

Dimensions: Helping people to live the life they want A Modern Balanced Scorecard Case Study

Summary

This case study describes the introduction of a modern balanced scorecard approach into Dimensions, an organisation that supports people with learning difficulties. It explains how the approach has been successful in helping Regional Directors focus on support for people with learning difficulties to lead the lives they want and has helped the Boards and management to understand and compare differing performance in very diverse regions. It explains how Dimensions' "tight-loose" management compact has been reflected in the approach, so avoiding many of the problems associated with poor systems of performance measurement which negatively impact the culture of an organisation.

This case study will interest anyone wishing to apply a more modern approach to managing performance through the use of balanced scorecards in the learning disability sector, and social care as a whole.

Contents

1. Who are Dimensions
2. The demands of the balanced scorecard project
3. The project
4. What has the project achieved
5. Further developments
6. Lessons learnt
7. Conclusions

1 Who are Dimensions?

When you enter any Dimensions office two things are immediately apparent. The walls are covered with pictures of the people they support, people with various levels of learning difficulty. They show people from all around the country engaged in all sorts of activities, and leading the lives they want to lead through developing choice, independence and control for themselves. It is clear Dimensions put the people they support at centre of all they do.

The second thing you see is that their offices are rather basic. This is deliberate. They are proud of how little they spend on offices and central support: the money goes to services for the people they support and they run a tight ship with only a 1% operating surplus.

Dimensions are a significant national provider of social care and support to people with learning difficulties. Dimensions comprises three subsidiary companies each operating in different parts of England and Wales – with a parent, which sets strategic direction and provides corporate and business support to all of the companies. They are not-for-profit organisations. Dimensions believes that people with learning disabilities should be respected, have the same opportunities in life as everyone else, gain independence and make their own choices and decisions.

Dimensions currently support more than 2000 young people and adults who have a broad range of learning difficulties or an autistic spectrum disorder. This support includes individualised packages for people living in their own homes, support for people living in shared housing, registered residential care homes, and transition support for young people as they enter adulthood. Dimensions also support people with complex needs, those who have additional physical and sensory disabilities, and people with behaviours that can challenge.

The management and staff are steeped in social care experience and are deeply committed to what they do. They also believe that the social care model developed over the last thirty years in the UK is flawed, and needs another to replace it: one that really puts the people they support at the centre of all they do. It is their mission to help people with learning difficulties to live the lives they want to lead, with independence, choice and control. When they talk about personalisation they really mean it, and really try to deliver it.

With the recent integration of Adepta into the Dimensions group, they now employ over 4000 staff and provide services through most of England and South Wales. They operate 20 'personal touch regions' around the country. Regions are called 'personal touch' because they are of a scale to be financially viable, yet small enough for the Regional Director to know all the people they support, their families and the staff. They don't go in for centralised management either. They have minimal, yet efficient, central support (for example only 5 IT staff support 4000+ staff) and operate a "tight-loose" management style with Regional Directors. This means Regional Directors have the autonomy to run their region as they see fit, within clear guidelines, and with necessary support and coordination from the centre.

2 The demands of their balanced scorecard project

Dimensions has doubled in size over the last few years and the Boards and Executive Team have ensured that growth has not impacted on the principles and values of the organisation. They wanted assurance that this would continue and were looking for ways to measure and manage delivery of the strategy through its basic business units, twenty Regions each led by a Regional Director.

The Boards also wanted to compare and contrast the performance of each of their wide range of 'personal touch regions' in a way that allowed for their diversity. Some regions

were well established, others recently formed to deliver new contracts. Some work with several (as many as eight) Local Authority commissioners, others only one. In one region at least fifty percent of the people they supported have difficulty communicating. Another supports predominantly older people. In one region there were many people in registered care homes with block funding streams that made it difficult to offer choice over where people lived or those who lived with them. In another many people were enjoying independent living in their own homes. Again the Boards wanted an approach that helped them unpick and compare performance across this wide and diverse configuration.

The organisation is entirely about people's lives, so Dimensions wanted to focus on the people they support, asking the right questions and acknowledging the real dilemmas this creates. How to reflect the fact that outcomes are subjective and personal, whereas measures deal largely with quantity? How to manage the statutory requirements of a large and complex not-for-profit business whilst developing the person centred approach for each person being supported? How to communicate the business strategy and still maintain a person-centred operational perspective? How to ensure the regional strategy is working without diverting people's effort from the real 'day job'?

Finally, some members of the Executive and Regional Directors had experienced measure mania and target tyranny in other human services organisations, some of which used less successful versions of the balanced scorecard, supposedly tailored to the public sector. They were adamant that whatever approach they eventually adopted would not make the same mistakes but would ensure "it fits the Dimensions 'culture'" and way of doing things. It would not be a burden, it would integrate with other initiatives, and would work practically for us". It had to support the "tight", yet maintain "light" touch? Simple then!

3 The Dimensions balanced scorecard project

To tackle this conundrum, Andy Donelan, Director of People and Organisational Development, asked specialist balanced scorecard consultant, Phil Jones of Excitant to help. Phil had worked with the founders of the balanced scorecard approach, had experience of helping local authorities develop balanced scorecards for Social Services and learning disability services, and brought much commercial and practical experience as well. Phil quickly tuned in to the complexities and contradictions that Dimensions were facing and offered sound, practical routes to devising solutions that could work for them.

Andy had already persuaded the board that the project needed a pilot phase to prove the approach and ensure it worked for them. Four regions were asked to be pilots: these were typically diverse and were managed by Regional Directors (RDs) with differing management styles and approaches. However, they were all well respected and influential, and if they could be persuaded, then others would follow.

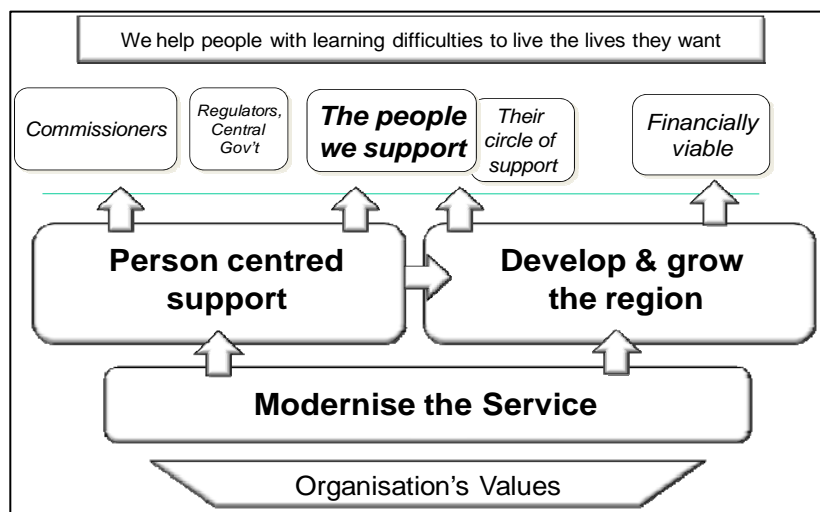
So working with the RDs and their functional colleagues, Phil developed the components of a regional focused balanced scorecard. This consists of three elements: the context,

which describes the region; the strategy map, which pictorially describes the broader Dimensions strategy; and the scorecard, which contains the detailed objectives, measures, targets, responsibilities and actions.

The context established the similarities and differences between the 20 regions. Whilst the regions were all implementing the same strategy based on person-centredness, growth and modernisation, each would be starting from a different place! Each had a different history, different characteristics and a different emphasis. For instance, a region with a new contract, and staff that were recently transferred from a public or third sector provider, is likely to need different attention to one with well established services and management team. A region with a predominance of residential care homes, often with complex and intertwined funding streams for the people being supported, makes it more difficult to help people towards the supported independent living that they desire. Another region could have a single commissioning local authority that was truly committed to unbundling their care funding arrangements to the individual benefit of the people being supported but the shortage of appropriate housing could frustrate their, and the region's, plans. Without an understanding of these characteristics, no consistent assessment of the region and its performance could be made. With the operating context clear, the state of the strategy and progress could be accurately stated and assessed.

Dimensions' overarching strategy for the regions was developed into a strategy map. The framework for Dimensions' map is shown on the right.

The Dimensions strategy framework can easily be read from this map. Think of this as a four-ball juggle? Firstly, and at the centre, are the



people they support (together with their circles of support). Whilst Dimensions has to ensure that they lead the lives that they want, it also has to satisfy the requirements and expectations of the commissioners (today mainly local authorities but increasingly people or families with their own budgets) in line with the terms of their contracts and the associated resources. But Dimensions also has to satisfy its various regulators who determine and monitor their overall standards of achievement against nationally set expectations. Then whilst serving the people they support, the commissioners and the regulators, Dimensions also need to ensure that they remain financially sound and viable!

Their strategic aims have three themes: to deliver truly **person-centred support**, to develop and **grow** their regions and to **modernise**. Person centred support is about how the regions, management and staff, deliver their services. It is about the approach and attitude to delivery. Only once the region is consistently delivering person centred support, does it earn the right to grow and develop. This growth could be through new contracts, service transfers or individual budget arrangements. Underpinning both person centred support and the growth is modernisation. This applies both to the modernisation of services from group living or residential care to personalised packages of support, but also to redesigning the business support functions with the aim of providing accessible real time data to front line staff and managers. In modernising, Dimensions have acknowledged the need to invest in their future. Through asset disposal, significant investment is now being made in information and communication technology – from enhanced communications systems to reduce cost through ‘paperless office’ initiatives to assistive technology to support independence – in order to maximise effectiveness and deliver economy. Finally their whole approach is underpinned by the organisation’s stated and shared values.

The RDs and the Executive Directors quickly signed up to the map as they could easily see all aspects of their strategy within in it. The strategy map, as it is called, provides a framework that balances objectives and measures across various perspectives: the people being supported, the commissioners, and the regulators, and, finally, the Dimensions own financial considerations. It also includes the internal activities and the underlying culture, skills, knowledge, capability and values that drive performance. It also establishes how the strategy and performance will be delivered because it is a cause and effect model. Simply put: we hold our values and modernise our services so we can operate person centred support and grow our regions; thus, the people we support can live the lives they want and this will satisfy regulators, commissioners and the financial objectives.

Rather than starting with measures, the modern balanced scorecard approach starts with objectives. Detailed objectives and their characteristics were developed within each of theme of the strategy. Starting with objectives makes it clear what you want to achieve before you start to think of ways to measure it. An example of this would be “person centred plans”.

The characteristics of the person centred planning objective were developed with the RDs and facilitated by Jackie Fletcher, Dimensions Director of Continuous Improvement. The RDs were then asked how well they thought they were delivering against these characteristics. Person centred plans (PCP) provide a good example of the problems of measuring outcomes and how those problems were overcome. In this case one region had a person centred plan for almost all of the people they supported. However the RD did not consider them to be of good quality as they were not developed by staff trained to Dimensions’ exacting standards and there was little evidence of participation and ownership of the people themselves within their plans. So whilst apparent coverage was high, qualitatively the RD scored their PCP position only 3 out of 10, and the quality of their

PCP process as a mere 4 out of 10. She had plans in place to develop her staff and ensure that all those who wanted PCPs were helped to develop ones that they wanted. In contrast, in another region, only 65% of the people supported had person centred plan but all those people who wanted one, had one! They had also been developed by experienced facilitators and so had high ownership. The people they supported were also achieving what they said they wanted to on their plans. So, whilst coverage of PCPs apparently looked low in comparison, the quality was high, and the RD scored their PCP situation as 8 out of 10 and the quality of their PCP support as 8 out of 10. They were doing “honest appraisal”.

This example shows how the approach mixed both evidence and qualitative assessment which in turn creates a quality of conversation. Scoring 3 or 8 out of 10 appears subjective, but the RDs (and their teams) were expressing their judgement and backing it up with evidence. They were qualifying the apparent measures with what they really thought. When we brought the RDs together to review and discuss their scores they said that the discussions amongst themselves about how they had scored their own region, what they saw as important, the experiences and evidence shared and the quality of conversation that this had created, was one of the most valuable results of the approach.

This type of conversation, featuring judgement backed with evidence, trusting the judgement of the RDs, reinforced by peer discussions and sharing of knowledge and experience, is an important expression of Dimensions’ approach. It is an approach that differs from many public sector scorecards, but one that reflects Dimensions’ tight-loose management style. They employ experienced people for their judgement, expect them to demonstrate they are delivering, but also give them the freedom to lead and manage their region.

This approach overcame one of the greatest fears of the RDs and the Executive Team, the fear that the approach would result in inflexible measures and slavish adherence to targets and the often distorting reactive behaviours that result from poor performance management design. One RD reported that it took a while to get his head around it and that it originally looked like “just another management initiative”. However, once that moment passed, the discussions it generated had been positive. The RDs said that it helped them to concentrate the mind on what is important and raised the level of conversation with their immediate reports and first line managers. In fact some RDs started cascading their strategy maps and scorecards to their services spontaneously, even before the pilots were complete, because they believed they would be useful in focusing action and achievement. Another RD asked to join the pilot group and used the approach to get a grip on his newly adopted region. He then worked with his team, developing their balanced scorecard from scratch, and found that it helped him to gain a clear understanding of his region’s context, the Dimensions strategy, and the beliefs and values of the managers he had inherited.

It was originally intended to have the four pilots, subsequently five, up and running with their own scorecards for at least six months before their external evaluation. However, RD and functional management support for the project was so positive, and the approach followed so successful, that evaluation was undertaken at month four and the full roll-out started several months earlier than planned!

The full roll-out to the other 15 regions was conducted with minimal support from the consultant, Phil Jones, who provided arms-length support and was, again, facilitated by Jackie Fletcher. Throughout the work, Phil's approach had been to develop client capability, so they understood the approach and were able to adopt and operate it themselves. So, within three months of the early end of the pilot evaluation project, all thirteen Dimensions regions plus the seven newly introduced Adepta regions were up and running with their own scorecards.

Since then, regional scorecards have become part of the management culture of Dimensions and form part of many of the day to day dialogues between RDs, with their leaders and with their functional colleagues. Similarly the scorecards are being used within regions to generate service and locality plans, and thus actively engaging second and first line managers in their development and use, to inform regional contributions to Dimensions' annual five-year rolling business plan, and is being to form part of the oversight / scrutiny activity of the three operating boards. Ownership has now passed from the centre to the regions and the scorecard is a fundamental plank of Dimensions' tight-loose management framework.

Building ownership and understanding into the approach was central to the project. Dimensions' Deputy Chief Executive, Steve Inch, described the project as astonishing. He said he had never come across an approach where people have been so positive, where there was so much up-take and enthusiasm, with no one resisting it. He was one of the most sceptical when it came to traditional target and measurement approaches. However he was fully won over, and was delighted that all from the Board to first line managers were as well.

4 What has the project achieved?

For individual Regional Directors and their teams the balanced scorecard has provided them with a tool that helps them with their planning and focus on the wider picture. They have a clear understanding of where they are in terms of **person centred support**, **growth** and **modernisation**, e.g. how do we install assistive technology, develop staff, re-configure services, modernise terms and conditions and improve competencies and skills.

It also provides them with a valuable tool that promotes discussion within the region and between regions. It has become the framework around which business planning is conducted and is also used for regional reviews.

For the Boards, they now have a way of comparing regions fairly, and tracking how the strategy is developed and implemented. They have the ability to look across regions, get a quick overview of the context, strategy and performance of a single region, and also drill into the detail of particular characteristics for individual regions.

And for the people whom Dimensions support? Whilst their needs are represented on the strategy map and scorecard, the RDs from the pilot regions thought that the people they support would not see a direct effect for around 6 months. However, after that they would eventually experience sustained improvements in service, care and support.

5 Future developments

The main development of the regional scorecard will be tracking strategy across regions as they implement their person centred support, growth and modernisation agenda at a pace that suits the operating context of each one. They are helping each region to develop its response to the personalisation agenda such as the introduction of individualised budgets for the people they support, and their family or circle of support, becoming the commissioners and purchasers of the services that they receive. They are also supporting the introduction of new products such as support for people with complex needs or those whose behaviour can challenge.

The consolidated view across the regional balanced scorecards is already helping the support functions to establish an overall view of demand for central services from across the regions. Next they will start to introduce the approach into support functions, so they can present their coordinated strategies to support the regions.

Even though the approach is still relatively new, some RD's are sharing their balanced scorecard with their commissioners. It is being used to demonstrate and evidence their overall view of performance and to explain their strategy and tactics to their commissioning partners.

6 Lessons learnt

Ownership and usefulness: The approach would not have been successful in Dimensions unless the pilot Regional Directors felt that the Dimensions modern balanced scorecard would make sense and be useful to them. Central to this buy-in has been the development of the overall strategy map with them. The words in the balanced scorecard and on the strategy map are their words, so they recognise the language that they use. As the approach was rolled out, the other Regional Directors also recognised the use of a common language with a consistent meaning for them all. As a result, the RDs have enthusiastically communicated and rolled out the approach further in their own regions, have acted as champions and advocated it use to other Regional Directors.

Using context, strategy and detail: Rather than starting with measures and targets the approach concentrated on context, strategy and objectives first. From these it was easier to choose appropriate measures that informed the objectives and strategy. It also ensured that the context of a region was understood before its strategy and performance are evaluated or compared.

Mixing judgement and evidence: Asking for judgement as well as evidence not only plays to Dimensions tight-loose management model, but recognises that experienced managers are employed for their experience and judgement. This means they can communicate a far richer picture than mere measures could provide: in reality, a picture of their region, as they and their team see and experience it.

Having pilots of significance: The choice of Regions with experienced and influential Regional Directors as the pilots sent a clear message of seriousness. It set the hurdle of success high and ensured, once the most sceptical were convinced, that there were strong influential advocates for the roll out to the rest of the organisation.

Ownership by Dimensions: All the roll-out was supported and managed by Dimensions staff, not the consultants, as they now owned the balanced scorecard. Throughout the approach, Excitant explicitly passed techniques and knowledge across to the client team and supported them in maximising the impact on their organisation. This has created informed and enthusiastic advocates who can own, maintain and pass on the techniques to others as the Dimensions' approach.

Rapid, cautious progress: Whilst the enthusiasm for the approach has been contagious it has been necessary to ensure clear links to regional reviews, business planning and other regional work, such as client relationship management and to the people we support and their advocacy groups. These have to be brought together so they work in harmony, rather than on top of one another. As Andy Donelan recently put it, "Our balanced scorecard is seen as the panacea in some quarters, although its miraculous powers are being downgraded by the wiser ones amongst us."

7 Conclusion

Andy Donelan summed it up. "This project has reinforced our overarching aim of using the balanced scorecard to allow us to focus on what's truly important - helping to improve the lives of people we support - rather than it being a business metrics/KPI driver. We are achieving that." Whilst measurement is important, in a social services context, telling the whole story, building in judgement and experience, backed up with evidence, is possible. An approach that gets support at all levels of the organisation.

For more information about

Balanced Scorecard Case Study
Dimensions: Helping people to live
the lives they want to live.



Dimensions: Contact Andy Donelan, Steve Inch or Jackie Fletcher

Excitant: Phil Jones, phil.jones@excitant.co.uk 0870 420 7978

