

# Training for safety

**By Maciej Szczukowski**

My older ATC colleagues often recall the times in the 80's and 90's when they used to organise holidays together with pilots from our national airline. Then, sitting by the fire with a bottle of some tasty beverage, they used to talk together about aviation and their work. The longer they talked the more specific cases they used to talk about. One could hear questions beginning with "I always wanted to ask you if ..." or "Tell me, how is it that you ...".

**A**fter such contact, all of them were enriched with new, practical knowledge. And that knowledge, at least for a time, allowed them to cooperate more effectively and work more efficiently. But only until new procedures arrived. Luckily the next holiday was only a year away.

Today, I sense that pilots and controllers are far more apart. More and more, I can see how different our points of view are and how disparate are our goals. Economic pressures and safety regulations do not always mix well and the effect is clearly visible (or rather audible) when you listen to everyday radio communication or to telephone conversations between controllers and pilots, after their flights or shifts.

Airlines want pilots to fly safely and to schedule. ANSPs want controllers to enable them to do it safely. Sometimes one needs or wants to push the tempo. Other times someone needs to slow down or even stop for a moment (unless it's the pilot!). There is usually no time and space to describe the reason to the other interested party. Questions arise. Conflicts and claims are on their way to ruining the atmosphere.

and probably some short educational movie clips. Still, most controllers will only learn that when there is a bird strike or engine fire they need to call here and there, inform this guy and that guy, provide this and that. And probably only a very few of us will ever really learn about the other side of the story. About real life on the flight deck or in the cockpit.

I am absolutely not here to judge but when I listen to the R/T recording of the now famous Hudson River ditching, I find the controller a "victim" of this type of training. I know he did very well and offered probably everything he could but I feel like he had no idea of what was really going on in the flight deck. Maybe it was only a shortage of available information.

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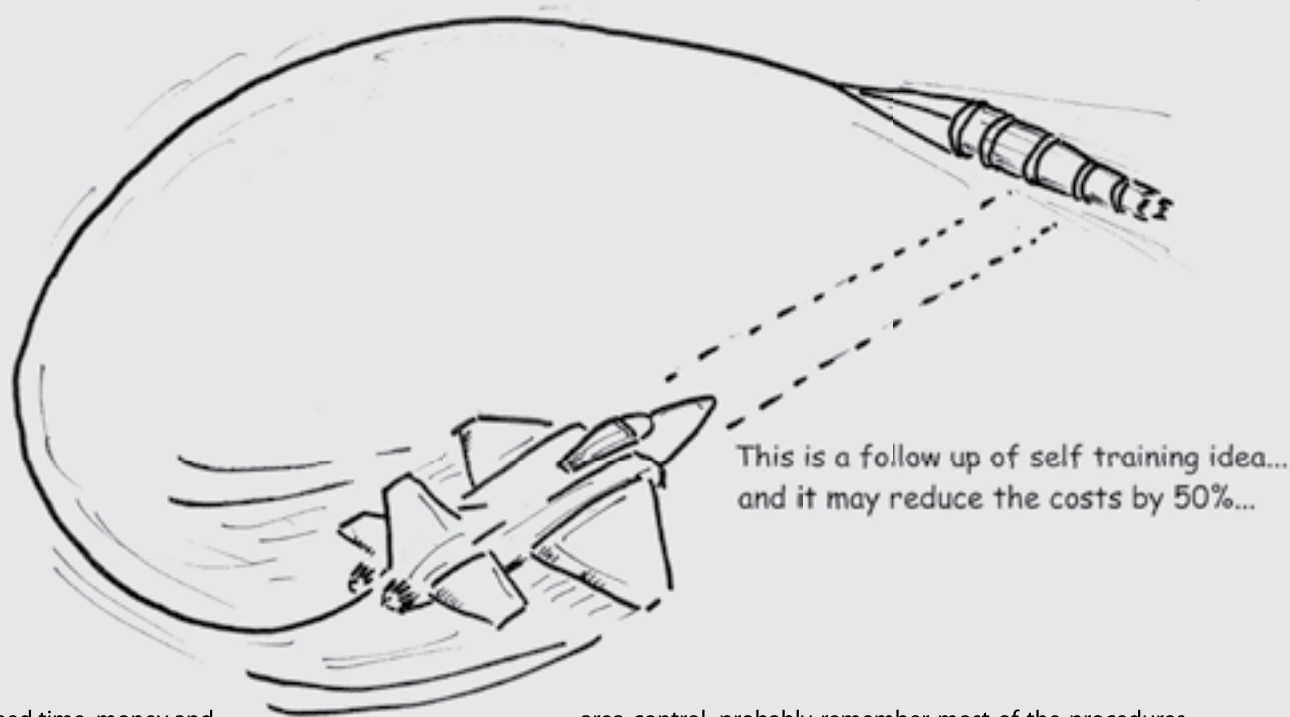


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Probably most of us are accustomed to periodic classroom sessions. Our memories go back to the times of our first, basic course, though now we sit at the desk only to refresh what we believe we already know. We are used to the fact that for a day or more we will look at the white board and will once again be taken through an interminable number of PowerPoint slides

The other very well known case, the Manchester bird strike, with almost 3 million views on YouTube, gives the impression that both the flight crew and the air traffic controllers were actually in the same place during the whole situation, sitting side by side. All information was given at the right moment, in a calm and steady voice and with nothing unnecessary and nothing missing. I don't know what the difference is between the training programmes for New York and Manchester controllers, but both situations show how very important it is to prepare and educate both pilots and controllers about the needs and limitations of other parties involved.

The problem which arises everywhere and every time any change is needed is... money. If we need the training programmes to be better, more attractive and more profes-



sional, we need time, money and close cooperation with all other parties involved. Along with the increasing level of traffic and regular procedure changes, we need to go through all the programmes periodically and change or improve them as necessary. That again means time and money. Many people need to be involved in such processes. People who are known for their expertise, experience and knowledge – ‘active specialists’. The very people who are probably most important to the success of their company. So surely the company would not want them to be taken out from their normal duties to allow them to work on some “unprofitable” education programmes or refresher courses. And nobody should expect those people to work in their own time.

So maybe we should leave all the presentations, handouts and books and concentrate only on case studies? I would say no. I also go through refresher sessions in my work and one of the case studies used for the last few years is one I was involved in. I generally have no problem with that but when I see the reactions, or when we discuss the case after seeing its recording, I always have the impression that it is not the ‘plot’ and the ‘ending’ which is really important but the cast of ‘actors’. We know each other, we know our good and bad sides, talents and limitations and we often have the tendency to ask the question “could that happen to me?” Or “did it happen because that particular person was on duty at that time?” It is at such times that I regret having no opportunity to watch the same situation from the pilots’ perspective. I know what happened in the tower at that moment. I was there. But I have no idea what happened in the flight deck. If I was able to find out, my own awareness would surely gain a lot.

I am sure we all agree that we are learning all the time. Therefore it is also worth thinking about how much of the available learning process those ANSPs who do not allow personnel interchangeability lose. A person with years of experience solely in aerodrome control will, after transfer to approach or

area control, probably remember most of the procedures and conditions of tower controllers’ operational work for a few months or even a year. With no opportunity to be able to see (and ‘feel’) both sides of the story, local priorities and not the bigger picture gradually come to ‘centre stage’.

Is cross training a solution here? Yes, why not. And there are people who warmly welcome me when I decide to spend an hour looking at one of the ACC sector screens. But is it something that people are encouraged to do? I also understand those who decide to spend an hour off relaxing rather than taking part in the ATC process somewhere else, even if only as a spectator.

Well then, maybe simulators will do? But how complex should an ATC simulator be to be able to “replay” human reactions and behaviours as they are in real life? Or how many people would have to operate it to “act” as all the parties involved? Once again, economy, money, time, people. So there will always be limits to the use of simulation. A point beyond which the simulator itself cannot go any further even though we all know that there may be a lot still to be done in situations of genuine distress.

So how about ‘coordinated simulations’? Aircraft and ATC simulators connected with the exercise being done in parallel by pilots and controllers? But are the needs common? Are the training programmes alike? What about planning, certification, regulations, instructor availability? Economy rings the alarm bell again, doesn’t it?

I would love to be the one to have all the answers to all the questions. Especially for the problems and challenges that come with aviation, but it seems that training is another issue which will not develop for the better until some of the priorities change. So for now, trying to take everything I can from the training I am provided with, along with my own ‘cross training’ or self-study, I will stick to what my colleagues used some 20 years ago. I will ask, talk and listen to those on the other side of the microphone whenever I can.

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