (cont.)

- *Out of ten, where 10 is 'excellent' and 0 is 'unacceptable', how would you rate our performance in dealing with your planning application?*

- *If you scored us less than 8, what would we have had to do to get a better score?*

No. 5 Consider alternatives

- Together with our clients, we need to first agree what is worth doing
- Being able to do something, doesn't make it worth doing

> *There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.*
>
> *Peter Drucker*

Alternatives

- How else can we hear the customer? Consider complaints, letters, call logs, call centre recordings

- Could the information needed be obtained from existing records? Does a system need to be set up so information is collected in future?

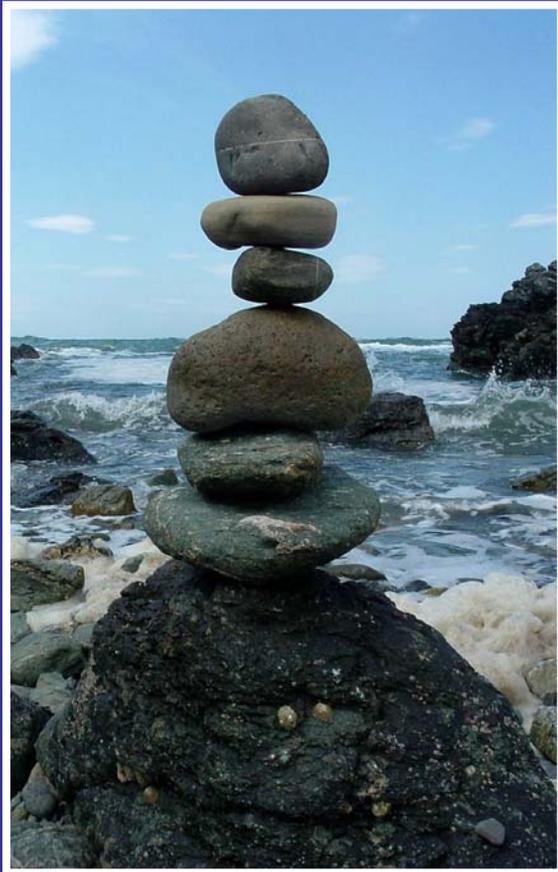- Do front line employees already know the answers?

To recap

- If you plan to make a difference
  - Be clear about your purpose
  - Think about relationships, who is the work for, where will it be used, and how do things work now
  - Don't do anything useless, ask only the right questions
  - Know the limits of your tools
  - Consider together what is worth doing

Thank you for listening

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