

On the Front Line

Motivating street cleansing teams and managing their impact on public perceptions

insight



research

Introduction

Keep Britain Tidy's recent Perceptions of Place project highlighted the impact front line staff can have on the public's perceptions of their local environment and the reputation of the services they provide. We undertook this study to find out what motivates front line staff in their roles, the extent to which they feel they contribute to the local environment, their level of engagement with cleansing standards and the impact of the work they do. Our findings aim to make front line staff feel more engaged with their role and empowered to perform their jobs more effectively, thereby increasing efficiencies and improving residents' perceptions, not only of the street cleansing service, but also of service providers.

Street Cleaning: A Super Service

Keep Britain Tidy has been working with the street cleansing industry for over fifty years to create cleaner streets for everyone to enjoy. Throughout that time we have built up many relationships within the industry and conducted a significant amount of research. As a result we know just how important the appearance of the local area is. For example, those who are more satisfied with the appearance of their local area are more likely to feel safe there.¹

We also know that to a certain extent, residents take street cleansing for granted, with many not being fully aware of how much it impacts upon their satisfaction with the local area. However, the prospect of the service being taken away causes significant worry, with 59% thinking it would lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour, 53% believing that property prices might fall and 51% thinking they might feel less safe. Only 9% feel that there would be no immediate consequences if local street cleaning services were stopped.²

Furthermore, 90% of the English public think that it is essential that there are people employed to clean their streets³ and it has been found that street cleansing alone has the biggest impact on the overall reputation of councils.⁴



90% of the public think that it is essential that there are people employed to clean their streets

Omnibus survey, 829 adults surveyed across England, TNS (February 2012)



The impact and importance of the street cleaner role is further strengthened by Keep Britain Tidy's research *Whose Reality is it Anyway?: Understanding the Impact of Deprivation on Perceptions of Place*⁵ which identified seven key drivers of perceptions of place that operate in conjunction with personal experience. One of the drivers, referred to as Experts at Hand, represents the finding that many residents will cite the source of their 'knowledge' as an 'expert' in the field, for example a council employee such as a street cleaner.

This position as an 'expert' gives them an air of authority which provides the resident with the belief that their perception is credible and an accurate reflection of reality.

Subsequently, employees of an organisation can play a significant role in influencing how members of the public view that organisation. Arguably, this is especially true of council employees who work in street cleansing, as they are the council employees that people are most likely to encounter in public.

¹*The Word on our Street: A national survey measuring the public's perceptions of their local environment*, Keep Britain Tidy (2011)

²*Local Environmental Quality in Times of Austerity*, Keep Britain Tidy and London Councils (2011)

³*Omnibus survey, 829 adults surveyed across England, conducted by TNS (February 2012)*

⁴*The New Reputation Guide*, Local Government Association (2011)

⁵*Whose Reality is it Anyway?: Understanding the Impact of Deprivation on Perceptions of Place*, Keep Britain Tidy (2009)

Your Experts At Hand

Research carried out on behalf of the Local Government Association revealed that councils with the highest Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores (as were) have staff who are the most likely to say they will speak positively about them.⁶

It would not be a huge leap then, to assume that staff who speak positively about their employer are more likely to be engaged with the organisation – highlighting the importance of a happy and engaged workforce for the success and efficiency of any organisation.

Keep Britain Tidy was therefore keen to carry out a piece of research to understand how cleansing teams are currently working so that we could identify how cleansing operatives can be better motivated and engaged to create cleaner streets and improve resident satisfaction with their local area and ultimately their council.



Employees who are engaged and who live and breathe the values of the organisation are likely to be 43% more productive, perform up to 20% more effectively and take 3.5 fewer sick days per year

Using an employee engagement approach to build a high-performing Civil Service, Cabinet Office (2007)

What We Did

Keep Britain Tidy worked with four local authority partners; Wirral Borough Council, South Staffordshire Council, North East Lincolnshire Council and Northumberland County Council. Fieldwork was carried out in each authority, which included:

- Interviews with chargehands/team managers
- Mini focus groups with cleansing operatives
- Shift observations with a sample of cleansing operatives

Interviews with chargehands/team managers were carried out first, to help set the scene, get an understanding of how the cleansing teams work and to understand from a management perspective where barriers and triggers may lie for more effective working.

Keep Britain Tidy wishes to thank all participating authorities and their street cleansing teams, for their co-operation and contribution to this research.



⁶The Reputation of Local Government, Ipsos Mori on behalf of the Local Government Association (2008)

Keep Britain Tidy Front Line Expectation Model

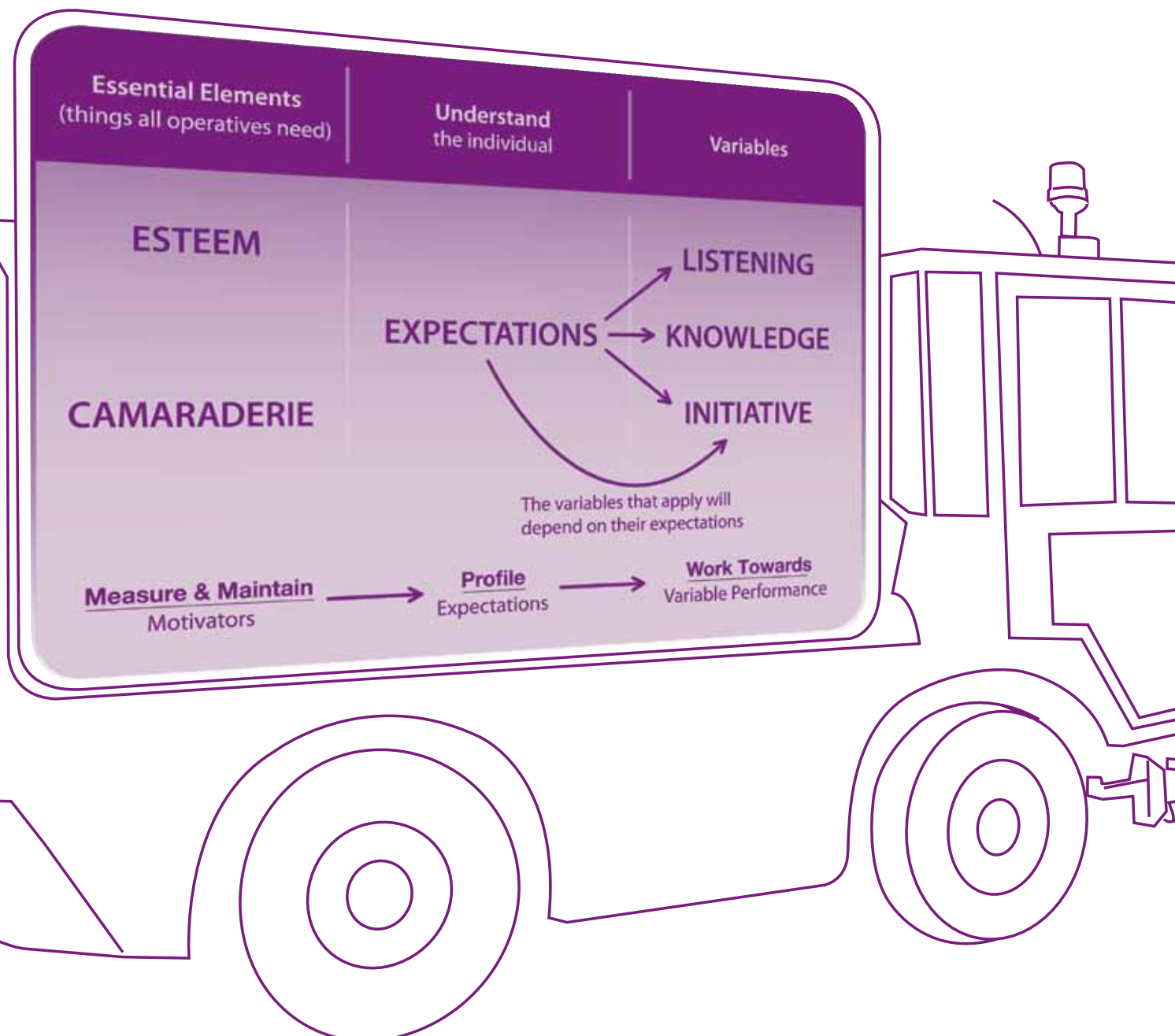
The culmination of mini-focus groups and shift observations identified a number of key components which need to be considered. These have been succinctly incorporated in the Keep Britain Tidy Front Line Expectation Model (pictured below).

The model is broken down into three sections:

Esteem and Camaraderie – feeling valued and respected and having a supportive team/colleagues are essential to the individual. No matter what an individual's expectations of the job, positive feelings of 'esteem' and 'camaraderie' need to be met.

Expectations – this is all about understanding the individual and involves profiling operatives to determine what expectations they have of the job. This allows you to identify the extent to which, 'listening', 'knowledge' and 'initiative' are relevant to the individual.

Listening, Knowledge and Initiative – a feeling that they are listened to, that they are provided with the necessary knowledge (information, training and support) and that they have the freedom to use their initiative to perform the job to the best of their ability are factors which are unique to the individual. They will vary depending upon what expectations they have of the role.



Crucial to all

Esteem - reduce stigma, raise reputation

Maintaining operatives' esteem is essential; internally within the organisation with colleagues and management and externally with local residents (through communications) and to the wider sector – cleansing duties being offered as Community Payback is giving society the message that street cleansing is a punishment!

Camaraderie - balance 'social' with 'strategic'

Don't underestimate the importance of the social element of the job. Ensure there are opportunities for shared spaces and times e.g. times and places to have a break/eat lunch together. However it is important to keep a balance between promoting team work and maintaining the external reputation that the team are working hard.

Will identify relevance of 'listening', 'knowledge' and 'initiative'

Expectations

Each operative comes with their own individual set of expectations of the job. It is crucial to profile your operatives to identify what it is that they want from the job, and therefore to what extent 'listening', 'knowledge' and 'initiative' are relevant to them. Remember that people's expectations may also change over time, so it is important to monitor them. Having profiled the most common expectations highlighted in the research, Keep Britain Tidy has identified three distinct profiles characterised by Eddie, Sam and Colin (see page 6).

Listening - knowledge is power

Your operatives are the ones with the knowledge of how the schedules and equipment work in reality. They may tell you something that will make the work easier and cheaper to do, therefore improving performance and increasing efficiencies.

Varies from operative to operative based upon expectations of the job

Knowledge - standards not schedules

There is an overwhelming lack of awareness amongst operatives of the standards they are working towards. Operatives often use their own judgements of appropriate standards whilst working to schedules. This means that local authorities may not be delivering their statutory duty!

Initiative - delivering outputs not inputs

Provide operatives with the freedom to tackle problems as and when they arrive. Harness the individual's interest in the 'output' – these operatives are more likely to be proactive to improve local environmental quality.

83% of the public say they wouldn't ever want to be a street cleaner or would only consider it as a last resort

Omnibus survey, 829 adults surveyed across England, TNS (February 2012)

Knowing Your Operatives

'Esteem' and 'camaraderie' are essential to all operatives however, the extent to which 'listening', 'knowledge' and 'initiative' are important will vary from person to person depending upon their 'expectations' of the job. By getting to know your operatives you will be able to identify what their needs are, how far they are being met and therefore what can be done to improve their job satisfaction, their productivity and ultimately residents' perceptions of the street cleansing service and your organisation. Analysis of the research identified three prominent personas that operatives are likely to fall into, which are characterised by Eddie, Sam and Colin.

Eddie



I just want to get on with my job!

Doesn't want to be overloaded with paperwork

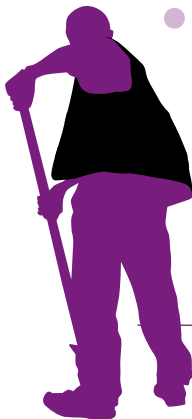
Likes guidance: Tell them what to do and when

Wants limited responsibility

Wants opportunities to be listened to but may not always have a lot to say

'Steady Eddie' – longevity and reliability in role

Sam



I've got ideas but I don't necessarily have solutions.

Has ideas, likes to share them (though may not have all the answers). Helps them to feel valued

Can pull team morale down

Welcomes a degree of 'knowledge' and free rein to use own initiative

Colin



I'd like some more responsibility and would like to progress.

Likely to go above and beyond
Always looking for ways to improve

Seeks opportunities to be heard and contribute to decisions

Provides helpful ideas

Offers solutions, not problems

Headlines

To help local authorities and contractors to use the Keep Britain Tidy Frontline Expectation Model, a number of recommendations are made in relation to each of the six key components. It is important to note however, that these are not exhaustive and are merely a starting point.

	Recommendations
Esteem	Crucial for all. Ensure avenues for individual and team feedback are provided. This should be more regular than yearly personal development reviews and should not be limited to special occasions e.g. when awards are won. Invest in external communications to residents to raise profile of street cleansing teams and the work that they do (see Keep Britain Tidy's Perception Wheel segment 'Seeing is Believing') ⁷ and work to address the implications of the associated stigma in wider society.
Camaraderie	Crucial for all. Encourage opportunities for team bonding, for example providing the space and time for teams to start/end the day having a drink together or holding team meetings to discuss workloads, schedules etc.
Expectations	Make sure you know and understand your workforce. Identify the degree to which operatives want to be listened to, provided with knowledge and given the opportunity to input into decision making processes and have the flexibility to use their initiative. Manage expectations and desires from the role.
Listening*	Provide opportunities for operatives to feedback, discuss issues and raise concerns. Ensure suggestions that are put forward are acknowledged and provide feedback and explanations when decisions are reached.
Knowledge*	Consider introducing training on the Code of Practice ⁸ and the grading systems that operatives are working towards. Explore opportunities for training operatives on the impact their work has on public perceptions and satisfaction with their local area. Provide individuals with information on why certain decisions have been made.
Initiative*	Consult your teams to identify the desire for multi-task working. Explore opportunities to up-skill individuals and teams to be able to multi-task and use their initiative to work more flexibly and efficiently.

**Remember that the degree to which these are relevant will depend on the individual's expectations, and therefore should be presented as optional where appropriate.*

⁷Whose Reality is it Anyway?: Understanding the Impact of Deprivation on Perceptions of Place, Keep Britain Tidy 2009

⁸Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse; Defra (2006)

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Keep Britain Tidy

Elizabeth House, The Pier, Wigan, WN3 4EX
enquiries@keepbritaintidy.org
01942 612621
www.keepbritaintidy.org



@kbt_insight

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