

Positioning ORAT for Success

From Then 'Til Now

ORAT (“Operational Readiness, Activation and Transition”) is often described as the bridge between a facility that is *technically complete* to one that is *operationally capable*. The responsibility of the combined Design/Construction team is to provide the former — a technically complete facility. It is the Owner who is uniquely qualified to determine whether the facility supports the intended operations and is therefore operationally capable. ORAT achieves the Owner’s vision by employing techniques which act in concert to achieve operational capability.

Not so long ago, the concept of operational readiness in airport facility programs was not part of the industry lexicon. The focus was exclusively “on time, on budget.” While critically important, these objectives speak neither to the dynamic nature of airport operations nor to passenger and staff experience on Day One. We need only invoke images of past troubled airport openings to know there is more to success than dates and dollars.

Nowadays we all understand that ORAT is an integral component of a facility program, one which leads (if properly executed) to an easy opening and happy passengers. But much like a late addition to a dinner party, **ORAT’s seat at the table remains ill-defined**. When ORAT is sourced externally (as opposed to internal staff performing this function), Owners do their best to fit it into the program in any way possible. Differing scenarios can be successful; however, it is important to understand the potential pitfalls of each approach.

Scenario #1: {Everything But} The Kitchen Sink

Many programs embrace the one-throat-to-choke model. And why not? Fewer contracts to manage is a benefit, particularly for Owners lacking internal staff to oversee them. And let’s not forget that procurement can be a real drag ... the more procurements, the greater the likelihood of sagging timelines and flagging morale.

In this scenario, ORAT becomes an added service in a larger (e.g., PM/CM, Design) scope. While seemingly efficient, this arrangement is fraught with potential unintended consequences:

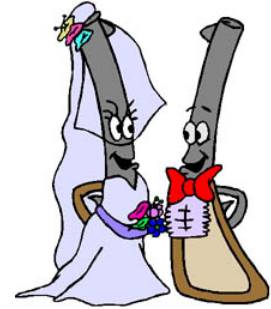
- The Owner relinquishes the opportunity to select the ORAT practitioner.
- The Owner may (intentionally or not) forfeit day-to-day input and the ability to make decisions impacting operational capability.
- The ORAT effort may be shortchanged in terms of expertise, time, and project dollars. This can occur when the prime assigns non-ORAT professionals to “handle” transition rather than invite an experienced ORAT practitioner to the team.
- The role of ORAT as independent guardian of the Owner’s operational priorities is lost. *(If you ask folks to grade their own paper, don’t be surprised if they ace the assignments but fail the final exam!)*

Sometimes the Owner incorporates ORAT into several larger scopes of work; i.e., all key players, including designer, contractor, PM/CM, etc. are responsible for ORAT. The foreseeable result is a hodgepodge of ORAT activity, lacking in continuity and at high risk of gaps and redundancies.



Scenario #2: The Shotgun Wedding

In this scenario, the Owner selects the ORAT practitioner but directs another entity to engage them contractually. Remembering that ORAT's role is to ensure that the Owner's operational priorities are honored, this arrangement should be approached with caution and in full recognition of the potential for conflicts of interest to arise.

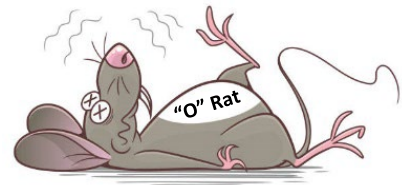


- If the ORAT function falls under the CMAR, competing priorities will become a fact of life. (*When budget is tight and the schedule slides right, ORAT is the first to go.*)
- While a prime may take contractual responsibility for the ORAT function, they may be unpracticed in incorporating ORAT principles into the project.
- Additional layers of reporting structure often result in hampered communication, diluted messaging, and delayed decision-making.
- In extreme cases, the ORAT function is viewed as a threat to the existing command structure, one that has the potential to expose weaknesses in the team. In these situations, the prime becomes a "gatekeeper" and ORAT recommendations are squelched, much to the detriment of the Owner's interests.

Owners who utilize this method should bias the ORAT contractual relationship to an entity such as the Executive Program Manager or Owner's Representative. This arrangement maximizes alignment of priorities and minimizes the potential for diverging interests.

Scenario #3: Dead on Arrival

Direct engagement of ORAT by the Owner offers the best opportunity for success. But even this arrangement can falter if the Owner does not set clear direction. If the Owner fails to set the expectation that ORAT is as integral as design, engineering, and construction, then conflicts between the program team and the ORAT function will be commonplace. ORAT becomes a disembodied voice having no authority and no ability to achieve operational capability.



Scenario #4: There's No Place Like Home

When ORAT is well-positioned, achieving operational capability is all but assured. What does this look like?



- ORAT is led by an experienced practitioner.
- ORAT is viewed as an equal partner in the program.
- ORAT milestones are incorporated into the project timeline, and ORAT considerations are front and center when key decisions are made.
- The ORAT function has direct, unencumbered, uncensored, and frequent communication with the Owner.
- The Owner actively engages to resolve conflicts between project and operational priorities.

The Takeaways

By incorporating the principles of ORAT into your program, you've already taken the first important step toward operational capability and a successful opening. In order to reap the full benefits of an ORAT initiative, the ORAT function must be thoughtfully positioned in the context of the team. Regardless of the method you employ, having an experienced ORAT practitioner with direct Owner involvement is critical for success. When this happens, your program will flourish and your staff will thank you!