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Reimagine Policing

Policing in a devolved world: Lessons from New York

New York City's Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies have come a long way. In less than a decade they have transformed operations, integrated services to make them more customer-centric, improved their employee experience and reduced costs.

At a College of Policing leadership course in Durham, Eric Applewhite talked to senior personnel from UK police forces about how the lessons from the New York City experience could be applied to shape public service integration in their force areas.

Background

Back in 2007, New York City recognized that the way its eight Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies delivered services was particularly siloed. These agencies cover the UK equivalent of adult and children's services, mental health provision, probation and youth offending, jails and a range of preventative programmes such as preventative healthcare.

At the time it was extremely difficult for New York residents to understand what programmes they might be eligible for as well as how and where to apply for them. Similarly, the agencies did not have a complete picture of their overall interactions with individuals and families, making it difficult to strategically plan service provision. Meanwhile HHS workers felt they would make different decisions if they had full knowledge of the citizen.

Faced with these problems, plus budgetary pressure, the Mayor and HHS Leadership committed to an ambitious transformation plan called HHS-Connect.

Creating buy in and accountability

In October 2007 the city published its vision and three-year plan for IT and process transformation. Creating this document clarified the goals for HHS-Connect. Critically, it established a brand for HHS-Connect creating a recognizable identity for stakeholders.

The Mayor signed an executive order that established the mandate of HHS-Connect and established the expectation that city agencies would cooperate with the programme in data exchange and technology cooperation.

This visible leadership was reinforced by the establishment of a rigorous, transparent governance process and a formal charter. Public signing of the charter by the leadership created a personal association and joint accountability for the programme's success.

Using integrated information to drive change

The city recognized it needed to break down information silos if it was truly going to transform HHS services. Data sharing is often seen as an impediment to change. So what important steps did New York take to get around this?

Firstly, they identified what information was most valuable from the end-user and worker perspectives. They defined more than 160 use cases across eight agencies to show how joining-up certain information could transform the end-to-end service. Each user group had to create narrative business use cases to justify access to each piece of desired client information. Different client information is owned by different agencies and therefore each of the data source agency members and overall City Corporation Counsel representative reviewed each user group and the narratives, and approved them in accordance with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws and regulations. This resulted in a prioritised list of information sharing requirements which would deliver the biggest benefits.

Secondly, they realised that many agencies would be reluctant to give others access to their information. To overcome this they brought in a federated technology solution. This means that HHS-Connect "borrows" the data from the agency that "owns" it and creates links as a service back to the agencies. This allows city agencies to better understand links between their clients and cases at other agencies but allows them to retain the responsibility for ownership and protection of their own data.

Because HHS-Connect has not taken a copy of the data and the data still resides in the originating agency system, HHS-Connect is not responsible for storing or securing it.

The federated approach has been one of the most important success factors for HHS-Connect as it allowed the programme to start more quickly. It could be copied by UK police forces and partner organisations to provide a much better view of citizens in a place.

Empowering workers with the information to make decisions

This joined-up information is provided to HHS workers through their web portal, Worker Connect. The portal enables these case workers to go beyond their own agency systems and see additional data about clients and services, for example, whether the client has children and whether those children are in child care.

This is supported by a standardized case-management software platform, accessible to key workers. The technology solution provides an alert to all authorized users from relevant agencies when another agency has had an interaction with a shared client.

The result is that workers are making better decisions about the best care or service for a client. Not only is this improving outcomes but it is removing the inefficiency and duplication across agencies.

Empowering citizens to serve themselves

New York City also invested in a client self-service web portal to make it easier for city residents to find and apply for services. This portal, called Access NYC, was the first stage of HHS-Connect to be completed and it established the momentum for the entire programme.

Access NYC allows residents to screen themselves for eligibility for HHS services based on their financial situation, family situation, age, and demographics. The portal matches client data entries against 36 Federal, State, and city programmes that might be appropriate and, based on the information entered, provides a "map" of services the client may wish to pursue. It not only lists programmes that might be helpful to clients it also tells them where to go to apply for a programme and what forms and documentation they need to bring to establish whether they are eligible. By helping clients identify services and learn how to apply, the portal improves their chances of acceptance and gets them faster access to benefits.

Access NYC was a foundational component of New York's broader service delivery model. It shifts high volume transactions to lighter-touch, self-service channels, enabling it to focus specialist resource on clients with the most complex needs. This concept is highly relevant to the UK. It also represents a trend that is only going to increase.

Independent oversight of delivery

The HHS-Connect programme is extremely complicated and was managed by a dedicated city project management team. Independent assurance was provided by a Project Monitoring and Quality Assurance (PMQA) vendor. This helps ensure that everything happens sequentially and on time, and that complex multi-project initiatives are being delivered in accordance with contract terms and industry standards. The independent view helped to keep a level of pressure on the city project team while providing stakeholders with a level of confidence.

The future

Over the next few years the city will build on what has been accomplished by adding more data, improving the self-service portal and continuing to work on data governance. There is also a specific focus on analytics. Data analytics, big data and business intelligence will enable pattern recognition, anomaly detection, and fraud detection. It will help the city make better decisions and have a better sense of context about the timing and types of services that can best help specific clients. Analytics may also help answer important social service questions. Take the thorny issue of reoffending. Analytics can help by answering questions such as: What indicators best predict this and what services or combinations of services can decrease the likelihood of recidivism?

Summary

The New York story closely mirrors the journey UK policing needs to continue along. Despite the surprise Budget announcement, the reality is that forces will need to continue to focus on reducing demand as well as managing demand more efficiently. New York provides one example of how to do the latter by enabling citizens to self-serve while providing workers with the tools to effectively perform their roles and focus on the specialist resources needed. It also shows how data integration can provide the insight required to reduce demand. The next step for New York is to identify risk triggers to provide early intervention. It's exactly the type of work needed to get "upstream" of demand and can give us all confidence that integration is a real option when designing future police services.

About the Author

Eric Applewhite supports public sector organisations as they transform themselves by using data and technology. Now a Director with KPMG in the UK, Eric was previously the PMQA manager for New York City's HHS-Connect programme. He has a Master's degree in Public Policy and Management from the H.J. Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management and undergraduate degrees in Psychology and Philosophy from Carnegie Mellon University.

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