

First Great Western: how radical performance improvements followed seamless integration and enhanced customer focus

The Challenge

When train-operating company First Great Western won the franchise to run operations in Greater London, the West Midlands, South Wales and the South East and South West of England, it recognised the need to optimise its operating performance across all areas. This was vital for it to leverage the contract's profit potential and retain the franchise at the re-bid stage.

The task in hand was a complex one. It depended above all on the successful integration of its smaller legacy franchises into a seamless whole, with a unified approach and organisational culture across all activities and operations.

Two specific objectives dominated the company's agenda. First, it wished to break down barriers between the former separate franchises to reduce and eradicate 'silo' behaviours. Most important of all, it knew that it had to place the customer at the heart of the company ethos. This meant focusing all available resources on delivering an enhanced customer experience.

The Vector Solution

When Vector Consultants were appointed to help design and deliver the required change management programme, our considerable experience in quantifying and integrating a desired organisational culture was a key factor in our appointment. Even more important was our proven record in helping companies and their employees to understand how every action is an opportunity to improve the customer experience.

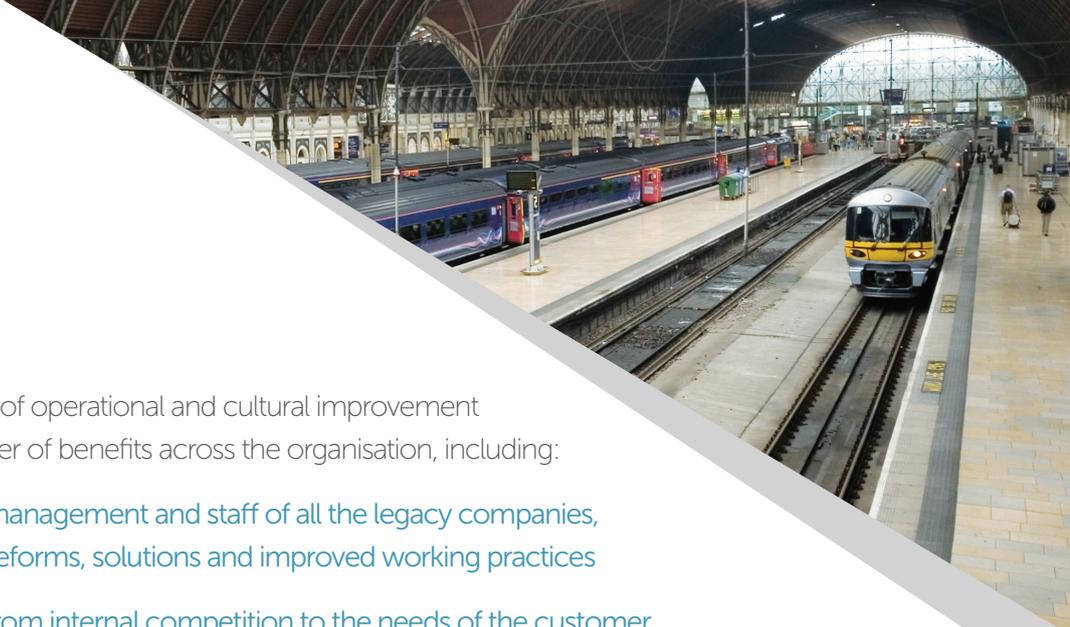
The first need was to gain a deep and accurate understanding of the current position. Our in-depth organisational scan included 'mystery shoppers' across the franchise network to ensure a complete vision of the company and its services, from an internal and a customer viewpoint.

The findings gave us the information required to develop a shared case for change, which was developed and refined through a series of senior management events. A fundamental achievement was the identification of a shared external challenge facing the entire organisation, which distracted attention away from the internal frictions and other issues resulting from integration.

Other key activities included:

- A series of organisation-wide feedback-based management sessions that effectively highlighted and clarified the differences between existing ways of working and those required to achieve the company's needs
- Sessions covering all employees to explain, embed and gain support for the new 'one-company' ethos supporting the foundations of the First Great Western culture
- The identification and formation of expert 'tiger' teams throughout the organisation to develop and share local improvement opportunities.





Results

First Great Western's programme of operational and cultural improvement has resulted in a significant number of benefits across the organisation, including:

- Full alignment between the management and staff of all the legacy companies, enabling organisation-wide reforms, solutions and improved working practices
- A radical shift in focus away from internal competition to the needs of the customer and the wider organisation
- A greatly enhanced ability to identify and respond to the current state of the franchise and a clear overview of how to execute the strategy for change
- Improved operational performance for the duration of the franchise.

First Great Western won the title 'Train Operator of the Year' at the national Rail Business awards in 2010, recognising its success in dramatically improving its operational performance by comparison with its train-operating peers. At the time of writing, First Great Western's tenure of the franchise has been extended from the original deadline of 2012 to 2016.

To find out more about how Vector Consultants can put you on track for better business performance, call us on

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