Customer led transformation programme

Case study – Kent County Council

Supporting the use of social networks by young people to address concerns around anti social behaviour

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The Customer Led Transformation Programme

The Developing Neighbourhood Networks project was funded under the Customer Led Transformation programme. The fund aims to embed the use of Customer Insight and Social Media tools and techniques as strategic management capabilities across the public sector family in order to support Place-Based working.

The Customer Led Transformation programme is overseen by the Local Government Delivery Council (supported by the Local Government Association).

The fund was established specifically to support collaborative working between local authorities and their partners focused on using customer insight and social media tools and techniques to improve service outcomes. These approaches offer public services bodies the opportunity to engage customers and gather insight into their preferences and needs, and thereby provide the evidence and intelligence needed to redesign services to be more targeted, effective and efficient.

Background

Kent is situated in the south east of England, covers an area in excess of 1,400 square miles and has 350 miles of coast line. It is known as 'the garden of England' and 85 per cent of the area is green space.

Kent County Council serves a sizeable population of approximately 1.5 million people. Of these some 215,000 are children of school age and these are educated in 592 schools.

Antisocial behaviour (ASB) can be defined as any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life. This project is concerned with ASB amongst young people.

One aspect of ASB that is particularly prevalent amongst young people is bullying. Also, with the growing use of social media the young are especially suspect to a new manifestation of this problem – known as 'cyber-bullying'.

In an attempt to address ASB amongst the young, KCC decided to investigate whether social media could also be part of the solution to ASB. To do this they launched a project, funded by £87,242 from the CLT programme, which aimed:

- to support and encourage the use of social networks by young people to address perceptions of anti social behaviour using an intelligence-led approach

- to use these social networks to communicate with other residents in the pilot neighbourhoods in order to improve public confidence in dealing with ASB.

Approach

The project was implemented in three phases:

1. Research:
An online questionnaire was administered to a sample of secondary school students to capture and help evaluate their experiences with antisocial behaviour (ASB).

For the pupils involved in this research, ASB was defined as "anything that is destructive to or causes harm to the other people around you. Examples of antisocial behaviour are: breaking or damaging something that did not belong to you (criminal damage); physically hurting someone (eg punching or kicking them) and hanging around in large groups making others feel uncomfortable.

The research also covered bullying, which was defined as follows: "When a student is bullied, another student or several students are repeatedly hurtful to him or her. Examples of bullying are: calling someone a name that wasn't very nice; completely ignoring or excluding someone; leaving someone out on purpose and telling lies or spreading rumours about someone to make others dislike them. We call it cyber bullying when the bullying is done online (via email, web sites, video, instant messaging etc) or via mobile phones (text message, picture message, video).

2. Testing
When people communicate via computers or telephones there are a number of possible communication paths (eg video, voice, typing etc) and these paths of communication between the human and the computer are known as technical modalities.

KCC, in partnership with the Project Salus and three Canterbury Schools, set out to identify which technical modality was the most effective in helping young people to resolve conflicts arising from bullying scenarios, both on and off line.

The modalities which were tested with different groups of pupils included:

- gesture based modality (AvatarKinect)
- Skype (audio and/or video).

This process included a conference which allowed pupils from the three schools to explore cyber bullying and to identify possible means of intervention. This was followed by pilots in each of the schools. A total of 64 year eight students took part in the project. A more detailed paper about this can be found at http://tinyurl.com/ckvltfj

During these pilots a hypothetical scenario was given to pairs of students in sessions lasting one hour. Students were asked to arrive at an agreed solution (to resolve the conflict) by using either Skype (to chat via video) or Xbox AvatarKinect (which allows users to communicate via an avatar that mimics their actions and expressions).

3. Dissemination
The learning from this project will be disseminated through a range of pre-existing channels. See Next steps for more details on how this will be done.

Research findings

147 students took part in the research element of this project and the major findings were as follows:

- that computers at home, the Internet and telephone/mobile were identified as the most used technologies with voicemail being the least used

- 76.19 per cent use online social networks

- 59.18 per cent reported being the victim of ASB (with females being considerably higher than males)

- 53.74 per cent admitted participating in ASB (females being slightly higher than males)

- 48.3 per cent reported being the victim of bullying with 8.45 per cent of these reporting being bullied several times a week

- 43 per cent admitted that they may have or had definitely acted as a bully

- 23.13 per cent reported being a victim of cyber bullying (more female than male) with text messaging being the main format

- of those bullied (by any means) 40.51 per cent did not seek any help, 36.71 per cent spoke to a friend, 29.11 per cent spoke to a family member, 25 per cent spoke to a teacher but only 2.53 per cent used a helpline

Results of the pilots

There was general agreement that each of the pilots was a success. Those running the project reported the following results –

St Anselm's School, Canterbury
At one of the sessions at St Anselm's School two pupils had arrived at the start of the session with a form of unresolved conflict between them. After the session finished, they left chatting to each other and far more open and relaxed about their own conflict. What had been an awkward stalemate between them gradually melted away through working on the tasks together, with an increasingly open manner between them.

The Archbishop's School, Canterbury
A clear benefit to the school situation at Archbishop's was the active involvement of sixth form psychology students in the experiments. In most sessions conducted there were four or more students observing. They asked good questions and often, after the pupils had finished the study, were keen to engage in discussion of why the project leaders did certain things during the sessions and how they dealt with unexpected rudiments during the study. This gave these sixth formers valuable insight into research studies and the sort of research possible in this field.

Borden Grammar School for Boys, Sittingbourne
One of the key benefits to the way this school used the sessions was the focus on the topic of bullying and the way this was fitted in as part of the wider school education on the realities and dangers of bullying. The project team were asked to participate in a morning assembly for the boys on bullying, where a good discussion, on cyber bullying in particular, took place.

The comparison between the two modalities showed that participants using AvatarKinect reported a higher outcome and performance satisfaction.
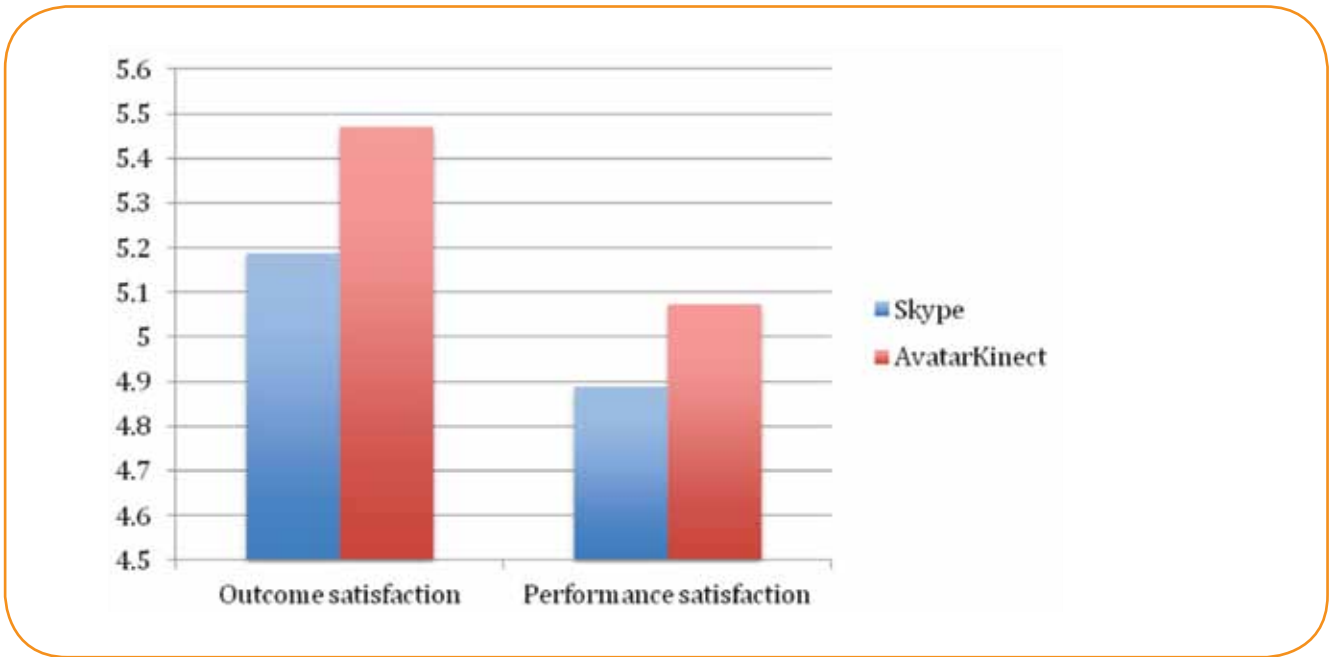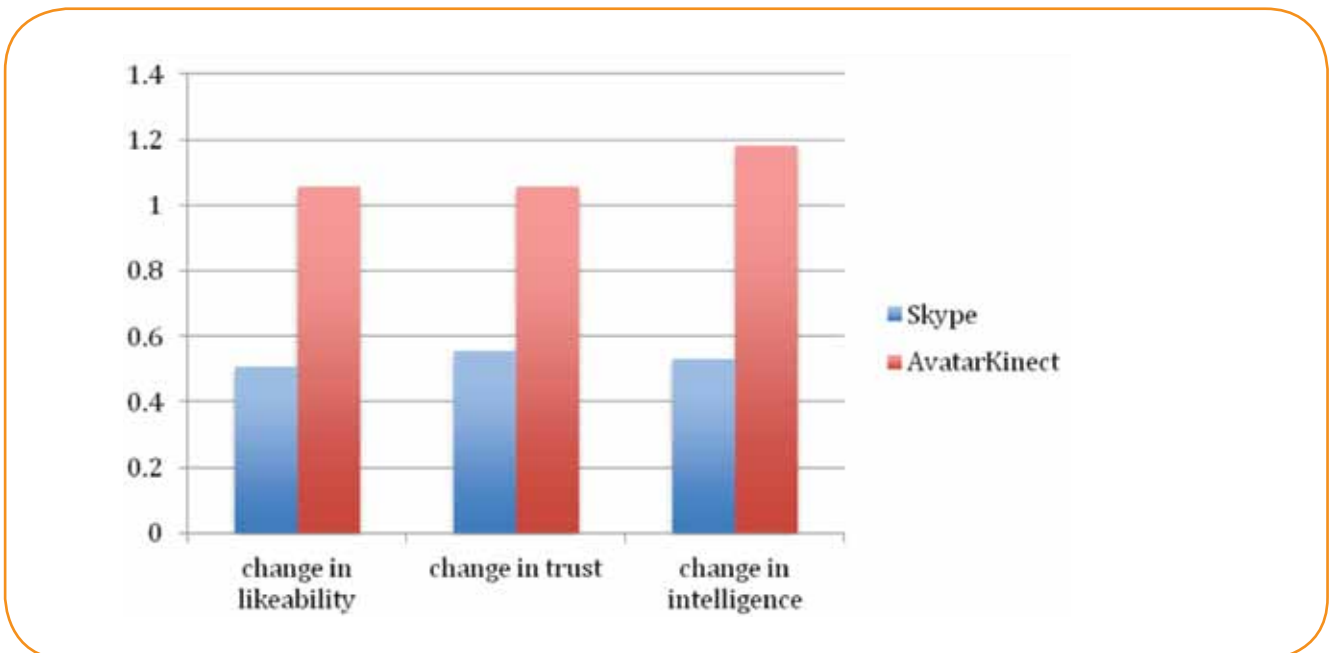

Figure: Perceived outcome and performance satisfaction (by modality)

Participants were also asked to rate each other in terms of likeability, trust and perceived intelligence before and after the study. When comparing Skype and AvatarKinect, the changes in these factors were more pronounced with AvatarKinect:

Conclusions and recommendations

The study highlighted that the use of avatar-augmented technology (AvatarKinect) in mediated communication seemed to have a positive impact on how the participants engaged in negotiation tasks.

AvatarKinect makes use of the latest gesture recognition technology, which is widely available at a low cost, and could be employed in schools or other educational/rehabilitative settings to help cope with bullying.

However, the team believes that a larger trial should be carried out before such a technology is implemented at schools. For example, it is reasonable to speculate that students from different types of schools and socio-economic backgrounds may react quite differently when they experience this technology. Furthermore, the ability to customise the appearance of the avatar and how different avatars affect the negotiation task has not been explored. Future studies should certainly focus on these areas.

Lessons learnt

Valuable lessons, summarised below, have been learnt throughout the project. They would provide useful guidance for similar studies in the future.

1. Partnership with Project Salus
Stage 2 was initiated following the Restorative Justice event in the summer of 2011 where the research findings from stage 1 were presented. These complemented the work which had already been carried out by Project Salus on anti-bullying programmes with Kent schools. The team therefore successfully identified potential areas for collaboration. Working with Project Salus was invaluable and enabled the project to:

- Tap into already established school management contacts at Kent schools where project Salus had already worked on the anti-bullying questionnaire - therefore the groundwork had been done in terms of contacting the right people and getting their support.

- Process and obtain CRB clearance. Staff from Project Salus have helped the research team process CRB checks speedily, allowing the project to proceed without unnecessary delays. Initially, the project was facing severe delays due to the requirement that each school conducts their own CRB check.

- Set the scene for our study. For example, at Borden Grammar School for Boys the research was introduced at the assembly where a hard hitting video about bullying produced by Project Salus was also shown.

- The team asked two independent experts to code data from one of the tasks in order to analyse the findings.

2. Support from the school management and IT staff

The project was heavily dependent on technology and on gaining free access to the internet (open data ports). Data ports in most schools are blocked for reasons of safety and security. Therefore, each school had to apply to the KCC computer support group for the ports to be enabled. This took some time to arrange.

In addition to IT support, the project relied very heavily on the school management's logistical support in setting up sessions, allocating students to sessions, data gathering, and general 'pupil management'.

3. Incentive to participate

The team thought it important that each school should get a small incentive to participate in the study. An Xbox Kinect was presented to each school that participated.

Next steps

The learning from this project will be disseminated through a number of pre-existing channels, including:

• the Curriculum Development role within the Integrated Youth Service – this enables access to the work undertaken within both Youth Centres and Detached Youth Projects. The expectation is that Senior Youth Work Practitioners will share the approaches with young people as part of their informal curriculum.

• the Effective Practice Group within the youth justice arm of the Integrated Youth Service – this is attended by Practice Supervisors who are responsible for both practice and practice development within their own teams. The expectation is that the learning will be used to support programmes which are concerned with anger management / reducing the risk of serious harm to others.

• the Restorative Justice Practitioner forum which promotes the use of processes which support conflict resolution. The expectation is that the members of the Forum will take the ideas generated by the Project back into their organisations. This should include the three Mediation Services in the county who are currently contracted by the Youth Offending Service to deliver mediation between young people who have offended and their victims (NB the contracts will be re-tendered later in the current financial year).

• Project Salus who have a line of communication with schools across the county. The learning from the Project will be included as an element of their anti bullying promotional work with individual schools.

• the Senior Youth Work Practitioners who are being appointed currently by KCC to take responsibility for the delivery of "in house" youth work and for overseeing the quality of youth work delivered by commissioned services.

Local Government Association
Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000
Fax 020 7664 3030
Email info@local.gov.uk
www.local.gov.uk

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audio, please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
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