



Beneficiary complaints handling procedures of UK human services charities

Roger Bennett and Sharmila Savani



Introduction

- What are human services charities (HSCs)?
- Examples of areas of work of these charities include: children and families, elderly, people with physical and learning disabilities, mental health, homelessness and healthcare.





- **Starting point – survey completed in 2005 by the UK Charity Commission for England and Wales.**
- **Charity Commission, 2006 – 30% of a sample of 1129 British charities had a formal complaints procedure (60% for large charities).**



- **In Britain, between 35-40% of the average HSC's annual income now derives from government sources. For large HSCs the figure is often in the region of 75-80% (NCVO, 2009).**
- **Inducements from government funders and from voluntary sector, e.g., NHS, Home Office, Charity Commission 2006, NCVO 2005 – charities should possess complaints procedures.**



Aims of study



- **To establish:**
 - **Degrees to which HSCs that do have formal beneficiary procedures apply strategic approaches to the management of their systems.**
 - **Senior HSC managers' views regarding the advantages of having robust complaints systems.**

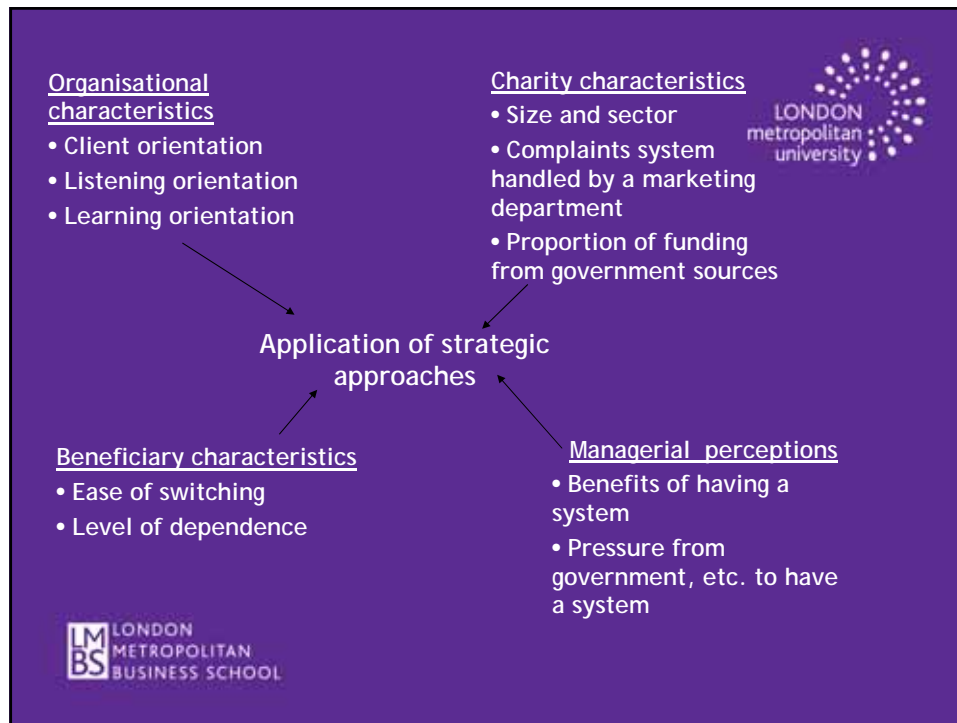


Aims of study continued...



- **To establish:**
 - **Influence of certain possible antecedents of an HSC management's decisions to apply strategic approaches.**
 - **Why HSCs without formal complaints handling system decided not to have a procedure.**






The study

- Questionnaire and covering letter sent to 'Head of Complaints'.
- So far response rate of 38% - 200 questionnaires mailed to HSCs.


LONDON metropolitan university

LMBS LONDON METROPOLITAN BUSINESS SCHOOL




Preliminary results


- 17% of the HSCs did not have a formal complaints procedure.
- All of these were small organisations (average of 8 employees).
- 80% of these received less than 5% of their total income from the state, with the remaining 20% obtaining between 6-10% of aggregate revenues from state sources.



Preliminary results continued...



- Major reasons for not having a system:
 - Complaints resolved 'on the spot'.
 - Very few people complained.
- 83% of the current sample operated formal complaints systems.
- 58% of the charities that did have complaints procedures derived more than half their total income from national or local government or from state bodies such as the NHS.





Preliminary results continued...

- **Size/sector – not significant.**
- **Three quarters of the participants confirmed operation of dedicated marketing department – but only 6% assumed responsibility for dealing with beneficiary complaints.**
- **Complaints dealt with mainly by operations managers, chief executives and directors.**
- **Proportion of funding from government sources – not significant.**
- **Major benefits attributed to having a complaints procedure were reputational in nature.**



Preliminary results continued...

- **Pressure from government, to have a system – insignificant.**
- **Constructs of client focus, learning orientation and listening orientation significantly explained adoption of strategic approaches to complaints handling.**
- **Ease of switching and level of dependence – insignificant.**

