

CASE STUDY COMMENT 2

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We hear rather a lot about 'Collaborative Decision Making' but a decision to do something is not a collaboration, it is the responsibility of the owner(s) of the problem. The specific problem here appears to be an airport taxi system which is deficient to the extent, in the first instance, that one particular taxi route is not clear enough to pilots to preclude repetitive routing error. So who owns the problem here?

First, we must decide on the cause(s) of the problem. Is it "the pilots" (and if so who are they, just the ones who 'messed up' or potentially all the pilots who work for the same operators or potentially all pilots who use the airport) or "the inadequate guidance on taxi routes provided by the airport operator"?

On the evidence available, whilst it might be a very good idea in the short term for the operators who employ the careless pilots to raise awareness of the obvious risk and for ATC to provide an explicit caution with every clearance through the problem area given to visiting pilots, there is a limit to this. It is really no more than holding action pending some permanent improvements in taxi guidance where it has gone wrong in the same place more than once. So the real problem owner in my assessment is the airport operator. They need to devise an enduring fix and, before finalising it, make sure it is the right one. It needs to

be appropriate to all pilots, especially the ones whose perspective is rarely available – the pilots of non-based operators. Of course on their very first visit to a new airport, pilots can be expected to be pretty cautious and are, by and large, unlikely to make too many assumptions about which way to go if it's not completely clear. Faced with doubt on this first encounter, they are likely to stop and check with ATC. On subsequent visits however, their confidence in ground operations at the no longer entirely unfamiliar destination can be expected to increase and it would not be unusual for it to do so without recognising all the 'gotchas' unless their operator destination brief has highlighted them.

Then we come to the second quite separate problem, that of whether ATC are going to make use of the newly-installed lit stop bars to help prevent pilot-caused runway incursions and the consequent risk of collision on the runway. Here, we find that the owner of the problem is ATC

and that the controllers trade union is playing with safety. Trade Unions can be a very effective contributor to a service delivery business or they can forget the need to avoid unilateral action which is clearly in conflict with the essential requirement for the highest practicable operational safety standards. Any concerns they have should always be taken first to the employer and the latter must constructively engage to resolve concerns raised. Of course even better, the employer should pre-empt problems with any proposed change by proactively engaging with the trade union well ahead of that change. It is not clear whether that happened here but the tacit inference is that it did not. And whilst this is a matter for the ANSP to sort out in the first instance, they are probably a service provider to the Airport Operator and therefore ensuring that the benefit of the investment in stop bars that they have presumably paid for is realised is ultimately also the Airport's responsibility.

A RECOMMENDATION

There are lessons here for all four organisations – the airport operator, the ANSP, the aircraft operator and the controllers' trade union. To this list, I am going to add the Safety Regulator who issued the airport operator with their licence and must thereafter oversee the performance of the licence holder. Since the airport operator appears unwilling to recognise the need for 'aggressive' action on both aspects of taxiing safety, I will choose the safety regulator for priority attention. They need to 'police' the use of the airport operating licence they have issued so that the conditions for safe operations are met. The current preference for 'Performance Based Regulation' is compatible with intervention in the face of inaction. S

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