

WELCOME

Welcome to Issue 30 of *HindSight* magazine – the EUROCONTROL magazine on the safety of air traffic management. The theme of this Issue is ‘Wellbeing’, which has an undeniable link to safe operations, though this is not often spoken about. This Issue coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, a serious threat to human wellbeing that was unthinkable to most people just a few months ago. The spread of the virus and its effect on our everyday lives has brought the biological, psychological, social, environmental, and economic aspects of wellbeing into clear view in a way we have never seen before.

While the theme of wellbeing seemed rather ‘soft’ and personal for *HindSight* magazine at the time that it was considered, it now seems to be the most meaningful and important theme for this time that we share. The authors of the articles in this Issue were considering wellbeing in the context of aviation, and other industries. But the articles touch on topics that are deeply relevant to the coronavirus pandemic.

In the minds of the general public, ‘stress’ is a term that has long been associated with operational jobs such as those of air traffic controllers and pilots. And stress, both acute and chronic, is part of everyday work and life, though it is not often discussed among front-line staff. Stress is a by-product of many lines of work up to CEO level and can be aggravated by shiftwork and any resulting sleep disturbance. Stress can also be more acute at certain times, such as serious incidents.

Now – with increased concern about health, isolation, job security and the future more generally – stress touches us all like never before. Traumatic life events have been found to be the biggest cause of anxiety and depression, now the most common mental health problems in many countries. But how a person thinks about these events and acts on their thoughts and feelings determines the stress they experience. For many, especially those affected by traumatic events such as an accident or near accident, post-traumatic stress (PTS) will confront them. This is discussed with Captain Richard Champion de Crespigny in this Issue. If not recognised and managed appropriately, PTS will become increasingly problematic, perhaps progressing to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

While fatigue and stress associated with high workload and shiftwork are known issues for front-line aviation personnel, we now find different stresses, with concern about the future of aviation and job security, as well as the health of us and those around us. For others, especially those in health and social care, like emergency physician Shannon McNamara who writes for this Issue, burnout and severe fatigue are becoming critical issues, as well as post-traumatic stress.

In response to everyday wellbeing issues, and the coronavirus pandemic, we have had to change our behaviour, integrating new behaviours into our daily lives. Some of these behaviours involve changes in frequency, such as handwashing and surface cleansing. Others involve old habits that we find hard to break, such as touching our faces. Still other behaviours seem to run contrary to our nature as social beings, such as keeping physical distance between ourselves and others. Behaviour change psychology has informed many wellbeing issues, such as smoking, drinking, and exercise, and is especially relevant now, as we try to implement behavioural measures to slow the spread of coronavirus. We try to learn from behaviour change psychology in this Issue, with an interview with Nick Godbehere. The research reminds us that we need to make behaviour change not only easy, attractive and timely, but social. The resurgence in community thinking and action is a warm reminder of our intuitive understanding of our social needs.

Because wellbeing is not an individual issue. It is rooted in the social and physical environment, including our organisations, as several writers remind us. And as Suzanne Shale writes in the Op Ed, there are also moral reasons for promoting wellbeing in organisations. The articles in this issue focus on a number of initiatives by air navigation service providers, airlines and professional associations. These include peer support, mindfulness, energy management facilities and coaching, and support following serious incidents.

Whether among family, friends, or colleagues, one thing is clear: we need to talk about wellbeing. We need to talk about mental wellbeing, not only now during the coronavirus pandemic, but after coronavirus. We need to talk about health, relationships, work, and all the other aspects of life that give meaning and purpose, but that can also bring stress, anxiety, and other problems. And now is also a good time to pick up and reinforce healthy habits, including checking in with people to see how they are – or how they *really* are.

With *HindSight*, we hope to help support these conversations. Do your operational and non-operational colleagues know about *HindSight*? Would you be willing to ask them, and encourage them to subscribe? Search ‘SKYbrary *HindSight*’ for details.

The next Issue of *HindSight* is on ‘Learning from Everyday Work’. What have you, your peers and your organisation learned by paying attention to what goes on in everyday work, whether things go well or not so well? Let us know, in a few words or more, for Issue 31 of *HindSight* magazine.