

KEY FACTS

- The software required for the AMC will be delivered by a team led by Ultra Electronics Airport Systems.
- Tambo's pilot scheme has been up and running for seven months.
- AMC will be completed by March 2010.

At Johannesburg OR Tambo International Airport, a new programme entitled collaborative decision making (CDM) has the goal of improving communications between airport staff across different departments and agencies, enabling airlines to boost their bottom line, and slashing turnaround times by at least ten minutes. Immigration, security procedures, car parking, baggage handling and passenger flow issues are some of the items to be reviewed and simplified for the convenience of the customer and to make certain that airport schedules are hit with higher consistency.

CDM was brought into force by Bongani Maseko, director of airport operations, when he was charged with improving the operational efficiency of the airport on taking up his post nearly four years ago (he was previously general manager of Johannesburg Airport, from 2001 to 2005). Maseko developed what Tambo has described as the 'end-to-end' concept. 'We wanted to look at all the processes involved in running the airport and see what we could introduce to improve it. In fact, we did the same for our airlines, as it was about helping to boost the bottom line for all,' says Maseko. 'However, in South Africa we have a very rigid regulatory environment, which does not allow for certain startup activities. In some ways our hands were tied, and we found that we were prohibited from marketing startups, unless we were really creative in the way we went about it.'

The Tambo team spent several months brainstorming possible options, visiting three or four major airports in Europe to see how they had handled the issue. 'The area that impressed us the most was collaborative decision making of the kind that had been successfully enacted at Zurich Airport to improve the operational efficiency of the airport, and the airlines in particular. We knew that it was possible to extract more value from our infrastructure. That's when we came up with the airport management centre (AMC).'

The AMC is a central hub from where airport operations can be managed and communication between different groups involved in running the airport can be simplified – the software involved, commissioned by Andre Vermeulen, group manager of airport operations, allows users and stakeholders at the airport to have a real-time representation of key airport operational aspects, enabling more effective choices to be made. The vision is for improved punctuality and greatly improved passenger service in time for the FIFA World Cup in 2010.

The software required for the AMC will be delivered by a team led by Ultra Electronics Airport Systems, an airport IT systems specialist. The technical solution is based on a suite that is already deployed at Zurich Airport and at London's Heathrow and Stansted Airports. Vermeulen describes the airport's software suppliers as 'long-term partners'.

Tambo's pilot has been up and running for the last seven months and Maseko claims that the positive

Running together

➤ **ANDRE VERMEULEN**, GROUP MANAGER OF AIRPORT OPERATIONS AND **BONGANI MASEKO** DIRECTOR OF AIRPORT OPERATIONS, AT JOHANNESBURG OR TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, GET TOGETHER WITH BARRY MANSFIELD TO TALK ABOUT THEIR AIRPORT MANAGEMENT CENTRE (AMC) PROJECT, WHICH WILL ENABLE BETTER COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING (CDM).



results are already there to be seen. 'We've been able to improve turnaround times and we're eager for the centre to open very shortly. But it's not all about the airlines. Handlers and, for example, government agencies, have also helped to push for the realisation of a greater need for collaboration among all of the stakeholders. One of the great successes of the project so far is that everyone has realised the importance of working together and communicating clearly.'

He adds: 'the centre at Oliver Tambo Airport will be fully operational by March, and the team will take its concept to Durban at a later date. 'We had hoped to have that open by the time of the World Cup, because the air traffic forecasted is huge. Ultimately we would like to see a centralised airport management centre of sorts, so that at any one given time we have a situational awareness of what's going on in any one of our airports nationwide. Obviously we haven't achieved that so far, but the transformation we have pushed through already has exceeded our best expectations.'

A highly technical project, the installation of an AMC at Tambo required new managerial blood. This came in the form of Vermeulen, who joined the airport three years ago. 'I asked him to move up here because of the statistical design for the centre, which meant that we needed the engineering skills,' says Maseko. 'He has brought several crucial skills to the table. One of those, the biggest challenge for us so far, was change management. We needed to do things a lot differently if we were serious about maximising efficiency. As I speak we currently have the handlers, and the airlines from outside, attending

a course designed locally to introduce the concept of collaborative decision making and its importance.'

CDM is designed to ensure that airport staff are never thrust into a new environment they don't understand. The goal of CDM is that from day one, every member of staff understands the importance of collaborative decision making. And now, Tambo is working on putting some figures to the operational efficiencies that CDM has brought to the airport and airlines. Maseko says that the airport has appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers to demonstrate financially the value this centre is delivering, particularly for the airlines. 'We want to demonstrate the effect on the bottom line. As

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we all know in the industry, airlines are under the greatest pressure these days to return a profit. The role we can play is to successfully manage the operating expenses. If we can allow greater utilisation of the aircraft, then we can do that well.

'It's also for the passengers' benefit from the point of view of improving their travelling experience so that when you arrive from a ten-hour flight from Europe or Asia, your bag will already be there at the carousel – and customs and immigration shouldn't be a hassle either, with the endless lines that you sometimes see. We want to preach the gospel to everybody in the airport community. We want to convince people that this is the right way to go.' ▶

'One of the significant benefits so far has been the mindset change in realising the value of working together.'



BONGANI MASEKO

➤ Bongani Maseko has been responsible for day-to-day operations at all ACSA airports since September 2004.

Maseko says he was inspired mostly by the example of Zurich Airport, whose own CDM project is closely similar to that in operation today at Tambo. 'In terms of our communications with Zurich, their operations director gave us a testimonial to show us how they turned things around. Of course, Zurich is a competing hub with Frankfurt, Munich, Paris Charles de Gaulle, Heathrow and Amsterdam, and so is in a slightly different position to Johannesburg. They wanted to improve their rating. Their experiences when Swissair went under and the action they took after recognising the importance that they swiftly recovered as a hub, was a real inspiration to us.' Vermeulen, group manager of airport operations, stresses the difficulty involved in isolating inefficiencies and improving processes at the typical commercial airport. 'With the fundamentals it's important to not only look at the inside, but to also examine the entire value chain, from the roads, to parking facilities, security, the terminal building itself and then airside. KPIs drive efficiency.' 'In a year, I'd like to be able to give a definitive

answer to say where we made the biggest improvements,' says Maseko. 'One of the significant benefits so far has been the mindset change in realising the value of working together. Before, everybody pointed fingers at each other. People couldn't find parking spaces, handlers weren't performing very well in any respect, and security was a horrible experience – the whole setup was wrong. We needed to get everybody in a room together to join up and work out how to make the necessary change.'

Air traffic navigation services were not necessarily 'cagey', according to Maseko, but they weren't always forthcoming or transparent in dealing with delays, especially with regards to weather problems and how that was affecting airport performance.

Vermeulen says the bulk of the work will be completed by March, and by end of May Tambo's AMC will be fully commissioned and complete. 'Staff will be fully trained and totally up to date with what we want to achieve, with slight changes likely to be made to the core system in the meantime, along with the possibility of some integration layers being changed. The software will be finished by December, and by March 2010 it will all be finished. That will take some time, naturally, because of the complexity of integrating so many different systems.' ○

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