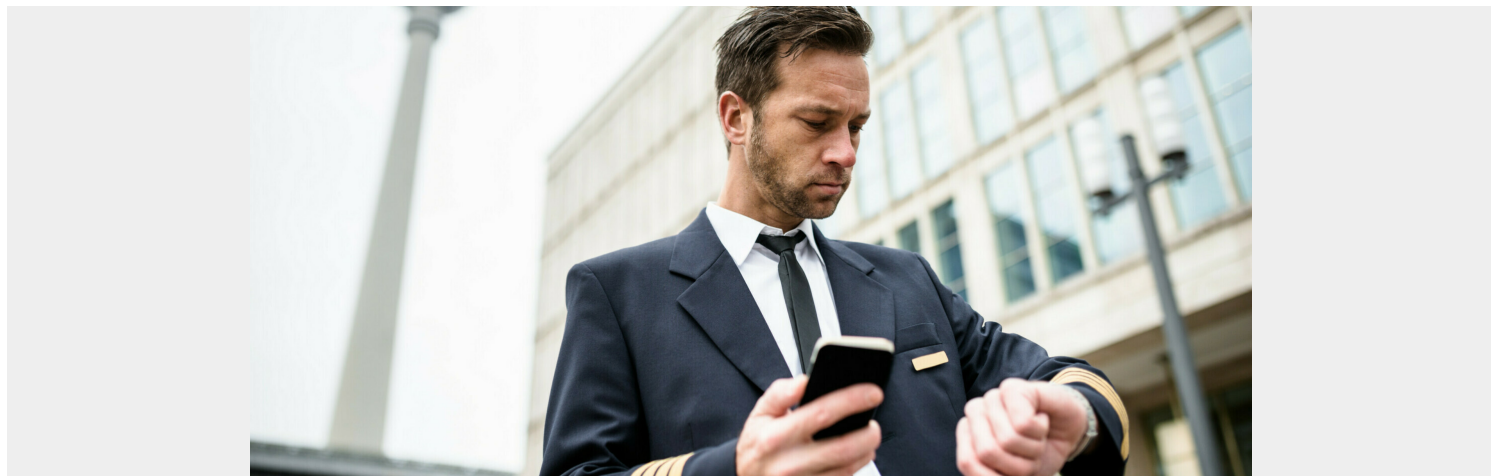


THE RISKS OF ROSTERING

Posted on 31.10.2023 by Steve Forward



Category: [Air Transport](#)

EditionATFB 148

Editorial

It's not just flight duties, the overall scheduling of simulators, training and standby duties sometimes doesn't take account of crews' effective rhythms

Rostering and duty lengths have been the stand-out issues reported to *CHIRP* over the last few months, many of which reflecting what appears to be a mis-match between schedule requirements and resource availability. The inevitable outcome being that crews appear to be being rostered increasingly tight duty periods that risk becoming unsustainable. And it's not just flight duties themselves, the overall rostering of simulators, training and standby duties sometimes doesn't take account of crews' effective circadian rhythm and acclimatisation. Scheduling brutal rosters with earlies followed by lates then earlies again is effectively causing the same effect as time zone and 'WOCL' transitions and should be recognised as such.

Although rostered duties may well fall within the published flight time limitations (FTL), some scheduling can be extremely disruptive to rest/sleep and contrary to rostering guidelines (for example, extremely early morning positioning for ground training within other duties can be highly

disruptive and fatigue inducing). Company responses of 'it's legal' need to be framed within 'it's safe/sensible' and reflect the fact that current FTL regulations are permissive rather than being restrictive. 'Legal' is not the same as 'safe' – it's 'legal' to drive at 60mph down a winding country road but rarely 'safe/sensible' to do so – and FTL maximums, imperfect as they are, should only be approached in extremis and in a carefully managed manner.

The nature of many of these reports mean that it's impossible for us to disidentify them sufficiently such that specific circumstances are removed whilst maintaining their meaning and impact. As a result, often we can only generically engage with the operators because, much as we would wish that the tenets of Open Reporting and Just Culture are upheld, some crews fear that some management appear to be less than enlightened in this respect and infer their displeasure and potential consequences for crews. But that is why we have a confidential reporting process and, although we err on the side of caution with respect to contacting operators, CHIRP regularly passes on disidentified processed and anonymised intelligence to the CAA who then factor that into routine and *ad hoc* oversight activities focused on issues raised. Notwithstanding, we encourage reporters to continue to report through company reporting systems where they feel able so that data is directly collected and processed within their FRMS and which might then highlight trends and issues that cause changes to be made – without such reporting and data, little will change.

Commander's Discretion gets another airing in this issue, and we're aware that the CAA is also focusing on this in light of a number of reports from us and their own analysis of MORs; they recently sent an [open letter](#) to all operators reflecting on the fact that "... *the use of Commander's Discretion ('CD') is being inconsistently interpreted by industry stakeholders, leading to inappropriate application (or the perception of inappropriate application) of CD.*" On an associated theme, controller rest is also a topic of concern, but from 2 opposing angles. Some controllers are concerned that they are being pressured to operate beyond the rules for duty versus breaks, whilst the other angle is the seeming incoherence of flight crews having to employ Commander's Discretion when faced with temporary ATC closures at regional airports because controllers are having a mandated break and there's no other controller to replace them. Just as for Commander's Discretion, the circumstances pertaining at the time are crucial, and it should be recognised that controllers can exceed their duty times but each exceedance must be formally reported. Accepting that there is a risk of direct pressure being applied by *in situ* senior managers, perhaps it's time to look at defining some form of 'Controller Discretion' that, subject to a controller's personal decision on their ability to do so versus traffic density, workload etc, allows for minor extensions of duty to facilitate continued operations without the penalty of a formal report? Overall, it seems that fatigue management is not well developed in some ATCU safety systems and so there's probably also a need for better awareness of the effects of fatigue on controllers in general.

Finally, we're rapidly approaching winter in the UK and Europe and so the extra considerations of cold weather operations also have to be factored into the post-COVID-19 'new normal' for many.

Many crews will be used to operating into colder climates throughout the year, but the extra pressures of returning to a UK environment that may not be so well rehearsed in cold weather operations as in previous times bears consideration. Some third-party service providers may well still be recruiting and training new staff to aviation who may not have extensive experience of cold weather operations (last winter was fairly mild) and so extra vigilance will be required if there is a cold snap where runway clearance, apron operations and de-icing crews may not be on top of their game. The prospect of operating with potentially fatigued crews who are new to cold weather operations in dark, miserable weather conditions adds another level of complexity to the calculation for all those involved, be they flight crew, cabin crew, engineers, controllers or ground-handling staff. There's lots of scope for errors and mistakes to mount up as we cope with cumulative pressures that, in themselves, would otherwise be easily handled individually.

The bottom-line? *CHIRP* provides a vital safety net as another route to promote change when the normal channels of reporting aren't delivering results, you don't feel able to report through company systems, or for collecting reports with safety concerns that did not meet the threshold for normal reporting and might otherwise have gone unwritten. We rely on you to report Human Factors related aviation safety concerns to us so that we can both help in their resolution and highlight relevant issues to others. Reporting is easy by using either our [website](#) portal or our App (scan the appropriate QR code shown or search for 'CHIRP Aviation' – avoiding the birdsong apps that may come up). In our reporting portal you'll be presented with a series of fields to complete, of which you fill in as much as you feel is relevant – not every field is mandatory, but the more information you can give us the better. Although you'll need to enter your email address to get access to the portal, none of your details are shared outside *CHIRP*, and we have our own independent secure database and IT systems to ensure confidentiality.



Steve Forward, Director Aviation

In Memorium

CHIRP is sad to hear that Chris Morris, an Air Transport Advisory Board member since October 2017, sadly passed away this summer. The CHIRP team would like to offer Chris's family our deepest and most sincere condolences.



CHIRP FEEDBACK Survey

We value your opinion about our FEEDBACK newsletters and associated engagement methods, please spend a few minutes responding to [10 short questions about CHIRP Aviation FEEDBACK](#).

Engineering Editorial

At what point in time could we say our industry has survived the COVID pandemic? Would it be when manning levels achieve the required strength? Could it be when logistics and supply of spares and tools improve, not to mention the supply of silicon chips in the appropriate spares? Perhaps it is when training resumes to the point that an engineer on training does not critically affect the existing reduced manning levels?

The real question is, when will experience on Type return to where it was in 2019? When an engineer leaves the industry for whatever reason, they take with them a unique degree of personal wisdom. This knowledge is not just related to their last employers and aircraft type/s, it is experience across all past employment, whether Production, Workshops, Base and/or Line Maintenance. This personal experience may include different weight categories and both fixed-wing and rotorcraft. An extensive knowledge of 'peripheral' disciplines may now be lost on subjects like Regulations of different States of Registry, Authorised Release Certificates, Heat Treatment, Peening, Composites and also staff supervision/management.

Continuing with experience on Type, a history of Service Bulletins (SB) and Airworthiness Directives (AD) should be available for scrutiny to existing and new staff. The Aircraft Maintenance Manual (AMM) and other Approved Maintenance Data should protect you at the point a decision is required to establish the modification status of your aircraft. The regulations require aircraft maintenance records are supplied to the aircraft operator and the operator's Continuing Airworthiness Management Organisation (CAMO). If the operator moves the aircraft from one Maintenance and Repair Organisation (MRO) to another, or changes to a different CAMO, the records must be transferred accordingly.

There is however a vast quantity of recorded experience held by an MRO that is lost if the organisation closes down or is purchased by another organisation. That experience is hidden in the records of Internal Occurrence Reports (IORs), some of which may include the background to

submitted Mandatory Occurrence Reports (MOR). Some IORs will have led to a Maintenance Error Investigation, the technical details of which still constitute organisational experience. IORs should propagate preventative actions as part of the Safety Management System (SMS). Although every Risk Assessment should be approached with a fresh pair of eyes, retaining this experience is also of real value. Within the new Part145 requirement to maintain an SMS (July 2024), the SMS needs to cover retention of corroborating material/records. Perhaps the regulations should require the new company to review the past material from the old one, so that the context and background material within the records is retained for future use as required. At present, companies that have taken over others don't have to look back to learn from the previous company they've taken over from, they just look forward. The new organisation is likely to think if they carry on the same way as their existing operation elsewhere, nothing could possibly go wrong and the old experience and preventative actions end up in the bin for shredding or disappear at the touch of the delete button. The only saving grace is in the memories of the engineers still involved, at least until they move on to where the grass seems greener.

Phil Young, Engineering Programme Manager

I Learned About Human Factors From That (ILAHFFT)

 <p>WE NEED YOU!</p>	<p>We need your ILAHFFT stories!</p> <p>The value of ILAHFFT is that it provides insights from those who have been there, done it, and have lessons for all of us to learn. If you have any anecdotes or amusing 'there I was...' stories then please do share them with us so that we can pass on the messages and inform others (ideally in a light-hearted and engaging manner). Send any interesting tales to mail@chirp.co.uk and put ILAHFFT in the subject header – we promise full confidentiality to protect the innocent (and not so innocent!).</p>
--	---

Comments on Previous FEEDBACKs

Comment No1 – Online learning Further to report FC5240 'Online learning' in the July *CHIRP* bulletin (FEEDBACK Ed147). The company expect us to maintain sound working knowledge of all

company Operations Manuals, SOPs, and familiarity with NTCs. We are rostered 4hrs or 8hrs every year for "Online Learning" in a tick-tock cycle - 4 hours or 8 hours in a single year to read hundreds of NTCs, 1000s of pages of manuals, complete approx 6 hours of SEP training prior to the winter recurrent simulator, approx 2-3 hours of MANDATORY reading and preparation prior to summer recurrent simulator, company emails which number hundreds per month, 6-monthly tech exams which take a few hours each, plus other mini-exams on new aircraft systems, new EFB softwares etc which take an hour a time also.

We are suffering a severe time-erosion. Our standard report is 60 minutes. This requires us to get through airport crew security (which is taking longer over time); get to the aircraft (which in many cases is 15-20 minutes' walk from crew security); review flight paperwork and meet the crew and brief them; then set up the aircraft, board, departure brief and complete all relevant paperwork. Most days this takes longer than 60 minutes and the crew report early. There is NO time given to read any mandatory Level 1 NTCs that may have been issued since the previous duty. There is no time given during post-flight duties for any of this either, as most days we are having to delay off duty due to the long walks back from the aircraft to the debrief area (20 minutes for many airport stands).

I estimate that I spend far in excess of 30 hours a year completing mandatory self-study. That doesn't include non-mandatory things like revising systems, failures, procedures etc in anticipation of simulator sessions, or reviewing new airports (particularly challenging or quirky ones such as Captains-only) to gain familiarity if I haven't visited there. We should be rostered a few whole days a year for the amount we are required to do as credit for the days off at home we spend on company duties unable to spend that time with our families or friends. Tacking a few hours onto the end of a flight duty where it has no impact on FDP or minimum-rest requirements is the company "hiding it" where it doesn't cost them anything. It is cynical and disingenuous, and it is very frustrating that CHIRP seems to support the company in its response.

Yes it is a roster duty credit, and we have SOME but not much flexibility on when we can perform these tasks, but it is nowhere near enough, and the company is ticking a box whilst trashing the intention of the duty credit. I agree with the previous reporter, it is absolutely the company having their cake and eating it. CHIRP needs to push back on our behalf, and the CAA needs to regulate stronger, stipulate exactly what is and is not acceptable, and require the company to time-stamp the amount of work that is required.

Part of the problem is that every middle manager has the ability to upload a 400 page document onto our company EFB, and then cover their backside when we transgress it or make a mistake by claiming we have access to it and it's our fault for not following it. In the past, when a Chief Pilot was a Chief Pilot and not a puppet for the board, they would pick up their flight bag full of paper manuals, think "wow this is heavy" and then have a massive cull of unnecessary paperwork. Unfortunately those times will never return. The company has its own agenda and will do what it

can get away with; it's the regulator that needs to hold it to account. But *CHIRP* and BALPA have the ability to push back on these things where appropriate, and I don't see how this is not an appropriate example. It's like someone getting away with a crime on a technicality, whereas it should be what is the right thing to do.

CHIRP Response: When we reviewed FC5240 we were sympathetic to the problem of out-of-hours reading requirements but recognised that a lot of this comes with the territory of being a professional pilot. Much as with other professions, it is not unreasonable to expect pilots to keep up-to-date with key regulations and notices outside of the rostered duty periods. That being said, sometimes companies ask too much in this respect and so it is a question of balance; there is undoubtedly a large and ever growing burden of duty to absorb the expanding body of information surrounding the job of being an aviation professional. Pilots are professionals, not piece workers, but their pay structure is akin to that of piece workers and this can create a tension in our minds. Furthermore, the structure of pilot pay is such that 'credited hours' do not always equal hours worked, and neither do certain 'credited hours' need to be worked at the time shown on rosters – they are merely an acknowledgement by the company that the pilot is completing work at the company's behest.

Report times are always tight and, although some notices and changes might be high priority, complex or require considerable thought, a pilot should be focusing on the safe application of his/her knowledge and skill in the interests of Flight Safety at this point, not mulling over a multitude of notices. Only high-priority, urgent notices should be read after report and, in this respect, best practice is for operators to have an 'effective from' or 'read by' time stamp on notices so that crews are able to filter the flow. Company emails are another issue – they are not regulatory instruments but can contain important context of notices and so they can add further to the burden and stress levels if not filtered effectively.

Add to this the immediacy that electronic communication affords, by which changes can be absorbed immediately into manual sets just by the click of a mouse, this can create a mushrooming information cloud which needs to be managed by the company, and also by the individual. Most pilots accept that they need to work outside of credited hours in the interests of their continual professional development; few pilots would turn up for their simulator check having not prepared for it because the company had not added credit to their rosters for such preparation. But companies probably seek to provide the minimum credit possible for extra-curricular activity and professional pilots fill in the gaps – just as professionals in other careers work outside of their agreed hours in order to get the job done, or in order to do it better.

Companies could do better, but how would they quantify how much credit is necessary and in what circumstances? The introduction of a major new system, such as an EFB for example, might justify an extra hour or two of credit (experience suggests companies rarely take this view) but a theorist might spend hours poring over the fine detail of such a change, whereas a pragmatist might skim

read the information and learn by getting his or her hands on the new kit. Time required for essential learning therefore varies according to the eye of the beholder.

It boils down to a question of balance – in an ideal world companies would quantify the time required for essential learning and apply credit to rosters for this but, to be fair to companies, the regulatory framework is ever-changing (Brexit, new procedures and airspace construction, policy changes due to societal shift) and the quantity of what constitutes ‘essential’ information is difficult to predict and assess. The pilot therefore is left to make his/her own assessments, to filter out the ‘nice to know’ from the essential. It’s not ideal, but is something that pilots share with professionals in other spheres such as medicine and law.

In discussions with the CAA, they comment that there are no regulatory requirements around online learning and so there’s no formal requirement for companies to provide time for it; they say that it’s good that the company at least recognises the issue and is doing something, and they would encourage all operators to consider this. So, should time be rostered for online learning and reading notices? Common sense suggests that of course it should, but defining how much time for each scenario is tricky depending on who is doing the learning/reading and what the content and complexity of the learning/reading is. Ultimately, companies need to promulgate material with appropriate ‘urgency’ markings, assess time required for the ‘average’ audience, plan ahead for when material is published or training is required so that people are able to factor it into their daily schedules, and roster periods that reflect a suitable amount of time, even if just shadow rostering to reflect duration rather than specific timings, so that time spent doing the learning/reading is properly recognised.

