

# Case Study: Turning Around a High-Volume Industrial Service Business

Rebuilding performance, discipline, and ownership in a long-tenured, underperforming operation.



## Executive Summary

A high-volume industrial service business within a multinational company was underperforming.

Service levels were too low, overtime had become too common, management routines were weak, and performance was not visible enough. The workforce was experienced, but motivation was low, ways of working were deeply entrenched, and confidence in change was limited.

Over roughly two and a half years, the business was rebuilt through tighter operating control, clearer performance management, early changes to team structure and incentives, stronger people leadership, and a much heavier push on continuous improvement.

In the first year, the share of repairs completed within the target service window improved from roughly 86% to 95% versus the prior year, while overtime fell by around 36%. Productivity improved further in the following period. Continuous improvement participation rose sharply. More circular repair practices supported both sustainability goals and cost performance. Progress continued through COVID despite major disruption.

## Context

The case took place in a major industrial service centre responsible for repairing and servicing a high annual volume of professional equipment, alongside related service activities.

It was one of the larger units in its network, with around 65–70 people, full operating responsibility, and P&L accountability. The role also required close coordination across both a central service organisation and the local market business.

## Challenge

Performance was below expectations, but the issue ran deeper than output. Visibility was weak. Management routines were not strong enough. Incentives were unclear. People development had been neglected. The business was too disconnected from the rest of the organisation, especially the customer-facing side.

Most employees had been there for many years. Habits were established, resistance was high, and too many people had little reason to believe things would improve quickly.

## Diagnosis

The business lacked both operating discipline and enough ownership on the people side. There was not enough day-to-day control, not enough visibility on performance, and not enough management consistency. At the same time, motivation was low, trust in change was limited, and too many people were set in long-established ways of working.

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## Role & Contribution

The first months involved several changes at once. Team structures were adjusted early to create better balance and better conditions for performance. Performance measurement was introduced for both the business and individuals. Daily operating routines were put in place and, when needed, run twice a day to manage flow, capacity, and bottlenecks more tightly.

Management routines were strengthened as well: more regular one-to-ones, clearer reviews, more follow-up, and more communication across the wider team. Incentive changes were also introduced early to create a clearer link between team performance and outcomes.

Data visibility improved, and more reporting and management information was simplified or automated. Continuous improvement became a major lever, both for efficiency and for getting people more involved in how the business was run. Links with customer-facing and commercial teams were strengthened, improving coordination and making the business more connected to the rest of the organisation.

Selected service changes reduced waiting times in some areas. More circular repair practices were introduced as well, using recoverable parts more systematically. That supported wider sustainability goals while also improving productivity and cost performance.

## Outcome

The first real progress showed up in 2019. Compared with the prior year, the share of repairs completed within the target service window improved from roughly 86% to 95%, while overtime fell by around 36%.

Productivity improved further in the following period. Continuous improvement participation rose significantly and became one of the strongest in the wider network. The business also strengthened its standing within the broader organisation.

COVID then put the changes under pressure. Volumes first dropped, then recovered. Absences and restrictions added strain. Even so, the business maintained progress, supported wider network needs, and kept improving.

Performance moved earlier than motivation and ownership. Those took longer and needed sustained effort.

## Why This Case Matters

Many industrial businesses do not drift because people stop working hard. They drift because management routines weaken, performance becomes less visible, incentives lose credibility, and teams stop taking ownership.

That was the issue here. The case matters because it shows how performance can be rebuilt in a long-tenured, change-resistant environment, and why the people side and the operating side have to be tackled together.

## HTX Partners Perspective

HTX Partners helps businesses when underperformance runs deeper than the numbers. In many cases, the real issue is weak routines, low ownership, poor visibility, and teams that no longer believe improvement will last.

The work is to restore control, rebuild confidence, and make the business easier to run well.