‘SAFETY HOLMES’: A DRAMATISED INVESTIGATION TO BRING SAFETY TO LIFE

How effective is the learning from safety occurrence reports? Most of us have probably experienced ‘report fatigue’ and there are limits to learning from safety reports. We need more interactive methods to help our learning. HungaroControl have a dramatic solution, where imaginary safety occurrences are acted out by employees. As Sherlock himself said: “There is nothing like first-hand evidence”. **István Hegedus** outlines the initiative.

Like most ANSPs, Hungarocontrol has numerous methods of safety communication and learning, such as reports, presentations, articles, surveys and e-learning courses. Most of these appeal to one’s logic and rational thinking. While these are essential aspects of how we learn about safety, they tend to suffer from two problems. First reports, presentations and so on are usually not interactive. Second, such methods tend to take a linear approach to communicating a narrative. Third, they do not tend to appeal to emotion.

HungaroControl organised its first Safety Day in 2012 with the purpose of facilitating safety awareness across the organisation in a new way. The idea is to help colleagues experience the significance of safety through various participative activities, such as taking part in a Safety Holmes session.

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KEY LEARNING POINTS

1. **The Safety Holmes dramatisation complements safety reports and safety training with participative, emotional and first-hand experience.**
2. **Safety Holmes can be used to help colleagues reflect on work-as-done and work-as-imagined for themselves, and the influences and interactions that bring about events.**
3. **Dramatisation engages the imagination of all participants to help make safety learning to stick.**

Safety Holmes is a dramatised, interactive presentation of ATM safety issues on the annual, in-company Safety Day organised by HungaroControl. It is a mock investigation into an imaginary ATS occurrence, where the roles are played by employees. The purpose of a Safety Holmes session is to help people discover for themselves the subtle yet important safety issues and interconnections that exist in a complex organisation, and which all contribute to the safety level achieved by an ANSP.

Safety Holmes takes the form of an ATS occurrence investigation where staff prepared for the roles (the ‘actors’) play the parts of employees involved directly or indirectly in an ATS occurrence. They present their story to other employees attending the event, who act as an investigatory body, or to several groups of 4-6 investigators. The investigators’ task is to reveal the underlying factors that contributed to the occurrence and then recommend changes and improvements in the functioning of the organisation (the ANSP).

In preparation for this, the ‘investigators’ (the audience) get a short verbal summary of the occurrence, then they listen to the story of each member of staff (the actors) involved in the case, and interview them. The actors come to the stage one-by-one, and stay on the stage when their part is over, so in the end all six or seven actors sit on the stage, and the investigators are free to ask questions to anyone of them. This interview part is followed by a 15-20 minute analysis and recommendations session, when the investigators work in their group to identify the causes and factors, and to draw up their conclusions and recommendations. Finally, they are asked to briefly present these to everybody in the room.

The members of staff participating become emotionally involved in the

process: the 'actors' present their stories as if it happened to them personally, and the 'investigators' have a feeling that they are interviewing people who were actually involved in an occurrence. This emotional factor is there to make the revealed issues be remembered for longer and hopefully to influence real life action at work 'when nobody is watching' more effectively than a scientific, rational presentation of the same issues.

Of course, the issues that the organiser wants to raise are carefully hidden in the Safety Holmes story, but typically the investigators come up also with extra ideas. The issues can be virtually anything with relevance to the performance of the people, procedures, equipment and the organisation as a whole. We have highlighted many issues using the Safety Holmes method, including:

- ATCO fatigue
- staffing
- TRM (EC-PC communication)
- communication between operational and support ("office") units
- clarity of procedures (e.g. reporting procedure)
- compliance with procedures
- adequacy of risk assessment
- planning
- understanding of how OPS works
- communication between ATCO and ATSEP
- prioritisation of resources (procurement), and
- consideration of human factors.

So far we have had positive reaction from participants. Safety Holmes is often mentioned in the feedback as the highlight of the Safety Day. The next HungaroControl Safety Day, including the fifth round of Safety Holmes is scheduled for 3 May 2017. Of course, a Safety Holmes session can also be used to highlight differences between work-as-done and work-as-imagined. For example, certain procedures or safety nets intended to increase safety could look good on paper, but in real life they may overload or frustrate the user. The result can even be counterproductive to safety: imagine STARs that are too difficult for pilots to fly or for ATCOs to manage due to the lack of proper validation in a simulator, or drawn up without adequate ATCO and pilot involvement. This could lead to a less safe practice: more shortcuts or visual approaches, eventually increasing the number of go-arounds or the risk of runway excursions at an airport. Or imagine an STCA warning, where of course the visibility of the warning is vital, but may actually hinder the controller in reacting properly, because the visualisation of the STCA renders certain radar label information invisible.

Based on feedback from HungaroControl participants, the Safety Holmes dramatisation method helps to complement safety reports and other aspects of safety training, adding an emotional, first-hand and fun dimension. In doing so, it engages the imagination of all participants to help to make safety learning to stick longer.

Tips for running a Safety Holmes:

- Always use invented cases that can never be identified as one particular case, especially not as one that happened at your ANSP. This is to avoid the feeling of being pointed at or blamed.
- If possible, enroll 'actors' with some actual experience of the role played: e.g., an ex-ATCO will surely deliver a convincing performance in the role of an ATCO.
- Keep the Safety Holmes session to about 90-100 minutes maximum.
- A good number of "investigators" is 15-30, working in 3 to 5 groups.