

Improving Gatwick Airport

Executive summary

Attract director, Howard Wyer-Roberts undertook a seven month assignment for the Operational Solutions Directorate at BAA Gatwick to drive operational performance improvement at the airport. Key strategic projects are now selected that demonstrate maximum improvements in efficiency, show large cost savings leading to an increase in airport income, with a target of £10m in 2007. Lean 6 sigma trained project teams are now achieving site-wide improvements.

Background

BAA Gatwick, Britain's second largest airport was running close to its physical capacity and needed to operate more efficiently and make the optimum use of its assets. This point was firmly underlined following the takeover by Spanish group, Ferrovial in June 2006.

The efficiency and smooth running of the airport was severely challenged after the heightened security alerts triggered by the August 2006 bomb threats. In particular this meant lengthy queues at check-in and central search stations.

BAA Gatwick had recently launched a major change programme including the establishment of an Operational Solutions Directorate charged with providing solutions to the business's problems and opportunities. A new senior post of Performance Improvement and Assurance Leader (PIAT Leader) was created reporting to the Operational Solutions director.



The challenge

BAA had failed to recruit a permanent executive to this new post. The need for action was urgent. The company had a wide range of initiatives and improvements projects in place but it was not clear that these were the right ones, neither were there sound project management disciplines in place. Deadlines were being missed and valuable people resources were stretched. Customer satisfaction monitoring was showing worrying downward trends. Relationships with the airlines were becoming strained.

The solution

Howard Wyer-Roberts was appointed as Interim Performance Improvement & Assurance Team Leader. The brief was to:

- ensure that Gatwick addressed the key strategic performance improvement projects
- capture the knowledge learned from the projects
- establish knowledge management function



In short, 'to do the right things and do them right'.

The solution – work on the right projects

Howard recruited and trained a small team. Historically Gatwick had submitted improvement suggestions in an unstructured way. Howard introduced a formal but simple system to capture potential projects. This enabled evaluation of the key projects and ensuring that they were aligned with strategic aims. Additionally, he undertook process mapping of key business processes on the airport to identify prime areas for improvement, principally passenger and baggage movement related.

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Tools like KPI trees and EVA (economic value add) were introduced to demonstrate that a sound business case existed for projects.

The solution – run effective project teams

Lean 6 sigma training had already started. This was excellent for larger scale projects and a simplified approach was designed for shorter, snappier projects. Effective project management disciplines were imposed. Risk assessment was carried out to identify business risks and means of mitigation.

The solution – showing we're getting there

Using a balanced scorecard approach, Howard established a governance reporting structure demonstrating the Operational Solutions directorate achievement of targeted improvements. In addition he set up Lotus Notes-based database to capture project lessons and to 'avoid re-inventing wheels'. This was a precursor to establishing an internal and external benchmarking facility.

The solution – integration into change programme

Working closely with the change manager, this new approach was carefully integrated into the overall Gatwick change programme

The benefits

Gatwick now has a rigorous means of determining which projects to pursue. Effort is now focused and expended on initiatives that produce the greatest benefits. There are now six key strategic projects for 2007 with targeted cost savings/income improvements of £10m. A trained team of "solutions deliverers" is in place. Projects are professionally managed and deliverables are sought and achieved. Customer satisfaction scores are now stabilising and airline relations are now being rebuilt.



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For further information contact:

attract

Leisure & tourism consultants

Leonard House 13 Silver Street Tamworth B79 7NH

01827 65814

www.attractmarketing.co.uk

info@attractmarketing.co.uk

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