Usage guidelines

Developing a library quality model at University of Sunderland Library Services

Kay Grieves and Michelle Halpin. University Library Services, University of Sunderland.

Abstract

Purpose -The purpose of this paper is to share the ways in which University Library Services Sunderland, created and embedded a quality model, to engender service-culture change, ensure engagement with and best use of library services and capture and demonstrate evidence of the value of the library's contribution to the student experience. Launched in 2008 our Quality Model initiative is ongoing and has become our established way of working.

Originality/Value -The University of Sunderland Quality Model differs from many library performance models in that it takes an holistic approach. It aims to inform and shape cultural change and lead a strategic approach to customer relationship management in order to facilitate the capturing of impact evidence and demonstrate the value of our contribution. It is self-formed and based upon strategic marketing principles and underpins University priorities.

Our approach is of particular significance as Higher Education libraries are increasingly challenged to demonstrate their contribution to the academic experience and are exploring the role of cultural change to facilitate this. Although designed to meet our specific aims at Sunderland many of our techniques will be transferrable to the strategic priorities of other HE libraries.

Key words - Academic Libraries, Higher Education, Quality, performance management, organizational culture, values, customer relationships, strategic marketing, organizational change

Paper type – Case study

Introduction

'Increasingly … University leaders will challenge the university as a whole, and individual departments, to answer the question, 'What's so special about you?' In other words, universities and departments will need to justify their existence.' (Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi, 2013, p.50)

The University of Sunderland Library Quality Model is an holistic, strategic approach to facilitate the cultural change required to meet the challenges facing HE Libraries today. A challenge to be agile enough to shape services to meet continually changing customer needs and be able to articulate and demonstrate the impact and contribution of these services on the experience, success, and outcomes of our customers.

Strategic priorities

Cultural change and organisational development were the key drivers for the creation of our Quality Model. Cultural change in terms of service ethos and staff roles; our relationship with our customers, and our perception of quality and performance. Our Quality Model is both a catalyst for cultural change and a vehicle, which informs the ways in which our commitment to that cultural change is demonstrated to our customers through service delivery

At the University of Sunderland there were a number of strategic priorities that informed its creation:

Values and Cultural Change
In 2006 University Library Services converged with eight other University services to form Student and Learning Support (SLS.) SLS Executive launched a programme of Values and Cultural Change with the aim of unifying a service, which whilst delivering professional specialisms, shared the central core values of: Information Sharing, Customer Focus, Customer Satisfaction, Teamwork and Continuous Improvement. These core values were developed in service wide workshops.

The vision was to nurture a 'liberating organisation' (McCaffery, 2008, p.69) characterised by an inspirational view of the future with shared values and vision. A non-hierarchical structure where leaders share behaviours and support staff to interface directly with customers, empower staff with the authority to self-manage teams and value organisational democracy. A culture where staff learn from mistakes and are encouraged to innovate without fear, to communicate openly and perceive change as a positive challenge.

In 2013 this cultural change was extended further with a library management restructure which replaced a structure based largely around physical sites with a matrix model of empowering leadership.

Contribution to the Student Experience
Contemporary HE places significant emphasis upon capturing impact, difference, value and contribution.

Significantly, the 2008-2013 University of Sunderland Academic Strategy (University of Sunderland, 2008) for the first time challenged all areas of the University to articulate the contribution they made to the quality of the Student Experience. In addition The University's Student Voice initiative was launched with an emphasis upon forming a more meaningful relationship with our students. The current Academic Strategy 2013-2016 (University of Sunderland, 2013) is yet more explicit, driving us to articulate our impact not only upon high quality service provision and the student experience but also upon student success and outcomes. For University Library Services this translated into some clear challenges.

The Quality Model – our initial challenges

It was imperative that every member of staff within our service understood our strategic aims and were able to relate their roles and daily work to the achievement of these; further, we were seeking to ensure that staff understood that they had a personal responsibility for the quality and impact of their work and thus they were an integral part of making our aims a reality on the ground.

We needed to shift our perception of the purpose of our service, from that of offering services and products to offering solutions and differences. We needed therefore to understand the contribution our customers were looking to us to make and plan and deliver services that could realize that contribution.

If we were to succeed in understanding what our customers looked to us to contribute to them, we needed to stop thinking of our customers as passive recipients and instead as 'active-agents' (Barber, Donnelly, Rizvi, 2013, p.65). We needed to be agile and flexible, anticipating and proactively responding to customer need rather than requiring customers to fit our shape, processes and procedures. This called for a new relationship with our customers and a new understanding of our role in an era when 'the student consumer will increasingly be king.' (Barber, Donnelly, Rizvi, 2013, p.51)

Having defined customer expectation we needed to be 'sharper and clearer' (Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi, 2013. P.51) about what we offer, to whom and why and ensure a shared understanding of this amongst staff within our service.

We could no-longer leave it to serendipity that our customers realise the contribution our services could make to them, to be left to select the relevant services to meet their specific needs or to work out for themselves how to make best use of them. We needed to be explicit about the expected contributions of our services to individuals, to proactively offer solutions to our customers according to their need and to demonstrate the value of our contribution by example.

In relation to performance management we needed to facilitate the collection of impact evidence. We could no longer leave it to chance that customers would provide us with qualitative evidence of the actual difference our services made or rely upon quantitative statistics alone as evidence of contribution. We needed a new perception of performance and a new performance model to facilitate the capture of evidence of our actual contribution.

Having captured evidence of the value of our contribution we must become skilled in collating our impact evidence, of using it to inform continuous improvement and to demonstrate our actual contribution to our customers and stakeholders. We needed to nurture our customers to become positive advocates of our service who were equipped and willing to amplify and demonstrate these benefits on our behalf.

Successfully meeting such challenges relied upon the nurturing a new kind of relationship with our customers. It also rested firmly upon significant cultural change ensuring a shared vision, ownership for the quality of this customer relationship and innovative, new ways of working.

7 Step Strategic Marketing Toolkit

Throughout the development cycle of our Quality Model it has become increasingly apparent that strategic marketing skills are key to developing successful customer relationship management.

In 2007 University Library Services developed a 7 Step Strategic Marketing Toolkit. This Toolkit enabled us to develop and employ key marketing techniques: to focus on the customer perspective; to align service planning with strategic priorities; to identify customer segments, their needs and expectations of us; to meet these expectations with benefit-based service offers and to manage customer relationships in order to capture and articulate contribution. The Toolkit is central in the formation of our Quality Model and has been shared with many libraries throughout the UK and at a number of international conferences.

9 Quality Promises

Our Quality Promise initiative was launched in 2008. In keeping with our cultural change objectives each member of library staff was involved in cross-team projects, to define 'sharper and clearer' core service offers (Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi, 2013. P.51.)

By way of detailed project briefs staff were challenged to define within each of these core areas, expected levels of service quality from a customer perspective.

As a result nine, core service offers and Quality Promises were defined:

- Customer Care – Every time you talk to us you will meet approachable, knowledgeable staff whose key motivation is to help you and ensure you get the most out of library services.

- Customer Support – We will give you help and support to enable you to use library resources to best effect.

- Skills for Learning – You will have the opportunity to develop information literacy skills that will help you to use library services to your best advantage, support your academic progress and your future development.

- Resources – You will have access to appropriate resources when you need them.

- Learning Spaces - Library spaces and virtual learning environments that are responsive to your learning needs.

- Equity - No matter where you are, when or how you reach us we will strive to deliver an equivalent library service.

- Knowing your Customers -We will always treat you as an individual and where possible will deliver support and services to meet your specific needs.

- Feedback- We will always consider your comments, thoughts and suggestions and respond to you. We will take actions and develop services where appropriate.

- Communication – You will always have the information you need to ensure that you are aware of service developments.

During the following four years our cross-team project groups worked to reshape our service offers, procedures and practices in order to realize the expectations of our Quality Promises.

These recommendations were then prioritized, actioned and fed into longer-term strategic planning.

New perceptions of performance and the new model

Focusing the purpose of our service upon contribution and impact called for an entirely new perception of performance. We developed an understanding of performance which:

- Focuses on outcome rather than output
- Is fluid and evidence capturing is designed for specific purpose
- Places importance on capturing the intangible e.g. ethos and culture, in addition to the tangible
- Is based upon the customer perception of quality
- Ensures customer feedback mechanisms are transparent, open and honest
- Ensures evidence is shared, used for continuous improvement and successfully communicated to stakeholders
- Places ownership for the quality of the customer experience upon all staff

Having established a new perception of performance we established a new model through which, we too began to capture actual contribution and impact.

It was based on the following principles:

- A shared understanding of the contribution our customers are looking to us to make and how our services can meet these expectations

- The ability to articulate and demonstrate the contribution we expect to make to our established customer segments

- A commitment to enabling our customers to articulate and share the actual contribution, difference and impact we have made with us, to their peers and to our stakeholders

- The development of an approach to capture evidence of actual and lack of contribution

- The use of this evidence to inform continuous improvement and to demonstrate evidence of our impact to customers and to our stakeholders

Quality Promise Campaign

By summer 2010 we felt that we were ready to share our commitment to our Quality Model with our customers.

It was apparent that in order to articulate successfully our expected service contributions; ensure best use of services and capture impact evidence we needed to develop a different kind of relationship with our customers.

Our Quality Promise Campaign aims to facilitate the establishment of mutually beneficial customer relationships. These relationships have been nurtured through a strategic approach to building trust with customers and continuous demonstration of our commitment to a culture of customer focus and service quality. Through these relationships our customers know exactly what contribution we expect our services to make and are therefore informed and equipped to be able to use our services to best meet their needs. We have established open channels of communication through which our customers can be involved in shaping our offers and a culture where customers feel comfortable to feed back on their real experience of using our services. As a result the Library can be more certain that our services are being made best use of and that we are able to capture vital intelligence and evidence of actual contribution.

We have now delivered two successful year-long Quality Promise Campaigns. Examples of all of our Campaign themes can be seen online. (http://www.Pinterest/UniOfSunLib, 2013)

The key campaign principles
- Clear service-wide conversational themes based upon our Quality Promises
- Exemplified by the promotion of key service offers within that theme
- The mapping of these key conversations onto relevant touch-points in the customer journey

- Contextualisation for key audiences eg. by Faculty, subject, customer-journey point
- Facilitated capturing of actual contribution
- Sharing and amplification of the impact of our actual contribution

Key concepts of the campaign

Leadership and ownership. Coordination and contextualisation. The balance.
Clear leadership is required in order to balance successful management of the Campaign with our core cultural aim to ensure that staff can fully contribute to and take ownership for building these relationships with our customers.

This has largely been achieved by:

- Involving staff in Quality Campaign planning and delivery
- Working with Academic Liaison Librarians to contextualize the themes and their delivery for their own audiences
- A coordinated programme of planning meetings and staff development sessions for library assistants, scheduled to run alongside our Campaign themes. Enabling staff to successfully articulate core messages and demonstrate relevant services to customers
- Ensuring all staff are involved in managing and sharing feedback and impact evidence

Quality Promise Timeline
Our timeline is our central planning tool (http://www.Pinterest/UniOfSunLib, 2013). It is a visual representation of our core Campaign activities across the academic year eg. Core themes, timings, articulated benefits, specific service promotions and delivery methods, impact capture mechanisms and staff development. It is shared across the service and ensures a coordinated approach and buy-in from all staff.

Quality Promise Brand
Our Quality Promise brand is a visual identity, which is reflected in all Quality Campaign activities on campus and online. A key priority is that it can be easily adopted and re-purposed by staff in the creation of their own Quality Promise materials. This is a priority if we are to achieve contextualisation and ownership of our core messages.

Culture of conversation
Facilitated dialogue is a core principle of strategic marketing. It is central to our approach to developing relationships with our customers.

We had a number of key aims in developing these customer conversations:

- To develop staff to be comfortable to lead and facilitate conversations with their own specific audiences
- To be friendly, warm, understanding, responsive, proactive and flexible

- To move from one way communication to multi-way conversations which encourage sharing
- To be honest, open and transparent
- To nurture a human voice in order to transform faceless, corporate communications
- To maintain a consistent message whilst nurturing multiple, diverse voices
- To shape conversations that are meaningful to our specific customer segments

Social media has facilitated perfectly these conversations. It is egalitarian – enabling all staff and the majority of customers to interact in their own voice and style. It enables us to be where our audience is, to be agile, responsive and timely, to be informal and friendly, to quickly push content to customers in many formats and most importantly to facilitate sharing.

Articulating sharp, clear service offers and our expected contribution
Having clearly defined our nine core service offers and promises of quality we are able to facilitate conversations around each. The fulcrum of each conversation comprises clearly articulated expected contributions. By articulating these benefits we not only motivate customers to use our services but also prepare them to be able to make judgments about the actual contribution of our services and equipped to identify and evaluate that contribution.

Inviting evidence of actual contribution and capturing it
Each conversation invites our customers to talk to us, their peers and other stakeholders about the actual contribution our services have made to them. This often focuses as much on service ethos as upon specific service offers.

We employ various imaginative techniques in a blended approach both on campus and online. A key priority is to ensure that feedback receives a timely and honest response and that the process is transparent. Negative feedback sits side by side with the positive, the quality of our responses often transforming negatives into positive opportunities and detractors into positive service advocates.

Encouraging sharing, amplification and advocacy
'In a worldwide Nielson survey 92% of online consumers said they completely trust or somewhat trust recommendations from people they know.' (Building brand advocates www.parature.com, 2012)

An intrinsic element of our approach is to facilitate the sharing and amplification of positive messages regarding the actual impact of our services. Each Campaign theme has a sharing element built into its design ensuring that customers are encouraged to become positive advocates of our service and that they are able and willing to share the real value of our contribution with their peers and with stakeholders - often with very powerful results.

Conclusion

Our Quality Model and Quality Model Campaign are successfully enabling us to achieve many of our original and emerging strategic aims.

The holistic nature of our Model has both informed and facilitated cultural change and has been instrumental in enabling and demonstrating our commitment to our shared Values and 'liberating culture' (McCaffery, 2008, p. 69)

As a result of this cultural change we have been able to develop our customers as 'active agents' (Barber, Donnelly and Rizvi, 2013, p. 65) and to develop mutually beneficial relationships with them. We have been successful in re-evaluating our perception of our role in terms of making a contribution to student experience, outcome and success and in re-evaluating our perception and model of performance, enabling us to capture and demonstrate this contribution and impact.

Having now established and embedded our Quality Model we look forward to developing our vision and culture and further enhancing our relationships with our customers.

References

Barber,M. Donnelly,K. and Rizvi,S. (2013) *An avalanche is coming: Higher education and the revolution ahead.* Available at: http://www.ippr.org

http://www.parature.com (accessed: 2 June 2013)

McCaffery, P., 2008. The Higher Education Manager's Handbook. RoutledgeFalmer.

http://www.Pinterest/UniOfSunLib (accessed:2 September, 2013)

University of Sunderland. (2008) *Enhancing the Student Experience: University of Sunderland Academic Strategy 2008-2013.*

University of Sunderland. (2013) *Academic Strategy 2013-2016*.