

INSIGHT

Improving services – understanding and managing demand

Introduction

Understanding and managing demand is about running your service in a way that provides people what they want, when they want it.

It requires you to know the different characteristics of the people using the service and what that means for the processes you design to meet those different needs. You need enough people with the right capabilities and to give them what they need to provide the service. You will have information to decide whether and how to trade off the quality, cost and time it takes to provide the service if demand increases.

What are the benefits of getting this right?

- The services you provide are more efficient, and your organisation meets its objectives more often.
- The service meets the needs of the people using it.
- People providing the service enjoy a better place to work with less pressure responding to unexpected peaks in demand.

What are the consequences of getting this wrong?

- All people using the service are treated the same way, regardless of their different circumstances or needs.
- Backlogs and delays for the people using the service – hand-offs between different people and steps in the process causes waiting, and effort to track work, manage in-trays and respond to questions about delays.
- The process is managed to a target which does not relate to the needs of different people.
- Failure demand – issues with quality that cause rework, workarounds that become the norm, and complaints from people using the service.

Explore our six insights on managing demand:

- 1 Plan for peaks and troughs** – You need to know if the process can provide the quality of service expected if the level of demand changes.
- 2 Focus on user needs** – The way you work should be informed by what matters to service users.
- 3 Understand process flow** – You should understand how demand flows through the steps of the process and where there are pinch-points and dependencies.
- 4 Avoid one size fits all** – You need to know if your ways of working meet the needs of the different types of people using the service.
- 5 Improve the quality of inputs** – Improving the quality of what comes into the process will allow you to complete work faster and right first time.
- 6 The right skills and tools** – The people providing the service must have the skills and tools they need to do their jobs.

Plan for peaks and troughs

Predicting demand

Dealing with increases

Maintaining capability

Clear and simple processes

You need to know if the process can provide the quality of service expected if the level of demand changes

Challenge 1: Getting the information you need to predict and deal with changes in demand

If you get this right: you will know if you have the number of people you need to provide the quality of service that people expect. You can spot when the amount of demand is likely to cause issues to the quality of the service, the time it takes to provide it or adding pressure on the people providing the service.

What works well:

- Collecting data via robust forecasting, including analysing trends to build an understanding of how many people you need.
- Working with stakeholders and the people using the service to build your knowledge of reasons demand might change, so that you can anticipate and respond to it.



Questions to ask

- Are we able to pick up changes in users' demand?
- How quickly do we need to know about changes in demand so we can take action to address potential quality issues?

Think about

- Understanding how many requests that current ways of working can cope with at the required quality means that you can be ready to move to a plan B. You can decide whether and how to meet overall demand including trading-off quality, time and cost as part of that decision. For more insight see challenge 2 on how to move people and change processes to deal with demand.
- Statistical process control is an approach to understanding variation and trends in demand. It helps you respond in an informed, evidenced way rather than reactive firefighting.

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Department for Education (DfE): working with internal teams to understand how policy changes will affect demand

Problem: Policy changes and new announcements, such as those about school funding, cause increases in the number of Parliamentary Questions. Larger numbers of questions create workload issues if they are not known about and planned for in advance. When there are frequent policy changes, which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, answers can become out of date between when drafted and when due for publication, requiring redrafts to answers, which increases the likelihood of failing to meet Parliamentary deadlines.

Approach: The department's Written Parliamentary Questions team sits within the Communications Group in DfE. The Written Parliamentary Questions team gets a readout from a morning communications call each day, highlights of which are shared

with the team. This insight enables them to take proactive action to prepare for future workload and identify responses which may need updating prior to their publication date.

Benefit: By having advance notice of what is coming up, the Written Parliamentary Questions team can engage with policy colleagues, understanding more on the timescales, whether there is any impact to current responses and encourage them to plan lines for a potential influx of questions. The team can also tee up private offices where there are likely to be increases in volumes, so that ministerial time can be set aside to reflect this where possible. This approach means that the team is much more proactive in preparing for announcements, can engage with the relevant stakeholders earlier and reduce the need to redraft responses.

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Keep in mind

- You need reliable, quality data to give you meaningful insights on process variation – is your process measurement approach up to the job?

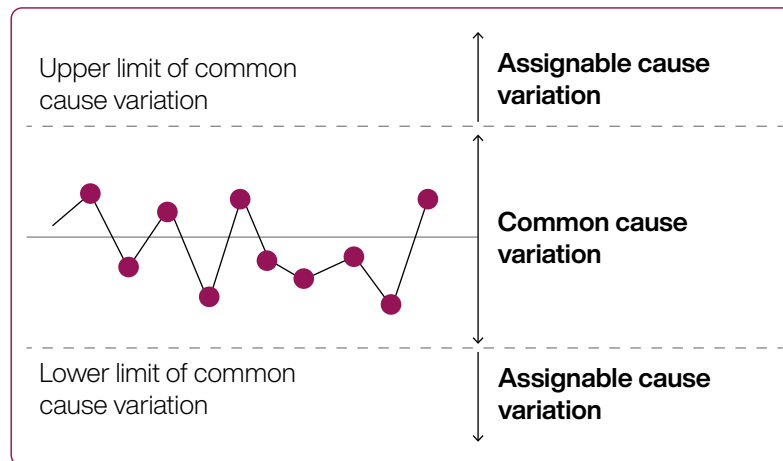
You need to know if the process can provide the quality of service expected if the level of demand changes

Challenge 1: Getting the information you need to predict and deal with changes in demand

Statistical process control

Statistical process control is one way of taking an evidenced approach to understanding and improving service performance. It uses data to track variation in process performance, and a set of rules to identify the likely reasons. It helps you understand what type of change is needed for different causes of variation in process performance, and whether your changes make a difference. Organisations that get this right spend less time reacting to unimportant variation in performance.

At its simplest, statistical process control will tell you whether variation in performance is due to **common causes** or **assignable causes**.



Common cause variation in process performance is natural variation between calculated upper and lower limits. Improving performance for this type of variation typically requires you to change what you do or how you do it.

For example, the time it takes you to cycle to work will vary day-to-day based on the weather and traffic. Improving the time it takes you to cycle to work (the 'process performance') requires a redesign of how you do the process – perhaps the route that you cycle.

Assignable cause variation in process performance is often due to a specific unexpected factor. One example of assignable cause variation is process performance that is outside the upper or lower limits of common cause variation. When you spot an assignable cause you can investigate and remove it to bring performance back to common cause variation.

For example, a puncture in your tyre could be a special cause that increases the time it takes you to cycle to work. You might remove that special cause by deciding to use a different type of tyre that does not puncture.

The NHS has a number of good resources on applying statistical process control. You can read more [here](#).

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Challenge 2: Moving people and changing processes to deal with increases in demand

If you get this right: you will be able to respond to demand in a more agile way, without always needing to recruit to fill resourcing gaps. You can make informed decisions about changing processes and moving people that take in to account the likely impact on the quality, cost and time to provide the service.

What works well:

- Making sure people have the skills and knowledge they need so they can move between roles or you can move work between teams to meet demand.
- Having alternative processes and ways of working ready to go, that everyone knows, for when current ways of working will not meet demand.



Questions to ask

- What do our scenario plans tell us about the number of people we need to meet increases or decreases in demand and how to change our processes? What impact do we expect on the quality, cost and time to provide the service?
- How can we redistribute process workload in response to higher or lower levels of demand?
- Are we agile enough to respond to changing users' needs or demand levels?

Think about

- Using a skills matrix that shows who is trained in which parts of the process helps show when demand is too much for a team and spotting and closing capability gaps.

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Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): moving work between teams to smooth workload

Problem: The ICO's data protection complaints department is split into six groups. Each group handles complaints from particular sectors, for example police and justice, banking and finance, central government and political parties. Complaints are routed to the relevant group's work queue upon receipt, with the aim of staff working on cases which they are more familiar with and related to their subject matter knowledge. This is particularly important in areas such as law enforcement, which is subject to different legislative requirements than the rest of the economy.

Each sector varies in size, number of complaints, number of organisations it deals with, and complexity of cases. The silo-based way of allocating and working cases, combined with the differing volumes and complexities of demand and differences in staff resources available in each group, meant that backlogs built up in some groups. The oldest case in some groups may have been 1–2 months old, but in others it was 6–7 months, set against a statutory requirement to respond to cases within three months.

Approach: The ICO set up a complaints allocation working group as part of its team managers' weekly meeting. The team managers agree how to share and allocate cases across individual groups to distribute them more evenly and reduce the overall number of

cases, working toward an allocation target each week across the department rather than by individual group. The allocation working group identified that some cases need particular stakeholder knowledge or an understanding of legislative complexity and are best worked by certain teams, but that 80%–90% of cases require no specialist knowledge. At the weekly meeting there is an open and honest conversation about workload and resources. Case managers take their latest cases from the intake and agree how many suitable older cases to take from other groups.

Benefit: The ICO say that its oldest cases are now 3–4 months, down from 6–7 months, and there is a more even spread of cases across the groups. The open and honest conversations between team leaders have helped them to understand why some people, teams or groups can do more or fewer cases, creating opportunities to learn from others. It feels that the new approach has helped bring greater collective accountability for performance, making performance of the entire organisation more important than individual groups.

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Keep in mind

- Consider if you need a way of seeing overall capability to complete the process. It might not be needed for all types of process but when used right it can help you see potential capability problems before they happen and take proactive action to manage demand, or build resilience.

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Challenge 2: Moving people and changing processes to deal with increases in demand

Skills matrix

A skills matrix can help you see who has the capability to do the work required in each part of the process. This is about more than just having the skills or having completed a training course. It is about knowing how to use the capability you have to complete the process in the required way of working. For example, even if you move organisation to do the same role there are many skills you can take with you, but you will still have to learn how to apply them in the new organisation's ways of working. You can use a skills matrix to identify gaps in capability and training needs, and make plans for building future capability.

A skills matrix provides a snapshot of capability at a point in time. Use it to build and maintain your understanding of who has what capability. Add new capabilities as you change and amend your ways of working and regularly confirm that the capabilities are still those needed. The matrix can help you see who has skills in other teams or parts of the organisation and move people or work to meet peaks in demand.

Staff name	Role	Business unit	Step 1 – registering	Step 2 – allocation	Step 3 – casework	Step 4 – review
Andy Blue	Caseworker	Applications (Alloa)	4	3	3	2
Carly Damson	Team Leader	Applications (Brent)	4	4	4	4
Elly Faun	Caseworker	Complaints (Cardiff)	3	3	3	0
Graham Henna	Caseworker	Complaints (Durham)	2	2	0	0

Capability level	Description
0	No capability
1	Developing capability
2	Fully capable
3	Has the capability and can apply it to complete the full process step
4	Can train others

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Challenge 3: Recruiting and training people at the pace needed to maintain effective capability

If you get this right: you will meet forecast demand, with the quality of service expected, by reducing the number of gaps in resources and the time and effort to fill them.

What works well:

- Designing recruitment processes and pipelines of capability to anticipate needs ahead of time and cope with people leaving their role as well as forecast increases in demand.
- Working on reducing the time it takes for new staff to become fully productive. Be clear on what capabilities are required for each part of the process and align your recruitment and capability-building approach with those needs.
- Do we know how many people we need with which skills to meet forecast demand?



Questions to ask

- Do we know where we will have gaps, and what our plan is to address them?
- Does our induction help new people build the capabilities they will need to do the process – and is it effective in doing so?

Think about

- Consider whether there are different ways to assess suitability for the practical realities of the role that you are trying to fill. One standard recruitment process may not work for all types of roles in an organisation.

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Keep in mind

- Reducing the time it takes people to become productive in their role and retaining them for longer improves your ability to meet demand. Do you test the capabilities and the practical realities of the role when you recruit?

You need to know if the process can provide the quality of service expected if the level of demand changes

Challenge 3: Recruiting and training people at the pace needed to maintain effective capability

Understanding and reducing time to productivity

Gaps in capability can take time to fill. Recruitment processes can take time, and induction and training processes can further increase the time it takes for a new member of staff to become fully capable. During this period, productivity and service standards may decline.

Here is an example from the automotive industry about how one company improved their recruitment process to help reduce the time to productivity of new staff.

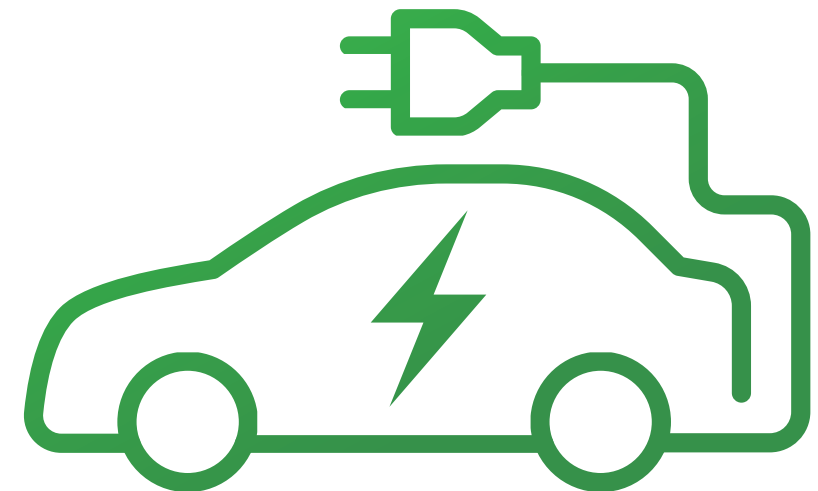
Toyota views long-term employment as a key asset to its business. The company had established that a significant level of staff turnover was due to candidates proving to be a poor fit with work in an assembly line environment.

To limit the cost and effort spent hiring and training these candidates, Toyota developed a system to test potential applicants in as realistic a way as possible by inviting them to a simulated work day, even requesting that candidates arrive at a normal start time in order to experience commuting during rush hour.

Each candidate is asked to perform the tasks required for the job on a mock assembly line. The assessment lasts an entire day in order to expose candidates to the physical demands of the job and allow them to decide if the work would suit them. Progression to the interview stage of the recruitment campaign is determined by how accurately and how fast candidates perform each task.

Toyota has tested this approach by asking existing staff to undergo the assessment, therefore ensuring that the 'pass mark' is set at the correct level.

[Source: Recruiting civil servants efficiently](#)



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Challenge 4: Improving consistency by having clear and simple processes

If you get this right: you will have processes that people apply consistently and you can rely on them to provide what people using the service want, right first time, every time.

What works well:

- Well-defined processes, including clear steps and workflow that everyone knows, are better able to respond to demand on time and to quality standards.
- Correct use of digital tools and automation can increase the capacity of the process, reducing the time it takes to produce outputs and with fewer errors.
- Everyone using the same tools and systems, in the same way, ensures there are no clunky handoffs between different ways of working.
- Challenging what you are doing from the perspective of the people using the service, particularly for older processes that have had multiple new parts or fixes. Processes often change over time away from their original intent.



Questions to ask

- Have you mapped the process from the service users' perspective, including other areas of the organisation or across organisations?
- Do your people providing the service share the same understanding of the process and describe it in the same way?

Think about

- Collect data to understand the impact of parts of the process that do not work and cause delays or frustration for people. For example, how many times does the issue happen, and how much time and effort does it take to do the workaround? The people closest to the work are best placed to build the evidence.

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Case study

Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Winter Fuel: using automation to speed up the flow of work

Problem: The Winter Fuel team deals with payments for up to 11.5 million customers. Other than claims, the content of work was not known until each piece of incoming communication had been assessed by the Winter Fuel team. This caused a significant problem – around 120,000 pieces of mail had to be physically handled to determine which work queue to place it in (for example: missed payments, top-ups or arrears). The team became overwhelmed with the volume of demand and additional work they had to do to work out the type of request. It triggered additional contact as it was taking longer to respond to customer contact and so people would chase through different routes.

Approach: Working with digital team colleagues, the Winter Fuel team identified a way to use redundant forms in the IT system to classify the type of customer request. Customers would use those

forms and the identifiers on the submission would automatically flow the work to the right people to deal with it. The workflow team can now identify what type of work is in the request without having to open most of the mail and work it out.

Benefit: DWP say that the automation has reduced the number of people needed and resulted in a saving of £300,000. It has also meant that people are not diverted from other parts of the business for so long to help with processing Winter Fuel payments. The Winter Fuel team now knows more quickly about issues such as customers who might have not been paid or paid in full, and can direct it to the people who can take action to fix them. The payment process was completed three months quicker than in the previous year.

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HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC): using automation to meet forecast peak in demand

Problem: Up to 16 million people in the UK working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic were entitled to a tax relief. HMRC did not have the capacity to deal with the expected demand using current ways of working if all the people that were entitled to claim came forward. A backlog of claims would have built up, disrupting HMRC's other business and taking years to resolve, at huge expense.

Approach: HMRC chose to build an online service that customers could fill in themselves. The information went straight into HMRC's systems for automatic processing, requiring no manual attention. The project team learned about the potential of this technology solution during an internal networking event. A multi-disciplinary team was established to design and deliver the project. The team included people with the right mix of expertise from both inside

and outside the organisation, including policy staff, subject matter experts, service managers and content designers. The group focused on challenging all assumptions about the design of the form and the information needed to process a claim. They made the process and language as simple as possible so that it was easy and quick for people to provide the right information.

Benefit: Approximately four million people used the form and applied for the relief, and HMRC managed to meet the demand. If these claims had been processed manually, it would have had significant negative impact on the department's workload and budget. Due to the pandemic and the time imperative of the project, the team did not have the opportunity to undertake lots of user research and testing but still achieved a customer satisfaction score of 98%.

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Keep in mind

- You can capture data on problems immediately. You do not need a sophisticated tool or approach to understand what stops you providing good service.
- Being clear on the consequence of the problem – the effort, time, cost or impact on service users – gets senior people interested in helping you to fix problems.

You need to know if the process can provide the quality of service expected if the level of demand changes

Challenge 4: Improving consistency by having clear and simple processes

Problem capture templates

You need evidence to know which problems have the biggest impact on providing a service. This helps overcome situations where you work on only those problems that the most senior person sees, or thinks is true.

Building evidence on problems ensures that you spend time fixing real issues. You can start to understand how often they occur and what the effect is – that might be cost, or time to do a workaround, or an impact on the person using the service. This way you can work out the benefit

of fixing the problems you identify and use that to understand if your solution makes a difference. Capturing evidence can be as simple as a tally chart of how often something does not happen right first time.

Collecting data about problems helps you to challenge myths about what causes issues. It can reveal problems that do not happen often but are high impact, as well as those that happen a lot, and do not have much impact, but can accumulate and become big issues over time. The insight helps you understand the real consequences of problems, and move from prioritising what issues to fix based on perception, to deciding based on evidence.

Process area	Issue	Impact area – cost, delivery, quality, people	Tally of occurrences	Total number of occurrences	Effect/Effort to work around
Allocation	Request not for us	Quality – 2/10 not for us Delivery – takes effort to reassign, delay in response time for user People – frustrating!	### ### ###	17	Have to find the right organisation to send the request to. Takes about 1 hour effort per request and typically 2 days to find the answer.

Focus on user needs

Understanding users' needs

Managing to their needs

Effective communication

The way you work should be informed by what matters to service users

Challenge 1: Ensuring a two-way understanding around what people using the service need and what it can provide

If you get this right: you will reduce the time and effort responding to people chasing outputs or complaining about the service, doing work again or dealing with follow-up questions.

What works well:

- Working with the people that use the service to understand what is important for them and using their input to design and test service processes. Ensure you understand the diversity of people's needs that use the service.
- Creating transparency by publishing service performance and information that helps people using the service know what to expect.

- What activities do you do that add value to what the people using the service need or want?
- When was the last time you spoke with someone that uses the service to understand what is important for them in how you provide it?

Think about

- 'Kano' analysis is one type of approach you can use for identifying and categorising the needs of people using your service. Click on practical tips to read more.



Questions to ask

- What do people using the service want or need?
- How is the end-to-end process (not just the bit you work in) actually experienced by people using it?

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Keep in mind

- Do not assume you know the needs of all types of people using the service – what matters for one person can be different for another.
- Today's delighters and performers are tomorrow's performers and basics – this analysis is not a one-off exercise.
- Use these insights to identify natural groups and inform service design.

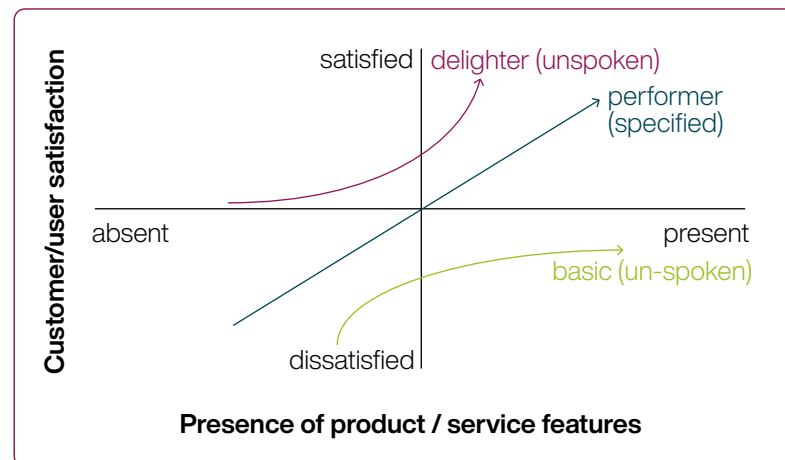
The way you work should be informed by what matters to service users

Challenge 1: Ensuring a two-way understanding around what people using the service need and what it can provide

Kano analysis

Kano analysis is one of many techniques you can use for understanding what your customers value in a product or service. It seeks to address the problem that what people using your service want is often unspoken. If you just ask people for general feedback on your service it is difficult to know what you can specifically do to improve it. There is a lot of important information that people will not tell you and you miss out on understanding the specific aspects that do or do not work for them.

Kano analysis helps you test a product or service's existing, or potential features, to understand whether people feel they are:



Basics: people just expect these features to be part of the service but will not necessarily tell you about them. If they are not present, people will be dissatisfied.

For example, it is unlikely that you would ask for a bed in a hotel room.

Performers: these features matter to people and they will tell you about them. If you provide these features it increases satisfaction with the service.

For example, you might ask for a hotel room on a high floor away from traffic.

Delighters: these are features which people do not know they want, but are delighted when the service provides them.

For example, you might not expect a free laundry service in your hotel – but you might be delighted if it is provided.

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Challenge 2: Managing the service in a way that focuses on what people using the service value

If you get this right: people experience a better service. The organisation's focus on the service user informs how people work, how you manage the service day-to-day, and how you judge performance.

What works well:

- Using measures that focus on the quality of service, based on what the customer wants, rather than an emphasis on measuring just speed of response or output.
- Designing ways of working that acknowledge differences in the people using the service. Ensuring the service meets the needs of different groups and it is easy to use for everyone.



Questions to ask

- What do your existing measures and data tell you about the experience of people using the service?
- What measures do you have that are based on what the people using the service want?
- How do you use customer feedback to improve your part of the service?
- How do you share feedback with colleagues in different parts of your organisation?

Think about

- Balanced measures, which include measures relating to the quality of what you do, not just how many, how quickly and at what cost, are important for judging performance and deciding what to change.

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Keep in mind

- Test how balanced your current measures are across quality, delivery, cost and people – where do you need more focus?
- Do a simple check of your current measures to see if you have the right balance between lead and lag.

The way you work should be informed by what matters to service users

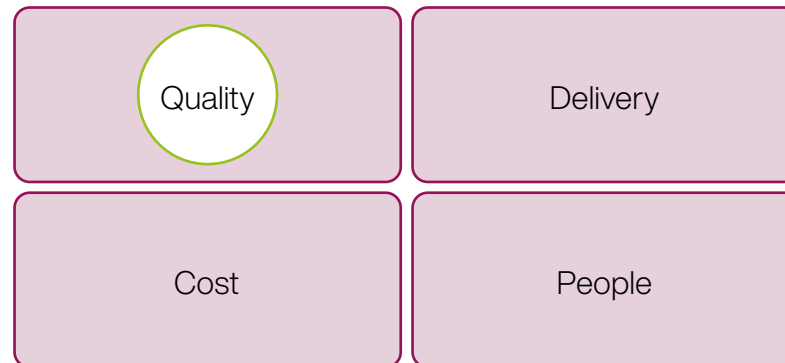
Challenge 2: Managing the service in a way that focuses on what people using the service value

Balanced measures

Measures must be **balanced** to understand and improve process performance.

Organisations are often tempted to focus their measures on **delivery** (how many have we done, how quickly have we done it) and **cost** (how much does it cost us to deliver the service).

Measures of **quality** force you to think about how often you are delivering what is needed 'right first time' at every stage of a process. Counterintuitively, a focus on quality also helps you perform better against delivery and cost measures. Your people spend less time, and money on rework, getting additional information, or workarounds to fix problems with quality. It also improves the overall experience for the people using the service. A focus on quality measures is a good place to start.



Understanding how the **people** working in the process feel is also important. People measures can provide early warning of potential issues or help explain service performance (for example, staff absence levels, investment in learning and development).

Balanced measures also need to include **lead measures** that help you predict, and do something about performance ahead of time, as well as **lag measures** to report performance.

Use the structure below to check if your current measures are balanced.

Measure category	Lead (tells you if you are likely to achieve your goal)	Lag (tells you if you have achieved your goal)	Total
Quality	Number of measures?	Number of measures?	
Delivery	Number of measures?	Number of measures?	
Cost	Number of measures?	Number of measures?	
People	Number of measures?	Number of measures?	
Total			

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Challenge 3: Effective communication with service users

If you get this right: people can access the services they need in a way that works for both you and them. They access the right service in the right place that can deal with their needs. People are kept informed of progress, meaning you spend less time dealing with unnecessary contact to find out what is happening.

What works well:

- Well-designed communication channels allow people to easily identify which service they need to use, to access it and keep up-to-date with progress.



Questions to ask

- How easy is it for people using the service to understand and interact with the process?
- Is it easy for the people using the service to give you feedback?

Think about

- The Local Government Association has examples of how organisations made quick and beneficial changes to how they communicate with customers. Read about them [here](#).

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Challenge 3: Effective communication with service users

Case study

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC): using SMS messages to keep customers informed

Problem: In early 2020, HMRC was dealing with unprecedented levels of complaints, particularly for teams in some parts of the business, such as PAYE. The volume of complaints meant that there were delays in responding, which caused additional demand as HMRC had to deal with calls from customers chasing their complaint. HMRC did not acknowledge receipt of customers' complaints, which caused unease for them as complaints often include personal information. Implementing the standard approach of using a letter to acknowledge the complaint would add additional delay as it could take between seven and ten days for the customer to receive a letter.

Approach: HMRC investigated how it might use SMS messaging to update customers and looked at how other government departments, such as HM Passport Office, use a similar approach. One business area trialled sending an automated SMS message when they received a complaint in March 2020. The approach was then rolled out to other areas. A working group with representatives from all parts of the business was set up to get

ideas from staff about how it could further improve the service for customers. In 2021, it successfully trialled additional messages – such as to advise customers that there was a delay with their application (to prevent customers chasing it), to inform them that their case has been allocated, and to inform them that they have missed a call to discuss the results of their complaint investigation.

Benefit: The number of calls from customers chasing progress updates dropped by 18% during the initial trial of acknowledging complaints by SMS. There was anecdotal evidence from customers and complaints handlers that the new approach was better, and the most recent survey carried out by the Institute of Customer Services shows a 7% increase in customer satisfaction. The working group continues to learn from customers, as well as other government departments and private sector companies, about what else is possible with SMS technology. Further benefits are expected to follow, such as improvements to the service for customers who require additional support.

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Case study

Understand process flow

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Quality assurance

You should understand how demand flows through the steps of the process and where there are pinch-points and dependencies

Challenge 1: Ensuring everyone shares the same understanding of priorities between the different parts of end-to-end processes

If you get this right: everyone knows the importance of dealing with the demand in a certain way, even if it is not the primary focus of their role. Work is done on time, complete and correct throughout the process, and there are no bottlenecks causing delays.

What works well:

- Ensuring everyone understands the importance of their contribution to end-to-end processes and agrees on how to prioritise work.
- Working with people leading different parts of the end-to-end service to see how your own objectives and measures create behaviours that stop work flowing between different parts of the process.



Questions to ask

- Can people describe how their work contributes to providing what the user of the service requires?
- Can people consistently describe the service users' journeys through the process, including any links and dependencies from other parts of the organisation?

Think about

- Consider how the way you deal with demand, and how you do your part of the work, impacts other parts of the process and the outcome for the service user.
- Business objectives can conflict with each other, so help staff to understand which they should focus on in which scenarios to ensure they make judgments consistently. Be mindful of whether different business units' priorities align when a process moves between different teams. It can impact the quality of service provided if priorities do not align and you do nothing about it.
- For further insight about improving the quality of the work flowing through the end-to-end process, see our insight on quality of input.

Understand process flow

Aligning priorities

Tools to support flow

Quality assurance

Keep in mind

- You do not need an IT system to measure quality – a simple approach can reveal if there are issues to investigate.
- It is easier to measure quality if you agree what 'good' looks like in the first place – particularly between process steps done by different teams or across organisation boundaries.

You should understand how demand flows through the steps of the process and where there are pinch-points and dependencies

Challenge 1: Ensuring everyone shares the same understanding of priorities between the different parts of end-to-end processes

Quality of input, process and output

Measuring performance at the end of a process tells you whether or not something has been achieved – but not why or where there are problems. By measuring the quality of input, quality of process and quality of output, all the way through, at each process step, rather than just at the end of the process, you get more detailed information on where there are issues and what needs to change.

Measure quality at each step of the end-to end process. You will identify where and how often problems occur, and where and how the impact of that is felt. You can then prioritise fixing those that are causing you the most pain. You might measure:

1) Quality of input:

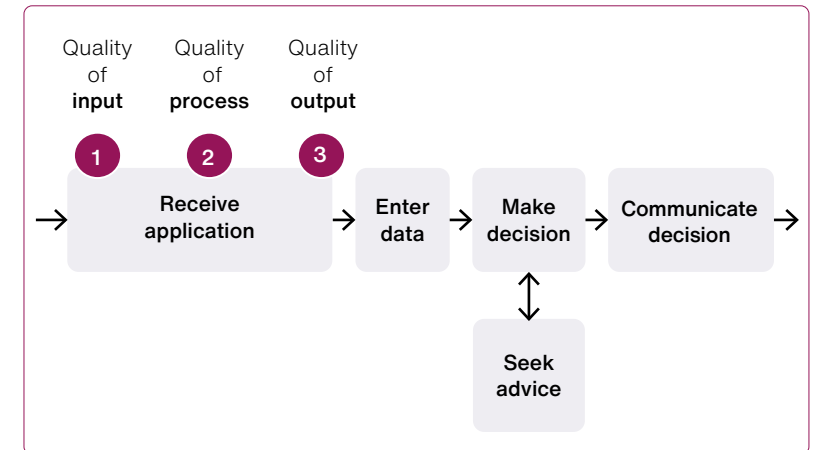
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Understand process flow

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Keep in mind

- Think about the consequence of only working towards one objective – for example, the likely impact on quality of service if you solely focus on costs.
- Remember that different service users might have different perspectives on what their priority is from a service.

You should understand how demand flows through the steps of the process and where there are pinch-points and dependencies

Challenge 1: Ensuring everyone shares the same understanding of priorities between the different parts of end-to-end processes

Aligning objectives

The organisations responsible for providing an end-to-end service may have objectives that do not fully align. You might need to work through how to trade-off seemingly competing objectives when they do not align. As a simple example, an objective to 'do it quickly' will not always align with an objective to 'do it right', but there can be more subtle and less obvious conflicts.

When tension exists between competing objectives, it can lead to inconsistent judgements on what matters most, and cause poor-quality service, appeals and complaints. People need clarity on which objectives to align with, when and if that changes.

Where a process passes through multiple business areas, it is important to build a shared understanding of each other's objectives. This helps you to see the likely impact on the service user of how you choose to prioritise your part of the process.

If someone cannot see the impact of how they do their part of the process on the overall service outcome, then it will have an impact on the quality of what they do, and on the end result for the service user. The risk is greater still if the core measures of success for their business unit are not what matters to the service user.

Understand process flow

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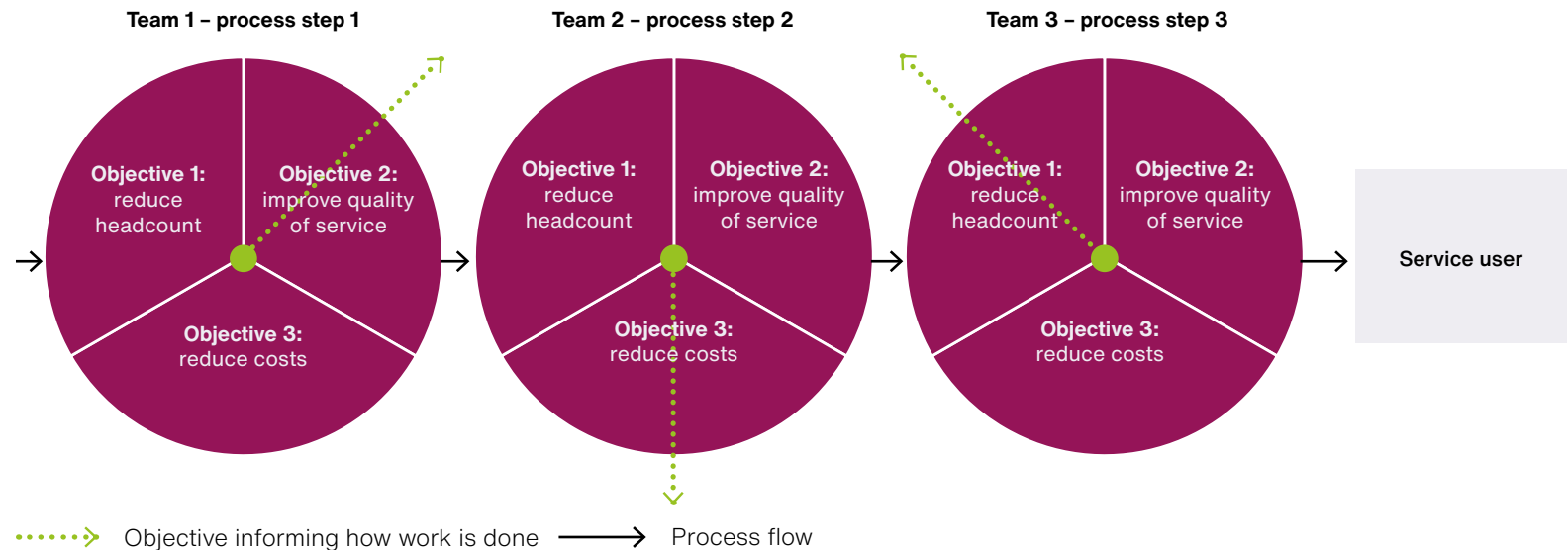
Challenge 1: Ensuring everyone shares the same understanding of priorities between the different parts of end-to-end processes

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- Think about the consequence of only working towards one objective – for example the likely impact on quality of service if you solely focus on costs.
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What is the impact on the service user of different teams prioritising different objectives?



Understand process flow

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You should understand how demand flows through the steps of the process and where there are pinch-points and dependencies

Challenge 2: using tools and systems to support end-to-end process flow

If you get this right: tools and systems are ways in which you can add value by making processes more efficient and effective. It can also make it easier to manage processes by providing visibility of how work flows and where work is at any point in time.

What works well:

- Having tools and data to understand how demand flows from end-to-end in the process.
- Automating data collection where possible to reduce the amount of manual entry, which adds time and causes errors and rework.



Questions to ask

- How do you measure performance at steps through the process – not just output at the end of it?
- Do you understand where blockages in the process might occur and why?
- Do you understand the level of rework in the process – how often things are not done right first time?

Think about

- You need to collect evidence of performance through the process, not just at the end, if you want to identify and do something about problems that will impact the service you provide. Think about the quality of inputs, quality of process and quality of outputs at all process steps.

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Challenge 2: using tools and systems to support end-to-end process flow

Home Office: redesigning the service to improve how work flows through the process

Problem: The Home Office's service standard is to respond to 95% of complaints within 20 days. The UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) complaints team was consistently meeting this standard, but a lot of responses were taking nearly the full 20 days. The people responding to complaints had a lot of work to do close to the time limit, which created pressure and stress. This work included getting information from business units and carrying out quality assurance checks. Teams captured management information on the complaint after responding to it, so there was no information to understand performance until four weeks after the fact, reducing its value.

Approach: The complaints team's data showed that only 8% of complaints were responded to within days 1 to 11 and that there was a large spike at day 18. By the time a case was registered and sifted by a central correspondence hub, four or five days had sometimes elapsed, so the team decided to work on streamlining the front end of the process. The registering and sifting role gradually transitioned from the central correspondence hub to the UKVI complaints team. They also piloted a new way of registering and recording within 48 hours, so they could triage cases on day 2. This identified more complex complaints that require multiple inputs from the business earlier, giving them a better chance of hitting the 20-day target. The team also started to collect management information when the triage was done, rather than when the case was completed.

Benefit: The team were managing to clear 40%–70% of complaints by day 11 after the pilot. They were meeting 100% of their service standard in some weeks, which they had not done before. The new way of working reduced the pressure on staff by giving them more time to get the right information and ensure a quality response within the time limit. The timelier management information in performance reports helped to identify and take action on emerging thematic issues and the possibility of informing how work is done in other parts of the organisation to prevent issues occurring. UKVI considers the pilot to have been a success and intends to use it as a model for improving the end-to-end process flow in future.

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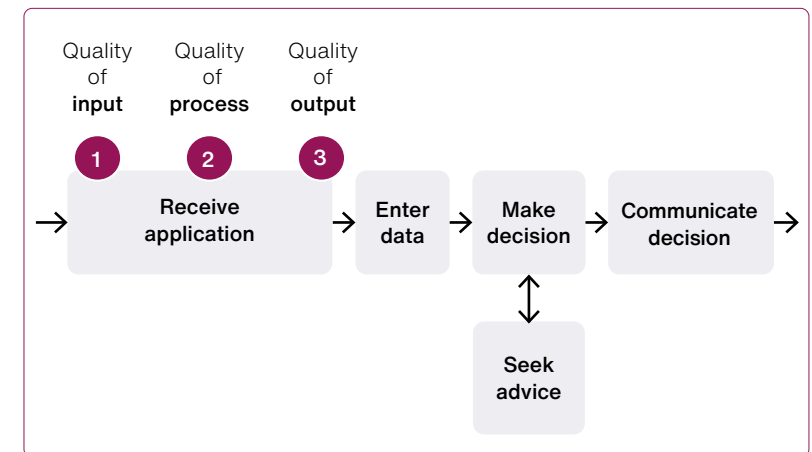
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Challenge 3: Effective quality assurance processes

If you get this right: you measure quality to improve systematically rather than as a checking process. Assurance processes spot issues quickly so you fix process problems and meet demand to high-quality standards – not just as a one-off but every time.

What works well:

- Moving from retrospective quality control checks on end results towards an ongoing assurance process, so quality issues are spotted and resolved earlier and quicker.
- Using every time you provide the service as an opportunity to improve quality. Defining what 'good' looks like and making it the role of the people working on the process to check quality and raise issues to fix as they occur.



Questions to ask

- Can people give examples of identifying, escalating and resolving problems quickly?
- How are people monitoring the quality of the work they receive, the work they do and the work they pass on to others as part of their routine ways of working?

Think about

- Use an approach to quality that focuses on quality improvement first and quality assurance second to systematically improve services.

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Keep in mind

- Quality improvement requires you to measure performance through the process – do you have that approach to measuring process performance or do you need to develop it?
- If quality improvement is important, you need to let your people know that and give them the time and capability to do it.

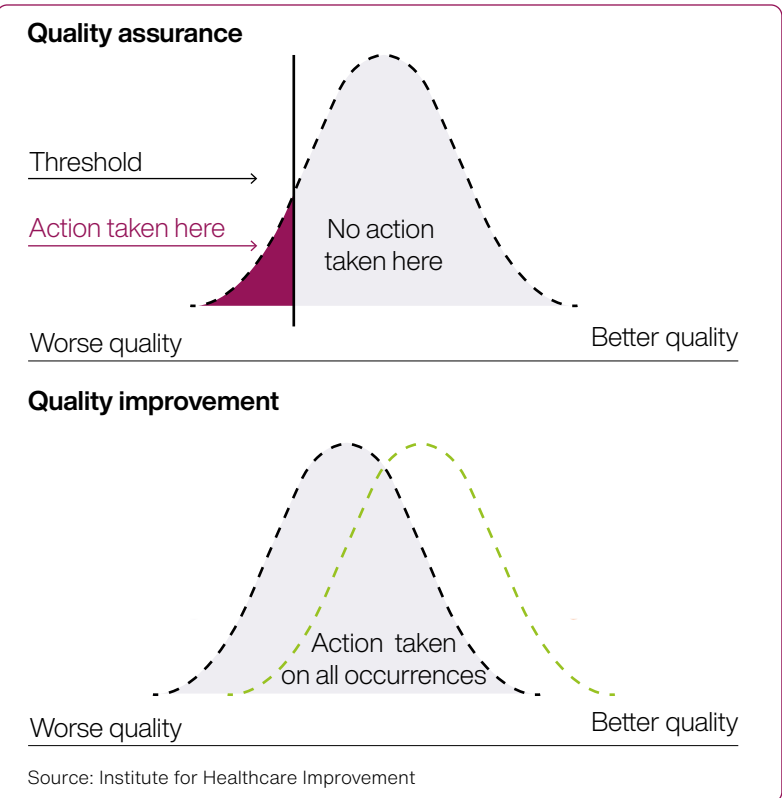
You should understand how demand flows through the steps of the process and where there are pinch-points and dependencies

Challenge 3: Effective quality assurance processes

Quality assurance, quality improvement or both?

A **quality assurance** approach supports action to improve the specific outputs it is applied to. In government it is often applied at the end of a process and is designed to address issues beyond a certain threshold. The outcome is that a minimum quality standard is maintained on those outputs it is applied to.

A **quality improvement** approach supports action to achieve an incremental shift and improvement of overall quality of service. It requires everyone to take responsibility for quality as part of their job. The aim is to consistently look for and address issues with quality each time you do the process. The outcome is quality of service gradually improves for every service user over time, rather than just ensuring a minimal threshold is met.



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Avoid one size fits all

Types of demand

Coping with complexity

You need to know if your ways of working meet the needs of the different types of people using the service

Challenge 1: Identifying different types of demand

If you get this right: you will be able to identify what work needs to flow through different processes. This will ensure the service works efficiently and provides a good-quality service for all users.

What works well:

- Triage approaches involve people with the right capabilities to identify which cases are simple or complex, high or low priority and why, and cases that need specialist expertise.
- Adapting and establishing new ways of working to absorb and support the needs of different service users that emerge over time. Rigidly sticking to templates and standard processes will not work for certain types of demand.



Questions to ask

- Do you have different processes for different types of demand?
- How do types of demand inform the process you use?
- Do you assess performance against the diversity of service users' needs?
- Do you assess performance against the diversity of service users' needs?

Think about

- Identify specific characteristics of demand and work out what processes are needed to meet the needs of those characteristics. Do not see demand just as broad groups, such as a demographic of the population or geographical location.

Avoid one size fits all

Types of demand

Coping with complexity

Keep in mind

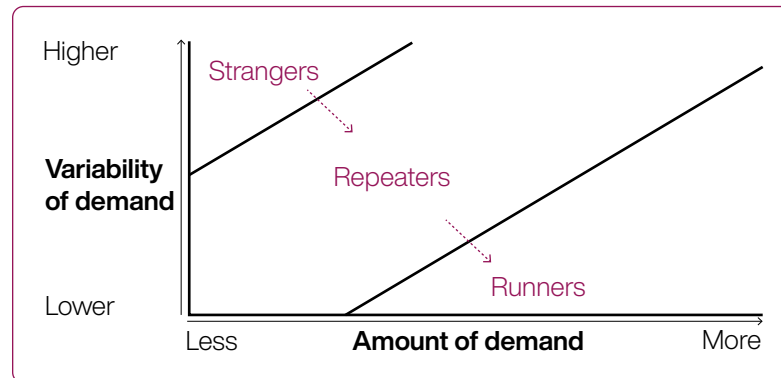
- Identify natural groups by building an understanding of the characteristics of the people using the service, and what that means for the way you deal with their needs. Do not just group people based on the services you provide, or demographic characteristics such as location or age.

You need to know if your ways of working meet the needs of the different types of people using the service

Challenge 1: Identifying different types of demand

Runners, repeaters, strangers

If you design your service for simple cases or only have capability to deal with those types, the **less common and more complex cases will get stuck, disrupt the flow of work and lead to poor-quality service**. It is easier to deal with different and more complex cases if you know the different characteristics of the people using the service, their needs and how that affects what you need to do. One approach to thinking about this is ‘runners, repeaters and strangers’.



Runners is the type of demand that varies the least, and is often the biggest proportion of total demand. Design a way to manage those as efficiently as possible, that everyone can use. That will help you cope with a large amount of demand and free up time for more complex types.

Repeaters is the type of demand that you will have seen before but less often. There is more variation in the characteristics and you need to know how those characteristics change what you need to do. That way you can identify them when they arrive and make sure that you have processes and the capability to deal with them.

Strangers is the type of demand that you might not have seen before. You cannot ignore this type of demand, but you might not have a process in place to deal with it. You might have to work it out ‘on the go’, so using your most experienced people can help. It is also vital to have an effective learning process so you can build a way of working for the next time you face the same type of demand.

Strangers may become repeaters, and repeaters may become runners over time as you learn more about the requests and how to deal with them. Your runners, repeaters and strangers can also change if people with different characteristics start using the service.

Avoid one size fits all

Types of demand

Coping with complexity

You need to know if your ways of working meet the needs of the different types of people using the service

Challenge 2: Making expertise available when it is needed to cope with more complex types of demand

If you get this right: you can deal with all types of work as it comes in rather than pushing problems somewhere else. Straightforward types of demand will not end up stuck in bottlenecks behind more complex types, and you will be better able to service the diverse needs of people using the service.

What works well:

- Allocating work so demand goes to the people best placed to deal with it, with specialist expertise brought in for more complicated types.
- Having a shared understanding, or clear rules, about who works on which type of demand, where multiple business units or organisations do the same process so you allocate responsibility quickly.
- Making a plan for how to deal with new, the most risky or sensitive types of demand.



Questions to ask

- Do people understand the different types of demand for their service, from the most common and straightforward to more unusual and challenging?
- Are there different processes for meeting the variation in service demand and what does that mean for skills or inputs you need?

Think about

- Keep tracking how much demand you resolve at first point of contact. Work out what process changes you can make and where to deploy new or additional expertise to improve how often you complete work right first time.
- An effective 'triage' process can help allocate work quickly to the people best placed to deal with that type of demand.

Avoid one size fits all

Types of demand

You need to know if your ways of working meet the needs of the different types of people using the service

Coping with complexity

Challenge 2: Making expertise available when it is needed to cope with more complex types of demand

Case study

Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) Levelling Up Fund: implementing a triage approach that gets applications to the right expertise

Problem: The Levelling Up Fund is a large fund which is jointly managed by DLUHC, HM Treasury and Department for Transport. There are detailed rules on what can and cannot be done with the money. Applications for funding vary in size and complexity and decisions need to be made consistently. There are three main categories for funding (regeneration, transport and culture). Different teams take the lead, but applications can combine multiple categories and need a mix of specialist skills and expertise to make decisions on them. The process for managing the first round of funding in 2021 was challenging due to the complexity of applications, variability of demand, supporting IT systems and the number of people and organisations involved in the process throughout the different assessment stages.

Approach: DLUHC intends to set up a triage approach for the second round of the Levelling Up Fund to ensure that the application goes to the right place for assessment, at the right time, and to those with the right skills. The underlying objective is to work through a high volume of complex assessments within a tight timeframe and provide high-quality scored assessments which are ready for the shortlisting and decision-making process. Applications will be received via a digital portal, and a digital assessment tool will use logic to batch them into three main types. The assessment tool will allocate them to the right teams and account for larger applications needing more time. Using management information from the assessment tool, the DLUHC team will do additional checks and triage when it is needed using their knowledge to assess which applications

are likely to raise issues and ensure consistency in approach across teams. They will also identify where specialist input is needed, such as from commercial teams. Work is assigned to the people in specialist teams that have the relevant expertise to deal with the complexity of the application.

Benefit: The team expects the digital portal and triage to reduce the amount of manual work they need to do when they receive applications. They believe it will considerably improve the coordination of work between different assessing teams and provide better access to live progress information. The quality of the work done is also expected to improve by having the right people involved, with the right skills and experience.

Avoid one size fits all

Types of demand

Coping with complexity

Keep in mind

- Use an understanding of the different types of service users to design the work and expertise required to absorb their needs effectively.
- If you choose a triage approach make sure it adds value from the perspective of the service user – not just redistributing work to other people.

You need to know if your ways of working meet the needs of the different types of people using the service

Challenge 2: Making expertise available when it is needed to cope with more complex types of demand

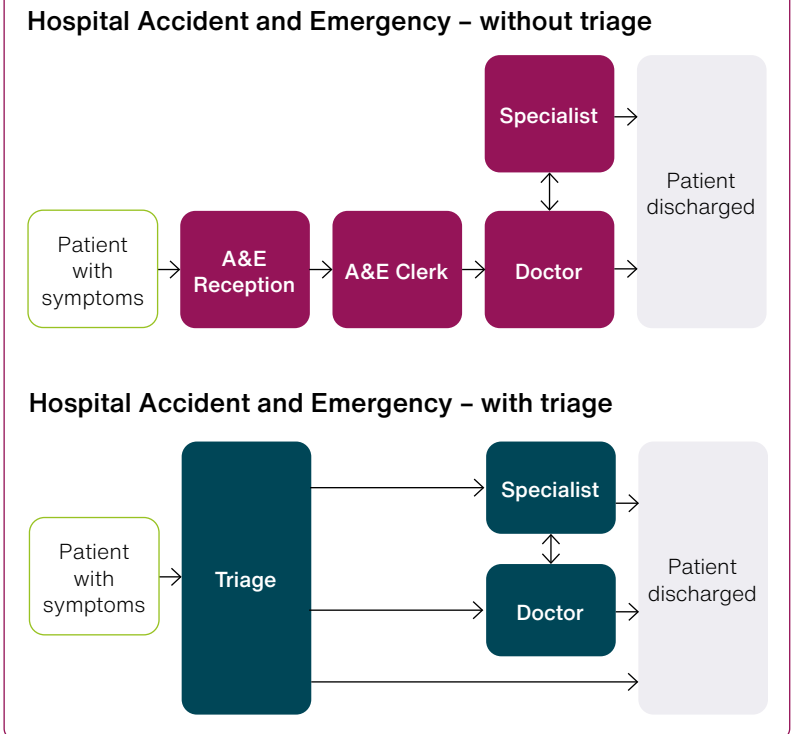
Triage

Triage is one approach you can use to spot types of demand that need to be treated differently. It helps identify what expertise is required to meet the needs of the person using the service. It can prevent delays in the process and provides the person using the service with what they need, closer to the point that it is needed.

Triage is used commonly in a range of processes across government. The principles can be adapted to everything from administrative processes, such as application or decision-making processes, to hospital accident and emergency departments like the example here.

The triage approach in the example has advantages over the process without triage, including:

- identifying patients that do not need medical attention earlier on in the process. This also frees up expertise and capacity for treating other patients;
- patients who need urgent specialist attention are identified and dealt with quickly by the expertise that can help them;
- fewer handoffs through the process means less waiting and frustration for people using the service; and
- people have spent less cumulative time in the process so there is less pressure on expertise at later points in the process to deal with patients quickly.



Improve the quality of inputs

User inputs

Internal handoffs

Improving the quality of what comes into the process will allow you to complete work faster and right first time

Challenge 1: Ensuring demand comes to the right place and making it easy for service users to provide the right quality of input

If you get this right: you will improve the speed and quality of services. People will spend less time searching for and transferring work to the appropriate team or organisation. People using the service will be less confused or frustrated about where to get the service they are looking for and what they need to do. They will not waste their time providing things you do not need, and you will not waste time chasing things you do not get.

What works well:

- Making the service as simple to interact with as possible so the people using it, and the inputs they provide, go to the people and part of the organisation that can help. This includes well-designed and signposted websites.
- Designing processes with the needs of the people using it in mind and making it easy for them to provide what you need. This helps reduce time and effort clarifying what is required and responding to service requests that are not valid.
- Creating user-friendly web-based forms to set the expectations of people using the service and collect all necessary information to service the demand.



Questions to ask

- Do we monitor the quality of inputs to the process?
- Are users routinely consulted on their requirements from the service?

Think about

- Monitoring the quality of input to your service will give you evidence of whether something is wrong with that part of the process and the impact. Use this to make evidence-based decisions about whether fixing it is a priority.
- For more practical information about making customer contact channels easy to use, see our insight on focusing on user needs.

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Challenge 1: Ensuring demand comes to the right place and making it easy for service users to provide the right quality of input

Case study

Home Office: using customer-facing tools to improve quality of input

Problem: The UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) complaints team noticed that around 40% of communications they received from customers were not actually complaints. They also noticed that people using the UKVI website found it difficult to provide the information required to support their complaint that was set out on the website's landing page. The complaints team spent additional time sifting through huge volumes of correspondence and writing to customers for additional information to resolve complaints.

Approach: The team chose to design a template complaint form which asks a set of questions in a structured format to collect the necessary information to investigate the complaint. It also signposts users to other means of contacting UKVI where

appropriate. The form was developed and designed by an external team and underwent user testing. The team evaluated how people used the template to make updates iteratively and have further changes planned, such as adding the ability to upload documents.

Benefit: As a result of the new complaint form, the amount of correspondence that is not a complaint has reduced to 20%. The team's analysis of how people are using the website suggests that more people are identifying and using the correct contact channels for their needs. It is now easier for the complaints team to start, manage and complete the process as the complaints contain more of the standard details they need and are presented to investigators in the same way. The team believe the new approach has reduced the time it takes to respond to a complaint.

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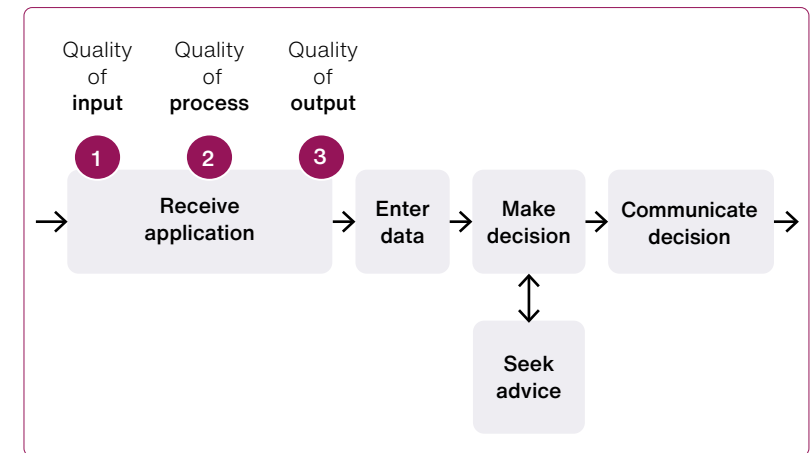
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Improve the quality of inputs

User inputs

Internal handoffs

Keep in mind

- You can capture data on problems immediately. You do not need a sophisticated tool or approach to understand what stops you providing good service.
- Being clear on the consequence of the problem – the effort, time, cost or impact on service users – gets senior people interested in helping you to fix problems.

Improving the quality of what comes into the process will allow you to complete work faster and right first time

Challenge 1: Ensuring demand comes to the right place and making it easy for service users to provide the right quality of input

Problem capture templates

You need evidence to know which problems have the biggest impact on providing a service. This helps overcome situations where you work on only those problems that the most senior person sees, or thinks is true.

Building evidence on problems ensures that you spend time fixing real issues. You can start to understand how often they occur and what the effect is – that might be cost, or time to do a workaround, or an impact on the person using the service. This way you can work out the benefit

of fixing the problems you identify and use that to understand if your solution makes a difference. Capturing evidence can be as simple as a tally chart of how often something does not happen right first time.

Collecting data about problems helps you to challenge myths about what causes issues. It can reveal problems that do not happen often but are high impact, as well as those that happen a lot, and do not have much impact, but can accumulate and become big issues over time. The insight helps you understand the real consequences of problems, and move from prioritising what issues to fix based on perception, to deciding based on evidence.

Process area	Issue	Impact area – cost, delivery, quality, people	Tally of occurrences	Total number of occurrences	Effect/Effort to work around
Allocation	Request not for us	Quality – 2/10 not for us Delivery – takes effort to reassign, delay in response time for user People – frustrating!	### ### ##	17	Have to find the right organisation to send the request to. Takes about 1 hour effort per request and typically 2 days to find the answer.

Improve the quality of inputs

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Challenge 2: Ensuring consistent quality of input from people within different internal teams

If you get this right: people in other parts of your organisation or in other government organisations will provide consistent and timely inputs to ensure you meet the goals of the process.

What works well:

- Working closely with other teams to improve the quality of inputs they provide through the process. Build a shared understanding of what 'good' looks like between parts of the process – such as the what, where and when of the inputs you need – and help people build their skills to provide those inputs.



Questions to ask

- When did you last speak to someone in your organisation that uses the outputs from your part of the process or provides the inputs to your part?
- How will you know if the needs of someone else in the process change?

Think about

- Do not assume everyone shares your understanding of the process and the quality requirements. Make the quality requirements explicit so that everyone is clear on what is needed, when and to what standard. This applies to handoffs between people within the same organisation and between different organisations.

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Keep in mind

- Understand what people need from each step in the process. Ask questions like what, when, where, and how often to help you build and iterate a list of quality requirements for inputs and outputs.
- Check whether and how often the process is meeting the quality requirements at each step.

Improving the quality of what comes into the process will allow you to complete work faster and right first time

Challenge 2: Ensuring consistent quality of input from people within different internal teams

Understanding true user needs through the process

It is easy to make assumptions about what people using the service value in how you provide the service or what they want from you. The same is true of other people who do different parts of the process – what do they need from you to do their job? Your assumptions will

be often wrong, so it is important to make the requirements explicit. The aim is to ensure that everyone gets what they need, right first time.

A SIPOC (Supplier, Input, Process, Output, Customer) table can be constructed to set out the user requirements for each stage of a process. Here is an example for one step of an application process:

Supplier (who provides the input?)	Input (what inputs are needed to perform the process step and to what standard?)	Process (what is done with the input?)	Output (what is produced by the process step and to what standard?)	Customer (who is the output for?)
Workflow team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application added to workflow system • Documents filed according to naming convention • Skills matrix • Team availability 	Triage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application allocated to appropriate team member's workflow queue within four hours 	Casework team member

The right skills and tools

Resources and guidance

Clear responsibilities

Consistent service

The people providing the service must have the skills and tools they need to do their jobs

Challenge 1: Giving people the right resources and guidance to support their role

If you get this right: staff have easy access to known best ways of working, and can work consistently to expected standards.

What works well:

- Providing information on ways of working that are easy to use and are kept up to date. It can include templates, 'how to' guides and good practice, as well as training. This helps people understand the process, maintain consistency in the quality of work across teams, and do things right first time.



Questions to ask

- Is the process stabilised and documented so everyone can use current best-known ways of working?
- When the process changes, how quickly do you train people and update documents?

Think about

- Using a skills matrix that shows who is trained in which parts of the process will help spot who needs support, training or guidance to bring them up to your current best-known ways of working.

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Keep in mind

- Consider if you need a way of seeing overall capability to complete the process. It might not be needed for all types of process but when used right it can help you see potential capability problems before they happen and take proactive action to manage demand, or build resilience.

The people providing the service must have the skills and tools they need to do their jobs

Challenge 1: Giving people the right resources and guidance to support their role

Skills matrix

A skills matrix can help you see who has the capability to do the work required in each part of the process. This is more than just having the skills or having completed a training course. It is about knowing how to use the capability you have to complete the process in the required way. For example if you move organisation to do the same role there are many skills you can take with you. But you will still have to learn how to apply them in the new organisation’s ways of working. You can use a skills matrix to identify gaps in capability and training needs, and make plans for building future capability.

A skills matrix provides a snapshot of capability at a point in time. Use it to build and maintain your understanding of who has what capability. Add new capabilities as you change and amend your ways of working and regularly confirm that the capabilities are still those needed.

The matrix can help you see who has skills in other teams or parts of the organisation and move people or work to meet peaks in demand.

Staff name	Role	Business unit	Step 1 – registering	Step 2 – allocation	Step 3 – casework	Step 4 – review
Andy Blue	Caseworker	Applications (Alloa)	4	3	3	2
Carly Damson	Team Leader	Applications (Brent)	4	4	4	4
Elly Faun	Caseworker	Complaints (Cardiff)	3	3	3	0
Graham Henna	Caseworker	Complaints (Durham)	2	2	0	0

Capability level	Description
0	No capability
1	Developing capability
2	Fully capable
3	Has the capability and can apply it to complete the full process step
4	Can train others

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Challenge 2: Creating clarity on roles and responsibilities for carrying out the process

If you get this right: all work has an owner at every step of the process. Everyone knows who does what to meet demand in the most effective way and ensure the best possible service.

What works well:

- Ensuring everyone knows who responds to demand and how, including giving people or teams ownership and autonomy to respond to service demand where appropriate.
- Being clear about who does what in an organisation where processes cross between teams and organisational boundaries.



Questions to ask

- Are our people clear on what is expected from them?
- Have we specified who is responsible for work where processes cross between business areas?

Think about

- Make sure everyone knows what types of process problems they can fix themselves and when and how to raise issues that need input from others. This might be when decisions taken in one part of the process will have a knock-on impact elsewhere.
- Make sure you know who does what and what they need to do their part of the process. For more, see our insight on quality of input.

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Keep in mind

- Be clear on what people can just get on and do when it comes to fixing problems.

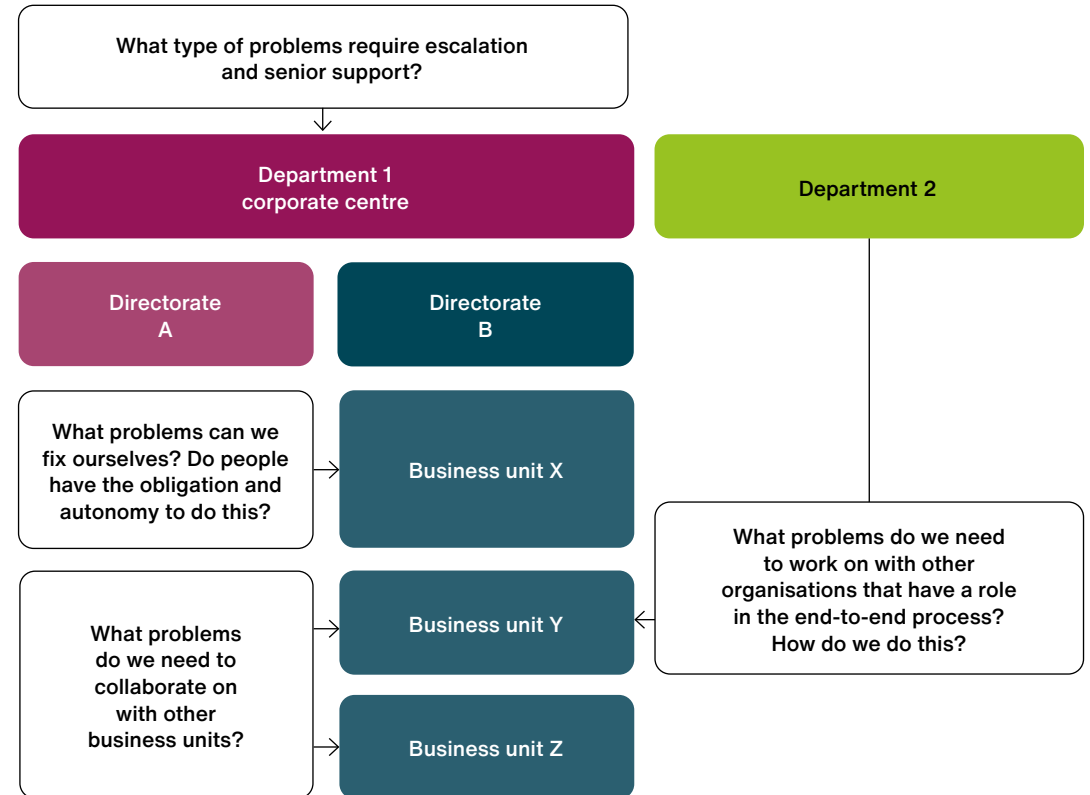
The people providing the service must have the skills and tools they need to do their jobs

Challenge 2: Creating clarity on roles and responsibilities for carrying out the process

Whose job is it to fix problems?

Providing clarity on 'how problems are solved around here' makes it more likely that people will do it. Ensure people know the boundaries for what they can fix themselves, and who they need to collaborate with on wider issues or when they need to escalate problems.

In this example, people working in different business units are considering how they can fix their process problems.



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Challenge 3: Ensuring consistency when there are multiple teams that provide the service

If you get this right: people get the same levels of service, no matter who provides it. All teams serving similar sorts of demand can access best-known ways of working. They can contribute to and benefit from improvements in ways of working made by others.

What works well:

- Providing teams that serve similar demand with ways for sharing knowledge on good practice and the time to do it.
- Having ways that support people to build and share knowledge and expertise, for example using a core expert team or specialist input and skills. This can provide consistency in approach and build the capability of the people closest to the demand.



Questions to ask

- How do you check the process continues to produce the expected outputs to the required quality?
- Are you meeting within teams and across teams to discuss improvement work and share ideas?
- How do you encourage people to spend some of their working hours learning lessons from other parts of the organisation or other organisations?

Think about

- Encourage your team to compare performance as a learning and improvement opportunity. Be curious and explore why there is a difference, rather than just competing between teams.

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The people providing the service must have the skills and tools they need to do their jobs

Challenge 3: Ensuring consistency when there are multiple teams that provide the service

Case study

Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC): ensuring consistency when there are multiple teams that provide the service

Problem: DLUHC has a small Parliamentary team that coordinates written Parliamentary Questions (PQs) briefing from across the department to send to ministers. Turnover of staff within policy teams can lead to a loss of knowledge and expertise in responding to PQs. This can manifest itself in inconsistencies in the quality of briefing from policy teams, meaning the Parliamentary team needs to seek clarification or additional information, leading to less timely submissions to ministers.

Approach: The Parliamentary team produces guidance to teams on handling written PQs. In addition, it offers ad-hoc training to staff,

particularly new members of staff or to staff working in policy areas where it expects an upturn in Parliamentary scrutiny, for example where the department is about to announce a new policy initiative. Through feedback from policy and ministerial teams, the Parliamentary team refines the guidance and staff training to ensure it is focused and relevant.

Benefit: This approach has helped maintain the consistency and quality of written PQ briefing across the department. It has also led to less time spent by the Parliamentary team and ministerial offices asking for further clarification or information.