

## The GNER Call Centre Case Study

Well here we go another case study by consultants trying to convince us that their approach is the best. Wow, look at all those benefits and don't tell me the return on investment was also staggering, sound familiar, we must confess just starting this first paragraph is making us chuckle.

It was Benjamin Franklin who once said 'In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes', a quote equally applicable to both our personal and business worlds. In today's businesses the pressures to perform are greater now than ever and if longevity is a goal then not performing is not really an option as there is always another supplier waiting in the wings eager to pounce.

The industry's we support may be Idiosyncratic but there is one challenge we all have in common 'How to provide our customers with more, more choice, more innovation, better service, whilst at the same time delivering the financial performances expected by our stakeholders. Is it possible that somewhere in pursuit of this challenge and debating over what is the best change programme e.g. Lean Six Sigma, TPS, EFQM, NVQ, Investors in People, 20 Keys etc, we may have lost sight of some of the fundamentals? Have the 'means' become the end in their own right?

In June 2003 the Harvard Business Review published an article entitled 'The Evergreen Project' a study to establish the differences between good and great companies. The article makes excellent reading, it describes the evaluation criteria used, and examples of excellence, however for the purpose of this review we have distilled the findings; the differentiators can be summarised as follows: -

- Strategy
- Execution - flawless
- Culture – right motivation & behaviours
- Structure – right people & skills

The change programmes used by the corporations who took part in this study was not important; in all cases the companies identified as 'great' were those that demonstrated excellence in the above disciplines. So are the 'means' Lean Six Sigma, TPS, EFQM, NVQ, Investors in People, 20 Keys etc the right programme, the answer is 'Yes' as long as the results give demonstrable benefit in Strategy, Execution, Culture and Structure.

Within the GNER Call Centre these differentiators formed the backbone of the change programme. The programme is as expected is an ongoing process of improvements so for purpose of this article we have focussed on the first twelve months of their programme.

We hope you continue to enjoy the read.

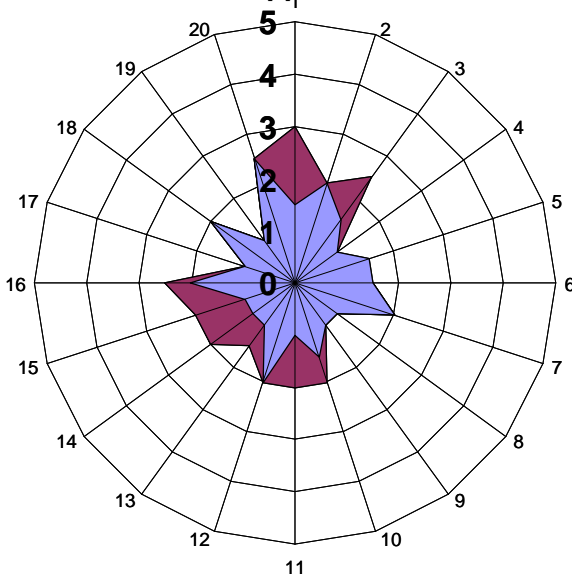
The programme started with the Call Centre in Jan 2005, following changes in management and a very different business landscape. The picture was showing a very profitable entity moving to breakeven in 2006 (the changes being a direct reflection of the parents channel shift strategy i.e. the migration from Telesales to Web.) Working with the management team, the first piece of work to be carried out was to quantify the performance required to ensure the Centre remained the preferred solution to provide ticket retailing for GNER.

### Appendix 1

	Gap 2004 A Vs 2006 Required	Quick Win 1	Key 1	Key 2	Key 3	Key 15	Etc
Safety		-	Level to Level 3	-	-	-	
Employee		-		100%	1400 ideas	-	
Customers		-	-	-	-	10% AVH	
Finance		£X	-	-	-	-	

To facilitate this process the table (appendix 1) was used to produce a visible summary and quantification of all the improvements planned and establish their impact on the balanced scorecard. These improvements included new IT equipment (hardware and software) and new roster patterns. From this exercise the 'Gap' was (2004 actual performance – 2006 required performance) identified and the additional improvement activities initiated. At this stage following a well executed communications process all employees were aware of the strategy going forward. (That is not to say everyone was committed at this stage).

### Appendix 2



There is a Chinese Proverb that says "Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand" so if the Call Centre was to get commitment it had to involve everyone and to this end the first three improvement activities were initiated these were:

- 1) A workplace organisation activity; this focussed on ergonomics at the workstation, visual management, house keeping and most importantly ensuring every single person had a role to play
- 2) A mini business structure to facilitate employee contribution; this focussed

on increasing the idea contribution from all employees, running daily Coach stand up meetings (communication of performance). The most important feature here addressing the issue for staff WIIFM (what's In It for Me)

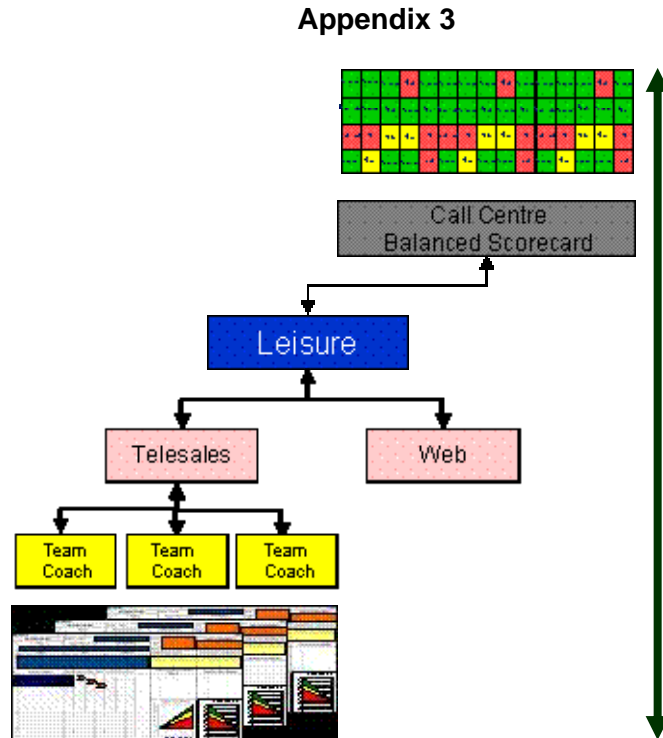
3) A quick wins programme within the business travel function (for the purists this equated to a 'Lean Six Sigma' Green Belt Project); the project focussed on reducing the time taken to complete a customer transaction.

Appendix 2 shows visually where the Call Centre scored in 2004 and the score they achieved in January 2006. *If you are interested in understanding more about the scoring system please contact us – details can be found at the end of this review.*

Our current thinking about change/ improvement has been influenced by many factors. Our own experiences, the Harvard Business review study referred to at the beginning of this article, the philosophies of Deming and Baldrige, however, few would disagree with the sentiment that peoples behaviours are determined by 'What' they see as important. Therefore putting in place the competencies, mechanisms to effectively manage performance becomes critical, in access2growth we say "If you can't measure it –don't bother investing time trying to improve it"

To address this factor it was imperative to put in place the mechanisms to track performance and where possible dovetail the solution into the existing Call Centre Performance Management System. The final solution had four additional benefits; -

- 1) Clear visible links between the actions of improvement and the outcome (KPI). The existing performance management process focussed on outcomes. With the clear links to the improvement activities they were now able to review both the outcome and improvement
- 2) Greater clarity around what everyone's contribution was in delivering the company strategy
- 3) Clear areas of personal development
- 4) Visible balance of improvements



The schematic in Appendix 3 shows how the Call Centre management team reviewed progress of their strategy implementation. Each team coach facilitated a session with their team members and developed the improvement plans. These plans reflected the minimum amount of improvement required to deliver their contribution to the strategy. This ensured effort was being applied selectively i.e. getting the biggest bang for their bucks. Via an in house developed Excel spreadsheet they entered the plan Vs actual improvement status which was summarised into a traffic light system, showed at the top of the diagram.

So, how are we doing against the four differentiators of Strategy, Execution, Culture and Structure?

Strategy: - To a great extent the future of the Call Centre sits within the strategy of GNER; however the Call Centre management team have pulled together a clear concise road map for the next two years and using a combination of visual management and Sales & Operations Planning it provided the management with information the macro and control of the day to day.

Execution: - Has it been flawless? no, has it delivered? absolutely yes. Not only did they exceed their budgets, they did it in a way that has received independent recognition on three fronts most noticeably receiving the Highly Commended award at the 2007 European Call centre Awards for Best Improvement Strategy.

Culture: - Absolutely, at the eighteen month review, 300 employees had implemented over 1400 ideas with an average value per idea in excess of £300, is there more to do? We don't think anyone at the Call Centre would say no.

Structure: - Definitely, with the introduction of mini business areas, a comprehensive skill versatility programme has enabled significant improvements in customer turnaround times, business productivity and employee morale.

Well we have come to the end of the first twelve months, god this is the tempting part of the article where we now list all the accolades, benefits, endorsements etc, after all we are consultants.

But no, that would not be ethical, if you are interested to know in more detail what was delivered, what the employees think about the programme. Then the best people to talk to are the people themselves, we are sure the team at the GNER Call Centre will be proud to help.

If you would like to know more about access2growth and how we might be able to add value to your existing change programme we would be pleased to hear from you. Please submit your enquiries to: [info@access2growth.com](mailto:info@access2growth.com) .

We really hope you enjoyed the article.