Abstract

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF AVIATION FRONT-LINE STAFF AND SAFETY: GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION OF ADVERSE EVENTS

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Abstract

On 24 March 2015, the Germanwings flight 9525, carrying 150 people on board, crashed in the foothills of the French Alps. Safety investigation ascertained, based on CVR listening, that the accident was due to the co-pilot's suicidal intention. Anti-depression medication was found in his home; furthermore, there was evidence that he had undergone psychiatric treatment in specialised centres.

Two questions are relevant: how was it possible for the co-pilot to keep pilot license despite a certified psychopathological condition? Is it possible to predict the social danger level of a person suffering from psychopathology?

Reading the current European Regulation (EASA part-MED), it seems that the certification of psychopathological disease is up to the individual initiative of the person suffering from it, or, potentially, to the reporting by the colleagues, with all the critical issues inherently associated. There are psychopathological syndromes that could result invisible to poor structured psychodiagnostic monitoring protocols.

To predict a social danger level of a person means to reconstruct his history and, hence, find out what personal meanings s/he is prone to attribute to her/his own experience and how this affects her/his wellbeing, in order to understand why s/he has ended up in limiting her/his range of possibilities to the extent that damaging her/himself and other people is considered as the only way to manage her/his discomfort.

These topics are the object of a corpus of guidelines, proposed by the author of this paper to safety-critical organizations, for the mitigation of the hazards related to the presence of psychopathological conditions in the aviation frontline staff.

The proposed approach brings about a change of perspective, intended to hinder stigma and trivialization towards psychopathological disease, as well as to deliver a message in which the safety of aviation operations corresponds to the health of professionals in charge of generating it.

Keywords— *Aviation, Guidelines, Psychopathology, Safety.*

Professional Biography

Paola graduated in Psychology in 2006. In 2007, she took a post-graduate degree in Occupational Psychology. In 2018 she took a post-graduate degree in Psychotherapy, with a thesis on Psychopatology and aviation safety. Currently she works as psychotherapist and Human Factors specialist. From 2016, she is Lecturer of Human Factors in Aviation for the Giustino Fortunato University. From 2011 she has been working in Deep Blue srl, a consultancy SME based in Rome, where she is involved as human factors specialist in several EU research projects and training initiatives. Her activity concerns the integration of human performance aspects into safety-critical systems, especially aviation and healthcare domains. She is periodically involved in the preparation and delivery of training courses in the area of Human Cognition and Human Error for the Italian and European aviation organizations. She is also involved in the preparation of R&D proposals for European funding (H2020, SESAR, etc).

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