

DUBAI AIRPORTS:

Securing leadership to transform customer service and create a world-class passenger hub for the future



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Background

Dubai International Airport (DXB) is the busiest airport by passenger traffic on the globe, serving over 80 million travellers in 2017 and hoping to increase this to 180 million by 2023.

With plans for Dubai's aviation industry to represent 37.5% of the Emirate's GDP by 2020, Dubai Airports (DA) is undergoing a rapid expansion that demands a transformation of their customer service framework to provide the exceptional travelling experience that their clients are entitled to expect.

The challenge

DA recognised that transforming, rather than incrementally improving, customer experience was necessary in order to reach their objectives. They needed to make the airport the stop-over of choice for passengers in transit, capitalising on DXB's existing popularity as a connecting airport, as well as putting it on the map as a destination in itself.

Following a restructure as part of their overall strategy, DA created a role on the executive committee that would focus on driving the airport to the top of the aviation industry by making it a truly customer-centric organisation, shifting the emphasis away from predominantly operational and technical aspects.

The individual would need to have a strong and varied track record in transforming customer experience as well as a truly international background. They would also need to bring diversity of thinking to the existing team, and provide the appropriate amount of challenge to the current status quo whilst not upsetting the delicate relationship with Dubai's cultural environment.

What we did

A vertical decorative column on the left side of the page features a complex, abstract network graphic composed of numerous small purple dots connected by thin lines, resembling a molecular or neural network structure.

We conducted a thorough global search, approaching people on every continent. We wanted to create a benchmark of excellence that would span industries, so we looked in those sectors that require the same expertise as leadership in aviation – a focus on safety, an emphasis on operational competence, and an underlying ethos of creating outstanding client experience.

We met executives who had transformed customer service across airlines, aviation, cruise ships, theme parks, hotels, and shopping malls.

After interviewing the candidates to gain insight into their background and experience, we put them through a series of assessments to analyse how well they might ‘land’ in DA. Indigogold’s ongoing project to transform the organisation’s HR function provided valuable contextual insight to inform the search process.

We presented a shortlist of four candidates to the CEO Paul Griffiths, with a detailed breakdown on how each of them might interact with the existing members of the executive committee, and what they could bring to the organisation as a whole.

The result

The feedback from DA was overwhelmingly positive.

“All four of the candidates on the shortlist were impressive enough for us to have hired them.”

Indigogold provided a quality shortlist of diverse candidates from a range of sectors for us to choose from.”

Ann-Marie Campbell, Executive Vice President of Human Resources & Development

The final decision was in favour of Rianne van der Eijk, SVP of Customer Experience at KLM. The executive committee felt that she fulfilled all the specifications for diversity, capability, and international experience, as well as bringing the ideal balance of diplomacy and challenge to effect meaningful and lasting change.

Rianne also felt that the process had been well executed.

“The personal support – which is so important when making such a complex decision – was strong.”

Indigogold shared their considerable insight into the culture and the existing executive team prior to me starting the role, which was very valuable.”

Rianne van der Eijk, Executive Vice President of Customer Service Delivery