

eircom: Working in partnership with eircom to deliver sustainable improvements in Core Network Services

Executive Summary

eircom is the leading provider of fixed-line telecommunications in Ireland. At the time of project ("Zeta"), eircom was facing several challenges. The company wanted to reduce the length and variability of data order delivery lead times; increase productivity via a capacity uplift; match demand more accurately with the resources available; manage the growing demand for higher bandwidths and fibre-based products. Project Zeta, which was carried out by Trinity Horne in partnership with eircom, was aimed at addressing these issues within eircom's Core Network Services Service Delivery unit (CNS-SD) and Services Transport Networks (CNS-TN). As part of an extensive programme of change, Trinity Horne introduced a new process operating management framework (PMOF), a lead-time matrix and a Delphi process. Trinity Horne developed eircom managers using its cultural and behavioural change methodology and instituted a programme of Lean Sigma. Within nine months of the project's inception, provisioning of high speed IP data services using fibre as the underlying medium improved by 97%. In addition, the original Zeta project Lead Time objective has been over achieved by 22% effectively hitting the planned stretch target. A 12% lift in operational capacity has also allowed eircom to provide additional focus on critical provisioning activities.

What could eircom not have done without Trinity Horne's assistance?

Without Trinity Horne's assistance eircom could not have delivered the programme's main benefits in such a short timescale. Improvements in lead-time and performance are significant and have created very positive changes in customer experience.

What was the problem/opportunity faced by the client?

eircom manages an extensive rural network, operating in a competitive environment with growing customer activity. eircom needed to reduce the variability in the time taken to deliver services to customers, especially for high speed IP data. Essentially, the company needed to instil more predictability, speed and reliability into the provisioning processes.

Brief project background

eircom is Ireland's leading fixed-line telecommunications company, with 1.2 million customers. It is also the country's leading Internet service provider. The Trinity Horne project focussed on the 170 staff working in the company's Core Network Services (CNS) division. The programme was sponsored by eircom's Director of Network Operations, Paul Reid, and Eamonn Walsh, General Manager of the CNS. In the five years prior to the inception of the project, the company had undergone three changes of ownership and had experienced a number of changes in direction and structure. The company also sought an opportunity to invest in best practice and management techniques.

Consulting activity

Approach proposed by consultants & actions taken

Trinity Horne worked in partnership with the eircom team and employed a number of initiatives to improve the firm's competitiveness and operational efficiency:

- Trinity Horne implemented a process management operating framework (PMOF). The PMOF consisted of a series of tools and approaches, contained in a "best practice guideline pack", aimed at improving the management community's ability to drive the overall performance of the business. The PMOF encompassed demand forecasting, supply planning, work management and operational reporting. The system outlined managers' roles and provided them with the tools to drive high performance within their teams (for example, best practice in conducting one-to-one performance and team reviews). Importantly, it also gave eircom managers a consistent management tool kit.
- Trinity Horne put in place a "lead-time matrix", delivered via Trinity Horne's Web-based Red Owl® resource performance reporting tool. The aim of the "lead-time matrix" was to manage lead-time jeopardy across the CNS. Red Owl® currently assists eircom in two ways. Firstly, Red Owl® monitors resource performance, providing managers with a dashboard indicating how engineers are performing on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis and highlighting variances in performance. Secondly, Red Owl® tracks the progress of each order. Red Owl's® "traffic light system" alerts managers to any glitches likely to jeopardise the timely provision of new data orders and enables them to take action in order to remedy the problem. The lead-time matrix monitors the delivery process from the initial customer order right through to the signing off of a product delivery. It has an impact on the entire business and the direct customer.
- Trinity Horne set up a Delphi process, aimed at tightening up the "interlock" between the demand for data order completions from the firm's retail and wholesale sectors and the resource capacity available to meet that demand in the CNS-SD. The Delphi process brings together sales and operations teams in a co-operative process to forecast demand and plan resource capacity. The process is supported by a three-monthly Delphi workshop, involving all the relevant stakeholders, plus the use of forecasting and capacity simulation models.
- Trinity Horne employed its Lean Sigma methodology to enable eircom staff to deliver continuous process improvements in both fibre and non-standard copper products. Designated individuals were trained to make process improvements, bettering the speed of processes and cutting their cost. Once the knowledge transfer was complete, eircom personnel were able to repeat the process improvement work independently. The Lean Sigma coaching contributed significantly to the project's success in reducing lead-times and also underpins the sustainability of the project.
- Trinity Horne implemented a cultural change programme using Trinity Horne's highly successful coaching methodology. As part of the programme, Trinity Horne coached eircom managers to adopt a proactive attitude to driving their teams' performance. Managers were trained in the use of a wide variety of tools and techniques with which to challenge team and individual under-performance. Individual, one-to-one coaching sessions, plus continued on-the-floor support ensured that the new behaviours became embedded and remained sustainable. Critically, the methodology ensured that a consistent style of management was adopted throughout the CNS.

Scope/scale of consulting intervention

The programme was named Project Zeta, and lasted for nine months, encompassing 170 people, including eircom's Network Operations' Director and General Managers. The project focussed primarily on eircom's Core Network Services Service Delivery organisation (CNS-SD) but part of the project also extended to the Transport Networks Design & Project Management organisation (CNS-TN). The project interacted with other areas of eircom including Network Engineering, Access Networks and Supply Chain Management.

Success factors and challenges

To what extent were project objectives met and challenges overcome?

All the key objectives were successfully met as part of Trinity Horne's contractual commitments. Due to the complexity of the product interrelationships, both Trinity Horne and eircom had to devote significant additional resource to the programme to ensure success. This commitment from both organisations resulted in over-delivery of the lead-time targets.

What were the benefits to the client?

Tangible

- High Speed IP data products' lead-times have improved by 97%. This is well ahead of the programme's December 2008 stretch target.
- Project Zeta has achieved a measurable improvement in productivity amongst CNS-SD staff. This yielded an average productivity improvement of 12%.
- The variability in order lead-time and due date assignment has been significantly reduced.
- The introduction of the Delphi process has increased the efficiency of the supply and demand interlock. Sales teams from the firm's wholesale and retail divisions now work with Core Network Services, on a regular basis, to accurately forecast demand and to plan resource capacity.
- Project Zeta has enhanced the people management capability within Core Network Services through the cultural change programme. The programme has provided eircom front-line managers with guidelines, training and "on-the-floor" coaching, assisting them to boost the productivity of their teams.
- Project Zeta established a Lean Sigma capability within eircom's CNS, enabling the company to maintain and build on the performance gains achieved during the project. It also allows the company to adapt future technology and product innovations to the new methodologies.

Intangible

- eircom managers now demonstrate increased rigour and discipline in their approach to work and to driving their teams' performance. They also exhibit more confidence and show greater motivation. Managers are more enthusiastic and are also willing to share best practice with their colleagues. Importantly, front-line teams also have a far better understanding of their own performance.
- There has been a significant transfer of capability: eircom managers are now fully trained in the use of the lead-time matrix. As a result, they are able to manage independently and further develop the tool.

What were the lessons learnt from your intervention?

The project was undertaken in a highly complex and technical environment. Trinity Horne now realises that more time was needed at the outset of the project to better understand the solution fit within the client organisation. Thanks to the effort put in by both companies, Trinity Horne now fully comprehends the framework that should be used in future programmes of this nature.

The client/consultant relationship

How did this work?

The working relationship between Trinity Horne and eircom was close and productive. Trinity Horne and eircom held weekly steering reviews and the meetings were regularly attended by senior directors. Importantly, throughout the project there was a very strong focus, both from client and consultant, on improving performance. Although the project turned out to be more complex than originally anticipated, the excellent co-operation between client and consultant allowed the resulting challenges to be successfully overcome.

Client Testimonial

“The Zeta programme has been a complete success and has achieved our vision of further investing and improving performance within Core Network Services. Trinity Horne consistently worked in partnership with our management team to deliver an excellent solution with very tangible benefits. We now see the operation as leading edge showing clear evidence of operational best practice. Through individual programme challenges our own internal team and Trinity Horne responded with both professionalism and commitment. As the project has evolved, the return for the effort put in on both sides has paid significant dividends.”

“I believe that by working together in partnership, we have met and exceeded the targets we set for the Zeta programme. The way in which the solutions have been introduced now allows us to continue to seek and achieve further sustainable performance improvements within our operation.”

Eamonn Walsh, General Manager, Core Network Services