

CASE STUDY (11)

DIVERSITY ICEBREAKER APPLIED IN A “REFRESHER CREW RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COURSE” FOR ROTARY WING PILOTS.

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Areas:

Team-building, CRM

Brief

Incidents and accidents in aviation are consistently linked to human errors; this in spite of a strong focus on the human factors enfolded in the cockpit for more than 30 years. Initial training on human factors and human limitations, as well as yearly refresher courses, are mandatory in the industry. Initially the focus was on personality of the pilots. It has then shifted to more systemic approaches. This is also illustrated by different contents in the wording of CRM; from Cockpit resource management, to Crew Resource management, to Company Resource management.

Awareness of potential risks linked to personal and professional preferences, is probably counteracted by a natural need of confidence required when accepting the responsibility of handling a commercial aircraft. Accompanied to a stated “no blame” policy when reporting errors and mistakes is also a growing trend of legal measures taken towards pilots who have made errors. A further classical challenge is that pilots in general are a lot more oriented towards technology than exploring the mind and human relations and the softer part of the operation.

Goal: The challenge in CRM courses is often to get beneath the theoretical models on human errors and beneath the technical explanations; this in order to create awareness on how individuals and pilot crews have different approaches, preferences and cognitive styles. Diversity Icebreaker was applied to create reflections on how different preferences represent assets and challenges in different areas of pilot operations.

Action

The administration of Diversity Icebreaker was classical. The pilots (18) was split in three groups, one with the highest scores on Green, then the ones with highest on Red, and then the (“ultra”) Blue, as not surprisingly most of these pilots had high quite scores on Blue. They described the assets of their own group, and then the characteristics of the two others. With humor as usual.

We then made mixed groups, comprising two pilots of each color-preference. Their tasks was then to describe assets and possible challenges of all three colors, with regard to the following areas of pilot operations; *Communication, Teamwork, Relation to rules & procedures, Situation Awareness, Stress, Errors, Leadership, Role and task allocation, Decision-making.* Each group had 3 of these areas.

Results

This gave a rather detailed matrix of statements, well aligned to what we know of differences between typical Red, Blue and Green preferences and cognitive styles. The most important result was however the opportunity it created for open minded reflections and discussions on how clear assets of one preference in some situations could represent challenges and threats to operative goals and safe actions in other. It was also obvious that all three colors, which we all have some of, have to be appreciated.

The Diversity Icebreaker process appeared to be an eye opener and a refreshing context, creating open talk and awareness of how preferences contributed to typical “angle of attacks” in different situations. Most probably, the session also was an opportunity for sharing opinions the pilots had on each other, in a humoristic, relaxed, but also serious and professional way.

The strength of Diversity Icebreaker was demonstrated by its potential for getting beneath the “nuts and bolts” in a group dominated by Blue preferences, and also to highlight the benefits of Red and Green. It should be equally useful in many technology-oriented teams and enterprises where safe operations are critical, creating reflections and shared learning. Additionally, in a rather joyful way!

About the author:

Jon Lars Syversen (psychologists, senior consultant). After some years working in the armed forces with selection and training, he joined Scandinavian Institute of Aviation Psychology, and has been a director there since 1992.

He has a versified working experience from the international aviation industry, with focus on selection, training, leadership assessment and development from a spectrum of industries and business areas. He joined Human Factors in 2003 and has assessment and selection, test and tool development, as his main areas.

He is dedicated to leadership and performance in high-risk operations, cross-cultural work, and the act of matching individual wellbeing and growth to organizational needs and goals.

