

Client:



Role: Business Unit Director

Sector: Ports, Logistics & Supply Chain

Finding the Right Leader to Transform a Strategic Port Operation

The Challenge

PD Ports operates a network of strategically important ports across the UK, supporting national and international trade through logistics, warehousing and port operations.

As part of its succession planning, the organisation needed to appoint a new Business Unit Director to lead its Groveport operation on the Humber. The existing postholder was approaching retirement, allowing the business not only to ensure continuity but also to redefine the site's leadership with significant potential for growth and improvement.

The role demanded far more than operational expertise.

The successful candidate would require the commercial acumen to grow revenues, the leadership skills to inspire an established workforce, and the vision to reposition the business unit towards higher-value markets. Working closely with the Chief Operating Officer and Chief People Officer, the appointee would play a critical role in shaping the site's future direction.

Recognising the strategic importance of the role, PD Ports wanted a search partner who could provide independent advice, challenge assumptions, and undertake a thorough market search rather than simply manage a recruitment process.

**Stephenson
Stappard.**



Our Approach

Before beginning the search, we invested time in understanding the business from the inside.

Working closely with senior stakeholders, we spent time on site, meeting leadership teams, touring the facilities and gaining first-hand insight into the culture, operational challenges and long-term ambitions of the business.

This enabled us to build a detailed candidate brief that reflected the technical requirements, leadership style, commercial mindset and personal characteristics needed to succeed.

We challenged the brief and explored adjacent industries where experienced operational leaders had successfully delivered large-scale transformation. We completed a comprehensive market mapping exercise before conducting a fresh headhunting campaign.

This collaborative approach enabled the client to make informed decisions based on a clear understanding of the available talent market, rather than relying solely on CVs.

The Outcome

The search produced a carefully curated shortlist of six high-calibre candidates, each capable of leading the business unit through its next stage of development.

The successful candidate was identified during the initial search and was not actively seeking a new opportunity.

Having previously led operations within another port environment, they brought an exceptional combination of operational expertise, commercial awareness and transformational leadership.

Importantly, the appointment was achieved well in advance of the incumbent's retirement, allowing for a structured handover and ensuring continuity of leadership.

Six months after joining the business, the candidate had already established a strong reputation across the organisation for their energy, resilience and ability to engage effectively with colleagues at every level, from operational teams on the ground through to the Board.

Key Results

Challenge: Recruit a Business Unit Director to lead a strategically important port operation while supporting succession planning and future growth.

Approach: On-site stakeholder engagement, consultative role definition, national market mapping and targeted executive search.

Outcome: Successful appointment of a high-calibre leader from the ports sector who was not actively seeking a new opportunity.

Added Value: Trusted strategic advice throughout the search, objective market intelligence, comprehensive candidate assessment and a successful appointment delivered first time.



Why This Matters

Executive appointments are rarely about finding someone who meets the job description.

They are about identifying leaders who can shape culture, inspire confidence and deliver long-term commercial value.

By building genuine insight into the organisation, challenging assumptions around the talent pool and conducting a rigorous search process, we were able to identify an individual who aligned with the technical requirements of the role and the client's long-term ambitions.

For senior operational appointments, experience isn't enough. Success comes from understanding the organisation, recognising leadership potential and connecting exceptional individuals with opportunities that genuinely match their aspirations.

"Stephenson Stappard assisted us with the search for a critical role within a new business unit we were looking to form on the Humber, our brief initially was fairly wide, and Stephenson Stappard worked with ourselves on the candidate profiles, backgrounds and cultural fit. As the search progressed, we became clearer on what we wanted in the role and refined the brief and approach which Peter helped us deliver against. Peter was prompt in responding, flexible in the approach and took time to understand the business and the fit to ensure we reached the right outcome."

Paul Foreman,
CEO at PD Ports

