

case study



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Capita Symonds North



Background

Size:	Less than 250
Sector:	Civil Engineering, Transportation and Environment
Locations:	Altrincham, Cumbria and Durham
Status:	First recognised with the Standard in June 2002; achieved Leadership and Management and Work Life Balance Models in 2005

The organisation

Capita Symonds North is a wholly-owned division of Capita Symonds, one of the UK's largest multidisciplinary consultancies offering a broad range of professional services for the design, engineering, construction, infrastructure and property markets.

Its northern England operation - Capita Symonds North - provides civil engineering, transportation, property and environmental services. It is the first organisation of its type to be recognised with the revised Investors in People Standard as well as the Leadership and Management and Work Life Balance Models.

- **Staff numbers have increased by 17%**
- **A 30% drop in the number of days lost to absence per employee**
- **Employees feel more listened to and staff suggestion levels are up, with 35% of ideas being approved and implemented**

“Testing ourselves against the revised Standard makes good business sense, we have measured the rewards and benefited from the returns. We are proud of our unique achievements and look forward to working with our staff to build on this success. Investors in People has proved itself over and over.”

Steve Robinson, Regional Director



The challenge

Capita Symonds was formed in June 2004 following the acquisition of the Symonds Group by Capita. 2005 therefore marked its first full financial year as a combined entity and was a period of consolidation.

At the same time Capita Symonds North had recently experienced several multi-million pound contract wins and, with a strong sales pipeline were continuing to expand. Therefore among its challenges were managing and getting the best from significantly growing staff numbers, recruiting a range of people from senior professionals to technician and support level to work on civil and highway design projects.

Against this background, the company was looking for a means of creating a coherent and comprehensive people strategy.

"We wanted a framework which would help us improve our approach to our people," says Jen Garnett, Head of Organisational Development. "Our clients have increasing demands and we need to be able to respond to them through our people."

"We wanted to have a better approach to training and development," she adds, "something that would help us to reduce absence and staff turnover levels, attract more staff and generally have better communication with people."

The strategy

"First off we developed a dedicated team to look after business improvements," says Jen. "More importantly, we looked at how we could learn to engage with our staff in a variety of ways as well as improve our approach to the various staff issues we were facing."

Internal communication and staff involvement were key focus areas, with a general move within the company to share information more freely. A staff council was created with a representative from each team. The council meets regularly to discuss key staff issues with the Regional Director as part of a two-way dialogue.

The company also introduced quarterly staff forums. Here, the Regional Director stands up in front of the staff as an opportunity to explain key business issues and answers questions from the floor. The Regional Director also introduced a quarterly report to keep staff updated on company issues and events.

With Capita Symonds' key objective to be a top three consultancy through sustainable growth, it was important that staff understood how the business intended to reach this position.

"Our people need to know how this objective impacts them as part of Capita Symonds North," explains Jen. "So a different

type of business plan was developed to clarify the business role and show how we can all work to achieve our regional objectives. We also publish a comprehensive calendar of the business planning process for all staff so they can see where they can have their say."

Teams are then left to develop a set of objectives to link to the overall business plan. Following that, individuals develop a set of objectives at their appraisals that link directly to the business plan.

In addition to the Standard, the company used the Leadership and Management Model to improve managers' approach to their people and measure their own effectiveness. At the same time the Work Life Balance Model was used to give people more choice of working arrangements that better accommodate their different needs. This move to offer greater flexibility was borne out of the belief that both the individual and the business would benefit.

"We can now offer a wide range of options and many of our people are working in ways that suit both them and the company," says Jen. "It comes from recognising that our people are our most valuable asset."

The results

Since gaining Investors in People recognition and creating a dedicated team to work on business improvements, the company has gained the confidence to work with other standards including the Highways Agency Capability Assessment Toolkit (CAT).

Staff numbers have increased by 17 per cent and the company intends to expand the Durham and Altrincham offices by at least 30 per cent. Its accelerated staff development initiative, the 'Skills Centre', has seen good levels of use and is being extended to other offices. Of those already benefiting from the Skills Centre, over 50 per cent are looking for people management opportunities. 15 per cent of these people have already successfully achieved promotion.

At the same time managers have benefited from a shift in training focus to softer people skills by piloting neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), the study of how mind and language affects peoples' behaviour. Staff also feel 'more listened to' and staff suggestion levels are up, with 35 per cent of ideas being approved and implemented.

Employee commitment has seen positive changes too. With the introduction of new absence management procedures in 2005, a 30 per cent drop in the number of days lost to absence per employee has been recorded.

Capita Symonds North is now looking at extending accreditation to all its offices in Cumbria by the summer of 2008 which is now over 500 staff across 11 sites.



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