



Air Traffic Control Company Builds its Values from the Ground Up

ORGANIZATION DETAILS:

Air Traffic Control organization

INDUSTRY:

State Owned Enterprise
Air Traffic Management

SIZE:

700 staff

OTHER:

- Although the company is a State Owned Enterprise, it receives no funding or financial guarantees from the Government
- It earns its revenue from the services it provides to airlines and pilots flying into or over its country of origin, plus advice and services it provides to overseas organizations and its international business partners
- 5-10% of the costs of major airlines in their market can be attributed to air traffic control
- One client alone contributes 55 million dollars
- Core business and expertise is in enabling aircraft to get from A to B in the safest and most efficient way. Behind that are a whole raft of disciplines and processes; the key for the organization is how these work everyday

This company is responsible for managing all domestic and international air traffic in two Flight Information Regions, that collectively make up one of the largest areas of airspace in the World—34 million square kilometers.

Due to increased globalization pressures and historical staff conflict the company knew it needed to change. Sharing a big-picture vision, and building values from the ground up, pulled them out of the quicksand.

OBJECTIVES

- To align the people with its strategic goal to be a global leader in air traffic management.
- To improve staff morale in order to prepare the company for the competitive and volatile times ahead.
- To actively manage the organizational culture the same way you would operations or finance.
- To develop a set of values that are grown organically from within, not compiled by consultants or from a textbook.
- To develop an intervention that focused on a tailored approach, built from the ground up.

BACKGROUND

The company operates in a climate of increasing globalization. World trends are around the aggregation of “mega-airlines” or airline alliances, at a rate that will see the 200 in the world today reduce to around 30 in 20 years time. The Air Traffic Control industry will undergo a similar metamorphosis, with a small group of ATM alliances operating a seamless global system. The company’s vision is to be a leading player in this new market. In the mid 90’s they faced a desperate situation. Morale hit an all time low. Unions were pressing for a 16% pay increase. The effects of a drawn out 18 month industrial relations wrangle created a chasm in the workforce. A new CEO was appointed to turn around a plummeting

balance sheet and dangerously low, if not volatile, staff morale.

IDENTIFIED ISSUES

- Culture of “us” versus “them” following strike action.
- Existing value statements plastered on the canteen walls were seen as nothing more than “corporate graffiti.”
- Staff loved their jobs but were dissatisfied with the company.

INTERVENTIONS

- With the help of TMI New Zealand, the company embarked on a journey to shift behavioral beliefs and the organizational culture. They created a brand for the project called “WWW” or the “WAY WE WORK.”
- Management believed that by sharing the vision, “to be a key-player in the global air navigation services industry through demonstrating world’s best practice in our own delivery of air navigation services for safety, shareholder value, our people’s performance, and customer satisfaction,” they could unite the workforce in a common goal.
- The “WAY WE WORK” became the most important people project ever embarked on in the company. This was the first time the organization had focused on people issues in 10-15 years.



The company has set itself up to be a player on the world stage, where it is not dictated too and where it continues to be proactive.

INTERVENTIONS

- A customized change process was developed that supported and sustained the desired outcomes. This involved building understanding and commitment to the values, service quality, and behaviors that are required to support the organization's objectives.
- Management interviews, focus groups, and a climate survey were used to understand the current environment and organizational issues.
- A "WWW" Project Team was established that drove the entire process, including running company-wide focus groups, addressing key issues from staff, and compiling draft values.
- From staff feedback, a core set of three values that reflect what staff wanted the company to be like in the future. These were not high-flying values but simple, from the bottom up. Behaviors typified this value and the opposite of each value was collated to best capture the "spirit" of each of the three new values.
- Staff values workshops were run, to provide inspiration to change current beliefs about themselves and the organization. This included topics such as personal development, individual-company values links, internal service, communication, and self belief.
- In order to build on the momentum of the workshops, a number of initiatives were introduced to turn ideas into action. These included values-based initiative teams, HR framework refinements, and an internal communication strategy.

CHALLENGES

- The business has a history that continued from the days of union action; at times it was difficult for the organization to move beyond that. However, there was a realization that you can't run a business based on conflict. This meant improving the way people relate to each other.
- Build an awareness and understanding of the need for the organization to change.

- Create a high level of ownership within the organization for change initiatives.
- Staff recruitment became a challenge. The application numbers for controllers had halved in the months before this intervention, in particular it was becoming more and more difficult to attract X and Y generations.

OUTCOMES

- Staff workshops were made voluntary, expected attendance to these was around 10%. The astounding outcome was a 90% attendance (670 people.)
- The company has set itself up to be a player on the world stage, where it is not dictated too and where it continues to be proactive.
- The company was presented with an "Eagle" award by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The award firmly establishes the company as one of the worlds top ANS providers, in terms of value for money and quality of service, as voted by customers—the airlines.
- The Group Manager Finance has been awarded "Young Executive of the Year 2004." He has been recognized for his part to play in helping the company reach and retain its current strong industry position.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that people are significantly more positive, willing to take responsibility, and committed; over 170 new ideas were generated, with over sixty easily addressed and implemented (quick wins.)
- All staff understand the business direction, the business values, and what they mean.
- Communication within the business has improved, with ideas like "Walk a Mile" being implemented (experience in another part of the business.)



LESSONS LEARNED

We are an ANS
Company,

We are a technology
company,

We are a service
company,

But whichever way
you look at it we are
a people company

– *Company CEO*

The importance of maintaining the message after any change intervention. The company came to the realization that the process couldn't end after the workshops. It made sure it used other mediums to spread the word such as the intranet, a magazine called "Altitude," a values booklet, posters, plus programs such as "Walk a Mile."

The new way of doing things encouraged staff to be open and honest with one another, but it had to be made clear that this did not mean negative or abusive comments.

CEO commitment was absolutely vital in ensuring that behaviors changed.
