AVIATION INSIGHT

Focus on wellbeing and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic

This article has been prepared using modified extracts from a similar maritime-focused article written for CHIRP Maritime by Dr. Claire Pekcan, Director of Safe Marine Ltd., and member of the CHIRP Maritime Advisory Board.

The world is in lockdown during this unprecedented global health crisis. A total of 181 countries have reported incidents of COVID-19 infection and are at war with this unseen enemy, the coronavirus. At the moment, Governments' only weapon is to restrict the movement of its citizens within their country's borders and to deny entry to the foreign visitors they would normally welcome. The disruption to lives and livelihoods is incalculable. We are consumed with media reports of the numbers of fatalities around the globe and are urged, commanded, to shield the vulnerable, to protect our key workers and stay at home.

It is against this backdrop that aviation is seeing an unprecedented impact on our industry, both to companies, organisations and operations. Although the way back to something approaching previous aviation norms is currently highly uncertain, some operations are continuing and need to be maintained to the usual high levels of safety, whilst other activities are reducing or ceasing with the corresponding impact on those who were involved and the need to be mindful of how such operations will eventually be re-established in a safe and considered manner as stakeholders begin bringing aircraft and services back online.

Supporting Aviation Practitioners with Interventions to get through COVID-19

Ways of supporting aviation practitioners through this crisis can be presented using a framework called the 'Six Category Intervention Analysis', developed by John Heron in 1976, a researcher at the University of Surrey (Heron, 1976).[1] This framework is used in many settings, both clinical (e.g. counselling) and non-clinical (e.g. policing), for guiding people who are helping those who face challenging circumstances. It defines and describes six categories of intervention, divided into two groups, *Authoritative* and *Facilitative,* that can be used to help people with difficult problems. The six categories of intervention are listed in Table 1.

The *Authoritative* group is more directive in nature, where the helper may command, guide, or instruct the individual to follow particular problem-solving strategies and solutions.

The *Facilitative* group is more collaborative in nature where the helper works with the individual to discover problem-solving strategies and solutions.

The circumstances of the individual or group of individuals affected will dictate the choice of intervention strategy that is most appropriate and likely to be the most effective. It is worth noting that each intervention needs to be offered in such a way that the recipient feels free to acknowledge that it does, or does not, meet with his or her true needs or interests.

Table 1. Heron's Six-Category Interventions, (Heron, 1976)

Intervention Category	Description
Authoritative	
i) Prescriptive	Give advice, be judgemental/ critical/ evaluative, seek explicitly to direct the behaviour of the other person.
ii) Informative	Be didactic, instruct/ inform, interpret; seek to impart new knowledge or information to the other person.
iii) Confronting	Challenge, give direct feedback; challenge the restrictive attitudes, beliefs, behaviour of the other.

1. Heron, J. (1976), A Six-Category Intervention Analysis, British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, Volume 4, Issue 2, pp143-155. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069887608256308.

Intervention Category	Description
Facilitative	
i) Cathartic	Release emotional tensions in; enable the other person to abreact; i.e., get out of their system – painful emotions
ii) Catalytic	Encourage self-directed problem solving, elicit information from; enable the other person to learn and develop by self-direction and self-discovery
iii) Supportive	Be approving, confirming validating – affirm the worth and value of the other person

Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 on people using the Job-Demands-Resources Model

Using the Job-Demands-Resources model to analyse the impact on those in the aviation community, we can conclude that the likely consequences of the pandemic are to increase peoples' exposure to the aspects of their jobs that cause stress and to remove or reduce the supports that can give them relief from their daily toil and anxiety about COVID-19. Table 2 illustrates some of the types of impact that COVID-19 is likely to have by increasing the job demands and reducing the sense of control over their situation, but there will be many more that apply depending on the circumstances pertaining in individual situations.

Added to this, aviators, controllers and engineers, like all humans, will be affected on a personal level by the crisis: they will be scared of the disease and getting infected; fearful for their families and loved ones; worried about the financial implications of the pandemic, particularly if they are unable to

work, and feeling a sense of isolation and powerlessness to make the situation better thus adding to the stresses and strains that they normally experience as part of their work.

COVID-19 Safety Toolkits

The international non-profit Flight Safety Foundation has recently developed a set of COVID-19 safety toolkits that provide detailed resources based on a 'safety roadmap' and 'punch lists' which cover a large variety of issues and circumstances. These are excellent resources that are well worth investigating in order to benefit from the thoughts of leading aviation experts.

The 'roadmap' itself outlines safety-related considerations for professionals in different segments of the industry and is intended to help safety and operational personnel navigate the pandemic's impact and inform operational safety decisions

The 'punch list' resources are a subset of the roadmap and cover many issues relating to the three broad themes of Continued Operations, Reduced/Ceased Operations and Re-Establishing Operations. Within each theme, there are easy to access bullet lists regarding general considerations, human factors, flight operations, air traffic services, airports, MRO/maintenance, ground operations, manufacturers and regulators.

In addition, the Foundation have also published 'An Aviation Professional's Guide to Wellbeing' which was developed by Flight Safety Foundation members, academic researchers and aviation professionals from across the industry as part of its broader effort to help the industry cope with the personal and professional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this document is to help individuals improve their personal wellbeing by describing both the idea of wellbeing and offering some simple tools based on fundamental psychological concepts that will help to make decisions and take actions to maintain or improve our state of wellbeing.

Table 2. Examples of Potential Impacts of COVID-19 on Aviation Practitioners

Job Demand Type	Job Characteristic	Example of Impact of COVID-19
Quantitative	Amount of work	• Large increase in amount of high priority tasks, workload and engineering/flight operations oversight required to return aircraft to service • Increased exposure to shift work • Continuing exposure to work schedules without breaks and/or increased shift/flight durations to manage workload
	Speed of work	• Increased demand for quick turnaround times to meet schedules
	Significance of work	• Obligation to maintain performance standards even if suffering from distress or fatigue because of the consequences for safety and company survival • Obligation to meet schedules despite distress or fatigue as commercial pressures mount
Cognitive	Unclear situation	• Normal routines of certifications, checks, simulators and training etc disrupted • Lack of information or answers regarding individual or company's future • Unclear whether aircraft and crews are in compliance with rules and obligations as certificates are about to expire or inspections are unable to be performed
	Complexity	• Unknown risk posed by need for additional contractors to complete work • Increased anxiety due to new procedures etc making it difficult to concentrate and make decisions • Feeling of aviation being 'in the spotlight' as a bell-weather for post-COVID-19 recovery and that any issues, errors or incidents will be widely reported
Emotional	Fear	• Fear of contracting the virus from passengers or other aviation practitioners • Fear of loved ones contracting the virus and being unable to protect them
	Anxiety	• Worry about keeping oneself healthy • Worry about access to medications for already-diagnosed health conditions • Financial worries if on an agency contract with no income coming in • Worries about job security
	Isolation	• Working with people from across UK who are not from their usual community • Increased feelings of loneliness caused by large seniority or experience differentials in new teams • For those not physically at the workplace, pressures from working at home, away from the normal team, interacting only by social media or collaborative tools
	Conflict	• Increasing stress, frustration and irritation leading to conflict • Having to break promises and deal with distressed family and friends due to increased working hours or schedules • Dealing with unhelpful or difficult officials, managers, colleagues, suppliers or customers
	Low mood	• Worries leading to uncontrollable thoughts which disrupt sleep and sap energy levels • Feeling of helplessness or powerlessness in the face of the invisible COVID-19 threat • Frustration that managers, colleagues in other departments, regulators, suppliers, customers et al don't understand the difficulties of delivering in the post-COVID-19 environment.
	Depression	• Having to cope alone with the loss of family members who have succumbed to the virus • Feeling helpless and unable to support sick / bereaved family members
Physical	Musculo-skeletal	• Increased exposure to physically demanding work due to extended shifts • Lack of exercise due to increased shift patterns, unsociable shift/roster times or increased workload
	Environmental	• Increased exposure to working in extreme physical environments e.g. aircraft stored in the open
	Health	• Lack of facilities, PPE and equipment for preventing infections and treating infections • Inability to access nutritional food due to workload, work environment, inability to access suitable shopping facilities due to shift patterns