



CASE STUDY – DASH

The Situation:

In 2012 DASH (Disability Arts in Shropshire – www.dasharts.org) found themselves in a challenging situation. They were forced to transform from RFO to NPO status, which would necessitate a 30% cut in funding. They found themselves having to make 1 of their 4 staff redundant, and end the freelance contract of another, and the remaining 2 would have to reduce their time by half a day per week. They also felt like the large space they occupied on the outskirts of Shrewsbury was no longer an asset, but rather a millstone around their necks – with massive overheads, and aiding a distinct feeling of isolation.

To make matters worse communications between the board and the Arts Council had become acrimonious, with much animosity and bad feeling due to the changes that had taken place. This all came to a head when a promised 'Transformation Fund' from the arts council appeared to have too many strings attached for the board and management's liking, leading to a complete break down of the relationship. Mike Layward, Artistic Director says, *"Things reached a standstill as the board were really angry, we were finding it hard to move on from what had happened"*.

At this point, the Arts Council suggested using the Transformation fund to involve Creative Shift as consultants, to aid the writing of a new business plan, and to look at structural issues within DASH.

What We Did:

Creative Shift organised a series of away days. *"Helga definitely had a difficult job on her hands from the outset, as she was very much seen as being 'The Arts Council's Woman' and many of us were resistant to the process. However, I realised that I had seen her previously at Hello Culture, and had thought that she had come across as very sharp and quite impressive, and so was interested to see what she would do."*

The first session saw Creative Shift assessing what the real issues were – i.e. the breakdown of communications, the level of anger and inability to move on and make progress.

"What Helga did that most other consultants wouldn't have, was actually work out what the real problems were, rather than try to tackle what we had told her were the problems. She was bold, and unafraid to ask difficult questions that may stir up anger. Through the duration of the first session, she won the trust, respect, and confidence of the team. Her direct approach shocked us into action – she simply stated that the situation regarding the transformation was what it was. We could either move on and work out what we were going to do next, or we could fold the organisation. We realised that dwelling on the past and trying to assign blame weren't doing us any good whatsoever!"



The team were encouraged to be a little introspective, and for the first time began to speak honestly about the impact of the changes, and it soon became obvious that all of the anger and miscommunication was all coming from a positive place – one of passion for the organisation. Creative Shift facilitated the discussion of how this passion could be redirected more constructively.

“Just that first away day saw a landmark change for the board and management team.”

Creative Shift continued to work with DASH, over a series of sessions that saw them re-define the vision and focus of the organisation, create a new mission statement, and develop a robust business plan. The structure and roles of the management and the board were clearly defined *“knowing exactly what was expected of us, and stating clearly what commitment we were prepared to offer meant that people could really stand up into their roles, whilst allowing and trusting others to do theirs”*.

“For the first time we were able to see the positives of the change – and how we could move forward successfully as an organisation.”

The Results:

When Creative Shift started working with DASH they were an organisation losing a large chunk of funding and half of its staff, feeling trapped in a location they could no longer afford, seeing a complete breakdown in relationship with the Arts Council, and confusion and anger ruling amongst the board and management.

Now they are in a very different situation – they have moved to a central location shared with another arts organisation, have taken on new long term projects, have been able to take on 2 more part time members of staff (these are freelancers), have a passionate board who operate in a constructive way, and moreover now have an exemplary relationship with the Arts Council.

“The board are now engaging positively with the Arts Council and feel able to move forward and embrace the full potential of the transformation. I now feel I can trust the board to do their job, which means that I am free to concentrate on mine. I have gone from feeling like I never have enough time to do anything, to feeling free to approach new and exciting projects”.

“In 2 years we have gone from a very dire situation, where we were incredibly close to shutting down the organisation completely, to being in a very different and positive place, and this wouldn't have happened without the work we did with Creative Shift.”



“Creative Shift are very different to other consultancies. They are able to bring clarity , and are brave enough not to take the situation at face value – instead asking bold questions and tackling the real issues. Along with this there is a real sense of empathy, where other consultants may just say 'get your act together', Creative Shift have the credibility and experience to make you feel that they really understand what your organisation is facing, and then poke and prod until you are able to move towards a successful resolution.”

“The bottom line is that Creative Shift are able to see what makes people tick, then allow you to harness that and re-focus it in the right direction.”

Creative Shift work with businesses facing difficult situations, and in need of conflict resolution. We do this by creating bespoke consultancy services employing creative approaches: Improbable activities; Intelligent connections and Inspiring results.

If you want to strengthen communication within your team, or discover the ways to achieve successful transformation, find out more at www.creativeshift.uk.com or call 0121 689 1051

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