

# Cereal Probe Case Study



## BFS Transport

BFS Transport is a specialist animal feed and grain haulier based near Goole, East Yorkshire. Simon Nichol is Managing Director of the business and took his team through the PROBE process in May and July 2006.

BFS Transport were approached as early participants in the Cereals Industry Forum initiative to get transport businesses more involved in the improvement measures offered to cereal businesses through the Forum.

### Why PROBE? Simon Nichol explains:

"We undertook the PROBE benchmarking workshops because we wanted to get an inward assessment of just how well we were doing as a business. Sometimes, operators in the transport industry can succumb a little to tunnel

vision and be more concerned about activity today, rather than concerning themselves with building a stronger business in the medium and long term."

"We were particularly grateful for the provision of an independent

facilitator during this exercise, as this gave us the impetus to be truly honest with ourselves when answering the questionnaire, as well as having the assistance available when questions challenged the team in ways to which they were unaccustomed."



Simon Nichol (on right) with Stuart McVitie - a Transport Planner and member of the PROBE team at BFS

### Identified Strengths

BFS Transport scored very strongly in customer loyalty and support, leadership style, reliability and support for employees. These key areas were symptomatic of their desire to build a business based around customer needs and supporting their employees.

"It was pleasing to see that, not only were there areas for improvement identified in the process, but, that in measuring our progress we were able to see that we had been moving in the right direction and that was very reassuring."

"I think every business, transport or otherwise, is almost certainly going to be put in the position where their previous initiatives are recognised and praised, but with that this is tempered with the need to maintain these strengths as critical components of business success to date."

### Areas for Improvement

Simon and his team took the results of their benchmarking workshop, which presented Business Performance and Practice scores and strengths and weaknesses. They were quick to arrange an action planning session where the outcomes could be translated into actions, responsibilities and deadlines.

"One of the key areas that we worked on was performance measurement. Previously, we had fairly simplistic measures in place for employee and customer satisfaction measurement and whilst these were deemed adequate, PROBE helped us to understand just what measures were taken by the very best companies in these areas."

"As a result, we have expanded both our customer and employee satisfaction measurement to reflect our desire to build a better business over time. Customer satisfaction measurement is now geared around finding out exactly what their needs are and amending our service accordingly. Previously we have been at the mercy of the British characteristic of not really wanting to provide feedback and thus our services on occasion may not have fully reflected their needs."

### Whole Business Approach

BFS Transport found that the PROBE tool allowed them to take a holistic view of the business and as a result, many of their improvement measures are linked.

"Previously, our training programmes had been a little fragmented but, with the overall improvement in performance management, we will be able to modify our training arrangements. Staff will now be asked on a more regular basis where they feel their skill shortages are and subsequent training will be developed to overcome these areas and to improve the performance of the business."

"Critical to this process will be the further defining of customer service standards within the business. We are determined to offer a multi-dimensional service; one that not only reflects the desire to meet customer needs on deliveries, but also on other issues such as the time it takes to respond to a customer query."

"We are looking to establish an internal benchmark in a number of these areas and will be tracking our progress so that we can share with our customers these service standards on a number of fronts, in addition to our core transporting service."

"For BFS Transport, PROBE was successful in raising issues that perhaps we may not have dealt with on our own. The fresh look taken through the PROBE methodology allowed us to challenge ourselves and think laterally about the measures we could take to improve the business."

"I would certainly recommend PROBE to any transport business. We had confidence in how we had managed the business and although sceptical at first were very pleased to have had the opportunity to use PROBE as a way of challenging ourselves and improving the business."

## What is PROBE?

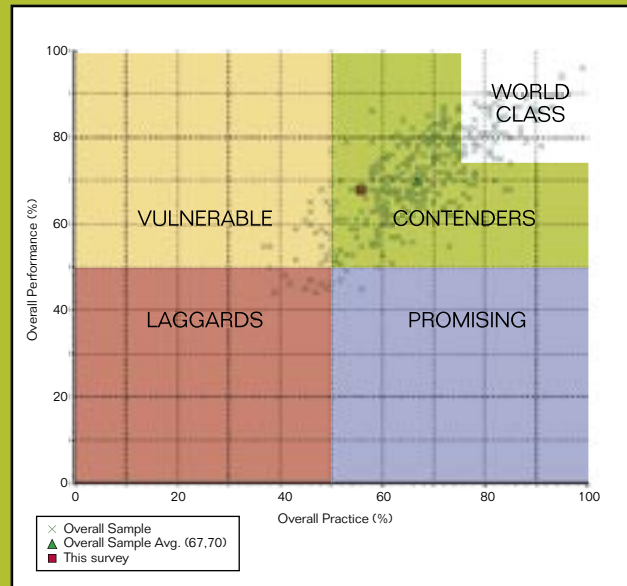
Cereals PROBE methodology has its roots in research on world-class manufacturing and service quality, led by IBM Consulting Ltd (UK) and London Business School. The PROBE database contains over 6000 individual site benchmarks from 32 countries across a wide range of sectors.

Cereals PROBE is based on a generic model of 'best practice', which is presented to the team in the form of a questionnaire. Comparison against the generic model and those companies on our database are shown in practice and performance terms. An example of the practice performance competitive positioning chart is shown here. All data is kept strictly confidential and the graph represents an anonymous example.

Strengths and opportunities for improvement are identified across a spectrum of the organisation's activities. Every aspect of the business is covered:

- from understanding the needs of service users, to measuring their satisfaction
- from service design to the operational processes of day-to-day service delivery
- from leadership styles and strategy development to people development and the measurement of staff satisfaction
- Material Processing in the Cereals Industry
- New Product Development in the Cereals Industry.

Test. UK. 14/03/2006  
Overall Practice vs Overall Performance: (56,68)  
(relative to overall sample)



The PROBE Partnership and Cereals Industry Forum are grateful to Simon and his colleagues for their support in writing up this case study, and for permission to publish it.

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