

# Flight-crew human factors handbook

CAP 737



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# Glossary

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AAIB – Air Accident Investigation Branch  
AMC – Acceptable Means of Compliance  
ASR – Air Safety Report  
CEO – Chief Executive Operator  
CRM – Crew Resource Management  
CRMI – Crew Resource Management Instructor  
CRMIE – Crew Resource Management Instructor Examiner  
CSA – Customer Service Agent  
CTA – Cognitive Task Analysis  
CVR – Cockpit Voice Recorder  
EASA – European Aviation Safety Agency  
EEG - Electroencephalogram  
EFB – Electronic Flight Bag  
FCL – Flight Crew Licensing  
FMA – Flight Mode Annunciator  
FAA – Federal Aviation Authority  
FCU – Flight Control Unit  
FDM – Flight Data Monitoring  
GOR – Ground Occurrence Report  
HF – Human Factors  
HUD – Head-Up Display  
ISP – Inflight Service Personnel  
JAA – Joint Aviation Authorities  
LOSA – Line Oriented Safety Audit  
LPC – Line Proficiency Check

LTM – Long Term Memory  
NOTECHS – Non-Technical Skills  
MCC – Multi-Crew Cooperation  
MCP – Mode Control Panel  
MOR – Mandatory Occurrence Report  
OPC – Operator Proficiency Check  
OTP – On Time Performance  
PF – Pilot Flying  
PM – Pilot Monitoring  
REM – Rapid Eye Movement  
RNP – Required Navigational Performance  
SCCM – Senior Cabin Crew Member  
SIM – Simulator  
SMS – Safety Management System  
SOP – Standard Operating Procedure  
TCO – Traffic Officers  
TEM – Threat and Error Management  
TRE – Type Rating Examiner  
TRI – Type-Rating Instructor  
UPRT – Upset Prevention and Recovery Training  
UT – University of Texas

# CAP 737 update 2023

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CAP 737 was revised and updated in 2023. The updates encompass the following:

1. Specific updates relating to Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBTA)
  - CBTA is now incorporated throughout CAP 737 section A. The core structure and sequence of Section A remains as before, but there are new sections at the end of each chapter as well as cross-referencing to competencies at the start of each chapter. In addition, a brief chapter has been added to section B for specific discussion of CBTA (Section B1, Chapter 17). For further information on the CBTA updates see next section.
2. Full re-write of automation and manual flying skills chapter (now chapter 13)
  - The former chapter 16 (*'Automation'*) has been fully re-written and updated to reflect recent research and encompass more discussion on manual flying skills. This is now chapter 13 (Section A) and has been renamed *'Automation and Manual Flying'*.
3. Section-A general updating
  - Section A chapters have undergone varying levels of updating and enhancement. The chapter sequence, anecdotes and core content remain as before.
4. Additional section added to chapter 7 (Surprise and Startle)
  - A new section has been added to this chapter in order to discuss training around startle and surprise
5. Removal of previous chapters relating to regulation and guidance
  - CAP 737 regulatory guidance written in 2013 had become out-of-date. Due to continual changes in regulation and guidance, as well as the wider use of CAP 737 across non-UK industry, these sections and chapters have been removed rather than updated. This also helps focus the document on human factors knowledge. Regulation pertaining to Human Factors can be sourced as required depending upon the over-seeing authority



and the regulation in place at the time. UK Standards Document 29 offers general UK regulatory guidance for Human Factors in training and assessment.

6. Removal of previous chapters relating specifically to safety management
  - Safety Management information and regulation has been removed from CAP 737 in order to increase focus on human factors knowledge applicable to pilots and crew.
7. Removal of spurious sections and resources
  - Some resources and guidance have been removed from Section B of the document, either because they were out of date, or in order to put greater focus on human factors theory and more contemporary assessment techniques such as CBTA. Legacy behavioural marker systems have been retained (now section B3) for completeness.

## **CAP 737 Update for Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBTA)**

CAP 737 has been revised (as of 2022) to better support CBTA. The IATA (2021) competency framework is now used throughout CAP 737 as the exemplary CBTA framework, but it should be noted that other competency frameworks are in use. The nine IATA competencies are:

C0 - Application of Knowledge

C1 - Application of procedures and compliance with regulations

C2 - Communication

C3 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)

C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)

C5 - Leadership and teamwork

C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making

C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information

C8 - Workload Management

CAP 737's original chapter sequence for PART-A has been retained, as this offers the wider underpinning theory that is still required by competencies. The CAP 737 updates (2022) in support of CBTA include:

- Part-A chapters now contain a list (at the beginning) of those competencies most underpinned by the knowledge in that chapter (whether directly or indirectly).
- Most Part A chapters now include a short section at the end entitled 'competencies' to discuss the main relevance and use of competencies and/or 'observable behaviours' ('performance indicators' etc) for that area.
- Section added (B3.c) to show the IATA CBTA framework
- Table 1 (below) has been created to show how the competencies map onto the chapters in Part A, in terms of supporting background theory and information.

Table 1 – Common human factors competencies mapped onto CAP 737 chapters. Note – most chapters inform most competencies to an extent. The list above and table below link competencies and chapters with most relevance to each other.

<b>HF related competency (area)</b>	<b>Most Relevant HF theory chapters</b>	<b>Other relevant background chapters</b>
C0 – Application of Knowledge	All	All
C1 - Application of Procedures and Compliance with Regulations	5	9
C2 - Communication	16	3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 14
C3 & C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (Automation AND Manual)	13	3, 4, 5, 6
C5 - Leadership and teamwork	14, 15	9, 12, 16
C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making	9	1-6, 8, 10, 11, 15
C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information	8	1-7
C8 - Workload Management	6	1, 3-5, 7, 10-11, 13

# Introduction to Crew Resource Management (CRM), Threat and Error Management (TEM)

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## Crew Resource Management and Human Factors

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Originally called Cockpit Resource Management, CRM training emerged after the recognition that the technical skills of piloting an aircraft were insufficient to ensure safety and best performance; accidents were occurring for reasons other than inadequate piloting skills.

It was apparent that pilots needed to learn more about how best to manage all the resources available to them in the cockpit including other crew-members, procedures, the machine interface, and themselves (i.e. recognising where they were most vulnerable and what their strengths were). This management of resources was the original essence of CRM training (hence the term). Many of the elements identified as necessary to support pilots in this process were borrowed from the management domain or from psychology and the embryonic science of Human Factors (HF). Examples are communication, personality, error, decision making, and leadership. Others elements came from common aviation practice (e.g. 'airmanship' and 'captaincy').

Cockpit resource management quickly grew to encompass the wider team available to the flight crew, including the cabin crew, and was renamed Crew Resource Management, hence retaining the same acronym (CRM). CRM is now considered essential training for most aviation professionals who make an operational contribution, including air traffic controllers and engineers. Whereas this document is written primarily for flight crew, the first sections of the chapters (in Part A) are deliberately generic and can therefore apply across contexts, even those outside aviation.

The scope of CRM has also grown and diversified to the extent that it is now easier to list the sorts of areas that get taught in CRM than to attempt to define exactly what CRM training is. A general but inadequate definition would be the training of the cognitive and social skills needed to support technical training in order to optimise safe and efficient aircraft operation. This firmly aligns CRM within human factors (HF). Indeed, CRM can be considered an application of human factors to the flight crew domain (and other domains). Indeed, the term 'human factors' is now often used instead of CRM. However human factors is a much larger science and so would not be adequately defined using the term CRM.

It is clear that to be most effective, such skills must be integrated into the job role, and this integration is something that CRM has traditionally struggled with. This document attempts to address this by including a second section in most knowledge chapters (Part A, chapters 1 – 16) called 'application' which puts the knowledge within an operational context (mainly for flight crew, with a variety of operations represented).

Finally, good use of CRM skills relies on effective training and assessment by practitioners (CRM trainers, flying instructors, examiners, etc.). To support this, the third and final section of most knowledge chapters (Part A, chapters 1 – 16) deals with the teaching and delivery of that subject, and where possible examples are included. Additionally, there is a section dedicated to resources, including assessment and requirements.

In this handbook, the use of the term 'Human Factors' (HF) includes CRM along with other aspects of human performance.

## Emergence and development of CRM

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The introduction of cockpit voice recorders (CVR) in the 1970s strongly suggested that 'human factors' were contributing strongly to many accidents. CVR data, along with analyses of accident causation (e.g. Ruffle-Smith 1979) led to a US based conference entitled 'Resource Management on the Flight Deck' in 1979. It was concluded that the majority of pilot-related errors were failures of interpersonal skills, communications, decision-making, and leadership (Cooper, White, & Lauber, 1980).

The loss of a United Airlines DC 8 at Portland in 1978 was an important driver for the introduction of CRM training. Analysis of the cockpit voice recordings led the National Transportation Safety Board (1979) to conclude that a contributory factor was the captain's failure to accept input from other flight crew members, as well as the lack of assertiveness from those crew members themselves. Following this United Airlines set up the very first comprehensive CRM course in 1981 (see Helmreich et al. 1999). Since then research and investigations have consistently cited human factors (under many labels) as contributory factors in the majority of accidents, but it is not known exactly how CRM training has influenced the situation.

Cockpit Voice Recorders can only uncover audible evidence, so understandably the content of early CRM courses tended towards areas within social psychology and group dynamics such as leadership, communication and interpersonal skills, because these could be deduced from the CVR conversations. A common theme was the perceived authoritarian role of captains and the lack of assertiveness from other crew-members as inferred from accident CVRs. Because of the areas being

addressed, early courses were often developed and run by people whose backgrounds were primarily in psychology or management, and these people often extended CRM ideas further towards their own knowledge domain. These courses were not always well received by pilots. One problem was a focus on areas such as 'personality types' which some pilots saw as an attack on themselves or their colleagues (with some justification). Another problem was a lack of direct application and integration of the new knowledge into the flight deck operations (pilots themselves were left to work out how to integrate it into their job roles).

Content of CRM grew with recognition that many important issues were out of direct reach of the CVR, such as monitoring and mode awareness, fatigue and vigilance, situation awareness and individual decision-making. Hence CRM training now encompasses a much wider scope than originally envisaged, which is why the term 'human factors' is now commonly used instead.

## Threat and error management

In the 1990s, threat and error management (TEM) was introduced, and under current EASA FCL regulations it should be covered during all training events.

The practical summation of threat and error management for flight crew is the practice of thinking ahead in order to predict and avoid errors and operational threats, and manage any that occur, similar to the practice of defensive driving. An old astute saying (though somewhat outdated) is:

"A superior pilot uses his superior judgement to avoid situations that would require his superior skills"

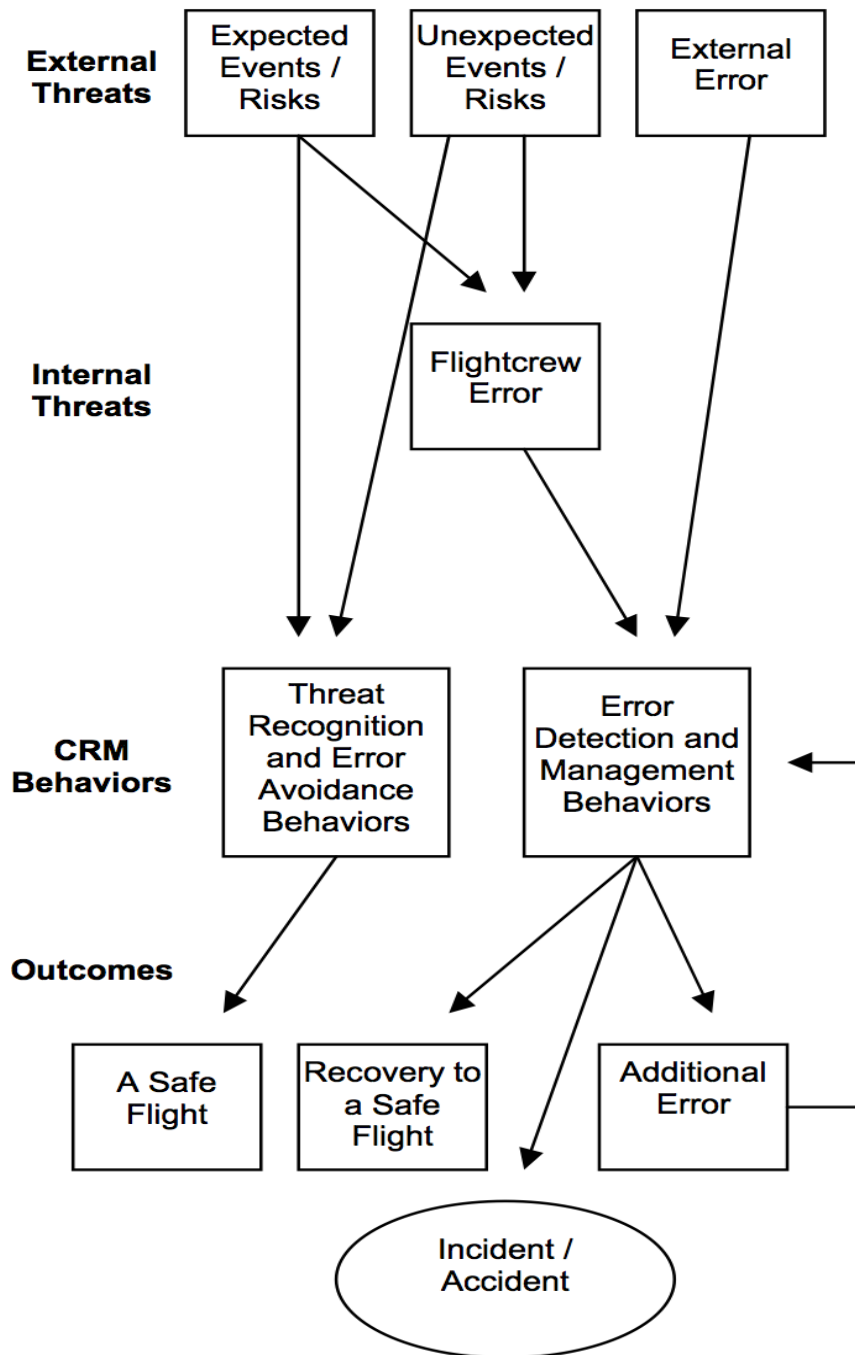
Like all great sayings, the source is contested, but it probably dates back to the 1940s at the latest. Certainly the UK's Royal Air Force used it on posters over many decades.

Threat and Error Management gives this message a more formal and theoretical underpinning, but TEM is more than just a re-application of a good mantra.

Threat and error management uses accident theory based on the work of James Reason (see Reason 1990). It has three elements relevant to flight crew; threats, errors and undesired aircraft states. Threats and errors have the potential to cause undesired aircraft states, and when they do so, those states must be managed (Maurino 2005). A foundation of TEM is the acceptance that threats will occur and errors will be made. Hence TEM is not an attempt to eliminate threats and errors, but is concerned with the management of them.

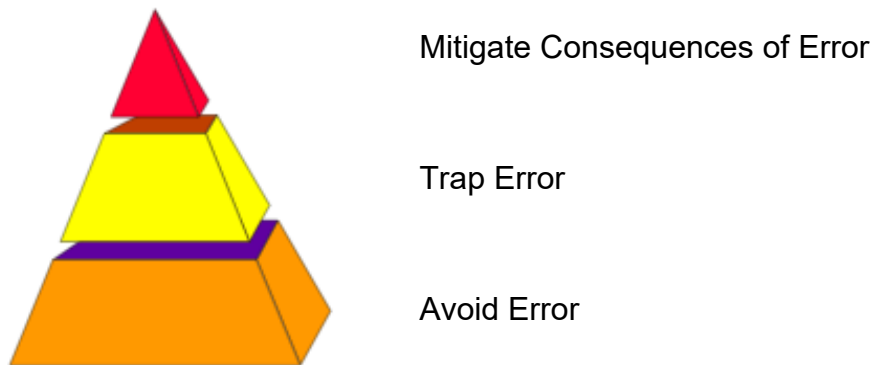
The model of flight crew error management (Helmreich et al 1999a) expands these ideas. The model (see figure 1 below) describes how risks to the operation can be expected (e.g. terrain and runway length) or unexpected (e.g. emergencies, malfunctions, traffic, etc.). Such threats are external to the operation and generally beyond the control of the flight crew, and must be managed by the CRM behaviours of threat recognition and avoidance in order to achieve a safe operation (hence the term 'threat management'). Additional risk comes from errors made by those other than the flight crew (external threats, such as errors made by air traffic controllers) and errors made by the flight crew (internal threats). These errors must be managed by the CRM skills of error detection and management, and if mismanaged can lead to further errors and potential incidents or accidents.

Helmreich et al (1999b) describe how CRM as a countermeasure to error has three lines of defence. The optimum state of error management (first line of defence) is the avoidance of errors before they occur. This is sometimes said to involve a high level of situation awareness in order that pilots can foresee issues and threats that may cause errors. Errors that are not avoided need to be recognised and understood (trapped) immediately so that they do not occur or there are no consequences (second line of defence). On rare occasions, if errors and threats are not trapped, then they might have consequences that will require mitigation. Mitigation is the last line of defence and is the least desirable state of error management. It is said that a crew that have to continually trap and mitigate errors is probably one working at a low level of situation awareness (caused by any number of factors including high workload on other tasks, low currency, stress, fatigue, fight or flight, emotional pressure, etc.).



**Figure 1.** Model of flight crew error management. From Helmreich et al (1999a)

A central practical mantra of TEM is 'avoid, trap, mitigate'. Helmreich et al's (1999b) error troika (Figure 2 below) proposes that most errors are avoided and of those that occur, most are trapped.



**Figure 2.** The error troika. From Helmreich et al, 1999b

In the UK, TEM is usually seen as sitting within CRM, but the flight crew error management model (figure 1) explains how the opposite view can exist (and is possibly even predominant in some countries) since CRM behaviours can be viewed as a part of overall threat and error management.

Whichever perspective one takes it is clear that there are many links between TEM and CRM. Research has found evidence to conclude that strong leadership, inquiry, workload management and automation management are correlated with fewer mismanaged errors and undesired aircraft states (Helmreich 2006). Additionally, crews that develop contingency management plans (such as discussing threat strategies) were found to have fewer mismanaged threats.



# SECTION A – HUMAN FACTORS KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION

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This section is split into two sections:

## Part A1 – The Individual

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Chapters 1 – 13 contain human factors (HF) knowledge areas that are most closely (but not exclusively) aligned with individual factors and performance and hence are applicable to everyone, including those operating as flight crew, cabin crew, and those operating small single pilot aircraft.

## Part A2 – The Crew

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Chapters 14 – 16 contain human factors (HF) knowledge applicable to teams and crews. These sections are mostly applicable to multi-crew pilots and other teams such as cabin crew, but with concepts that single pilots can also benefit from. From a scientific perspective, much of this section draws from social psychology and group dynamics.

This whole section (Section A) can be treated like a textbook of sixteen chapters. Most chapters are divided into three distinct parts: basic theory, application to aviation operations, and training assistance, as follows:

1. Knowledge – A very brief theoretical introduction to the topic
2. Application – How the knowledge applies in aviation operations
3. Application to Training – Assistance for the HF/CRM trainer, instructor or examiner in putting across the knowledge. These section have been updated (2022) to be more applicable to CBTA where relevant.

## Use of Anecdotes

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Throughout Section A, numerous anecdotes are used to illustrate theory. These are short stories that will help to add 'colour' and application to the narrative. The anecdotes come from all types operation right across civil aviation, including air transport (fixed and rotary wing) and recreational flying of various types. Anecdotes have kindly been supplied by volunteers. Where those volunteers preferred not to be named in the document, the anecdote has no reference. Where volunteers were comfortable to be named, the anecdote is followed by a number referring to the list of contributors in the front of this document.

## Limitations of Section A

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Section A is not an exhaustive description of all human factors knowledge required by a CRM trainer or flight instructor. Each topic is covered with some basic theory that is then integrated into the flight operations domain (within the 'application' sub-sections) and finally discussed with relevance to CRM / HF training. The focus has been on width rather than depth of coverage.

The scientific knowledge has been intentionally simplified and phrased in a non-ambiguous manner that may, on occasions, seem frustratingly imprecise to researchers and scientists. The chapters sometimes state scientific information as if simple fact, when usually the precision of the information is still debatable within science. This has been done in order to make the document more easily accessible, readable and more usable in the practical domain. For example, a statement might be used such as:

“Startle is a reflex that automatically happens in response to a shocking event”

Scientists in the domain would not enjoy such a statement, because although not overtly incorrect, it does not reflect the precision of the evidential inferences or ongoing arguments. A more correct version of the above sentence would be:

“Although still debated, 'startle' is usually considered to exhibit more characteristics of a reflex than an emotion by modern researchers. This is because the acoustic startle pathway is known to be relatively short, and that evidence from eye-blink amplitude measurements suggests the activation happens before full conscious awareness. Startle can therefore be argued to be an autonomous response to a stimulus, and the term 'reflex' can be justified in this context.”

The reader can see that if topics were approached in this way, this manual would be difficult to read, and less usable in the practical domain. Scientists, investigators, and researchers are asked to treat this as a limitation to be considered if ever quoting from this manual in investigation findings or scientific research literature.

# A1 – The Individual

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	<b>Competencies (most relevant)</b>
1. Information Processing . . . . .	C6, C7, C8
2. Perception . . . . .	C6, C7
3. Attention . . . . .	C3, C6, C7, C8
4. Vigilance and Monitoring . . . . .	C3, C4, C7, C8
5. Error and Skills . . . . .	C1, C2, C3, C4, C6, C7, C8
6. Workload . . . . .	C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8
7. Surprise and Startle . . . . .	C7, C8
8. Situation Awareness . . . . .	C6, C7
9. Decision Making . . . . .	C1, C5, C6
10. Stress In Aviation, Stress Management	C2, C5, C6, C8
11. Sleep and Fatigue . . . . .	C3, C5, C6, C8
12. Personality and Culture . . . . .	C2, C5
13. Automation and Manual Flying Skills .	C3, C4, C8

Note – most chapters inform most competencies to an extent.

# Chapter 1 - Information processing

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**Chapter 1 gives a brief theoretical foundation for subsequent (more applied) chapters.**

IATA (2022) competencies under-pinned by this section are:

C2 - Communication

C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)

C5 - Leadership and teamwork

C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making

C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information

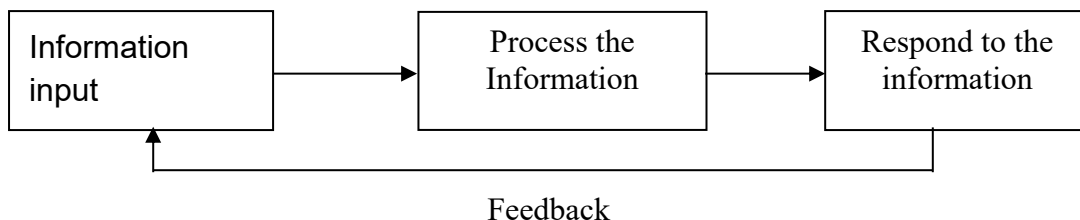
C8 - Workload Management

## Knowledge

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'Information Processing' models are a traditional attempt to create simple frameworks for understanding how the brain responds to incoming information. They are relevant to areas including situation awareness and decision-making.

At the most basic level we can think of three fundamental stages: 'information input', 'processing', and 'response' (input, process, output). It is useful to consider information processing as a very simplified system that includes a feedback loop, because most actions (output) will change or create further input.



### 1. Input (information in)

The human brain is on a constant quest to extract meaning from the world. When senses are stimulated (e.g. a sound or sight) the stimuli are unconsciously interpreted by a process called 'perception'. This extracts initial meaning and determines whether the stimuli represent something

unexpected. This process might result in the stimuli being given further scrutiny and/or attention. Basically, for new incoming information to reach a stage where it is consciously processed (thought about), it must be sensed (stimuli), perceived to have meaning to the organism (human), and/or noticed (attention drawn).

## 2. Processing (process the information)

Processing is the interpretation and consideration of perceptions (and other information including memories). In this simple form, it is a mental activity that includes making decisions and deploying skills. Processing can be conscious, unconscious, or may use a mix of both. Hypothetically dividing mental processing into two types of processes (such as unconscious and conscious) is given the general name 'dual process theory' and has a history going back to Freud and beyond. The topic is very complex, and there are many debates within it. In a nutshell, there is some validity in a simplified hypothesis of two general types of mental processes that roughly align with intuition and reflection. The first type of process is unconscious, fast and involves no perceptible workload. The second type is conscious, slow and generates workload. These themes have been emerging in parallel for many decades across domains in psychology and neuroscience and were given the generic categorical labels 'System 1' and 'System 2' by Keith Stanovich (1999) to reflect the breadth of the all-encompassing notion being proposed.

The first category of processing is effectively unconscious and automatic and may not catch our attention at all. It has comparatively little impact on mental workload. Such processing can be innate and intuitive, or learned, and hence it can manifest itself within decision making, skills, social interactions, etc.

The second category of processing is conscious, and would be exemplified by processes such as hypothesizing, assessing, calculating, analytical decision-making, or any other thought processes that can be referred to as 'consideration' or 'reflection'. During conscious processing there is a need for accessible storage for short-term manipulation of information (like computer RAM) and this uses a hypothetical area called the 'working memory'. Unconscious processes and emotions might influence conscious processing without the person recognising that influence (this is often called cognitive bias and will be discussed in later chapters).

## 3. Response

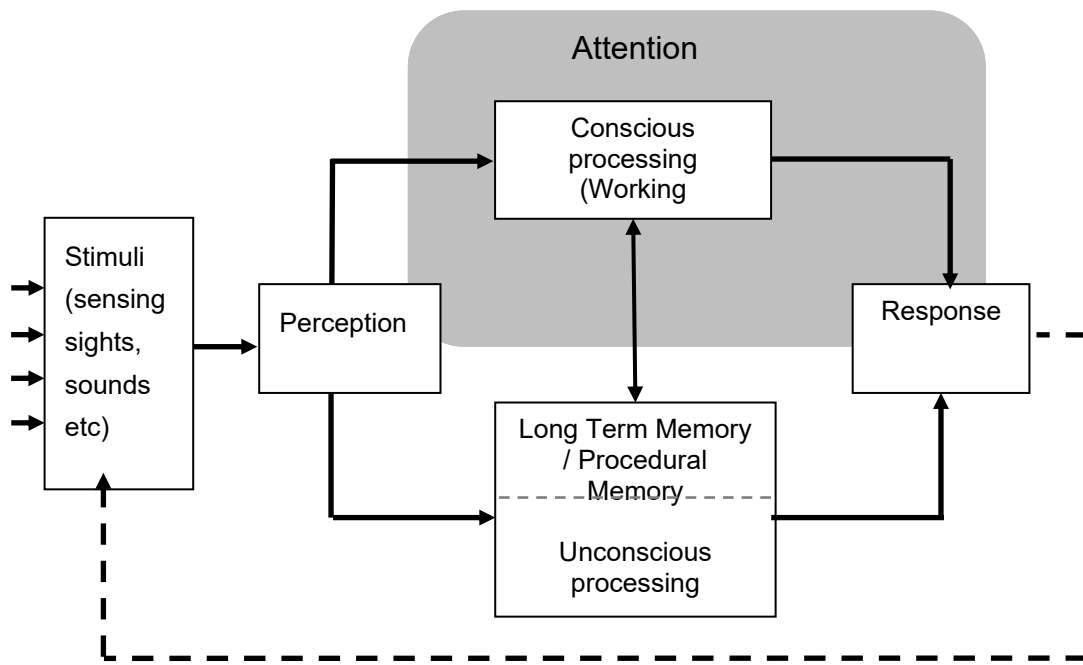
For most practical tasks, responding takes a physical or verbal form (doing or saying) but there are other responses such as further thoughts and consideration, eye movements, emotional reactions, or doing nothing, etc. In general, conscious processing leads to intentions that can then be put into effect, for example deciding to alter the aircraft's heading and then activating

a skilled response to do so. Unconscious processes might also drive skilled responses, and do so without conscious consideration; for example, making the continual manual handling adjustments in heading to stay on a prescribed flight path.

#### 4. Feedback

Responses or outputs will change what is happening and will often present new information that can feed back into the start of the process, creating a system with a feedback loop. This allows a person to manage and control the task continuously.

#### 5. Overall Theory of Information Processing



**Figure 3.** Simplified generic diagram of Information Processing (based on simplification and merger of many authors' work)

Figure 3 above is a simplified version of the overall theory for the purpose of learning. It works from left to right except for the feedback loop (broken line). Stimuli are perceived and the information may then pass into either conscious processing (working memory) or automatic processing before determining a response. There is a connection shown between conscious and unconscious processes because conscious processing almost always draws on unconscious processes, and unconscious processing may call upon consciousness.

An important hypothetical type of memory is 'long term memory' (LTM), which is a store of previous experiences and events. Although unconscious, it can be accessed either consciously or unconsciously.

The concept of 'attention' is represented by the shaded area in Figure 3. Attention will be discussed further in other sections because it is so fundamental to cognition and error. Attention is also aligned with mental effort (concentration, thinking, etc.). Conscious activities require attention and unconscious (automatic) activities do not. All central processing involves attention (hence it is within the shaded area).

## Application of Knowledge - information processing

Information processing theory can help practitioners articulate or understand a mental task. Consider a complex task such as a pilot having to make a diversion decision (see the decision-making section for more specific analysis on this decision). The decision involves input, processing, actions and feedback. The information comes from many sources and requires conscious processing (in working memory). A problem at any stage of information processing could affect the outcome, for example:

- *Sensing*: Failing to hear an important radio call about the weather at the diversion, due to turning the volume down during a critical discussion.
- *Perceiving*: Misperception of a fuel indication (resulting in selecting an airfield too far away).
- *Processing*: Miscalculating the crosswind vector at the diversion airfield.
- *Responding*: Accidentally selecting a speed of 140 knots rather than a heading of 140 degrees.

Almost all actions and operations can be analysed in this way, including quick and simple tasks. Identifying the problem stage can help further analysis and inform solutions.

## Application to Training - information processing

Trainers must first be fully aware that information processing theory is a simple hypothetical idea; it is not a model of the brain. For a pilot trainer, using basic models such as information processing is very useful, and generally safe. In practice, an understanding of information processing theory reminds us that performing any task has several different stages, any of which can produce an unintended consequence. An understanding of information processing (as a hypothetical model) is generally helpful at the applied level, and can support articulation of ideas and assessments of why people do what they do (e.g. for classroom case studies, diagnosing events in simulators, etc.) It is also helpful in considering the cognitive foundations of everyday tasks, and where errors and accidents stem from.

Simply put, incoming information must be sensed, perceived, processed (unconsciously and/or consciously), and responded to. Feedback is then produced that re-enters the system at the input stage. Any of these stages can go wrong.

## Consideration of competencies

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Information processing helps to remind us that a specific point of interest (e.g. an error or decision outcome) usually has a larger 'footprint' than is obvious at the time, and is part of a system. A vulnerability of CBTA is that, used inappropriately, it can allow an instructor to select observable behaviours and competencies without wider or systems considerations of the whole task process. Consideration of information processing can help avoid this.

For example; a crew may make a seemingly poor decision (e.g. continuing the sector after a simulated problem in the climb) and the trainer considers the issue to be 'problem solving and decision making', having considered the competencies and observed behaviours. For example, they might determine that the crew did not identify the appropriate threats or seek adequate information (IATA observable behaviour OB6.1) to support their determination. But the trainer should still be open to other possibilities or wider causal explanations prompted by a consideration of information processing. These could include the crew not correctly perceiving the information, the information being missed (e.g. due to issues around workload or workload management), or the action/output being inappropriate for the situation. Hence situation awareness, workload management, communication or flight path management might have been even more relevant areas (competencies) to consider, despite decision-making being the most overt issue. Of course, in multi-crew aircraft, teamwork and leadership will also be involved in most issues of this kind. In other words, most issues will involve interplay between most competencies.

Information processing can remind us that the task of aircraft operation is a system, rather than the sum of a set of quasi-independent phenomena such as various scores on various competencies. Information processing reflects a managed system, because changes made impact the system in which they are made and necessitate further change. Each component is dependent upon others. Trainers and instructors know this intuitively, but a basic consideration of information processing can help.

An example of the systematic nature of the task could be: 'Situation Awareness under-pins decision making... but decision-making uses attention and generates workload... this can impact situation awareness and therefore impact decision-making'. Hence, by considering a human task as a system, more competencies are drawn in and more possibilities are covered.



The trainer should therefore debrief in a way that allows a diagnosis of the whole task (input, processing, output, feedback) to attempt to assess each competency and their impact on other competencies. The trainer should establish any differences between their own observation and the crew's picture of the situation and ask questions that attempt to uncover where the issues occurred, and what they were.

Examples of such questions would be:

- “Which part of the task do you think worked well?”
- “Did you find any part of the task difficult? Why?”
- “In hindsight, would you do anything differently? What/Why?”
- “What information were you basing the decision on?”
- “At [this stage] what information do you recall being most aware of?”
- “At this point, was there anything causing you concern?”
- “What information source would you have based the decision on, if that source was unavailable?”
- “Did the decision feel urgent?”
- “Did the decision feel obvious?”

The aim of these sorts of questions would be to find out what went right and what didn't and ensure that the competencies are considered in a relevant way. For example, it might have been that the crew response was appropriate given the information the crew perceived, but the information was incomplete or misperceived by the crew. This might draw the trainer more towards the situation awareness competency than the decision-making competency

## Chapter 2 – Perception

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

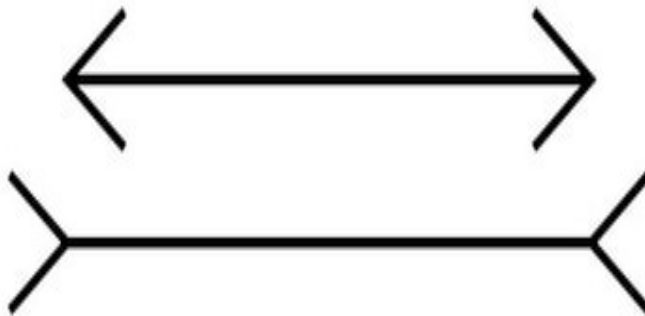
**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

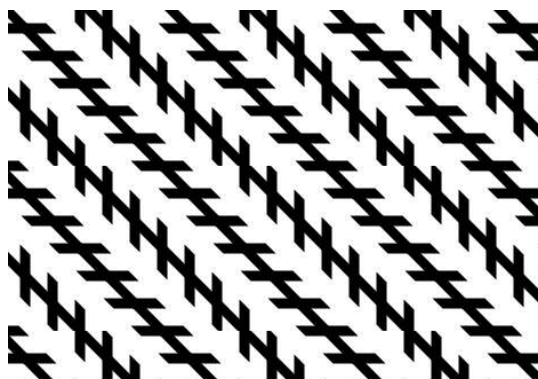
### Knowledge

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Incoming stimuli need to be quickly interpreted to know roughly what is being sensed. This process of *perception* is generally unconscious, fast and effortless. For centuries, people have created optical Illusions that act to ‘fool’ the perceptual process (illusions are designed to create a misperception; i.e. there appears to be a difference between what you perceive and what is ‘true’).



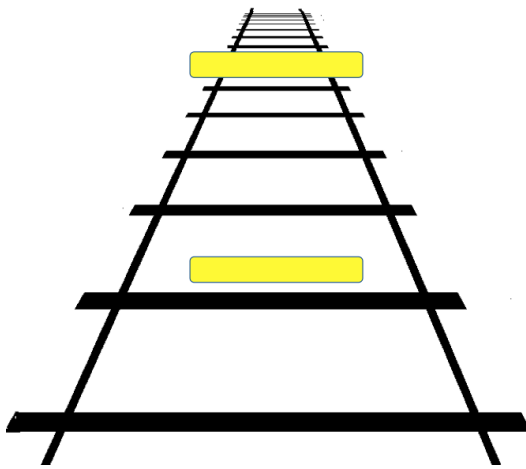
**Figure 4.** The Müller-Lyer Illusion by F.C Müller-Lyer 1889. The two parallel lines are of equal length, but most people perceive the top one to be shorter. The exact reason for this is still debated.



**Figure 5.** The Zöllner illusion (Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner, 1860). The diagonal lines are all parallel, but due to the short horizontal and vertical cross-lines, they do not appear so. The exact reason is also still debated.

The essence of the perceptual process is that it combines existing knowledge with incoming stimuli and the current situation, in order to create meaning from what is being sensed. In other words the brain takes a very quick 'best guess' as to what the stimuli represent based on what it has learned about previous stimuli in similar conditions.

As well as the object being perceived, the context around the object also feeds the perceptual process of that object. A good example is a form of illusion created by the suggestion of perspective in two-dimensional images, such as classic convergence illusions like the one in fig 6 below.



**Figure 6.** Classic Perspective Illusion

Sometimes called the Ponzo Illusion, putting two identically sized objects on a scene with suggested perspective causes one object to be perceived as larger than the other. This is because the brain naturally compensates for the perspective as it would in the real world (objects nearer the horizon or closer to the vanishing point are perceived as further away, and the size is unconsciously compensated for by the perceptual process).

Like all tasks, piloting an aircraft relies on constantly updated perceptions, but on rare occasions the process will inevitably lead to the brain 'guessing' wrongly about the meaning (or properties) of an object.

### 'Top down' or 'bottom-up'?

There is plenty of scientific debate about the amount of perception that is driven by the stimulus (bottom-up) and the amount driven by the brain itself (top-down). This is a highly complex area and to avoid a large discussion, it can be simplified by stating that the perceptual process combines experience and expectation with sensed information, and can be most usefully considered as a predominantly 'top-down' process at its most 'pure'. It should

be noted that the above notion does not relate to 'top-down' and 'bottom up' processing (which is not referred to in these terms in CAP 737).

## Which comes first: noticing or perceiving?

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In terms of information acquisition, there has long been a scientific debate about which comes first: the drawing of attention to a stimulus (noticing) or the perceiving of that stimulus (what it is). Because most everyday information is within the bounds of our expectation and experience, it is practical to consider that perception usually occurs first, though this is a huge over-simplification. To avoid a complex but fascinating indulgence into the science, it is useful (and generally correct) to consider that many things will get perceived whether they catch our attention or not, but only some things will draw our attention (either because of their physical characteristics or the meaning around them). Hence, most of what catches our attention has been or will be perceived. Hence, we perceive more than we attend to.

## Application of knowledge - Perception

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**This section explains common perceptual illusions in flying.**

The single most important learning point regarding perceptual illusions is well established in aviation: pilots are rightly trained that unless obviously wrong, instrument readings should be prioritised over perceptions created by the sensations of flight (both vestibular and visual). It may be worth the CRM instructor recapping these illusions in order to reinforce that important point, and showing the number and breadth of situations to which it applies.

### Glideslope

The need for VASIs and PAPIs stem from the difficulty that all pilots have (to varying extents at various times) in accurately judging the right glideslope angle using purely visual judgment. There are no reliable natural visual cues for glideslope angle.

The raw, uncorrected shape (a trapezium) that a runway presents to the eye during a final approach (known as form-ratio) is said to be one of the most important cues for the perceptual process in judging the glideslope. Because of this, one of the most common perceptual illusions is caused by a sloping runway surface. A runway that slopes downhill, away from the pilot is likely to generate a high approach (as the pilot attempts to maintain the normal perception of form-ratio). This could lead to a high-energy approach (to a downhill sloping runway) and the risk of an overrun. Equally, an upward sloping runway, as viewed from the pilot, may cause a low approach for the same reason. Hence it is important that whatever the runway shape seems to suggest about the glideslope, technical sources of glideslope information are

carefully monitored (whether PAPI, ILS glideslope etc.) even on a visual approach. These illusions are unlikely to cause consequences in isolation, but can contribute to a situation.

As well as the sight of the runway, ground cues such as texture and horizon play an important role in maintaining the correct perception of the glideslope. The perceptual limitation inherent in judging approach path angle is particularly critical when there are no outside visual features other than the runway or helipad. Normally, when visual with a runway a pilot will also use ground cues some of which will become increasingly visible in their peripheral vision as they descend (such as ground texture). If these cues do not appear as normal, it can lead the pilot to unconsciously understand the reason for their absence as excess aircraft height. Hence in situations where there are no ground cues (such as night time approaches over desert or unlit water) the common and strong impression (perception) can be that the aircraft is high on the glideslope. This is dangerous because it leads the pilot to descend (i.e. depart from the glideslope). This specific illusion is often called the *black-hole illusion*, due to the apparent visual 'black hole' between the aircraft and the runway.

It was a dark but clear night with no horizon and our destination, a lone platform, could be easily seen with some distance to go. I briefed the approach and we commenced the descent. During the descent I was aware that something was not right. I understood that given my altitude and range from the platform I was too low, yet visually the approach appeared to be steep. I was aware of the black hole approach illusion having briefed it many times during CRM training, yet I was unprepared for the strength of the illusion I was now encountering. My co-pilot had fortunately been vigilantly monitoring the situation and re-orientated me with a command to climb.

## Height

Visual height illusions can be potentially dangerous in visual flight regimes such as military low flying, helicopter operations or general aviation, but even occasionally in commercial airline operations. An illusion might be innocuous by itself, but if workload is high due to other tasks then such illusions can cause problems, particularly below a thousand feet.

Numerous factors feed the visual perception of height, including:

1. The visibility of texture and detail that can be seen on the ground, and the size of known objects (i.e. houses and animals).
2. The relative speed of ground texture flow (the slower that the ground seems to be moving relative to the viewer, the further away it is perceived to be).
3. Perspective and shape, e.g. of buildings, mountains, runways etc.

#### 4. Known landmarks, distances and angles.

Miniaturized ground objects (miniature trees, small fields) can give the impression that the ground is further away than it is. Likewise, larger than expected objects can make the ground seem closer than it really is

The commander (PF) was carrying out some SAR training approaches to a mountain peak at night using night vision goggles. The summit was strewn with large boulders and with no other object for reference the commander perceived the boulders to be smaller than they were. Several approaches were made and on each occasion the commander went around believing he had become too low.

Poor visibility can also make ground objects seem further away (removing the colour and clarity associated with close objects). Flying very slowly and/or into a strong headwind can contribute to a perception that the aircraft is higher than it is and this can be exacerbated with ground lights at night. Night also removes many perceptual cues, particularly ground detail. Changes in the spacing and brightness of ground lights can feed illusions (roads, houses, etc.). Featureless terrain, water and glare remove several cues to height. Loss of perceptual cues can put a slightly heavier burden on a pilot to pay attention to height.

### Speed

Humans have evolved ways of perceiving the speed of their movement, but for obvious reasons humans have not evolved a perceptual process for airspeed, only for speed (and only within a narrow band of meaning). A major natural cue for perceiving the speed of one's movement is texture flow, usually in peripheral vision. Other cues can also factor such as noise (volume and pitch change), perception of attitude (nose-low attitude can be mistaken for speed), buffeting and control response, and vestibular acceleration cues. Difference between speed and airspeed may be learned but even then, movement cues will feed a sense of airspeed. Aerobatic and post-stall accidents frequently occur when pilots apply too much back-pressure to the control column because the nose-down attitude gives the impression of sufficient airspeed before the airspeed has built up in the dive, leading to a secondary stall or flick. This can be a fatal misperception of speed caused by use of an unreliable cue.

Substituting ground speed cues for airspeed indications is common, since the perceptual process can perceive actual motion intuitively, but airspeed is far less intuitively obvious. A disproportionate number of accidents are caused after turning downwind during pylon racing (Eshelby 1996) almost certainly for this reason. Another example occurs where gliders stall and 'flick' while rotating into the climb during winch launching, usually resulting in serious

(often fatal) accidents. A disproportionate number of such accidents happen in calm conditions. Because pilots factor natural cues into their sense of airspeed during the moments of launch (texture flow, acceleration and time elapsed) their timing of the rotation into the climb is skewed by the ground speed, despite that being irrelevant compared to the airspeed. Due to this, calm conditions can cause launches to err towards early and steep rotations and high angles of attack, occasionally just enough to stall a high-performance glider (which account for most such accidents despite accounting for a fraction of such launches).

Aerobatic and airshow pilots performing low rolls or other ‘airspeed-critical’ manoeuvres downwind are also vulnerable, as are general aviation aircraft after engine failure on climb out (i.e. turning back downwind for a landing). Although the message seems simple (“use the airspeed indicator”) in practice this may not be easy in certain situations because perception is powerful and not under conscious control.

Late on in the approach my mind was focussed on the very short runway. Things seemed ok: the nose seemed higher than normal but there was no sensation of losing airspeed. I remember momentarily thinking that it must be to do with the airfield sloping (I had not landed here before). As I flared, the aircraft didn’t seem to respond at all and just fell onto the runway very heavily (fortunately without damage). I later realised that I had landed with at least 15 knots of tailwind, and had probably run out of airspeed by the flare. The tailwind must have given me the impression of speed and I had clearly not properly monitored the airspeed indicator.

The above anecdote is a good example of the power of ground cues to feed perception, particularly when under high workload. This effect has contributed to many serious accidents. In 2008, an Extra 300 aerobatic aircraft transiting an air display was destroyed and its passenger seriously injured after worsening weather led the pilot to make an emergency landing in a field. The tailwind component was between 10 and 15 knots. The following section is from a UK AAIB report:

In assessing speed at low level, pilots use a number of cues: primarily the airspeed indicator, but also the power setting and attitude, the feel of the controls and the impression of speed, sensed in the peripheral vision, by the rate at which the ground texture passes by. This last cue has been identified as being particularly powerful and difficult to ignore, and is known to have been a factor in the context of downwind landing accidents. It is possible that this impression of increasing ground speed as the aircraft turned downwind influenced the pilot inadvertently to allow the airspeed to reduce until the aircraft stalled, at which point there was insufficient height in which to recover control (AAIB 2009).

## Attitude and Bank angle

The inner ear has small receptors that pass information to the brain. Head orientation information is sensed using *otoliths*. These can be considered as little spirit levels (they have lots of little hairs with tiny weights on at the end, that bend whenever the head tilts). Head rotations (accelerations) are sensed in three dimensions by three *semi-circular canals* (fluid filled tubes in a circular shape).

The perception of gravity can be masked (indeed replaced) by aircraft bank angle or acceleration. This means that a pilot can have a perception of being upright when they are banked, and vice-versa. This does not usually fool visual perception and it is therefore useful that visual perception is prioritized naturally; except when there are insufficient *natural* visual cues of the outside world. An additional limitation with the vestibular system is that it requires a threshold of acceleration or displacement in order to be perceived. Hence, if orientation changes slowly, that change may be invisible to the perceptual process.

The classic problem is often called ‘the leans’ and occurs in IMC (or even on a dark night) as follows: a gradual increase in bank angle occurs unnoticed to the pilot. The pilot then notices the bank angle on the attitude indicator (e.g. artificial horizon) and rolls the aircraft back to level flight. The vestibular system only senses this second ‘counter’ roll (returning the aircraft to level flight) but not the first roll that banked the aircraft gradually. The net vestibular perception therefore becomes that the aircraft is now banked, when it has in fact returned to level flight. This gives the pilot a feeling of being banked despite the attitude indicator showing proof that the wings are level. Because the attitude indicator is small (uses foveal vision) this illusion is not overcome by visual perception, and so the erroneous feeling of being banked remains. This is uncomfortable at best and dangerous at worst. If attention is distracted to a different task, then the pilot could unconsciously roll the aircraft without noticing to negate the uncomfortable sensation created by the feeling of being banked, and this might have consequences. Pilots must understand and accept that they should always control the bank angle of an aircraft with visual cues, whether external or internal (attitude director) and never use a sense of orientation.

Another well-known issue is that the hairs in the otoliths will be bent backwards by forward acceleration in exactly the same way as they get bent backwards by gravity when the head is tilted back. Therefore pitching upward and accelerating forward generate the same cue to the perceptual process, and hence the same perception, unless another sensory cue is factored in. This is a good reason why the attitude indicator should be used to establish



pitch angle after take-off on a dark night, or indeed any time when there is a lack of valid external cues.

## Application to Training - Perception

It is reasonable to ask whether there is any value in teaching pilots about perception.

The CRM trainer should be careful if discussing vulnerabilities around perception in a general way. Although a valid thing to do, the trainer must not imply that because perceptions can occasionally be wrong or even dangerous, pilots should treat them all with caution. It is an illusion caused by the benefit of hindsight (called hindsight bias) to point to a single misperception and suggest that the pilot should have questioned it at the time. Additionally, we have no choice in the way we perceive things and no matter how much we stare at misperceptions they will not change (consider the optical illusion, it does not suddenly become a non-illusion once you know it is wrong). If audience members infer that they are being told to be cautious of perceptions in general, then it can create the impression that CRM and human factors training does not apply to real world activity.

Despite this, there is value in teaching about perception and perceptual illusions. Firstly, as described in the previous section there are common perceptual illusions that apply to pilots. Knowledge of these can help to prepare for or avoid problems. Secondly (and less usefully) there may be some value in discussing what can happen (i.e. misperception) so that in rare cases individuals might consider a reappraisal or cross-check if they are receiving contradictory information. However even this is subject to hindsight in the same way as before.

In terms of classroom teaching, optical illusions provide an easy and fun way to support the theory around perception. Asking the key question as the illusion appears can be effective, e.g. “which line looks longest here?” Usually the audience will know that they are seeing an illusion, and some will second-guess the answer. That is fine. The trainer can ask those people whether that is what they see or what they know / guess. The trainer can point out that s/he sees line A as longest, despite knowing that is untrue, and no matter how many times s/he shows the slide. The trainer must never show any hint of trying to fool the audience with the illusion, and no hint of superiority. The trainer must remember that they only know the key to the illusion because they have seen it before, not because they have more expertise or qualifications.

The simple objective is to show as clearly as possible that perception can occasionally be at odds with reality. For example the trainer can point out that:

“When we look at the Müller-Lyer illusion we ‘see’ two lines of different lengths, despite knowing that the lines are the same length”.

Hence in that specifically engineered case, perception does not match ‘reality’. Additionally, it is worth showing that no matter how hard we stare at the illusion, we still cannot help but be ‘fooled’ by it. Perception cannot simply be ‘over-ruled’. This leads to the question of ‘why learn about it? So what?’ There are several good reasons. Firstly, in order that pilots can be more prepared to counter common illusions recognised in a specific context (vestibular illusions during instrument flying are the classic example). Secondly, if pilots know the context then they can use different cues or consciously cross-check during a specific period (e.g. approaching a runway on a dark night with no ground features).

In terms of common illusions, it can help to ask the audience for examples that have occurred to them, or ask them to find the specific applications for certain common modes of illusions (e.g. convergence and perspective). Importantly, most teaching of common perceptual illusions should be put into definite and highly specific context, because it is the context that will trigger the recall of the illusion’s effects in the real world, not simply the knowledge of perception and illusions in general. Whereas we can work out the application of a real-world illusion easily enough in hindsight, it is very difficult in foresight and unrealistic at the time that it occurs.

## Competencies

CBTA is limited here because perception is not observable; it is generally unconscious and often unknown to the crew, as well as the instructor.

Perception is an integral process in almost everything we do, and knowledge of it can underpin theory for all competencies. Perhaps the two most relevant competencies are C6 (Problem Solving and Decision Making) and C7 (Situation Awareness and Management of Information).

Most decision making involves perception of at least some information factored into the decision. However, in very fast types of decision making (recognition-primed decisions; see chapter 9, part 3) perception is a direct part of the recognition element. The perception of a situation as being recognisable is unconscious and often based on previous experiences. Different people are unlikely to perceive situational elements in identical ways; and yet the perception can load heavily onto the decision outcome, often resulting in the chosen option or action. It is this outcome that the instructor will observe, and so they need to be prepared to dig into the background reasons, which may include the initial perceptions of the situation.

Understandably, the IATA decision making competency (C6) does not fully account for 'perception driven' decisions (since perception is unconscious and not observable). For example, it could be unreasonable to use OB6.1, OB6.2, and OB6.3 for decisions based on recognition (recognition-primed decisions, see Chapter 9), unless it is determined that the crew could have reasonably recognised that their perceptions were problematic and been able to overcome them. This is not simple. Care should be taken to avoid misrepresenting a decision-making problem of this kind.

The same is true of competency C7 (situation awareness). Perception directly underpins awareness, yet it is unobservable and therefore not represented in the observable markers. The situation awareness competency (C7) tends towards active processes such as monitoring.

Due to perceptions being unobservable but important drivers of behaviour, instructors can try to think outside the limits of the observational structure and consider using other techniques to determine what was really happening. Care should be taken to consider whether perception could have been a large factor in a given issue (though this can be difficult to do).

De-briefing, careful questioning, and considering situational context can be helpful. If a decision is felt to be problematic, then questions to establish what the pilot/crew thought was occurring (prior to making the decision) are as important as discussing the decision itself. Subtle differences in complex perceptions (between crew members or pilots and instructors) can go unnoticed at the time, but unless identified can lead to unresolved disagreements and poor training outcomes. Instructors need to recognise that 'misperception' is not itself poor performance, and should remain open to recognising this.

## Chapter 3 – Attention

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

**C8 - Workload Management**

### Knowledge

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To pay attention to something is to concentrate on it, whether that is a stimulus that has been sensed, a known threat, a decision, a calculation, etc. Critically, attention is limited; if some attention is being used for one thing then it cannot be used for something else.

A person can choose to pay their attention wherever they deem it necessary (the visual scene, a conversation, thoughts, actions, etc.). That does not mean attention is required to do everything; e.g. autonomous actions such as walking or driving a car can continue without attention. It is generally accepted that we can only fully concentrate on (pay attention to) one thing at a time. As well as voluntarily controlling what and where to pay attention, attention can also be diverted or captured (e.g. by a flashing light).

Huge amounts of data hit the senses but only a small proportion ever catch attention and enter awareness. Therefore it must not be assumed that whenever something is sensed (e.g. *seen* by the eye or heard by the eardrum) it has been noticed. A good example comes from the excellent work on inattention blindness from institutions such as the University of Illinois Visual Cognition Lab (the well-known and well-used example being the famous Basketball game by Chabris and Simon). Sometimes things that would appear to be perfectly audible or visible do not catch our attention and may not receive further conscious processing. The brain only has the capacity to process a small amount of what is sensed, and it can be surprising what can be missed.

A whole field of science is dedicated to how and why we become aware of some stimuli but not others. A traditional theory is that of a filter, which prevents all but the most important sensory information from getting through to the working memory. More modern theories suggest that rather than actively blocking out stimuli, the brain makes selections (based on subliminal perceptions and expectations) and prioritises certain stimuli over others for attentional scrutiny. In basic practical terms, we can consider the effect to be the same whether a result of filtering or selection.

When stimuli cause attention to be drawn to them, this can be called attentional 'breakthrough'. Ideally, critical information such as an alarm should breakthrough but irrelevant background 'clutter' (noise) should not. The physical properties of stimuli are an important clue for the brain as to whether a stimulus should attract its attention. Bigger, louder, brighter stimuli and those with relative movement stand out from the background and are more likely to breakthrough (draw attention / get through the filter). Occasionally however, particularly during very high workload, even a very salient stimulus will fail to 'breakthrough'. For example, in many of the classic passenger evacuation trials by the late Professor Helen Muir OBE, participants reported a lack of noise during the evacuation, when in fact there had been a tremendous din. Clearly the sound had vibrated participants' eardrums, but their brains had not consciously registered the noise. This could have been a lack of memory encoding but it is also possible that the noise was not selected for attention and processing (or 'filtered out' in the traditional view) because there were more important things to pay attention to at the time.

Whereas physical properties can help a stimulus breakthrough to attention, the 'meaning' of a stimulus can also help. The classic 'cocktail party effect' describes how. With many conversations occurring all around, one conversation can suddenly breakthrough to attention because a word or phrase was particularly meaningful (the classic example is a person hearing their own name mentioned in another conversation that they were not paying attention to). This suggests that there is at least some pre-processing of stimuli prior to attention being drawn, even if it is not realized or remembered.

Attention is aligned with capacity and resource because some difficult tasks need a lot of attention (sometimes too much) and there is only a limited supply. As such, attention is one of the most important hypothetical concepts when considering workload and multi-tasking.

## Application of knowledge - attention

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The sensory organs and their memory buffers (sensory memory) are not discerning; they will collect practically everything that they are able to physically sense. Hence much of the time pilots may not notice something when in fact they have physically sensed it.

The general issue of 'not noticing something' is often cited as the cause of accidents; e.g. VFR mid-air collisions (ineffective lookout), low speed events (failure to monitor airspeed), automation related events (failed to notice the autopilot disengage, or failed to monitor mode annunciators), lateral disorientation accidents (failed to cross-check the navigation), configuration related events (failed to notice the flaps were not set), and many others. It is usually true in hindsight that had these critical parameters caught the pilots'

attention at a specific point then the accident would have been prevented. Whereas it is debatable whether this constitutes a fair determination of cause, it is important to ask why the pilots were not aware of the information at that time.

Eastern Flight 401 was perhaps the first 'modern' highly automated airliner lost through a problem of automation 'mode awareness' (1972). The autopilot changed mode; it stopped holding the altitude and allowed the aircraft to descend. The audible chime that signified this change went unnoticed, meaning that it did not 'breakthrough' to the pilots' attention, and they were unaware that the descent. There were few outside visual references. The visual mode annunciators on the instrument panel did not draw the pilots' attention, and if they did their meaning was not perceived. All crew were involved in solving a problem, and so their attentional resources were heavily utilized (a CRM issue).

From an attentional perspective, it is reasonable to theorise that the alerting chime had been actively filtered out by the pilots' attentional systems because activities such as problem solving or communicating were unconsciously prioritised. Equally, rather than actively blocking out stimuli, the pilots' brains might have been so engaged in the other tasks that there was no capacity to select the chime for further scrutiny. Either way, pilots' attention was already on an activity that felt important, and so the chime did not breakthrough to consciousness. It is debatable whether it would have done so had it been louder or brighter.

Pilot's attentional need is sometimes greater than the mental resources available to them, and so attention must be carefully managed by the brain. For example, a visual manually flown final turn requires a pilot to share visual attention between at least three widely separated areas (the runway, the airspeed, and the attitude). This is an attentional compromise. Live flying experiments (using gliders) showed that pilots who paid less attention to attitude (view ahead) were more likely to over-use the rudder and fly skidding final turns, which can lead to spinning-in accidents (Jarvis and Harris 2007). However, correcting this by paying more attention to attitude could risk misalignment of the final approach or mismanaged airspeed. In many similar situations pilots must juggle attentional needs, and so it is usually too simple to state, after an event, that the accident was caused by pilots being unaware (or insufficiently aware) of one of those needs. Solutions usually lie in planning and workload management (managing attentional resource) and/or skill development.

Occasionally attention can be distracted away from the primary task because of low workload, particularly when the distraction has emotional relevance or

interest. This is especially possible when everything is going well, or as planned.

Flying a visual approach to one of the thousand islands in the Med, I was fascinated by the perfect combination of blue sky, emerald sea and inviting landing strip glittering under the sun. I thought – “Why is everything is so right and perfect this morning?” Then the FO’s voice came – “What you are aiming at is the taxiway Captain. ” It was only then, I acknowledged the beauty of the runway as well.” [11]

The discussion of attention theory is continued and expanded in the workload section.

## Application to Training - attention

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Pilots will benefit from recognizing that anyone (including themselves) can miss things, even when those things are seemingly obvious. Pilots will feel more confident intervening (when they think that a colleague has missed something) if they know that (1) it is common for everyone to miss obvious things, and (2) the colleague also knows this to be true (perhaps because of the CRM training) and so knows that the intervention is not a personal criticism. It may also motivate crew to practice double-checking at specific or important times, in the knowledge that they are as vulnerable as anyone else.

Many CRM courses have used movies such as the well-known basketball game video (Chabris and Simons) and other similar clips, in order to powerfully demonstrate this. This has been successful and adds fun to a classroom session (though it has now been so widely used that audiences are wise to it, and it can even be counter-productive). If using such clips and exercises, the CRM trainer should follow through with an accurate explanation, discussion of application to flight operations, and suggestions of how and when such knowledge can help. Otherwise an important opportunity is missed.

## Competencies

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Like perception, attention is a core issue at the centre of much performance (almost all conscious processing) and is therefore relevant as background knowledge when judging most competencies. Indeed, workload management (a competency itself; C8) is effectively about the management of attention.

Attention is needed for any parts of the task that require some level of conscious processing, either directly or in an indirect role. In terms of competencies, Analytical types of decision-making (C6), Situation awareness (C7), and manual flying (C3) all have attentional implications and

requirements. Problems with these are often down to attention, for example attention being displaced by a concurrent task.

Types of decision-making will be influenced by the amount of attention available. Lower levels of attention will favour recognition-primed decisions over analytical ones, and probably mean more influence of heuristics and biases (see chapter 9). This means that many decision problems can be caused by attentional issues and may be traceable to workload management. Workload and attention are inseparable, since it is the use of attention that creates workload. For this reason decision-making and workload management are highly related competencies, with attention as the main shared issue. For example, an apparent issue of decision making might be traced back to insufficient attention being available due to workload management, or workload created but not well managed during the decision-making.

Maintaining high levels of current awareness (C7- situation awareness) also requires attention, as does manual flying, which despite being a skill will usually require some attention in an 'executive' role. Hence, due to attention, workload management (C8) is inextricably linked to at least three other competencies and in fact relates to all. Overall, attention can be a clue to problems experienced across multiple competency areas.



## Chapter 4 – Vigilance and Monitoring

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C3 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)**

**C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)**

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

**C8 - Workload Management**

**Additionally – ‘Monitoring’ if part of an operator’s framework.**

### Knowledge

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#### Vigilance

Vigilance refers to sustaining attention on something so as to notice when a non-ordinary event happens (e.g. monitoring a radar screen in case of incoming threats). The term *vigilance* is usually used to refer to tasks where the object of interest is independent of the person monitoring it and this is an important area in the operational oversight of modern automated systems.

Vigilance research has a long history. Researchers such as Norman Mackworth helped to firmly establish the concept of ‘performance decrement’ in valid vigilance tasks (see Mackworth, 1948). It was shown that vigilance performance dipped significantly within half an hour. It is now accepted that sustaining one’s attention is difficult due to the way the attentional system works, and that performance will drop significantly over a short time. This drop is still known as the *vigilance decrement*. It is now agreed that most of it occurs within just 15 minutes of starting a vigilance task (Teichner, 1974) and can occur within a few minutes if the vigilance task is especially demanding.

The traditional view was that vigilance tasks were so undemanding that users became bored, and it was this ‘underload’ that caused attention to be withdrawn leading to the decrement. However, it is now commonly accepted that true vigilance tasks create high workload, frustration, fatigue and stress (Warm JS, Parasuraman R, Matthews G, 2008). It is hypothesised that attention is withdrawn from the task because of its unrewarding workload and perceived relevance.

It has been proposed that the performance decrement is due to fatigue. However, the relationship between fatigue and vigilance is not settled in science. It has been demonstrated that maintaining vigilance will add to fatigue and will be more difficult when fatigued. Fatigue and vigilance are nevertheless independent entities. To avoid participant confusion, it is

probably best that vigilance and fatigue are not discussed as if part of the same phenomenon in CRM training. Fatigue impacts on most areas of human performance, and many factors increase fatigue. Vigilance does not appear to be a special case, although it may appear so to practitioners because it is more noticeable.

There is no '*silver bullet*' for improving vigilance. Knowing about vigilance decrement will not stop it, and whereas a good night's sleep is beneficial it will not prevent vigilance decrement. The human brain is simply not set up to monitor unchanging or non-signalling independent parameters for long periods. No matter how much good intention or motivation someone has, they will still be subject to vigilance decrement.

## Monitoring

Monitoring can be considered the practice of continually looking and listening to what is happening to update current knowledge of the situation (i.e. to maintain situation or system awareness). In the context of flying an aircraft, the concept of vigilance is often used synonymously with the concept of 'monitoring'.

In practice, whereas the terms 'monitoring' and 'vigilance' get used interchangeably, it is best to consider them as subtly different concepts. Vigilance can be viewed as a general process of maintaining awareness of a system (or parameters), whereas 'monitoring' usually refers to the mechanics of collecting the information (and possibly interpreting it).

Whereas awareness can be reduced by vigilance decrement, it also can be negatively impacted by the monitoring processes, independent of vigilance decrement. For example, by a pilot's attention being distracted by a different priority, or a pilot mistakenly believing that monitoring a certain piece of information is no longer required for the task.

There is no specifically recognised 'best practice' when it comes to monitoring in the cockpit. The only recognised general 'scan pattern' is the selective radial 'T' scan, used when instrument flying. This is a general pattern involving a core scan on the attitude director with various samples of the performance instruments. All pilots (fixed and rotary) use this scan when flying manually in IMC, and there is little variation outside this pattern (with some specific exceptions).

In terms of monitoring under autopilot control, flying pilots and monitoring pilots have no defined scan 'pattern', and tend to be similar in their allocation of attention.

## Application of knowledge - vigilance & monitoring

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Every time I ignored some of the flight instruments and didn't pay them the necessary timely attention, I learned a lesson. Looking at them again was like meeting one of those difficult people in life whose teachings you won't forget. So do respect them and give them this so needed attention through good scanning. [11]

It is arguable that 'vigilance' is the foundation of the modern pilot's work, but equally it is easy to attribute 'vigilance decrement' whenever something goes unnoticed, or to attribute 'complacency'.

In modern automated aircraft, pilots are not expected to pay attention to a single specific item for an extended period of time, but to continually re-visit various parameters. Such checking may well decrease in frequency or attentiveness and although it is arguable whether this is the same thing as vigilance, there would appear to be read-across to vigilance research: Secondary checking increases workload and since it rarely leads to intervention or consequence (mainly due to technical reliability) it causes frustration and stress as described in vigilance research. It is clear that (in common with single primary vigilance tasks) withdrawal of attention from the vigilance task will lower workload.

Because pilots must scan numerous sources of information it can be unrealistic after an event to suggest a pilot suffered a lack of vigilance; it is just as likely that their attention was elsewhere, particularly when a lot was happening. When workload becomes high on a primary task such as manual flying or emergency actions, attention narrows to that task, and so monitoring of other sources degrades. This is not an effect of vigilance or fatigue; it is a matter of cognitive workload.

However, even when workload is low it is almost inevitable that high levels of vigilance are not maintained. Elements that are seemingly unchanging (reliably static), or have no direct feedback to the main task, or are rarely consequential, or are not easy to interpret, will often be dropped quickly. Unfortunately, modern automated flight decks contain a lot of information sources that fit these descriptions.

Because of this it can be tempting for pilots to stop monitoring, or to be distracted from the monitoring task, particularly when the autopilot is engaged.

The aircraft was in the cruise with the autopilot fully coupled when the commander (PM) became aware that the first officer (PF) was staring out of his side window and that something on the ground had drawn his attention. The commander decided to time how long it would take before the first

officer's attention returned to scanning the instruments. His attention was diverted for over three minutes.

When pilots drop sources from their scan, they often do not remember dropping those unless a reason arises. However, occasionally a pilot makes an effort or recalls the readings, and in these cases they recall monitoring that source. Hence pilots can gain a false impression of their own ability to monitor (while noticing the lack of monitoring in others).

The experienced training captain was becoming more and more passionate; "How many times do I have to tell these guys to monitor properly? They engage the autopilot and just stop monitoring! Perhaps they should all fly general aviation like I did, so that they learn not to be so complacent..." The training captain carried on while I wondered how to break the news to him that during the simulator experiment that he was now being debriefed about, he and his co pilot had missed the deliberately failed instrument that he was now referring to. It wasn't that he or his pilots were complacent, it was that they were human. [5]

Pilots of all levels of experience are susceptible to this monitoring degradation and the brain is very quick to determine what is and is not worthy of attention in a scan (a matter of minutes).

It is generally recognized that closed loop monitoring tasks (such as control or tracking tasks) suffer far less from the effect of vigilance decrement. For example, when a pilot is flying an aircraft manually in IMC there is very little decrement in terms of vigilance towards the primary flight instruments. One hypothesis is that because the controlling task is more aligned with the brain's normal functioning there is no build-up of stress or frustration, and so no urge to reduce attention on task. The use of procedural memory for manual controlling means that this task does not generate the workload associated with maintaining attention on an open-loop area of interest. This statement might appear slightly unintuitive, but it is probable that the slight workload caused by the perceptual motor control (closed loop control) is less than that caused by having to direct attention to an open loop task that is causing strain and frustration.

## Application to Training – vigilance and monitoring

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### Can vigilance be taught?

#### The Bad news

Unfortunately the research work in the area of vigilance is mainly descriptive (describing vigilance) rather than prescriptive. There is no evidence that the vigilance decrement can be permanently reduced by training or instruction.

People do not become generally more vigilant just because they understand the vigilance decrement or feel more motivated to be vigilant. This is chiefly because the vigilance decrement is not under voluntary control and is not a factor of motivation. There is therefore no 'easy win' for the CRM trainer in this respect.

Discussing the consequences and risks of the vigilance decrement will also have little direct effect, although it may provide some motivation to improve and cross-check. Accident reports, analyses and CRM courses sometimes imply or state that pilots must maintain constantly high levels of vigilance in order to avoid catastrophic consequences, and this also gets aligned with professionalism. However, whereas there is little doubt that greater crew vigilance would have prevented many accidents, such expectations are usually unrealistic because they take no account of the reasons behind the vigilant decrement.

Of all people, the CRM trainer should account for human factors in any proposed solution that they recommend (or even imply). Vigilance (and automation) is one area where this does not always happen.

### **The Good News**

Learning about vigilance decrement could prepare a pilot to support their colleague, being more aware that a lack of vigilance is not something that only happens at night or when fatigued. They will then be less surprised and more confident to intervene if they recognize a lack of vigilance in a highly competent and fresh colleague. Additionally, the colleague will be more receptive and encouraging of the intervention if they understand the reality of the vigilance issue in themselves.

A vigilance or monitoring session should do more than teach theory. It should attempt to engage the participants in thinking of ways to help avoid as much of the natural decrement as possible or mitigate its effects, including sharing tasks where necessary. However it is not for the CRM trainer to change policy, procedure or technical training issues, and so the CRM trainer should avoid attempting to instruct pilots how to monitor (or what to pay more attention to) unless it is done in line with flight operations / technical training.

It is generally impractical to devise exercises that allow participants to experience and demonstrate vigilance decrement, due to the time required. However if time were available and an exercise was devised, then a competitive element could be introduced to show that despite motivation and effort, the vigilance decrement applies to all.

An example session might have the following objectives:

1. Participants understand that all people are subject to vigilance decrement (especially themselves)
  - Discuss background and theory to vigilance decrement
  - Extract several examples from the class if possible
2. Participants state for themselves (through facilitation) specific areas of risk around vigilance decrements:
  - What elements are vulnerable to decrement?
  - When is the decrement more likely to happen and be hazardous?
  - What increases decrement (fatigue, workload on another task, etc.)?
3. Participants *own* the problem and discuss solutions  
E.g. What can you do to add resilience?
4. Participants understand why people withdraw attention during vigilance tasks
5. Participants have the opportunity to demonstrate and practice their understanding using case-studies

An exercise that can assist the above objectives is:

- Participants get into small groups (not absolutely necessary)
- A flight phase is described.
- They are asked to note the following:
  - What THREE specific pieces of information are the most important for a pilot to monitor in this phase (defined as specific informational elements, these would include airspeed tape, individual mode annunciator, altitude tape, radio altitude, attitude indicator, runway visual, etc)
  - What risk is associated with not monitoring each (of your three) effectively?
  - Rank those three by priority
  - How could you insure the top ranked one was ALWAYS monitored?

Then debrief the class, make a class 'list' on a flip chart, from their separate lists. Do all the groups agree? Why / why not?

The idea is that the group accept the need to monitor *carefully* (and on particular items), consider the need to monitor certain elements, the risks associated with not doing so, and that it is not obvious what should be monitored (usually there is too much).

A further debriefing question to the class could be "what problems did YOU have doing this exercise?" This question should elicit some responses that demonstrate that the participants have thought more deeply about the issues of monitoring and vigilance, for example:

- How do you determine the ‘importance’ of something without hindsight?
  - Some elements need only be glanced at occasionally, whereas others should be scanned as often as possible.
  - Some elements are only important if they go wrong, others require active scanning (if controlling – e.g. manual flying).
  - It depends what is happening (is everything going ok?)

All of these prompts and questions are designed to open discussion and facilitate a better understanding of the complexity of the issues and the need to consider the issue of monitoring in more detail.

## Categorizing Vigilance

The CRM trainer should treat vigilance as part of attention and cognition, not as part of fatigue. If vigilance is delivered as part of a fatigue lesson, then pilots could easily get the impression that feeling awake and fresh (fatigued) will make them vigilant. This is not true. Pilots should understand that vigilance decrement is a direct factor of the time and task, and whereas fatigue will make things worse it is not a necessary condition for the performance decrement.

## Training of monitoring

Novices in many domains may benefit from instruction on what to monitor or scan to improve performance; “*watch the ball, not the bat*”, “*look at the horizon when initiating a roll*” However, a qualified professional is no longer a novice, and with the exception of poorly learned habits (such as looking down at the tarmac while flaring the aircraft) improving the scanning of skilled pilots is currently more an aspiration than a reality. The reason for this is the sheer complexity of interaction between the human brain, the situation and the interface. There are no recognised scanning patterns that have been shown to improve monitoring performance, regardless of pilot role. The question is more about attentional priorities at given times, as opposed to how the pilots should be monitoring.

However, there are no easy answers when it comes to what information should be monitored. The key issue to remember is that most monitoring is not consciously driven. Hence trying to tell a pilot what to look at may have inadvertent consequences. Training needs to consider the task itself, and how the pilot is achieving it, not just focus on what the pilot may or may not be looking at.

## Competencies

Obvious related competencies are situation awareness (C7, IATA) and flight path management (C3 and C4). All have some observable behaviours explicitly about monitoring. OB7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 begin “monitors and assesses...”. OB 3.2 and 4.2 begin “monitors and detects...”.

It is very challenging for an instructor to assess actual monitoring performance from observation. Usually, some element of overt performance will be required in order to make a judgement, such as a pilot reacting promptly to changing flight path parameters, missing an uncommanded mode change, or making calls that match or appropriately project the situation. As is often the case, pilot monitoring performance is highly dependent upon workload (and attention). This is why an important related competency is workload management.

Lastly, instructors should be aware that situation awareness can degrade despite pilots appearing to monitor well (for example due to vigilance decrement). Indeed a pilot can appear to be monitoring very effectively, while situation awareness is degrading. Hence, it is probably appropriate to consider some overt elements of performance (outcome) to confirm observations relating to situation awareness and monitoring.



# Chapter 5 - Human Error, skill, reliability, and error management

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C1 – Application of Procedures and Compliance with Regulations**

**C2 - Communication**

**C3 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)**

**C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)**

**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

**C8 - Workload Management**

## Knowledge

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### Skill acquisition

Prior to discussing human error, it is important to consider some basic points about acquiring skills. A skilled task is always much more difficult to achieve when one first starts to learn it, but somehow with repeated practice the skill becomes very easy to do. This applies to complex skills even more than simple skills. The universal example is driving a car; at first it seems impossible to master all the concurrent tasks required and the workload appears impossible to cope with. However, after several years those same tasks generate such a low workload that the driver switches on the radio to relieve the boredom. Indeed, the driver may find herself at a red light in neutral gear, having achieved all the tasks that she found impossibly difficult two years before, but without even noticing herself doing them.

The common models of skill acquisition are continuums that describe this skill learning process. Perhaps the most well-known is the classic Fitts & Posner three stage model (1967). This describes initial skill learning as the cognitive stage, that gives way to the associative stage, and finally the autonomous stage.

Clearly the more complex the skill is, the longer the process takes, but it is surprising how the most seemingly impossible tasks can eventually become automatic for someone who practices enough (such as riding a unicycle while juggling clubs).

Once a skill is *autonomous* then it requires little or no attention to carry out, and so the process of making repeated tasks into automatic routines is one of

the human brain's most important strategies of reducing workload on familiar tasks, in order to release attention for use on other tasks.

This process does not just apply to motor skills, but many sets of procedures that are repeated reliably, arguably including decisions. Hence a new and novel problem requiring a decision will take a lot of effort and conscious thought, regardless how much of an expert someone is. Hence, an expert pilot faced with a completely novel problem is still effectively working at the cognitive stage of learning in terms of that particular situation. Later we will also call this 'knowledge-based performance'. If, having thought the problem through, the pilot comes to the wrong conclusion, then they are said to have made a 'knowledge-based mistake' (as will be discussed in the following section). On the other hand, if the same pilot accidentally selects Flaps 20 when intending to arm the speed brake then they have made a skill-based error (as will be described) because the error occurred during a fully learned skill due to the automated processing (the autonomous phase of learning was reached long ago). Error types depend upon the processing that caused them, and the processing tends to depend on the stage of learning that the person is at in terms of the task being done (or the ease of the task, which amounts to the same thing).

One can see instantly that experts are more vulnerable to certain errors than novices, and vice-versa, due to the processing of the task and therefore the stage on the learning continuum.

A final point on skill learning is that it is generally understood that skills cannot be improved without practice of some kind. At the very least, it seems that repetition of some sort is required to form the autonomous routines, improve them and maintain them.

## Human Error

It has long been accepted that errors are inevitable; even the Roman Philosopher Cicero stated: "It is the nature of man to err". That does not mean that the frequency of error cannot be reduced or the effects cannot be avoided or mitigated. CRM/HF has long been part of the drive to reduce errors and their consequences.

Agreeing upon a definition of human error is problematic and surprisingly difficult. Some within academia argue that human error is a construction that only exists in hindsight. Although most people within industry do not share this view, the concept is instructive for those observing or analysing events. It can be very easy to pick out errors after an event, without noticing that the error was only identified by its consequences. This is fine, as long as it is appreciated that the flight crew who made the error did so without knowledge of those subsequent consequences. This sounds simple and obvious, but is

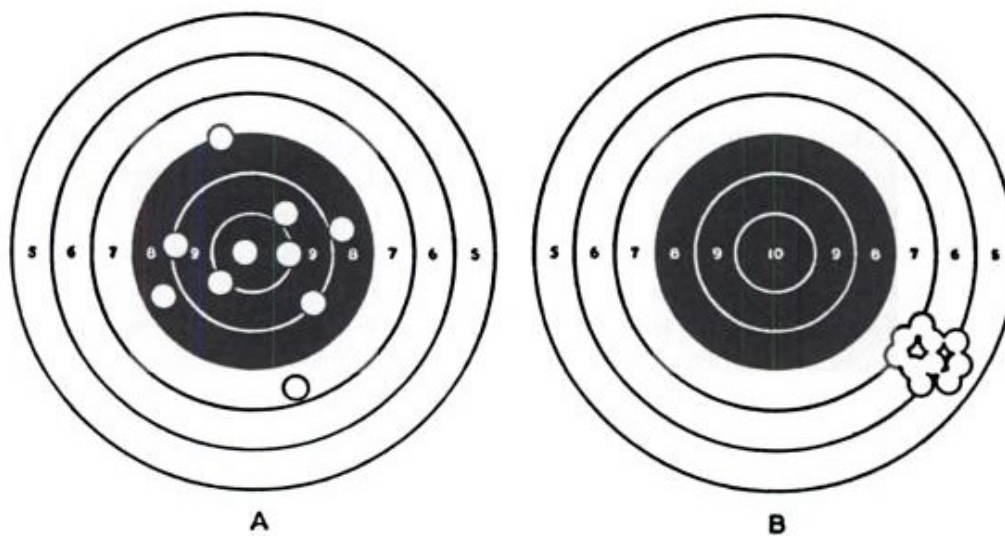
challenging for the human to appreciate because once consequences occur the preceding events are then recalled as being more likely to have led to those consequences than they really were, or than they appeared to be at the time.

James Reason defines error as follows: “A generic term to encompass all those occasions in which a planned sequence of mental or physical activities fails to achieve its intended outcome, and when these failures cannot be attributed to the intervention of some chance agency” (Reason 1990). This definition is reasonably workable for a practitioner. Outside academia most people understand error to be a general (fairly loose) term referring to when humans get something wrong, such as an incorrect action, a forgotten check or a bad decision. Error is not therefore a particular mechanism of creating unsafe events, but a term used to denote any human factors process going wrong and having consequences. It therefore spans across all other areas of human factors (information processing, decision making, situation awareness, etc.). There are also underlying conditions under which humans are more likely to make errors such as circadian lows, stress, high workload and fatigue).

Dekker (2002) differentiates between two philosophies of human error, that he calls an old view and a new view. The old view is said to be where human error is seen as indicating a human problem; meaning that an error is seen as having been caused by the human agent who causes a problem to the safe running of the system (the ‘bad apple’ theory). In the modern view human error is seen as indicating a wider system problem and being a *symptom* of a non-ideal system. This so called ‘new view’ is a socio-technical approach whereby all elements of a system (design of interfaces, procedures, working practices and human vulnerabilities) are considered as being inextricably connected. Any ‘failure’ is therefore a failure of the whole system, and so the whole system requires looking at, not just the human agent who happened to make the error. Questions asked after a serious error would be ‘why did the system allow this error to occur? Why did the system cause this person to do what they did? Why did the system not block or mitigate the consequence of the error’. This is commonly referred to as a ‘systems’ view of error. This can be a challenging way of thinking about error. It can also be misinterpreted as making excuses for negligent performance.

Clearly it is reasonable to consider error in many ways, which may include aspects of both views. Certain errors may appear to some observers to fit one view better than the other. Alfonse Chapanis (1951) differentiated between two important patterns of error using a metaphor of two expended rifle targets (Figure 7). One marksman (target A) has achieved a higher score but most bullet holes are scattered widely and randomly within the central portion of

the target. The other marksman (target B) has a low score but all the bullet holes form a tight cluster (group) just outside the central portion. Most people would recognize that the difference between the scores is down to the sighting of the rifle, not the accuracy of the shooter's aiming, and that the second marksman has better aim despite scoring lower. The off-centre error was produced by the setting of the rifle sight, not by the person's aiming. This low score of the second marksman can be metaphorically considered a system issue (setting aside the fact that the sighting is part of the skill when firing a rifle).



**Figure 7**

The bullet holes are an excellent metaphor for the different error philosophies. Where lots of errors from different people are found in the same place within a system (i.e. lots of people are making identical errors) this is called 'constant error' and is almost always attributable to systems elements (i.e. not the aiming of the rifle, but the sighting). An adjustment within the system (setting the sights) is far more likely to eliminate the errors than trying to retrain each individual, or trying to change their attitudes or motivation. This aligns easily with the 'new view' of human error. However, where errors are scattered around a system, much more diagnosis is required. It could be a common mode such as poor training, secondary task workload or shift pattern, but there could also be an element of individual human cause such as low motivation, poor skill level, etc. However, where the same individual continues to make the same mistakes, but others do not, then the solution should involve the individual.

Application of the 'old view' to all circumstances is common but is inefficient and ineffective where constant forms of error are recognised. The old view

tends to look at individual humans within the system (e.g. the pilot, controller, engineer) and attempts to 'fix' them (through re-training or sanctions) or remove them. The opportunity for systematic remedial action is therefore lost, as the opportunity to learn the cause of the problem.

## Error types

Firstly, in practice errors are categorised within the umbrella term 'unsafe acts', which includes all errors but also other issues. An unsafe act is an action (or inaction) that leads to a safety issue. Whereas an unsafe act can happen by accident (error) it can also happen intentionally (violation). There are many ways to categorise unsafe acts, but the most widely used is Rasmussen's SRK taxonomy (Rasmussen 1986) and an extension of it; Reason's generic error modelling system (GEMS). These sorts of taxonomies will be very familiar to many within industry, usually in adjusted and re-branded forms. Although it is usually unimportant for the HF/CRM trainer to be able to label and categorise unsafe acts, they should know the basic categorises for use when reading accident and incident reports, and other literature.

Unsafe acts are usually divided into three major types: errors (skill-based), mistakes (knowledge-based) and violations. The traditional way to understand this classification is to divide unsafe acts into those that are intended and those that are not. Skill based errors (called slips and lapses) are unintended actions or omissions, whereas mistakes and violations are intended acts or omissions, but mistaken. However perhaps a more useful method (loosely related to the framework) is to consider within which of the skill learning stages or which part of the information-processing system the unsafe act occurred.

## Skill-based errors

If an unsafe act (including an omission) occurs as part of a learned skill or unconscious procedure then it is called a skill-based error. If this error occurred because the skilled action was inappropriate for the situation, this is called a slip (raising the flap lever while intending to have raised the gear lever). If on the other hand the error occurs because a skill or task step was omitted, or something was forgotten, this is a lapse (forgetting to raise the undercarriage). Lapses can be particularly insidious in aviation, due to the rule-based nature of many fundamental safety processes. The following extract shows how a seemingly minor lapse can lead to a potentially fatal situation, with only a few chances to trap the error, and none to mitigate it:

I push the Pitts round the outside loop. I glance in to check the top-height – 900 feet, which surprises me. 900 feet is on the low side of lovely, but high enough and better than I expected – so I keep pushing. Landscape scrolls up

the windscreens and then the Leicester runway fills the gap between cowling and top wing, swelling rapidly. I push on, past the down-vertical, past the point-of-no-return...

And then, and only then, I remember that the altimeter was set for Farnborough, not for Leicester. I was simply 230 feet lower than I thought I was. Man! The runway! Just PUSH... I recorded a negative figure on the G-meter which prompted a major inspection of the airframe, and caused the Pitts factory to state that this was so far outside normal parameters that they could not offer comment.

It was my fault. I deliberately miss-set the altimeter in the first place, failed to rectify it during my precious pre-aerobatic briefing, then topped it off by failing to notice over two whole manoeuvres that things were going altogether too well for a heavy S2-A with the front screen on. Mea definitely culpa. They told me my fin missed the runway by ten feet that morning. The most impressive low-level push-out anyone had ever seen; well would have been... [6]

Extract from 'High Time' (Lecomber 2013) with permission

One also hears the terms 'error of commission' and 'error of omission', which are effectively the same as slip and lapse. People make skill-based errors all the time. For example taking the wrong turn on a car journey because that is the turning they usually take on most other journeys (this would be called a slip, because it is an error of 'doing' something). An example of a lapse would be that the driver forgot to post a letter on the way to work, because usually her journey passes the post box without stopping. This is called a lapse because it is an error of *not* doing something. One can see that the situational drivers to slips and lapses are similar even though the labels are different. Skill-based errors are usually more likely when there are subtle differences between two situations or actions that get confused. The term 'habit capture' is sometimes used to describe these sorts of skill-based errors. The anecdote below, from commercial rotary wing operation, is a good example.

The standard departure required a climb to 3000ft, however, on this occasion the departure clearance was initially to not above 2000ft. Despite correctly acknowledging the clearance, the crew briefed and programmed the automation for a standard climb to 3000ft. Fortunately, as they approached 2000ft they were transferred to the departure controller and the error was corrected before a level bust occurred.

### **Knowledge based mistakes**

If an unsafe act happens as part of a 'thinking' task such as making a decision, then it is called a mistake (also called a knowledge-based mistake)

or a violation. The action was carried out as intended (there was no slip or lapse) but it turned out to be wrong. Where a decision or action requires an effortful conscious (knowledge-based) thought process then it would normally have involved some aspect of novelty and therefore would be approached in a similar way to the cognitive stage of skill learning.

Mistakes are unsafe acts where a person determines or decides their actions through thinking and carries them out correctly, but the actions do not have the desired consequences. In other words their actions were intentional but do not have the anticipated or hoped for effect. In the terminology of 'human error' all issues raised in part 1 of the decision-making chapter (chapter 9, part 1) relate to knowledge based mistakes. The classic definition is that mistakes occur in the planning stage of an activity, such that the planned actions are correctly carried out, but the plan turns out to have been wrong.

## **Violations**

It is worth looking at the difference between violations and mistakes or errors. Reason points out that violations differ from slips, lapses and mistakes because they are deliberate 'illegal' actions, i.e. somebody did something knowing it to be against the rules.

There are some important points to recognize about violations in aviation work. Firstly, most violations are not deliberate sabotage but are instead 'well-intentioned' acts. The person carrying them out believes that they are necessary, or they are the best course of action. Secondly, violations are extremely common, and depending upon how the definition is applied, they are part of almost all tasks. Thirdly, most violations lead to positive or neutral results rather than adverse consequences. This is not to suggest that violations are good, but simply to state facts.

There are many reasons that violations occur. The main one is that personnel consider them necessary to get the job done. Violations can be roughly split into two types: routine violations and exceptional violations.

### **Routine Violations**

Sometimes, procedures do not account for the cumulative time required to follow them and so personnel find ways of doing the tasks more quickly. These routine violations therefore save time and lower temporal workload. The result could be safer working and fewer incidents. Clearly, when violations have evolved within such a system, it can be dangerous simply to remove them all without allowing more time for the same tasks, because the workload will increase markedly and unintended consequences will result. The solution is to understand the violations, and attempt to change practices and procedures in a way that addresses the sorts of issues that the routine



violations have evolved in response to. In these cases, no amount of enforcement, training or re-education will result in a violation-free environment that is as effective or as safe as previously. Hence the HF/CRM trainer themselves can have little impact upon these sorts of situations. Tackling routine violations that have evolved in response to task demand involves much more consideration than simply telling people to stop violating.

However, other routine violations occur when personnel do not understand, remember or agree with procedures. Again, these can quickly become part of normal working. These should be easier to resolve, by educating personnel in the reasons behind the procedures.

### **Exceptional violations**

Some violations are rare and have little precedent. These are known as exceptional violations. They are not necessarily extreme and most (not all) are intended for a good outcome. Whereas routine violations are normal ways of working, exceptional violations are acts that stand out as being different. They might be in response to unusual situations (where it is felt that SOPs are insufficient or not working), they might be an attempt to go beyond SOPs for even better performance (e.g. to catch up from a late departure), they might even stem from boredom (i.e. trying something different or being inquisitive) or rarely they may be deliberately harmful actions (sabotage).

Sometimes a violation will precede an incident or accident. In most cases it is too easy for an investigator or trainer to focus on the violation as the main cause, and fail to see that similar violations occur all the time, and do not cause these sorts of events. The danger is that the solution put forward is simply 'follow the procedure'. This is almost always too simple and the trainer should try to see past the violation in order to look at all the interaction of other accident factors as well, so as to understand the complexity.

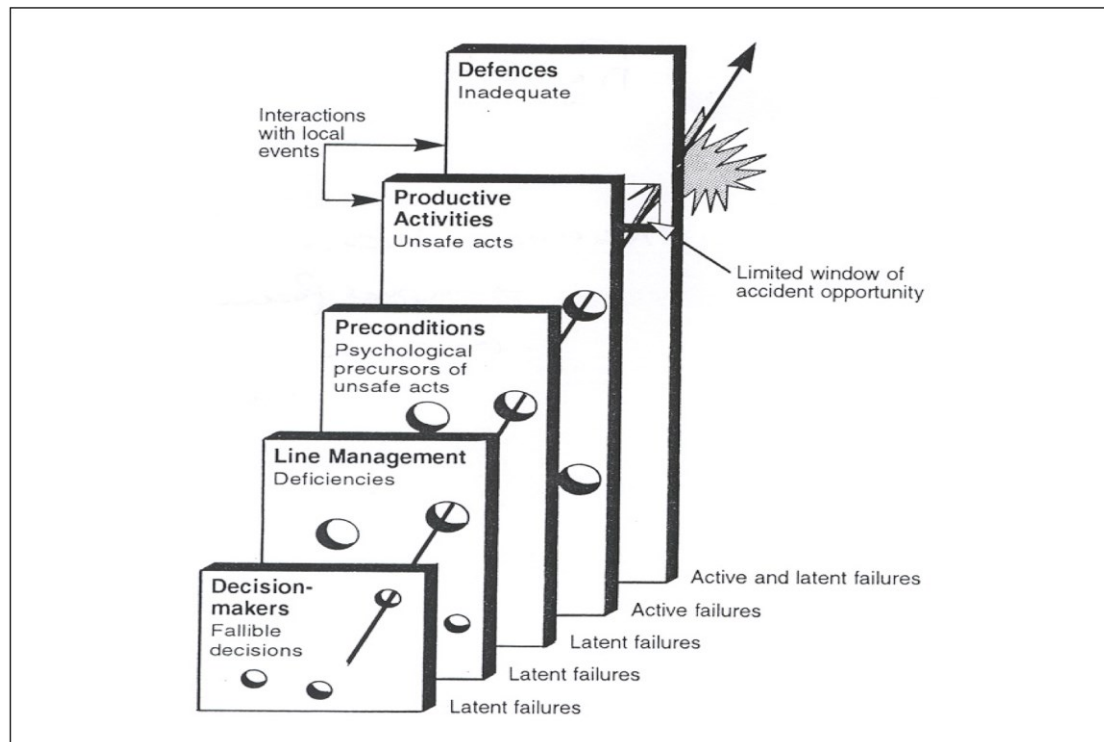
### **Error management**

A key concept associated with error management is that of "defences in depth", based on the premise that there are many stages in any system where errors can occur, and similarly many stages where defences can be built to prevent and trap errors.

Reason has highlighted the concept of 'defences' against human error within an organisation and has coined the notion of 'defences in depth'. Examples of defences are pre-flight checks, automatic warnings, challenge-response procedures, etc. which help prevent and 'trap' human errors, reducing the likelihood of negative consequences. It is when these defences are weakened and breached that human errors can result in incidents or accidents. These defences have been portrayed diagrammatically, as several



slices of Swiss cheese (and hence the model has become known as Professor Reason's "Swiss cheese" model) (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8** Reason's Swiss Cheese Accident Metaphor

Some failures are 'latent', meaning that they have been made at some point in the past and lay dormant. They may have been introduced at the time an aircraft was designed or may be associated with a management decision. Errors made by front line personnel such as flight crew are unsafe acts ('active' failures). The more holes in a system's defences the more likely it is that errors result in incidents or accidents, but it is only in certain circumstances, when all holes 'line up', that these occur. Usually, if an error has breached the design or engineering defences it reaches the flight operations defences (e.g. in flight warning) and is detected and handled at this stage. However, occasionally in aviation, an error can breach all the defences (e.g. a pilot does not act upon an in flight warning, believing it to be a false alarm) and a catastrophic situation ensues.

### Error detection and prevention

The concept of redundancy should be applied at all stages of the aviation system, never assuming that one single mechanism, especially if human, will detect and prevent an error. CRM provides a form of redundancy in that it emphasises the role of the second pilot to check what the first pilot has done. There is a potential danger with independent checks that the second person will trust the first person not to have done anything wrong, and therefore not to carry out the second check properly. CRM dual checking is one of the last

lines of defence, especially if no automatic system checks and alerts are present. Pilots should try to be alert for the possibility that their colleague may have made an error, particularly in critical activities such as checklists. Pilots will be more open to being challenged if they have a good knowledge of error. Similarly, the pilot carrying out the first action should not rely upon the other pilot detecting an error. (The same applies with pilot-ATC communications, and read-backs). It is essential to remember that everyone is human and therefore everyone makes errors and mistakes from time to time.

## **Human Error, skill, reliability, and error management – Application**

Knowledge-based mistakes are naturally covered within the decision-making chapter (chapter 9), and therefore this chapter focuses mainly on skill-based errors and violations.

### **Slips**

Once a skill is learned to the point of being autonomous, it is reliable and robust. However it is also vulnerable to situational and contextual change. Skills literature (rather than error literature) uses terms such as ‘skill transfer’ or ‘transfer of training’ to denote a phenomenon whereby skills learned in one situation are applied to a different situation (rightly or wrongly). Usually this is positive; otherwise a pilot would have to learn each aircraft as if a completely new vehicle requiring a completely new skill set. However, where situations are quite similar, negative transfer can take place. This is where the skill for one situation is deployed in another with negative effects, “when a new response is needed for an old stimulus” (Magill 1989). A classic example of the risk is associated with a change of aircraft type. The autonomous skill has developed or been recently practiced on one aircraft and the ‘new’ aircraft is similar enough to lead to the ‘old’ skill being used in error. An example would be a pilot changing from a Cessna 172 light aircraft to a Robin DR400. The C172 has a plunger-type throttle control in the same location as a plunger-type mixture control of the Robin. If the pilot is concentrating on the approach, he/she could easily set some flap, return their hand to the throttle autonomously and retard it, only to find the engine cutting because the hand had located the mixture control of the Robin. There are infinite such examples between aircraft types. Flare height could present the same problem in small and large aircraft, as can general-handling and even stall recovery, particularly in aerobatic aircraft. Aircraft with common type ratings are particularly vulnerable particularly if the pilot has flown one type many times continuously and then flies the other.

I had just moved the throttle to taxi forward when the seat suddenly slid backwards and the aircraft lurched forward out of control. I grabbed and

pulled on the handbrake between the seats.....unfortunately my brain had decided I was in a car and the 'handbrake' was actually the flap lever.

Error literature would refer to such errors as slips, and specifically 'interference errors' or 'habit capture errors'. For the practical purposes of aviation professionals, it can be considered that the same phenomena are being referred to, just using different terminology. Skills and errors are closely related and their respective literature has many parallels but uses different terminology. This is not unusual for two sub-disciplines but it can be confusing for the HF/CRM trainer trying to increase their knowledge across a number of areas. There are currently no resources that can easily answer whether a phenomenon found in one discipline is the same phenomenon described by another but under a different label. Very often, since the phenomena are hypothetical even the academics involved are not sure!

Just as the use of an old skill can be prompted by a new aircraft or situation, so subtly different tasks and controls within the same aircraft can also produce these kinds of errors. The following anecdote (from a commercial helicopter operation) shows a classic skill-based error caused by two similar controls. It also shows how confusing the aftermath can be for a crew.

The aircraft parking brake and nose wheel lock are identical 'T handles' situated adjacent to each other. As the aircraft came to a stop to disembark the passengers the pilot monitoring reached out and applied what he believed was the parking brake. Having disembarked the passengers the crew ran through the pre-taxi checklist in order to reposition to a suitable parking spot for shutdown. As the checks were carried out the pilot flying highlighted that the parking brake was already off. The monitoring pilot felt confused as he was certain that he had applied the brake, however, as there was another aircraft waiting for them to move he didn't question the discrepancy. As they taxied they soon realised it was impossible to turn the aircraft. An engaged and now jammed nose wheel-locking pin was diagnosed which required the aircraft to be shut down in its current position.

Although in the described event the error caused inconvenience, the same issue can lead to more hazardous outcomes (see reference AAIB 2008).

One particularly modern area of concern in automated aircraft is that of crew errors when programming the flight management computer (FMC). Serious incidents and accidents have been caused by simple but highly consequential errors, including slips, transposition errors and misreading data.

## Lapses

A further common error type in aviation is the lapse. Human memory is not well suited to remembering all the tasks and order of steps required in all

situations, or even in several common situations. The use of checklists has proved highly effective over many years in terms of preventing and mitigating these problems, and the error types discussed previously. Occasionally however, checklists are vulnerable to the way human skills work. The repeatable nature of checklist tasks means that the brain can turn checklist tasks into skills in the same way as any other tasks. This can lead to pilots using checklists without paying attention to the items being checked. In CRM courses this issue is often taught through a concept labelled 'expectation bias'. This describes that people *will see what they expect to see*.

There are many examples where aircraft have attempted to take off without flaps correctly configured. In most cases the take-off configuration alert did not operate (the holes in the cheese lined up). In most cases the aircraft took off and the situation was resolved, but in a number of well-known accidents the aircraft did not take off, or crashed shortly afterwards.

In 1989 a Delta Boeing 727 attempted to take off from Dallas Fort Worth but crashed with loss of life. The cockpit voice recorder captured the moment when the first officer replied to the challenge checklist item "flaps?" with "fifteen, fifteen, green light". This reply would be the correct reply to the appropriate take-off flap setting, but the flaps were not set. One of the stated causes was that the flight deck environment was not sterile; the pilots were distracted by non-operation conversation.

More recently, in August 2008, the same accident occurred to a Spanair MD82 taking off from Madrid. During the 'Final Items' checklist, the first officer stated "... Eleven, Aligned, Eleven..." which would be the normal response to seeing flaps correctly set at eleven degrees. The flaps were not set.

In almost all cases where checklist items are bypassed or performed incorrectly, such errors will be trapped by the individual at the time or immediately afterwards, or be trapped by the other crew-member. Distractions and parallel tasks in the flight deck are apparent in many cases where a checklist error is made and not trapped. These might be general distractors, or other tasks impinging or interrupting the checklist task.

Lapses can also occur when a situation that normally prompts an action does not occur, and so the crew do not take the action. The following anecdote is an extreme example from a commercial rotary wing crew.

It was a weekend; the crew had experienced multiple delays and were now tight against a departure time in order to beat forecast deteriorating conditions at their destination. It was normal practice to start engines, taxi to the gate, then complete the pre-take-off checks as the passengers boarded. On this occasion the task was to carry freight so there was no requirement to taxi to the gate. The freight seemed to take forever to load and the commander was

very conscious of the need to make the departure time. The commander was aware they were rushing as they started engines, ran through the checks, and requested taxi. ATC were very co-operative and cleared them for an immediate departure. Shortly after take-off, ATC requested they re-cycle their Squawk. The pilot monitoring looked at the transponder and thought, "that's funny it's still set to standby". ATC then provided a direct routing to their first en-route waypoint. The pilot monitoring looked at the FMS, it was blank. Then the penny dropped, they had omitted the pre-take off checks in their entirety!

## **Defence against error**

The first line of defence against error is the system designer. Work in the 1940s and 1950s by scientists such as Paul Fitts and Alphonse Chapanis helped to establish the idea that aviation design should account for human vulnerabilities. The classic example of that work is the placement and shapes of the gear and flap levers, intended to defend against the human error slip of selecting the wrong lever. Although established over seventy years ago this work is still apparent in all modern air transport aircraft and is driven by regulation. Other methods of preventing skill-based errors are control guards (e.g. over hydraulic cut-off switches), interlocks (gear lever in ground-mode), different shapes and feel of controls (e.g. on autopilot control panels), making controls more difficult to operate (having to pull a switch before changing its selection) and putting controls out of reach where possible (e.g. IRS mode selectors on an aft overhead panel). Despite such work errors can still occur, including on autopilot control panels (selecting the wrong parameter or mode) and systems controls on overhead panels (configuring the wrong system, or the wrong side of a system). For this reason, as well as attempting to prevent skill-based errors, designers put devices in place to mitigate or alert of consequences. These include alerts, warnings and automatic recovery functions such as reversionary modes.

However, designers cannot guard against everything nor provide barriers for every conceivable permutation of error. Therefore crew should never rely on the design to keep them safe.

Effective procedures are the next important stage (after effective design) and after that the crew themselves.

One clear defence against the problems of checklist usage (e.g. failing to set take-off flap) is to keep the cockpit and the tasks sterile. Compliance with requirements for sterile cockpits is helpful, but usually not sufficient in itself. A sterile cockpit can exist in which pilots are distracted by each other or otherwise occupied during checklist usage.

Although the use of checklists is an obvious and important example, skill based errors occur in many areas of pilots' work. Some other important areas

are configuring, programming flight management computers, autopilot panel and bug selections, emergency actions, monitoring lapses and system settings.

Operating procedures often provide a framework of steps for actions or tasks (whether written or memorized). Following such procedures alleviates the need for heavy knowledge-based processing (decision making) but on the other hand the steps may be too complex or insufficiently repeatable to become skills. The result is to support 'rule-based performance'. Following a set of directions or instructions is a good example of rule-based performance. An error occurring due to a misapplied rule, omitted a rule or repeating a rule is called a rule-based mistake. Simple processes such as checklists can suffer from rule-based mistakes as well as skill-based errors; for example if a checklist is interrupted and the pilot returns to the wrong place. This has occurred in many accidents.

Due to the infinite number of situations that can occur, there cannot always be an operating procedure to protect against every potential error. One reason for crews to learn about error theory in HF/CRM training is in order for them to appreciate their vulnerability and then to become used to spotting the potential for them to commit error, so that they might find a way of successfully defending against it. One good rule of thumb is that if any doubt surfaces, pilots should re-check or pause to review the situation. Good crews often do this and the following anecdotes show some good examples.

I was a new ex-military F/O flying B747s with Cathay. There was a strict curfew at Kai Tak and, after frantic activity, we had made it to the holding point with 2 minutes to spare. We were cleared "Immediate Take-off" and entered the runway. The captain applied the parking brake, started his stop watch and folded his arms. The F/E and I started to look at everything we had done thinking we'd missed something. After 1 minute, the captain said "All set?" we said "Yes" and he took off. In the cruise I asked what that was all about and he said that we were all tense and rushed and about to take off through the Lei Yu Mun gap into a rainy night and he thought the one minute left to curfew was best spent calming down. Brilliant!

Taxiing out after a lot of pressure to get the aircraft away from the stand on time, the captain said 'OK we had a lot of hassle and interruptions at the gate - the main thing is to make sure we don't keep on hurrying. Let's take a minute to do a review and get our heads back in flying mode. Does that make sense?' [1]

In the two examples, the captains intuitively recognised the relationship between feeling hurried and the potential for error (particularly lapses), and used that feeling as a cue to stop, slow down and re-check. Although it is not

possible to know for sure, such behaviour has almost certainly prevented accidents in the past, and does not apply only to large or multi-crew aircraft:

The glider before me in the launch queue was suddenly pushed out of the way. I jumped into my glider so as not to hold things up. The rope was attached to my glider and the tug aircraft taxied forward. I had had to rush my checks and did not feel ready, so I decided to release the rope and open my canopy. I was relieved that I had done so when it was noticed that I had left the heavy wheel dolly (for ground manoeuvring) attached to the tail of the glider!

Sometimes situations occur where a specific error is predictable in a given situation. A common example is where a pilot recognises that a crucial action must be taken, but not for five minutes, and therefore there is a serious risk of forgetting it. Crews who understand their vulnerability to error are more likely to recognise these sorts of risks, are likely to develop their own ways of guarding against such potential errors. The following anecdote from rotary wing operation is a good example.

As a condition of the daily engine power checks, all bleed air consumers are switched off, then after three minutes at maximum continuous power the automated power check is conducted. Once the check is complete the crew make a note of the various engine parameters and the displayed check results. At this point crews were often making a premature exit error: with the check results recorded, they were omitting to select the bleed air consumers back on. One enterprising co-pilot I flew with switched the ice detector off (a bleed air consumer) then hooked one of the aircraft blanks over the switch and trailed the tail of the blank across the FMS. The presence of the blank made it very obvious that the ice detector and other bleed air consumers were switched off.

This anecdote is a personal solution that worked for the individual. It is used here as an informational anecdote only, to illustrate the general principle, not as a suggestion or an example to be necessarily followed.

## Violations

It is usually unimportant to precisely define labels, but a huge amount of effort is expended around defining the term 'violation' and the need to be able to apply that label to an unsafe act. Indeed in some cases a person's entire career can depend on this labelling process. In general 'just cultures' tend to be more accepting of mistakes and errors than of violations. One must not confuse an intention to violate with an intention to do harm.

Many errors violate rules and procedures, but are not classed as violations because there was no intention to violate. Hence the defining characteristic of



a violation as opposed to a mistake or error is the intention to violate. The following is an example of an event that would normally be categorised as a violation, for all the reasons given.

The commander was in his first job as a commercial pilot and was tasked to a wedding to fly a newly married couple from the church to their wedding reception. As the couple emerged from the church it became apparent that the bride was of a somewhat fuller figure than the commander had anticipated and would likely put the aircraft above its restricted take off mass for the confined area departure. Faced with informing the bride versus giving the task a go he conducted the latter. As he neared the obstacles in his take off path, he realised his mistake, avoiding them by only a small margin.

It follows that the person must be aware of the rules (at least to an extent) otherwise their action would be classed as a mistake rather than a violation because they did not understand what was permitted.

Clusters of violations can be thought of in the same way as clusters of errors. Where many people make identical violations, there is usually a systematic issue. Where individuals make different exceptional violations, these can usually be effectively dealt with at an individual level.

CRM and human factors professionals are concerned with the drivers behind violations even more than the actions themselves. Routine violations can be an indicator that procedures are not adequately aligned with the human task (often requiring too much time) or the culture is inadequate. Even exceptional violations (like the anecdote above) are usually done for reasons that appear justifiable to the crew at the time.

## **Human Error, skill, reliability, and error management - Application to training**

It is important for both students and facilitators to accept that human error is inevitable to some extent, and move towards a motivation to reduce, detect and manage error through systems such as error management or even by improved performance.

An underlying aim of some HF/CRM training appears to be to teach the audience how to categorise different kinds of errors. This is unimportant in itself. It is much more important for the participants to understand roots to error. This may include categorization as a step, but it is not a means in itself.

There is a great deal of terminology in use around types of errors, much of which is synonymous. Because some errors and consequences are related to attention being distracted from the task, they are often referred to as 'attention capture' or 'environmental capture' errors. They are also said to be



caused by 'expectation bias', which is a term used to refer to a situation whereby a skill will be triggered by an 'expected cue' rather than a real cue. The term 'skill-based' error is a more generic term for an error occurring as part of a skilled routine. All the terminology can be confusing, and although the terms are not precise synonyms, at a practical level they describe very similar things. It is therefore important that CRM trainers within the same operator decide upon consistent terminology. The actual terminology used is less important than consistency and understanding; using multiple synonyms can cause confusion at many levels.

It is important for participants to understand how errors and mistakes come about, so that they can guard against them. Areas that are 'error prone' should be discussed, along with the types of errors that occur. For example, skill-based errors will tend to occur in areas of the operation that are easy but ought to be paid attention to, particularly where there are other tasks and interruptions occurring.

### **Example of running an error session in a classroom**

The objectives of this session will be for participants to understand the root of errors and mistakes, understand them in the operational context, look at solutions and feel motivation and ownership in attempts to manage them.

- To begin an error session in a classroom, a trainer could ask each person to write down one/two errors that they have seen occur recently on the flight deck (it is a good idea for the trainer to have a number of prepared errors written down in case the audience does not provide many good examples). The trainer can write them up on a large white board (or present them one by one on a slide if pre-prepared) to promote brief discussion. The trainer has several alternatives in this process; one might be to write each anecdote on the board with no pre-organisation, circle and number each, then when finished ask the participants to group them into events that have the same "mental-mechanism" or other colloquial term for cognitive root. Alternatively, the skilled trainer might categorise the anecdotes as they collect them, and then ask the participants to explain why the trainer has grouped them in these sets. The trainer must recall that the purpose is to understand cause, not to categorise. The categories emerge as a way of showing and discussing various roots to error.
- After facilitating the discussion, the trainer could show some examples from accidents or incidents to further contextualize understanding. Use of flight data or recent incidents in the airline will be powerful here.
- After this the trainer can ask the class to come up with preventions and mitigations. This would be done in groups. Usually, this is best done with single examples, rather than asking people to solve 'error'

generally. One purpose of doing this is to achieve 'buy-in' from the audience into the concept. If the audience generate solutions then they will have accepted that the area is applicable.

- Discuss these ideas and show the interventions or initiatives that the company is championing. A skilled facilitator can listen while the groups are working on solutions, and should be able to find a way to align the solutions being put forward with company solutions. This is a very powerful way to gain acceptance of company proposals, because the participants perceive some ownership of the solution. Solutions may include sterile tasking, threat and error management practices, highlighting of error prone procedures or practices, and many others.

It may be useful to link the teaching of error with information about the company's occurrence reporting scheme, stressing the importance of open and frank reporting of errors in order that lessons can be learned from them. However, this can be a sensitive area, and care should be taken not to jeopardise any confidentiality agreements if using real examples of errors from the occurrence database.

HF/CRM sessions should have an objective of fostering increased understanding and awareness of the issues in more depth. Spotting and labelling violations is an insufficient activity for a classroom lesson. The trainer should seek to facilitate discussion around why violations occur, what solutions are available, what causes the violations and whether the solutions address the problem. Solutions that simply aim to prevent all violations occurring, without any other adjustments, are usually insufficient and in some cases can be dangerous.

In the simulator, pilots should be encouraged to spot their own and others errors as well as routine violations. Instructors should allow and facilitate such practice, in order to foster greater understanding of how the errors came about, and their predictability. Instructors should try to avoid considering errors as a sign of poor performance in themselves.

## Competencies

**For obvious reasons, the content of this chapter is relevant to most, if not all, competencies.** Specifically, competencies C1-C4 and C6-C8 have been highlighted in Table 1. This is all chapters except 'Application of Knowledge' (C0) and 'Leadership and teamwork' (C5), although both are still relevant.

Skill-based processes in aircraft operation include manual flying (C3), operating controls and running procedures (hence competency C1). Knowledge-based processes include analytical decision making and analysing information (such as weather, fuel calculations, interpreting NOTAMs etc). If the underlying mechanisms behind knowledge-based and

skill-based performance are understood, then observable issues in these areas are easier to recognise and analyse. It is also important to understand violations and intention, particularly when dealing with procedures. Violations are seen less in checking and training for obvious reasons, but if pilots are used-to making routine violations, they will need to compensate for this in training and checking situations, and this can cause difficulty such as increased workload.

Thinking in terms of systems (systems view of human error) can help instructors and trainers take a broader view of causality when behaviours are observed. It is easy to attribute all causality of observed behaviour directly to individual (skill-level, poor knowledge, rushing, failure to take certain actions, etc). However, sometimes by 'zooming out' and looking at the wider 'systematic' factors, a deeper explanation might become apparent. As well as better explaining the observed issues, this will usually lead to better training outcomes. It is not that the trainer is attempting to find ways of removing agency or responsibility from the crew or individuals, but simply looking more deeply to find the context and situation which might have catalysed the observed behaviour.

# Chapter 6 –Workload

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## Knowledge

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C3 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)**

**C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)**

**C5 - Leadership and teamwork**

**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

**C8 - Workload Management**

Workload can be loosely and simply thought of as the amount of mental effort needed (and expended) to process information. This chapter discusses cognitive (or mental) workload, as opposed to physical workload. Workload is a deeply complex (and contended) area within science, with many competing interpretations and definitions. It is linked to almost all other areas within cognition and performance, particularly attention, vigilance, fatigue, decision-making and multi-tasking. This section uses hypotheses and explanations designed to be usable whilst approximating, and occasionally being selective with, scientific knowledge. In general, high workload is associated with increased errors, fatigue, task degradation and poor performance.

All conscious operations (problem solving, decision making, thinking, etc.) cause workload. The hypothetical area that deals with all such activity is called the working memory (Chapter 1 – ‘Information Processing’) and specifically an element called the ‘central executive’, which requires attention to perform the tasks. Hence *attention* and *working memory* are the keys to understanding workload. The more attention is required and used, the higher the workload is said to be. Hence workload can be approximately expressed as the amount of attentional demand.

From chapter 5 (Human Error, skill, reliability, and error management) it should be recalled that skilled tasks require attention to learn (high workload), but once learned use very little (or no) attention. This is the brain’s main strategy of workload reduction: to turn repeated tasks into skilled routines, so that they can be performed in the future without demanding attention, and therefore generating workload. Without this strategy and capability, everyday life tasks would be impossible.

## Task causes of high workload

In practice, workload is *directly* affected by four general task factors (Jarvis 2010).

1. 'Difficulty' of the task
2. Number of tasks running in parallel (concurrently)
3. Number of tasks in series (switching from task to task)
4. The time available for the task (speed of task)

It is worth noting that there are other indirect factors such as duration of task, fatigue and level of arousal. However the direct factors (listed) will be discussed at more length.

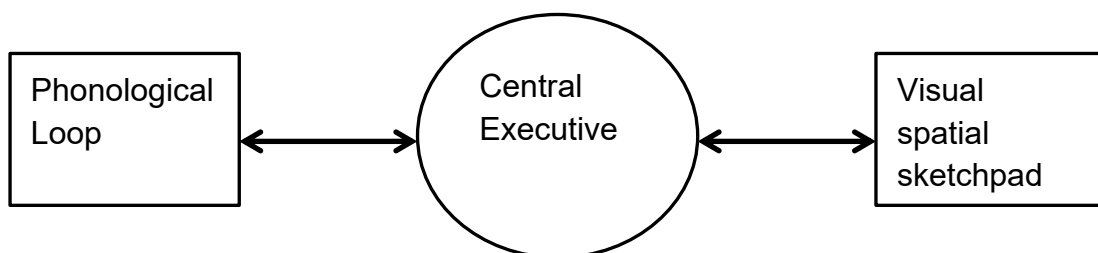
### 1. Task Difficulty

Task difficulty is the most obvious factor, and is easy to appreciate. Putting aside factors such as time constraints and parallel tasks, mentally adding 2 and 2 together is a low workload task while mentally multiplying 236 by 37 is a high workload task. As tasks become more difficult the central executive has to do heavier processing, more buffering and recalling of data at various stages, and more interrogation of long-term memory and learned rules.

### 2. Multi-tasking

This is a complex area, but a highly simplified merger of the main theories will be used to demonstrate the basic science behind 'multi-tasking'. The main theory of 'working memory' must be looked at (introduced in chapter 1, information processing).

Serving the central executive (the brain's hypothetical single central processor) are two short-term memory buffers called the 'phonological loop' and the 'visual-spatial sketchpad' (Figure 9). These are small active stores that act to buffer sounds and pictures respectively. These sounds and pictures may be sourced from the senses or from the long-term memory. The visual spatial sketchpad is like the 'mind's eye'. The phonological loop is a 'mental ear' that sounds out short clips of audible information.



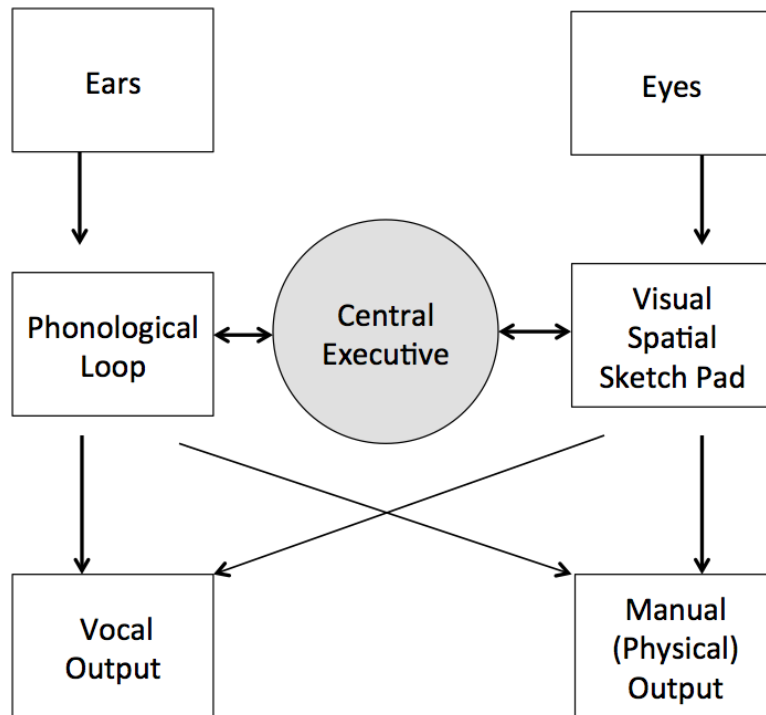
**Figure 9.** Working memory, simplified from Baddeley and Hitch 1974, see Baddeley (1990).

If a task requires continual visual information input (such as flying an aircraft manually) then the visual spatial sketchpad will be in constant use, picturing what comes from the eyes. The same is true of the phonological loop during verbal processing tasks (such as communicating with ATC). Ideal multi-tasking is possible when one task uses just the visual spatial sketchpad, and the other uses just the phonological loop. Additionally, because there is only one central executive, only one of the tasks can fully use it. Hence ultimate task sharing happens when a visual/spatial/manual task is being performed concurrently with a verbal/auditory task AND at least one is a well-learned skill (hence not requiring the central executive). Furthermore, the two tasks should use separate sense organs for input (eye and ear) and separate forms of output (e.g. physical arm movements and vocal sounds) in order for ideal task sharing.

Figure 10 shows all this in the form of a highly simplified model (Jarvis 2014) that combines aspects of multiple resource theory with Baddeley's working memory model. From top to bottom it follows the basic input-processing-output model introduced in chapter 1. However there are clearly two sides (left and right): one auditory and one visual/spatial. The arrows do not join the boxes because the theory is not defined in this level of detail.

To demonstrate the model: manually flying an aircraft requires visual input (eyes) feeding into the visual spatial sketch-pad and requiring a manual response (physical handling). All of this involves the right-hand side of the model. Communication requires audible input (ears) feeding the phonological loop and requiring a verbal output (talking), and hence consumes the left hand side of the model. In theory therefore pilots should be able to fly and communicate at the same time, but it depends on the need that either task has for conscious control and attention - the central executive).

If both the tasks discussed are autonomous (skills that require little attention) then they require little central executive control, and after a little practice should be able to be shared without interfering with each other.



**Figure 10.** Simplified version of multi-tasking theory (by Jarvis 2014, based on merging Baddeley 1990 and Wickens 1999).

The usual problem in multi-tasking is the competition between tasks for the central executive. Communicating and manual flying are good examples of two tasks that may appear to be easy and autonomous as well as sufficiently resource independent, but that often clash in practice, leading to decrement of one, the other, or both. This is because both these tasks are likely to compete for executive control (attention) on a regular basis (the communication task in order to work out what is being said, and the flying task if more attention is needed to strive for accuracy). Occasionally, each task may even demand the working memory buffer of the other (for example if talking about directions then the visual spatial sketch pad will be required to imagine the route).

It has been shown that flying an accurate ILS approach is adversely affected by mentally processing crosswind information (Ebbatson, Jarvis, Harris 2007). This is because although the crosswind information is presented verbally, the calculation of the wind vector requires heavy executive functioning and some spatial visual resource. Hence the mental process of the wind calculation task competes for attention (central executive) with the concentration being paid to the manual flying task to keep it accurate.

In Figure 10 the two diagonal 'crossover' arrows represent tasks where the input is on one side but the response is on the other, such as reading aloud (visual input to the visual special sketch pad, but vocal output) or writing

dictated words (auditory input, manual output). These can be shared in the same way as tasks that occupy only one side of the model.

These sorts of theories help to predict which tasks can be potentially executed concurrently and which cannot. For further or deeper information on multiple resource theory see Wickens (1999).

### **3. Tasks in Series (Attention Switching)**

Knowing that in most cases concurrent tasks will compete for resources to some extent, doing one task at a time may appear to be the ultimate solution if time allows. However the very act of switching tasks is expensive in terms of attention and is therefore intuitively avoided if at all possible.

### **4. Time available for task (Speed of task)**

Obviously, attempting to process a task more rapidly than one would prefer adds difficulty to the task, and potentially induces error. Additionally, the very awareness of reduced time can itself add an extra attentional demand (the pilot gives some attention to the considerations and awareness of the time criticality). There is clearly a danger of a vicious workload circle beginning.

## **Effects of high workload**

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From a practical perspective, increasing workload has the following symptoms, each of which will be discussed:

- Attentional and task focusing
- Task shedding and reprioritization
- Implications for Situation awareness
- Increased use of decision short cuts and less scrutiny or review.
- Increased fatigue and chance of error

Sustained workload contributes to fatigue. Very high workload (particularly fast onset) and feelings of not coping with the workload can cause high arousal or stress. All these things make error more likely.

A direct effect that occurs with high workload, is focusing of attention (also called attentional narrowing, coning or funnelling). There is some scientific debate about whether this effect is primarily associated with arousal but because of the approximate commonality between symptoms of high arousal and high workload, for practical purposes this is unimportant. Attentional focusing is a very effective strategy that appears to have evolved in order to maximise concentration on a problem or threat (e.g. the object that is creating the workload or arousal). Additionally, because the attention is narrowly focused, other events and stimuli that would normally draw attention, fail to do so. Hence information outside the task can be missed. Although often a



positive effect (minimizing distraction) this can lead to important signals being missed, even signals that are seemingly highly salient (loud, bright etc.) There are many repeated stories of pilots landing despite continual loud alerts sounding all the way down the approach because the gear was up.

Under a high workload task, a pilot may not have the capacity to search and assess other areas, problems and alternatives. This is one reason for the insidious nature of an apparent bias that leads pilots to stick to courses of action that, in hindsight, appear to be flawed. In order to do something other than continue a mentally planned action (such as continuing an approach) attention will have to be diverted from the primary task in order to make other assessments. As well as the reluctance to remove attention, this would also represent a switch of attention that has a cost all of itself.

When all attention is focused on one element of the operation (such as an emergency) then situation awareness of other aspects and the wider picture will suffer as a consequence. The process of maintaining high awareness requires attention and hence workload and it follows that situation awareness around the area of focus can be high even when overall Situation awareness might decrease. Maintaining situation awareness requires attention, and situation awareness is therefore as likely to be lost under very low workload, as it is under high workload. Hence the relationship between high workload and situation awareness is far from simple.

If the cause of excessive workload is several concurrent or serial tasks then the urge is to shed one or several tasks, and to avoid continual switching (Jarvis 2010). If some of those tasks are autonomous then the skill may continue unchecked. In the case of executive control tasks, one or more tasks might effectively be dropped but this will not always be noticed due to the concentration on other tasks. Unfortunately there is no general rule to predict which tasks may suffer and which will be prioritized; situations and combinations of tasks are extremely varied and so it will depend on many factors.

A poorly planned glider flight under a low cloud base developed into a very low level circuit. With the increasing workload and considerable anxiety, I became fixated on the landing area. The low height and strong tailwind exacerbated the sense of speed to such an extent that I ceased to monitor the ASI. I was very lucky to survive the stall and spin accident that destroyed the glider.

In the above anecdote, the pilot's attention has narrowed to the critical area of concern: the landing area (the pilot was unsure whether he could make the circuit work). Under high workload the scan of the ASI was dropped because powerful (but unreliable) speed cues were available from the peripheral

texture flow that falsely reassured him of the airspeed (see chapter 2, 'Perception'). The workload and anxiety were strong enough to overcome all the pilot's experience and training in this respect.

When assessing information and making decisions, high workload can lead to complex decisions being taken more rapidly than normal, possibly without considering some factors, options or complexities. Whether a decision is itself the creator of high workload or whether it must happen alongside a different high workload task, similar issues apply. The temptation can be to base that decision on just a few (or a single) criteria rather than considering how factors interact (non-compensatory decision making, see chapter 9, 'Decision making'). Heuristics and biases could be used with little scrutiny or review. A temptation will be to get the decision made and shed that decision task (lowering workload and returning to the primary task of operating the aircraft).

An increased chance of error comes from all the above factors. High workload on a particular task makes errors on other tasks more likely to happen and less likely to be noticed, particularly autonomous routines or checking tasks that have been under-prioritised. There can be benefits from high workload; task engagement and concentration on a single task are some.

## Application of knowledge - Workload

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Processes that primarily require executive control will add considerably to workload. These might include concentrating, paying attention, calculating, trying to remember something, being careful, maintaining awareness, doing an unfamiliar or novel task, doing a new or unlearned task, doing a challenging task, making a decision, assessing evidence, reviewing a situation, looking for something, listening to something or someone, managing a set of tasks, etc. Although most of these things happen regularly on a flight deck, excessive workload is not usually caused. But when they are required to be managed in addition to existing tasks, or are particularly challenging or time limited, there is a danger of excessive workload and problems associated with it.

Lowering of workload can be discussed in the light of the four workload drivers discussed earlier (from Jarvis 2010). Task difficulty is the driver that is least likely to be able to be reduced at the time; there is often no quick way to make a task less difficult.

Time limitation (speed of task) is the most obvious variable that a pilot can change in order to affect workload. When possible, allowing more time for a task lowers the workload and helps to avoid a vicious cycle of workload from building up.

A captain on a line check needed to return to land after a technical snag, meaning they could not dispatch for the next sector. After the decision had been made he said to the F/O 'Let's not hurry, keep flying away from the airfield whilst we make a plan and set up the FMS - that way we will have time to fly a normal descent and approach' [1]

Parallel tasks usually require effective CRM practices; relieving a colleague of one task for a short time, or asking a colleague to take over a task can bring back sufficient capacity for normal functioning.

With serial tasks, the issue is not the tasks themselves, but the switching. The brain naturally tries to avoid continual attention switches that are costly and difficult, but when two non-sharable tasks must be completed the strategy used for parallel tasks applies (CRM, re-arranging flight deck tasks).

Unfortunately, there are situations that occur on the flight deck that have aspects of all the four workload drivers, particularly emergency situations. In such cases, if time can be created it lowers the workload as well as facilitating better management of tasks between crew-members.

Dealing with high workload is problematic for an individual once they are in a high workload situation. This is not because people do not recognize high workload: individuals are good at self-reporting their workload once prompted. However several other effects mean that high workload may not be recognized for what it is, at the time. Firstly, the perception of time changes so that it feels like less time has passed; hence the higher speed of tasks is less obvious. Secondly, high workload tasks are so absorbing that the individual may not consider the workload that they are under (in effect they do not have the time and capacity to step outside the situation briefly to consider their own effectiveness). Because of these issues, relying on individuals to recognize and then manage their own workload can be unreliable unless specific training or practice is given. More realistic triggers for initiating workload management are recognition of the changing situation before the workload elevates (avoidance), recognition of high workload in a different crew member, or recognition of the task characteristics and types of situations (rather than recognizing the effects of them).

A new Captain experienced his first emergency and was returning to the airfield having had an engine shutdown a few minutes in to the flight. Whilst the QRH was being completed, ATC turned the aircraft downwind while the crew prepared for the approach. On being given a closing heading, even though everything was done, the Captain recognised he was not feeling comfortable and felt rushed. He instructed the F/O to tell ATC to extend downwind for another minute, extended the flaps and took a moment to review prior to turning in. [1]

## Application of knowledge for training - Workload

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### In the classroom

In a classroom environment, many activities can be used to replicate workload. These do not have to be within an emulated flight deck, but the types and elements of the tasks should match those in a flight situation. For example, a time-forced physical manipulation task that requires visual and spatial processing resource can be chosen to use the same resources as a challenging manual flying task. A verbal task such as answering questions aloud can emulate communication tasks. However it is no good simply getting pilots to do such tasks, unless there is an objective relating to the pilots' roles and some consideration of how such tasks feed into the learning experience.

Example: the trainer might decide to facilitate thought about task type and 'effective' workload management by giving one manual and two verbal tasks that must be maintained at all times by two pilots who must decide how to share them. To add challenge, the least challenging verbal task might in fact compete for some visual/spatial resource and hence be unable to share with the spatial task, while the harder verbal task competes less. This might lead to a discussion about why the two seemingly most challenging tasks would be better off being done by one person, while the other 'easy' verbal task is picked up by the other. Clearly there are a myriad of ideas around such themes.

Case studies can be used and the participants asked how the crew in the case study could realistically have managed a specific part of the situation differently? Discuss whether there are any general lessons from that exercise, in terms of approaching any high workload situation.

### In the simulator

The simulator instructor or evaluator who identifies high workload (probably predicts it based on the task) should ask themselves what drivers are creating the workload and whether the crew are actively dealing with the workload (workload management – C8). Here are some questions that the trainer should ask themselves;

- Did the crew recognise the workload (before, during, etc.)?
- Did the crew attempt to reduce the workload? How?
- Did the crew work together to balance or shift workload appropriately, or did they try to unsuccessfully multi-task by themselves when the other crew-member could have alleviated the problem?
- Did one crew-member recognise and proactively re-task to reduce the other's workload?
- Did the crew make any attempt to assess or extend the time available?

As the situation is ongoing, the trainer should consider what is being done and what has to be done (i.e. tasks) and how those tasks are being distributed and swapped. They should also look for signals that the crew have recognised the workload problem (existing or pending) and signs that they are attempting to deal with it. There is a difference between a crew attempting to deal with the situation and attempting to deal with the workload. Although both may be related and both may happen, one should not be mistaken for the other; a crew can work very well to sort a situation out, while failing to manage workload. Such an approach may have consequences on other aspects of the overall detail.

After a very high workload situation in which the crew could have managed better, it is a good idea to repeat it, but this time position-freeze the simulator at a critical point and allow the crew as much time as they like to sort it out, assess, plan and even prepare things before unfreezing and continuing. Some examples of questions and prompts for the trainer would be:

- What did the crew do differently the second time?
- How did it feel compared to the first attempt?
- How much extra time did they use?
- How could they have generated that the first time (without position freeze)?
- How could the crew have done an overall better job on the first attempt?

## Competencies

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Obviously, this chapter is directly related to competency C8 (Workload Management). The last section (above) discusses application.

‘Workload Management’ (C8) is the competency most integral to other competencies, because workload itself is so central to much of human factors. Workload Management can be validly argued as the most important and the least important competency.

In the former case, workload management could be identified as the route of poor decision outcomes (C6), ‘low’ Situation awareness (C7), skill-based errors when following procedures (C1), manual flying issues (C3) and communication issues (C2), poor leadership and teamwork (C5), and ineffective automation management (C4). In the latter case, it can be argued that workload management is itself is a type of decision making, relying on leadership, flight path management, good awareness and monitoring, and effective use of procedures, and is therefore redundant to other competencies.

Some previous assessment systems used ‘workload management’ as a central tenant of human performance, with all other categories of performance / behaviour emanating from it (like spokes off a hub). Such ideas reflect the integral nature of workload to other aspects of human performance.

For these reasons it is easy for some instructors to over-use workload management, and others to under-use it, when using CBTA assessment.

In any case, it is likely that workload management assessments will often correlate highly with assessments on other competencies.

Not only do these discussion points demonstrate the challenge of objectively integrating ‘Workload Management’ into a CBTA assessment, but of using a CBTA system in a balanced and meaningful way.

# Chapter 7 - Surprise and Startle

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## Knowledge

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

**C8 - Workload Management**

## Startle Reflex

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The human startle reflex was famously investigated by Landis and Hunt (1939) who filmed the reactions of people to an unexpected pistol shot occurring just behind them. It is now well established that there is a reflex-like event (startle reflex) that blinks the eyes and causes a whole body 'jerk' to occur (similar to that sometimes caused in sleep). This reflex has a relatively basic neural pathway from the sense organ. Many things can cause (or contribute to) a startle reflex, including sudden noises, unexpected tactile sensations, abrupt shocking perceptions, the sensation of falling or an abrupt visual stimulus.

There is little evidence that a startle reflex alone creates much of a sustained or lasting impact on cognitive functions (although there are some minor and short-lived physiological changes such as raised heart rate). A skilled motor task will be momentarily disrupted by a startle reflex but return to normal within five to ten seconds. For more details see Thackray & Touchstone (1970).

For pilots, the main effects of the pure startle reflex are the interruption of the on-going process and distraction of attention towards the stimulus. These happen almost immediately, and can be quickly dealt with if the cause is found to be non-threatening; for more detail see Graham (1979), Herbert, Kissler, Junghöfer, Peyk & Rockstroh (2006) or Schupp, Cuthbert, Bradley, Birbaumer & Lang (1997). A further possibility is that any 'primed' motor action may be *triggered*. For more detail see Valls-Sole, Kumru, Kofler (2008).

## Reaction to Fear

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A perception of fear can cause a startle reflex to be potentiated (more pronounced) should it occur and attention to become more focused. In a state of fear, very little is required to trigger a full 'fight or flight' response (a startle will probably be sufficient at this point).

## Fight or Flight

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When we perceive a serious and imminent threat (whether we are already in a high state of fear or not) the hypothalamus initiates a cascade of events (nervous and hormonal) such as increased heart rate and breathing, secretion of adrenaline, and increased sweating. This is called the alarm reaction and is part of 'fight or flight' (see chapter 10, Stress). These changes immediately prepare the body for action to maximize the chances of survival in the anticipated imminent encounter. No startle is required to activate the fight or flight response, although a startling stimulus may be part of, or coincident with, the same threat.

Importantly the alarm element of the fight or flight response also appears to have an immediate and sustained impact on our cognition. Almost all mental capacity becomes focussed on the threat and/or the escape from it. As long as the required response to the threat is to engage in a single basic task (i.e. a single learned skill or set of easy steps) then this focussing of attentional resource can be beneficial. The senses can appear heightened to the threat and the level of attention is very high but very focussed. The following anecdote is from a non-IMC rated, general aviation pilot.

Having descended to avoid infringement, we had to deviate from our track and fly through the visible VFR trenches between increasing cloud and rising ground. I could not believe how quickly the weather had changed from the time it took us to venture the 46 nm from the Sunny Cotswolds to the rural high Welsh terrain. Before we could execute a 180 turn, cloud in our 9 o'clock position rapidly engulfed us. A heightened sense of hearing coupled with adrenaline amplified some disturbing rattles in the cabin, including the sound of pelting rain, and startled us into the most alert state of mind that we have ever been in. After invaluable guidance from London Radar, we emerged into VMC after the longest 6 minutes of our lives!

The anecdote describes the heightened attention to the threat. ATC involvement was crucial, because it meant problem solving tasks and ambiguity were lifted off the pilot who could simply concentrate all attention on carrying out that single basic flying task. Although not experienced at this task, it was sufficiently bounded that with the heightened and focussed attention, the pilot managed it. It will be seen that without ATC removing the ambiguity, the pilot would probably not have managed the fight or flight response.

Some experimental evidence has suggested a decrease in memory performance of recently learned information (using memory tests) during fight or flight. But there is little evidence that long-term memory or skills are negatively affected, except in terms of manipulation issues (coordinating the



skill, e.g. with tremor). So it is probable that old established learning and innate knowledge trumps new learning during fight or flight. This may be part of the explanation for an effect often called 'primacy' whereby individuals report that in difficult situations they reverted to early (or previous) learning, even when it was inappropriate to do so (for example reverting to the handling characteristics of a previous aircraft type).

## A vicious circle

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Hypothetically and anecdotally, during fight or flight pilots can get mentally 'stuck' within a situation (unable to interpret or resolve a situation, and unable to move on, even if that situation would present no problems under normal circumstances). This usually happens when, unlike the above anecdote, the situation is ambiguous or requires problem solving. For practical purposes, let us try to generate a hypothetical way of understanding this issue that takes reasonable account of the scientific knowledge.

In a fight or flight state, time is key to survival. In modern humans, the fight or flight response is accompanied by an urge to be engaged in the active solution (like in the above anecdote – where the pilot is simply concentrating all their attention on one task, in line with the natural fight or flight response). But to do this the correct response must be relatively unambiguous and accessible (e.g. known or easy to work out). More ambiguous cases might require problem solving or complex thinking to assess the situation or response required. But in fight or flight, the brain *wants* to quickly establish a very basic mental model then drop any assessment process in order to concentrate all attention to the response. But if resources are not given to assessment and problem solving then the person cannot decide the best response. This situation would be best described as a vicious circle. As part of this, during the fight or flight response the brain favours sources of information that require the minimum of processing. This means simple 'real-world' cues or conditioned cues and responses.

All this worked well in nature, over millennia. However it is a problematic strategy when dealing with new technology (within which humans have not evolved). Humans are not perfectly adapted to perceive the cues and information from modern interfaces. Such information requires more mental processing than does 'real world' information, particularly in new situations.

Taking all the above into account, it can be helpful to hypothesise a vicious circle occurring during ambiguous situations on modern flight decks, as follows: The brain requires a basic and quick understanding of the problem in order to act at once. But because flight deck information is often abstract and unnatural, the pilot requires more time to work out the problem than they would if the cues were natural real-world ones; time that they are

unconsciously not willing to allow. Unless this conflict is resolved, the pilot becomes mentally 'stuck' (the start of the vicious circle).

Let us take a simple example: an unusual attitude. While easy enough normally, when experiencing extreme fight or flight, a pilot may glance at the attitude indicator but be unable to make sense of it (particularly an unusual and unfamiliar attitude) because the brain does not want to dwell on assessment, but wants to move to engagement in the task resolution. The pilot (consciously) does not know the attitude and needs a little more resource and time before acting or responding. The pilot is stuck. Anecdotally, this feels like a mental block. There is no easy solution:

1. If the pilot yields to the unconscious urge and breaks the vicious circle by making a spurious or guessed response then this could solve the situation by lucky chance (an action was effective) but also risks disaster (such as a fatally wrong control input). In any case, if the action does not solve the situation (or leads to a further threatening situation) the fight or flight continues, and nothing is resolved.
2. Alternatively, if the pilot continues trying to process the information then they may not receive the resource to process it while in that state, and so remain stuck.

While flying straight and level in the cruise during an early instrument flying detail, the increasing pressure (levels of concentration and air traffic input) eventually became too much. Loss of Situation awareness and orientation was sudden with no obvious warning precursor. Despite staring at the instruments, nothing made sense. At this point the only option appeared to be to eject. However this was an instructional detail, and the reassuring words 'I have control' were sufficient to completely negate the workload pressure. As quickly as the mental picture was lost, it was regained. The experience was frightening and unforgettable. [10]

In the above anecdote, it is likely that the increasing pressure and workload narrowed attention causing difficulty in managing the various tasks, and ended in a fight or flight response (perhaps in response to the realization of being overloaded). This led to the pilot feeling the need to escape the situation. The action of the instructor taking control resolved the threat. From that point mental resources and time were no longer quite so focussed on the perceived threat, and interpretation quickly occurred.

## Application of knowledge – Surprise and Startle

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### Startle Reflex

The startle reflex should not cause serious sustained problems for pilots in most circumstances. One recent possibility however is that due to the

industry focus on 'startle effect' or 'startle factor' and the linking of it to disturbing accidents (often inaccurately or through conjecture) some less confident pilots could mistakenly infer that a startle itself may seriously affect their ability, generating a fight or flight response. Aviation commentators, trainers, conferences and publications must be careful not to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Without continual exposure to all possible startle stimuli, we cannot avoid the startle reflex, and cannot control it as it occurs. A particularly intense startle will be caused either by the magnitude and onset of the stimulus, or by a person's underlying feeling at the time, particularly of fear or anticipation.

### **Fight or flight**

This appears to be the closest effect to the 'startle effect/factor' colloquialism used often in aviation, and so it is reasonable to consider how it applies and whether anything can be done about it.

The flight or fight response is an innate reaction (i.e. hard-wired), but there is also generally agreed to be an overall element of learned emotional response. Preventing innate emotional responses is not possible in practice.

However, the fight or flight response is a reaction to a set of perceptions. Recall that it is the perception or interpretation of the situation (not the situation itself) that the body reacts to. This is one reason why given a common set of circumstances, some people will experience a flight or fight response, whereas others will not. Once a set of circumstances is felt to be safe (unconsciously) then experiencing those circumstances becomes less threatening, and less likely to cause an emotional response (fight or flight). Given this, a realistic (but not particularly practical) way to reduce the effect is to reduce the perception of fear caused by exposure to the situation. Usually this would be through exposure to the situation and/or solution so that it begins to feel non-threatening. The obvious difficulty is that infinite situations to gain exposure to.

However reduced fear of situations can happen at a slightly more general level (for example becoming more confident in one's ability to cope with emergencies, more familiar with an aircraft type or more familiar with unusual situations or upsets).

A more practically realistic counter-measure is to align the task expectation in a way that recognizes the cognitive response. This points towards the need for the simplest assessment or solution possible to remain safe.

Recall that in a fight or flight state the brain likes to respond as quickly as possible (or at least get closure of the assessment process) and does not like to engage in difficult processing or thinking about what action might be best.

Well learned, easy, rule-based tasks will be very attractive, and preferred in such situations. As long as those tasks are reliably harmless (at worst) across all situations (or easily recognised situations), then such a solution is worthy of wider consideration.

We had to 'de-plane' due to an APU fire. The air-bridge was still connected to the front left door so all passengers would go that route back to the terminal. There was some confusion among cabin crew and passengers. I had no clear role (my door was not in use) and I felt rising panic as I wondered what to do. However as the evacuation started I found myself counting the exiting passengers, so that we would know when it was complete and could exit ourselves. This felt like an important thing to do and although challenging in that situation, it was a task that I could achieve. I suddenly felt calm and in control. All the panic disappeared and I was able to say for sure when we had definitely evacuated all 139 passengers. I think doing that task kept me calm and focused [8]

In the above anecdote, after a probable fight or flight response, the crew-member defaulted to a clear rule-based task that was within her capability when in a fight or flight state (counting is learned early in life). At that point, she broke the cycle and could function clearly again. Rule based, well-learned tasks (in this case simply counting people) are very attractive in such situations. Because the task felt useful and achievable, it calmed her and lifted the fight or flight response from her, allowing her to perform extremely well in that task (which was probably not as simple as it sounds when people are trying to de-plane in a hurry).

This explains why running QRH drills or checklists is both effective and calming. It is very comforting for pilots to be able to run through a set of familiar, well-defined rule based-steps, and doing this can help to maintain a functional flight deck. Each easy, rule-based task, gives that pilot perceived control of a task and with it the possibility to break out of any vicious fight or flight circle. These tasks act to distract from the threat and so calm the perception of threat that is causing fight or flight. Completing the task successfully can also help to give the impression that the threat is being dealt with. The more that any task is perceived by the crew to resolve part of the situation (whether it has done so or not) the more positive its effect will be in terms of countering the cognitive symptoms caused by fight or flight.

The best mitigation solution therefore to the elements that form 'the startle effect/factor' is a prepared linear, simple, rule-based response (whether actions, words or thoughts). The classic rule of 'aviate, navigate, communicate' is a very good starting point in most cases, but in severe and heightened cases with fight or flight, it may not be simple enough. Aviating (prioritising on flying) may not bring relief, and may not resolve the situation.

For example in a severe upset situation or with a primary control or display problem, the 'aviate' task may not be resolvable when in the fight or flight state, and the pilot(s) could get stuck trying to 'aviate'. The Air France Flt 447 accident may be an example of this, although it will never be known for sure. The 'aviate' task is in fact complex (more so for some pilots than others). A simple rule-based task would be 'airspeed reading?' (i.e. assessment) or 'control column central' (i.e. action). A simple well-learned (conditioned) act would be 'airspeed too low – control column forward'. However the recognition of a stall is more complex, relying on multiple cues, and in some cases may be difficult in a fight or flight state. One can instantly see the difficulty in generating simple rule-based tasks to solve complex situations. Sometimes, such solutions can be quite specific and individualised.

I was usually the cabin crew member 'volunteered' to deal with medical emergencies. The first few times I found it difficult to get my thoughts clear due to 'internal panic' as I first arrived at the casualty and everyone else stood looking over me expectantly. One day I accidentally stumbled on a solution that worked well for me personally from then on; it was that no matter what the emergency was, I would take the heart rate first. While counting the heart rate for 15 seconds or so, I had time to collect my thoughts, onlookers calmed-down as they perceived I was in control, I felt in control, and the situation quickly became clear in my mind. After taking the heart rate, I always felt able to think clearly and deal with the situation. It didn't matter that the heart rate was sometimes irrelevant! [8]

The above anecdote is a personal solution that worked for the individual. It is used here as an informational anecdote only, to illustrate the general principle, not as a suggestion or an example to be necessarily followed.

## Application to Training - Surprise and Startle

Training can emphasise the difference between the startle reflex and other responses to fear or threat, specifically the flight and fight response. The startle reflex does not necessarily lead to degraded cognition, and under most circumstances, a pilot will regain almost full cognition before having time to think about what happened.

Suggested resolutions for training the fight and flight element of surprise and startle are:

- Avoid taking any action unless obvious (the urge will be to act).
- Act simply. Do only the simplest safe actions.
- If stuck trying to unsuccessfully assess one thing, acknowledge it and actively switch attention to something else.

- Consider hand over or swap of control or of tasks (to break the vicious circle)
- If someone else appears stuck, assess their task and then consider offering to take it from them in a confident manner (albeit perhaps for a short time).
- If the feeling arises (and it is recognizable) simply vocalizing the fact can help alert the other pilot so that they can help

## Preparing and training for startle and surprise.

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There is much debate around avoiding or reducing startle and surprise (or mitigating its effects) through training. This is a very complex area. The main practical issue is that events that cause startle and surprise are unusual by their very nature, otherwise they would no longer cause startle and surprise. The idealistic solution would be familiarisation with every potential situation, but this is obviously not possible.

However, familiarisation with a general set of events can have an extended impact on unfamiliar but similar events. In other words, there is a positive transfer effect from some situations to related (but not identical) situations, in terms of familiarisation. For example, familiarisation with upset attitudes will reduce the severity of startle in some upset situations that the pilot may not have specifically practiced. In essence therefore practicing 'unusual' events has an impact beyond those specific events. Hence the more unusual events a pilot experiences and deals with, the more 'resilient' they ought to become. This must not be over-stated however. Familiarisation means a lot of exposure, not just a few simulator scenarios over one session, and the shared (or unshared) situational characteristics may not be at all obvious or predictable.

## Training for the unexpected and unfamiliar

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There is no silver bullet training solution to improve on millions of years of evolution. Notwithstanding fight or flight, a major human strategy for dealing with unfamiliar situations is to engage conscious cognition; i.e. to think it through. Indeed, some scientists theorise that this is a major reason for the evolution of consciousness. This means using knowledge-based performance, and it is well established that this is not perfect. In novel and unfamiliar situations, experts are less able to use their expertise (pattern matching, recognition, rule-based solutions, etc), and so their knowledge-based performance can be considerably degraded. When the situation is also startling or stressful, it can mean a combination of fight or flight and imperfect knowledge-based performance. This is far from ideal, and not something that lends itself to easy training solutions.

Hence, training for unexpected situations needs to offer support that will work in situations that can be reasonably expected to occur (if occasionally) or make the situations more familiar by increasing exposure. In other words, solutions need to be more specific around consideration of possibilities.

Obviously (and ideally) the most effective mitigation is to experience more and more possibilities and become confident at dealing with them. Where a pilot has confidence that the emergency can be safely dealt with, they will be less likely to succumb to the negative implications of startle and surprise.

Beyond this, it can be useful to mentally rehearse (or pre-brief) situations that might occur (eventualities) to reduce potential for fight or flight and/or make them easier to identify and deal with if they should happen. This should improve performance in those eventualities, but it does have risks associated with it, depending upon how it is done. If, having pre-briefed one or two contingencies, a different critical issue then happens there may be greater potential for misdiagnosis or error than without the pre-brief. This is because the person is primed to identify and deal with the 'briefed / rehearsed' eventuality (i.e. a different problem to the one that occurs). This has the potential to make the situation considerably worse than it would have been without the pre-brief / pre-cognition. Therefore, any such pre-briefing should not be overly-specific, and the actions rehearsed should be harmless (at worst) in the event of a different emergency occurring. This sort of strategy is best used when specific situations are unexpected but predictable, such as go-arounds, but it is nevertheless not without inadvertent possibilities.

There is debate over the value of attempting to create actual surprise and startle during training, by engineering such events. A fundamental question is 'what constitutes a genuine surprise/startle event?' There is no clear set of events since they will be different for each individual. However in general, the event would need to be both unexpected and unfamiliar. Unless it is both, then it would not create the effect being discussed. For example an 'unexpected' go-around would not be ideal as a surprise and startle event, because it is familiar (especially in training) and is not truly unexpected (since it happens only in a short window, and is common in training). However, a rare emergency occurring after the crew have dealt with a familiar and briefed emergency might have a surprising impact (i.e. the crew thought they were finished!).

Unfortunately, simulators cannot fully or reliably simulate the psychological effects that are experienced in extreme fight or flight. Nevertheless, there can be benefits from simulating such events. Firstly, if a real startle can be engineered then pilots will be better prepared to recognise its effects in future. Secondly, if the pilots deal with the situation despite the startle, then it builds confidence and may reduce potential for startle should that situation be

encountered again. Thirdly, if there is a specific overt aim (such as using a pre-briefed drill) then the training helps to build the dominance of the habit. For example, the six bullet points above (suggestions for dealing with startle) could have been pre-taught and even practiced before the surprise event, in order that crew can access the 'tools' in that event.

On the other hand, there is negative potential. Negative training could result from the crews not dealing well with a genuine surprise/startle situation, and this could reduce confidence with the potential to make future fight or flight response more likely. Additionally, there may be little real training value unless there is a set objective for the crew (such as using a learned tool) as opposed to simply experiencing a surprising event and doing their best. Lastly, pilots might feel the exercise to be 'unfair', and this could impact their attitude to the whole session, or the training in general.

In summary, this is an area to be dealt with carefully, using preparation and possible practice, and making sure crews have as great a chance of success as possible (and therefore positive training).

## Competencies

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Workload Management (C8) is the most relevant competency for startle and surprise, since dealing with such situations is about managing the workload, albeit that the workload can be abnormal and impacted by the fight or flight response. Situation awareness (C7) is also relevant, since in a genuine startle awareness can narrow considerably.



## Chapter 8 - Situation Awareness (SA)

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### Knowledge

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

**C7 - Situation Awareness and Management of Information**

The general concept of situation awareness (SA) emerged from colloquial consensus. Arguably (and anecdotally) the term has been used for over half a century but SA is generally agreed to have become part of established aviation science and academia in the 1990s. Certainly from that time the scientific interest in the term 'situation awareness' grew.

Whereas situation awareness is very easily understood as a colloquial generality, it is surprisingly difficult to define or measure objectively. Criticism towards the concept of Situation awareness has been attracted by this problem. However as a vehicle of general understanding among flight crew, situation awareness appears to have merit. This is unsurprising given its roots; it almost certainly emerged as one of many terms used to express an idea in the real world. Flight crews are not usually concerned about definitions and measurements, but about understanding and communication of general ideas. From this perspective, situation awareness appears to have proven useful. A colloquial definition of situation awareness is "knowing what is going on". It also appears synonymous with the colloquial idea of 'mental models'. Situation awareness is deemed to be at its highest when the person is able to anticipate how a situation is likely to continue into the immediate future.

Situation awareness therefore appears to be a hypothetical state of the individual that continually changes (by the minute and even second). If so, it must relate to information processing models because it relies on information being properly sensed, perceived and interpreted. There must also be an element of attention because high situation awareness does not appear to be something that happens passively. Research generally agrees that maintenance of high levels of situation awareness increases workload, and hence uses attention. It follows that situation awareness is associated with working memory, and this is also generally agreed amongst theorists. Because it is a process reliant on working memory, the quality and quantity of situation awareness are necessarily limited. The process by which SA is actively updated is usually called situational assessment and is also associated with working memory. It is generally uncontended that a low level

of assessment normally happens naturally and passively in a conscious human but that higher levels of attention are required to assess actively in order to maintain high levels of awareness.

Classically, situation awareness is spoken about as having three levels: perceiving the situation (equivalent to recognising what is happening at the time), understanding the situation (understanding fully what is happening) and projecting the situation (equivalent to being able to project ahead to predict what is likely to happen next). These are known as levels 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Each stage is reliant on the one below it. Level 1 is said to be the foundation of SA because without perceiving the situation one cannot establish understanding of it (level 2), or project it forward (level 3). Similarly, level 2 (understanding) is vital to be able to project ahead (establish level 3 SA).

It is said that numerous types of failures can occur at each level, as shown in table v2 below (the types of failures are in the right-hand column). It can be seen that 'level 1' failures are mostly during the early stage of information processing (sensing, perceiving, etc.) This aligns with the earlier narrative (chapter 1 – information processing), in that information wrongly sensed, perceived or not available will make processing ineffective. Level 2 and 3 failures are associated with problems further into the information processing process, mostly in the working memory.

**Table 2:** SA Error Taxonomy (Endsley 1995)

Level 1 SA: failure to correctly perceive the situation	A: Data not available B: Data difficult to detect/perceive C: Failure to scan or observe data 1. Omission 2. Attentional narrowing / distraction 3. High taskload
Level 2 SA: Failure to comprehend situation	A: Lack of/poor mental model B: Use of incorrect mental model C: Over-reliance on default values in model
Level 3 SA: Failure to project situation into the future	A: Lack of/poor mental model B: Other

The three levels of SA above are approximately aligned with the central tenant of threat and error management (TEM). In order to avoid a threat one must be able to project ahead. In order to trap a threat or error one must understand the situation. If someone does not understand the situation then they are more likely to make an error requiring mitigation.

Situation awareness and information processing theory seem to have a lot in common and certainly large parts of them are, to an extent, interchangeable. Some trainers prefer to discuss issues using an SA-based model rather than an information-processing model and vice versa.

Information processing started out as a theoretical framework to explain cognitive phenomenon such as memory and perception whereas SA 'theory' was very probably started by practitioners trying to articulate and encapsulate the process of assessing and understanding situations in the real world, and was then described and expanded by academics later.

For these reasons, some people have found situation awareness to be a useful vehicle for articulating the initial general process that occurs in most tasks (such as decisions and skilled performances). Indeed some HF/CRM trainers substitute the early stages of information processing for situation awareness, and substitute the later parts for 'decision making' creating a simple information-processing model for articulating the process of making decisions based on good situation awareness. Ideas such as these can allow the trainer and trainees to articulate, understand and apply basic processes, and move towards forming safe practices. It is important that trainers recognise that all theoretical ideas (even scientifically supportable ones) are not hard facts, but are vehicles to assist understanding (whether scientific or colloquial). Hence, trainers should not become overly focussed on the exact nature of the various theoretical models, but simply use them to support and explain practical applications as they see fit.

More recent extensions of the SA theory include shared SA and distributed SA. Shared SA (or crew SA) refers to how Situation awareness is shared and divided across the crew. Distributed SA refers to how SA is distributed across the system, including the crew, interfaces, system and all components. The latter can only be modelled; there is no way to measure it. Both these theories tend to be descriptive rather than prescriptive.

## Application of knowledge – Situation Awareness

Situation awareness is said to describe a pilot's awareness of what is going on around him or her, e.g. where they are geographically, his/her orientation in space, what mode the aircraft is in, etc. Under Mica Endley's three levels, SA refers to:

- The perception of important elements, e.g. seeing a low oil pressure indication.
- The comprehension of their meaning, e.g. Is there a leak? Is it a faulty indication?
- The projection of their status into the future, e.g. Does this require a diversion?

Almost any case study can be found to have elements within in that could be described as 'loss of SA' or can be attributed to degraded SA. When studying an accident it can be tempting to attribute the cause to 'loss of SA' or insufficient level of SA but it is important go beyond this. 'Lost/reduced situation awareness' is a term that sometimes gets used very generally, often without much analysis. It is easy to identify in hindsight that the crew did not know something important but much more challenging to discover why, and determine whether the circumstances could have been reasonably foreseen and can be generalised to other situations. Often a crew 'lose situation awareness' due to concentrating on other things so it is crucial to analyse whether they took a reasonable course of action *in foresight*, not in hindsight. Also recall that if crews are distracted by other important events, the time and effort they have to spend on SA processes is low. That explains the loss, but it does not explain why they prioritised the way that they did. Such analysis should at least be seriously attempted.

In terms of maintaining and updating overall situation awareness (i.e. related to navigation – one's position in space) it is important to use multiple sources of information whenever possible (not just in order to triangulate one's position but to avoid problems caused by single unreliable sources or errors in interpretation of the source). Problems often occur when crews become reliant on only one source, making their situation awareness vulnerable. The anecdote below aptly illustrates the problem; the pilot relied solely on the VOR needle (which he had set wrongly) and did not use other sources of SA updating, such as the map.

To get back before dark I decided to follow a VOR radial approximately South East to Bovingdon rather than messing about with dead reckoning. But then I accidentally selected the frequency for Heathrow's VOR! Why I didn't check the frequency on the box I'll never know. My next error was relying totally on the VOR (I had no DME, so was just waiting for the VOR needle to flip). I must have looked at the ground often but somehow didn't compute a problem; probably I was focussed on doing a good job of tracking the radial (not being IMC rated). Had I checked on the map I would have noticed something wrong. Luckily, before getting too close to Heathrow a bit of weather got in my way and while having to re-orientate myself I fortunately recognised

Wycombe Air Park below and realised I'd messed up! I managed to sort it out ok after that and get in before dark... just. Many lessons learned and no harm done – thanks to a cloud.

In the following anecdote, the crew maintained general situation awareness but the single source of information about the destination turned out to be erroneous.

With some twenty minutes to run until landing we managed to establish contact with our destination, a vessel. Radio communication with the vessel was difficult; however, we had a good radar contact in the vessels reported position and elected to conduct an Airborne Radar Approach. As we broke from cloud close to approach minima we discovered the radar contact was not the vessel that we believed. We went around from the approach and contacted the vessel again. They had omitted to inform us they were making way and were now some 20nm from their last reported position! Fortunately we had added contingency fuel to cope with such a situation.

## Application to Training– Situation Awareness

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Initial training (in the classroom) could introduce the concept of SA and illustrate the dangers of poor SA (possibly using well-known incidents and accidents). Factors contributing to good and bad SA should be covered.

'Loss of SA' should not be deemed to be the cause of the accident. Much more depth is required in analysing the case study. Questions should be asked such as:

- What did the crew become unaware of?
- When did they stop noticing the critical element?
- WHY have they lost awareness of that aspect?
- What WERE they aware of?
- How could you use this knowledge to help you generally, in the future?

It is obvious to state that pilots must maintain high levels of SA at all times, in order to achieve safe flight and effective threat and error management. However, such a statement is simplistic. Maintaining high SA takes some effort and requires resources. In many situations a pilot has no easy way of knowing how to direct their effort or resource in order to achieve 'high' SA. SA is not something that one can easily interrogate. It is not possible to be certain of the level of SA that one has at any given time, although a pilot may have a feeling about their awareness levels. A pilot with a very different mental model to reality is often said to have lost SA but may have no idea that they have lost it, and indeed may feel perfectly normal. Because of this, it is not easy for pilots to determine the amount or type of assessment that they need to do in order to maintain or increase SA.

Also, under difficult conditions attention is taken away from the situational assessment task and so SA will degrade. It is established good practice (and worth reinforcement) that after an intense period of dealing with a specific situation, pilots make a wider review of their overall situation (partly in order to regain SA). It is however not simple for the pilots to know the extent that they may have lost SA, or to what extent they have regained it. SA involves awareness of many factors and so pilots can be under the firm impression that they have high SA, when in fact they may have a critical loss of SA in a single area. For these reasons, HF/CRM trainers should be open to the limitations inherent in discussing situation awareness as if it is a 'method' for maintaining safe operation. Additionally, despite tips and tools developed to assist in diagnosing SA, the HF/CRM trainer must be careful not to give the impression that this is an exact science.

Maintaining situation awareness may be a worthy principle and a good vehicle for a common articulation of a general phenomenon, as well as a way of helping pilots understand their limitations. However, it is not a 'silver bullet' for safety and HF/CRM must not give pilots that impression or any idea that maintaining high SA is simply a factor of effort or 'professionalism'. The trainer should be able to balance the debate with realistic expectations and knowledge.

When operating, recognition of reduced SA is understood to be important, although very difficult (as explained). It is unlikely that a pilot who has lost SA will passively recognise it without a clear signal or consequence. It is quite possible that SA will be regained on its own without the pilot ever realising that they had a very inaccurate mental model of the situation.

Many trainers find LOFT exercises and debriefs to be a useful way to improve the recognition of reduced SA with regard to both individuals and crew. The use of distractors to remove crew attention from an important but usually reliable parameter is one way to make the point. Mica Endsley advocates a training method whereby LOFT exercises are stopped midway through, in order to test individuals on their SA, and make them aware of their actual levels of SA, rather than their perceived levels, particularly at the end of an exercise.

Cues to recognition of 'loss of SA' have been proposed. The following list is adapted from Bovier 1997. It is claimed that most accidents involving human error include at least four of these cues, although such statements should be treated with caution because they imply causation and extrapolation without support.

- Ambiguity – information from two or more sources does not agree
- Fixation – focusing on one thing (i.e. attentional focus / tunnelling)

- Confusion – uncertainty or bafflement about a situation (often accompanied by anxiety or psychological discomfort)
- Not prioritising the flying task – everyone is focused on non-flying activities
- Everyone heads down
- Not meeting expected checkpoint on flight plan or profile ETA, fuel burn, etc.
- Skipping or not complying with SOPs
- Busting limitations, minimums, regulatory requirements, etc.
- Cannot resolve discrepancies – contradictory data or personal conflicts
- Not communicating fully and effectively – vague or incomplete statements

This list can be useful for a crew or trainer / checker. An item might suggest a problem with SA but it cannot confirm reduced SA. Hence pilots may need to assume reduced SA based on a few cues, and attempt to regain it if they have the capacity.

Regaining SA can be problematic for the reasons previously given (one will not know when it has been regained or what aspects may have reduced and when). Hence, regaining SA is effectively a blind process that is much the same as for normal management of the flight. Crews can prioritise their situational updating using the aviate, navigate, communicate model or any other systematic process. Tips for Good SA Management (Bovier, 1997) are as follows:

- Predetermine crew roles for high-workload phases of flight
- Develop a plan and assign responsibilities for handling problems and distractions
- Solicit input from other agencies, including cabin, ATC, etc.
- Rotate attention from plane to path to people (aviate, navigate, communicate)
- Monitor and evaluate current status relative to your plan
- Project ahead and consider contingencies
- Focus on the details and scan the big picture
- Create visual and/or aural reminders of interrupted tasks
- Watch for clues of degraded SA
- Speak up when you see SA breaking down

The following text is from JARTEL (2002) and gives examples of good and bad practices that could indicate clues to situation awareness.

### **1. Crews need to be constantly aware of the state of different aircraft systems.**

*Examples of poor practice:*

- Does not ask for updates
- Does not signal awareness of changing systems

*Examples of good practice:*

- Monitors and reports changes in system states
- Acknowledges entries and changes to systems

### **2. Crews need to be aware of their environment (position, weather, air traffic, terrain).**

*Examples of poor practice:*

- Does not acknowledge / repeat ATC directions
- Does not enquire about environmental changes
- Does not comment on relevant environmental factors, or is surprised by them

*Examples of good practice:*

- Collects information about the environment
- Contacts outside resources when necessary
- Shares information about the environment with others

### **3. Crews need not only to be aware of the present state of the aircraft systems and environment, but must also be able to predict future states in order to anticipate future events.**

*Examples of poor practice:*

- Does not set priorities with respect to time limits
- Does not discuss relationship between past events and present – future
- Is surprised by outcomes of past events.

*Examples of good practice:*

- Discusses contingency strategies
- Identifies possible – future problems

## **Competencies**

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**All the above is directly relevant to IATA competency 7 (situation awareness).** A closely related competency is C6 – ‘Problem Solving and Decision Making’, due to decision-making being reliant on situation awareness, and projections about the situation.



## Chapter 9 – Decision Making

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C5 - Leadership and teamwork**

**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

### Introduction

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Consider a simple continuum of different decision processes (fig 11). From left to right, less time is used and less attention is required (less mental effort) overall. When simplified, most types of decision-making sit on this line. The brain tries to shorten decisions whenever possible.

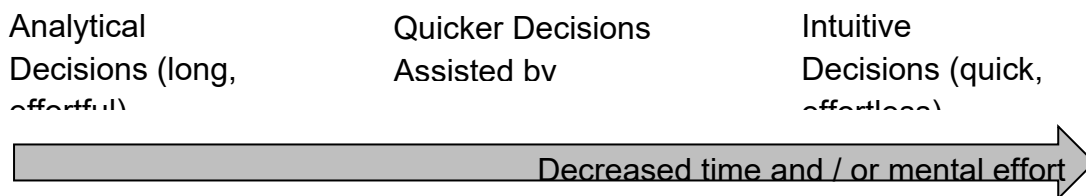


Fig 11. Simple continuum for decision types

On the far left: analytical decision-making is an effortful logical process that is mainly conscious processing. In the middle: time and effort are saved by using various unconscious short-cuts; this is usually a mix of conscious and unconscious decision mechanisms. On the right, decisions are made by what 'feels' right at that moment.

For ease of presentation, this section is broken into these three areas the decision continuum, and will cover knowledge, application and training for each of the three areas in turn. It must be stressed that the continuum is not a scientific finding, but a highly simplified overview of the enormous field of decision-making theory, created for the practitioner.

## Chapter 9, Part 1 -Analytical (classical) decision-making

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### Knowledge – analytical decision making

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Consciously working through information in an attempt to make the *ideal* objective choice is known as 'analytical decision making'. In theory, a perfect analytical decision is based on an objective evaluation of all relevant information and potential options available. Theoretically at least, this process gives the best chance of reaching the optimal decision choice and avoiding errors. However, attempting to make decisions in this way is cognitively challenging, uses a lot of time and attention, and generates workload.

The following is an illustration of an analytical decision process using a non-aviation context (intentionally).

After several failed relationships, Jessie has decided to try a 'rational' method to choose the next date, rather than basing the choice simply on attraction and 'gut-feeling' as in the past. This means attempting an analytical decision. There are three options for possible dates (Alex, Brooks and Casey) and Jessie decides to compare the positive and negative factors of each by entering them in a notebook (Figure 12). Of course, analytical decisions are not usually written down, but the notebook assists the example by reflecting the theoretical mental process. Jessie soon realises that the comparison is not straight forward, and decides to create a score for each potential date (option) by subtracting the number of negative points from the number of positive points (call this method 1). In this case Jessie will choose Brooks.

<i>negatives</i>			<i>positives</i>		
<i>Alex</i>	<i>Brooks</i>	<i>Casey</i>	<i>Alex</i>	<i>Brooks</i>	<i>Casey</i>
Not hard-working	Workaholic	Quite Shy	Fun character	Good looking	Kind
Unfit	Insecure	Has very old car	Great family	Hard worker	Not materialistic
Dislikes films	Arrogant	My friends don't rate them as very attractive	Good sense of humour	Good dresser	Likely to be loyal
Unattractive	Overly groomed		Trying to get fit	Good salary	Intellectual
Lives with parents	Has many dates	Don't think they have ever had a partner	Likes travelling and socialising	High wealth	Pleasant and polite
Poor dress sense	Likes football	Cloths are out of fashion	Dislikes football and sport generally	Intelligent	Good job
Relatively low paid, no wealth	Opinionated	Likes hockey	Likes fine restaurants	Successful with good prospects	Has own flat
Likes Gambling			Likes pets		
Big party-goer					

**Figure 12.** Analytical decision matrix of Jessie's perceptions

Although this method appears objective at first, it becomes obvious to Jessie that it fails to account for the *scale* of each element; e.g. is poor dress-sense worse than love of football? If so, by how much?

Having noticed the weakness of the first method, Jessie decides instead to score each potential date across a set of identical dimensions and compare each total (Figure 13).

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Scores (out of ten)</i>		
	<i>Alex</i>	<i>Brookes</i>	<i>Casey</i>
<i>Intelligence</i>	5	7	10
<i>Physical Attractiveness</i>	3	9	3
<i>Sense of Humour</i>	8	4	5
<i>Personality</i>	7	3	8
<i>Job</i>	5	9	9
<i>Wealth</i>	2	10	4
<b><i>Total.....</i></b>	<b>30</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>39</b>

**Figure 13.** Method 2: determining dimensions and scoring each.

After looking at the results of method-2, Jessie still suspects this method is not optimal. Jessie values a sense of humour more than wealth, and yet the method values these equally (i.e. a score of 10 for wealth adds as much weight to the outcome as a score of 10 for sense of humour). To account for this problem, Jessie assigns a general weighting to each dimension, by which to multiply each score (Figure 14).

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Weighting (importance)</i>	<i>Score X weighting</i>		
		<i>Alex</i>	<i>Brooks</i>	<i>Casey</i>
<i>Intelligence</i>	1	5	7	10
<i>Physical Attractiveness</i>	0.6	1.8	5.4	1.8
<i>Sense of Humour</i>	1	8	4	5
<i>Personality</i>	0.9	6.3	2.7	7.2
<i>Job</i>	0.2	1	1.8	1.8
<i>Wealth</i>	0.2	0.4	2	0.8
<b><i>Total.....</i></b>		<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>27</b>

**Figure 14.** Method 3. Scores on all dimensions weighted and summed.

Notice that wealth receives a weighing of 0.2 reflecting Jesse's feeling that this is of relatively little importance in a potential partner, compared to other dimensions. On the other hand, intelligence is weighted 1, reflecting its value to Jessie (five times higher than wealth). Of course, all this assumes that Jessie is perfectly in touch with their own implicit values, that these are stable entities, and that Jessie is accurately reflecting them in the weighting. Despite these limitations, this method appears the most sophisticated. Casey wins for the first time, mainly by scoring highest on dimensions that Jessie has valued (weighted) as important.

Just before picking up the phone to call Casey, Jessie quickly reviews the decision and realizes an omission. Keen to settle into a permanent long-term relationship and have a family, Jessie does not know which of the dates is similarly matched in that respect. After phoning a friend, Jessie discovers that Casey is not looking for the same thing. On this basis, Jessie must re-think the method again, realising that this important dimension was missed.

Jessie's example demonstrates analytical decision making. In theory, analytical decisions take the form of recognizing and considering the problem, generating options, comparing the various aspects (called 'decision dimensions') of each option, and choosing the best option overall. It has been proposed that this is what our brains roughly attempt to do when faced with multiple reasonable options (without necessarily being aware of it). Attempts

to test analytical decision processes have shown only limited success in laboratory experiments. Clearly, making decisions this way is challenging and only suitable in certain situations. Furthermore, real decisions are seldom purely rational and will almost always include some short cuts and omissions.

Jessie's example also demonstrates some important pit falls of analytical decisions. Trying to directly compare positive and negative attributes of the alternatives will always be highly subjective and prone to difficulty, as shown in method 1. Generating dimensions (method 2) may be better, but comparisons are usually problematic. Weighting dimensions resolves some of the problem (method 3) but both scores and weightings usually over-simplify the problem and miss potentially important subtleties. There is also the risk of missing important dimensions (as in the example). Reviewing a decision of this sort is sensible.

However, within such limitations, using analytical methods can help to overcome or notice some biases and short-cuts, and illuminate information or options that had not been considered.

## Application of knowledge – Analytical Decision Making

In aviation, the most likely occasions when analytical decision processes are attempted are novel and/or complex situations, and when time is available. Predictable circumstances are usually trained for and/or proceduralised, so most inflight decisions are rule-based or well-practiced. Hence analytical types of decisions in flight are generally only used in response to an unexpected, unusual, ongoing or emergency situation.

The diversion decision (if and where to divert) is the most obvious set of inflight circumstances requiring analytical decision processes because most situations requiring diversions are varied and novel (there is no easy rule or response). The combination of circumstances and options (often accompanied by an emergency) are unlikely to be the same as previously practiced due to situational complexity. Hence, although expertise can be factored into such circumstances, large elements are effectively new and unpractised on every occasion. Because of the inevitable novelty and complexity of divert decisions it is generally agreed that it is better for crews to consider and discuss them analytically, rather than simply act upon them intuitively. Other situations requiring analytical decision processes occur on the ground. Usually, these situations also involve novel complexities around unpredictable factors such as weather and changes to flight plans.

On most occasions where the classic kinds of analytical decision-making processes are used, the crew will be facing a situation that is undesirable and unanticipated. Such circumstances are not ideal in terms of clarity of thought,

and this is why decision acronyms (decision aids) are said to assist. Decision acronyms are as close as the industry has got to proceduralising the analytical decision process.

There are many aviation decision-aids (all in the form of acronyms) such as GRADE, DODAR, DESIDE, FOR-DEC and SHOR. Each letter stands for a step in the decision process, e.g. DESIDE: Detect, Estimate, Set Safe Objectives, Identify, Do, Evaluate. Such aids work by giving a structure to an analytical decision process, encouraging pilots to use a systematic process and avoid shortcuts that can lead to error. It is important to recognize that such tools aim to help structure the decision process, but do not make the decision.

Research evidence around use of such decision aids is mixed. For example, evidence by Li and Harris (2006, 2008) found improvement in the quality of pilots' situational assessment and risk management when using aids, but at the expense of speed (Harris 2011). On the other hand, Jarvis (2007) found no strong evidence that using decision aids (specifically FORDEC and DESIDE) made a positive impact upon general aviation pilots' decision outcomes when continuing towards unplanned IMC conditions. The most likely reason for this was that pilot decision-making during this situation was found to be more aligned with a process of trade-offs than the consideration of options (Jarvis 2007). As yet, no research has found convincing evidence that decision aids lead to better outcomes, although it is possible that this is because researching such a hypothesis in a valid and realistic way is extremely challenging.

Decision aids are designed for novel situations where time and information are clear. In general, analytical decision methods are unsuited to situations where there is insufficient time to make full use of them. In some situations, using analytical decision processes may even be worse than allowing the brain to deploy its normal shortcut tactics or rely on intuition. Hence the key point for operators to note is that analytical or acronym-aided decisions should only be attempted if time allows, or if the crew needs a structure or rule-base to revert to normal functioning in times of stress or high workload around unexpected events.

For these reasons, available time should be a major consideration for pilots when determining decision-making tactics. Several airlines add a 'T' prefix to their decision acronym (T-DODAR). The T stands for 'time' and reminds pilots to consider time-criticality and time available before running the decision process. This is effectively a pre-decision point asking the question 'is there time to run through a DODAR supporting analytical decision?' In rare time-critical cases, this can usefully support rejection of an aided decision process (e.g. where it becomes clear that the time spent running the process would be

likely to worsen the situation regardless of the outcome). At other times it can help to set boundaries on the decision time (e.g. where there is fuel criticality or worsening weather). An early consideration of available time is a useful addition to a dynamic decision process because there are situations in which spending five minutes making a decision is itself the worse possible option. Equally, it is best not to rush things when time is available. Hence, encouraging pilots to briefly consider the time available to them before determining how best to proceed is usually a moment well spent.

It is important for trainers to note that in most everyday situations humans do not use analytical methods of decision making, and nor could they. A pilot may make several decisions every minute in normal operation (and many more depending upon the definition of 'decision'). The definition of decision-making could include choices such as whether to put the seat belt sign on, make a radio call, or even check a particular display. Repeatable decisions of this kind do not require the depth of analysis given to analytical decision techniques.

With or without the support of decision aids, analytical decision-making processes can be poorly used even when the situation is optimal for their use. One common problem is option generation. In most situations there is no way for crews to systematically generate options and no way of knowing whether they have exhausted the possible alternatives. Beyond option generation lie a number of other problems for flight crew. These are illustrated in the example of Jessie, where each analysis method was flawed in some way. These problems can be generalised as follows:

Unsystematic consideration of the options (plucking positives and negatives out of the air in response to each option) can lead to missing important dimensions that will appear obvious in hindsight. This is very common when applying analytical methods to unexpected situations.

Being influenced by the 'amount' of good and bad points is misleading, hence the need to 'score' the alternatives (i.e. consider the amount of 'good or bad' not just *if* it is good or bad).

The amount of 'good or bad' still fails to account for the importance of each dimension. Good scores on important dimensions should influence the choice more. Hence there should be some consideration of what is required of the options prior to option assessment, or at least afterwards (as a review).

Missing an important decision dimension (simply because it did not come to mind)

Use of decision acronyms would not necessarily avoid or mitigate these problems. To demonstrate why not, consider a night-time diversion decision with three options (A, B or C). The method that some crews use will sound like Jessie's first method (and probably fit with a decision acronym). The crew goes through the options in turn, considering the positive and negative points of each. There may be no systematic consideration of what dimensions should be considered, with the risk of missing important dimensions such as runway length, weather, or airport opening times (because these were not triggered by any particular option). When crews start their decision from the options (rather than the objectives or dimensions) they risk missing important aspects of the problem.

Notice that a crew needs technical expertise to generate the dimensions, weigh them, generate the options, assess them, and decide the best to choose. Such expertise is not part of HF/CRM training but is gained through experience and technical training. Hence HF/CRM training can solve some parts of some decision-making issues but must rely on good technical training and pilot expertise to be fully realized. Here is where HF/CRM integration has some way to go. To teach people 'decision-making' in a classroom can be of value but is insufficient. Telling pilots to consider options does not help them identify the options, nor how to go about evaluating and comparing them. These things require specific technical knowledge and expertise.

Finally, Jessie's example did bring out a particularly important aspect of good decision-making: the review. There are two main reasons to review decisions after making or executing them. Firstly, when caught up in the decision process, the sheer workload means that there is a chance that even quite obvious issues (e.g. options or requirements) will be missed, and hence not factored in. Secondly, if a decision is reviewed after the action has been taken then the immediate effect of the decision can be factored into a review, and other important information may come to light.

## Application to Training – Analytical Decision Making

Trainers need to recognise where analytical decision making occurs and is appropriate.

When teaching methods of making or structuring analytical decisions, the basis of what such decisions are can be taught before (such as in a classroom) or in parallel. An understanding of analytical decision characteristics should include;

- What they are (basics – conscious thought process)
- Understanding of duration required (analytical decisions take time)
- High workload of such decisions (heavy use of attention)



- Reliance on good informational overview (e.g. SA etc)
- Consideration of options
- Need for review
- The imperfect nature of such processes
- When they are appropriate and inappropriate (e.g. time available, novel situations)
- Specific vulnerabilities (including those listed in the preceding section)

In the case of diversion decisions this could involve establishing time available for the decision, making an effort to assess the situation thoroughly (update SA), identifying the important requirements (e.g. runway length, weather, range, etc.), generating the appropriate and realistic options, deciding on a course of action, and reviewing with a mind on the vulnerabilities of such processes. In the real world the crew might use the options to generate requirements, which will also work as long as those important requirements that are not cued by the options (such as weather) are still considered or reviewed. The exact order or technique used is less important than the process being sound (i.e. options are considered with requirements).

### **Example exercise for integrated analytical decision-making**

*Classroom exercise example (allow at least one hour)*

**Aim – Improve the analytical decision process: crews generate and consider requirements as well as options.**

#### **Objectives**

Demonstrate the temptation as well as the problem of driving a decision from the options alone.

- Show the inherent risks involved.
- Make crews consider the critical option requirements.
- Allow them to practice the process, and demonstrate the worth.

#### **Exercise steps**

1. Put the pilots into groups (2 to 4).
2. Explain a night-time divert decision scenario (Airports A, B, C) and give them a summary sheet with airport plan but leave out some less obvious dimensions, (e.g. information on runway lighting). Make 'Airport A' the best choice (in the absence of the omitted information).
3. Tell the groups to call you across to them if they require any further information about any of the options.

4. Tell them they have five minutes to decide an option (a clock on a computer generated slide would help focus the time element).
5. Ask for then write down their preferred option.
6. Facilitate a debrief;
  - a. Ask each group what airport they chose
  - b. Ask what process each group went through.
  - c. Ask whether they considered the time available to them first, and how that affected the process
  - d. Make a note of whether they drove the process from the options or the decision dimensions (you can call them factors, requirements, aspects, etc. It does not matter what you call the dimensions, as long as it is consistent).
  - e. Point out the critical information left out about Airport A (e.g. it does not have runway lights).
  - f. Did any group miss that consideration – e.g. runway lights? If not, when did they realize that they needed to know? Why? Did they drive the decision process from the options available, rather than considering the requirements for a night time diversion (the dimensions) first? Humans are very bad at considering information that is not immediately to hand.
  - g. Talk through an effective process (e.g. consider time available for decision then consider the important things required, compare those across the options, consider other information around the options, select the option and review the decision).
7. At this point (or earlier; before the debrief if you are a confident facilitator), ask the groups to *step outside* the scenario, and simply list all the factors that they would need to consider for any option (airport) in a night time diversion and how important each is (use the term 'requirements' if preferred). This will force them to consider the critical decision dimensions in a *bottom-up* manner, rather than cueing them from the options themselves.
8. Did the groups come up with any factors/requirements (decision dimensions) that they did not consider in the A, B, C exercise? Why did they not miss these previously? E.g. was it because they were driven by the options?
9. Give groups a similar but different diversion scenario to try, but this time allow them to use their newly constructed list of night time

diversion decision dimensions in order to drive the comparison of options.

10. Now give them a completely different analytical decision (not a divert) and see if there is an attempt to take the critical requirements into account.

This lesson can subsequently transfer directly to the simulator (or be modified as a simulator exercise itself).

Note: This exercise should be facilitated by a person who is a confident in both facilitation AND technical expertise (preferably an experienced airline pilot with examples and anecdotes to hand).

## Competencies

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IATA competency 6 (Problem Solving and Decision Making) is directly related to analytical decision making. Since many analytical situations in multicrew aircraft are group processes, it is also relevant to competency 5 (Leadership and teamwork).

## Chapter 9 – Part 2 - Quicker Decision Mechanisms and shortcuts

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### Knowledge – Quicker Decision Mechanisms and Shortcuts

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Humans use *shortcuts* all the time. For example if asked the answer to  $70 \times 10$ , most people would not use the process of adding 10 together 70 times, they either retrieve the answer from long-term memory or use a shortcut such as putting a zero behind the 70.

In the same way, many scientists have long believed that humans very rarely, if ever, make decisions in the way that classical (analytical) models suggest. Simon (1957) used the term 'bounded rationality' to suggest that humans do not have the 'mental capacity' to make perfectly rational decisions. Scientists began to find evidence that the human brain appeared to use various mechanisms and shortcuts that did not fit the rational model (e.g. Simon, Kahneman and Tversky).

Many ways of shortcutting the rational process have been described and studied. Understanding some of these methods will enable a trainer to better understand why a crew did what they did (useful in exploring a case study or observing a crew). It is important for trainers to understand that these decision mechanisms are both inevitable and usually necessary. Trainers should not simply criticise any shortcut that they notice, or crudely draw a causal link between any observed mechanism and a poor outcome.

With analytical decision tasks there is a complex mesh of information that the brain must make sense of in order to form a hypothesis on which to base a decision. Selecting and combining information to build a hypothesis is a highly complex task and so the brain usually uses mechanisms that might be considered as 'shortcuts' to construct understanding (and then almost always a partial understanding, no matter how it is done). The trainer should have a basic understanding of common mechanisms in order to assess to what extent those mechanisms may have contributed to an outcome, whilst also appreciating their necessity.

The analytical decision-making process described previously usually involves having to compare and compensate for numerous different elements. Such *compensatory* processes demand a lot of mental effort and generate mental conflict (i.e. the various elements make the decision difficult to resolve). It is much quicker and easier to use *non-compensatory* processes. These are not

specific techniques, but processes whereby decision makers only use a small number of factors and simple criteria. For example, when making a diversion decision, rather than weighing up runway length, weather, distance, available approach type, passenger convenience, time, etc, the crew may simply decide to go to the nearest airport with sufficient runway length and weather minima. In that case only three factors were considered, and all were binary choices (yes/no) requiring no optimising of comparisons and compensations within a mesh of interacting variables. Clearly such decisions risk choosing a non-optimal option, but they are far easier to make and save time. Under high workload, and in emergencies, analytical decision processes tend to become more non-compensatory. It can be argued that all analytical decisions contain some elements that have been considered in a non-compensatory manner.

Most decisions can be crudely broken down into two parts: the assessment of the incoming information and the processing of that information (including what action to take if any). The first part (assessment) is roughly equivalent to SA (but requires more internal construction of hypotheses) and the second part is what is popularly understood to be the decision. The following description of decision mechanisms is split into two parts accordingly.

### Mechanisms for shortening information assessment

Many shortcut mechanisms occur at the stage where information is being assessed prior to generating options, determining responses etc. This must be expected given the huge amount of information that accompanies most big decisions. Working memory cannot hold all the details and complexities associated with all the sources of information, and must therefore find ways to make a decision possible. Here are examples of five important mechanisms (biases & shortcuts) associated with information assessment.

*Recency* - For good reason, when forming a hypothesis, the brain allows itself to be heavily influenced by information that it perceived most recently. This could also be considered to be an 'up-to-date bias', which is probably the reason that natural selection maintained it. One can see that this bias usually has unseen and effortless benefits. Occasionally however it may lead to a more important piece of information being ignored (although this may only be obvious in hindsight).

*Neglect of underlying information* - It is easy to overlook underlying information, even though it would explain the evidence more reliably. For example, if flight data reveal that visual approaches produce ten times more safety concerns each year than go-arounds, our first reaction is to think that visual approaches are more likely to produce events than go-arounds, and are therefore in more need of intervention. Only when we think a little harder will we recognise that the situation is almost certainly the reverse, because

more than ten times the number of visual approaches are flown than go-arounds.

*Availability* - All things being otherwise equal, information that comes to mind easily (for whatever reason) is much more likely to influence the hypothesis than other information. It is well established that when assessing risk we are influenced by the information that comes easily to mind. This is often said to be why people are unreasonably scared of flying, because air accidents have a high profile in the media, whereas safe flights are not discussed. The most available information about commercial flying in the mind of a non-flyer may be the memory of seeing the aftermath of a big accident on the news.

*Accepting small samples* - Humans are quick to extrapolate general hypotheses from only one or two repeated events or experiences. Often this is correct, but it does not account well for random chance.

## Mechanisms for shortening decision choices

As well as using shortcuts to assess information, humans use various processes to assist in determining answers and responses. Simon (1957) described how in most situations people do not seek the optimal solution, just a satisfactory one (known as satisficing). Optimising obviously takes a lot more time and effort, but importantly it may be beyond the capabilities of people in most complex situations. Satisficing can be thought of as a type of short cut, but some academics would not consider it as such; it is often thought of as a normal and natural part of decision processes.

Two other applicable mechanisms that have been well described in scientific literature are as follows:

*Anchoring and adjustment* - When the human brain has no easy frame of reference to provide an answer or solution it will allow itself to be influenced by *anchors* that it 'knows' consciously to be abstract, independent or have no relationship to the situation under consideration. It is as if the brain always requires a starting point from which to adjust its answer, rather than being able to simply generate an answer based on the information it knows. This effect was classically shown by Kahneman and Tversky in the following way: Participants saw a random number generated by a spinning wheel. They were then asked whether they thought the percentage of African nations in the UN was smaller or larger than that number. They were then asked to guess the percentage of African nations in the United Nations. Those who had witnessed a high random number being generated gave significantly higher answers than those who had seen a low number. In fact the 'random' numbers were fixed for experimental and analytical reasons, but the participants were not aware of this. This experiment, and others, gave

convincing evidence for anchoring and adjustment. For more information, see the extensive and classic work of Kahneman and Tversky.

*Confirmation bias* - Once humans have an answer, hypothesis, or have decided upon a response, the natural tendency is to give more weight to subsequent evidence that confirms the hypothesis, and to give less weight to evidence that conflicts with the hypothesis. The effect might be so strong as to accept confirmatory evidence and reject contrary evidence. In experiments, when asked to question their own hypothesis, it is regularly found that people ask questions that attempt to confirm it.

## Uncertainty

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Theoretically, the aim of most decisions is to achieve the maximum *utility*. *Utility* is the worth of an option to the decision maker, which may be different for different people. For example; £1,000 is the same regardless of who gets it, but the *utility* of £1,000 is greater for a poor person than a rich one. The former would go to much greater lengths to obtain the £1,000 than the latter. Utility drives decision making more than the absolute value of the options. The modern view of utility is that it is a relative concept.

Usually making a choice involves considering future states that are uncertain, so the decision maker must factor in the *chance* of an option being successful. This 'likelihood' of success also affects the utility (a near-zero chance of winning a million pounds represents a low utility, despite a million pounds being highly valued by most people).

## Use of these mechanisms in general

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It is useful to consider these sorts of decision mechanisms as part of otherwise analytical processes. There are occasions when a decision will be based solely on a short-cut without further consideration of circumstances or options, but usually such processes form a smaller part of a situational assessment or decision choice.

The obvious advantage of these mechanisms is that they save time and effort. However the effectiveness has probably been underestimated in the past, and without doubt these processes are relatively reliable (otherwise they would not have been naturally selected). Some research has even suggested that ignoring part of the decision information can lead to more accurate judgments than weighting and adding together all information (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011). Occasionally however, shortcut processes are followed by the selection of a course of action (or decision option) that was not the best available, even in foresight. The use of decision shortening mechanisms must not be seen as a failure of process regardless of the occasion; such an analysis would be crude and incomplete; most (or arguably

all) decisions use shortcuts. It is important that the trainer or instructor identifies the technique that contributed to the problem and determines whether there was any reasonable way of doing it differently at the time (i.e. against the background of other workload and current knowledge).

## Application of Knowledge – Quicker Decision Mechanisms and shortcuts

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Shortcuts affect flight crews all of the time. Usually they cause no problems, and combined with intuitively dispensed experience and effortful analytical processes, most decisions are safe enough. Occasionally however, such processes create decision errors.

Shortcut mechanisms will become more prevalent as general task load increases, when the time and attention required for analytical decision processes is limited. Additionally they may happen more frequently when the decision does not appear so critical, due to lower prioritisation of attention. Nevertheless, In all cases the ability to use shortening mechanisms is important in order to prioritise resources elsewhere.

A recent example occurred where crew actions led to a situation that looked like a technical failure, but unbeknown to the crew was solvable if they ran the appropriate QRH checklist. However recent and available information impacted the assessment of the problem. The captain had experienced several failures on other aircraft (increasing availability of that diagnosis) and the current aircraft had suffered a track error earlier in the sector (increasing recency of that diagnosis). This predisposed the crew to conclude that the result of a later error was a technical failure, which lead to incorrect diagnoses and a subsequent incident. The colloquialism that would be applied in hindsight is 'the crew jumped to a conclusion'. However such a conclusion was predictable given the natural decision making process and the workload at hand.

There is no evidence that problems caused by shortcuts and biases are overcome just by a greater understanding that such shortcuts occur. More recent and available information will feel more important even if a person knows why.

Biases and heuristics such as recency and availability can lead to an incorrect diagnosis of a situation and confirmation biases can work against the trapping of the problem. This is why the use of frameworks, reminders and decision aids can help. The decision review is probably the most realistic countermeasure.

A stark illustration of confirmation bias comes from the PSA Boeing 727 that collided with a Cessna 172 at San Diego in 1978. On the downwind leg in



visual conditions, the flight crew was visually searching for a Cessna 172 that they had previously had visual contact with. The captains asked: “are we clear of that Cessna?” The replies implied that no one knew for sure, but everyone considered they should be clear, e.g. “supposed to be”. The captain then said the following:

“I guess... Yeah; before we turned downwind, I saw him about one o’ clock - probably behind us now”

The first part of the communication indicates that the captain was unsure but then found a small piece of evidence to provide some confirmatory support for this preferred consensus, as opposed to challenging it. One might expect (particularly in hindsight) that the non-sighting of the Cessna 172 at this point would cause the crew concern and lead to seeking evidence of its whereabouts (e.g. using ATC or prioritising the visual lookout). But the very fact that they cannot see it becomes evidence supporting the idea that it is behind them. The captain’s statement shows a rationalisation of this position using further aspects such as the earlier sighted position at one o’ clock. This is entirely normal and natural, even though in hindsight it might appear to some to be reckless.

## Application to Training – Quicker Decision Mechanisms and shortcuts

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### Decision making training in the classroom

As with many areas of HF/CRM, knowledge of human issues is important in terms of motivating individuals to attempt to make small changes to the way they do things.

In terms of classroom HF/CRM, decision-making shortcuts and other mechanisms can be taught through examples of research or abstract situations. The trainer should quickly move to putting these into reasonable context, rather than producing slides and narrative based on textbooks. If the trainer is confident, knowledgeable and able to apply theory quickly to examples, then extracting examples from delegates can be more fruitful than spending time on case studies. If the trainer is less confident than preparing some small examples from accident reports will prove useful. Discussion of examples should lead to discussion of what things can help. Despite this the trainer must not give the impression that the various mechanisms that have been developed by evolution can be easily optimised by education or training. It is also important to avoid giving the impression that decision shortcuts are always problematic.

There is very little valid evidence that teaching decision-making in general improves decision-making in real world environments. Whereas it is probable that certain situations and accompanying decisions can be optimised, the overall phenomenon of decision-making is too wide and complex for general rules to be applied for improvement. The classroom HF/CRM trainer should therefore attempt to contextualise theory quickly and facilitate discussion of how decision-making applies to certain common situations on the flight deck.

### **Assessing and observing decisions in the simulator or on the line**

There is always a reason behind the process of shortening a decision, and where the mechanism seems inappropriate the trainer must explore why it was used.

If a trainer identifies a shortcut as part of problem, then they must first establish whether that shortcut is routinely used in similar situations. If so then the trainer must uncover why it failed in that case. The shortcut may be generally inappropriate, and the training scenario may expose the reason to the crew. However it is likely that the situation was not exactly as perceived by the crew, and the trainer can facilitate some learning about why that shortcut did not work in that situation. The trainer may also discuss ways to add resilience to an inevitable shortcut situation. For example if a crew make a shortcut to allow time to prioritise something else, then putting in place a review or a barrier to error may be appropriate. One can see that a trainer who simply states that using the shortcut was inappropriate is at best missing a good learning opportunity, and at worst re-directing crew resources artificially without considering the unintended consequences.

If a crew makes a choice that appears unwise, they have usually done so because they assessed their chosen option as having greater utility than the other options. The trainer should prioritise finding out why that option had higher perceived utility for the crew.

When debriefing such an event it is worth recalling that the utility of a choice is formed of both probability of success and the worth of the choice. The crew may have assessed an option as being likely to work, but it did not work. A common underlying assumption is that because a chosen option did not work, the crew could have known that at the time, or have been able to work it out. This is not always true. Once a scenario has played out, and the consequences of taking a particular option become apparent, the perception of utility will unconsciously change due to hindsight bias (in both the trainer and the crew). If the option worked, the utility will be perceived as higher than it was at the time, whereas if it fails the utility will be viewed as lower than it really was. The trainer needs to be aware of this bias in themselves and not

treat the situation as having been more obvious than it was at the time, or the crew's choice as being more correct or more incorrect than it was at the time. A 90% probability will fail 10% of the time. The trainer must recognize this rather than assuming that if something failed then it had been unlikely to work to begin with. Sometimes the right option (at the time) can subsequently fail. The trainer should avoid the temptation of assessing the decision purely on its subsequent consequences.

Many risk-based decisions taken in flight have an unfortunate characteristic when looked at from the perspective of someone outside the process, or in hindsight. Sometime the chosen option appeared to the crew to represent the least risky choice at the time, but appears to the observer to have been a risky choice in hindsight. The trainer or observer can overcome this natural hindsight bias to try to establish whether the crew felt the decision to be a relatively low risk choice at the time, and why. The level of risk accepted by a crew is not necessarily correlated with the level of risk as seen from outside the decision. Asking what made an option appear less risky than others is usually a more fruitful approach than asking the crew why they took a risk. As a bonus, this approach shows the crew that the trainer is trying to understand the process.

The session debrief is usually the best time to dig into a decision, with the obvious disadvantage of memory limitations, given everything else that may have happened in the meantime. Some effective questions to try to break into a decision process after the event are:

**What made the decision appear to be right at that time?**

This type of question aligns the questioner and the crew, as opposed to creating conflict. It shows the crew that the trainer understands implicitly that the decision was made for a *good* reason in terms of informational assessment.

**How was the situation expected to pan out after the decision?**

This type of question tries to discover what the future assessment was, and why it appeared to be the right choice of action.

**How confident were you that the decision was good at the time?**

This gives a clue as to the nature of risk in the decision. The decision may look risky to the trainer, but may have appeared to the crew to be low risk at the time.

**After the decision was taken, what else occurred that made things go wrong?**

This type of question helps the trainer and the crew to align their perceptions of the situational variables that impacted upon the decision. The trainer can then decide to what extent those factors were reasonably predictable, or linked to the decision process.

**What would happen to a crew in your position who chose to do [a different option]?**

This gives the crew an opportunity to explain why they did not choose other specific options, and may enlighten the trainer to their decision making process. It is too easy to make the assumption that alternatives would have worked better, without testing them or considering them fully. Having discovered why the crew assessed the situation in the way they did, chose the action they chose, and rejected the alternatives that they rejected, the trainer will be in a strong position to give realistic feedback and assessment of what occurred.

## Competencies

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Whereas current CBTA systems include 'decision making' competencies (e.g. IATA competency 6) these tend to be related to, and be taught as, analytical decision making.

Yet short-cuts feature in almost all analytical decisions, but there is not much scope to reflect short-cuts within most CBTA systems. One way that it can be attempted is to use observable behaviours that reflect time management. The main examples within competency C6 (decision making) are OB 6.6 ("Identifies, assesses and manages threats and errors in a timely manner") and OB 6.6. ("OB 6.6 Applies appropriate and timely decision-making techniques"). Competency C8 (workload management) can also be used; for example OB 8.2 ("Manages time efficiently when carrying out tasks").

In reality however, decision short-cuts are rarely observable in analytical decisions with effective outcomes. They will tend to show up only generally as an expeditious decision rather than being identified specifically. Short cuts are easier to (although not easy to) identify when things go wrong. This means that short cuts will tend to be reflected in the negative marking of competencies (e.g. a poor outcome on OB 6.5 "Identifies and considers appropriate options").

## Chapter 9 - Part 3 - Very fast (intuitive) decision-making

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### Knowledge - Very fast decision-making

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It has long been known that some seemingly complex decisions appear to be made without the effortful process of considering options or even using shortcuts. This is different to a reflex action (i.e. ducking to avoid a thrown object). It seems that there are times when despite a situation being seemingly ambiguous or complicated, an answer 'comes to the mind'.

There are a number of scientific schools of thought around such decisions, such as the process being emotionally driven, being driven by 'system 1' (see Chapter 1; information processing) or the process being primed by deeply learned but 'non-declarable' expertise. The latter school of thought will be considered for the purposes of this section, although all these are somewhat related at a very high level.

The scientist best known for his extensive work on this area in the last few decades is Gary Klein. Klein termed this process 'recognition-primed decision making' (RPD, Klein 1998) after his research in naturalistic decision-making situations. His work is well known for being carried out within real world contexts. This means that it is not concerned with clinical laboratory tasks, but with understanding how real people (particularly experts) make critical choices in their real environments (i.e. on the job). Klein spent many years studying and observing various experts in order to describe the process.

In general (and at its most basic level) RPD is a process whereby typical situations are recognised from previous experience. The decision maker then quickly simulates the first option that comes to their mind and as long as it seems like a satisfactory response, they carry it out. If that first option is not satisfactory, then they move to another. Hence, one fundamental part of recognition-primed decisions is the serial processing of options. This means that a single option is generated and then tested (mentally simulated) before any other options are generated. If the option is satisfactory (if it seems likely to fulfil the objective) then it is acted upon, but this means that there may have been better options that were never considered. However RPDs are all about speed and workload, not optimisation. This therefore has a strong theoretical similarity to the theory of satisficing (Simon 1950) that was discussed earlier.

## Application of Knowledge - Very fast decision-making

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It is arguable that most decisions made on the flight deck could fall into the category of recognition-primed decisions. This is because both crew-members are experienced enough to base choices on past experience.

Sometimes crew take RPD decisions that are inappropriate in the circumstances. The Tenerife 1977 runway collision is a probable example (although it will never be known for sure). The captain's decision to take off was not discussed or analysed, and appears to have surprised the other crew-members. It appears to have been taken very quickly without consideration. But there are many reasons why the captain would have felt that the situation was typical of one where the decision to take off was appropriate. He had spent most of his time in simulators where RT practices were often not fully adhered to, or were of secondary importance. In the captain's mind, the communications (departure clearance) probably did not feel different to a typical take off clearance, and did not therefore flag a problem. Indeed the communication using the term 'clearance' was probably enough to cue the captain to take-off given the circumstances and his recent simulator experience. He could not see the other aircraft and probably felt sure that it had cleared the runway, perhaps because he heard the previous conversation that he perceived as indicating that the American 'clipper' would leave the runway. His mental model was that the runway was clear. With the perception of a clear runway and the perception that clearance had been given, he made a decision that he had made thousands of times before: to take off. It can be seen that the situational assessment (that of situational 'typicality') was the critical issue in terms of the decision error, not the decision choice itself (the choice was a 'symptom' of the situational misunderstanding).

A real-world situation can often generate a feeling (in the moment) that it should be safe enough to 'bend the rules' in this case. This happens when a situation has many typical features and the expert does not have the time or capacity to consider everything at that moment. If there is motive or pressure then a decision to go further than agreed becomes more likely and will appear reckless in hindsight but feel acceptable at the time. Specifically the busting of minima or agreed bottom lines can feel acceptable at the time but may be based on partial information. For this reason it is important that pilots are very cautious about allowing themselves to break planned safety limits when under pressure, or even when in seemingly normal circumstances. The following anecdote is a good demonstration of this.

As a very new commander, I taxied out at Rome with a large thunderstorm cell approaching the airfield on an otherwise clear evening. The departure queue was long and there were no reports of any wind shear. Myself and the

FO agreed that if the approaching rain shafts from the very active CB were anywhere close to airfield boundary we wouldn't go. Murphy's law dictated that just as we became number one for departure, the rain appeared at the boundary. We declined the take-off clearance. The traffic behind was offered take off which they accepted and taxied past, along with another aircraft. I was now on PA explaining why I was unwilling to take off despite the obvious departures occurring beside us and in full view of our pax. The aircraft rolling on the runway disappeared into heavy rain. It then reappeared at about 50' over the grass! A very shaken crew reported severe wind shear at lift off and the tower commented that wind was now 50kts across the runway! They were lucky. Set bottom lines and stick to them. [9]

### Application to Training - Very fast decision-making

Fast intuitive decisions may not be open to much (or even any) conscious scrutiny at the time. The process is deeply rooted and cannot simply be improved or made error-free by putting in more effort or employing various techniques or decision aids at the time. It is likely that recognition primed decisions are usually good when made by an expert in their own domain, although this is almost impossible to test in real world practice.

It is widely accepted that recognition primed decision-making theory (along with all such intuitive decision theory) is largely descriptive, but not prescriptive. However, this does not mean that knowledge of intuitive decision-making is of no use. Most people are familiar with a feeling about a certain option, or confidence in a choice that they are making, without knowing why (without being able to 'put their finger on it'). It is worth knowing that in many cases such feelings have grounding, even if consciously the reasons cannot be unpacked. This does not mean pilots should always opt for the option that 'feels' better, but that if they feel that one option is better than another, it is worth at least scrutinising why that is the case.

Another learning point is that when there is a strong feeling towards a certain option, a pilot should consider whether there are any particularly untypical circumstances. Intuitive decisions are based on typical situations, and so will be less reliable when the situation has certain atypical features (such as in the Tenerife Airport accident example). These atypical features may require more scrutiny because they can easily cause error in intuitive decisions. It follows that decision reviews are equally if not more important, after a big decision influenced by RPD.

Intuitive forms of decision-making can easily be examined in the classroom, and case studies can be used to show them. Gary Klein's books and papers relate compelling examples of RPD in action. As with other decision-making instruction, generating examples from the audience is an effective way to get



the point across, as long as the audience participate and the trainer is able to facilitate. However the trainer must also realise the limitations of teaching about intuitive decision making in the classroom, and that just teaching people about the topic will not necessarily be of any use to them in real world situations.

In terms of instructors / examiners, knowledge of intuitive processes as one part of overall decision-making area is very useful. It can help the instructor to understand why a crew did what they did, especially when there was little communication around a decision they made. Without overt communication or discussion, a decision can sometimes appear to be unfounded or rushed, when in fact it was soundly based. If the decision leads to an undesirable consequence, then the trainer should not simply state that the crew ought to have spent more time on the decision, without considering whether extra time would have helped (or even been possible), and should try to resolve whether the decision was in fact better than the subsequent situation made it look in hindsight.

Hence there are several ways that learning about intuitive decisions can help. Firstly, it can help pilots appreciate that their general liking or disliking of an option is often worth further examination, and secondly it can help instructors or examiners to understand what they observe, and to de-brief appropriately.

## Competencies

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The general application of fast decision-making to competencies is similar to that biases and shortcuts.

Elements of RPD feature in most (if not all) analytical decisions made by experts in their domain, but there is not much scope to reflect this in most CBTA systems. As with short-cuts, observable behaviours that reflect time management offer some scope. The main examples within competency C6 (decision making) are OB 6.6 (“Identifies, assesses and manages threats and errors in a timely manner”) and OB 6.6. (“OB 6.6 Applies appropriate and timely decision-making techniques”). Competency C8 (workload management) can also be used; for example OB 8.2 (“Manages time efficiently when carrying out tasks”).

RPD decisions are most easily recognisable when made outside of analytical decision process. RPD elements can be difficult to observe or remember when part of analytical decisions, especially when the outcomes are good. RPD processes are easier to (although not easy to) identify when things go wrong. This means that RPD will tend to be reflected in the negative marking of competencies (e.g. a poor outcome on OB 6.5 “Identifies and considers appropriate options”).



## Chapter 9 - Conclusion

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It is useful for trainers to learn about different types and mechanisms of decision-making. A common flaw in the assessing of decision-making is to conclude that any undesirable outcome following a decision could have been prevented by spending more time and effort on the decision. Because of the use of decision aids, good decision-making is often thought to be that which appears to be performed in the manner of a decision acronym, regardless of the circumstances. A poor choice is then said to stem from a decision process (of analytical decision making) that was not carried out properly. Decision aids are designed to force 'ideal' ideas of what analytical decisions should be. It is important to note that pilots rarely use analytical decision-making approaches in the manner that trainers might deem appropriate, but that does not necessarily make the decision process or workload management poor.

A further cautionary note, as previously suggested earlier, is that current CBTA systems tend to be designed around ideal analytical decision-making processes. It is important that trainers understand that very few decisions will perfectly fit this mould. Hence a poor outcome is often down to something more than the observation that the decision process was not a perfect analytical process.

## Chapter 10 – Stress in Aviation

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C2 - Communication**

**C5 - Leadership and teamwork**

**C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**

**C8 - Workload Management**

Stress is the response to unfavourable environmental conditions, referred to as stressors, and describes how a body reacts to demands placed upon it. Stress applied to an airframe or power plant which exceeds the designed load factor leads to weakening or failure of the component affected. In the same way if excessive demands are placed on an individual, it is possible to exceed the individual's capacity to meet them. This can result in deterioration of the individual's ability to cope with the situation.

Stress is an inescapable part of human life. It is impossible to live without experiencing some degree of stress, whether at home, during our work role or at leisure. Further, an optimum amount of stress is necessary for an individual to function efficiently and perform a given task such as flying an aeroplane.

Selye described two forms of stress. The first is 'eustress', which is associated with a feeling of increased energy and ability to deal with the stressor. It can be considered to be 'good stress' which stimulates and adapts the body. The second is 'distress', when the individual feels that events are out of control and there is an inability to cope. This is 'bad stress'.

Stress can develop when an individual's perceived ability to perform a given task does not meet the demand. This gives rise to physiological (physical) and psychological (mental) responses which can affect the individual's performance.

Physical stress occurs when external conditions either put a strain on the homeostatic mechanisms of the body or are so extreme as to nullify them. Mental stress occurs when the perceived demand exceeds the perceived ability.

An individual can be likened in some ways to a bucket in that he or she has only a certain capacity. Once that capacity is exceeded, the bucket will overflow and will hold no more. Just as buckets come in different shapes and sizes, so different individuals have different capacities and abilities to cope.

Stress on a human being can be defined as:

- The body's non-specific response to demands placed up on it, whether these demands are pleasant or unpleasant;
- An unresolved pressure, strain or force acting upon the individual's mental or physical systems which, if continued, will cause damage to those systems.

Thus continued stress can create physical symptoms such as insomnia, loss of appetite, headache, irritability etc. The stimulus for stress is known as a stressor which is the force producing a change in the self-regulating balance between the individual's internal and external environment.

This stimulus will demand a response which may be psychological or physiological. Thus we see that the stressor is the stimulus and the stress is the response to it.

Stress can be acute or chronic:

- Acute stress is something sudden and unexpected such as an engine fire or discovering the loss of one's wallet;
- Chronic stress results from stressors that continue for a long period of time such as financial difficulties or inter-personal relationship problems.
- The response to acute stress takes three stages, known as Selye's general adaptation syndrome:
  1. Alarm reaction - In the alarm stage the body recognises the stressor and prepares for fight or flight by the release of hormones (adrenaline – also known as epinephrine - and corticosteroids). These hormones increase the heartbeat and the rate of breathing, raise the blood sugar level, increase perspiration, and slow digestion. Depending on the degree of danger recognised, the alarm reaction may result in a burst of energy, greater muscular strength, heightened hearing and vision.
  2. Resistance - In the resistance stage the body attempts to repair any damage caused by the stress, enabling it to adapt to sustained or chronic stressors such as extreme cold, hard physical labour or personal worries. If the stress continues over a long period, the body will attempt to maintain its arousal state of readiness.
  3. Exhaustion - Exhaustion is short lived and affects those parts of the body which have been involved in the resistance stage. If the combination of resistance and exhaustion continues without relief over a long period, physical symptoms may develop such as raised blood pressure, headaches or indigestion.

## Stressors

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The total stress which can be imposed on the individual can be considered as from three sources:

### Environmental (physical)

These stressors are related to normal events which may occur during flight operations.

They may occur singly or collectively, and can be created by noise, vibration, heat, lack of oxygen, presence of carbon monoxide, the onset of fatigue etc. Others are directly related to the tasks involved in flying and the degree of stress will vary from flight to flight, and for different stages of the flight.

The potential main environmental sources of stress on the flight deck are:

- **temperature**
  - 20 deg C - comfortable temperature for most people in normal clothing
  - > 30 deg C - increased heart rate, blood pressure, and sweating
  - < 15 deg C - discomfort, loss of feeling in hands, poor control of fine muscle movement
- **vibration**

Different parts of the body show a natural resonance at different periods of vibration. For example, the natural resonance of the eyeball is 30-40 Hz, and the skull is 1-4 Hz. Effects of vibration include:

- 1-4 Hz - interference with breathing; neck pain
  - 4-10 Hz - chest and abdominal pain
  - 8-12 Hz - backache
  - 10-12 Hz - headache, eyestrain, throat pain, speech difficulty, muscle tension
  - 30-40 Hz - interference with vision
- **noise**

>80 dB - task performance may be impaired

>90 dB - measurable impairment of task performance

However, it has been shown that in some situations performance of vigilance tasks can actually be better in high noise levels than in low levels. This is

because noise increases arousal and can move the individual into the optimum performance area of the Yerkes -Dodson inverted U curve.

- **humidity**

40-60% - normal

<20% - minor discomfort, such as skin, eye, nose, throat dryness

- **glare**

UV radiation from sunlight can cause visual fatigue, as well as affecting visual health

### **Life (psychological).**

These stressors include causes such as emotional, domestic, social and financial.

These are associated with events in everyday life. They are wide ranged and may include such factors as domestic and financial pressures which most of us face on a recurring basis. Family arguments, death of a close relative, inability to pay bills, lifestyle and personal activities, smoking or drinking to excess and other factors which may affect physical and mental health, all contribute to life stress which is part of everyday living. These can add significantly to the operational stressors which are a normal part of flying activities.

Stress can also arise from physiological factors such as hunger, thirst, pain, lack of sleep and fatigue.

There have been many attempts to quantify the stress effect of life or domestic events. Once such scheme scores stressors by totalling points, as follows:

Death of a spouse or partner	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Loss of job	47
Retirement	45
Pregnancy	40
Sexual problems	40

Son or daughter leaving home	29
Change of residence	20
Bank loan or credit card debt	17
Vacation	13
Minor law violation	11

The cumulative points score gives an indication of life stress, but such schemes need to be treated with caution because of wide individual variability.

<60	Free of life stress
60-80	Normal life stress
80-100	High life stress
>100	Under serious life stress

## Reactive

These are the body's physical or mental responses to situations which arise in everyday life, as well as those which arise from operating within the aviation environment.

They stem from the body's reaction to a specific event. Examples in aviation are encountering wind shear on finals or running short of fuel.

## Organisational

Stress can arise from within the company or organisation for which an individual works. Certain organisational conditions have been identified as potential stressors. These include:

- poor communication
- role conflict or ambiguity
- workload and autonomy
- relationships with others
- lack of career development
- pay inequality
- bureaucratic processes

Organisational stress in the aviation industry can affect flight safety. It can be avoided when the company is proactive in giving attention to the listed factors and providing support for employees.

There is anecdotal evidence that a major stressor for pilots in modern aviation is insufficient hands-on flying.

## Stress Overload

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Stress factors or stressors are cumulative and additive. Each individual has a personal stress limit and if this is exceeded, stress overload occurs which can result in an inability to handle even moderate workload. This personal stress limit varies with different people, as it is affected by an individual's physiological and psychological characteristics. For example, some individuals have the ability to switch off and relax, thus reducing the effects of stressors. Others are not so well equipped and the stress level increases to an unacceptable degree. When it happens to individuals working in a safety related environment, such as flight crew, air traffic controllers or aircraft engineers, it can have serious effects in terms of flight safety.

It is common for an individual to believe that admitting to suffering from pressure is an admission of failure of ability to meet the demands of the job. It has long been an accepted culture in aviation that flight crew and others should be able to cope with any pressure or any situation, and training is directed at developing this capability in the individual - the 'can do' attitude.

Often an individual, or his or her managers, will fail to recognise or to accept the emergence of stress-related symptoms. Denial is common, in a misguided attempt to maintain self-esteem. Once the symptoms are apparent, behavioural changes such as aggression or alcohol dependence may have become established. Such behaviour may impact on flight safety and lead to disciplinary action, which could have been avoided by early recognition of the developing situation and appropriate intervention and support.

## Anxiety and its Relationship to Stress

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Anxiety creates worry, and in turn any form of worry may lead to stress. Anxiety may be produced by an individual knowing that he or she has no control over specific effects, or that he or she lacks the knowledge to handle such events. It is particularly prevalent in people who, for one reason or another, are lacking in self-confidence. It can be changed by increasing knowledge and gaining greater proficiency in operating an aircraft which requires more time devoted to study and flight training.

Attitudes and general mental state have a direct influence on an individual's well-being. Psychological and emotional factors such as fear, anger, frustration, worry and anxiety may, over a long period of time, begin to affect the physical aspects of an individual's state of well-being.

Stress and anxiety are an inevitable part of human life and in small amounts they are necessary to achieve optimum performance. It is nature's way of keeping an individual keyed up for a task, by helping concentration and making recognition of danger easier. On the other hand excessive stress levels lead to excessive anxiety and it is important that individuals and their managers are able to recognise this.

## Effects of Stress

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Individuals respond in different ways to high stress loads. Apart from the effects on behaviour, such as aggression, irritability, dogmatism and frustration, various psychological mechanisms may come into play in an attempt to cope with the situation. These all occur at the subconscious level and may include the following:

- Omission - completely omitting a particular action, such as failing to lower the landing gear during an approach with high workload and additional distractions;
- Error - Incorrect response to a given stimulus, such as switching off the anti-collision beacon instead of the electric fuel pump;
- Queuing - Sequentially delaying necessary actions in an inappropriate order of attention priority, such as failing to action a check list while dealing with complicated air traffic control instructions;
- Filtering - Rejection of certain tasks because of overload, such as not identifying the navigation aids when setting up for an instrument approach, or failing to consciously hear R/T transmissions;
- Approximation - Making approximations in technique in an attempt to cope with all the tasks required in a short-term interval, such as accepting inaccuracies while flying an instrument approach;
- Coning of attention - With increasing stress, the attention scan closes in to a smaller field of awareness. This can lead to inability to integrate the available information, and may be seen in the breakdown of the instrument scan during high workload activity in instrument flying conditions;
- Regression - Under stress, behaviour may regress to the earliest learned, such as operating a control or selector in a manner which would have been appropriate to the previous type of aircraft flown but not the current one;
- Escape - The ultimate response to extreme levels of stress is to give up or freeze.



In addition to the psychological effects of stress, physical effects may occur which vary from one individual to another. Stress is often perceived by the brain as some form of threat, and indeed, if you are being chased by a sabre-toothed tiger who fancies you for dinner, it is a reasonable assumption on the part of the brain.

The 'fight or flight' response is when the primitive automatic responses for handling threatening situations come into play. The hormone adrenaline (epinephrine) is released, causing a rise in blood pressure, an increase in heart rate, deeper and more rapid breathing and an increase in tone of the larger muscle groups. Hormones known as corticosteroids are also released, making available stored sugars for increased energy use. The body is now ready for fight or flight (escape). Unfortunately, this is often an inappropriate response and, because the situation has to be handled by mental rather than physical effort, the excess hormones can result in muscle tremor, incoordination, excessive sweating, and, in extreme cases, mental confusion and dizziness. The effects of continuing stress or overload can therefore severely compromise performance.

## Stress Management

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A certain amount of stress is unavoidable and indeed in certain conditions, it may be beneficial in raising arousal and hence improving performance. However, stress overload can reduce performance and it is helpful to consider ways of dealing with stress and reducing its effects.

The first step in reducing stress is to recognise when one is approaching the normal stress limit; inevitably this is a personal evaluation based on an understanding of one's own personality and capacity.

In determining fitness to fly, the psychological and emotional part of well-being must be considered in addition to the physical. Flying training engenders self-confidence and a strong desire to complete the task in hand. It can be difficult therefore to recognise and admit that one may indeed be approaching the limit.

The maintenance of physical well-being can assist in developing resistance to stress.

Actions to deal with stress include:

- Recognise the factors which are combining to cause the stress. Assess your own situation to see which of these factors are present;
- Deal with those factors which can be removed. Some can be handled just by recognising them by what they are and mentally putting them aside;

- If stress is being produced by overload, pause to organise a list of priorities. Do not allow low priority problems to influence you when you are not intending to deal with them. In flight, follow standard operating procedures and use check lists with which you are familiar;
- Manage your time. It helps to develop a cycle of activity, apportioning time to each item;
- When appropriate, delegate duties and learn to off-load;
- Involve other people in your problems. Communicating and avoiding isolation is an effective way of lowering the level of stressors;
- In situations of acute stress, learn to recognise what is occurring. Learn to “let go” and to mentally and physically relax. It may help to consciously relax your muscles whenever you feel tense or stressed;
- If the situation allows, take a short break for refreshment or relaxation. In flight, hand over control to another crew member when this is possible;
- Physical fitness seems to make some people more stress resistant. Eating regular balanced meals and indulging in physical activity several times a week promotes general health;
- Be positive and tackle responsibilities and problems as they occur. Avoid the tendency to put things off in the hope they will go away;
- Development of an appropriate sense of humour can be excellent way of avoiding emotional stress;
- Recognise your own limitations and avoid over commitment.

Finally, remember that clear thinking, free from emotional or physical worries is essential for flight planning and the safe conduct of a flight. Accidents and incidents in flight may occur because the requirements of the task exceed the pilot’s capabilities, and this is more likely to occur when the effects of life stresses reduce the capacity to cope.

## Coping Strategies

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Coping is the process in which the individual either adjusts to the perceived demands of a situation or changes the situation itself. Some of the strategies appear to be carried out subconsciously, and it is only when they are unsuccessful that the stressor is noticed. Individuals vary in their ability to cope.

Three coping strategies can be defined:

- **Action Coping.** In this strategy the individual takes some action to reduce the stress either by removing the problem or altering the situation so that it becomes less demanding. The extreme is when the individual removes him or herself from the situation, for example by changing jobs or getting divorced.

- Cognitive Coping. This coping strategy is used when the situation cannot be changed. It involves reducing the emotional and physiological impact of the stress. This may be done by rationalisation or emotional and intellectual detachment from the situation. The effect is to change the perception of the problem even if the demand itself is no different.
- System Directing Coping. This is a means of removing the symptoms of the stress by taking physical exercise, using drugs such as tobacco and alcohol (which can obviously lead to their own problems) or utilising other stress management techniques.

Stress management is the process in which an individual will adopt systems to assist the coping strategies. Stress management techniques include:

- Health and fitness programmes. Regular physical exercise assists some people with cognitive coping;
- Relaxation techniques. There are many forms of relaxation frequently involving progressive muscle relaxation and the use of mental imagery. Examples include meditation, self-hypnosis, biofeedback techniques and autogenics. Some or all of these can be helpful in enabling individuals to reduce anxiety and control tension;
- Counselling techniques. Counselling can assist both cognitive and action coping by modifying the way a situation is perceived leading to appropriate behavioural change. It may involve anything from regular sessions with a professional counsellor to simply talking about a stress problem with a supportive friend or colleague.

As in all aspects of human factors, there is much variation between individuals and within the same individual. An understanding of the human response to stressors should assist in developing individual coping strategies.

# Chapter 11 – Sleep and fatigue

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

- C3 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)**
- C5 - Leadership and teamwork**
- C6 - Problem Solving and Decision Making**
- C8 - Workload Management**

Sleep is essential for restoring the normal balance between the different parts of the central nervous system.

In terms of a computer microprocessor, it may be considered analogous to transferring the experiences from the preceding period of wakefulness, stored on a data stick, to the central neural store which can be likened to the computer hard disk or Cloud storage. This frees up the data stick for use during the next period of wakefulness.

Also during sleep, the body's physical functions are rested and some renewal takes place. During sleep, sympathetic nervous activity decreases and the muscular tone becomes almost nil. The arterial blood pressure falls, the pulse rate decreases, the blood vessels in the skin dilate and the overall basal metabolic rate of the body falls by up to 20%.

On average, most humans physiologically need about 8 hours of sleep per night. However, in modern society most adults report an average of 7 and 7.5 hours sleep per night. Studies have shown that up to 75% of adults report day time sleepiness, with nearly a third of them reporting severe levels which interfered with activities.

Sleep loss can be acute or cumulative. In an acute situation, sleep loss can occur either totally or as a partial loss. It can accumulate over time into what is referred to as "sleep debt". As little as 2 hours of sleep loss can result in impairment of performance and levels of alertness. Sleep loss leads to increased reaction time, reduced vigilance, cognitive slowing, memory problems, time-on-task decrements and optimum response decrements. It has also been shown that performance variability increases with sleep loss.

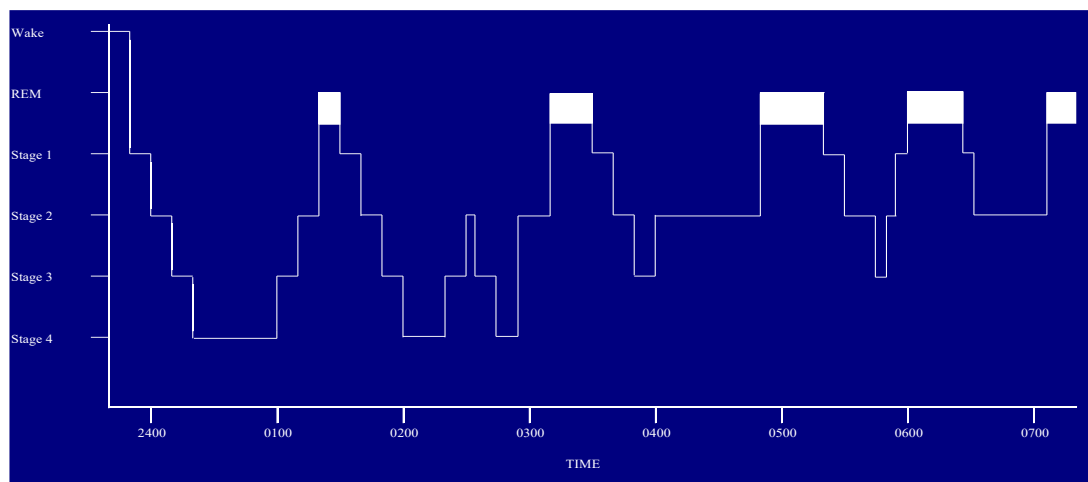
The normal sleep requirement is 8 hours in every 24-hour period, and it is possible to perform a simple calculation of sleep debt when this is not achieved. As the sleep requirement is 8 hours, within a 24 hour period this leaves 16 hours available for activity. Alternatively, this can be expressed as one sleep hour being good for two hours of wakeful activity. The maximum

possible credit to offset against sleep debt is 8 sleep hours. It is not necessary to sleep for the exact number of hours in deficit to recover sleep debt. Most people find that a 'catch-up' sleep of around one third of the deficit is sufficient. Sleep debt can become cumulative, leading to a decrement in alertness and performance if the deficit is not recovered within a reasonable time.

## Stages of sleep

Normal sleep has five stages - stages 1 to 4 and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep.

Stage 1 is a transitional phase between waking and sleeping and this normally takes around 10 minutes as a person falls asleep. Sleep then becomes deeper with 15 minutes in stage 2 sleep and a further 15 minutes in stage 3 sleep before moving on to stage 4. Approximately 90 minutes after sleep onset, REM sleep will occur. The cycle of REM sleep and stage 1 to 4 sleep repeats during the course of the night in 90 minute cycles, each succeeding cycle containing greater amounts of REM sleep. An 8 hour sleep period will typically contain about 4 or 5 bouts of REM sleep. Most stage 4 sleep happens early in the night, as can be seen in the hypnogram in which the solid bars represent REM sleep.



**Figure 15,** Hypnogram

Examination of the electroencephalogram (EEG), which measures electrical activity in the brain, shows the stages of sleep. The pattern changes for each stage, and stages 3 and 4 are referred to as 'slow wave' sleep from the shape of the EEG tracing. During an 8 hour period of sleep, 50% is usually made up of stage 2.

It is thought that the stage 1 to 4 sleep is related to body restoration whereas as the REM sleep may be related to strengthening and organising memory.

When learning new tasks, an increased proportion of REM sleep is seen. REM sleep is sometimes referred to as 'paradoxical sleep'.

## Performance and alertness

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Besides sleep, the other major influence on waking performance and alertness is the internal circadian clock. Circadian rhythms fluctuate on a regular cycle which lasts something over 24 hours when allowed to 'free run'. The circadian rhythms are controlled by the suprachiasmatic nucleus of the hypothalamus situated in the brain which is the time keeper for a wide range of human functions, including physiological performance, behavioural mood and sleepiness/alertness. Many body functions have their own circadian rhythm and they are synchronised to a 24 hour pattern by 'zeitgebers' (time givers), the most powerful being light which acts as a circadian pacemaker.

The mean normal body temperature is 37 degC, but it has a natural cycle of less than one degree over the 24 hour period with a minimum at 06:00 hours, rising during the day to a maximum at 20:00 hours. In the normal rhythm, sleep would occur between 24:00 and 08:00 hours when body temperature is falling and reaching its low point. Therefore it is most difficult to work when body temperature is falling, and hardest to sleep when the body temperature is rising.

Moving to a new light/dark schedule (e.g. shift work or time zone changes) can create internal and external desynchronosis. This leads to a discrepancy between internal suprachiasmatic nucleus timing and external environmental cues. The internal clock can take days or weeks to readjust, but generally requires one day for each time zone crossed or one day for every 90 minutes of jet lag.

Crossing time zones is a way of life for long-haul flight crew, and constant time zone shifts can lead to cumulative sleep deprivation due to disruption of the body cycles known as circadian desynchronosis. This is also known as 'situational insomnia'. However, sleep debt and fatigue can also be a problem for short-haul crew as a result of regular very early morning starts and long multi-sector days.

Long-haul crew have to constantly adjust and readjust circadian rhythms, and the various intrinsic rhythms for temperature, digestion and excretion get out of phase with the rhythm for sleep. This leads to *jet lag* or *circadian dysrhythmia*.

Resynchronisation on westbound flights is aided by the body's normal circadian rhythm being nearer 25 hours, thus assisting the day to be 'stretched', whereas eastbound flights are more difficult due to the day being 'compressed'. Resynchronisation is easier when local time on landing is

behind that at the airport of departure, whereas it is difficult when local time is ahead.

Fatigue can be defined as the likelihood of falling asleep. Therefore, in practical terms, there is little difference between chronic fatigue and acute tiredness. However, the state of fatigue is more complex than simple sleepiness. When experiencing fatigue, the individual's sleep is affected, taking longer to fall asleep, sleeping for a shorter period and having a reduced sleep quality. Increasing fatigue is associated with deterioration in mood ratings. Fatigue can be caused by sleep loss and circadian desynchronosis, but it can also result from low motivation and low levels of external stimulation. In aviation, fatigue becomes important when it reduces efficiency and impairs performance.

In commercial aviation, fatigue is controlled by the imposition of flight time limitations which are complex and take account of work rest schedules and previous flight duty periods. These do not apply in non-commercial flying but it is important to recognise the effect that fatigue or sleepiness can have on an individual's performance and limit flying time accordingly.

Factors leading to the development of fatigue include early starts, night flying, a high number of sectors and long duty days for short-haul flight crew. For long-haul flight crew there is the additional problem of long flight duration and regular crossing of time zones. The effect can be minimised by the use of appropriate fatigue management safety systems.

There are two principal components of sleepiness or fatigue:

- Physiological sleepiness - this is a requirement like hunger or thirst and can only be reversed by sleep;
- Subjective sleepiness - this is an individual's perception of his or her sleepiness but it may be affected by other factors. It may be difficult for an individual to subjectively assess his or her own alertness. In general, an individual over-estimates the time taken to fall asleep and under-estimates the total sleep time. Individuals tend to report a greater level of alertness than is actually the case.

Factors affecting sleepiness include:

- Prior sleep and wakefulness;
- Circadian phase leading to –
- Increased sleepiness in the early hours of the morning and during the afternoon;
- Decreased performance in the early hours of the morning.
- Age (the amount of nocturnal sleep required reduces after the age of 50);

- Alcohol (reduces the quality of sleep);
- Work and environmental conditions.

## Management of Fatigue

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Fatigue can be either short-term acute physiological or long-term chronic fatigue.

Short-term fatigue is akin to tiredness and is usually a result of lack of sleep, hard physical or mental exertion, long duty period or jet lag.

Chronic fatigue is much more difficult to recognise and quantify. It may be a result of lack of physical or mental fitness, domestic or work stress, financial problems and/or a high workload. It is subjective, with one individual being able to tolerate a greater level of stress than another before the onset of fatigue.

Fatigue gives rise to impaired performance and reduced levels of awareness.

## Symptoms of fatigue

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- tiredness
- slow reactions
- diminished motor skills
- diminished visual acuity
- reduced short term memory capacity
- channelled or tunnelled concentration

## Effects of fatigue

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- reduced awareness
- easy distraction
- poor instrument flying
- increased slips and mistakes
- abnormal mood swings

Individuals have different needs and react differently to sleep loss. Therefore each individual must apply recommendations to suit his or her own particular circumstances.

## Preventative Measures

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### Coping strategies for jet lag

**Stop-over less than 24 hours** - maintain eating and sleeping cycle on home time.



**Stop-over of 24 hours** - a difficult time interval to cope with. It does not allow time for two good 8 hour sleep periods, but is too long to cover with a single sleep session. The coping strategy may involve taking a limited rest period on arrival, and then a later longer period of sleep before call for duty.

Stop-over greater than 24 hours - it is important to gain sufficient sleep credit to complete the planned schedule, with an allowance for possible delays.

**Sleep scheduling:**

- At home the best possible sleep should be obtained before a trip;
- On a trip, as much sleep per 24 hours should be obtained as would be at home;
- Feelings should be trusted - if the individual feels sleepy and circumstances permit, then he or she should sleep. However, if the individual wakes spontaneously and cannot get to back to sleep in about 15-30 minutes, then he or she should get up out of bed.

**Good Sleep Habits:**

- A regular pre-sleep routine should be developed;
- Sleep time should be kept protected;
- The individual should avoid going to bed hungry, but should not eat or drink heavily before going to bed;
- Alcohol or caffeine should be avoided before bedtime.

If necessary, physical and mental relaxation techniques can be tried to aid falling asleep. If unable to go to sleep within 30 minutes, the individual should get up. An optimum dark, quiet and comfortable sleep environment is important. A healthy lifestyle with regular exercise should be maintained, which seems to help with the first stages of sleep.

Decreased wakefulness leads to a state of hypovigilance, which helps to control energy consumption by reducing activity of the central nervous system. Its total prevention in flight is not possible.

Strategies for delaying the onset of hypovigilance during flight include:

- maintain sleep credit - always plan sleep patterns whenever possible
- be aware of the symptoms - drowsiness, slower sensory perception, preoccupation with an out of context problem, moodiness, reluctance to communicate
- alternate periods of activity and relaxation
- engage in social conversation
- engage in physical activity such as arm and leg stretching

- in a multi-crew operation, it is possible for crew members to take planned naps during the flight - these should not exceed 30-45 mins, and recovery from a nap takes a period of 5 mins.

Strategies for delaying or preventing the onset of fatigue include:

- keep fit
- eat regular balanced meals
- avoid regular use of alcohol
- ensure control of emotional and psychological aspects of life
- ensure adequate preparation for flight, including flight planning and flight deck comfort.

During flight it is helpful to alternate periods of activity and relaxation. Engaging in social conversation and physical activity such as arm and leg stretching may also assist in maintaining wakefulness.

Caffeine consumption may be used to increase alertness. A cup of coffee usually takes about 15 and 30 minutes to become effective, and the effect lasts for between 3 and 4 hours, although this is less effective for those who consume regular large quantities of coffee. A balanced diet including drinking plenty of fluids can also help to prevent the onset of fatigue.

Bright light (more than 2,500 lux), used at the appropriate time in the circadian cycle, can help to reset the circadian clock.

After flying east, the traveller should be exposed to evening light with respect to body time, but morning light avoided. Conversely, when travelling west, morning light should be sought and evening light avoided. This makes the best use of the natural zeitgebers in resetting the body clock.

When used appropriately, certain drugs can help in the short-term to resynchronise the sleep cycle after time zone crossing.

Temazepam is a short acting benzodiazepine which is rapidly cleared from the body. Many people find this drug helpful in promoting sleep and used for two or three days after travel, it can assist in resetting the sleep cycle. However, it should only be used under medical supervision and should never be taken within 8 hours of flying as a member of crew.

Melatonin is a hormone secreted by the pineal gland with a rhythm linked to the light/dark cycle through the suprachiasmatic nucleus. It is produced at night when the external light decreases, signalling that the body should sleep, declining as light returns, signalling the time to wake. However, melatonin also influences other body functions, such as temperature, blood sugar and the tone of blood vessels, as well as being involved in the control of puberty and sexual function. The hormone is available commercially in tablet form

and is used by many people to assist sleep, utilising its role in setting the body's biological clock and the sleep/wake cycle. However, the appropriate dose is not standardised, ranging from 1 to 5 milligrams, and research has shown that the melatonin content can vary by more than 10% of the ingredients on the label. In addition to melatonin, research has shown contamination with other hormones such as serotonin and impurities. Despite being a natural substance, the long-term side effects of melatonin are not fully understood, particularly those affecting reproductive function and heart activity, so it does not have a pharmaceutical licence for general use.

Although alcohol is used by some air crew as an aid to sleep, it is a non-selective nervous system depressant and is effectively a drug. Whilst it may induce sleep, REM sleep is considerably reduced, and early waking is likely. It is important to remember the decrement in cognitive performance and the after effects on the vestibular system of even small amounts of alcohol. It is therefore not appropriate to use alcohol in this manner.

Finally, it should be remembered that there is no simple or single solution for combating the effects of sleep loss and jet lag. The individual has to discover what helps him or her to cope, utilising fatigue risk management programmes where available.

# Chapter 12 – Personality and Cultural Differences

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C2 - Communication**

**C5 - Leadership and teamwork**

## Knowledge

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It is obvious to point out that everyone is different; some people seem to behave or perform in different ways to others. Although some observable differences are due to situations that people find themselves in rather than personal traits, there are still clearly more stable and permanent differences that exist between people. What is sometimes not obvious is how much of these differences are due to individual personality traits and how much are inherited from the culture that the person developed in. The easiest way to consider the difference between personality and culture is to appreciate that personality differences are the characteristics of an individual within their own national group, whereas cultural factors are the characteristics of people that are common to their national culture (but may be quite different from people of other cultures). It is clear that complete separation of personality and cultural factors is impossible; personalities are almost certainly influenced by culture, and vice-versa. However the two phenomena are usually treated as different areas within human factors science and research, and so will be discussed as such here.

## Personality

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Eysenck (1970) developed an approach to personality involving two major factors: neuroticism-stable (denoted by the letter N), and the introversion-extraversion continuum, (known by the letter E). Extraverts are said to be impulsive and sociable, introverts are more withdrawn and cautious. A low neuroticism personality is one of an emotionally stable person, whereas a high-neuroticism person will worry and get upset easily. High neuroticism is also called high trait anxiety, meaning that high anxiety is a personal trait of that person, as opposed to state anxiety, which is a transient state of anxiety present in anyone at any time. Eysenck deemed the two factors (E and N) to be unrelated (independent). The Eysenck personality inventory (EPI) produces a score on these factors and is widely used even today.

In addition to these two main factors, three others are commonly added to create 'the big five'. These are agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), and openness to experience (O). In order to obtain a measure on these five dimensions, tests such as OCEAN (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism; Collis 1997) are used. The 'big-five' personality factors are seen across most modern approaches to personality, even if not specifically labelled as such.

Many other approaches to personality exist, and many other personality inventories are in use. Two well-known examples are Cattell's 16 PF (16 personality factors) and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). Both are used often in selection and job-related personality assessments. All such tests rely on participant self-reporting or answering of questions.

The validity and application of such personality tests is still debated.

## Cultural differences

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The way that people behave, think and interact towards each other generally, as well as what motivates them, will be partly a factor of their national and cultural background. People who have grown up in different countries will have experienced different general ways of acting and behaving, particularly in social situations. They will also have developed different values. A person might act in ways that are deemed polite in one country, but are perceived as impolite in another. For example, one culture may value subordinates speaking up, whereas another culture may value subordinates who obey their superiors unquestioningly. The latter might perceive a subordinate who points out a concern as being impolite, aggressive or disruptive.

Culture of any kind is notoriously difficult to define, or even to explain. Perhaps the best known figure in the area, Professor Geert Hofstede, defines it as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede 2014). One can see the difficulty of producing a simple definition. Describing cultural differences in more detail has long been an area of debate and study.

The classic Hofstede model describes four major cultural elements (dimensions) that can vary between different cultures:

1. Power Distance (PDI) -This is the acceptance (by less powerful members of the society) of the amount of power held by higher group individuals, and hence society's acceptance and expectation of differences in power between group members. In other words, some societies are comfortable with large inequalities of power between individuals, whereas others are not.

2. Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV) – This is the difference between the value put on individual needs and the value put on group (team) needs. Western societies are often observed to be high in terms of individualism.
3. Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) – Societies can reflect more ‘masculine’ or more ‘feminine’ traits. A masculine society is one that values factors such as assertive and materialism, whereas feminine societies are more submissive and cooperative.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) – This is the extent to which people avoid uncertain and ambiguous situations.

Hofstede accepts two further dimensions added later by Michael Bond and Michael Minkov respectively;

1. Long term Orientation (LTO) – The propensity for a society to think in long-term or short-term ways. Short term thinking values tradition and current norms, whereas long term thinking adapts tradition and is concerned with thrift, saving and investment.
2. Indulgence V Restraint (IND) – This is how much a society accepts free gratification, or suppresses such gratification for wider or longer term aims.

(Source: Hofstede 2014)

It is not easy for people to recognize their own cultural traits because those traits are such an integral part of their personalities, and unlike personality traits they are reflected in most people around them (i.e. from a similar culture or country) and therefore do not stand out.

## Personality and cultural differences – Application of knowledge

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Early CRM training often focused upon pilots’ personalities. Because many trainers were brought in from management disciplines, the content was often borrowed from management training. The main idea was that by recognizing personality traits (themselves and others) crews could work better as teams, and social skills such as communication and leadership could account for the personalities of the crewmembers.

Tests like those mentioned earlier were sometimes administered to pilots, either as demonstrations and learning exercises, or in attempts to train and educate people around their own strengths and weaknesses. This practice appears to have reduced markedly over the last few decades, which is probably a positive step for three main reasons; firstly, pilots (like many people) are not always comfortable openly discussing their apparent personality traits and the relationship of these to their professional duties.

Secondly, pilots often infer (sometimes rightly) that the implication in such training is that some of them have the wrong personality and should change it. Thirdly, evidence that personality relates to accidents is not strong, regardless of the field of study.

A meta-analysis of personality and accidents in high-risk occupations by Robertson and Clarke (2002) concluded that accidents were slightly associated with personality traits such as openness, low agreeableness and low conscientiousness. However Cellar et al. (2000) had found only limited evidence that agreeableness was associated negatively with vehicular accidents, and Salgado (2002) found no reliable association between any personality factors and accident rates. A study of accident involvement in US Navy (Levine et al. 1976) found those with a history of accident involvement to be more risk-taking and more adventurous.

Sanders et al. (1976) attempted to cross-validate previous findings that three factors from the Cattell 16PF (personality factors) personality test were predictive of pilot-error accident involvement. They found that; *individual differences in personality characteristics of the aviators prevent consistent identification of traits associated with pilot-error groups*. Although there does appear to be some association between personality and accidents, it is unlikely that a single 'accident-prone' personality exists (Sümer 2003; Farmer 1984).

Various scientific studies have found debatable correlations between personality factors and pilot performance, or cultural differences and pilot performance. One of the biggest problems is defining pilot performance in a way that can be measured and statistically compared to personality or cultural factors. In general, it is agreed that commercial pilots' personalities should be emotionally stable, non-impulsive, agreeable but assertive, and that cultural differences should be appreciated by all crew-members, and where possible substituted for a professional culture.

The emphasis on operational safety culture can be seen as an attempt to supersede the problems of other forms of culture and personality traits with an optimal culture that applies to aviation professionals.

Whereas it is clear that accident rates vary among nations (particularly between the developed and developing world) it is not obvious to what extent those accident rates are influenced by cultural differences. Nevertheless some researchers have made convincing arguments attributing cultural dimensions to accidents. One example is argued by Helmrich (1994) to be the Avianca Boeing 707 (flight 52) that ran out of fuel approaching John F Kennedy Airport (the criticality of the fuel emergency was not communicated). Another, argued by Westrum and Adamski (1999) is the runway overrun of

Korean Air 1533 in which there was disagreement between the Korean and Canadian pilots.

A large part of CRM training attempts to redefine the operating culture, and where this directly clashes with national culture, CRM has been slow to gain acceptance, or has been rejected. An obvious example is assertiveness of junior flight crew regarding safety critical information. This was accepted relatively easily by Western cultures because it was quite closely aligned to elements within their national cultures (e.g. more 'individualistic' and lower 'power-distance'). However the idea of assertive junior pilots directly clashes with some Eastern cultures, where it is seen as anything from impolite to dangerous. It can be difficult for individuals brought up with Western values to appreciate the difficulty of adopting such activity on an Eastern flight deck. To go against cultural norms can be very damaging to a working dynamic, and lead to a less functional (and possibly less safe) environment.

## Personality and cultural differences – Application to Training

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CRM that attempts to improve safety by identifying pilot personality traits associated with safety risk is controversial. Doing so could be seen as another way of expressing the old view of human error (the bad apple theory, that certain people cause errors and accidents and so the solution is to root out those people). A more effective focus might be the way people behave and act in a group and a culture, not what personality people have. Humans tend to be very quick to perceive differences between themselves and others, and attribute those differences to personal predispositions. However, showing why certain types of behaviour or interactions are unhelpful is generally more powerful in driving change than focusing on pilot personalities. If assertiveness is a good thing, then assertiveness should be encouraged for everyone. It is unnecessary to make this a personality issue and could distract from the message.

If one is to look at 'personality' or 'culture' as part of CRM, then rather than attempting to use labels and scientific notions, it would perhaps be more realistic and useful to discuss the sorts of common traits and behaviours that pilots perceive in others they work with (and themselves); what effects and challenges these cause, and what can be done. If this is done, specific personality types need not be analysed. It does not matter what label is given to the various types of behaviour (or perceived traits) that emerge from the participants' anecdotes during a session (e.g. impatient, supportive, argumentative, cold, etc.). What matters is that the group discusses coping strategies and helpful suggestions from their own experience, in order to maintain effective crew performance. The underlying objective of doing this



would be to get peer-influenced buy-in in terms of helpful and unhelpful behaviours.

Discussing culture used to be less controversial among pilots than discussing personality, although times are changing. If pilots of various cultures are in the classroom, then a CRM trainer can make the sessions more realistic and interesting as long as they take a sensitive approach. They might, for example, ask various pilots how a pilot from their culture may react or behave in a given situation. The basic aim is the acceptance and understanding that colleagues who act and behave in ways that seem alien, unhelpful, confrontational, etc are often not necessarily intending to come across in those ways. A pilot perceiving a colleague as doing so should not react in a way that will aggravate the situation, but appreciate that it may be a cultural difference. Emphasis should be on a standard and safe operating culture as the ultimate redress for cross-cultural issues.

## Competencies

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The main area where personality and background culture are important is inter-personal interaction. In terms of competencies, this means C2 (communication) and C5 (leadership and teamwork). This could be crew interactions or interactions outside agencies such as air traffic control.

Effective two-way communication can be impacted by culture. The first stage of dealing with this is to use the observable behaviours (e.g, IATA OB 2.2; “Selects appropriately what, when, how and with whom to communicate”, or OB 2.3; “Conveys messages clearly, accurately, and concisely”). These are very general and do not prompt any reasons for the observed issues, and so more unpacking is required. It can be difficult for a trainer to know if cultural traits are at the root of a communication problem, and they should never assume it based on having a crew with different cultural backgrounds. If such problems are suspected (e.g. if there are multiple common signs through a session) then the observable markers are a useful initial step for the trainer to explain what was observed, but not attempt to explain why. It is often best to allow the crew to unpack deeper issues beyond the marker descriptions, especially where cultural elements are suspected. Because culture is not a personal trait, most pilots are comfortable discussing the pros and cons of their own culture in terms of the operation, and of attaching these to the observed issues that may have arisen. They will almost certainly be better placed to do so than a trainer. Hence the trainers job becomes facilitation and supporting the debrief to maintain the aim.

Leadership and teamwork is clearly impacted by culture, since that is a core part of what culture is. Instructors need to consider the cultural backgrounds of the crew members, and whether they have different backgrounds. IATA OB

5.11 directly addresses cultural management as a teamwork/leadership marker (“Manages cultural and language challenges, as appropriate”). The use of the word ‘appropriate’ offers the instructor considerable flexibility, which is required. Culture is a huge field, and no instructor can be expected to have more than a cursory knowledge and understanding of it. Not only are there numerous cultures, all with differences in their own approaches to social situations, but on a modern flight deck there are thousands of cultural combinations possible. Understanding how cultural issues can impact interactions and performance requires a lot of knowledge (e.g. knowing the norms of many cultures, and the impact), but understanding inter-cultural impacts (interactions between pilots of different cultures) requires immense expertise. As with communication, an effective approach can be for the trainer to facilitate the unpacking of any cultural issues that appear to arise, rather than trying to identify the root of those issues.

With some cultures, the very descriptions of observable behaviours can be a challenge; for example IATA OB 5.1 (“Encourages team participation and open communication”) or OB 5.8 (“Accepts responsibility for decisions and actions”). This can be challenging for cultures with large power-distance characteristics. Hence, the trainer may need to take different approaches for different cultural flight decks.

# Chapter 13 – Automation (and manual flying skills) (updated 2022)

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C3 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)**

**C4 - Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)**

**C8 – Workload Management**

## Background

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Autopilots have been in use for over 100 years. They started out as being simple to use but unreliable, and gradually became the opposite; complex to use but extremely reliable.

Increased complexity was inevitable as autopilot capability grew. By about the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century autopilots could reliably fly selected headings, altitudes and airspeeds, and later became able to achieve navigational goals, such as holding a track or path.

All this meant more options for the pilot, resulting in autopilot ‘modes’. Modes can be thought of as the different ways in which the autopilot can achieve the pilots’ goals. For example, to achieve a lateral flight path, the autopilot can follow a planned track (e.g. NAV mode) or simply hold a heading (e.g. HDG mode). Or, when descending to a new altitude, the autopilot can target a descent-rate or an airspeed. These are options to the pilot that are available as different selectable modes. When introduced, selectable parameters and modes offered much greater capability but increased complexity. Autopilot controls evolved from the humble on-off switch/lever to whole panels of buttons and knobs. In parallel, displays of modes were added to the instrument panel. As automation took over most of the aircraft operation, these controls moved to more prominent and central positions in the cockpit (for example the now familiar mode control panels [MCPs] or flight control units [FCUs] in large, fixed wing aircraft).

The next big step was the introduction of the flight management system (FMS) in both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. A major function of FMSs is to allow routes (or parts of) to be pre-programmed so that the autopilot manages its own settings and selections en-route. For example using an FMS the autopilot can fly an entire standard instrument departure without any pilot

input to the primary flight controls or autopilot controls. At the same time, status displays (mode annunciators, bugs and markers, etc) were integrated into primary flight display (PFD).

Along this journey, the increasing reliability and accuracy of autopilots offered opportunities to extend the scope of operations in a way that would be impossible using human pilots. Examples include automatic landing systems and some modern types of approach using performance-based-navigation.

In summary, automation has become extremely capable and reliable, but with an inevitably high level of complexity for the user.

## Levels of automation

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With so much automation available, pilots are faced with a lot of choice about how much of it to use at any time. The amount of automation in use is often considered on a continuum called 'levels of automation'. An extreme end would be no automation (manual flight, no flight director, no auto-thrust, no enhanced map display, etc) and the other end would be full automation; the autopilot flying a pre-programmed route (autopilot and auto-thrust engaged, LNAV/VNAV [*managed modes*], etc). In between lie numerous possible 'levels' (combinations and options).

The concept of 'automation levels' is understood differently by academics and operators/pilots, and this can cause confusion for either party. For academics, the amount of augmentation, support and execution provided by the system (to the human) is what elevates each level, and this results in anywhere between seven and twelve automation levels. These contain levels that pilots do not generally alter such as the level of the flight control augmentation (e.g. type of fly-by-wire laws) and so such classifications have little operational utility to pilots. Pilots instead consider automation levels based on the general configurations of automation that they use in practice. This is how 'automation levels' will be considered from here in.

Traditionally of course, pilots considered only two overall levels of automation; manual flight and automated flight. Pilots of modern automated airliners have three fundamental levels; manual flight (i.e. no or little automation), auto-pilot using tactical automation (e.g. selecting parameters like heading or altitude on a mode control panel) and autopilot using strategic automation (e.g. using the FMS to fly a programmed route). Beyond this it can be useful to widen the first level (manual flying) into a number of combinations. For example, the use of flight directors while manual flying is a step above basic manual flying ('raw-data' flying) because whereas the pilot still physically manipulates the controls, they can do so by following attitude

guidance displayed by the autopilot system (the flight director). Another step up is the inclusion the auto-thrust while manual flying.

The use of these levels will depend on the type of operation but in most modern airline operations (and many large helicopter operations) there are only two short inflight phases that regularly involve use of any sort of manual flying; take-off/initial climb and final approach/landing. However, some situations and aircraft require more manual flying, including non-normal situations and go-arounds in some older aircraft types. Additionally, the possibility of autopilot failure can never be discounted.

In most situations however, pilots use either tactical or strategic automation. Within these exist many options and permutations and deciding how much automation to use and how to use it is a skill (or competency) in its own right, and is usually called 'automation management'.

The level of automation factors into many contemporary debates including workload, automation management, flight path monitoring and manual handling skills.

## Automation management

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Many operators and manufacturers have automation recommendations, policies and procedures that require crews to use automation in certain ways at certain times or in certain situations. These often set a minimum level of automation given a situation or type of operational task or recommend that the highest level available should be used. This is because general operational experience over the long-term tends to suggest that higher levels of automation lead to fewer safety-related incidents compared to lower levels. Of course, because this is constantly managed (i.e. through policies, requirements etc) the real-world safety picture related to automation levels is very difficult to pin down. For example, if all manual flying were stopped then no incidents would occur due to manual flying, and only those occurring against a background of automation would remain. This would produce a picture of available evidence that would lead a layperson to conclude that using an autopilot is more risky than manual flying. The same would be true the other way around. Hence the aviation industry is continually attempting to make sense of complex and dynamic pictures of evidence in order to determine the best ways for crews to manage automation and achieve the safest operational outcomes. The consensus is that using higher automation levels has a net safety benefit compared to using lower levels, though this is a very simplified claim.

At a crew level, managing automation is part of the pilot skill-set, and is closely related to workload management and threat and error management.

Crews must adhere to automation policies and procedures, but within these are many choices as to what automation levels to use, and how to use them. Choices around automation levels can be a key part of workload management, since it is theoretically possible to fly most types of operations manually. Hence automation management is a key safety issue, not least because it has direct implications for crew workload. However the optimum automation configuration for any given situation is not always obvious, either to companies or to individual crews at the time, and there is very little valid research to assist in such decisions.

In general, it is good practice to plan ahead and use automation to reduce or avoid predictable workload peaks, for example programming an arrival into the FMS during an earlier low workload phase. In dynamic situations such as radar vectored arrivals, use of tactical automation allows the pilots the necessary flexibility to regularly select new goals as required (such as target altitudes and speeds) without the work of re-programming the automation, while alleviating the need for the manual flying and thereby allowing more capacity to think ahead and manage the overall situation. This is an example of where the optimal automation level may not be the highest level available.

## Automation and pilot workload

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As stated, automation has a close relationship with pilot workload. 'Manual flying' usually elevates immediate workload (compared to auto-flight) even when supported by lower automation levels such as attitude hold modes. Where a pilot is flying manually during a busy situation, crew capacity for managing that situation is usually reduced. Manual flying also increases the potential severity (though not the likelihood) of distraction. Factors such as fatigue, stress and startle can also impact manual flying. Clearly autopilots do not get distracted, stressed or tired, and are very reliable. They relieve pilots of the continual need to maintain the required flight path and so, in theory, liberate spare capacity for pilots to look ahead for other threats and plan strategically. In multicrew aircraft, operating with the autopilot in command usually has a lower immediate workload for both pilots, since studies show that both the pilot-flying (PF) and pilot-monitoring (PM) monitor the flight path slightly more closely when the autopilot is not engaged (Jarvis 2017). Compared to use of tactical automation (selecting parameters for the autopilot to follow) operating with pre-programmed FMS modes engaged is usually even lower workload for both pilots, as long as the programming is correct and the situation is suitable.

However the relationship between automation and workload is not simple, nor linear. Bainbridge (1983) claimed that automation acts to lower pilots' workload for flight phases in which workload was already low, and increase workload for phases in which it was already high. This was termed 'the irony

of automation'. The common example used is that automation lowers workload in the cruise phase (where it was already low) and raises it in the arrival phase, where it was already high (due to the workload of managing the automation). Although such ideas are often considered as firm truths, there is considerable nuance. For example, large parts of the cruise may be low workload for some operations such as long haul, but in very short haul operations (and towards the end of long-haul flights) the cruise can become extremely busy and automation relieves crew workload for concentration on planning and preparation. Not only that, crews are usually better able to prepare for an arrival while automation is engaged, and this can lower the subsequent workload during arrival and approach. However, it is true that arrival and approach phases can become very busy, especially if things do not go as expected, and in these cases automation itself can create workload; particularly if any automation reprogramming is needed. Even so, it is usually debatable whether the root-cause of such a problem was the automation itself, or the pilots' workload-management. For example, high workload following a decision during an arrival to reprogram the automation without a change of plan to increase the time available to do so, is arguably an issue of workload management rather than an inherent problem of having automation. The management of automation is a modern crew competency that can substantially decrease workload but done badly can increase workload and even make the automation more of a hindrance than a help.

## Automation awareness

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Modern automation capability inevitably means greater complexity. Pilots need to be aware of what the automation is doing and why. This is called 'automation awareness'. It is well known that situations can occur on modern flight decks where it is not obvious to the pilots why the automation is acting as it is, and the commonly quoted phrase "what's it doing now?" exemplifies the problem.

Pilots maintain awareness of automation through displays including mode annunciators, displayed parameters, painted extended flight paths, and the resultant effects of the automation (i.e. what the automation is doing to the aircraft, flight path, etc). The mode annunciators are the primary window into the automation status, yet research has shown that automation modes are not well monitored or verified (E.g. Sarter et al 2007). Mode annunciators are generally in the form of abbreviated text such as "NAV", "LVL CHG", "LOC" etc. These are not implicitly meaningful, and so pilots require memorised knowledge about how the automation works in order to interpret the flight path. This is one possible reason why the mode annunciators are not well monitored.

For multicrew flight decks, both pilots need to share the same understanding and awareness of the automation. If one pilot makes an automation change or an error that the other is unaware of, the resulting confusion can be draining, distracting and potentially dangerous. Hence it is very important that changes, new selections, or re-programming are clearly communicated and understood by both pilots and that communication around the automation is standardized.

It is usually appropriate that pilots include the automation mode when informing an intention, for example: “I’m going to descend to 5000ft in flight level change”. This might be followed by an FMA (flight mode annunciator) call-out such as “Arm... MCP-Speed” to confirm the mode change has been seen. Whereas this has clear benefits, it is not perfect. A human factors threat is that this becomes an automatic verbalisation that neither pilot pays attention to. Worse still, research shows that pilots sometimes make such calls without looking at the annunciators, and so where the mode does not meet the expectation there is the potential for a very confusing situation (source; unpublished client research by author).

Some airlines have created FMA callout processes that include both pilots, in order to be more resilient in this respect. For example the pilot-flying (PF) makes the mode change, the pilot monitoring (PM) calls the active mode change, and the PF then calls any armed modes. While there can be advantages to such ideas, it is always best to carefully monitor the results over time. In this example, an inadvertent consequence could be an erosion in PF monitoring of the active mode changes. There is no undisputed universal best practice around such call outs; some problems can be solved by use of such practices, but other problems can emerge.

Whether or not mode changes are called out, the monitoring and understanding of mode annunciators is universally accepted as essential. Issues around mode awareness are particularly important in the most automation-reliant phases such as RNAV and RNP operations or auto-lands, where the automation mode is critical to maintaining a safe flight path.

Although these are technical issues, there is nothing wrong with the CRM trainer emphasizing the issues around automation generally and mode understanding and awareness in particular. Additionally, there are human performance issues that impact upon mode awareness. As well as factors such as vigilance decrement, fatigue, startle and stress, simple high workload caused by a distracting task or conversation can lead pilots to drop the monitoring of automation from their scan with potential adverse consequences. All these sorts of issues can be usefully discussed in CRM classrooms.



## Automation and Flight Path Awareness

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Use of automation is often said to affect pilots' flight path awareness. There is little doubt that automation affects awareness, but the manifestation is not simple. By way of example, it is unquestionable that having an autopilot engaged/coupled reduces the monitoring of primary flight instruments. Research is very consistent on this point (Jarvis 2017). As primary flight displays (such as attitude indicators and airspeed indicators) are monitored less under automated conditions, awareness of the immediate flight path declines. At the same time however, as pilot attention shifts to other areas, awareness of the extended flight path and wider aspects of the operation can increase. Hence automation can alter pilot awareness across many areas and elements in a complex way.

There may also be longer-term implications of automation. For example, some believe that practicing manual-flying (particularly raw data flying) helps maintain pilot monitoring skills during automated flight over the long-term. To date however, no research has shown evidence of this.

In summary, the question of how automation affects flight path awareness is complex, and does not lend itself to simple claims in either direction.

### Automation and manual flying skills

There is a long-standing concern about the impact of automation on basic piloting skills, particularly manual flying. This is an important area within aviation human factors.

The accepted argument is that extensive use of automation is causing long-term erosion of pilot manual flying skills, through displacement of practice opportunity. It is also said that continual use of automation impairs the development of manual flying skills in inexperienced pilots. Terms such as 'automation dependency' and even 'automation addiction' have been coined to mean that over-reliance on automated systems is leading to a situation whereby many pilots are no longer able to cope without those systems.

Evidence used to support such theories comes from investigations, analysis of events, subjective surveys, opinion-based articles, subjective observations, and some scientific research. Many commentators have cited such evidence in press articles, and many conferences have devoted significant time to the issue. The current situation is one of wide-spread acceptance of three hypotheses.

#### **1. Insufficient manual flying skills are a modern safety threat**

IATA analysis in 2020 identified an increase in manual handling errors (IATA 2020) based on surveys of pilots. Various papers have highlighted eroded or

under-developed manual flying skills as contributory in accidents, including Air France AF447 (2009), Air Nippon Flight JA16AN (2011), Asiana Airline Flight 214 San Francisco International Airport (2013), United Air Lines flight United 863, San Francisco (1998), Ethiopian Airlines Flt 409 (2010), Continental Flt 3407, Buffalo (2009), and others. Indeed, it has been claimed that from 2009-2016, 92% of the flight path management related accidents worldwide had a manual flight operations error that was contributory or causal in the accident (ICAO 2019).

Whereas such claims undoubtedly have some validity, they should not remain unquestioned. There is usually no way to fully determine the extent to which any one accident or incident was related to a problem of manual flying skills. Such a determination will rely on subjective judgement, regardless of the expertise involved in making it. As well as being cautious about single assessments of accidents, a healthy questioning of all research reliant upon such judgements is important. Whereas research output is often presented numerically (e.g. “85% of accidents...”) it should be remembered that such figures are ultimate based by subjective judgements.

Nevertheless, it does appear probable that manual flying skills contribute to some accidents.

## **2. Pilot manual flying skills are eroding**

Current accepted theory is that manual flying skills are eroding over the long-term (the term ‘skill fade’ is often used). This cannot be informed in either direction from point-1 above. An acceptance that many modern accidents are caused by poor manual flying skills (or even that such numbers are increasing) does not necessarily mean that skills are eroding. Accidents where pilot handling can be cited as causal have been occurring in professional aviation for over a century. An increase in number might be expected simply due to growth of aviation activity, whereas a decrease might be expected due to less manual handling in operations. Hence, the existence and numbers of such events is not itself evidence of manual flying skill erosion. Furthermore, mishandling accidents still occur to pilots who regularly practice manual skills and rarely if ever fly automated aircraft (e.g. in general and sport aviation).

Research was reviewed to establish the strength of scientific evidence for the theory of manual flying skill erosion (skill fade).

Some research findings have suggested that lack of recent manual flying practice leads to less accurate flying. Ebbatson (2009) found pilots with more recent practice showed better performance on ILS tracking tasks, using subjective instructor assessments. Haslbeck et al (2014) found significant differences in accuracy of ILS tracking between a group of long-haul captains

and a group of short-haul first officers. Haslbeck et al (2018) compared A320 and A340 pilots on ILS approaches, and stated the headline conclusion that *“Pilots showed a relationship between manual fine-motor flying skills and recent flight practice”*. In conclusion, despite some limitations, the research findings strongly suggest a relationship between current practice and flying accuracy.

Although an important issue, evidence that lack of current practice is related to less accuracy is not the same as finding a general erosion of manual flying skills or accuracy over time. While it may appear likely that long-term flying skills are eroding, to date research has not uncovered an evidential picture that properly informs this question either way. One reason is that researching this in a valid way is extremely challenging. A major issue is that long-term trends in manual handling are difficult to measure. Another consideration is that the definition of ‘manual flying’ can range from accuracy of a tracking task to recovery from an unusual attitude. Most studies use tracking task accuracy (such as ILS accuracy) as a measure because it lends itself to being measured (though it is not a straightforward metric). However, accuracy on a tracking task does not necessarily predict a pilot’s ability to recover properly from a stall, fly a coordinated steep turn, or manage a manually flown engine failure. Hence inferring a level of ‘manual flying skill’ from a single measure such as ILS accuracy is problematic and can only inform a small part of the evidential picture. Properly measuring all aspects of manual flying skills is not realistic in any single piece of experimental research. Whereas recent research has shown strong evidence to suggest that accuracy of compensatory tracking skills is impacted by current practice (Ebbatson et al 2010, Haslbeck et al 2014/2016/2018) there is far less experimental research into wider elements of practice and manual handling (such as general manoeuvring, avoidance of upset, or upset recovery). One further consideration is the definition of ‘manual flying skills’. Pilots manually handle primary flight controls under multiple supporting automation levels, such as use of the flight director, or flying in a hybrid automation configuration (e.g. with or without auto-thrust). Hence manual flying is multi-faceted.

Partly because of the above, overall proficiency is currently not possible to measure scientifically in a way that accounts for all the facets of the skill. However, a lack of scientific evidence for a hypothesis is not evidence against that hypothesis, and most information still suggests declining manual skills is likely.

In conclusion, it is likely that manual flying skills are suffering long-term erosion, although the current picture from scientific research is not definitive except in relation to some specific areas relating to current practice.

### **3. Increased use of automation causes manual flying skills to erode**

Along with the general acceptance that manual flying skills are eroding, there is a widely accepted theory that increased automation usage is the cause.

The theory is that the autopilot has effectively taken over the manual handling task from the pilot, causing pilots' flying skills to decay (or not properly develop) through lack of practice. Not only has automation replaced most manual handling, but it supports almost all the remainder, through automated flight guidance (such as flight directors) and control augmentation including fly-by-wire control laws or autopilot stabilisation (in helicopters). Hence, not only do modern air transport pilots get less practice in manual flying than previous generations, but even the practice they get is heavily supported, and so traditional 'stick and rudder' skills are almost never required. It is highly likely that such change has impacted pilots in various ways.

Four major studies are often cited as showing the impact of automation on manual flying skills. These are Veillette (1995), Ebbatson et al (2009), Casner et al/NASA (2014), and Haslbeck and Hoermann/DLR (2016). All these were robust and well carried out research programmes.

Haslbeck and Hoermann (2016) claimed to have found that “...*Flight deck automation erodes fine motor flying skills among airline pilots*”. This is a strong statement, claiming direct causality of automation on manual skills erosion. The research compared A340 (long haul) pilots and A320 (short haul) pilots on the performance of manually flown ILS approaches (in their own type simulators). The A340 pilots were found to be worse in terms of manual-flying, using an ILS task. These results do suggest that a lack of physical practice impacts accuracy (ILS handling task), and that automation is at least one reason for the practice displacement.

However, the precise claim that automation erodes those skills is unsupported from the data. If the claim were correct (automation erodes fine manual flying skills) then one should question why the results were not the reverse of those obtained. The A320 group would probably have been recently exposed to more automation (monitoring, management, usage etc) than the A340 group, including more automated approaches. Hence the results seem more likely to support the opposite claim; that automation does NOT cause erosion (even though lack of practice might). The original statement (“...*Flight deck automation erodes fine motor flying skills among airline pilots*”) may have been an attempt to simplify the claim, but from a scientific perspective it is incorrect and misleading. A more valid general claim from this research might be “*Lack of current physical practice resulting from automation usage, erodes manual flying skills*”. A problem with misleading claims is that when summarised in subsequent publications, they become part of the overall scientific knowledge; accepted as ‘fact’. Those reliant on the research (such as regulators, accident investigators and

operators) then receive a misleading or incorrect picture that is difficult to dispute.

Research by Casner et al (2014) collected information from pilots about their current manual flying experience but reported finding no relationship between this information and manual handling performance. There was no assessment of automation exposure or currency. This research found that pilot flying skills were “*mostly intact, even when pilots reported that they were infrequently practiced*”. No results showed a negative link between current automation usage and manual flying skills.

Older research by Veillette (1995) and Ebbatson (2009) attempted to factor in automation exposure (as opposed to current practice).

Ebbatson compared the proportion of time pilots had logged on manual types versus automated types, as a quasi-measure of automation exposure. This was found to be somewhat related to differences in subjective manual flying ratings, suggesting signs of a possible effect (i.e. more manual flying resulted in better ratings of manual skills in simulator tests).

Veillette (1995) compared pilots who flew an automated commercial aircraft with those who flew the older less automated version of the same aircraft. Differences in performance between the two groups suggested poorer manual performance in pilots from the automated type. Although over 25 years old at the time of writing, this is perhaps the strongest research-based evidence of a link between displacement of manual flying practice resulting from automation usage, and a decline in manual flying skills. However, it does contain some limitations. One is that both groups were tested in the same simulator; despite those of automated types having become used to EFIS displays (e.g. tapes) while those on the manual types were familiar with the electro-mechanical displays. These sorts of issues could account for large amounts of experimental effects.

Despite the limitations however, these two pieces of research do provide some evidence that automation usage might negatively impact manual flying skills through displacement of manual flying exposure (as opposed to direct causation).

Summarising the picture overall, most of the evidence suggests that lack of practice negatively impacts manual flying skills, where automation usage is at least one factor reducing the opportunity to practice. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this is not the same as showing that automation has a direct impact on manual flying skills (positive or negative). To do this, research would need to separate the concepts of automation usage and manual flying exposure.

## Industry solutions to the manual skills deficiency

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Attempts to resolve the accepted manual flying problem can be considered in three main strands. Firstly, for pilots to practice more manual flying in real operations. Secondly, for pilots to experience more manual handling during training (at all stages of their career), and thirdly for upset prevention and recovery training; meaning that pilots practice manual flying in situations that they would never experience in normal circumstances.

Safety alerts and initiatives have been released by aviation authorities over the last decade that address these. Authorities have asked operators to encourage more practice of manual flying skills in both operations and training (E.g. FAA SAFO 17007, 2017, EASA Safety Information Bulletin SIB No.: 2013-05; 2013, and Transport Canada Advisory Circular AC-600-06, 2015). This includes pilots being allowed to fly entire line sectors manually where this is deemed safe. Additionally, competency-based training regimes designed and implemented in the last decade include manual flying as a separate competency. In terms of upset prevention and recovery, training regimes are now mandated, for commercial pilot training and type ratings. Many third-party aircraft operators are meeting some of the need using aircraft including small aerobatic aircraft.

There seems little doubt that these initiatives will have some benefits. However there remain uncertainties as to whether safety threats caused by loss of manual handling skills are reduced by the solutions (such as periods of practice during normal flight operations or UPRT training in light aircraft). There is also the possibility that the solutions will create their own risk through inadvertent consequences. None of these issues has been fully established.

## Conclusions

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There is little doubt that more reliable and complex automation has created some inadvertent safety threats of its own, but these are less clear than is often accepted. It is important to see any such issues in proper context. Modern automation (complex and reliable as it is) is a vital component of ultra-safe modern aviation systems, and whereas it has undoubtedly contributed to some accidents (directly or indirectly), it has almost certainly prevented many times more. Discussion of the safety threats inherent in high levels of aircraft automation *must be seen* against this background. Furthermore, safety initiatives (including training) must work to complement rather than counter the already ultra-safe systems in place.

## A2 – The Crew

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	Competency (most relevant)
14 - Effects of groups and teams . (Coordination, Teamwork, Roles and Group decisions)	C5, C6
15 – Leadership . . . . .	C5
16 - Communication, . . . . . Shared Mental Models, Assertiveness and Intervention	C2, C5

Note – most chapters inform most competencies to an extent.

# Chapter 14 – Effects of groups and teams

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(Coordination, Teamwork, roles and group decisions)

Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C5 - Leadership and Teamwork**

**C6 – Problem Solving and Decision Making**

## Knowledge

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Having a crew means having spare capacity, redundancy and safety. Really effective teamwork can go further; providing synergy. Synergy is the concept that the product of the crew is more than the sum of the two pilots combined. In other words the team aspect adds something extra. Examples would be the ability to generate the best solutions or the ability to understand situations through team discussion. In poor cases, having two individuals can be worse than one. For example, if the group becomes disruptive, political, argumentative, etc. Hence, it is important to make sure that flight crews can work together in specific roles within the operation, and contribute to the overall team.

When a number of people interact with a shared aim or experience, they are called a 'group' (a specific term in psychology). The interplay and 'forces' within groups of people is known as *group dynamics*. A strong group is said to be cohesive. Cohesion is the subtle bonds between group / team members at any time, caused by liking, dependence, trust, etc. Cohesive groups are said to be more functional, but also more inward looking.

The way that people act and behave is usually quite different when they are part of a group or team, compared to when they are alone. That difference may be difficult for the individual to recognize at the time.

The essence of group behaviour (the behaviour change between 'individual on their own' and 'individual in a group') is the *role* that the individual takes on when in a particular social or professional context. Taking on a role usually involves taking on a subtly different identity (sometimes called a social identity or group identity) and is a bit like temporarily changing one's personality. This can be informal or formal. In an informal group situation such as a group of friends, a person may take on a fairly permanent role, for example becoming the leader, the counsellor, the arbitrator, the antagonist, the joker, etc. These roles can become internalized and drive the way that that person acts whenever they are amongst that particular group of people.



Such behaviour may be quite different to the way the person seems to act at other times (i.e. when with their family). The person may feel like a 'different person' in certain company, compared to other company, due to the role they take on. Roles can also be formal, such as an appointed captain and first officer. The internal expectations associated with a role predict the types of behaviour that people exhibit when in those roles. This is the essence of good role modelling: so that when newcomers take on a role, they have a good model from which to anchor their behaviour.

The most famous psychological observation demonstrating the power of roles was carried out by Professor Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University in the 1970s. A fake but realistic prison was set up in the university. After agreeing to take part in 'an experiment' student volunteers were unknowingly and randomly assigned to two groups (two roles); prisoners or guards. Guards were given sunglasses and uniforms, and told to guard the prisoners, but there was no detailed instruction of how to do so. The prisoners were realistically 'arrested' at their homes and taken to the prison. The plan was for Zimbardo's team to subtly observe what happened for the next two weeks, but not to interfere. Rather than the student volunteers deciding to walk away from the bizarre experiment, they became immersed in it, taking on their roles. After a minor revolt, prisoners fell into the role of prisoners, being subordinate and accepting all sorts of real punishments and bad treatment. Guards became abusive and devised such unpleasant and unnecessary treatments that Zimbardo had no choice but to call off the experiment after just four days. Afterwards (even many years later), the students who were assigned as guards were shocked by the way they had acted, and felt that their behaviour went against their normal values. They had become immersed in the role of prison guards, their actions seemingly being driven by what they felt the role of a prison guard was. In the same way, individuals' behaviour and actions are driven by their perception of what people normally act like in those roles (called norms). It is worth considering what pilots consider the norms of their own roles to be.

Even where a social group is absent, it is possible for the simple presence or attention of others to change one's way of behaving. In aviation, a classic example is airshow flying, where a crowd of passive spectators can influence an individual to behave in a way that seems out of character (even to themselves). Research by Papdakis and Jarvis (2008) showed that despite airshow pilots performing more practice flights than flights in front of an audience, they were more likely to crash when flying at an audience event. With responses from pilots right across the world, the same research project found evidence to support a view that many pilots hold seemingly inconsistent values towards their own safety. This is a common and natural effect of social behaviour. Evidence suggests that the values held by many airshow pilots

towards safety, subtly changes in the presence of an audience, when their role appears to shift towards their airshow-pilot “persona” (Jarvis 2010).

Our multi-aircraft display team was due to open the show before transiting to another display. The wind was gusty and the cloudbase was low and grey, and not particularly inviting. Frankly I didn't want to fly but none of my teammates seemed concerned so I thought I was having an off-morning. We taxied out past the expectant crowd line and this probably presented an implicit demand on us to fly when we really should have stayed in the pilot tent for another hour and waited for conditions to improve.

Within groups, roles usually demonstrate some hierarchical elements. A common characteristic of groups is the tendency of members (particularly those lower down in the social hierarchy) to follow group practices and norms. This is known as group compliance. The classic experiments of Stanley Milgram carried out at Yale in the 1960s, and repeated many times since, show an extreme aspect of compliance called obedience that is important for leaders and followers to understand. Milgram set up a fake laboratory where volunteer participants had to ask questions to another person (whom they perceived to be another volunteer, but was in fact an actor) who was strapped into a chair with fake electrodes attached. The volunteer was instructed by the experimenter (another actor) to administer increasingly large electric shocks to the person in the chair, whenever that person answered a question wrongly. Some verbal pressure was put on the volunteer, but nevertheless almost all volunteers administered a shock and over half of volunteers administered a lethal shock despite clear labelling to that effect and the respondent apparently being in serious distress (indeed ultimately pretending to have died). Repeated trials with many variations by many scientists have shown similar results since, and the general effect is undeniable. In essence, the effect of being in a subtly subordinate role (taking instructions from a perceived figure of authority) can lead people to take actions that they would normally not take.

## Group decision-making

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Group decision-making is a complex and well-researched area. Processes similar to all the mechanisms of individual decision making can occur (see Chapter 9). However, on top of this, there are effects unique to groups. One of the best known is called group-think. This is where members of a group are reluctant to challenge the decision of a leader (or the group) and instead overtly agree, even when in doubt. There are a number of reasons why people do this. One is to maintain their own position in the group (be favoured by the leader and others), another is to maintain good group relationships. The members often recognise that group issues are more important to them than the decision outcome (the task is sacrificed for the relationships or

politics). These effects have been well researched and expertly described in some famous case studies, perhaps the two best known being the J F Kennedy 'Bay of Pigs incident', and the space shuttle Challenger (see Janis and Irving 1982, and Moorhead, Ference and Neck 1991).

A related effect (arguably a symptom of the group-think phenomenon) is risk-polarization. This is the tendency for group decisions to err towards extremely high or extremely low risk strategies, rather than moderate risk strategies which individuals are more likely to make alone. Risky-shift is well known, but is simply the high-risk side of group polarisation. This occurs because an individual's doubts about a strategy can disappear as others show agreement. Confidence in the decision grows as agreement is perceived. The original decision then appears less risky than it did, and so further discussions that generate even more risky choices appear less risky than they otherwise would have. This effect is accompanied by a *diffusion of responsibility*, meaning that each group member feels only partly responsible for the decision and is therefore able to accept an overall higher level of decision risk than they would alone.

### Application of knowledge - Effects of groups and teams

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Flight crews are usually temporary teams; pilots may not even have met until the briefing, so there is no time to develop as a crew before entering an effective working relationship. A common understanding of how the crew will work together is therefore important. Company operating procedures cover how pilots should operate, but HF/CRM training can show what behaviours and attitudes are expected, and help to standardise these across the company.

Given human tendencies such role taking, anchoring, adjustment, and confirmation bias, it is important that crewmembers set the right tone straight away (to take on appropriate roles) otherwise small relationship problems can become engrained and reinforced. Good 'first impressions' are important for establishing the right authority gradient (the leader and follower roles), including trust and confidence in one's colleague. It is important to use standard practices and procedures and to act within the accepted norms. This is particularly important when dealing with people from other cultures. Importantly, as well as setting the right task climate, doing this will act to make the situation familiar to everyone. Familiarity makes people feel comfortable, and so pilots that act in standard, predictable ways are more likely to build confidence and trust in others, and begin the process of forming a cohesive and effective team.

Simple acts (e.g. within a Western-Centric Culture, smiling, shaking someone's hand or using a little humour) are surprisingly powerful ways to

set a good initial climate and put people at ease. These small things help to show acceptance of other group members and of the team as a group. Additionally, a captain who shows acceptance of his own natural vulnerability and empowers the first officer by inviting their input usually sets a mutually supportive climate (as long as the first officer understands the message). Some examples follow;

Carrying out line flying duties with Police units every month involves stepping in as the duty pilot with the resident crew for 2 shifts. I am acutely aware that whilst being fully qualified and current, I am not as familiar as one of their regular pilots would be with their operation. In an effort to 'highlight' and 'address' this potential problem, I always mention this at the end of the crew brief and encourage the crew to not feel shy about pointing out anything if they see me try to do something that is wrong or different to any of the other pilots, in summary: "Treat me like a fool and I'll try not to let you down". [2]

A senior trainer flying with a new F/O set the tone: 'As we haven't flown together before let us set the scene. I am a great believer that we enjoy each other's company and the flight - and of course we will also try do things properly. So if at any stage you aren't sure of what I'm doing, if I'm not doing it properly or you have a suggestion - please say. And I will do the same - does that make sense?' [1]

A fundamental tenet of teamwork is a 'shared goal'. When team members perceive and desire a shared goal, they are more cohesive and supportive. Fortunately, at a macro level this is a given for a flight crew. However it is still up to the captain to create the sense of shared goals. This can happen early on, for instance by taking opportunities to stress joint tasks and even simply by using the first person plural for shared tasks and goals ("we will / let's do this and that first"). Asking, or showing acceptance of another crew-members' opinion is another way of hinting at joint goals. Most good captains do these things quite naturally.

Large differences in age and experience between crew-members can cause issues. Younger, less experienced pilots can be reluctant to challenge or query a captain's actions. Similarly, there may be reluctance on the part of the cabin-crew to 'bother' the flight-crew with concerns. It is important to ensure that communication between team members is encouraged from the outset, even if that information turns out to be non-relevant or not important, or a challenge by a co-pilot proves the captain to be correct. Team members should not be afraid or embarrassed to speak up. Such behaviour should be part of role modelling: showing that the role of a good cabin crew member or first officer includes sharing concerns or information. If it is perceived as part of the professional role, then it will happen with less effort for most first

officers. However, captains should still be aware of the vulnerability of some first officers to compliance or obedience.

Compliance (and even obedience) is probably a useful trait for groups in most situations. If a captain were questioned about every command then the crew would become dysfunctional. However, in critical or unusual situations where team members could feel uncomfortable with what is being done or requested, it is sensible to consider the influence of obedience and compliance. Captains should be conscious that a co-pilot acting on a command is not necessarily agreeing with that command, even when they act without question. In the same way, a co-pilot who does not question a course of action is not necessarily agreeing with that course of action. The following anecdote shows that even when specifically instructed, some first officers still find it difficult to speak up in the face of an unsafe situation.

My co-pilot had been with the company for about a year; we had flown together before and always got on well. As we planned our approach I made an error... and briefed that it would be my landing. The landing direction for an offshore approach is determined by the wind direction, obstacles and orientation of the platform and it is common that only one pilot will be visual with the helideck during the final stages of the approach. Once on final approach my mistake was obvious, yet despite asking the co-pilot if they were happy with the approach on more than one occasion, they continued to reinforce my poor decision.

It can be seen that leaders should avoid any natural temptation to take comfort from the fact that group members do not show concern or fail to speak up about a course of action that they are involved with. It is natural to infer tacit support or agreement from the actions or inactions of others, and many accidents have occurred where the leader later admitted feeling reassured because the follower appeared to be comfortable with the situation. Only later is it discovered that the follower was acting out of compliance or obedience. It may be said that professionals would not fall into these seemingly obvious traps nowadays, but cases similar to this happen many times a year, and such incidents only seem obvious when viewed in hindsight.

## Group decision-making

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The group-think phenomenon may at first appear less likely with only two crew members (although one must remember the contributions of cabin crew and outside teams). However sometimes pilots will sacrifice their point of view in order to maintain relationships, give a good impression, or avoid the possibility of being wrong. This will be more likely to occur when the authority gradient is very steep (for example in a training or checking situation or

whenever the captain's opinion can affect the first officer's prospects or confidence). This is a further reason to establish a good working climate straight away, and for a captain to emphasise their acceptance to be challenged or advised.

However in many cases a captain may still have difficulty in deciding whether a first officer's opinion is independent, or just an agreement (particularly in the situations described). An effective technique in these circumstances is for the captain to avoid leading or suggestive questions and try open questions. For example:

**Leading question:** "He said 3,000ft didn't he?"

**Suggestive question:** "Did he say 3,000ft?"

**Open question:** "What height did he tell us to level off?"

This can be surprisingly difficult to do in the heat of the situation.

Unfortunately, leading questions often come more naturally, and additionally can feel more polite and supportive. Open questions demand a little thought in order to suppress the piece of information that one is focussing on.

Conducting a final line check for a converting P2. After pushback our ACARS load sheet didn't come through. We have to enter the runway and vacate to free up the holding point, which included a difficult 120 degree turn at night at a notoriously difficult airfield. So by now (50 minutes after push) we've burned a lot of contingency fuel but still no final figures. At what point do I return to stand for more fuel? I establish my bottom line but how do I have my calculations confirmed by a P2 who is likely to agree that the earth was flat if I said so. So I needed open questions, no statements E.g. 'what do you reckon reserve fuel is? When airborne at what stage would you be happy dispensing with an alternate? What options do we have?'. The answers are good. I ask P2 to work out a fuel figure that he'd be comfortable departing with; "What figure have you decided upon? ...Sounds good to me what have we got in tanks? ....Ok do you reckon we can go? ...Yep I agree anything else we need to do? ...Great let's tell him we're ready for departure.

In some circumstances, acceptance of another's opinion may be easier than attempting to justify or argue one's own, or risk further upsetting the team dynamic. If the decision is a minor one, then a pilot may feel that the crew relationship is more important than the outcome and so openly agree with their colleague. In the same way, even where no decision has been discussed, it is common for pilots to keep doubts about a situation to themselves because the other pilot appears to be comfortable with proceedings. This is a group think effect, and it is not unusual for both pilots

to be unaware of the other's doubts. To voice doubt or concern (in or out of the decision making process) is to counter group-think.

As we taxied out, it was clear that the weather was very bad and might affect the take off or climb out. The airport was well known for challenging conditions. It became very quiet on the flight deck; perhaps we were both thinking the same thing. Aircraft from other companies ahead of us were taking off, and aircraft were queuing behind us; everything was normal: no one else seemed concerned. More silence in the flight deck. I heard myself say "I'm thinking that we should go back to the gate and wait this out". "Yes, I agree" exhaled the first officer instantly, clearly relieved. We called our intention on the radio and took the available taxiway turn off, as the airwaves suddenly came alive with the same request from every aircraft behind us! [4]

The above anecdote shows that social influence effects (similar to group-think) were setting in on two levels; in the flight deck of the particular aircraft, and across the airport operation. This was causing crews to continue as normal despite their doubts, because no one else seemed to be of accord. The captain's comment on the radio is enough to break the effect. Clearly many aircraft crews were having the same concerns, but did not want to be the only crew to return, and were doubtful because all other aircraft crews seemed to be acting normally. As soon as this captain made the radio call, it demonstrated to all the other crews that someone else had the same concerns, which dispelled the doubt, and gave them more confidence in their own assessments. As more calls were made the group influence effect took hold in the opposite direction. Simply voicing a concern can sometimes tip the balance.

Commanders should be particularly aware of risky-shift. The maintenance of a positive (if shallow) gradient will help to tackle this because the captain should feel a responsibility for all critical decisions, and not allow a feeling of diffused responsibility to be of influence.

It should be stressed that commanders should not feel that due to an expected role all decisions must include the whole crew (this can be inferred, and even inappropriately reinforced, by CRM and HF training). There will always be occasions when the captain uses their discretion, which might mean acting independently as the leader if the situation demands it.

### Scenario from a simulator check debrief:

Examiner: Why didn't you consult the FO and share ideas before electing to immediately divert? We are meant to involve our colleague...

Captain: I considered involving the FO, but I noticed that he was already struggling with the high workload and was starting to make mistakes with the

FMS - and I decided not to further increase his workload or distract him, especially as we were down close to minimum fuel and there were other aircraft in front of us. In this case I thought through the landing distance, weather and engineering availability.. and the diversion choice was completely obvious... so I decided not to waste time and fuel on unnecessary discussion. I do remember checking with the FO that he was comfortable with the airfield I announced and he said that he was.

In group situations, where critical decisions and actions are involved, a helpful mantra to remember is: “It doesn't matter who's right, it matters what's right”.

## Application to Training - Effects of groups and teams

### **In the classroom**

The influence of groups is a wide-ranging topic with a strong research history. Taught well, it should be fascinating for an audience. Some of the research experiments (such as Milgram and Zimbardo) are worth outlining if time allows. The key theoretical points to put across are the importance of roles and norms and the influence these have on behaviour. From a decision perspective, the dangers of risky shift and group-think can be emphasized using appropriate case studies. Awareness of the effects and the maintenance of a sensible cockpit gradient are important countermeasures.

The subject and application of *roles* can be reinforced and explored by finding out what expectations captains and first officers (or pilot handling and pilot monitoring) have of their own and each other's roles. The trainer can ask the participants questions such as: “what is a captain ‘like’ / what should a captain be like? What is an FO ‘like’?” The answers can be compared between the two groups to see if differences exist. What the facilitator is looking for is the *stereotype*<sup>1</sup>, because that will inform the group about the role models that influence behaviour. The facilitator can help to emphasise the effective aspects of the roles. Similar exercises can be done for any job role (e.g. cabin crew).

Classroom sessions about social influence can discuss what aspects of an aircraft operation might be vulnerable to such effects. Some examples are:

- Wanting to be accommodating to ATC
- Wanting to please passengers
- Wanting to impress others (e.g. flying a friend or performing at an airshow)
- Not wanting to hold others up (e.g. accepting an abbreviated circuit) or keeping up a higher speed than desired.
- Not questioning a situation because another pilot looks comfortable with it.



An ambitious and capable trainer can have a lot of fun teaching about group effects because the audience can be used to create these effects, in order that they see the issues for themselves. For example: splitting into groups of five and giving the groups a challenge such as a tricky logic puzzle can bring out many effects including role taking and group decision-making. By debriefing the groups the trainer can show how an informal leader probably emerged (why was it that person?), how the group dealt with differences of opinion, whether anyone suppressed their doubts (group think) etc. The issues emerging should quickly be applied to a flight deck activity / example. This sort of exercise can be rewarding and useful, but if done badly is boring for the audience or could appear irrelevant to their work. A trainer should avoid this sort of exercise if not confident in their classroom management, knowledge of group effects, debriefing skills, or ability to apply emerging phenomenon to flight deck activities in real time. It is also important to note that such exercises can take a lot of time.

The classroom trainer can also explain when group-think is likely (high authority or checking environment) and ask for ways of countering it. They should facilitate discussion in which countermeasures emerge such as the use of open questions when needing a double check. Practice at turning statements or leading questions into open questions can be done in a classroom CRM environment.

<sup>1</sup>. A stereotype is the 'aggregated' set of behaviours that a person would expect from a role. Stereotyping is natural and unavoidable, although more commonly it is colloquially aligned with undesirable and judgemental behaviour, and so the word 'stereotype' might be best avoided in a classroom situation.

### **In the simulator**

Social effects are difficult to teach, assess or observe in a simulated environment because the environment is socially and psychologically artificial, and therefore people may act quite differently than when in a real situation. For example, in the simulator some pilots may be less likely to openly express doubts and concerns to the other in case these prove unnecessary and draw the attention of the trainer to the fact that they are unsure about some aspects of the situation. The trainer needs to be sympathetic to explanations given by crews during debriefs, and be sensitive to issues that might have been caused by the simulated environment rather than the task itself. On the other hand, the trainer can use knowledge of roles, norms and groupthink to help understand and explain some seemingly strange behaviour and performance that is not explained by technical phenomena.

## Competencies

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Most CBTA systems have at least one competency for teamworking. IATA competency 5 combines teamwork and leadership. This is a common and appropriate combination because both are 'group' activities.

For obvious reasons, the descriptions in the observable behaviours describe observable symptoms that can be caused by group processes (aspects of team working). The challenge for the trainer is to identify the group issues underlying the observed symptom. Often this involves recognising a particular dynamic occurring between two people, which is more challenging than noting a single person's behaviour because it can involve being concurrently cognisant of both parties. As in some previous sections, one suggestion is to facilitate the underlying issues in the de-briefing. This can work well but the challenge is that group processes can be very difficult to perceive from inside the group, especially group processes emanating from oneself. Pilots might not believe that group processes were taking effect, and require more supporting information. Hence the trainer will benefit from some depth of knowledge and practice in recognising such issues, beyond identifying the symptoms (e.g. from the observable behaviours).

Helpfully, the trainer is also a human being, and enters into a limited dynamic in the training session (even before entering the simulator). From this perspective, the trainer will pick up on various general issues that can help get a feel for the dynamics occurring. For example, does the trainer themselves feel that the captain is approachable? Does the trainer understand the expectations of the captain? Does the trainer feel that the first officer is reacting or supporting appropriately (as they, the trainer, would expect a first officer to do)? Where a trainer senses an issue, they should trust their recognition and focus on what the issue could be (as well as looking for observable behaviours). However it is worth noting that where dynamics issues exist, they can be easy to 'sense' in some crews and very difficult in others.

Decision making competencies (such as C6) are highly relevant to teamwork and group processes because many decisions in multicrew aircraft are group decisions. They will share many characteristics of individual decisions but parts of them will be very observable due to the verbal communication. Almost all decisions that are verbalised in a group environment will be influenced by group dynamics (for better or worse). This can mean observable elements of crew performance/behaviour that are almost impossible to differentiate between decision making and teamworking competencies. It is tempting for a trainer to critique a group decision as if it were an individual decision (using a decision competency) without extending over to a teamworking (group) competency. This could miss important group

issues. The group element adds a whole dimension of complexity to the analysis of an 'analytical' decision process. Just one example would be where only one option was raised, it can be difficult to know whether that was due to lack of option generation by the pilot involved, or was a result of group influence confirmation (i.e. confident agreement by the other pilot when the option is voiced). It is almost impossible to know whether, had the same pilot been flying alone, that pilot may have continued to consider another one or two options. This would be a case where de-briefing would be helpful to establish which competency the behaviour was related to (if only one); i.e. whether the issue was decision making or teamworking.

# Chapter 15 – Leadership

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Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

## **C5 - Leadership and Teamwork**

### Knowledge

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Attempts to understand effective leadership can be traced back as far as Plato, who endorsed the theory of 'expert embodied authority' that stated that the most effective leader will be the person with the greatest appropriate 'expert' knowledge. Modern leadership theories understand 'expert knowledge' as just one part of one factor (the leader) determining effective leadership. For example, it is clear that the best captains are not always the most experienced pilots, and vice-versa. Such variation in leader effectiveness points to factors other than expertise to explain good leadership. Researchers in the mid-twentieth century recognized that the 'social atmosphere' or 'social climate' of a group was more responsible for its overall effectiveness than the leader. Because of this, a big part of effective leadership is now understood to be about optimizing that climate. In the 1950s Bales noted that leader interactions fell into two distinct strains; those oriented towards the completion of the task, and those oriented towards the maintenance of relationships.

The later part of the twentieth century saw more models of leadership emerge, such as situational trait approaches, where effective leadership was seen as a happy match of a leaders' traits and the situation that the group was in. This predicted that where some people may be good leaders in some situations, they might be poor in others. More modern theories such as situational behavioural models describe effective leadership as being a combination of situational variables and leader behaviours (rather than simply leader traits).

Scientific research in leadership is usually of the observational and self-reporting nature (i.e. observing leader behaviours and comparing these to effectiveness and group satisfaction), or examining case studies.

The three classically researched styles of leadership are autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Pure autocratic leadership is where all leader interactions and behaviours are focused on productivity (effectiveness), and relationship factors such as social cohesion are effectively ignored. An autocratic leader is not necessarily one who interacts in a hostile or stern

manner but this can sometimes be the characterization of a purely task-orientated leader. Democratic leadership is characterized by inclusive leader behaviour where ‘followers’ are given overt responsibility and included in steering tasks such as strategic decision-making. Democratic leadership can be roughly characterised as a balance between task-oriented and relationship-oriented leader behaviour. Laissez-faire leadership is where the leader allows the group members to do what they wish (the leader may set or explain the tasks, but then does not stipulate or manage group behaviour). Although usually researched as distinct groups, these leadership styles are best thought of as a continuum.

Early studies by Lewin, Lippit and White found strong evidence that (in classroom situations) autocratic leadership was the most effective for simple productivity, followed by democratic leadership. Laissez-faire was very poor. Democratic leadership led to more group satisfaction and therefore a more sustainable climate. In the temporary absence of the leader, productivity suffered seriously in the autocratic climates but little in democratic climates.

In general, a balance of task-orientated behaviour and relationship maintenance predicts more effective leadership. An imbalance in either direction can be detrimental.

In informal groups (such as groups of friends or classmates) leadership emerges ‘naturally’, whereas in formal and professional situations leaders are appointed. Either way, a balanced and effective climate is easier for a leader to produce if a leader has implicit ‘authority’ within the group. The term ‘authority’ is used here in a colloquial sense, as a way of describing the combined facets of the leader that make the group members implicitly consider that leader as being above them in the social hierarchy. In this sense, leader authority is a property of the followers, not the leader themselves. An informal leader who emerges has the advantage of implicit authority almost by definition (that is the reason that they are the leader), whereas a formal leader must ‘create’ that perception of authority. The characteristics and behaviours that make informal leaders emerge would be helpful to formal leaders too.

In the case of captains, the formalized position within the organization is an important signal of authority, reinforced by seating position, uniform, etc. These identifiers help to establish authority, but are not in themselves sufficient. Clearly, overall respect for the organisations’ command process will contribute to this. Beyond this, authority is helped by task factors (such as expertise, good track record, ability to achieve goals, etc.) and social factors (such as being liked, respected, attractive, feared, etc.).

## Application of Knowledge – Leadership

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Although most leadership research has been done observing large groups or management teams, general parallels can be cautiously transferred to multi-crew flight decks. Flight deck authority gradients align approximately with the continuum formed by the three classic types of leadership. An autocratic gradient is one where the captain makes most decisions without consulting or considering the first officer. The captain's behaviours are probably task orientated, and may be lacking in social maintenance. A number of accidents have previously been partly attributed to autocratic flight deck gradients, the most notable being the KLM/Pan Am runway collision in Tenerife (1977). One of the early aims of CRM was to reduce authority gradients. The aim was to encourage first officers and other crew-members to speak up (be assertive), and to encourage captains to be more inclusive and exercise joint decision making where possible. In essence, CRM principles aimed to reduce the flight deck gradient to a more democratic situation (often called a synergistic gradient). However in some cases the gradient reduction went too far and produced a near laissez-faire climate, where task-orientated behaviours were not properly prioritized. Such gradients lead to off-task conversation and behaviour, even at critical times. Accidents such as Delta 1141 at Dallas Fort Worth in 1988 demonstrate the effects of laissez-faire cockpits. Sterile cockpit requirements were one way of countering these sorts of problems.

The desired situation is a gradient where the captain's authority is recognised, but good relationships and synergistic working are retained. This requires a balance of task-orientated and relationship-orientated behaviours, the amount of which depends on the crew-members and the situation. It is impossible to be specific or prescriptive about the ideal mix, or even the ideal behaviours. In some cases, task-orientated behaviours will coincidentally be good for relationship maintenance, particularly where there is a strongly shared goal. If the crew work well as a team to attain joint overall goals, there is an extremely positive effect on relationships. Maintaining relationships is more challenging when tasks are going wrong, or the goals are not being achieved. It is important to note that leaders cannot achieve an optimal working environment through use of relationship maintenance behaviours only; the usual result of such behaviour will be a laissez-faire climate, which in the long-term is unsatisfactory to everyone, as well as being unproductive. In other words, being friendly and trying to be liked is only effective (beyond the short-term) if accompanied by achieving task goals. In the long-term, too much emphasis on relationship-orientated behaviour at the expense of task-oriented behaviour will usually lead to the opposite of what is intended, and the subordinates will feel negatively towards the leader regardless of the leader's attempts to be liked.

Captains must therefore retain authority and executive control over the overall climate and strategy, and should be seen to be doing so. It is important to recognise that good CRM is not about establishing a flat or shallow cockpit gradient, nor a very steep one. In an ideal situation, the captain should feel sufficiently empowered to determine critical decisions in the best interests of flight safety, not in the best interests of CRM practices or crew relationships. Most effective first officers prefer positive leadership.

The FO was flying into a demanding airfield with maximum gusty crosswinds and the aircraft was damaged after a heavy side load landing. Subsequently the Captain said that on approach he was thinking 'I wish I was doing this' and the FO was thinking 'I wish he was doing this' ... but no one said anything.

In the above anecdote, the captain has avoided taking what he felt to be the safest course of action, in order to maintain the first officer's contribution to the task. This may be an unintended consequence of CRM training, because the captain mistakenly felt either insufficiently empowered to take the task-related action he wanted to, or he felt that the first officer's entitlements were more important than the captain's task preference. It also demonstrates that effective leadership depends to a large extent on those being led (followers). Followers can dictate part of the situational component of effective leadership. Acceptance of the captain's authority is an obvious requirement, helped by respect for the organization and process by which the captain was appointed. But good 'followership' also involves assisting in the creation of the right social and task climate. This might involve reassuring the leader of their authority and support, as well as completing tasks as required and keeping the leader informed of the status of those tasks. It also requires followers to communicate doubts and concerns about their own abilities when appropriate so that the leader can cater for these (as in the above scenario).

Followership behaviour motivated by goals other than joint goals can be destructive. An example would be a first officer attempting to be seen in a better light than their captain during an observation. Good followership involves taking a supporting role that does not undermine the leader.

Finally, it is worth considering that good leadership skills can be helpful in single crew operations, and so should not necessarily be restricted to multi-crew CRM training. Single pilots often have to show leadership when dealing with people who make up the wider operation. Examples might be in dealing with ATC (e.g. having to refuse an ATC request), dealing with passenger behaviour, or demonstrating authority when protecting safety interests against commercial or social interests. A good example follows;

The commander was to conduct a single-pilot task to transport a newly married couple from their wedding reception to the local airport, where they were to board a flight to commence their honeymoon. The couple emerged from the reception followed by an entourage carrying many heavy bags and it was immediately obvious to the commander that if he agreed to carry all the baggage he would be overweight. Resolving the conflict with the groom and bride's father required assertiveness, tact and diplomacy, normally dismissed as irrelevant during single pilot CRM training.

## **Application to Training – Leadership**

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Effective leadership should be taught as part of HF/CRM training and assessed as part of the operator's CBTA process (or equivalent skills assessment). It is therefore important that trainers can describe and recognize the difference between good and bad leadership (and factor in the positive and negative effects of situations and followers into their assessment).

### **In the classroom**

In a classroom, the ability to practice leadership skills can be limited. A practical method is for the trainer to try to paint a clear and complete picture of what good leadership looks like, in normal and non-normal situations. If done well, this can act as a role model for participants. For obvious reasons, accident narratives are not ideal for this; positive examples are not easy to find in accident reports. Well-trodden examples are the United Airways A320 Hudson River landing and the 1970s Sioux City DC-10 accident. Others can be sought from within the company, and from other pilots. The HF/CRM trainer could use their CBTA system's observable behaviours (performance indicators) or similar framework to support the examples. Although some examples of poor leadership may be worth discussing, in a classroom situation analysis of good leadership will be much more effective. The HF/CRM trainer should also take the opportunity to extract points about good followership from each example discussed. This may be less obvious.

### **Simulator and Line**

The simulator or line trainer attempting to observe leadership behaviour through observable behaviours / performance markers is in good historical company. Much scientific research in the leadership field has been through the development and use of observational taxonomies (also called scales) to collect comparable data on leader behaviour. Taxonomies attempt to measure specific observable leader behaviours, or tag them as being good or bad. Overall, good leadership will usually align with good consequences, but it is important to note that good leadership behaviours will not always achieve



effective ends due to situational and followership reasons that a captain could not have reasonably foreseen or changed. Hence care must be taken when judging someone's leadership ability on the consequences of a single session such as a LOFT training session. The trainer should try to distinguish between poor leadership behaviours given the situation, and satisfactory leadership that does not lead to effective consequences due to subsequent occurrences or situational factors. The best way to do this is to firstly consider whether leadership behaviours were appropriate regardless of the consequence, before considering whether those behaviours necessarily caused the consequence. CBTA observable behaviours (performance indicators) can help, because they encourage the trainer to look at the specific behaviours rather than inferring them from consequences or debriefings.

### **Competencies**

IATA competence 5 (leadership and teamwork) is the obvious 'go to' competency for this area. Other competencies are relevant but indirect, because they describe the necessary behaviours for the tasks that the leadership performance is attempting to support.

Reading through the observable behaviour descriptors prior to a session is a useful way to refresh on the main aspects of behaviour to look out for in effective leadership.

## Chapter 16 – Communication

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(Communication, language, sharing mental models, assertiveness and verbal intervention)

Related competencies (IATA, 2021 CBTA framework):

**C2 - Communication**

**C5 - Leadership and teamwork**

### Knowledge

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It is generally accepted that crews who communicate and exchange operational information more often have more evenly distributed workload and commit fewer errors during critical phases of flight (Foushee and Manos 1981, Kanki and Palmer 1993). More modern research supports the premise that effective and frequent operational communication is related to positive crew performance. However, this does not necessarily mean there is a simple relationship between the quantity of communication and the performance of the crew. It is possible that good crews also happen to communicate a lot. Research shows that the most effective crews discuss problems in greater depth and use low workload periods to discuss options and plan ahead (Orasanu and Fisher 1992). The relationship between performance and communication is less clear in abnormal and emergency situations however (Harris 2011).

The quality and timing of communication is probably even more important than the frequency. Simply put, communication is the passing of a message (information) from one party (a sender) to another (a receiver). In reality however each communication is a fragile serial process. Communication can fail because the message is omitted, poorly constructed, not transmitted, blocked or lost, not received, or because it is misinterpreted by the receiving party. It can be seen that successful communication is sometimes taken for granted, because there are many weak links in the chain, any one of which can cause a failed communication.

It has been shown that humans naturally use several channels when communicating or receiving information. Talking (verbal communication) is supported by other cues such as intonation and body language, although the main content of a spoken message is usually communicated verbally. Supporting a verbal communication with other cues, such as visual cues, can help to get a message across.

Obviously, many verbal communications fail in transmission because they are masked by other sound or noise. A less obvious (but more common) failure is caused when the receiver does not properly perceive or process the information that was otherwise audible. If they are engaged in other thoughts or activities, they may hear the communication and even react to it, but without processing the content. It is therefore important that the sender makes the message clear and simple (to maximize the chance of it being processed) and also sends it at an appropriate moment (not when the other party is engaged in hard mental effort). Some CBTA indicators now reflect this, for example IATA CBTA observable behaviour OB2.1 (“determines that the recipient is ready and able to receive information”).

Complexity, unfamiliarity and length of single communications are also known to lead to communication failures. The number of pilot requests for repeated taxi instructions increase with more complex instructions, as do read-back errors, because lengthy communications can overburden the working memory (Morrow and Rodvold 1993; Morrow et al. 1993).

## Language

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Nowadays, pilots from many different nationalities are competent in English, which makes it possible to have many combinations of nationalities rostered together. However this can cause problems. For example communication between English-speaking flight crew and ‘English as a Second language’ (ESL) flight crew of flight safety related issues on the flight deck has been noted as a precursor to procedural deviation (Sevillian and Jarvis 2013).

There is a minimum level of English language proficiency that all pilots and air traffic controllers working in international civil aviation must achieve. Pilots and controllers who speak English as a second language are expected to be proficient in ICAO standard proficiency; however ICAO proficiency does not cover all possible situations in aviation. As such, it is likely that pilots and controllers will also use ‘Plain Language’, particularly in non-routine situations. Plain Language sounds very similar to the natural English language, with all its informality and colloquialisms that many people grow up speaking. The crucial difference is that, like ICAO phraseology, Plain Language is primarily concerned with the aviation workplace and maintaining safe operations.

It can be easy for primary English speakers to forget that English is not their colleague’s first language, and so fall into the use of colloquialisms, slang phrases, poor pronunciation, accelerated speech, and non-standard operational phraseology. All these can cause serious problems in communication. Indeed, perhaps counter-intuitively, it has been shown that when communicating operational messages in English, two people of the

same non-English speaking language background make fewer communication errors between them than is the case where one such communicator is a primary English speaker (Tiewtrakul and Fletcher 2010). This may be explained by the familiarity of the sounds, intonations and accents in use. However, it underlines the importance of primary English speakers articulating clearly and adhering to ICAO standard phraseology where possible. Pilots should understand that many people who have learned English as a second language will be primarily familiar with standard and correct use of grammar and phraseology. Primary English speakers may be unaware that they rarely speak in this way themselves. For example, many younger English speakers use phrases such as “she was like..” instead of “she said..”, which may make little sense to a non-native speaker. In an aviation context for example, an air traffic controller instructing a pilot to ‘keep your speed up’ (meaning maintain speed) may not be aware that such a phrase may be interpreted as ‘increase speed’ by a non-native English speaker.

## Application - Communication

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It is important to limit the amount of information being communicated at any one time, and use familiar phraseology and sequencing where possible. IATA OB2.3 reflects this; “Conveys messages clearly, accurately and *concisely*”. Standard operational terms and phrases are essential, particularly when one or both crew-members do not speak English as a first language. Even intonation and punctuation can completely change the perception of a message, as the following anecdote makes clear;

The crew were running through a minor electrical malfunction in the simulator. The checklist line read, “Bat switch on Emergency Gangbar ..... Off”. This was read aloud by the PM as “Bat switch on, Emergency Gangbar off”. The PF paused for a moment and asked the PM if he was sure. The PM confirmed he was correct and read the checklist again, punctuating it as before. The PF then carried out the drill as it had been read and instantly induced a total electrical failure.

Clarity of communication can be improved by methods such as standardizing and restricting vocabulary, using short messages, and presenting several types of cues such as visual and auditory (Huey and Wickens 1993).

Many years ago I had a German Captain in the left hand seat and an English F/O in the right hand seat (in the simulator). During an EFATO drill the F/O (PF) gave the command "SUSPEND ECAM" (should have been "STOP ECAM"). The Capt cocked his head to one side for a moment then gave a bisque nod of his head (he had taken a moment to translate the unexpected word then understood!). This gave me an ideal opportunity to reinforce the

use of exact terminology to minimise misunderstandings, especially with our diverse ethnic/linguistic backgrounds in the cockpit. [3]

Clarity of communication can also be improved by maintaining a steady speech rate and not speaking faster in situations of high stress. Advice from Jensen and Biegelski (1989) still holds true today. They list the communication skills that can be improved by HF/CRM training as:

- Enquiry (countering the reluctance to seek clarification in case it calls into question their ability or hearing).
- Advocacy (stating beliefs despite one's social or team role)
- Listening: Jensen and Biegelski emphasize that this is a skill that can be improved by practice and learning.
- Conflict resolution: (Two-way communication and the stating of opinions and beliefs often causes conflict due to disagreements).
- Critique: (feedback to improve future performance).

## Crew resource management communication skills

### **Sharing information and mental models**

In multi-crew aircraft, sharing of information is vital, particularly for the effectiveness of the monitoring task. The same situation can look quite different to two people, depending upon their intentions and awareness of what the other knows. Monitoring pilots are handicapped if they do not have a full picture of what the flying pilot is intending to do. It is common for a monitoring pilot to become distracted by a specific issue simply because information has not been communicated by the flying pilot. Consider an example: The flying pilot (PF) suddenly changes the heading in order to abbreviate the arrival. The monitoring pilot (PM) now becomes concerned about the amount of energy they have, and wonders whether to suggest further speed reduction. Additionally the PF has made no mention of another aircraft ahead, which will now be much closer. The PM thinks that the other traffic is still sufficiently far ahead but must decide whether to point this out as well (there is often the risk of a small social cost in all such communications). The whole situation distracts the PM from normal monitoring tasks, resulting in vulnerability. However, it need not have done because the flying pilot had taken it all into account already; the plan being to lengthen the downwind leg later in order to give more time to assess the strong crosswind on the final approach. But because this intention was not communicated, the monitoring pilot was unnecessarily distracted in assessing the situation and trying to decide whether to and how to intervene.

An *example of good* and easy practice of sharing intentions would be as follows;

Captain: 'I'm going into 'Flight-Level Change' now and going below the profile - I think there is a good chance ATC will cut the corner on us' [1]

A further unfortunate effect is that something that is seemingly large and obvious may not be communicated because there is a natural assumption that it must be known.

Taxying out of Miami, FO's first line sector, very slow and cautious. Eventually we got airborne. In cruise, I asked how he had found his first take off in B747-400. He replied, no problem although I found the taxiing a bit difficult as I have never taxied an aircraft before. He had over 2000 hours and I had just assumed he had that experience (he had previously flown for an airline who's aircraft have no steering on right seat). [7]

This can also be true of highly critical information. Communicating one's awareness of critical safety elements is therefore important even if these seem obvious. In many accidents it is possible (although usually impossible to know, even from CVR data) that seemingly obvious preventative information was known to some crew members, but either not communicated, or poorly communicated. These issues were pivotal in the original formation of CRM training, after accidents such as the 1977 Tenerife disaster and the 1978 Portland DC-8 accident.

The sharing of communications and mental models can be expanded to the whole flight operation to include other local traffic and air traffic control.

While offshore and before embarking on their final sector, the crew obtained a weather update for their destination, Aberdeen. The update confirmed that the destination met the criteria for a coastal airfield which permitted them to operate the final sector under IFR without holding an alternate. They lifted from the offshore platform and had been in the cruise for approximately thirty minutes when ATC began to advise that conditions at the airfield were deteriorating rapidly in fog. With insufficient fuel to go anywhere else they monitored the condition closely. A number of aircraft across the North Sea were similarly affected by this un-forecast deterioration and everyone began to pass ATC their intentions and holding endurance. The information enhanced the controller's situation awareness which enabled him to prioritise and co-ordinate the recovery.

It is established good practice for pilots to share safety information such as local weather conditions, including turbulence and wind shear. While there is a balance to be struck between useful communications and clutter, pilots should always consider communicating information that could be important for wider safety, when they are confident that others would benefit from that information. Unfortunately social effects sometimes prevent pilots sharing important information openly due to doubts about the communication (*will it*

*just add to others' workload? Will it show ignorance on my part? Is it already known? Is this information really important in any case?*). This problem can occur to all levels of pilots, but is very common for recreational pilots as the following anecdote from a glider pilot demonstrates;

I was circling, almost at cloud base about 1000ft above the ATZ [Air Traffic Zone] of a large GA airfield that also had a VOR beacon associated with it. I listened in on the airfield frequency but it was busy so I did not want to bother them and I was drifting fairly fast anyway. Suddenly a twin-prop aeroplane appeared from a cloud and flashed past me. I then heard the pilot communicating a general message to watch out for gliders in the overhead. After a long pause (probably while the controller looked out of the window) I heard the controller repeat this message and also advise an en-route aircraft. He then tried to call me ('the unknown glider') but I felt like a naughty schoolboy and kept quiet. I had put the nose down and was speeding away. Whereas technically I'd done nothing wrong, I knew that I ought to have made a call to let them know I was there. Now I always make that call around airfields or beacons.

## Assertiveness and intervention

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Assertiveness is usually associated with a communication from a subordinate to an authority (e.g. FO to captain) but in some situations, for example when the FO is pilot flying, the captain may have to intervene and this may also require assertion.

Although it is important to be assertive when an intervention is urgent or critical, assertive communication is not *usually* a first resort. This is because assertive communications can carry a social dynamic risk ; potentially creating a difficult flight deck dynamic and adding to a problem. This is something that many pilots understand implicitly, but would prefer not to admit. Even when done perfectly well with use of standard phraseology, a receiver of an assertion might see it as undermining their authority.

I had not enjoyed flying with this captain, and then during the arrival we levelled out, power went on, and it became clear that he had forgotten to close the speed brake. I waited, hoping that he would notice, but he didn't. I recalled the procedure, and called "speed brake up" in the most respectful and professional tone I could. Nothing. I repeated it. Nothing. Procedure at this point was to close it myself, so I reached across to do so. He slapped my hand away and admonished me, whilst closing it himself. Not a single word was said after that, other than standard calls. If we had had a go around or an emergency, the atmosphere would have been dangerous.

Most interventions are not urgent. In most cases skilful and experienced pilots will draw others' attention to the critical issue or parameters in a way that specifically updates situation awareness without aggravating, shocking, or startling the other pilot, in order to help maintain the cockpit dynamic (obviously this may be inappropriate in very critical cases). Since the problem is often that one pilot has not noticed something, the specific need is to draw that pilot's attention to the critical parameter to update their situation awareness. If done early enough, such an intervention need not be assertive or challenging. It could take the form of a hint or question. Here are examples of both:

The aircraft was hot and high (had more energy than desirable): a stable approach is looking unlikely, and it may not make an ATC height restriction:

**Hinting:**

F/O: 'Looks like a bit of a tail wind'

Captain: 'Yes, let's use a bit of speed brake'

**Questioning:**

F/O 'Looks like we are getting high - what's the plan?'

Captain 'I'm going to take the gear early'

FO 'Thanks'

The questioning method communicates what the pilot is thinking (providing situation awareness) and encourages the other pilot to share his plan. This can have the effect of saving face for the receiver, who does not have to confront the possible discomfort of feeling 'caught-out'.

When an intervention is really urgent or critical, the communication or action is far more important than the manner in which it is communicated. In such cases the momentary cockpit dynamic should be more resilient in any case (because of the shared threat).

If an urgent verbal intervention is required, an assertive comment should be de-personal, specific, and may contain brief information to update the others' situation awareness. It will often contain an instruction or solution.

"We're not within the ATC height restriction, we need speed brake immediately"

Of course, it would be hoped that an earlier intervention would have prevented the necessity for such an intervention. It is role-dependent and a matter of organizational choice (through procedures) whether such a



communication should be accompanied by action (e.g. the monitoring pilot raising the speed brake).

Occasionally, even with direct and assertive comment of this kind, the verbal intervention may fail. This can be for a number of reasons, but the most likely ones are that the other pilot's workload is high or situation awareness is poor, or a very poor crew relationship exists (for example where a captain has lost confidence in a first officer). These situations would be particularly difficult if the intervention was from the first officer to the captain. Some airlines have critical phrases (prefixes) to be used in such instances, such as "Captain you must listen...". These can be very effective, but it is important that they are only used in exceptional situations. Most interventions can be dealt with in the ways discussed, without resorting to these phrases (which do risk disturbing or undermining the crew dynamic).

Assertiveness and intervention training should help ensure that people speak out in the appropriate way at the appropriate time. It is as important for participants of such training to recognize that most situations require low-level intervention (drawing attention to something) so that it can be resolved, and this can and should be done early. Leaving interventions late, risks a more difficult and potentially disruptive verbal intervention. A trainer can use illustrations of incidents and accidents where team communication or functioning has been poor (or particularly good) to help reinforce their training.

The assertiveness of first officers has almost certainly increased since the widespread use of HF/CRM training. This is probably due to role modelling as much as training. The formal *role* of the first officer (especially in Western cultures) is now strongly perceived to include speaking-up and sharing opinions, whereas this was not the case prior to CRM. Although probably a good thing, there is a danger that some pilots equate FOs speaking up and sharing decisions, to a flatter cockpit gradient. The difference between these two things should be emphasized in HF/CRM training. First officers can speak up and share opinions, contribute to joint decisions and be responsible for part-tasks, but the commander must accept and be accepted as the leader and the final arbiter.

It is also important to note that there are two sides to assertiveness and intervention (in the same way that communication requires a sender and a receiver). As well as encouraging crewmembers to speak up when appropriate, pilots (particularly captains) should understand that their behaviour when acting as the recipient of that assertion sends a strong message about the expected role (a good example is from the previous anecdote from an anonymous first officer). There have been many cases of inexperienced pilots speaking up and being either admonished, ignored or

patronized. These individuals are less likely to speak up in future. If the captain does not agree with the assertion, then he or she should still acknowledge it (if and where possible). In such a case it may be inappropriate for the recipient to consider the best response in terms of relationships and climate in the moment, but in later debriefing they could show some appreciation of the communication (even if just to show that they value the other pilot making a sensible input). Such behaviour, particularly from a respected captain, can be very valuable in giving tacit information to junior pilots about how to appropriately carry out their role, and will pay dividends in the future.

## Application to Training - Communication

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HF/CRM training can help to prevent or minimise communication errors by explaining common communication problems and reinforcing standard language to ensure the error-free transmission of a message and its correct interpretation.

### Classroom

HF/CRM sessions in the classroom can give an opportunity to facilitate communication (perhaps in pairs) in order to highlight common problems, as well as practice creating clear and precise messages. If two classroom participants have to communicate without looking at one another, or using any visual cues, this adds to the level of difficulty in the communication and demands careful thought in order to optimize the message. Some people may be surprised at how they naturally rely on visual signs and gestures to assist the clarity of their messages, and so practicing clear communication through purely verbal means can be useful. Adding workload to the receiver is another good way of showing the problems of communicating in the flight deck.

Verbal intervention: Giving out (or reading) short scenarios and asking participants to offer the best statements to make in those situations can be a useful way of getting participants to consider when intervention is required and what level of assertion is needed (and not needed). Participants can consider exactly what piece of information must be communicated, and how best to do it given the urgency or otherwise. An obvious scenario is the one previously given, whereby a captain is using a flight-level change descent but nevertheless the first officer realizes that they will not meet a height restriction (or that they have already broken it - which would be treated differently in terms of communication, as indicated).

## Simulator

The above classroom training can be easily transferred into very short (five minute) simulated scenarios if time and resource allows (even using a low-fidelity or PC flight simulator). Classroom activities that generate scenarios where certain levels and types of communication are required can be tried in simulators. Taking the example discussed (where the rate of descent is insufficient to meet a restriction or allow a stable approach), this could easily be set up in a simulator with different levels of urgency. The first officer would then have to communicate an assertive intervention to resolve the situation. Afterwards the captain and first officer would discuss their experience of the interaction, and it would be interesting for the FO to hear the captain's experience of receiving it. Clearly, being role-play, the social dynamics will not emerge realistically, but most pilots can get a feeling for how these could have played out in reality.

## Competencies

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Clearly competency C2 (communication) is directly applicable to this section, and has been referred to a number of times above.

Observing communication (using observable behaviours) can appear easy compared to other competencies because almost all flight deck communication is 'overt'; i.e. the trainer does not need to go looking for it. However whereas issues such as message clarity and delivery are important, there are many more important characteristics that are key to effective communication that cannot be assessed in isolation of the context or situation. In other words the trainer still needs to be widely aware of context and what is happening, in order to assess what they hear in terms of communication. This is well reflected in IATA Competency 2 (communication). Few of the observable behaviours are concerned with the physical properties of the message (i.e. clarity, volume, speed, and delivery). Most are about the message content itself, how well that content is conveyed to the other party, and how well the other party receives it. It is worth the trainer familiarising him/herself with the observable behaviours / performance indicators of their CBTA system prior to a session, since there is good information about effective communication symptoms within the observable behaviours.

In order to assess observable markers of effective communications, the trainer needs to understand the aim of the message, compare this with the content and timing, and determine the effectiveness with at least some reference to the receiving party. This sounds complex but most is recognised through trainer expertise and their own familiarisation with the context. However in a dynamic situation it is not easy to isolate communication

effectiveness unless it is fairly obvious or has overt consequences. Trainers may find it useful to consider communication in three parts (in sequence); transmission, content and reception. All are covered in various ways, multiple times, in the observable behaviours of competency C2. For example, the transmission includes the message timing and clarity, the content includes the way the information is passed and how concise the message is, and the reception includes the receiver responses and success of the communication process.

As well as communication (C2), competency C5 (leadership and teamwork) is also relevant, because communication is a social interaction with impacts beyond information (such as group dynamic impacts around relationship maintenance).

## SECTION B – RESOURCES

### B1 – Specific Context Guidance

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- 17. Competency Based Training and Assessment
- 18. Working with external teams
- 19. Specific Guidance for Cabin Crew

# Chapter 17 - Competency Based Training and Assessment

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## Background

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Increasing numbers of airlines and operators are now using competency-based-training and assessment (CBTA). CBTA attempts to bring together technical and non-technical skills training and assessment into a single framework, so that pilots can be assessed on a single set of 'competencies'. Competencies are generally described in terms of over-arching behaviours and knowledge that predict overall task success, such as good communication or problem solving. IATA defines a competency as:

A dimension of human performance that is used to reliably predict successful performance on the job. A competency is manifested and observed through behaviours that mobilize the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to carry out activities or tasks under specified conditions (IATA 2021)

The move towards CBTA can be said to be a further step in the integration of human factors into technical training and assessment. This puts more onus onto instructors to be able to assess and train the human factors elements of flight crew tasks, as well as the traditional technical elements. Happily, the main human factors related competencies are drawn directly from previous non-technical skills assessment frameworks (such as NOTECHS, see section B3), and so many instructors will have some familiarity with the concepts.

Most current competency-based systems are very similar to each other and have fewer than 10 overall competencies. Each of these competencies is further de-composed into a set of 'observable behaviours' (also referred to as 'performance indicators', 'behavioural markers', etc depending upon the CBTA system). Each of these 'observable behaviours' consists of a short statement describing a behaviour that maps onto their overall competency. The use of 'observable behaviours' to help observe specific areas of performance is a familiar feature of the behavioural marker systems in past and present use.

## Essential discussion of CBTA usage and limitations

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CBTA systems can make training and assessment more flexible and allow trainers to use their expertise more freely within a structured and standardised framework. CBTA can help trainers focus on the way a task is being performed, rather than just the outcomes. CBTA also helps to

standardise language and concepts, providing a framework for communicating and explaining performance elements between the trainer and candidates.

However, like all training systems, CBTA needs instructor expertise more than instructors need the CBTA framework. CBTA systems are not a form of expertise in themselves. Indeed, the competencies were imported from previous ideas and concepts (such as 'situation awareness, workload management and decision making) which evolved alongside instructor expertise, over many decades. Hence CBTA does not add much in terms of additional resource for instructors and should be viewed as a vehicle for better applying instructor expertise, rather than offering new or additional expertise.

The reliance on overtly observable performance for assessment has advantages but can also be a weakness of CBTA (and previous systems). Exhaustive-looking lists of observable indicators imply that all elements of pilot performance are readily observable, and captured within the system. This is clearly not the case, and instructor expertise is still required to draw out less overt problems and training points. Hence, whereas CBTA markers are useful, it is important that instructors do not become over-reliant on them.

It is also important to understand that observable behaviours / performance indicators have undergone very little real validity testing, mainly because the system is almost impossible to map to real world pilot performance in an objective way. It is easy for anyone to overstate the extent to which CBTA guides instructor expertise, and in turn risk instructors overly focussing on the CBTA process at the expense of their own expert judgement. Much focus is put on inter-rater reliability in CBTA, and it is often erroneously stated that inter-rater reliability is a measure of validity (i.e. the extent to which CBTA output reflects pilot performance and competence on the task being assessed). This is not true. High inter-rater reliability only shows that a system is being used consistently, it does not indicate that that system is valid, or even being used well. Indeed, it can mean the opposite.

In conclusion, whereas CBTA systems can help frame and support training and assessment, they should not be over-relied upon in their detail and should not restrict or supersede instructor expertise. Instructor expertise remains the key to high quality training and assessment and will be the key to successful use of CBTA. Indeed, increasing instructor expertise (particularly in the human performance areas) will be important for effective CBTA in the future.

## Chapter 18 – Working with external teams

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Human Factors and CRM training for pilots and cabin crew is now well established and quite mature (although scope for improvement still exists – poor flight operations CRM features as a significant causal factor in CAA analysis of high risk events). There are however, many thousands of people working to support aircraft operations for which CRM training is either poor or non-existent. This chapter aims to assist CRM facilitators to understand the world of CRM beyond the aircraft door and some of the cultures and perspectives that exist.

When CRM trained personnel (e.g. flight crew, cabin crew) interact with personnel who have not been exposed to CRM training, there is specific potential for misunderstandings. For example, pilots may expect others to speak up if they perceive an issue, but this should not be assumed, particularly where others have not been exposed to CRM ideas and therefore may not share the same expectations of their roles. Different attitudes exist towards issues such as reporting and safety culture and so some groups may be generally less inclined to report incidents or to draw attention to problems where they perceive potentially negative consequences for doing so. Different teams may have very different interests to be served, and this can lead to problems where the interests of one party (e.g. ground handlers) come into conflict with the interests of another group, such as cabin crew or flight crew.

Hence, just knowing the extent of exposure to CRM, safety culture or TEM training that another group has had can be useful when working with other personnel. This chapter attempts to outline the situation at the time of writing.

A CRM instructor tasked with providing a joint training package for flight crew and ground staff should be able to use this chapter as a starting point for writing a course that will be well received by both parties. This chapter briefly assesses the level of CRM training that various parties receive, and looks at some issues that can emerge between flying and non-flying personnel.

### Research

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In preparing to write this chapter, a very broad field of opinion was sought, ranging from airline CEOs to ground handlers, in order to gain an understanding of what would or would not be practical or achievable as a means of introducing CRM training on such a broad scale.

It quickly became apparent that there is a vast range of understanding and knowledge as to what constitutes HF/CRM training and whether it is of benefit



to a particular organisation or not. At most levels cost was a major concern; senior managers and CEOs understood the value of conducting this training but were keen to keep control of both the product and the cost.

The majority of airlines today make extensive use of contractors. Such contracts are hard to win and keenly priced, meaning that there is no room for extra training without incurring some cost. Every company who responded indicated that they would not conduct additional training unless the regulator or the customers mandated it. These responses are understandable but nevertheless run contrary to the recently published CAA HF strategy.

“Vision – HF understanding is visibly demonstrated through appropriate attitudes and behaviours which result in a reduction of human error in the system” (UK CAA 2014 - A Strategy for Human Factors in Aviation)

If progress is to be made in continuing to develop and progress the CAA HF strategy the message must be that CRM (in whatever context dependent forms; TRM, RRM, etc.) should be established and that in future any ground service contracts issued should stipulate elements of HF/CRM training at appropriate levels.

“Our aim is to see everyone within aviation receive appropriate HF training according to their role” (UK CAA 2014 - A Strategy for Human Factors in Aviation)

## Air Traffic Control

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Although the National Air Traffic Service (NATS) is the leading ATC provider in the UK at the time of writing, there are many others providing local control at many UK regional airports. Providers tend to have different views on HF training, but in the main the concept of CRM and human factors has transferred across to Air Traffic Control.

Many air traffic organisations around the world have tried some form of course or training provision that brings together pilots and air traffic controllers (NATS and Airways New Zealand are two examples). There is anecdotal evidence that pilots and air traffic controllers find these courses useful and feedback from candidates is generally good. One current limitation is that most such courses rely on joint issues ‘emerging’ in the sessions. Although this can be very effective, it means there is a great deal of variability between candidate experiences. Hence, one issue that remains to be addressed is a thorough analysis of specific joint task (pilot and controller) components requiring knowledge sharing, in order to systematically facilitate the most beneficial content. Other useful practices have been familiarisation flying for air traffic controllers and pilot visits to air traffic centres. There is

general agreement that bringing together pilots and air traffic controllers to learn about each other's work is beneficial.

## Traffic Officers (TCO) and Dispatchers

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At the time of writing there is no mandated HF training for TCOs and dispatchers. Some airlines recruit their own staff, whereas others use contractors or 3<sup>rd</sup> party companies. Some airlines provide new hire and recurrent training for all TCOs. The airport services training team invariably runs these sessions. There are currently no recognised HF training standards for the trainers and although they are often highly experienced and excellent in their roles they sometimes lack in depth HF knowledge. If the company has a human factors department (or specialists) then it might be possible to establishing a closer relationship with the TCO trainers, providing training support where required. Other initiatives include inviting TCO trainers on pilot initial or recurrent CRM training. While this doesn't expose all TCOs to a joint training session, it can build bridges and generate a positive response on the line. On the other hand, consideration should always be given to the effect this might have on the quality of pilot CRM sessions (i.e. if the session material needs to be changed, or certain topics are not followed through in the same depth as they would otherwise be).

The problem is more difficult with contractors, where the perennial problem of time and money emerges. Some proactive operators adopt a co-operative relationship between contractor and customer and as one senior manager said, *"we are trying to move away from the unequal relationship between purchaser and service provider to a more collaborative relationship"*.

Problems experienced by most operators revolve around a clash of cultures and poor communications skills. Generally this is manifested by poor relations between pilots and dispatchers, which impacts upon efficiency and in some instances safety.

For a local CRM instructor tasked with trying to ease these situations there is no simple solution. The problem is often a lack of communications between the two organisations or reluctance to change. Frequently there is a conflict of interest between aircrew and dispatchers. The crew's motivation is to make an on time departure while ensuring they don't take any unnecessary problems into the air with them. The dispatcher is performance driven and can sometimes fail to appreciate the flight crew issues. For example, while they might return to their office grumbling about the crew being picky about the pre-departure routine, the same crew may have to spend many hours dealing with the fallout from a poor decision.

In some cases, airline senior management could help this by encouraging the contractor's senior management to engage with HF training. This opening would allow the CRM instructor to invite these individuals to join in with company CRM where appropriate.

Friction can occur on the line between the company and contractor managers, resulting in pressure being applied to the TCOs to adopt an inflexible or even confrontational attitude. Comments like "I don't care what they say, this is the way we do it and that's it" were mentioned by TCOs when they tried to discuss operational differences with their managers. This attitude can then colour the relationship between pilots and TCOs that can lead to friction and compromise good CRM.

A typical scenario to illustrate this possible breakdown of trust is delay codes. TCOs are responsible for getting flights away on time and On Time Performance (OTP) is a major performance indicator. One airline CRM instructor reported that TCOs adopted a habit of putting any minor delays down to the crew arriving late at the aircraft or at "commanders request". Pilots, while keen to make OTP, are usually far keener on making sure everything is in order before they depart. Over time pilots became aware of the TCOs tactics and naturally this caused friction. This resulted in a case where one captain refused to depart until a TCO manager came to the aircraft to confirm that the delay was not coded as late crew arrival at aircraft. This crew was probably not in the best frame of mind as they taxied from the gate. This situation could not be allowed to continue so the HF department arranged for a TCO to deliver a short briefing and discussion during recurrent pilot CRM training. This small intervention reduced friction and appeared to improve OTP.

This is not to attribute blame to any parties. Very often (for example) TCOs are left with the feeling that captains give little or no thought to seeing the operation from the TCO point of view. TCOs also commented on poor communications skills by captains leading to unnecessary conflict.

Below are some cases to demonstrate the issues.

### **Case 1**

A captain was on the flight deck with his feet up during a turnaround when the TCO asked for the load sheet the captain firmly said that he was the commander of the aircraft and it was up to him when the aircraft was ready to push back, so he refused to handover the signed load sheet until he was ready.

## Case 2

The dispatcher approached flight deck for the signed load sheet at ETD -7. The captain was clearly on a personal call. The engineer was also waiting to sign off the tech log. The dispatcher gently tapped the captain on shoulder and asked if he would mind signing the tech log. The captain was very apologetic and ended his phone call. The dispatcher advised LCMs were complete and first officer confirmed they had the final load sheet and it was ok to close up. The captain confirmed he was happy to do so. The dispatcher was in the process of closing doors when captain arrived at the door and (according to the dispatcher) shouted at the dispatcher for being rude and told him he'd been flying since before the dispatcher had been born.

CRM instructors should consider the best ways to spend some time with these team members to help improve communications and break down barriers. Options include CRM instructors shadowing TCOs on shifts and CRM instructors providing informal sessions in contractor crew rooms.

## Customer Service Agents (CSA)

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CSAs deal with passengers and try to ensure that their experience is a good one. Most CSAs have been exposed to little or no CRM training. Many companies use contractors, so the problems explained in the previous section (TCOs) apply here, but it is still worth examining how the specific motivations of CSAs might conflict with that of the crew.

The principle measurement of efficiency for most gate staff is on time departures, therefore the motivation of the CSA is to get the passengers on and the doors shut. Knowledge of what happens beyond the gate is very limited and there is some anecdotal suggestion that an understanding of the crew perspective is not always encouraged. In discussions, many gate staff expressed desire to know more about what happens once the passengers are on-board. They were keen to understand how they fitted into the 'overall picture'. Below are some examples of the issues that can occur between crew and CSAs.

## Case 1

This example happened to a long haul carrier operating from India to UK with UK and Indian crew. During boarding a very old frail Indian lady was brought to the aircraft door by the CSA. She spoke no English. The crewmember taking boarding cards at the door felt that this lady looked ill so she called the crew supervisor. When the supervisor arrived she spoke to passenger with the help of the CSA who interpreted. The supervisor spent some time questioning the frail passenger to determine if she was happy to fly. Throughout this exchange the CSA sought to re-assure the supervisor that

the lady was fit to fly and that she was telling him she was able to look after herself. There was another Indian crewmember close by who spoke Punjabi. She started to listen to the conversation and quickly realised that the CSA was not accurately interpreting. She challenged him on this, at which point he admitted that he was trying to get the crew to take her because he did not want the hassle of off loading her and the penalty of a late departure.

## Case 2

This example happened on a UK charter operator, operating into Florida. The boarding door crewmember became concerned about the behaviour of a male passenger queuing to board the aircraft because he appeared drunk and aggressive. She called the Cabin Supervisor who agreed with her assessment and asked the passenger not to board the aircraft, but to wait. At this point the passenger became aggressive and abusive. The supervisor called the gate and asked the gate staff to assist but was told that they had already assessed the passenger and were happy for him to fly. The supervisor told them she was not happy but the CSA supervisor said it was their policy that if they assessed a passenger was fit then they were fit. At this point the captain was called. He too assessed the passenger as being very intoxicated and not fit to fly. By now the passenger was becoming very aggressive and so the police were called. The passengers seated by the door witnessed the crew receive a sustained attack of foul-mouthed abuse before the passenger was eventually removed by the police. He was taken back to the gate area where he broke loose and ran amuck destroying some airport property. The airport SWAT team eventually subdued the passenger. The flight left on time. During the subsequent follow up, discussion between the airline and the handling agent revealed a lack of mutual understanding around decision-making and communications. The handling agent appeared uncompromising: if they assessed a passenger as being fit to fly, then they were fit to fly.

Both these examples demonstrate a clash of culture and a possible failure of CSA management to recognise some important HF principles.

1. Culture: Understand your own culture and that of the crew and think about how they might interact
2. Teamwork and leadership: It is a team effort to get an aircraft away safely and on time.
3. Communication: Swift effective communication between crew and CSA would have solved these problems almost immediately.

## Airport Operations Staff

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During the research that preceded the writing of this chapter, it was clear that the majority of airport operators and airport operations managers were familiar with human factors and keen to pursue HF training for their staff, though most seemed unsure how best to achieve this. The Airport Operators Association were open and helpful in compiling information about HF training for their staff.

Some airports are already conducting some HF training. This training would not necessarily be recognised as being a traditional model, but seeks to address some key areas of HF training, as follows:

1. Teamwork and leadership
2. Interpersonal skills
3. Dealing with conflict
4. Managing change
5. Reporting and SMS

Most discussion with airport managers centred on ramp operations staff. Many appeared to have an excellent understanding of ramp practice and safety around aircraft, but a limited understanding of the pilot perspective. They appeared to have a strong knowledge of the technical side of the operation but a limited knowledge of non-technical issues. Further discussions revealed that in many cases staff had a low level of understanding of the SMS and in most cases did not view HF practices as being related to their role. Below is an example:

One small regional airport reported that there was frequently a problem with chocks being left on the ramp area presenting a safety hazard. When staff were challenged about this during a discussion on company culture and safety culture, a number of them said that it was common practice to observe someone walk past the offending chocks into the terminal and telephone the fire department to tell them that chocks needed to be removed. This story was not an isolated occurrence. Others reported the same attitude towards foreign objects (FOD), i.e. that an individual would walk past the item and ask someone else to pick it up because it wasn't their job.

Ramp reporting culture is very varied, but some organisations are making good progress with introducing SMS and just cultures, whereas others are not. The Ground Occurrence Reports (GOR) system is not as mature as the ASR or MOR system and the majority of reports contain little information beyond a short factual account of the occurrence. A CRM instructor tasked with preparing a joint HF session should approach his or her local airport operations team and ask for some anecdotal information about recent

occurrences. He or she should have no difficulty using this information to facilitate a useful and lively session with both pilots and operations staff, which can form the foundation of a good HF learning session.

When questioned, most managers appeared keen to use the skills of the CRM instructor. Hence an approach from the local CRM instructor to the airport manager might initiate HF training for airport operations staff.

## Line Engineering

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Human-factors training for engineers is mature across the industry. Engineering HF tends to concentrate on error detection and is technically orientated. That said, most line engineers appear to have a good understanding of how human factors affect them in their everyday work. Where they have less understanding is with regard to what the pilot is thinking. The reverse is also true; pilots currently appear to have a poor understanding of the engineer's perspective.

An approach was made to the Engineering Human Factors group of the Royal Aeronautical Society for their views on the relationship between pilots and engineers. Most members felt that in most organisations there is little contact between the two groups and that most interaction relates more to efficiency than safety. This is supported by a number of studies. It is likely that pilot/engineer interaction will continue to reduce as new aircraft are produced that have been designed from the outset to require less engineering input on turn round.

While perhaps desirable, joint training between pilots and engineers is unlikely to occur on a widespread basis. Opportunity for interaction during recurrent training could be beneficial, but getting the two teams together is very difficult if the same company does not employ both. During recurrent training guest speakers from the other group could give short presentations to promote understanding and gain a better perspective of the other's problems and challenges.

## Cargo and Ground Handlers

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Cargo and ground handlers have the least opportunity or requirement for interaction with pilots and crew. Informal discussion with members of the GHOST group revealed that there is some way to go before "just safety culture" is fully implemented and understood by both management and ground handlers. Some research from the Netherlands has suggested that management have more belief in the justness of the current culture than do operational staff (Balk and Bossenbroek, 2010). Operational staff appear to believe that a primary management objective to be to find and punish those



responsible for negative outcomes (i.e. they perceive a blame culture). In short the management feel they are running a just culture, the workers do not.

### In summary

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Pilots and cabin crew rely on the contributions of many other parties in order to achieve their operational goals. Some of those external groups will share similar cultures and values with the aircrew due to being immersed in the aviation culture (e.g. air traffic controllers) but some may have little exposure to this (e.g. ground handlers and loaders). Furthermore, it appears that the latter are the least likely to have undergone any form of CRM training. In addition, all groups will have different motivations and ways of working. Therefore there is potential for misunderstanding or misalignment of desires or requirements, and these can have safety implications. The possible sharing of CRM ideas and extension of CRM training to external groups could have benefits, if for no other reason than beginning to align culture and attitudes.



## Chapter 19 – Specific Guidance for Cabin Crew CRM Trainers

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This section aims to assist CRM facilitators involved in the training of cabin crew. It is to be used in conjunction with the other chapters of this document.

Any CRM instructor from a cabin crew background must have a sound knowledge of Human Performance and Limitations. However the motivation for learning and reading around this large but fascinating topic lies with the trainer themselves. If new cabin crew are to embrace and use 'good CRM', they need to recognise how CRM affects the way they operate both as an individual and team member.

Trainers involved in integrating procedural training with non-technical skills (CRM) should ensure that the procedural (SOP) content of the training session does not undermine or devalue how trainees' CRM skills need to be applied. The instructor therefore needs to have a clear CRM focus (e.g. decision-making, situation awareness, communication) together with specific objectives that they wish to highlight during the training session. These need to be integrated fully within the technical knowledge and skills.

### Cabin Crew CRM Training (General)

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Cabin Crew members are an essential part of the aircraft team. It is a demanding role, often with pressure to meet required service and sales targets, and assist with on time performance.

Communication and teamwork are two elements that require emphasis in cabin crew CRM training. Open and effective communication is important both within the cabin team and with the flight deck crew. The Chain of Command and Authority of the Commander is clear and must be respected, and similarly within the cabin crew team the senior cabin crew member (SCCM) must be deferred to as the person with overall cabin responsibility.

Some pilots refer to cabin crew as their eyes and ears. Flight crew rely on cabin crew to effectively manage and communicate all cabin and passenger management issues. The flight crew require accurate and clear information which will allow them to make decisions about the next steps they should take. This is often in very stressful situations and in such a confined space and in flight this can often feel exaggerated. Hence communication skills are very important.

Examples of where cabin crew communication could have positively influenced accident events are Flight BD92, Kegworth in January 1989, Flight 1363, Dryden Ontario in March 1989, and Flight 797 in Cincinnati in June 1983. An example of where cabin crew actions did assist the flight crew is Flight 232, Sioux City in July 1989.

Many cabin crew working in the industry nowadays will probably have little or no knowledge or recollection of an accident or serious incident. Effective CRM training should incorporate scenarios and discussions focused around everyday operations as well as abnormal and emergency situations. The training should give cabin crew some key strategies and behaviours to manage different situations. Examples could be dealing with disruptive passengers or hand baggage issues. CRM should offer tools and techniques to help resolve and manage problems rather than focusing only on SOP responses. SOPs may be insufficient in themselves in terms of equipping cabin crew to deal with live situations. CRM gives the arena to practice important people management skills that complement SOPs.

## Introductory Cabin Crew CRM Training

General Human Factors, including human performance and limitations (HPL), should be taught during introductory courses. This is a broad topic with many theories, models and literature available in the public domain to help support training. Caution should be exercised when sourcing information from the Internet, and instructors should ensure that all information to be used is validated.

Cabin crew on an introductory course will not normally have any flying experience to draw upon during training. Trainers should encourage delegates to consider their study and/or work experience to date and to use this as a vehicle for meeting the objectives. Everyone will have examples of a good or bad day at work, and such anecdotes can be used to identify helpful or unhelpful behaviours and techniques for dealing with various situations and contexts. The trainer should link exercises into the aviation context and the error chain. Cabin crew should understand that errors are unintentional, because this is the basis of further CRM training.

Introductory CRM training considers the individual performance rather than the crew performance (see Section A, part A1), and an awareness of the limitations of the working memory is an important objective to cover (see Chapters 1 and 6).

## Operator's CRM Training

This is a good opportunity for cabin crew who are new to an operator to learn about the culture and values of their new company – 'it's the way we do

things around here' that they need to learn about. Operator's CRM is about how the individual will work within the team environment, therefore building on the learning from the Introductory course.

When developing training programmes, consideration should be given to the type of organisation (e.g. long haul, short haul or both, corporate, single cabin crew operation) and areas of operation. The experience level of the cabin crew within the company may also be considered as a key point to include in the programme.

Safety culture, risk management and crew-members' role in the area of reporting systems all come into effective training for the Operator. Using the risk assessment matrix from the Operators SMS system is an effective way to introduce and expand upon the Operator as the 'umbrella' with the cabin crew as a vital part within the organisation. Risk management behaviours and strategies can be introduced.

The use of de-identified company incidents is invaluable; a good example can be just as powerful as a poor example. Cabin crew should be made aware of trends (such as passenger behaviour on various routes) and the trainer should facilitate ways to deal with these sorts of specific challenges.

The trainer should bring in the concept of a 'Just Culture' as this part of this training.

At the end of an Operators CRM training course, cabin crew should be clear about their role as a team member on the aircraft and have a full knowledge of how their new company works. They should feel motivated and empowered to be a valuable resource within the organisation.

## Operator Aircraft Type Conversion CRM Training

The aim of this training is to clearly define the human factor issues related to the particular aircraft type. Areas to address may include:

- All systems with particular emphasis on communication and areas that may be unfamiliar or different from previous experience and therefore result in rule based error.
- Number of cabin crew operating on the specific a/c type and how this may affect teamwork
- Configuration of passenger cabins, even location of flight decks on larger aircraft that may adversely affect effective crew co-ordination unless crew awareness is raised.
- Crew complement and operating with heavy crew on ultra long haul flights.

- Cabin crew responsible for more than one exit (particularly on a wide-bodied aircraft)
- Unfamiliar systems
- Possible challenges on corporate jets and smaller aircraft where cabin crew are operating as a single crew-member

Although cabin crew will have received the technical information on the above, there may be specific human factor issues that should be included in the CRM training, for example whether there is anything that could lead to error that they may otherwise be unaware of.

## Recurrent CRM Training

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Many Operators carry out joint flight crew and cabin crew CRM training. This can be very effective and has been shown to improve flight deck and cabin crew understanding of one another's roles and enhance communication during line operations. However, the tasks and roles of flight crew and cabin crew are very different and therefore over recent years there has been a move towards part-joint training and part-separate training. Some of the modular requirements differ: for example flight crew must include a module on Automation during recurrent training and cabin crew must cover the passenger and medical factors.

Recurrent training is perhaps the only opportunity in the year to develop cabin crew non-technical skills. The trainer should avoid simply repeating the initial course with a few adjustments. There should be a training-needs-analysis of the organization with relation to incidents that occurred during the past year and these should form the basis of the training resources for modular sessions and exercises. The opportunity to share and learn from others is the main aim of recurrent training. Experienced crew-members should leave the training feeling motivated to continue or improve their use of non-technical skills and behaviours in line operations.

Effective recurrent training material should be more carefully researched than other CRM training course material. If there is little material 'in-house' available, then using examples from other operators can be valuable.

The de-identified results of an operator's behavioural marker system must be included in flight crew CRM training. If an operator used such a system for cabin crew (as previously mentioned) then this would give a valid picture from which to highlight and develop areas of strength and weakness for cabin crew.

## Senior cabin crew member (SCCM) CRM Training

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Section A, Part A2, chapter 15 (Leadership) should be referred to, along with the following text, adapted from Airbus Flight Operations Briefing Notes (Effective Briefings for Cabin Operations).

The SCCM has an important role on the aircraft as a leader and a role model. They are the vital communication link between the cabin crew and flight crew, the cabin crew and the passengers, and the cabin crew team themselves.

Effective CRM can be helped or hindered as soon as a crew reports for duty. The atmosphere for the flight, including respect, trust, motivation and good communication is in the hands of the SCCM.

The SCCM is responsible for all cabin crewmembers and managing the overall workload by delegating tasks. As the team leader they have the ability to influence the behaviour of others and the ability to motivate the team to achieve their goals.

SCCMs should be encouraged to use their CRM knowledge, skills and attitude to enhance effective teamwork and co-operation. Using 'real life' examples and scenarios during classroom training will support the behaviours and principles that the session is trying to address. Trainers should ask delegates to share their good and bad experiences when working with SCCMs during their time as main cabin crew. Example questions would be:

- What do they hope their leadership style will be once promoted?
- How can the SCCM support the flight crew during stressful situations?
- How can the SCCM liaise effectively with the flight crew when there are problematic passenger issues?

Operators should ensure that SCCMs receive appropriate training and have necessary skills, including leadership, decision-making and effective teamwork.

Corporate Aviation including Inflight-Service-Personnel (ISP) V Cabin Crew

Many corporate operators now train non-required cabin crew (under 19 seats) as full cabin crew and this is encouraged as best practice. Training needs to focus as above for single cabin crew operations.

Confusion and misunderstandings have been known to occur where the operator employs the services of inflight service personnel (ISPs) rather than fully trained cabin crew-members. Operators must ensure the flight-crews are fully aware that an ISP may not take any safety responsibility.

## Section B2 – CRM Effectiveness

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20. Facilitation skills for CRM Trainers

21 Resources for improving CRM Effectiveness

- Ten point checklist for assessing overall CRM effectiveness
- Guide to assessing a CRM ground trainer
- Informal guide to twenty instructional traps and faults of CRM trainer
- Report Writing and Handover guide

## Chapter 20 – Facilitation Skills

For any training to be effective, trainers must communicate information clearly. Additional to the effective transmission of information by the trainers, learners must engage with the content in order to properly understand and accept it. The latter is particularly important where attitudes towards CRM are concerned. Pilots' attitude towards CRM is an oft-debated issue and regularly researched. There were certainly some problems in the early days of CRM, when some pilots did not accept CRM ideas and there was even some open hostility. Although things have changed, the CRM trainer will still find a number of CRM sceptics in any session, and these critics usually have sound reasons for their attitudes.

It is sometimes said that style of delivery is more important than content of a training session. This mind-set can be damaging to CRM in general. Although style of delivery is important, aviation professionals are an intelligent audience; the trainer who puts presentation before content will be noticed, and will adversely affect attitudes to CRM. Unfortunately it is still common for a skilled facilitator to run a superbly enjoyable and seemingly thoughtful session after which participants fill in fine reviews, but from which they recall little of value the day after. Before concentrating too heavily on methods of delivery, the CRM trainer must get the content right.

		Instructing	Facilitating
1	What do the words	Telling, showing	Making easy, enabling
2	What is the aim?	Transfer knowledge /	Gain insight/self analysis to enable an attitude
3	Who knows the subject?	Instructor	Both
4	Who has the experience	Instructor	Both
5	What is the	Top down	Equal
6	Who sets the agenda	Instructor	Both
7	Who talks the most?	Instructor	Student
8	What is the timescale?	Finite	Infinite
9	Where is the focus?	Instructor/task	Student/attitudes/behavi
10	What is the workload?	Medium/high	Intense
11	What are trainers'	Judgemental	Non-judgemental
12	How is progress	Test	Observation/self

**Table 3:** Differences between Instruction and Facilitation (Dismukes and Smith 2000)

Once the trainer has decided on effective content including achievable objectives, they should consider the most effective ways to deliver it. The method of delivery will depend upon what is being taught, and what the objectives are. In practice, there are two basic forms of delivery: instruction and facilitating. The differences between instruction and facilitation are outlined in Table 3.

Instruction can be described as being primarily a telling activity, where information is communicated to trainees through either direct communication or demonstration, with questioning primarily used to check understanding or reinforce key messages. Facilitation on the other hand, can be described as a technique that helps trainees to discover for themselves what is appropriate and effective, in the context of their own experience and circumstances.

Both techniques are useful and have their place. Instruction is the most efficient technique to employ for straightforward knowledge transfer; it would be laborious and unnecessary to teach a straightforward and precise subject such as an electrical system using facilitation. Instruction is quick and efficient, and can be used to train larger numbers of people. However trying to teach appropriate attitudes using instruction is difficult, particularly if the instructor does not have the authority or credibility required. One reason is that a person's behaviour is based on their own past experiences and values and therefore telling people to behave differently carries the implication that their values are wrong. Facilitation allows for values and beliefs of trainees to be accounted for, and is therefore less likely to create internal conflict (CAA 2006).

To facilitate well, a trainer starts by deciding on objectives; what a successful session would achieve in terms of audience knowledge, understanding or attitude. They then decide what needs to be done in order for the participants to achieve these objectives by themselves. The audience can gain their own understanding by engaging in activities, such as answering well-framed questions or analysing data or case studies that the trainer has prepared. The skill of the trainer is to prepare and guide the session in a way that allows discovery of the desired points by audience members, but avoids generating a lot of off-task discussion (wasting time), unsolvable disagreements, or the audience reaching the opposite conclusions to those desired. These are all dangers of facilitation, and trainers must therefore plan and act carefully.

The following four facilitation skills should be practiced and used whenever possible:

1. Effective Questioning
2. Listening
3. Observation of behaviour



#### 4. Role modelling

### 1. Effective Questioning

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Asking the right questions at the right time is a fundamental skill of facilitation. Appropriate questioning techniques are:

*Open Questions:* Open questions are constructed in order to elicit objective answers that are not skewed by the questioner's agenda. The nature of open questioning lends itself to long and detailed explanations where these are required. The participants' response to an open question is not anticipated or implied by the questioner, and whereas post-question prompts can steer the answer to explore particular areas, they should not suggest or hint at what the questioner's expectations. Open questions often start with words such as 'what, when, why, where, who, how'.

*Closed Questions:* Closed questions are those where the possible answers are restricted or even implied. Multiple choice or dichotomous questions are closed, e.g. "Do you think this topic is useful?" (The equivalent open question would be "what do you think of this topic?"). Closed questions are used to check understanding or to invite short and controlled contributions. Closed questions often start with words / phrases such as 'do you, don't you, did it, was it'.

*Probing and prompting:* For many reasons, people sometimes answer questions without giving much information, and the facilitator wants more. Facilitators must be careful not to narrow the possible responses to an open question by following it up with a closed one; a skill of a facilitator is to obtain more information to the original question without changing it. Hence to develop an answer, facilitators should use open and objective phrases such as 'tell me more about that', or 'what are the reasons behind that?'

The following types of questions are best avoided where possible:

- Leading questions 'it was a classic case of human error wasn't it?'
- Multiple answer questions 'what was it? Human error, weather, technical failure?'
- Rhetorical 'How can a crew be safe if they don't communicate properly?'

### 2. Listening

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It is frustrating for participants if a trainer appears unable to listen and engage with participants' views. It has often been said that hearing is done with your ears whereas listening is done with your mind. In this respect the term active listening means that a person is concentrating carefully on what is being said,

so that they can really understand the other person. The following mnemonic could help trainers to appear more engaged:

- Look interested;
- Inquire with questions;
- Stay on target;
- Test understanding;
- Evaluate the message;
- Neutralise your thoughts, feelings and opinions.

### 3. Observation of behaviour

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The ability to observe and discuss behaviour and attitudes as well as technical issues is a skill that trainers need to practice to become effective facilitators.

### 4. Role modelling

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The importance of role-modelling was discussed in chapter 14, and it applies to an instructor or trainer in the same way as others. Students should observe appropriate ways of acting and communicating and experience the positive effects on themselves. It is therefore important that the CRM trainer has good communication and 'people' skills such as showing the ability to take on board contrary opinions or accepting criticism.

#### Participant feedback in developing facilitation skills

To continuously improve one's facilitation skills, a trainer should regularly seek feedback from those being trained. If participants appear to be giving no criticism then the following possibilities should be considered:

- The trainer is doing a good job
- The trainer has a reputation of difficulty when dealing with criticism
- The trainer is not respected enough (feedback is considered 'not worth the effort')
- The trainees believe there is nothing to be gained from feeding back

Feedback that is collected in a simple way, straight after a session (often known as happy sheets) should be treated with caution because it often reflects emotionally affected responses that bias the reactions. People who enjoyed being in a session will tend to state that the session content was useful. Similarly trainees who dislike a trainer or got bored will tend to see less value in the content. Hence a trainer who adjusts their session content based on immediate or simple feedback risks making a mistake, as does the trainer who believes they are doing a good job because the feedback was excellent.

Although more difficult, collecting open feedback after a few days will be more useful. Participants will have had time to consider the content and will be less affected by their experience of the trainer or presentation. Collecting feedback by talking honestly to participants is usually more beneficial than feedback sheets, particularly when done out of the session context.

All trainers will receive criticism and must be prepared to view it objectively and not personally. Very few participants are interested in making comments as personal attacks on trainers, even if it looks that way. A trainer must be dispassionate, and it can therefore be helpful to ask a trusted other to give their impression of one's training feedback.

## Chapter 21 - Resources for Improving CRM Effectiveness

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- Ten point checklist for assessing overall CRM effectiveness
- Guide to assessing a CRM ground trainer
- Informal guide to twenty instructional traps and faults of CRM trainer
- Report Writing and Handover guide

# 21 (a) - Checklist of 10 Practical Indicators of Effective CRM

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## Introduction

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The purpose of this checklist is to offer an easy set of indicators of effective CRM throughout a company. It offers 10 items for the operator, the training pilots and the line pilots. Not all items are relevant to every operator, nor of course is the list exhaustive, but it can act as a starting point from which to determine the effectiveness of the CRM programme, and whether it is making a difference to line flight crew performance. The checklist is designed to promote understanding and identify strengths or gaps in overall CRM.

## Operator

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1. CRM is integrated into training programmes to align the SIM and Ground School
2. CRM has a scientifically robust basis in its design, as far as possible.
3. CRM targets or aims are set for training and SMS monitoring
4. Training data are used to assess and evaluate CRM skills. Skills are individually assessed (rather than a simple CRM pass/fail)
5. Feedback on FDM and/or ASR includes analysis of CRM issues
6. The safety management system recognizes CRM issues
7. CRM articles or papers are distributed to the pilots (e.g. via safety magazines)
8. Instructors are suitably trained/checked in CRM and receive on-going development
9. In-depth CRM is understood beyond just teamwork/communication/joint training
10. There is a mix of joint and role-specific separate training

## Training Pilots

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1. CRM training has clear aims in terms of specific skills to develop
2. Routine and overt use of behavioural markers in briefing and debriefing
3. Trainers are able to identify CRM root causes of *both* effective and poor performance
4. Simulator lessons allow crews to practice time management skills that replicate the real world
5. Instructor is able to pass on practical CRM tips to enhance pilot performance

6. Instructors can use CRM models or illustrations to help pilot understanding
7. Instructors are able to facilitate reasonably well
8. Instructors limit the number of debrief items to maximize in-depth learning
9. Trainers are able to role model CRM skills
10. Training is practical, and integrates both technical and CRM aspects

## Flight Crew

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1. Pilots are familiar with the Behavioural Marker / CBTA System
2. Pilots demonstrate CRM skills openly (such as avoiding rushing / sharing thinking)
3. Flight deck tone is relaxed and professional
4. Problems are anticipated
5. Contingency plans are included in briefings (such as diversion routes)
6. Formal briefings are updated when things change
7. Things are done in a timely way through the flight
8. Pilots routinely seek feedback from one another to maximize learning
9. Pilots are able to self-reflect on their performance to enhance self-development
10. The flight deck gradient is appropriate to the situation

## 21 (b) - Guide to assessing a CRM ground trainer

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This brief guide is to assist in the assessment of a CRM (ground) trainer in the classroom environment. It includes a checklist in the form of effective CRM trainer knowledge, skills and attitudes so that assessors will know what to look for. The checklist is designed to help an assessor make and record an assessment of the candidate's suitability to train CRM on the ground.

In the early stages of CRM training the test should also include encouragement and development of CRM teaching and assessment skills. Assessors should also bear in mind that whilst some CRM ground-school training pilots may be experienced in their role, classroom facilitation skills may still be new to them.

### Documents

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In addition to any course material, assessors should also be familiar with the general content of the following documents:

- Standards Document 29 (available at [www.caa.co.uk](http://www.caa.co.uk))
- The company's CBTA framework, behavioural marker framework (e.g. NOTECHS), or company CRM Standards

### Preparation<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

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The assessor will need to establish the type of course, review the syllabus/course material and establish the experience level and recency of the candidate and course trainees. Additionally a date/time should be agreed to allow for extra opportunity for briefing/debriefing of the candidate.

#### Briefing / Conducting the assessment

The assessor needs to brief the candidate in plenty of time before the course starts. This ensures there is time to:

- Set an open and professional tone
- Discuss the assessor's role (including seating position and involvement with the class)
- Discuss briefing the class about the assessor
- Establish what the training objectives are for the session
- Allow an opportunity for the CRM trainer (candidate) to ask questions
- Establish how many courses the candidate has run in the validity period

- The assessor should maintain an unobtrusive role during the training, leaving the CRM trainer responsible for course conduct and timing
- The assessor should bear in mind that the needs of the trainees

## Debriefing/Report

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- Assessors should adopt an appropriately relaxed but professional tone required for the debrief and deliver the test result at the outset
- The overall aim is to facilitate learning and for the assessor to role model an effective debriefing that ensures that the candidate makes the analysis of their own performance
- The debriefing should focus on the candidate's development and include an appropriate balance of positive and negative feedback.
- Any written report should reflect the debrief. In addition the assessor should bear in mind the following points:

“Examining CRM trainer performance requires that an assessor displays the best examples of CRM skill in handling the CRM trainer candidate throughout the test, without losing any of the objectivity required to ensure a minimum standard.”

## Assessment Criteria

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The candidate should explain the reasons for the training at the outset. The aim of the assessor's checklist (below) is to provide a summary of the key knowledge, skills, and attitudes as an aid to making an assessment of the candidate's competence. The assessor may find using this simple 8-point checklist of effective knowledge, skills and attitudes to be an easy way to analyse and assess the appropriate important performance elements.

Were the training objectives achieved, YES or NO? In deciding, consider the following:

1. Did the candidate demonstrate the **knowledge** required for the role?
2. Did the candidate encourage trainees to participate, share their experience and self-analyse?
3. Did the candidate **identify** and **respond to the trainees' needs** relative to their expertise/experience?
4. Did the candidate incorporate CBTA (or NOTECHS) or company CRM standards as appropriate?
5. Did the candidate **integrate** practical CRM within technical training and line operations?
6. Did the candidate identify **CRM reasons** for accidents / incidents?
7. Did the candidate regularly check for understanding and resolve ambiguity?



8. Did the candidate demonstrate effective **instruction and facilitation skills**?

If further assistance is required in addition to the above checklist, the examiner could ask him/herself whether the candidate:

- Overtly supports CRM principles in word & deed (actively role models good CRM).
- Works hard to establish a rapport with trainees.
- Is open and honest.
- Creates an atmosphere of trust and respect
- Preserves confidentiality.
- Shows themselves to be a good listener
- Uses a sense of humour.
- Is supportive of any fellow trainers.
- Is always patient, sensitive and respectful of others
- Seeks feedback and responds appropriately
- Openly strives to improve their own performance

## 21 (c) - Informal guide to twenty instructional traps and faults of CRM trainers

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The following is an informal guide to common problems seen when observing CRM trainers.

1. Not checking for understanding when giving participants tasks to complete
2. When discussing 'core' CRM theory, not exploring participants' personal experiences or allow sharing of experiences to give validity to the subject.
3. Miss-management of case studies by not getting the participants to study fully any associated text in advance or during breaks. This can lead to rushed reading during the course immediately before the exercise starts, or participants being unable to gain the most from the discussion.
4. Not challenging participants to give more thought and examples to their comments.
5. Failure to resolve ambiguity when it appears
6. A lack of planning for when two Instructors are working together, in terms of deciding how they will jointly run the course.
7. A tendency to instruct at times when facilitation would have been more effective and appropriate.
8. Tendency to verbalize personal experiences more than exploring the experiences of the group.
9. Avoiding or 'skimming-over' subject matter that they are uncomfortable with rather than working to become more knowledgeable, or using participants to support the topic.
10. Not addressing difficulties encountered when participants do not have English as their first language (or culture).
11. A lack of a clear understanding of the course aims and objectives (this is common when the course was not written by the Instructor).
12. Not having or communicating a clear strategy when working with a large group and/or multiple trainers.
13. Not using the room and space to the best advantage.
14. Not looking critically at course content to ensure it meets the participants' needs
15. Ineffective strategy to ensure attention is maintained, particularly with large groups

16. Ignoring those participants who are quiet, rather than trying to include them.
17. Not considering the content of computer-based presentation software to ensure it gives scope for comment.
18. Being driven by the limitations of presentational software packages
19. A lack of CBTA competency content (or NOTECHS if applicable) or lack of alignment with the organisation's Safety Management System (SMS)
20. Coping strategies for participants are not agreed or are missing.

## 21 (d) - Report Writing and Handover Guide

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Ensure that training reports are focused, effective and fully inform the trainee and the next trainer of progress, problems and pointers for development.

When writing a training report, satisfy the requirements of the next trainer, the trainee and the training Manager.

The next **Trainer** needs the report to:

- Be a legible, relevant, concise, factual and accurate record of what occurred
- Identify areas of weakness
- Record outstanding syllabus items
- Record training progress
- Suggest changes/improvements necessary (plus agreed timescales)

The **Trainee** needs the report to:

- Be clear, honest, accurate, factual and constructive
- Be a clear record of progress made against appropriate standard (course, company, CAA) and feedback given
- Include agreed changes/improvements (in terms of tasks/ timescale/content)

The **Training Manager** needs the report to be:

- A permanent record, particularly of progress made and deviations from the standard
- A record of completed exercises and outstanding items

In order to achieve the needs of all 3, we can use the following format:

**Commentary** - agreed facts plus outstanding items

**Appraisal** - progress

**Pointers** - agreed changes

The trainer has a responsibility to write clear, balanced, legible, honest, relevant, succinct and accurate records. Moreover, the trainer must ensure that the intended message is the same as the perceived meaning when the report is read.

Unless this responsibility is taken seriously, reports may be incomplete, inaccurate, ineffective, contradictory or confusing.

The trainer must:

- Be truthful, honest and accurate
- Identify problem areas and agree corrective action/timeframe
- Provide feedback and review trainee progress
- Provide a permanent record of the training facts
- Ensure the written report matches the verbal debrief
- Meet company needs – especially when managing poor progress
- Think – has my report addressed everyone's needs and will their perception match my intention?

Having written your training notes, re-read them. Are they clear, objective, concise and relevant? Many training reports tell more about the writer than they do about the trainee! The ability to write good training reports/handover notes is a skill that requires practice. But, of course, good handover notes are invaluable to effective training.

## Section B3 - Behavioural Markers and Performance Indicators

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The technical outcomes of pilot actions have long been the basis for assessment. Maintaining and/or not exceeding important parameters such as airspeed and altitude became the norm early on, and are still used today along with many other indicators such as good navigation and the ability to consistently demonstrate certain manoeuvres such as take off and landing. Such measures are relatively objective, meaning that the opinion of the assessor should have only a small overall effect. However such indicators give little insight into the non-technical performance of the pilot or crew such as ability to communicate effectively, or manage workload. Although this was recognized many years ago, non-technical skills remained a small part of pilot assessment until relatively recently (under headings such as 'airmanship').

With the introduction and growth of CRM a method of CRM assessment was needed. The only realistic method available was the observation of crew behaviour, and this is still the case today. There are major problems with this method, mostly stemming from its subjective nature; for example it is not an inherently reliable system (one trainer may judge things very differently to another, or even themselves on a different day). In an attempt to resolve these issues, scientifically established methods of behavioural observation were adapted for use within aviation training and assessment.

A well-established scientific method for recording and analysing behaviour is the construction of lists (or taxonomies) of behaviours that the scientists expect to see (the items in the list can be called behavioural descriptors). The observer refers to the list while watching the activity (or a recording of it) and notes each of the behaviours as they notice them occurring. In scientific research, this process is usually repeated for samples of people. Reliability and consistency of the descriptors is usually scrutinised statistically (i.e. by use of inter-rater reliability tests) in an attempt to counter some of the subjective nature of the data collected.

Using scales of this sort, scientists can produce data about peoples' behaviour, and this can be analysed alongside factors such as peoples' performance.

The adjustment of this sort of methodology for assessing the behaviour of a flight deck crew during a single session is still debated, but is nevertheless firmly established in the form of behaviour marker systems, and now CBTA observable behaviours. The general idea behind such systems is to provide a

set of descriptors that when identified by the instructor or trainer, indicate effective (and in some marker systems, ineffective) behaviours. Hence, a key principle of the system is that trainers are able to recognize the behaviours consistently in the training environment. Many marker systems have been produced and a variety of consistency measures have been attempted in order to demonstrate their consistency. The University of Texas (UT) system and the NOTECHS scheme are shown as examples in this section.

CBTA observable markers (also referred to by other names including 'performance indicators') follow the same general principle as the behavioural marker schemes in practical usage. The IATA CBTA observable behaviours are shown as the example of observable behaviours in this section.

## University of Texas (UT) Behaviour Marker System

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The UT system is considered to be the first major behaviour marker scheme and was developed from research by Helmreich et al in the early days of CRM. It was subsequently used as the basis for many airlines' behaviour marker schemes (Flin and Martin 2001). The UT scheme splits CRM into 13 general elements, each one being accompanied by a number of exemplar behaviours used to assist the trainer / examiner to identify good CRM performance.

Importantly, in common with most subsequent behavioural marker systems, the UT system only provides positive markers. This has been questioned in terms of its validity for use as an assessment tool, and arguably led directly to the development of NOTECHS. The UT system is shown below (Table 4)

Table 4 (below): University of Texas (UT) Behavioural markers Rating Scale

SOP BRIEFING	The required briefing was interactive and operationally thorough	Concise, not rushed, and met SOP requirements. Bottom lines were established	P-D
PLANS STATED	Operational plans and decisions were communicated and acknowledged	Shared understanding about plans. "Everybody on the same page"	P-D
WORKLOAD ASSIGNMENT	Roles and responsibilities were defined for normal and non-normal situations	Workload assignments were communicated and acknowledged	P-D
CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT	Crew members developed effective strategies to manage threats to safety	Threats and consequences anticipated. Used all available resources to manage threats	P-D



MONITOR/ CROSSCHECK	Crew members actively monitored and crosschecked systems <del>and other crew</del>	Aircraft position, settings, and crew actions were verified	P- T-D
WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT	Operational tasks prioritised and properly managed to handle primary flight duties	Avoided task fixation. Did not allow work overload	P- T-D
VIGILANCE	Crew members remained alert of the environment and position of the aircraft	Crew members maintained situation awareness	P- T-D
AUTOMATION MANAGEMENT	Automation was properly managed to balance situational and/or workload requirements	Automation setup briefed to other members. Effective recovery techniques from automation anomalies	P- T-D
EVALUATION OF PLANS	Existing plans were reviewed and modified when necessary	Crew decisions and actions openly analysed to insure existing plan was best	P-T
INQUIRY	Crew members asked questions to investigate and/or clarify current plans of action	Not afraid to express a lack of knowledge. "Nothing taken for granted" attitude	P-T
ASSERTIVENESS	Crew members stated critical information and/ or solutions with appropriate persistence	Crew members spoke up without hesitation	P-T
COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT	Environment for open communication was established and maintained	Good cross talk – flow of information was fluid, clear, and direct	G

LEADERSHIP	Captain showed leadership and co-ordinated flight deck activities	In command, decisive, and encouraged crew participation	G
Key to Phase: P =Pre-departure/Taxi; T =Take-off /Climb; D =Descent/Approach/ Land; G =Global			

Table 5 (below): The rating scale for the UT marker system

1=poor	2=marginal	3=good	4=outstanding
Observed performance had safety implications	Observed performance was barely adequate	Observed performance was effective	Observed performance was truly noteworthy

## The NOTECHS Behavioural Marker Scheme

Categories	Elements	Example Behaviours (positive)
CO-OPERATION	Team building and maintaining	Establishes atmosphere for open communication and participation
	Considering others	Takes condition of other crew members into account
	Supporting others	Helps other crew members in demanding situation
	Conflict solving	Concentrates on what is right rather than who is right
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGERIAL SKILLS	Use of authority and assertiveness	Takes initiative to ensure involvement and task completion
	Maintaining standards	Intervenes if task completion deviates from standards
	Planning and co-ordinating	Clearly states intentions and goals
	Workload management	Allocates enough time to complete tasks
SITUATION AWARENESS	System awareness	Monitors and reports changes in system's states
	Environmental awareness	Collects information about the environment
	Anticipation	Identifies possible future problems
DECISION MAKING	Problem definition/diagnosis	Reviews causal factors with other crew members
	Option generation	States alternative courses of action. Asks other crew member for options
	Risk assessment/ Option choice	Considers and shares risks of alternative courses of action

Table 6 - The NOTECHS Behavioural Markers

Very Poor	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good
Observed behaviour directly endangers flight safety	Observed behaviour in other conditions could endanger flight safety	Observed behaviour does not endanger flight safety but needs improvement	Observed behaviour enhances flight safety	Observed behaviour optimally enhances flight safety and could serve as an example for other pilots

Table 7 – NOTECHS grading guidance table

The NOTECHS system (Table 6, above) was developed to fulfil a need within the JAA (Joint Aviation Authorities) for a generic method of non-technical skills evaluation for use by their operators (Flin et al 2003). It is composed of four categories (Cooperation, Leadership and Managerial skills, Situation Awareness and Decision Making). Each is broken into a number of elements with exemplar behaviours. The primary difference between NOTECHS and most other behavioural marker systems was the inclusion of both positive and negative CRM behaviours. For more in depth information about NOTECHS, refer to Klampfer et al (2001) or other documentation from the GIHRE (Group Interaction in High Risk Environments) project, or the JARTEL project.

# IATA Pilot Competencies, with observable behaviours (OB)

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The IATA system is shown as an example of a CBTA system. The 'observable behaviours' are the equivalent of behavioural markers. In other CBTA systems these may go by other names such as 'performance indicators').

## 0. Application of knowledge

**Description: Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of relevant information, operating instructions, aircraft systems and the operating environment**

OB 0.1 Demonstrates practical and applicable knowledge of limitations and systems and their interaction

OB 0.2 Demonstrates required knowledge of published operating instructions

OB 0.3 Demonstrates knowledge of the physical environment, the air traffic environment including routings, weather, airports and the operational infrastructure

OB 0.4 Demonstrates appropriate knowledge of applicable legislation

OB 0.5 Knows where to source required information

OB 0.6 Demonstrates a positive interest in acquiring knowledge

OB 0.7 Is able to apply knowledge effectively

## 1. Application of procedures and compliance with regulations

**Description: Identifies and applies appropriate procedures in accordance with published operating instructions and applicable regulations**

OB 1.1 Identifies where to find procedures and regulations

OB 1.2 Applies relevant operating instructions, procedures and techniques in a timely manner

OB 1.3 Follows SOPs unless a higher degree of safety dictates an appropriate deviation

- OB 1.4 Operates aeroplane systems and associated equipment correctly
- OB 1.5 Monitors aircraft systems status
- OB 1.6 Complies with applicable regulations
- OB 1.7 Applies relevant procedural knowledge

## **2. Communication**

Description: Communicates through appropriate means in the operational environment, in both normal and non-normal situations

- OB 2.1 Determines that the recipient is ready and able to receive information
- OB 2.2 Selects appropriately what, when, how and with whom to communicate
- OB 2.3 Conveys messages clearly, accurately and concisely
- OB 2.4 Confirms that the recipient demonstrates understanding of important information
- OB 2.5 Listens actively and demonstrates understanding when receiving information
- OB 2.6 Asks relevant and effective questions
- OB 2.7 Uses appropriate escalation in communication to resolve identified deviations
- OB 2.8 Uses and interprets non-verbal communication in a manner appropriate to the organizational and social culture
- OB 2.9 Adheres to standard radiotelephone phraseology and procedures
- OB 2.10 Accurately reads, interprets, constructs and responds to datalink messages in English

## **3. Aeroplane Flight Path Management (automation)**

Description: Controls the flight path through automation

- OB 3.1 Uses appropriate flight management, guidance systems and automation, as installed and applicable to the conditions
- OB 3.2 Monitors and detects deviations from the intended flight path and takes appropriate action

OB 3.3 Manages the flight path safely to achieve optimum operational performance

OB 3.4 Maintains the intended flight path during flight using automation while managing other tasks and distractions

OB 3.5 Selects appropriate level and mode of automation in a timely manner considering phase of flight and workload

OB 3.6 Effectively monitors automation, including engagement and automatic mode transitions

#### **4. Aeroplane Flight Path Management (manual control)**

##### **Description: Controls the flight path through manual control**

OB 4.1 Controls the aircraft manually with accuracy and smoothness as appropriate to the situation

OB 4.2 Monitors and detects deviations from the intended flight path and takes appropriate action

OB 4.3 Manually controls the aeroplane using the relationship between aeroplane attitude, speed and thrust, and navigation signals or visual information

OB 4.4 Manages the flight path safely to achieve optimum operational performance

OB 4.5 Maintains the intended flight path during manual flight while managing other tasks and distractions

OB 4.6 Uses appropriate flight management and guidance systems, as installed and applicable to the conditions

OB 4.7 Effectively monitors flight guidance systems including engagement and automatic mode transitions

## 5. Leadership and Teamwork

- OB 5.1 Encourages team participation and open communication
- OB 5.2 Demonstrates initiative and provides direction when required
- OB 5.3 Engages others in planning
- OB 5.4 Considers inputs from others
- OB 5.5 Gives and receives feedback constructively
- OB 5.6 Addresses and resolves conflicts and disagreements in a constructive manner
- OB 5.7 Exercises decisive leadership when required
- OB 5.8 Accepts responsibility for decisions and actions
- OB 5.9 Carries out instructions when directed
- OB 5.10 Applies effective intervention strategies to resolve identified deviations
- OB 5.11 Manages cultural and language challenges, as applicable

## 6. Problem Solving and Decision Making

**Description: Identifies precursors, mitigates problems; and makes decisions**

- OB 6.1 Identifies, assesses and manages threats and errors in a timely manner
- OB 6.2 Seeks accurate and adequate information from appropriate sources
- OB 6.3 Identifies and verifies what and why things have gone wrong, if appropriate
- OB 6.4 Perseveres in working through problems while prioritizing safety
- OB 6.5 Identifies and considers appropriate options
- OB 6.6 Applies appropriate and timely decision-making techniques
- OB 6.7 Monitors, reviews and adapts decisions as required
- OB 6.8 Adapts when faced with situations where no guidance or procedure exists
- OB 6.9 Demonstrates resilience when encountering an unexpected event



## 7. Situation awareness and management of information

**Description: Perceives, comprehends and manages information and anticipates its effect on the operation.**

OB 7.1 Monitors and assesses the state of the aeroplane and its systems

OB 7.2 Monitors and assesses the aeroplane's energy state, and its anticipated flight path.

OB 7.3 Monitors and assesses the general environment as it may affect the operation

OB 7.4 Validates the accuracy of information and checks for gross errors

OB 7.5 Maintains awareness of the people involved in or affected by the operation and their capacity to perform as expected

OB 7.6 Develops effective contingency plans based upon potential risks associated with threats and errors

OB 7.7 Responds to indications of reduced situation awareness

## 8. Workload Management

**Description: Maintain available workload capacity by prioritizing and distributing tasks using appropriate resources**

OB 8.1 Exercises self-control in all situations

OB 8.2 Plans, prioritizes and schedules appropriate tasks effectively

OB 8.3 Manages time efficiently when carrying out tasks

OB 8.4 Offers and gives assistance

OB 8.5 Delegates tasks

OB 8.6 Seeks and accepts assistance, when appropriate

OB 8.7 Monitors, reviews and cross-checks actions conscientiously

OB 8.8 Verifies that tasks are completed to the expected outcome

OB 8.9 Manages and recovers from interruptions, distractions, variations and failures effectively while performing tasks

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