



## **dhp and Teachers' Pensions: consultancy in a class of its own**

*In 2011, despite being one of the UK's largest public sector schemes, Teachers' Pensions, run by Capita for the Department of Education, was held back in delivering its promises for improvements to scheme administration by old-style operational behaviours and procedures. That's when dhp consulting ltd was entrusted with a project that transformed the Darlington-based business and brought its performance management up to date ...*

The work dhp did for Teachers' Pensions (TP) began with the consultancy's signature diagnostic.

### **The challenge**

Their challenge was to streamline processes, introduce much-needed metrics, overhaul performance management and quality components, and fundamentally change the day-to-day operating models and working patterns in a 160-employee part of a 300-person business that supports 1.6 million members. Despite management commitment to rapid, wholesale change, dhp's involvement came at a time when the organisation's mindset lagged noticeably behind industry best practice.

*'Depth of organisational understanding and empathy with people...'*

### **dhp was a known quantity**

Managing director **Andrea Waller**, a seasoned director with considerable financial services, insurance and legal services experience, takes up the story: 'dhp had already worked for other Capita divisions, including Life & Pensions. As a known quantity, they were the neutral third-party we needed so badly at TP – and we knew they brought the "bandwidth" to tackle such a major challenge in the timescales required.'

Her initial impression, as someone used to working with consultancies, was not of a typical consultancy, but one that quickly blended into the workplace, aligned itself with the operations and avoided the overbearing 'in your face' approach that can be so disconcerting for clients.

### **An integral part of the operation**

Instead, the team, under lead consultant Alan Williams, became an integral part of TP's operation for 18 months. As Andrea recalls, 'they simply got on with getting to know our teams, running fortnightly progress meetings and instilling vital new practices with their four-quadrant model and a diverse, but complementary, team of specialists. We respected their feedback and their honesty. In meetings, their pragmatic point of view gave real insight into how our operations worked as well as open, honest, feedback about individual performance and the action we needed to take to optimise future performance.'

When describing what differentiates dhp, Andrea highlights a depth of organisational understanding and empathy with people that comes from frontline experience in similar environments. 'I'm sure it was significant that Alan's team all had operational backgrounds in financial services or the public sector. This led to obvious mutual respect. That they weren't novice consultants with limited real world experience was vital. As experienced professionals, they quickly got into our managers' shoes, worked calmly and methodically, and supported feedback with clear, compelling, fact-based evidence.'

'If one thing stood out, it was their blend of process knowledge and people skills – an area where some consultancies struggle.'

**Minor problems: this is the real world**

From her considerable experience, Andrea Waller recognises that even successful consultancy projects have minor issues en route. In this case, she recalls occasions where, due to internal TP issues, it became clear that some milestones were at risk. 'When this happened, I was impressed by how David [dhp's MD, David Scott], was always proactive about defining issues and successfully resolving them.' She also mentions the team's assertiveness – balanced by an equally well-developed ability to take honest feedback. 'Given the massive behavioural change and attitudes dhp tackled, a few frank exchanges were to be expected.'

**'Significant quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits'**

**Measurable and fully-audited benefits**

The outcome of dhp's consultancy bears out the effectiveness of their models and methodologies. 'One target they achieved,' says Andrea, 'created significant capacity of some 30 FTE – which has been used to free resource for other value adding services including improved communication with scheme members and clients. For obvious reasons, numbers are confidential. Suffice to say dhp delivered significant quantifiable and non-quantifiable efficiency benefits. We're delighted with the improved employee buy-in, lower error rates, less incoming post, elimination of work and removal of backlogs. And we now have the performance management metrics that were previously missing.'

**eureka! moments**

Andrea's satisfaction is summed up by a eureka! moment on arriving at the office some months into the consultancy: 'Until then there had been the usual uncertainty about having consultants on site. Suddenly, I heard formerly-intransigent colleagues openly celebrating transactional-target achievements and proclaiming their understanding of the project. I'll never forget the difference in some previously sceptical people. Not only did they "get" dhp's work, but I sensed an appetite for more change.'

And the moment Alan Williams and his team realised they'd broken the back of the challenge? 'That was at one of our four-day off-site performance management workshops,' he says, 'when we suddenly saw some of the

most unlikely managers "fly" for the first time. That's always extremely rewarding.'

**The new culture is well embedded**

Several months on, the new culture is well embedded. Client relationships at TP's Darlington site are at an all-time high and employees understand performance management and its underlying principles as never before. Since dhp finished, Andrea Waller has mentioned them to several contacts – another clear indicator that the team left a positive impression. 'I'll happily recommend them. They know their stuff and their tenacity and people skills are remarkable. I also valued the way open and honest discussion was always possible and how, as I said before, they aren't intrusive or exclusive like some consultants.'

**We wouldn't have seen such progress without dhp**

In conclusion, Andrea Waller reiterates that dhp were a pleasure to work with and their approach was successful in a challenging environment. 'The secret lay in their skills, experience and empathy with an operational team that was, to be honest, struggling. When dhp left we were newly motivated, transformed and ready for a very successful year. I'm convinced we wouldn't have seen such progress if we'd chosen to manage the changes with existing resources.'

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