

Operation Highlight

Operation Highlight is a one day business simulation that involves participants in managing a range of events that simultaneously impact operations at DevonAir. The activity involves 8- 12 participants who form the management team at DevonAir.

DevonAir is a private limited company engaged in the air charter business. During the nineties the company gained a good reputation for providing efficient and good quality air transport services to the 'more specialized' sector of the package holiday industry, In June 2007, DevonAir entered the 'business air charter' sector – and is currently struggling to gain more than a minute share of this small but highly lucrative market the increasingly serious impact of the recession and the increase in oil prices has heralded a period of great difficulty for the company.

Welcome to DevonAir

Overnight the training venue has been transformed to become the DevonAir operations centre, the theme indicative of an airline contributes to developing authenticity. Reality strikes almost immediately as participants are faced with incoming phone calls from the outside world regarding a range of concerns including, complaints, concerns, and publicity matters both positive and negative. Participants are provided with a correspondence in tray, in the form of memos and letters to inform them of the issues involved in their work at DevonAir.

As you would expect this is a very busy airline and the operations centre receives constant communications by fax from international air traffic controllers and aviation authorities, of course these communications must receive urgent attention since they require decisions on a range of issues including safety and security matters. In addition there are a number of employee matters connected to the recent redundancies and the ongoing effects on morale are having an impact on rotas and scheduling of cabin crew, pilots and ground staff. Pressure increases with the unexpected arrival of an auditor from the aviation authority.

A word about participation

First and most important, this is a business simulation activity – and it is not expected or required that participants become excellent in their various specialist roles overnight, or, for that matter, they know anything about civil aviation, although most people have a lot of fun when adopting their roles. Every manager is required to manage people and events; and, whatever the scenario, the general principles involved are exactly the same. The degree of benefit derived from this exercise will depend entirely on the extent to which individuals devote their energies to the task of carrying out assigned roles This does not mean that they will be required to display any acting ability – but, rather, that they concentrate on the job in hand.

Fight or Flight?

DevonAir is faced with a number of challenges that are apparent for many organisations in today's business climate. Opportunities are presented during the day if exploited with a little creative thinking could secure the future of the organisation will participants spot the opportunities? Following is a summary of just a few of the issues facing the organisation

DevonAir
Dilemma

- A suspicion that the recent redundancy measures which included flight deck crew and cabin teams have left Devonair with an insufficient number of aircrew to service the summer schedule constraints of the NAA regulations on aircrew duty hours/off-duty breaks, coupled with annual holiday entitlements and possible sickness absences, could throw the proverbial spanner in the works.
- A move by the Personnel Director to make (or persuade,) the aircraft captains and first officers agree to become SELF EMPLOYED resulting in a reduction in PAYE/ National Insurance, and all those recurrent aircrew medicals, renewal of licences, etc. would become the responsibility of the individual
- Confirmation that a senior stewardess is pregnant and a request to transfer to a position in training and development during the term of her pregnancy
- A leaked memo the annual pay review will result in anything but a minimal all round increase
- A complaint to the Industrial Tribunal on the grounds of unfair dismissal

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- A complaint from a community group which about the naming of an aircraft. The local press are interested in developing this as a feature
- A complaint from a passenger delayed at Gatwick because of a jammed cargo hold
- The curious case of food poisoning on the Nicosia flight
- A flight grounded in Catawampi containing 166 passengers and crew due to a suspected terrorism attack
- Serious allergic reaction on the inbound flight from Istanbul triggered by the practice of spraying mosquito repellent

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- The Challenge of increasing aircraft utilisation particularly the two Dash Seven aircraft The associated costs of aircraft lying idle and the increasing cost of oil
- The ever-spiralling costs of servicing and maintaining aircraft, and the impact of the recession .
- A series of unexplained faults has necessitated a number extremely costly engine changes - and protracted negotiations with the engine manufacturers
- A recent incident at Gatwick involving Airbus Hotel Bravo which arrived at Gatwick, ex- Lisbon, on the evening in question, when the latch to a cargo door was found to be jammed in the locked position
- A notice of mandatory aircraft modification/rectification from the aviation authority this affects two aircraft on the summer schedule

Applications

As Operation Highlight is an exercise that simulates real life first-line Managerial situations, it presents an ideal opportunity for competence-based assessment.

Additional and bespoke scenarios can be included into the activity to align with your competency framework. The activity also presents an excellent opportunity for participants of an established group to practice new skills and transfer learning following a development initiative.

Operation Highlight is a complex activity with many things happening simultaneously. The characteristics of the group, their interactions, experience, and their interpretation of the role ensures that no two events produce the same outcome. While there is opportunity to assess many aspects of competency we suggest assessment criteria below based upon the exercise activities, although your assessors may observe and note behaviours demonstrated beyond this framework

Exercise Activity	Competency Area
Preparing and conducting/participating in meetings	Written and verbal communication Coaching Influencing and persuading others Managing disagreements and conflict Collaborating and exchanging ideas
Collating and analyzing statistical and financial data	Presenting a logical and clear argument Clarifying and summarising information
Preparing and producing schedules, rotas Preparing accurate information and timetables	Respecting and applying rules and regulations Disseminating requirements relating to work activities to all relevant people
Dealing with internal and external telephone calls and correspondence	Managing conflict Informing and consulting with others Seeking information to solve problems. Questioning
Organising work to be done within set timescales	Collaborating and seeking views Providing appropriate and timely feedback Communicating plans and proposals
Leading and participation in management and trade union meetings	Presenting logical and factual arguments Negotiating Establishing and communicating objectives