

Corporate Resource Management.

This presentation reviews the role of an organisations corporate management of safety events and discusses the various demands on the safety systems. The need for corporate understanding and restraint in the event of a serious incident is discussed and the benefits of extending the concepts of CRM to involve the senior management are reviewed.

These ideas are the result of my 21 years' experience with the Government Investigation Agency and 13 years in safety roles with various airlines and operators.

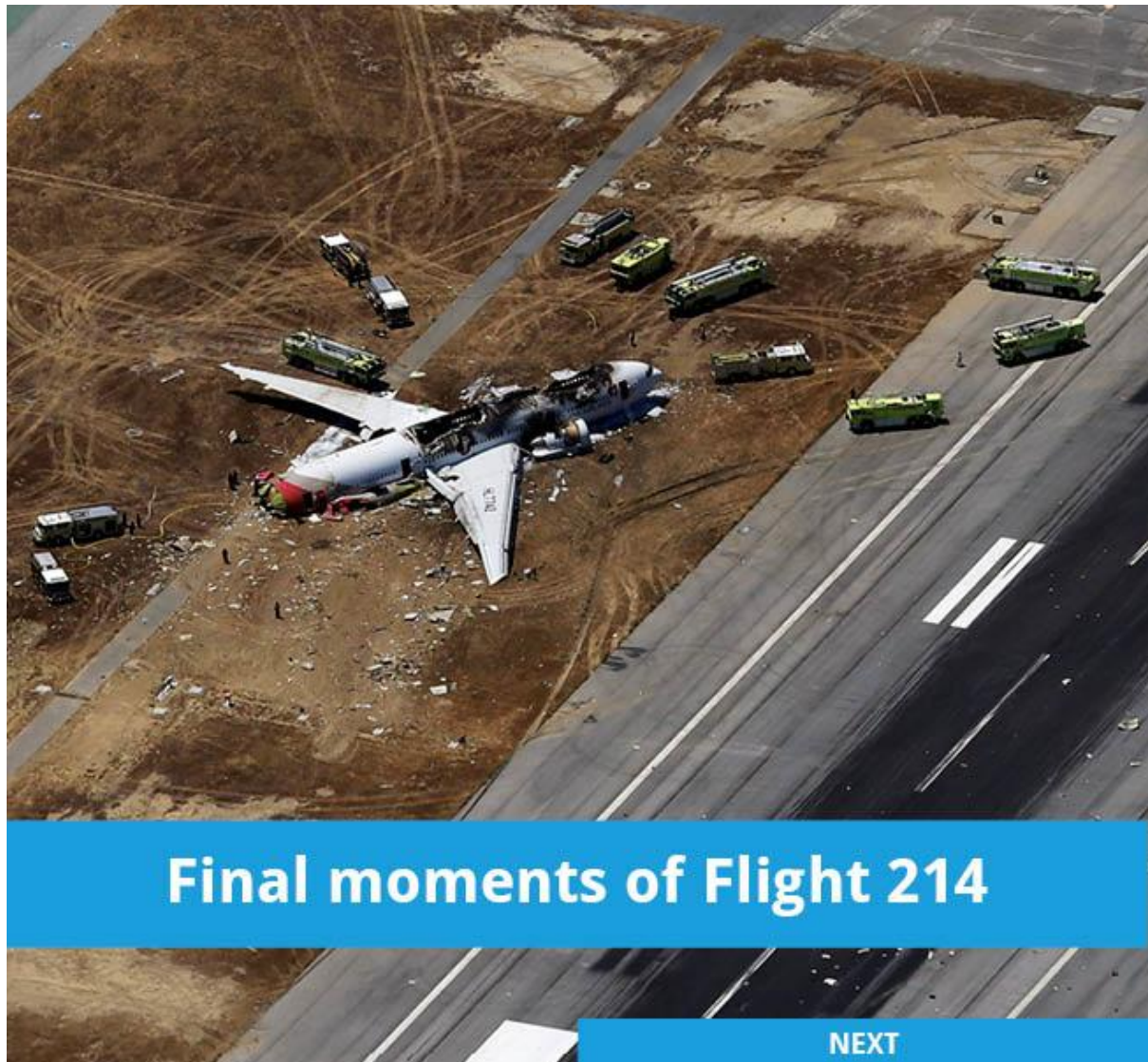
Media



To set the background we should look at the media's role and publicity that surrounds recent safety events and accidents. The Asiana Boeing 777 accident at San Francisco is a "good" example of current developments in media involvement in accident investigation. This was the first major accident in the United States since the Colgan accident in February 2009 so naturally there was a lot of interest. Although Asiana was a foreign carrier there were about 70 US nationals on board, approximately 40% of the total POB.

The initial media response by the National Transport Safety Board was full and perhaps "too" frank briefings of the media on a daily basis. The chairperson of the NTSB, Deborah Hersman made it a major publicity event and "in the interests of travelling public" released large amounts of information much of

which was preliminary information from flight recorders. There are many aviation specialists who were only too pleased to comment and analyse the information, speculating what happened and why. The media had a field day with lots of sensational headlines.



As an investigator this early release of data is against our training. There are many reasons why the data is considered preliminary and any analysis has to be precautionary. The fact finding phase should be just that with no preconceived ideas or early conclusions. It is imperative to have an open mind.

The NTSB's media approach makes this very difficult and it is very bad for the corporate image of the operator. As the CEO of the airline you are finding out information at the same time as the media and have no chance to pre-empt any adverse comments. Brand damage control becomes very difficult. It was not long ago that the approach was very different with official information not being released until it was verified. Operators would even paint out the identity of their aircraft wreckage at the accident scene to minimise brand awareness.



Similarly Southwest and UPS have featured recently in the media and the same issues must be of concern to their corporate management.



Some of the many media reports contained the details such as "Ten of the 149 people aboard the Southwest Boeing 737 were injured when the plane landed on its front wheels at LaGuardia, causing the nose gear to collapse and substantially damaging other parts of the aircraft. The high-profile accident temporarily closed the busy runway.

The captain of Southwest Flight 345, arriving from Nashville, took the unusual step of taking over the controls during the last 400 feet of the descent, and investigators are now trying to determine if she throttled back the engines prematurely. The plane switched to a nose-down position in the final four seconds of flight.

The NTSB has said it found no airplane malfunctions that could have caused the botched landing, though investigators haven't yet disclosed their conclusions.

"Friction between federal aviation regulators and crash investigators threatens to impede a probe into a Southwest Airlines Inc. landing accident last month in New York, according to the carrier's safety officials. There is growing tension between experts at the National Transportation Safety Board, responsible for uncovering the causes of accidents, and regulators at the Federal Aviation Administration interested in swiftly punishing pilots or bringing civil-enforcement actions against airlines in the wake of a crash.

That inherent conflict is now exacerbated, according to industry and government-safety experts, by the growing importance of social media in disseminating air-safety information. As a result, many airline officials increasingly feel trapped between competing demands for ever faster releases of information, coming from passengers as well as different parts of the government and even their own top executives."

Any safety publicity is arguably bad for business. There have been several examples of carriers failing financially after a serious accident; the accident may be the last straw to cause the financial collapse. So the CEO, senior management and the Board of Governors want to minimise any adverse publicity and go into damage control. It can be argued that their first responsibility is to shareholders, then their customers and employees, but at the same time they have to ensure that the safety regulator is satisfied.

The ATSB and British AAIB have different policies for the release of information. A preliminary release of factual information is made within 10 to 15 days after the accident when the data has been verified. This allows the operator / airline company to prepare a response for media release.

One of the issues is that the general public will not understand the technicalities of an accident and will latch on to common phrases used in the media such as pilot error. This can result in negative opinions of an operator which may be unfounded. The media escalate this impression with graphical reconstructions many of which are based on superstition and guess work, but once it is animated it becomes "fact". This also fuels the social media much of which is unsubstantiated comments.

At the recent ISASI conference in Vancouver it was stated that "Escalating public pressure for nearly instantaneous details about airliner incidents and accidents has shaken up the previously staid, traditional world of accident investigations. The safety board's leaders increasingly are turning to Twitter to rush out details of significant findings-sometimes before advising on-site investigators of impending messages."

In an email response, an NTSB spokesman said the board relies on social media since many journalists use Twitter because "it is instantaneous and often meets their deadlines." The statement called it a valuable tool "to inform the media and the general public about the status of accident investigations."

“Those unconventional announcements in turn are prompting the FAA and industry players to speed up their internal investigations and responses.

The LaGuardia situation "is a good example of the multitude of information requests that come into the airline" after a typical crash or major incident, according to Timothy Logan, Southwest's senior risk-management official. Even before investigators from the safety board had completed their preliminary inquiry, he said, regulators from a number of different offices within the FAA already were seeking some of the same information from the carrier.”

"I'm not sure it serves anybody's purpose," said Mr. Logan, because it wasn't coordinated properly and in any event, "the safety investigation should take precedence." FAA officials helping the NTSB on investigations are prohibited from working on potential enforcement cases.”

So it is obvious that the developments in communication technology and social media are changing the way investigations are conducted and making it difficult for the CEO of an operator involved in a safety event to “protect” his company.

Safety Management Systems

Safety Management Systems could be considered that 21st century’s development for improving safety levels, although they have been around in various disguises for a long time. The purpose of this presentation is not to examine their effectiveness but to look at where the CEO and senior management fit into the SMS

The aspects of a SMS which are relevant to this presentation are: safety reports; risk assessment; risk management; safety actions and reporting to management.

If the SMS is successful there will be a steady flow of safety reports of actual events and perceived hazards. In some cases the number of reports can be overwhelming so that risk assessment becomes the critical step. The majority of reports will be classified as nil or low risk and recorded for statistical analysis.(this can be an issue for the integrity of the SMS as staff who make reports may expect safety action). The few reports which make it to medium or high risk will be investigated and safety action taken. These are brought to the attention of the CEO and safety management on a regular basis such as weekly meetings or monthly reports. The line management who have responsibility for the relevant division will want to minimise exposure and will have answers ready for the senior management. In this way the CEO and Senior management have confidence that the SMS is working.

If they are safety sensitivity however they will have a constant unease that a serious event can occur at any moment. This aspect is covered through the

Emergency Response Planning, another essential part of the SMS. If ERP is taken responsibly then there will be regular exercises to check the systems and make refinements. These may be desk top exercises to check communication channels. The CEO and Senior Management would probably have minor roles in this, such as a courtesy call to let them know an exercise was being conducted. However these desk top exercises should be complemented by full scale exercises involving serious safety scenarios and role playing. Staff may be asked to represent next of kin and the general public so that the phone systems and notification communications are tested.

The CEO and Senior Management should take an active role in the exercise representing the actions they would take with media releases and damage control. They need to have confidence that the initial response is appropriate.

The exercise will usually involve all the relevant departments and outside agencies but will terminate when the initial first responders have theoretically departed for the accident site.

This is where the Corporate Resource Management first comes into focus with the initial responses and actions.

However the exercise does not cover the aspects that occur after the initial response. This is usually not covered until there is a real event when Corporate Resource Management is required with the interactions with the Government Investigation Agency and Safety Regulator. These aspects are not usually tested and can become important issues with understanding of all the various agencies policies and procedures.

Returning to the Southwest situation "The FAA said it is "supporting the NTSB and examining our areas of responsibility to determine if any near-term action is necessary to ensure safe operations," but a spokeswoman declined to elaborate. The Southwest probe highlights the dramatic procedural and attitude changes already embraced by Southwest's safety team in this new era.

Serious Safety Events

When a serious event does occur involving aircraft damage and or injuries the SMS investigation procedures are often no longer considered sufficient by the CEO and Senior Management. A form of Corporate Resource Management takes over but the weakness is that it is usually not pretested and actions are taken strategically. The main reason for the different approach is the parallel investigations which usually eventuate with the government agencies involved, and the publicity from the role of the media.

"Dennis Post, the Southwest airline's senior accident investigator, told the ISASI Vancouver conference that the prevalence of Twitter and videos taken by passengers using cellphones has drastically altered the way Southwest begins

examining in-flight emergencies. "Our passengers are our first investigators," Mr. Post said, calling them "on-scene reporters" eager to share information about all types of events. Every day, he added, "we have teams pulling everything we can off social media" in order to create a novel warning system about unusual events throughout Southwest's nationwide network".

From my experiences there will be the official internal investigation utilising the resources of the safety department and other staff as specialists, following the same procedures in the SMS, except there is a great sense of urgency to get results. The flight crew and other staff involved would be stood down so that they can be interviewed by the safety team. At the same time the managers of flight operations, engineering or check and training will be demanding access to their staff members as they feel they have the accountability for the human performance issues. They will be under scrutiny by the CEO and Senior Managers to provide confidence that they are handling the issues and that the operations are not at risk. They also have to answer to the safety regulator who will be asking for information and wanting reassurance that this is not a systemic weakness.

In addition the government safety investigation agency (eg ATSB) will have been notified and will require the relevant staff to be made available for interview as well as access to flight recorders. They will also require other data to be quarantined and supplied to them, such as crew training records. As their investigation proceeds there are often demands for additional data and information, copies of manuals and policy documents.

The CEO and Senior Management will feel uncomfortable as their staff and company come under scrutiny by external agencies and become the subject of media reporting and social media speculation. Videos and recordings from passengers and the public will be in the public domain and be bad publicity for the airline brand. It is not uncommon for the CEO to employ one or more independent advisors to sit in on internal interviews and monitor the internal investigations and safety actions so that they can provide another level of advice. So from a Corporate Resource Management perspective the situation becomes complex with the need for close control of information and public release of information. The CEO will be answerable to the Board and to the client organisation if operating under contract to ensure them that he or she has control of the situation while at the same time the airline could be headline news and the subject of social media comments and speculation. This is not an easy situation to deal with.

This initial phase of the investigation can last several weeks until appropriate corrective actions have been taken within the company and the safety regulator has been satisfied.

The action taken may involve disciplinary action against staff and managers, additional training or dismissal. The concepts of just culture can be strained when Senior Management and the Board want decisive action. The Board and shareholders may not understand the aspects of just culture and if there has been "trial by media" with terms like human error featuring in the headlines then they may expect action against staff.

Although the media interest may have waned the investigations may continue for several months, or years in the case of the government investigation agency. There may be further interim reports which will reignite media interest and by the time the final report is published the company should have been completed all actions and be able to defend their position.

The situation can be much more complex if it involves a safety event overseas because other countries have different procedures and various responsible agencies, including judicial investigations. The CEO and senior management must understand the different cultures which can be very frustrating if company property and records are involved and retained for many months. They must work with the government agencies and ensure that they do not release confidential or sensitive information without "permission". These aspects are more reasons for better Corporate Resource Management.

There is not an easy solution but "CRM" training for the CEO and senior managers should cover all these issues and assist with their managing a smooth and effective response to the demands of a serious safety event.