



# ukgovcamp

**Session: 3**

**Room: Committee Room 6**

**Session title :** Creative and Participatory Methodology & Using Complaints

**Session leader :** Becca & Ruth

**Volunteer to continue conversation after :**

Notes taken by : Raam Chauhan-Train (Softwire)

## Notes (Raam)

Organiser: Think about a practical thing that can go wrong – like an eligibility checker.

Something wrong at the user end that might cause a complaint. Then tracing it back (fishbone method) to the different layers at play. And how might you intervene at different points to improve user experience. Does anyone use complaints?

Attendee: Complaint is risk-laden language. Therefore, risk is hard to find out about. Especially when organisations are risk-averse.

Org: Typically, poor feedback loop between decision makers and frontline workers.

Att: Restorative scrutiny. Grenfell victims don't trust gov to scrutinize properly. So how might we build trust and share the tradeoffs. How can citizens work with councils to have conversations earlier.

Att: Open spaces idea (like the one used at govcamp) came from Alaska to create a way to get conversations started.

Att: Why do we feel that good feedbacks loops don't exist?

Org: The language of failings and mistakes aren't typically shared or openly discussed. Possibly hidden from leadership.

Att: Tracking complaints isn't the right measure. Don't mean you've solved the underlying problem. Otherwise you could just make the UX of the complaint website really bad!

Org: We see a lot of complaints about ADHD diagnosis, described as the wild west by NHS and ICBs (integrated care boards). But the issue is a lack of information for GPs, how to triage people and assess them, regional challenges around them all doing all differently (different funding models and data). But also nationally the guidance is unclear. NHSE in the national frameworks there are gaps and loopholes at that level too.

The citizen gets frustrated at the GPs, but the problem is multi-layered. Could there be smaller changes upstream to help alleviate this?

Are there other examples you've seen on this?

Att: Radical Help (book) by Hilary Cottam with lots of good examples of this. Rented a flat in the community, with all the health and care professionals in one room to help solve the problem of "65 clipboards a week".

Att: There is a wide diversity and variation in need. Not neatly packaged in terms of their needs. But the provisioning model of care and services is more commodity. So there's a collision there. And there's no good way of solving that when money's tight. You could measure variation. And complaints could be a good proxy. Either the complain is the service is not working as planned. Or it is working relatively well for most people, but it doesn't need these variations of user needs.

And if needs are very varied, you may not encounter those problems very often (for research and design).

Att: Government human services – blog series with lots of references for this. Get the data and fundamentals right. Money has been earmarked in DEFRA to do more of this type of messy work. Relational Service Design – Dennis V and Joseph Badman.

Att: People can be dismissive of complaints from UR, or defensive. And building empathy with the team is important. Otherwise they can tend to assume the worst about users.

Att: Understanding how the system is getting stuck and understanding where complaints arise from.

Att: Continuous improvement is important because circumstances change. So having feedback loops to senior leadership.

Att: The liberated method from Gateshead: to avoid loads of effort going into a defensive model. Instead, how do we empower teams to see themselves as problem solvers.

Att: Hold the space for teams to find how to solve their problems.

Att: Upward defensiveness is a big part of public service. "I want to know what you know, when you know it". I can make a difference, or I can make a document. Only make a document when it makes a difference.

Org: Looking at the methods. Our methods have really narrowed with users in public services.

Att: Interviews, in-person workshop, hackathons, usability tests.

Org: Exercise: Why has it become this way? And how does that make us feel as practitioners.

Group feedback: Policy Lab have been looking at this for the last 12 years. This is valuable for all teams (not just policy teams).

People feeling scared about change

Structural changes (e.g. covid has changed how research is done). Next shift is AI-moderated platforms and tools. People are thinking about arriving at answers quicker and better. As researchers, it's not just the methods, but also communicating out the case of better methods could also lead to better outcomes and the why.

Procurement could be an issue, if you have just only supplier, that will limit the method options.

When you're planning work, it's very rare that people want to hear "I need time to think about novel methods". They want to hear we've done that before and here's what we'll do. Less methods, helps to reduce uncertainty to leadership.

Fear.

We don't hire the right disciplines into teams. E.g. artists in policy as they are great at building communities.

## **Notes (Second volunteer)**

Can we use complaints as a signal to inform service design?

Opening question: Has anyone used complaints to help design a service?

Interesting example of a situation where citizens don't trust local authorities but there is a need for collaboration, reconciliation and rebuilding.

Example of complexity and confusion in ADHD care.

Mention of [Radical Help](#) by Hillary Cottam as an example of coherence in dealing with complex social problems. (Hillary is now working with a team on similar complex problems in a piece of work called "Relational Service Design" in Defra. See [this](#) and [this](#))

John S described the problem of meeting many, varied complex needs...

John C mentioned the work of Nora Bateson on language and understanding.

Human Learning Systems and the Liberated Method ([link](#)) allowing service providers to feel more like problem solvers.

In pairs, we worked to explain why we always seem to have come back to standard ways of doing service design.

Film: [Power Station](#)