



Case Study Comment 3

by Captain Ed Pooley

I was struck by the fact that when a supplier delivers a service or a product – or in this case both – to a customer, the interests of the customer and the supplier might, on first sight, appear to be the same – a satisfied customer.

But who exactly is the customer?



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In a large organisation, the procurement process will begin once there is a defined and approved operational requirement. A minimum specification will be determined, a supplier identified and a contract set up. The delivery will be carefully monitored to see that it meets the contract specification in every way. The changes which new equipment might bring will have been foreseen when the project was approved and any training and familiarisation for the affected personnel which is not included in the contract will have been scoped and dovetailed with it. Somebody in middle management

will have picked up the job of monitoring the project.

But it appears that the above did not happen in this case. Lacklustre management failed to ensure that the changes would be understood by the controllers or that they satisfied the basic requirements of an SMS in the first place. They also failed to properly control the way the contractor was permitted to work with the system. They apparently delegated 'controller training' to the contractor - they only heard about the failure to inform controllers of the changes after the fact - and they passively accepted the after-the-fact 'judgement' of the contractor that 'it's more important to get the system up and running than 'involve any operational people in the process'. So the interests of the supplier were not the same as those of the customer.

The other part of the story which caught my attention was the portrayal of a supervisor who was clearly taking a 'hands off approach' to his responsibilities. When traffic is light, any supervisor needs to ensure that complacency doesn't take over. The best way to start is by not "spending more time outside the operations room than in position" just in case it sends the wrong message to those being 'supervised'. Of course, he also was responsible for the way he routinely did his job to somebody in management who was either aware and did nothing about it or unaware and should have been.

And as for the matter of smoking, there is no reason why management needed to allow smoking during a duty period, even outside the operations room, to continue. On the evidence here it was

a factor not only in the behaviour of the supervisor but probably also in the quick handover of position in order to allow time for more than one cigarette to be smoked in the break. Most pilots' shifts are at least as long as those worked by controllers and often longer and, in many airlines, they haven't been able to smoke for years. The smokers amongst them at the time the rules changed all coped.

A RECOMMENDATION

The 'management' of this Unit is incompetent at some level. We don't know whether the rot actively starts at the top or just passively. But on the evidence we have, a new boss is required at the top who will make it their business to see that those who report directly to them are doing their jobs properly. And of course that effect will cascade down to the level of the shift supervisor. Si

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