

Group Insight

1. The basic technique

In its simplest form Group Insight works by actively involving a group of people in a facilitated workshop. The result is shared ownership of the outcomes.

The Group Insight approach is structural rather than dynamic, and deals with concepts and relationships. The starting point for developing shared understanding is an agreed concept. The first stage is to identify at the highest level, the other concepts in the wider environment within which this concept exists. Each concept is chosen to provide an important perspective in relation to the initial concept. The important relationships between concepts are also agreed. This high level view is then expanded into further levels of detail, where necessary, in order to understand the interaction between the concepts.

The shared outcome is documented as an IT supported model. This enables consistency checking and flagging of issues for the group to resolve. The model can be used to transfer information between workshops or other related activities.

2. Group Insight within the changing organisation

Group Insight can be used in a variety of contexts as part of enabling change. For each set of workshops the purpose may be different, though they are always used to understand structure rather than time ordered activities. This means that the nature of what is being modelled and how the workshops fit with other related activities will differ. The workshops may be focused on how things are today or on the development of a shared vision of how things could be in the future. In the organisational change context, the IT tooling adds value by enabling views of the information from any individual perspective.

For example, a high level model might address large scale roles such as an organisation may undertake e.g. a probation service area may define its role as 'reducing re-offending in Strathmore'. A more detailed model might address the roles taken on by teams or individuals e.g. 'delivering accredited programmes for offenders'. Concepts may include the roles of customers, operational staff, partners and managers within a single overall context. Alternatively the model may relate requirements to solutions. A model can become a mechanism for transferring shared understanding between programme phases.

2.1 Understanding the current situation

When Group Insight is used to understand an existing situation, the workshop participants act as experts, sharing and capturing knowledge. The outcome may primarily be a shared and captured understanding of the area of common interest and its environment.

Previous participants of Group Insight workshops have found the following benefits:

- Elucidating an overall scope and identification of stakeholders.
- Identification of the relationships which will produce requirements.
- The ability to view the relationships from any perspective, including the customer.
- Participants develop new insights.
- The model can be used offline to validate the coherence of current practice.

An example of this usage of Group Insight is Understanding Customer Need (Circles of Need). This project has been initiated by Chorley, sponsored by NWeGG and participated in by five North-West Local Authorities. The series of four workshops explored local government citizen needs. They addressed the linkages between different needs and also the coverage of citizen needs by local authority services. IT supported views were used to see the needs from the perspective of both life events and from customer segments.

Further potential for Group Insight in Customer Need is now being considered, e.g.

- Extending the model to explore other local government customer types (business, neighbourhood and public interest group).
- Extending the service coverage to voluntary and private sector services as a basis for a full citizen centric view of local service possibilities that address their specific needs.
- Tailoring the model for individual local authorities to incorporate local demographic information and more detail of their own specific services.

2.2 Agreeing ways forward

When Group Insight is used to envisage a proposed future, the workshop participants are stakeholder representatives and they are engaged in working out how they will need to work together. The concepts dealt with are roles for organisations, collaborators, teams or individuals. The relationships identify agreements for joint working and co-ordination.

Previous participants of Group Insight workshops have found the following benefits:

- The participative nature of the workshop engenders stakeholder engagement through shared ownership of the outcome.
- Linking stakeholders to roles provides a personal stake for each representative within the overall programme.
- Stakeholders volunteer decisions to work together
- The IT supported views enable stakeholders to see which roles they will take part in and the working relationships that they will need to build as well as providing insight into customer and partner organisation viewpoints
- Useful for exploring partnerships, defining governance and management roles.

Examples of Group Insight are:

The Group Insight approach was used with the Probation Service and one of its potential Service Providers at both the National and at an Area level.

- Strategic partnership working
 - Understanding of the customer / supplier context for a major government IT outsourcing bid. Also organisational design, for the bid and for the delivery organisation.
- Understanding perspectives and the need for joint working
 - Seeing Probation from the viewpoint of an offender
 - Enabling probation staff to see their own roles as part of the overall organisational purpose
 - Supporting the Probation Service Programme manager to identify solutions for co-operation & co-ordination issues in a new organisation.