



Write-up of PCF seminar on 'Customer Perceptions of Public Services'

Thursday, 10th April 2014, 4-5.30pm

2 Carlton Gardens, London SW1Y 5AA

The Public Chairs' Forum held a seminar on Customer Perceptions of Public Services. The keynote speaker was Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI is a leading market research organisation that has worked extensively for the UK Government, looking at public attitudes to key public services to inform social policy. Ben presented the results of several decades of public sector research, covering subjects such as public perceptions of the NHS, the European Union and Immigration policies in the UK. His presentation was followed by a roundtable discussion with Chairs.

Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI

- Surveys by Ipsos MORI identified the following trends in public perceptions:
 - The public is still broadly happy with the current level of service provided by the NHS –although they are very concerned about the future
 - The compassion with which patients are treated by the NHS has increased in the last year – a response to changes after the Francis Report?
 - Anxiety about education is declining and trust in civil servants has been rising over the last decade
 - In general, satisfaction with public services has remained relatively stable since 2010 (i.e. as many services are improving as are those that are deteriorating), except for rising dissatisfaction with the conditions of roads – and among users, care for the elderly is believed to have deteriorated
 - In terms of spending, overseas aid and benefits remain the most popular areas for cuts, with the NHS and the elderly one of the least popular areas for cuts. The bulk of the public think that benefits are wasted - for every £100 the government spent on benefits, there is a public perception that up to £24 is claimed fraudulently. The true value per £100 spent is 70p.
 - In the long term, only one in three think government will improve public services. These views are shared by public sector leaders. It is worth noting that these figures are similar to the position in 2006 – the public rarely believe the government will improve anything!
 - Different generations view key social issues that have defined British society in very different ways. For example, 30% of Generation Y respondents expected their lives to be worse than their parents; this was greater than for any other generation. This raises important questions about future consensus on a wide range of political and social policy issues. Please see the programme of work by Ipsos MORI, available for download from their website [here](#).
 - There has been a major shift in the way information is communicated, particularly due to the substantial effect technology has had on communication and knowledge transfer.
- Four main points were highlighted by Ben:
 1. The public sector has dealt much better with austerity than many may have expected –so far.
 2. The public is fearful about the future of public services, and more so, their financial future.
 3. There is a huge opportunity to utilise technology to better understand behaviours and interact with the public.

4. There is more pressure to lead, rather than manage – tell the story and take people with you.

Main points from the roundtable discussion

- A number of questions were raised relating to differences between generations of the respondents. There was a discussion about age and human perception at the time that respondents were interviewed. Past Ipsos MORI research has shown that individuals in their 40s are the unhappiest i.e. a respondent's natural state of happiness during different stages of their life will affect the positive or negative nature of their response.
- There is evidence that big corporates are supportive of government plans and changes – used to be Euro or EU issues, now the main public concern is infrastructure and development.
- If you ask people aged 18 if they are going to vote, they will all vehemently say yes – studies have suggested that people will initially try it at 18 and assume it had no effect. They will then lose interest for a number of years and likely only begin voting again at around 25.
- Looking to the future, the public sees the elderly as the neediest group in the UK, but the reality is different.
- The public is unclear on where financial savings are likely to be sourced, the reality is that it is unlikely to be the NHS.