

KHÄLED SHAHEEN

Leading the Charge in
AVIATION TRANSFORMATION
with Expertise and Innovation

“ A key factor in ORAT's success was the dedication of passionate Bahrainis, who went the extra mile to deliver what they believed was important—not just for their airport, but for their country. ”



Khaled Shaheen: The Strategist Behind Seamless Aviation

The aviation industry operates within a framework of precision, safety, and efficiency, where even the slightest deviation can disrupt entire networks. To maintain seamless airport operations, meticulous planning and rigorous testing are essential. This is particularly true when launching new airport facilities or implementing large-scale operational changes. The highest standards in aviation are achieved not through reactive adjustments but through proactive measures—comprehensive training, structured trials, and the establishment of clear protocols. Without these, airports risk inefficiencies that impact passengers, airlines, and stakeholders alike.

However, achieving and maintaining these high standards is no small feat. Many airports struggle with fragmented coordination between departments, outdated operational practices, and a lack of structured readiness programs. The challenge becomes even greater when major projects, such as opening new terminals, must be executed under extraordinary circumstances, such as a global crisis. The absence of well-defined processes can lead to operational bottlenecks, safety concerns, and service disruptions, making it clear that expertise and leadership in operational readiness are critical for success.

This is where **Khaled Shaheen** has distinguished himself. His journey in aviation began with Bahrain International Airport's Operational Readiness & Airport Transfer (ORAT) program, a role that required both technical expertise and strategic vision. From leading large-scale airport transformations to implementing industry-first operational trials, Khaled's approach combines meticulous planning with hands-on

execution. His ability to unify diverse teams, establish rigorous performance benchmarks, and drive efficiency under challenging conditions has set him apart as a leader in aviation operations and risk management.

Orchestrating Excellence in Aviation Leadership

Khaled Shaheen's journey into the aviation industry began with the Operational Readiness & Airport Transfer (ORAT) program at Bahrain International Airport. This unique opportunity provided him with a comprehensive understanding of various disciplines within the aviation sector, igniting his deep passion for the field.

His tenure at Bahrain Airport Company played a pivotal role in shaping his leadership approach, emphasizing the significance of both coaching and mentorship. Leading transformative changes within an airport setting required a unifying vision—one that could align all stakeholders toward a common goal.

At flydubai, Khaled had the opportunity to visit countless airports and gain exposure on different leadership styles. This experience reinforced his values of human connection and empathy in leadership. He recognized that understanding different perspectives was key to guiding individuals toward their best potential, ultimately fostering a more cohesive and motivated team.

Steering Bahrain's Aviation Milestone

The aviation industry presents numerous challenges, but for Khaled, one of the most significant was delivering a mega project—the opening of Bahrain International Airport—amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and during a crucial stage of his own professional development. With aviation spanning multiple

disciplines, he quickly learned that theoretical knowledge does not always align with practical implementation. Fortunately, he had the guidance of exceptional mentors who played a crucial role in his growth. Mr. Ali Rashed, then Director of Airport Transfer at Bahrain Airport Company and now Chief Airport Operations Officer, provided invaluable industry knowledge that enabled Khaled to lead an ORAT program at an airport-wide scale despite being new to the field. Likewise, Mrs. Hend Mahmood, who was Vice President of Human Resources at the time and now serves as Chief Human Resources Officer at Bahrain Development Bank, helped shape his leadership, soft skills and showed him the true value behind effective coaching—qualities he believes are just as essential as technical expertise.

Beyond mentorship, Khaled credits the success of the project to the young and passionate Bahraini team that went above and beyond, driven by their commitment not just to their airport but to their country. For him, being part of the ORAT program under such circumstances was an invaluable learning experience, reinforcing the power of teamwork, resilience, and dedicated guidance in overcoming industry challenges.

During his tenure at Bahrain Airport Company, Khaled worked across four different departments in just four and a half years, contributing to numerous projects that emphasized operational excellence, quality, and performance management. His commitment to setting high standards and maintaining them was particularly evident in the ORAT program for the new passenger terminal building.

The Architect of Aviation Excellence

With no pre-existing framework in place, the program required the development of standards from scratch. It combined extensive practical





exercises with the creation of standard operating procedures and operational contingency plans. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bahraini ORAT team conducted over 50 full-scale trials within 10 months—far exceeding industry norms—along with hundreds of targeted exercises, walkthroughs, and tabletop simulations to refine airport operations.

Each trial was meticulously designed to address a unique scenario specific to Bahrain Airport, allowing the team to identify and eliminate potential operational hurdles. The success of this rigorous approach became evident on January 28, 2021, when the new terminal officially opened. The observed standards far surpassed those of the old airport, not only in efficiency and quality but also in fostering a cultural shift—one where young professionals were empowered to raise operational benchmarks to new heights.

Transforming Readiness into a Lasting Legacy

As part of his role at Bahrain Airport Company, Khaled was entrusted with the temporary task of establishing the Readiness, Performance & Quality department while serving as a Senior Analyst. Even before his official appointment, he had been working closely with top management to lay the groundwork for this initiative. Traditionally, these functions were handled separately, and following the opening of the airport, there was no dedicated team to oversee ongoing readiness after the dissolution of the ORAT team.

The primary objective of this new department was to create a consolidated framework that not only provided clear visibility into the airport's operational performance but also structured critical data in a way that facilitated regular sharing among all stakeholders. The department achieved many milestones, some of which includes strategic OKRs and KPIs to ensure alignment across

departments, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

A major contribution of the department was the institutionalization of the ORAT function as an ongoing process rather than a one-time project. This approach ensured that future airport expansions, the introduction of new systems, and significant process changes fell under the scope of the dedicated Readiness team, which was responsible for maintaining operational resilience. Khaled highlighted the role of industry veteran Eng. Mazen Jameel, who shared his passion in the field since the start of the ORAT program and proved to be an exceptional leader in his own right.

Pioneering Precision in Airport Forecasting

The challenge of establishing a pioneering department from scratch required personnel with expertise spanning multiple aviation disciplines—knowledge that was a rare commodity, primarily acquired through the ORAT program. The department

became instrumental in providing top management with operational insights, implementing innovative solutions, and raising performance standards. It evolved into a recognized center of operational excellence, where various teams sought support to enhance their own processes and efficiency.

Khaled took the initiative to develop a passenger forecast logic, achieving an impressive 99.65% accuracy rate. Recognizing the potential benefits of accurate forecasting, he sought to create a model that would enhance operational efficiency and elevate airport standards.

The model was designed to bridge the gap between booked passenger loads (pre-flight) and actual passenger loads (post-flight), providing insights into airport-wide traffic patterns by the hour, day, week, or month. It began by identifying flight profiles based on key factors such as the flight number, aircraft type, and day of the week. To further refine accuracy, Khaled emphasized on the importance of

incorporating recurring events such as Eid holidays and seasonal variations into the forecasting process. The model will then analyze historical passenger loads for similar flight profiles, allowing it to generate precise predictions for both passenger and baggage movements.

Achieving this level of precision required extensive trial and error to fine-tune the formula's parameters. Khaled emphasized that no universal formula could apply to all airports, making the adaptability of this approach a key factor in its success.

Bahrain International Airport's unique operational patterns—characterized by fluctuating peak months rather than consistent passenger flows—posed an additional challenge. Despite this, the model consistently maintained over 99% accuracy for short-term planning. A crucial aspect of this achievement was the collaboration with Bahraini aviation systems expert Mr. Abdulla Musaiger, who played a vital role in transforming the formula into the

“Truly making an impact requires one to undergo challenges, defy the status quo, and drive change even when the tides are against them.”





“ I believe in mentoring the next generation, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to lead. When we empower youth, we build not just careers, but the future of aviation itself. ”

Airport Management System (AMS). This automation ensured that the forecasting model's benefits extended across airport operations. The impact of this innovation was significant. Departments were able to optimize manpower and logistical resources more efficiently, shifting from static deployment models to dynamic shift rostering based on forecasted passenger loads.

Additionally, the forecasted figures became a cornerstone of the airport's Readiness function, providing data-driven justification for various projects and initiatives. This initiative further strengthened the adoption of a Data-

Driven Decision Making (DDDM) strategy, reinforcing the importance of analytics in enhancing airport operations.

Striking the Perfect Balance Between Security and Seamless Travel

Khaled believes that balancing security compliance with efficiency and passenger experience requires a strategic approach, emphasizing the importance of both facilitation and security. He highlights that many disruptions to smooth passenger flow often stem from either insufficient resources or overly stringent security

measures. To address this, he advocates for investments in infrastructure, systems, and manpower to ensure that security remains uncompromised while facilitation is optimized.

Establishing clear standards, such as defining the time required for screening processes or the total duration of a passenger's journey through security, is essential. These predefined benchmarks allow for more effective quality control activities, ensuring that security measures align with operational efficiency. Without such standards and ongoing quality control activities—including evaluations of facilitation aspects like

screening duration—airports may encounter unforeseen challenges in managing passenger flow.

Elevating Aviation Standards Through Quality and Resilience

Khaled emphasizes that quality assurance and quality control are crucial across all functions, including aviation security. By implementing structured monitoring and continuous improvement initiatives, security operations can be both effective and passenger-friendly, maintaining high standards without compromising efficiency.

Khaled's ability to adapt and excel across multiple disciplines within the aviation industry stems from his strong foundation in the Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer (ORAT) program. Gaining visibility across various airport functions early in his career provided him with invaluable insights. His role in business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic further expanded his expertise, as he conducted organization-wide Business Impact Analysis (BIA), and contributed to establishing the airport's Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) and subsequent Business Continuity Plans (BCPs). He attributes his growth to tackling challenging milestones, including the airport opening under ORAT, accommodating a national audit on BCMS, setting data-driven performance metrics for Airside Operations, and leading the establishment of the Readiness, Performance & Quality department. His passion for aviation has allowed him to embrace these challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles.

Regarding collaboration in aviation, Khaled emphasizes the importance of open communication and an aligned vision. His experience at flydubai, where he oversaw operations across a network of 130 airports, reinforced the value of genuine cooperation over

regulatory enforcement. While some airports mandate collaboration through regulations, he finds that a culture of mutual understanding and voluntary engagement leads to more effective teamwork. He believes that committees and stakeholder interactions should not be driven by regulatory requirements alone but by a shared commitment to improving operations. Aligning all entities to a common vision and fostering authentic collaboration, rather than enforcing compliance, is the key to successful partnerships in the aviation industry.

Orchestrating Aviation's Flawless Leap Forward

Khaled played a crucial role in the Operational Readiness & Airport Transfer (ORAT) program for Bahrain International Airport's new terminal, transitioning from supporting the previous ORAT consultant to taking full ownership of the program. The Bahraini ORAT team enhanced the efficiency of full-scale trials, increasing their frequency from once a week to three times per week while integrating unique scenarios into each trial. Time constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges, but these were overcome through the dedication of both the ORAT team and airport stakeholders.

Khaled was tasked to lead the Operational Readiness aspect and was responsible for managing the transition on the opening day. Due to extensive planning and risk mitigation, the actual transition felt smoother than the rigorous trials, while the Airport Transfer was led by his Bahraini colleague, Mr. Mohammed Rinno, who played a critical role in the logistics aspect of the program. A major achievement was executing an 'instant cut-off plan,' where operations immediately shifted from the old terminal to the new one without any flight rescheduling or operational disruptions. Additionally, during the pandemic, the ORAT team devised a

special plan to ensure continuous operations at the existing airport while preparing for the new terminal's readiness and transfer. The seamless transition was a testament to the team's meticulous planning and collaboration.

Envisioning for AI-Driven Airports

Looking toward the future of aviation, Khaled envisions Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) revolutionizing airport operations and security. He foresees a shift toward seamless passenger experiences, where traditional immigration counters may be replaced with AI-driven movement tracking, security screenings could be conducted through walk-through body scanners, and optimized queuing systems could eliminate the need for passengers to stand in line. Innovations in baggage handling could also transform passenger experiences, with AI-enabled systems providing real-time baggage tracking and automated delivery options. Khaled believes that the greatest impact of AI and automation will be in reducing passenger uncertainty—whether through real-time updates on baggage delays or personalized notifications that improve overall customer satisfaction. As technological advancements continue, today's modern airport touchpoints may soon be considered traditional, marking a significant evolution in how airports and airlines operate.

Guide to Transforming Aviation

Khaled offers invaluable advice to young professionals aspiring to make an impact in the aviation industry. He emphasizes the importance of taking risks, trusting one's intuition, and becoming a catalyst for change. According to him, following a predefined path only allows one to reach as far as their predecessors; true impact requires challenging the status quo and driving innovation even in the face of adversity.



“ My advice to young professionals who aim to make an impact in the aviation industry as a whole: Take risks, follow your intuition, and become the catalyst for change. ”

At the core of this mindset is the unwavering support of family. Khaled believes that we don't always need to look far for role models—often, they are right beside us. For him, taking high-stakes risks throughout his career would not have been possible without the encouragement and belief of his family. Their support not only gave him the confidence to embrace challenges but also served as a constant source of inspiration, reinforcing the importance of acknowledging those who stand by us as we push boundaries and strive for excellence.

He highlights the immense complexity of the aviation industry, illustrating it with a study he conducted in Bahrain. During a single quick turnaround—when an aircraft lands and departs in less than an hour—111 activities were identified, involving over 30 functions and 120 employees. Additionally, 141 laws and 46 regulations were in effect for just that one turnaround. With Bahrain International Airport handling 102 aircraft turnarounds per day at the time of the study, this translated to 11,322 intricate activities being executed daily. Khaled advises aspiring professionals to develop a comprehensive understanding of how the aviation industry operates as a whole and to recognize the significance of their role within this vast ecosystem. He believes that by grasping the industry's depth and interconnectedness, individuals can contribute meaningfully, driving progress not just in their specific domain but across the entire aviation sector.

Cultivating the Next Generation of Aviation Trailblazers

Khaled emphasizes the critical importance of developing local youth in the aviation industry. He is a graduate of Lamea, a national youth development program in the Kingdom of Bahrain under the patronage of HH Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa. This initiative aimed to identify the top 1% of local youth and equip them with enhanced leadership and soft skills. One of the most significant benefits of the Lamea program for Khaled was the opportunity to receive exclusive coaching from Nusaiba AlMadani, a distinguished professional coach. Her guidance helped him recognize the profound value of personal principles and the importance of balancing life beyond professional achievements. Through her mentorship, Khaled gained a deeper understanding that true growth extends beyond technical expertise and soft skills—it is also about staying grounded in one's values

and broader purpose.

He highlights a prevalent challenge in the aviation sector—the lack of innovation due to the relatively low number of empowered young professionals. While he has observed strong youth development programs in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, he notes that similar initiatives are often absent in many international airports.

Khaled believes that industry veterans today have a responsibility to mentor and develop the next generation, who will, in turn, become the leaders of tomorrow and continue the cycle of progress. Given the vast and highly specialized nature of aviation, fostering young talent is not just beneficial but essential for the industry's long-term growth.

He also underscores the unique advantage of investing in local youth who exhibit a strong passion for the field. This is not merely about increasing retention rates but about elevating the industry as a whole. In his experience, passionate local professionals go above and beyond because their work is not just a job—it is a service to their country. Their deep-rooted connection to the industry and national pride drives them to set higher standards, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic and innovative aviation sector.