

Accelerate and de-risk: Optimising operations at WSP New Zealand



CASE STUDY

When a Canadian multinational engineering professional services consulting firm took over New Zealand's Opus International Consultants Ltd in 2017, the local company had to amalgamate existing processes with those of the new parent company when onboarding of new projects. The organisation, known locally as WSP New Zealand, engaged Assurity Consulting for the delivery of two engagements: Process Optimisation Training, and optimisation of the onboarding processes themselves.

As a result, WSP New Zealand today enjoys an accelerated and de-risked method which directly affects its ability to bring new clients and projects on board the right way.

WSP New Zealand Ltd is an engineering professional services consulting firm based in New Zealand and owned by Canadian multinational WSP Global.

The New Zealand operation has 40 offices across the country and offers professional consultancy services, covering property and buildings, environment, power and water, transport, health and safety, architecture, sustainability and climate change, and research.

Situation

Following its acquisition, WSP New Zealand performed an engagement survey which found that while it had world-class systems, the march of time meant some were outdated and in need of attention. As a company constantly seeking improvement – and within the broader context of digital improvements taking place in organisations of all kinds – it set out on a transformation agenda called ReimagineNZ.

“As part of this agenda, Assurity Consulting came in and trained a cohort of our people on change management as part of a Process Optimisation Training exercise,” says John Leatherbarrow, Manager - Commercial at WSP Global. “As a result of this initial engagement, and as one of the initiatives where we appreciated that change was necessary, was in delegations.”

The issue, explains Leatherbarrow, is that Project Management delegations, known as DLAs (Delegation Level Authority) are complex and can be difficult for WSP staff to navigate easily. In fact, while personally working with DLAs daily, he describes them as ‘near impenetrable’.

“This is a major issue because the DLAs sit at the very front end of project engagement and relate directly to risk management. The DLA, effectively, determines who in the organisation should be approached for advice, insight and approval, prior to a contract being entered into. If the DLA isn’t followed accurately at the outset, it can imperil entire projects and even put our organisation at risk.”

Beset with what Leatherbarrow describes as ‘a lot of contractual small print’, he further adds that “They don’t invite you to look in. That means they might not be referenced when necessary, or they might be misinterpreted. In turn, that means our consultants might not be getting delegations from the right level, and so might miss commercial risks by failing to engage appropriately experienced people.”

A further factor is that executing DLAs isn’t considered a particularly exciting or rewarding component of tendering for a project; any improvement, particularly if it automated or accelerated any part of the process, would be highly desirable – alleviating a cumbersome task.



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Solution

To simplify and accelerate the process WSP requested the support of Assurity to analyse the current DLA policy documentation and in collaboration with key stakeholders, create a decision tree model to better enable WSP staff understand and apply the correct Project Management DLAs to their contracts and projects.

Leatherbarrow’s colleague Ben Holland, who is GM Transformation, Commercial and Major Project Governance at WSP New Zealand, explains that the organisation had an idea of what that might look like. “We’d conceptualized a solution but hadn’t put it into practice. With the success of the Process Optimisation Training, we got Assurity in, put forward our idea, and said ‘over to you’.”

That idea was to automate the process as far as possible by using online tools which would rapidly guide the company’s consultants in the right direction. “We wanted an automated process where the consultant would need to respond to the least number of questions possible, which would drive them to an answer,” Holland adds.

To this end, WSP handed its DLAs to Assurity for analysis. Delivery took place over the course of six weeks using Agile and Lean delivery methods, commencing with a discovery and analysis process. The second phase saw initial and then further development of the Decision Tree including project DLA model analysis with design sessions alongside WSP stakeholders; demonstrations provided ample opportunity for feedback and advancement of the Decision Tree structure. By the final week, the model was completed and delivered with supporting documentation.

Holland says the initial Process Optimisation training engagement proved an ideal introduction to Assurity’s methods and approach. “This brought a lot of thinking processes to light and established the right mindset for looking at our delegations. After all, the delegations are about logic; Assurity hasn’t changed the delegations, which stay as they are, but has rather guided the thinking around them to get our organisation away from waste.”

It was, he stresses, a complex engagement. “The flexibility and rational approach taken has stood out in the delivery,” Holland adds.



Results

The work delivered by Assurity Consulting has substantially simplified the way in which WSP consultants engage with the previously ‘impenetrable’ DLAs. Leatherbarrow explains how: “A consultant now asks four or five questions and the vast majority get the answer of who the delegated authority is, or they are directed to the appropriate Subject Matter Expert.”

The questions effectively activate the Decision Tree, delivering either a name or a position from whom the consultant should seek further input or approval.

The benefit, however, goes far beyond speed and alleviation of a cumbersome task. “Commercial delegations are there for good reasons as they help manage risk for both parties when we commence a bidding process or enter into a new contract,” Leatherbarrow points out. “Poor decisions at the bidding phase affects the entire project; getting the DLAs right is foundational. Getting them right fast is highly advantageous.”

While asserting that it is ‘early days’ for the work done by Assurity, and that the passage of time will more fully expose the value, Leatherbarrow says an immediate benefit is greater clarity on how WSP can fully automate the DLA.

“It can be codified. We know the minimum number of questions which make it easier for our people to navigate a complex but foundational document. That feeds into a long-term view to increase the commerciality of people, improve the robustness of bids and delivery outcomes to client, and help our people spend more time with clients which improves relationships with them.”

Holland adds that since engaging with Assurity Consulting and through its own sustained effort over an extended period focusing on all aspects of delivery, WSP New Zealand has seen improvements in how it runs projects. “The outcomes of paying attention to client centricity, behaviours, systems and tools are legion. They include financial benefits and productivity improvements with WSP now in the top quarter of consulting companies,” he says.

These results, Holland and Leatherbarrow assert, are the fruit of a focus on front-end due diligence with the right people involved. “And Assurity has played an important part in that,” they conclude.

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At a glance



Company:
WSP New Zealand

Industry:
Engineering Professional Services

Requirements:

WSP New Zealand engaged Assurity Consulting for the delivery of Process Optimisation Training. As a result of the initial engagement, Project Management delegations, known as DLAs (Delegation Level Authority) were identified as key processes to simplify and accelerate.

Solution:

Assurity utilised Lean and Agile methods when performing the analysis of WSPs current DLA policy documentation. Due to the complexity of the DLA policies it was key that the WSP stakeholders were able view the work being done at an early stage, collaborating and guiding the Assurity team in an iterative manner. The great collaboration with key stakeholders at WSP enabled Assurity Business Analysts to deliver the work in a lean and iterative way, ensuring a high-quality end results, within the desired timeframes.

Assurity created a decision tree model to better enable WSP staff to understand and apply the correct Project Management DLAs to their contracts and projects.

Outcomes achieved:

WSP New Zealand today enjoys an accelerated and de-risked method which directly affects its ability to bring new clients and projects on board the right way.