

How this domestic airline kept its fleet in the air by getting its maintenance costs down on the ground.

This domestic carrier, caught between rising fuel and labor costs and cutthroat competition, was looking for ways to increase aircraft utilization and decrease costs. To stay in the air, it had to find ways to drastically reduce its expense base in the face of continually changing and frequently adverse market conditions.

Opening a new state-of-the art maintenance facility was an important part of its plan, but, after startup, it was not performing up to expectations.

“Even with our investment in a world class facility, we recognized the need to enhance our processes in order to get the most out of it,” said the general manager. “At that point we turned to USC Consulting Group, a process improvement specialist we’d worked with for years, to help us reduce cycle times and, ultimately, costs. USCCG’s assignment was to work with our teams to improve critical path management and reduce visit costs for all types of checks on our 737 fleet.”

The consulting team started by soliciting managers, team leaders and leads in all areas on all shifts for suggestions to eliminate nonvalue-added activities. Based on this input, a new process - starting with planning and extending through execution - was

developed and successfully prototyped in a single bay before it was rolled out across the facility.

“Every member of the team was highly skilled and motivated in their own right, and wanted to perform at a higher level to keep



Key Metrics

Cycle time reduced 20%

Cost-per-visit reduced 15 - 20%

Annual savings \$5 Million

The improvements successfully implemented in this USCCG-led engagement were subsequently rolled out across multiple facilities.

the fleet in service,” said one team leader. “But sometimes, despite the best intentions, we got in each other’s way. Working with an objective third party helped us eliminate unnecessary and time-consuming steps and put our processes in order.”

In short order, existing bays were reconfigured, organization was revamped, planning tools and methodologies were refined and reporting tools were upgraded. Methods for better managing critical path and overall workloads were significantly improved.

A system of visual management was installed to help keep everyone focused on their individual turnaround times and that of the aircraft. Most importantly, management skills at various levels were upgraded through training and on-the-floor coaching.

As a result, cycle times were reduced 20% and cost-per-visit decreased 15 to 20%, representing a savings of more than \$5 million per year as the airline was able to better leverage the facility. Subsequently, best practices implemented at this facility were rolled out across the airline’s other maintenance operations.

“Lately, we’ve had to face more than our fair share of adversity,” said the general manager, “but, with these improvements, we’ve become much more competitive.”

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General Manager
Domestic Airline



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