

Case Study



Police Aviation Services

Matching an interim's experience with a client's needs

Police Aviation Services (PAS) is the leading provider of helicopters, pilots and maintenance support for the police air service. Helicopter kits arrive from the US by ship and are then designed, built and customised to exacting specifications.

Within a \$4m helicopter, PAS will install between \$500,000 to \$1m worth of sophisticated surveillance equipment, such as digital radio communications, thermal imaging cameras, searchlights and loudspeaker systems.

Each project, from design through assembly and role equipping, takes around six months to complete, including flight-testing. PAS urgently needed an engineering director to tighten up operations and ensure its helicopters were delivered on time. Contractual delivery dates meant delays could run up costs of up to £35,000 per week per helicopter.

"I had a major order to deliver a new aircraft for Greater Manchester Police," explains Mike Hayle, PAS's former chief executive and now deputy chairman. "I had a targeted delivery date but at the time had little chance of being able to bring the team together to make it work. We had good managers, real leading-edge, technical experts in their field, but I didn't have an engineering director to pull the whole thing together."

BIE provided PAS with aerospace specialist Malcolm Longley and, within months, the Manchester helicopter went out as agreed. "I used an interim because I didn't have someone in-house to do it and I didn't have time to go and look for the right people. I was days, not weeks, away from needing someone", says Hayle.

Mike Hayle turned to BIE. They identified Malcolm Longley as they know him well from previous projects and know that he had the right skills and style to fit into PAS. Five days later he was on the job.

"Malcolm saw through all the issues and got straight to the kernel of the problem," says Hayle. "Literally, within a couple of days, I had a project plan presented to me that crystallised all the issues we had to address. His technical background enabled him to get a handle on things very quickly and he took complete control of the whole project. He was able to talk issues through with my experts and gauge when they were over or under-exaggerating. He also had the skills to motivate the team lower down."

“Malcolm’s strengths are that he is a competent director and he has the experience and gravitas to give customer confidence,” Hayle continues. “My own managers are very enthusiastic, but they’re youthful and they lack Malcolm’s broad experience. Because our delivery date is contractual, we face financial penalties if we don’t deliver on time and, more than that, we let down the customer who has an operational need for the aircraft.”

The first task for Longley was drawing up a precise project plan. “Once you have analysed what is required,” he says, “clearly the trick is making sure that it happens. Things can start to go wrong almost from day one – a unit doesn’t turn up, or it turns up and it fails. Final testing is always carried out two or three weeks before the aircraft is shipped, and the very nature of flight testing is to find out if there is anything wrong. If something doesn’t work you have to try to get an exchange unit at very short notice. Contingency plans are needed, which make it possible to bring about events that appear, initially, to be impossible.”

Longley has a long track record in the aviation industry, starting out as a technical apprentice with British Aerospace and eventually running Dunlop Aerospace as operations director. He had been an interim for about six years and went into major companies at a senior, organisational level. He clearly revelled in the interim life.

“Very often when I go into an organisation, I find that there isn’t a plan in the first place. There’s a lot of hope that it’ll be all right on the day, but no-one has actually assessed the situation in a cold and calculated way. As an interim, you avoid all the politics and your only concentration is resolving the issues of the day. In this regard, it is much easier because you can be very focused.

“The moment you arrive you are costing the client money, and the company expects you to be instantly active,” Longley says. “You can’t play your way in as you can in a normal job. You’ve got to assess it quickly, act accordingly, and be right.”

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