

Making c-o-n-n-e-c-t-i-o-n-s

➤ GREAT EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO OPTIMISE THE INDIVIDUAL FUNCTIONS THAT DEFINE THE PASSENGER EXPERIENCE ONCE A FLIGHT HAS LANDED, BUT WHEN PROBLEMS EMERGE IT IS USUALLY WHERE THESE FUNCTIONS MEET. *FUTURE AIRPORT* SPEAKS TO BAA ENTERPRISE ARCHITECT **EAMONN CHEVERTON** ABOUT IMPROVING THE KERB-TO-GATE PROCESS WITH SOME JOINED-UP THINKING.

KEY FACTS

- BAA's £40 million Stansted project is due for completion this year.
- The company plans to be entirely process-centric by the end of 2012.
- Cheverton urges better use of data to improve the kerb-to-gate process.

Once an aircraft has touched down its passengers are in the hands of many service providers, whose goal is to ensure that processing of people and luggage is smooth. The quality of passenger experience is at stake, but so is the operational performance of the airport.

Although there has been a lot of effort made to improve the technology and procedure for each individual function, there is often a lack of effective communication between the agencies involved. The data and the technology exist to bring these functions together but there must be a willingness among all the stakeholders, and a guiding hand to direct them towards a holistic view of the kerb-to-gate process.

In his two years with BAA, enterprise architect Eamonn Cheverton has focused on ways to help the organisation adapt its business model for the future. He is responsible for the development of all operational and passenger-facing systems, so the kerb-to-gate process is among his chief priorities.

In this process Cheverton urges the better use of the huge quantity of data to get individual functions working together. BAA is in the midst of a project to ensure that it has joined-up processes underpinning efficient operations. 'The aviation industry is very much function-centric. It is certainly not geared to process planning, where the emphasis is on how these functions work together to create the entire kerb-to-gate process,' notes Cheverton.

He is not saying that the industry has got it wrong in the past, but that the approach that has targeted functional excellence over the years has

created a platform from which the industry can take the next step. 'A focus on function has been great since the industrial revolution. But now the time has come for the industry to be process-centric.'

Putting theory into practice

Given that BAA operates Heathrow and Gatwick – two of the world's busiest airports – efficiency is paramount. Processing a high volume of passengers and their baggage rapidly, while ensuring that procedures such as immigration and security are maintained at the highest standard, is a big challenge. Nevertheless, BAA has embraced it and has started to make the practical steps towards implementing a process-centric architecture.

It has recently put in place a suite of performance-management systems that enable it to define and implement key performance indicators (KPIs) that can measure the quality of kerb-to-gate and other processes. The resulting information helps identify where problems arise. The first project is to monitor arrivals. This involves hand-offs between many stakeholders, such as air traffic control, airlines, airport operators and providers of ground services. The challenge is to bring these players together.

Cheverton has seen other business sectors wrestle with this challenge and emerge victorious. He has drawn on his extensive experience to tackle the current problems faced by the air-travel industry.

'It is a question of maturity. I came from the logistics sector, where a focus on process has been achieved. Look at Fedex or UPS. You may send a package with one of these couriers, but it will be handled by many other organisations before it is delivered. There is good co-ordination between these companies, which is crucial for services such as the tracking of packages. This is what our industry needs now,' he stresses.

This summer BAA will be able to look at the results of its project at London Stansted Airport, where it has been using the performance management suite to monitor arrivals. The



airport has been undergoing expansion, with a £40 million terminal extension project due to reach full completion at the end of this year, and a key driver has been the goal of improving passenger service. The kerb-to-gate process is vital in attaining this goal, so BAA took the opportunity to try out its new approach before it is applied to larger facilities.

The engagement of senior executives has been fundamental to the success of BAA's transformation efforts. Cheverton would like to see this top-level commitment among the stakeholders whose services create the processes on which he believes the industry must focus. Without that commitment it may prove hard to address the technical and organisational challenges that must be overcome to deliver a process-oriented business model.

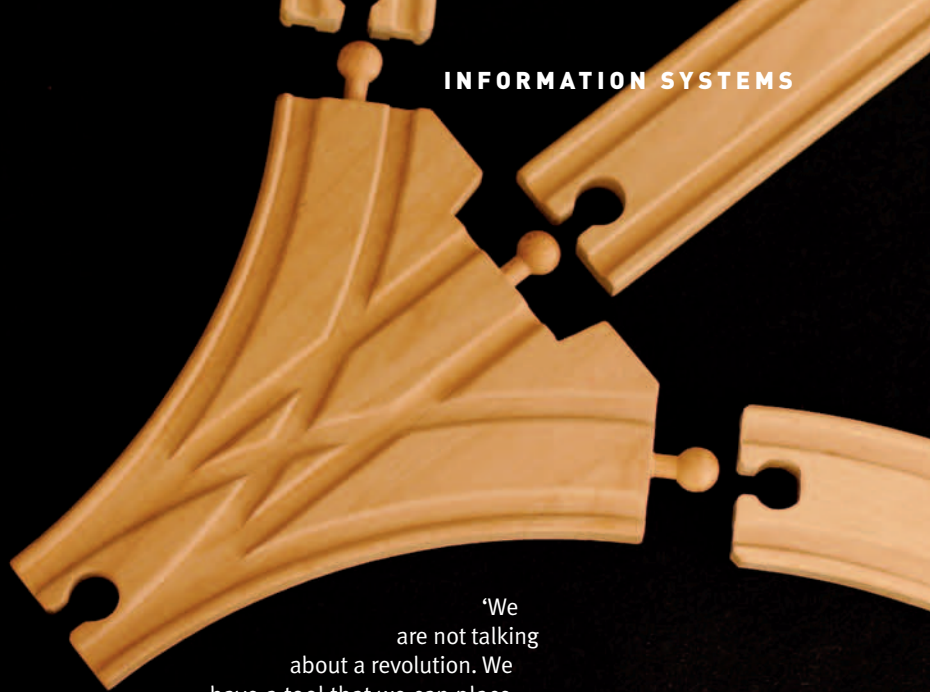
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The trial application at Stansted may be on a small scale in the context of BAA's operations but, as Cheverton suggests, it must be driven from the highest level in the organisation. Without this senior management backing, the project would most likely not cement the involvement of all the parties, whose willingness to collaborate is the most crucial ingredient. Once the engagement of all stakeholders has been secured the focus must turn to technology.

Collecting, collating and analysing data on functional performance enables better planning, which introduces more predictability into a complex process. Flow management relies on information and checkpointing. If we could get passenger numbers from the airlines 24 hours beforehand that would help a lot with our planning. The information is already out there but it is not necessarily in the right place or the right order. To change that we need to ensure that information is shared,' believes Cheverton, who notes that 'we, as BAA, are responsible for the process, but we don't control it. It is in the hands of many other organisations.'

Planning and prediction

The ability to accurately predict passenger volume enables airports to take a proactive approach to delivering the appropriate level of resources, which could significantly improve the kerb-to-gate process. Cheverton perceives a need in the industry to change its mindset to enable this kind of planning through collaborative thinking. Eurocontrol has driven the concept of collaborative decision-making, and industry players have taken the concept on board. There is, however, still much to be done. A vital step could be refocusing the planning process around a clear target, says Cheverton.



'We are not talking about a revolution. We have a tool that we can place in our existing systems to join up information and present a real-time picture of the airport. Now we are in the process of linking things to this system, which has already been successfully trialled,' notes Cheverton.

Fundamental to the success of such performance-management solutions in the financial services sector has been the industry's ability to integrate the huge amount of data its activities generate. Analytics software then mines, organises and presents that data in a meaningful form, to give senior management the up-to-date information they need to make vital strategic decisions.

The same technology is available to companies in the air travel industry, but it is still in need of a clear and focused set of key performance indicators. Though this is still lacking, Cheverton feels that progress is being made.

For him, the main challenge is to ensure that all of the relevant players in the process embrace changes to mindset and technology. From what he has seen at BAA there is a willingness to adapt quickly to the performance-management environment, and he hopes that this sentiment will be shared throughout the industry.

'It is our job in IT to make sure that we present the information in a way that makes people want to adapt. Communication between IT and business is important, so BAA has constructed the business architecture to support that. Our flight model is the one that Eurocontrol will adopt,' says Cheverton.

BAA's goal is to be entirely process-centric by 2012. Alongside the kerb-to-gate process, the company will look to improve the air-to-air process.

Although greater efficiency is a key commercial goal, for BAA the change in approach is not about cost reduction. It is about raising levels of passenger satisfaction, improving responsiveness, and providing the service environment that the industry needs as pressure on capacity continues to grow. ○



EAMONN CHEVERTON

➔ Cheverton has more than 20 years' experience in architecting, designing, and managing major projects throughout the world. He is the enterprise architect for BAA, with responsibility for all operational and passenger-facing systems. Eamonn is also a member of the SESAR Architecture Task Force and the Airport Joint Undertaking team.