

OFGEM RP SEMINAR PRESENTATION - SKILL SETS

In order to assess the skills required by Revenue Protection Practitioners, it is first necessary to explain my definition of Revenue Protection.

My viewpoint is that the term “Revenue Protection” covers anything, which causes the customer to be under billed, or in the worst case scenario not billed at all.

Obvious examples are: -

Records anomalies,
Failed metering equipment,
Unauthorised use, and of course,
Theft.

As these examples suggest, I do not believe that units not being recorded through a meter are a pre requisite of my Revenue Protection definition. It is sufficient that the supplier is unaware that the units are being recorded and is not therefore billing them.

Nevertheless theft, is, and must remain the core activity of any Revenue Protection operation, but to be truly effective, it must be able to deal, in an appropriate fashion, with any situation involving unbilled units. Furthermore it is no longer sufficient for the Revenue Protection Service to respond to outside stimuli. – to be a reactive operation, reliant on reports of possible meter irregularities. It must actively seek out unbilled units.

Revenue Protection professionals must be able to deal with a whole host of potential situations which has the potential for an immediate detrimental impact on Customer Service. This then is the background against which I assess the skills and knowledge required by individual members of my Revenue Protection teams.

There are three elements to the Revenue Protection Activity

- 1 Detect
- 2 Rectify
- 3 Recover

and there are three elements that go to make up a Revenue Protection team

- 1 The manager(s)
- 2 The field investigators
- 3 The clerical support staff

These roles may overlap but they make a convenient way of breaking the activity down into manageable chunks.

I will work backwards: -

The Clerical Support Staff

Traditionally the clerical supports have been seen as the least important aspect of the Revenue Protection activity. Often regarded as nothing more than glorified record clerks, they passed messages between informants and field investigators, (or more likely the investigators' foreman) compiled basic statistical information for senior management and told de energised customers how much they needed to pay to get their supplies back.

It is only in recent times, driven by the need for Revenue Protection to be cost effective and, for whatever reason, the demise of vast numbers of irregularity reports being received from Data Collectors and Meter Operators, that support staff have come to the fore.

Today they are the key, the lynch pin, of a successful Revenue Protection operation. Quite simply they create, direct and conclude the work.

Reports of possible irregularities are of course still received, but not in sufficient quantities to keep the Revenue Protection Service effectively employed. The clerical support needs to supplement these reports from other sources. They need a deep understanding of their employer's customer service records systems - how to interrogate and how to interpret the information they find there. They need to decide which jobs will lead to the discovery of, and more importantly, the recovery of, unbilled units.

Up to 90% of the RP work in some areas of EDF Energy comes from these sources.

The foremen have long gone, and although the clerical supports have no supervisory involvement with the Investigators, it is their task to programme the daily workload to achieve maximum efficiency.

Each call given to the Investigators will have involved a host of decisions, often based solely on the information the clerical support has accessed: -

Is this a bone fide Revenue Protection investigation or could it be done by the MOP or Data collector?

Should we notify the customer or cold call?

Should I use a two-person team or it is safe for one person to call.

Will the customer attempt to delay access, so do I consider an application for a warrant?

If access is not available what then, write to the customer or try again?

These are just some of the questions the clerical support must ask dozens of times each working day.

Eventually the call is issued. Usually, but not too often we hope, nothing amiss will be found, or only a minor anomaly, such as a seal innocently removed, will require attention. But what if units have been unbilled?

The clerical supports need to be able to understand what the Investigator is talking about. A basic understanding of electrical installations is required as is knowledge of why a certain method of interference or fault has the effect it does on a meter. Next comes the question of calculating the loss, if any.

Usually this involves a straightforward calculation based on a list of the electrical appliances in use, the number of occupiers and the period of the fault or theft. But what if the customer refuses to let the investigator poke around? Maybe he won't admit to when the meter was tampered, or as is most common, claims he did it for the first time two hours before the Investigator called.

The clerical supports need to be aware of other methods of loss calculation and when and how to use them.

Negotiation of settlement with the customer follows. This is often more difficult where the loss is the result of equipment or records failure rather than theft – customers, perhaps rightly, are much keener to make restitution when they're in the wrong. In these cases issues of customer service are a major consideration. Suppliers don't want customer complaints or to lose customers, but they do want their money back. How tough then does the clerical support get with someone whose meter has failed and doesn't think he should repay because it's not his fault?

Criminal prosecution does not seem to figure highly on the priorities of most suppliers. But for those, like EDF, who do consider it to be a valuable deterrent, the clerical support needs to be aware of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. How to handle evidence, talk to a customer suspected of a criminal offence and provide an expert witness statement as to how much energy has been lost. This may of course lead to an appearance in court as a witness, so an appropriate set of skills for how best to present the evidence will be needed.

Sad to say, giving guidance to Police Officers as to what offences may have been committed is also a too common part of the clerk supports role.

Finally the clerical support will need to be aware of how money can be recovered. What methods are available and how and when they can be used.

The Clerical support's task may be summed up as: -

- Identify where unbilled units may exist and screen incoming irregularity reports
- Programme and prioritise Investigators' work
- Calculate losses and obtain settlement

The Investigator

The Investigator needs to be part diplomat, part detective and part electrician.

A few years ago detective and electrician, probably with a heavy bias on the former would have been sufficient.

It goes without saying that the Investigator needs to be appropriately trained and authorised to work on the system - Advanced Meter Fixer level being the standard for EDF's own Investigators.

Nowadays the Investigator's day is largely pre programmed. As I have said, the majority of calls won't involve theft, so diplomatic skills will be much called for when replacing faulty metering equipment, uncovering record anomalies and subsequently explaining to customers why they haven't been correctly billed.

Nevertheless theft is always on the agenda.

Confirming that physical tampering has taken place is relatively easy, given an in depth knowledge of electrical installations, and methods of interference, but establishing responsibility for the tampering calls for more ethereal skills, especially if the quality of information the Investigator has to hand is not good.

A detailed knowledge of PACE in terms of evidence gathering and preservation, cautions and interviews under caution, is needed, (although sadly seldom used), but the ability to extract information from the suspect is always an important tool in helping supplier's recover losses, and often leads to further investigations and discoveries.

The ability to write clear concise statements and reports is a priority, but one that few Investigators seem to possess. Most prefer to rely on their clerical supports to make sense of a poor quality Polaroid photograph and information scribbled on the back of a work instruction.

Many of the on site decisions an Investigator would have needed to make a few years ago are now made in advance by suppliers. Few suppliers adopt a policy of immediate de energisation for first time domestic thieves, so confrontational encounters have diminished. Usually installation of a prepayment meter is all that is required and responsibility for the action being taken can be easily passed off onto the "the office."

Even so, when unpleasant situations do arise, the Investigator needs to be able to diffuse them. That said, they are not law enforcement officers. They are not expected to put themselves or their colleagues at risk and having risk assessed each call, should always adopt the motto "If in doubt, walk away."

Today's Investigator's task may be summed up as: -

Visit premises

Establish if units unbilled and rectify any anomaly in accordance with supplier's policies

Obtain information, which may assist supplier to recover losses

The Revenue Protection Manager

The Revenue Protection Manager by comparison, has a simple task – Operate a cost effective Revenue Protection function whilst providing the highest standards of customer service.

To do this the manager must

Utilise the resources at his disposal as effectively as possible

Engender the belief that revenue protection must be as customer service orientated as a call centre

Provide regular, detailed statistical information to senior management, which proves the worth of the Revenue Protection activity

Publicise and demonstrate the benefits of revenue protection whenever and wherever possible

See that the RP team are properly trained, equipped and empowered to carry out their tasks to the best of their abilities.

Ensure that they are aware of legal and regulatory requirements such as the Human Rights Act and Condition 39

See they are aware of and follow supplier's policies

Ensure that the interests of suppliers and DNOs are equally represented

Pay due regard to Health and Safety issues

Motivate, coach and cudgel the team as required