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Electricity North West stakeholder engagement strategy



Introduction

Everything we do affects, and is affected by, our stakeholders. From a single domestic customer, to a county council or a multinational business, we aim to keep our stakeholders informed and engaged with us in a tailored and targeted way.

Only with tailored engagement can we help to make sure that stakeholders feel able to interact with us, and provide relevant feedback allowing us to implement changes to our business to address concerns to enable mutual benefit.

Stakeholder engagement strategy

Stakeholder engagement at Electricity North West is not restricted to one team. We have an holistic approach throughout the organisation which means that we consider all of our stakeholders as part of our day-to-day business – not just those who shout the loudest. We want our stakeholders to understand that their engagement and feedback is business as usual.

We have established a process to identify stakeholders and engage them to help us understand their interests and priorities. It is essential, not only that we engage our stakeholders, but that we implement changes as a result of their feedback.

These changes to our business are then communicated back to stakeholders so that they can see that they have made a difference and are encouraged to continue engaging with us. Our overall strategy is also reviewed annually by the executive team to ensure that it is fresh and relevant.

We have also begun a benchmarking exercise, looking at competitive companies within our industry. By analysing businesses such as Connect, Energetics, Fulcrum and Inexus among others, we can help position our own processes against those within a competitive market to improve our performance.

Over the next four pages we will use practical case studies to guide you through how we:

- identify stakeholders;
- listen to stakeholders; and
- use stakeholder feedback to make changes to our business.

Identifying stakeholders

In 2010/11 we began a thorough audit of our stakeholder information to ensure that we were engaging with each stakeholder in the correct way. This involved a four-step process:

- 1: Identifying key stakeholders with thorough stakeholder mapping.
- 2: Grouping those stakeholders and establishing likely common interests through a process of planning.
- 3: Creating specific opportunities for engagement by taking into account barriers, evidence and service provision, establishing an annual calendar of events for engagement.
- 4: Trialling engagement to ensure that it is appropriate, and developing this approach based on feedback from stakeholders.

Our stakeholders can be identified as any individual or group with an interest in Electricity North West. Everyone who uses electricity in the North West will have a passive interest, but the majority with an active interest will have a specific issue that they will want to engage on.

We work to ensure that we have a representative example of all types of stakeholder so that we don't just engage on an issue-led or fire-fighting basis.



CASE STUDY: Engaged consumer panel

ISSUE

During stakeholder engagement exercises with domestic customers, we discovered that many did not recognise Electricity North West or fully understand our role. Further work showed that in December 2010, just 7% of customers identified us correctly as their DNO. By March 2011 this number had risen to 30%, however this shows a lack of understanding that undoubtedly hampers feedback and would result in a number of customers being unable to comment on our service or plans effectively.

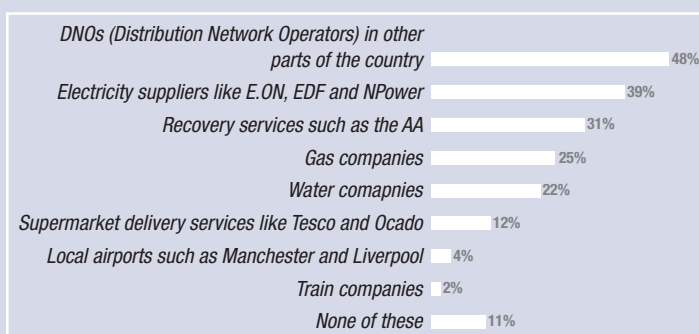
SOLUTION

To address this, we set up a panel of engaged consumers. To establish the group we interviewed 2,000 customers living in our distribution area. We followed up this initial interview with a further survey targeting 200 of the most well-informed and interested customers. We sent these customers briefing information and carried out quality checks to ensure that they understood Electricity North West and the industry, resulting in a well-informed representative group of customers to make up the panel.

CHANGE

This panel has already given us valuable insight into customers' opinions and needs, including views on outages, restoration times, compensation and even benchmarking:

This graph shows the response to the question 'Which of the following organisations should Electricity North West try and compare itself to?':



Although other DNOs come out on top – closely followed by suppliers – recovery services and other utility companies are also seen to be comparative. We will be using this data to analyse our performance against such businesses and bring it in line with customer expectations.

CASE STUDY: Landowners and the National Farmers' Union

ISSUE

As part of our requirements under the Electricity safety, quality and continuity regulations (ESQCR), we had to survey more than 200,000 wooden poles in our region. This survey work is now being followed up by work on the ground to address any issues discovered during the surveying.

The work involved more than 10,000 landowners and we had to find a way of making them aware of the work that needed doing without having to visit each one individually. Although they may not have known it at the time, they were now key stakeholders for the project.

SOLUTION

We used another of our stakeholders to help pass information to these stakeholders, engaging with the National Farmers' Union (NFU) to ask for assistance.

We proactively established a connection with our North West regional NFU representatives and director to find the best way of informing their members of the necessary work (many of whom were the landowners that we needed to contact).

The NFU were happy to help and as a result they were able to inform their members making our job on the ground easier. Interaction with the NFU aided our relationship with the landowners direct and enabled our work to be carried out much more efficiently.

CHANGE

We encouraged feedback from the landowners via the NFU and direct to our Wayleaves officers. We asked for direct feedback after the initial surveys so that any issues, such as problems with access or timings of visits, could be rectified before we went back to carry out the work needed. The work has resulted in improved relationships with customers and allowed the work to continue as smoothly as possible.

We also engaged with the NFU about their involvement and as a result have established regular face-to-face meetings and information updates about other work affecting their members, allowing them to feedback and keep their members informed.

By encouraging contact and developing a relationship with our regional NFU representatives, we now have a strong working relationship. Where possible we will adopt this engagement approach in future projects.

Listening to stakeholders

We listen to stakeholders through events and specific engagement activities, as well as day-to-day contact and discussion, working with them to share ideas and views to help solve issues, and shape our long-term plans.

We have also carried out an in-depth survey of key stakeholders, investigating the views of 40 of our most important stakeholders. This qualitative research allows for thorough explanation of views and better understanding between both the business and the stakeholder.

Our stakeholder engagement work has also included a focus group as part of our engaged consumer panel (see case study) in which we have identified those members of the panel considered to be in vulnerable categories, to give us insight into their specific views.

Responding to stakeholder feedback we are developing our services for priority service customers, including: improving our website with more easily accessible and appropriate information for priority service customers; establishing a partnership with Air Products that is helping us to identify the 8500 customers who rely on oxygen concentrators. We are also updating our reporting systems to flag these MPANS as priorities during fault restoration; revising internal guidelines regarding planned interruptions to ensure appropriate consideration is given to priority service customers during periods of severe weather; investing in new software to enable us to utilise more regular priority service customer data flows from suppliers providing enhanced services, eg, storing up to four contact telephone numbers per priority service customer.

CASE STUDY: Stakeholder consultation on long-term plans

ISSUE

We listen to stakeholders through events, working with them to both educate them and understand their views to help shape our plans. We recently consulted stakeholders on our plans to 2050 at the launch of our Strategic Direction Statement at the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Manchester.

SOLUTION

The event combined two very different but very important stakeholders.

The first was MOSI itself – a major visitor attraction in Manchester city centre, with 750,000 visitors every year. They are currently working to redevelop their energy gallery and we have had a number of discussions with them about how we can help. A fully-engaged relationship will mutually benefit both organisations, and ultimately consumers in developing understanding.

By holding our event there, we showed our commitment to their work and highlighted the venue to a number of our other regional stakeholders. We also invited the senior curator of the energy gallery, so that our vision for the next 40 years could help inform the development of the new gallery.

Our second was regional stakeholders focusing on the public sector in Greater Manchester. We attracted around 60 delegates and ran workshops in small groups to garner their views on our long-term plans from their perspective, enabling them to feedback to us with their views and priorities.

CHANGE

We will use the information gathered at this session to update our plans and share them with stakeholders again as part of an ongoing process. We will also continue to work with MOSI to develop their energy gallery, providing insight, collections, and staff time to help educate our customers via the museum.



Recording feedback and implementing change

Stakeholder engagement has always featured as part of the day job at Electricity North West but there is a new impetus on the management of that engagement to ensure that it is consistent and feeds into the board and strategic plan.

This year, we introduced new software to help us manage stakeholder views and record feedback. This new package, Vuelio, allows us to monitor our engagement record feedback from stakeholders and change the way that we do things in future.

We work closely with a number of stakeholders taking on their views for mutual benefit to develop our business and provide a better service.

Listening to stakeholders in the early stages of a project can help enormously. But engaging during projects when issues arise is equally as important. This flexibility allows changes to be made to improve services, and being open to this engagement is essential.



CASE STUDY: Transport for Greater Manchester

ISSUE

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM – and previously Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive) is the owner of the city region's light rail transport system, Metrolink, which is currently being extended in a number of areas.

Metrolink first contacted Electricity North West in 2008 to discuss issues surrounding the New Roads and Street Works Act. Plans were in place for tram lines to be extended to Rochdale and Oldham in the northeast of the region and to Chorlton in south Manchester. In addition, further projects were identified to extend the network to Manchester Airport.

This £20m+ diversions project would be one of the biggest projects in the North West for a number of years and would throw up a number of challenges.

The timescales for the project were very tight with huge public expectation on delivery. This resulted in designs being constantly updated and amended, meaning that our preparatory work would often have to be redone to new specifications at further cost to the client.

SOLUTION

After consultation with TfGM, we decided to appoint a dedicated project manager for all client contacts. This was followed up with a plan of regular meetings at a high level within both organisations to discuss various aspects of the project on an ongoing basis.

These meetings allowed us to help the client understand the difficulties that we were facing and develop an open dialogue as to how they could be rectified. Our willingness to adapt to the customer's timetable and coordinate our work accordingly reduced the timescale for the work and as a result reduced disruption for customers.

We also arranged for our design team in Stockport to meet with one of the officers from TfGM for a half-day session to review plans and processes. This valuable engagement allowed immediate feedback from the client and immediate changes to the project.

CHANGES

As a result of open and honest engagement, we were able to reduce our lead-in times, streamline our processes to reduce charges and provide a dedicated team of contractors who have developed a specific knowledge of the client and its processes.

We now have an extremely transparent relationship with the client – recognising that the project is likely to go on for a number of years and acknowledging that these new processes must be continued. This project has even led to the client giving us advance notice of future unrelated work, enabling us to get involved in the early stages of the process.

We will use this open and flexible approach, using a specific project manager where appropriate for future major projects with this client and others.

CASE STUDY: E.ON prepayment meters

ISSUE

Through our day-to-day work in dealing with RPU services that we provide for suppliers on request, we recognised an issue regarding replacing meters following illegal interference with supply.

When our revenue protection unit are called to properties by the police, they are often requested to disconnect supplies. Supplies are then restored by installing one of our own stock of conventional prepayment meters. This way suppliers can monitor usage and payment and reduce the chances of further illegal activity.

Suppliers often then need to visit the property to replace these prepayment meters with their own increasingly-used key meters at further expense to them, and further inconvenience to their customers.

SOLUTION

We contacted a number of suppliers to address the issue and following consultation, offered to conduct a joint trial in the North West where our staff would install a supplier's stock of key meters where appropriate.

CHANGE

This offer was taken up by E.ON, who supplied us with a number of key meters to install on their behalf where replacements for their customers were needed as part of our work.

The trial includes regular feedback from E.ON and has been heralded a success. The number of subsequent visits to these premises has been reduced by 50%, reducing cost to the supplier and ultimately the customer.

We are currently looking at rolling out this facility to all suppliers however suppliers would need to agree on a standard specification e.g. standard amount of credit preloaded on meter, and dawn to dusk setting to avoid costly out-of-hours call outs. This would allow DNOs to carry just one type of meter for all suppliers. We will continue to engage with suppliers to pursue this potential option.



04111/SD/45309