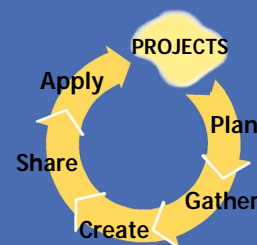


# BAA plc

## Learning about fit-out



### Background

BAA are the largest international airport operator in the world, and one of the UK's biggest construction clients. They own Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Southampton in the UK and have management contracts or stakes in 13 airports overseas, providing facilities for nearly 200 million passengers a year. BAA Property develop and manage a £2 billion portfolio of support accommodation for the airlines using their airports, including offices, airline executive lounges, hangars, catering bases, cargo warehouses, hotels and check-in desks, making them one of the largest commercial property owners in the UK. Overall, BAA spend around £1.5 million a day on new build, adaptation, refurbishment and maintenance projects.

BAA based their pilot trial of the Learning Toolkit on a £10 million project to develop a new check-in area for Continental Airlines by adapting under-used space in Gatwick South Terminal and linking it to the existing passenger circulation area on the floor above through new construction. The work involved designing and constructing a new space to accommodate a linking ramp suitable for luggage trolleys, and installing check-in desks and baggage-handling conveyors — all to a tight timetable and with minimal disruption to the passengers using the existing circulation area. After a feasibility study, work started on site in late 2000, and the new facility was brought into use in time for the 2001 Easter rush. Continental are delighted with the result.

### Learning at BAA

As a construction client, BAA put a strong emphasis on value for money. They are always looking for worthwhile innovation in construction management, and over the past few years they have made sweeping changes in the way they handle construction projects. All BAA construction managers are expected to strive for continuous improvement in their own work, and periodically major changes are made in organisational structure and procedures to establish new ways of working. However, there has historically been a gap between individual learning and corporate initiatives. There has been no structured process designed to support ongoing corporate learning — to disseminate lessons learned by individual managers among their colleagues, to feed them into corporate thinking, or to create learning opportunities for project teams.

Shortly before the Learning from Experience project started, BAA's Fit Out Team took a local initiative to set up a simple, structured process designed to promote continuous learning and knowledge sharing amongst team members. This proposes that each project should routinely include:

- one-hour team meetings at the beginning of the definition, design, manufacture and assembly stages to feed in lessons from previous experience, and
- two-hour learning review meetings at the end of each of these stages, followed by short collation exercises to extract key messages and record them on a spreadsheet as a permanent, accessible record.

The meetings will be led, and the lessons collated and recorded, by project managers from outside the project team who have been trained as facilitators.

This proposal (which has yet to be implemented) has much in common with the methods described in the LfE Learning Manual, but it also has some important differences. Most notably, the structure and short duration of Fit Out Team learning reviews focuses them on conscious tacit knowledge which can be captured quickly, the spreadsheet recording format



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emphasises 'bullet-point' messages, and the meetings only involve managers and key professionals. This creates a risk that the lessons learnt will seem obvious, and motivation will wane — as appears to have happened in the limited trials carried out so far. The Fit Out Team's learning process does not attempt to tap into the experience of other parts of the workforce, or into the deeper layers of unconscious tacit knowledge which BP and the US Army (for example) have found the most valuable.

## Using the Learning Toolkit

The LfE project provided an opportunity to try out an alternative approach. BAA chose to base it on the Continental check-in project because, behind its ultimate success, it had had a chequered history of delay and increases in anticipated final cost: there was a clear opportunity to learn lessons with real business value. BAA chose to use:

- a **Hindsight Review** process (the Continental check-in was already complete)
- a **desk review of project records**
- **individual interviews**, to give time for deep probing and encourage frank dialogue, and
- a **dissemination workshop** for team members in a similar subsequent project to spread the lessons learnt.

The Learning Manual was also used to guide a hindsight review workshop on another project.

The project record review provided a concise factual record of what happened, pinpointed the events most likely to be worth probing, and provided a basis for planning the interviews in detail and tailoring them to the individual interviewees. Each interview lasted between half an hour and an hour, ensuring that each interviewee's point of view was fully explored and giving time for issues to be followed through. The combination of sound preparation of interview scripts, good briefing of interviewees, adequate time, and privacy worked well: all the interviewees spoke remarkably freely, and the process revealed new insights into why things had happened and how difficulties could be avoided in future projects. It showed, for example, that pressures to bring forward completion deadlines without regard for what is physically achievable should be resisted more strongly. The gains from earlier handover are illusory, because it is more difficult, takes longer and costs more to complete construction work when an area is open to the public and in use than it would behind shutters.

## How it worked

BAA found that the Learning Manual techniques they chose to use worked well, and they expect to use them increasingly in the future. The *principle* of structured learning had been accepted in the company before the pilot started, but learning *practice* was inconsistent. There were local resource and cultural issues to address, and a lack of the tools people need to make learning work. The Learning Manual has helped crystallise thinking on the way forward and provided all the key tools.

BAA already carry out some short learning reviews in the earlier stages of projects. In the future, they expect to carry out larger-scale hindsight reviews as well, using project records, interviews and workshops. They also plan to develop a more systematic approach to dissemination along the lines suggested in the Learning Manual. The only significant change they expect to make to the process used in the pilot is to do reviews *immediately* after project completion, before memories and interest start to fade. It would not be cost-effective to do hindsight reviews as thoroughly as this after every project — BAA carry out around 500 construction projects a year at Heathrow alone — so they expect to concentrate on the higher-value projects, and on repeatable projects.

## Lessons learnt about Learning from Experience

- Make sure the staff responsible for the learning process have time to do it properly. Cutting corners saves very little and can lose much more in lessons missed.
- Remember that business value comes from applying lessons learnt, not from collecting information. Workshops and interviews are only the beginning of the process: lessons need to be extracted from the records, and disseminated to the right audience.
- Give structured learning strong support from the top and reinforce the culture with appropriate incentives.
- Carry out hindsight reviews immediately after project completion, before memories and interest fade.



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