



Case study

Name: Telent Infrastructure,
Project Phoenix
Sector: Infrastructure /Telecoms
Location: Doncaster Depot

Transforming Network Service Delivery for Telent Infrastructure

Telent plc supplies a broad range of technology and network services to many of the UK and Ireland's largest and most mission-critical operational systems. Having had a relationship with Openreach since the nineties, in 2009 their existing operations were rolled out into a joint venture with Carillion. In September 2020 Telent was awarded a contract with Openreach to support a £12 billion project to implement their ultrafast broadband rollout in a number of locations across the UK. A further Fibre to the Premises contract started in 2022 with almost 1m premises being supplied.

A Direct Labour Operation (DLO) was set up two years ago primarily to support the Openreach work, which is now delivered using a mix of contractors and directly employed staff.

Key challenges

- Telent had an ambitious programme of fibre installation and needed to ensure that this was delivered on time and on budget for Openreach
- Resource shortages within the industry meant that there was a challenge in delivering this work
- Work requirements often only became clear at the last minute, making it difficult to make best use of the available resources
- Supervisors' time was spent resolving issues rather than driving performance, which led to difficulties in achieving the programme

Key gains

- 30% increase in throughput achieved
- Improved processes supported increased rates of delivery
- Internal roles and responsibilities were modified to ensure that issues were resolved in a timely manner, allowing delivery to proceed in a more controlled way
- Visibility of required resource was improved, allowing internal teams and contractors to resource accordingly

Background

Following previous successful transformation projects within the Telecoms and Infrastructure sectors, the Managementors team was invited to carry out an in-depth analysis of the Telent operation.

Senior management recognised they had challenging targets to hit and that the DLO was struggling to achieve these. The business was aware there were numerous bottlenecks in the process and that by improving the workflow between different internal functions they could deliver more effectively. Ric Welsby, Managing Director of Telent's Infrastructure Services commented; "The reality was that we weren't getting the productivity and output that we needed from the depots. We didn't seem to have control of the work that we were doing. It was very difficult to understand where the problems were and we never knew if we were going to have a good day the next day. Everything was 'rear view mirror' and we needed to do something different. We set up Direct Labour (DL) to grow our outputs and take control of the supplier resources and that was benefitting us on getting stability, but we just weren't getting the performance level that we expected and we knew we could get more out of it."

It was also recognised there were many external factors that could delay, or even halt, the DL function in delivering work. National shortages of vital materials, skilled resource, a reliance on other providers who share the network to complete work on time, and the great British weather were all having detrimental impacts on performance. These factors highlighted the need for the DL function to be flexible in their planning and efficient in delivery. Whilst some of these factors were not directly within Telent's control, using their influence to tackle these issues was of paramount importance in creating a sustainable, profit-making enterprise.

Project Phoenix commenced in January 2022 and was a 16-week engagement focusing on the Doncaster depot, concluding April 2022.



The Challenge

Managementors undertook an in-depth analysis of Telent's Direct Labour operation to understand what the drivers of current performance were, the challenges they were facing and the overall readiness and willingness of the workforce to change to meet business requirements. "I was particularly impressed with the analysis phase, the data collected and the way that it was presented back. It had the wow factor and it helped me and my other stakeholders understand that this was going to be a worthwhile activity. The quality of the data was clearly high" Ric commented.

The analysis revealed substantial issues that would need to be addressed to meet the tight delivery requirements set by Openreach. Ric explained; "When we actually sat as a Senior Management team and asked some of the core questions around weekly programmes and what needed to be achieved each day for each operative to be successful, it quickly became obvious that we didn't really know or have that grip. We knew we needed to standardise what we were doing."



“We wanted to increase productivity, improve our control and predictability, establish some set KPIs, metrics and governance and we wanted to be confident that we had a model that could continue to scale.”

Ric Welsby,
Managing Director -
Telent Infrastructure Services

There were significant labour shortages within the market, which meant that contractors were able to pick and choose what work they carried out. It also meant that securing a pool of skilled resource to carry out work in-house was also a challenge for Telent. The need to keep contractors sufficiently busy meant that internal teams were often left with more difficult jobs or, in some cases, very little work to carry out. Additionally, the internal teams spent significant amounts of time resolving issues caused by poor third party work.

Bottlenecks in the process for making work fluid meant that visibility of workloads was often very short term, meaning any delays or obstacles encountered held up teams who often did not have alternative work to do. Supervisors were often unable to carry out work in the field due to the amount of administrative work they had to conduct in resolving issues and preparing work for the gangs. As a consequence, poor performance on the part of the DL teams or contractors often went unaddressed, further hampering the business's ability to deliver a quality service.



The Approach and Outcomes

Taking a facilitative approach, Managementors worked in partnership with key Telent stakeholders to implement enhanced planning and delivery processes, improved management controls and reporting, as well as strengthening the interface between the planning teams and DL to form a more resilient, efficient and collaborative operation. “The deployment and the speed of it was impressive. The team were straight in there with two feet, no messing around”, explained Ric.

At the start of the project, it was crucial to gain visibility and consensus with regards to the key issues hampering the end-to-end delivery process. To achieve this, workshops were organised involving all stakeholders to map and critique the ‘as is’ process (including sub-processes such as stores and quality-checks), and identify frustrations and bottlenecks. A key area of focus was the hand-offs within the process, ensuring that these were robust at all stages.

In addition to the external factors already known, key themes and gaps within Telent’s own Direct Labour operation quickly emerged such as a lack of clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities within the process, poor adherence to the existing ‘mandated’ processes and the short-term nature of planning, due to the limited availability of ‘fluid’ jobs.

Following a review of the process, the group quickly moved on to looking at how to make improvements going forwards. “As always when bringing people in there was a fear factor around what was going to be reported back. I was amazed at the candidness with which your team were able to engage with people across the operation. On all occasions, they managed to quickly overcome any rejection from the team and build trust with them to help them understand that they were there to help them be successful”, Ric commented. The working group demonstrated a really positive and constructive mind-set in developing workstreams and next steps, as well as identifying a number of ‘quick wins’ that were able to be actioned speedily, for example:

- Developing and implementing a 4-week rolling programme of works for Build and Civils to create flexibility of work for when things go wrong
- Improving the permit process to ensure they were achieved in time for the work to be carried out
- Implementing an enhanced Quality Check process
- Implementing an improved enablement process prior to build to ensure that the work could proceed as planned
- Addressing issues caused by external stakeholders to capture and quantify the impact and use these to drive further improvements



Over the subsequent weeks, the ‘to be’ process was developed and adopted by the business.

Alongside the development of the ‘to be’ process, a series of training workshops were held, accelerating supervisor and manager understanding of the key principles required for their role such as active management, effective planning, short interval control and elements of the Management Operating System (MOS). Attendees were also trained on how to conduct ‘Day in the Life of’ (DILo) studies, whereby supervisors and managers spend time observing someone in another area of the business, to deepen their understanding of a different part of the business, identify issues impacting that person’s role and strengthen relationships across different teams.

A plan was put in place to mitigate any future delays caused by external factors. Stakeholder issues were analysed and a trend was identified which allowed Telent to anticipate delays in delivery and plan for other jobs to be completed, ensuring the engineers are always progressing work and earning revenue. A log of issues was captured and the impacts quantified, providing the evidence needed to influence key stakeholders and providers to ‘up their game’.

At the heart of the project was the development and implementation of a bespoke MOS – providing management with the tools and reporting needed to gain control of the operation and build a platform for continuous improvement. Key elements of the DLO MOS included:

- Development of a refined suite of job times to allow for more effective planning and control
- An improved planning tool to ensure that resource requirements matched the workload
- Refined reporting to ensure that the focus on operational performance measures, such as utilisation, effectiveness and productivity, were maintained at a depot level. Operational KPIs were also linked to financial measures, with an indication of revenue and margin enabling the supervisors to answer the question, “Will my plan for the day allow me to hit margin expectations?” And, if not, to make the appropriate adjustments
- A Weekly Performance Tracking Dashboard, providing greater transparency and a single version of the truth for performance across the business
- Supervisor Standard Weeks, clarifying key activities, responsibilities and how supervisors should be spending their time, were introduced to enable them to carry out their roles more effectively
- A central Issue Capture Log – capturing, categorising and quantifying the issues affecting the operation and taking a more structured, action-focused approach to issue resolution
- A Review structure focusing on plan vs actual, operative utilisation, planned revenue/margin and issue escalation and resolution, embedding increased accountability for performance at supervisor level and further strengthening the Projects/DL interface.



Project Phoenix, through a facilitative approach, shifted Telent's DLO function in Doncaster to a sustainable, profit-making enterprise, which delivered more effectively against the requirements of Openreach. "In the time that your team landed in the depots, they quickly formed positive relationships. What we saw was the initial rejection of the idea, and the thought that it would be 'more consultants wasting money etc'. Within a couple of weeks, they were getting on well with them and our teams were reporting back that they could see the value in what Managementors were doing."

This was achieved through identifying and implementing small but crucial process changes, reinforced by a MOS to drive the process adherence and behavioural change. DLO Doncaster now have a reliable pipeline of work which they can share with the internal teams and contractors to enable them to plan more effectively. Gang utilisation has been increased and they now anticipate and address issues as they occur, with supervisors much more effective in actively managing their gangs in delivering work on time and removing quality issues. Ric added, "We also got the benefit of tidying up our communication and interaction within the DLO. It definitely helped to shine a light on some of the areas of improvement that we didn't know were there." This now enables Telent to more effectively support Openreach in delivering their network upgrades for the residents of Doncaster and beyond.

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"We've successfully given credibility to our Direct Labour depots, that we can make them work and that we do have control. Getting those wins was key and we want this to be a blueprint that we can run by going forwards."

Ric Welsby,
Managing Director -
Telent Infrastructure Services

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Contact us to find out what
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