

Londonlines

Implementing an effective crisis management plan within the rail industry

Londonlines was set up in 2001 as the headquarters of National Express Group's London train operations – Wagn, c2c and Silverlink. These three companies represent a major part of Britain's railway network, running almost 2,000 trains each weekday and delivering 130 million passenger journeys across 530 route miles to destinations covering London, East Anglia and the Midlands.

The project driver

Before joining Londonlines as Operations Director, Richard Morris worked at the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) where he was influential in improving crisis management across the rail industry.

"Whilst I was at the SRA, I took it upon myself to investigate how we dealt with crises on the railway" explains Morris. "It seemed to me that what was missing in the privatised railway – compared to the way we used to do it – was a process."

"It's important, too, that people understand where they fit in that process and that they have the assurance that everybody else has the same understanding" continues Morris. "Looking back, all sorts of people from different organisations assumed responsibilities they didn't have. They were confused about who to contact, for example, or what they would be expected to do with others."

Identifying a partner

Morris knew that a review of crisis management across the rail industry would be a major project and he would need help. "I've always been an advocate of going outside and seeing what other people do. They can teach you things that you hadn't thought of before."

"The consultant I met at Insight talked a lot of sense. He told me to look at what he could offer as ideas for a process which he would then fit and mould to our organisation" recounts Morris. "He had experience of the rail and airline industries and it seemed to me that this was an individual who could offer something to us."

How Siemens helped

Morris started the project by organising a working group comprising representatives from all of the organisations that would need to be involved "I included the SRA, Railtrack, HSE, a number of train

operating companies and several other agencies" says Morris.

Siemens then embarked on a series of interviews with senior managers from each of these organisations. The work involved identifying their current practices for crisis management as well as capturing views and ideas for the types of improvements that could be introduced.

Once the interviews were complete, Morris organised a meeting of the group to review progress. "Insight facilitated the meeting and we had a very productive day" comments Morris. "I wanted to keep things simple and we kicked off a series of actions including work streams to investigate particular issues further."

Although Morris left the SRA to join Londonlines shortly after, Siemens continued its work and prepared a draft crisis management plan and a series of recommendations for the rail industry.

This was presented to the SRA on May 10th 2002 – the day of the Potters Bar rail crash. Even though it was still at draft stage, it was decided to implement the plan to help deal with the accident. "The natural tendency following an incident is for everybody to rush to site" explains Morris. "We didn't do that. Instead, we met in our Managing Director's office and all agreed what everybody's role and responsibilities would be beforehand."

"It was decided that I should go to site. When I got there, because of my previous experience and the work I'd done with Insight, I walked into a situation where I knew exactly what I would be doing" says Morris. "I also knew that I wouldn't need to get involved in matters that were being dealt with by others."

"This agreement of responsibilities worked at Potters Bar better than I've ever seen it work before. Everybody just did what they said they were going to do" remarks Morris. "The plan helped management achieve a much better appreciation of crisis management and they facilitated things they maybe wouldn't have done before. It helped me, as Operations Director, to re-open the line within one week of the crash."



Case Study

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Key features

- Review of crisis management plans for rail industry and Londonlines
- Clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities by crisis management team
- Improved confidence in ability to deal with incidents and crises
- Plan used to support response to Potters Bar accident
- Recommendations included use of intranet and emergency response vehicle.



Case Study

"Following the accident, I chaired a review meeting of everybody that had been involved" says Morris. "Insight facilitated the meeting and it provided valuable input to a review of Londonlines' own crisis management plan that Insight were helping me to conduct at the time."

The benefits

"That plan is now almost complete" confirms Morris. "It recommends things like using our intranet to ensure everybody has access to the current version of the plan. I'm also looking at providing palmtops to every on-call person. Siemens also recommended we invest in our own emergency vehicle which can be taken to site. This we've already done."

"One of the tangible benefits from the project is an air of professionalism about myself that says I've got a plan which will work" adds Morris. "We've discussed the plan amongst the management team and we feel confident that we can deal with crises."

Reflecting on the value of consultants, Morris remarks "There are many different types of consultants working out there. Some come in with little or no knowledge of what they're talking about. Others are too didactic and prescriptive. Insight hit exactly the middle road – they listened to us, offered advice but didn't try to enforce an 'off the shelf plan' onto us."

"The consultant we worked with was urbane and personable and we quickly established a rapport" concludes Morris. "He also brought broad experience of crisis management within our industry. He'd been there, done it and came with authority. If you get somebody like that, then you listen and learn."

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Siemens Enterprise

Brickhill Street
Willen Lake
Milton Keynes
MK15 0DJ
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1908 817151

www.siemens-enterprise.com

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