

A day in the life

by Bengt Collin

05.11

Drinking his first black coffee in his hotel room, he started singing on the song "Samba Sambero". He stopped immediately when he came aware of it. Why did he remember songs like that? Irritating songs with irritating lyrics, performed by artists that were, to say the least, different. Nine times out of ten the songs been broadcast on TV, somehow they stayed in his mind forever. How ever hard he tried, it was impossible to forget these songs, in fact the more he tried to forget, the more he remembered them. Like this morning. He started singing Samba Sambero again.

05.45

The crew transport was waiting for them outside the hotel, to take them to the small airport a few kilometres away. The darkness was thick, the streets empty. The clear crispy air woke him up in seconds. It was his first year with the airline, before he had worked abroad for six years for another low cost carrier. The opportunity to move back home arose when this airline, continuously expanding their route network, invested in new aircraft. They had a need for more pilots with experience.

They worked hard, today being no exception. An eleven hour flying duty period was



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involved in operational ATC safety activities. Bengt has a long background as Tower and Approach controller at Stockholm-Arlanda Airport, Sweden

scheduled, with six flights. The first flight was south returning back to their home base, followed by a return flight up to the very north, then two more legs out from and back to where they started this morning. At least it was not snowing, but the planning was very tight to say the least, with 25 minutes scheduled turn around times.

09.10

Three of the walls in the meeting room were in a dark green colour, a colour that reminded her on the big forest where she grew up. The fourth wall was brown, luckily it didn't give her any flash backs at all.

The big organisation was visiting to do a study on safety culture. Prior to the scheduled visit, everybody had had the chance to answer a questionnaire. Now they were discussing and explaining what the written answers indicated. This particular session included the airport people; airside workers as well as ATC. In the corner of the room was a big plant, well it was, obviously no one had watered it for months.

Liza, a controller from the Tower, was a bit surprised that some of the meeting participants were unaware of the existence of the Local Runway Safety Team. Being a member of the team herself, she assumed everybody knew about it. They were actually having a Team meeting this afternoon, the first for ten months.

11.30

The safety culture visitors continued with a meeting with the airport management. "We have a good safety culture, in fact this is our top priority" Steve, one of the management representatives, explained. The other participants nodded and looked very serious. "If our workforce have other

opinions, then we have no idea why", he added.

"We haven't said that, we just wanted your opinions" a representative from the big organisation responded, "it's important to have an open discussion about everything".

"Well, our budget is under pressure, but we know what to do, no problem, we will look after all the issues. Next year we will have more resources and everything will be just fine". The airport representative looked confident. The ATC representative agreed, "we will have a really in-depth look at the increasing number of runway incursions next year too, but we know nothing has really changed".

11.42

They arrived 30 minutes late at the airport in the north. Considering the tight turn around time, plus the expectation of a strong head wind on their return flight, the Captain decided to contact crew planning at their home base. It was clearly impossible to complete the planned sectors inside the rostered eleven hour duty time, the maximum allowed. He did not want to file another Captain's Discretion Report, a must if you exceeded the permitted maximum hours. The last time he had had to do so was some three weeks ago, he knew from colleagues that this happened in the company far too often. More important was that they would certainly not be fit to fly towards the end of the day. The report was one thing, the reason behind it much more important.

13.35

"I'll hope you understand the cost for our company if you don't fly your rostered flights. Being a company highly appreciated by our customers we ex-

pect you to meet their expectations. No one ever expected us to depart on time, but our passengers at least expect to arrive at their destination the same evening”.

The message from the crew base supervisor was crystal clear. He felt the pressure - refusing to fly the last two flights may end up in increased pressure at the next six month proficiency check, it had happened before to pilots who had complained.

14.55

The Local Runway Safety Team meeting started five minutes early, everybody was there on time - unbelievable. Chris, the secretary, went quickly through the actions from the previous meeting. “The runway safety awareness campaign is still on hold. The airport thought it was not necessary, we had one five years ago and without their support we can’t proceed. Let’s look at the problem from a positive side, less work for us”.

Liza couldn’t stay silent, she almost never could. “We need to do this campaign, we have a lot of new people in various airside jobs and besides that, the number of reported runway incursions has increased. Earlier today I was in a safety culture meeting, some participants were completely unaware of our Team and our safety work”. “Brent, you are representing the airport, can’t you do something”? Brent looked uncomfortable. “I’ve tried to explain this to the management but the standard answer is that we need to save money. We don’t even have enough money to update the signs that we suggested at the last meeting although it is urgent”.

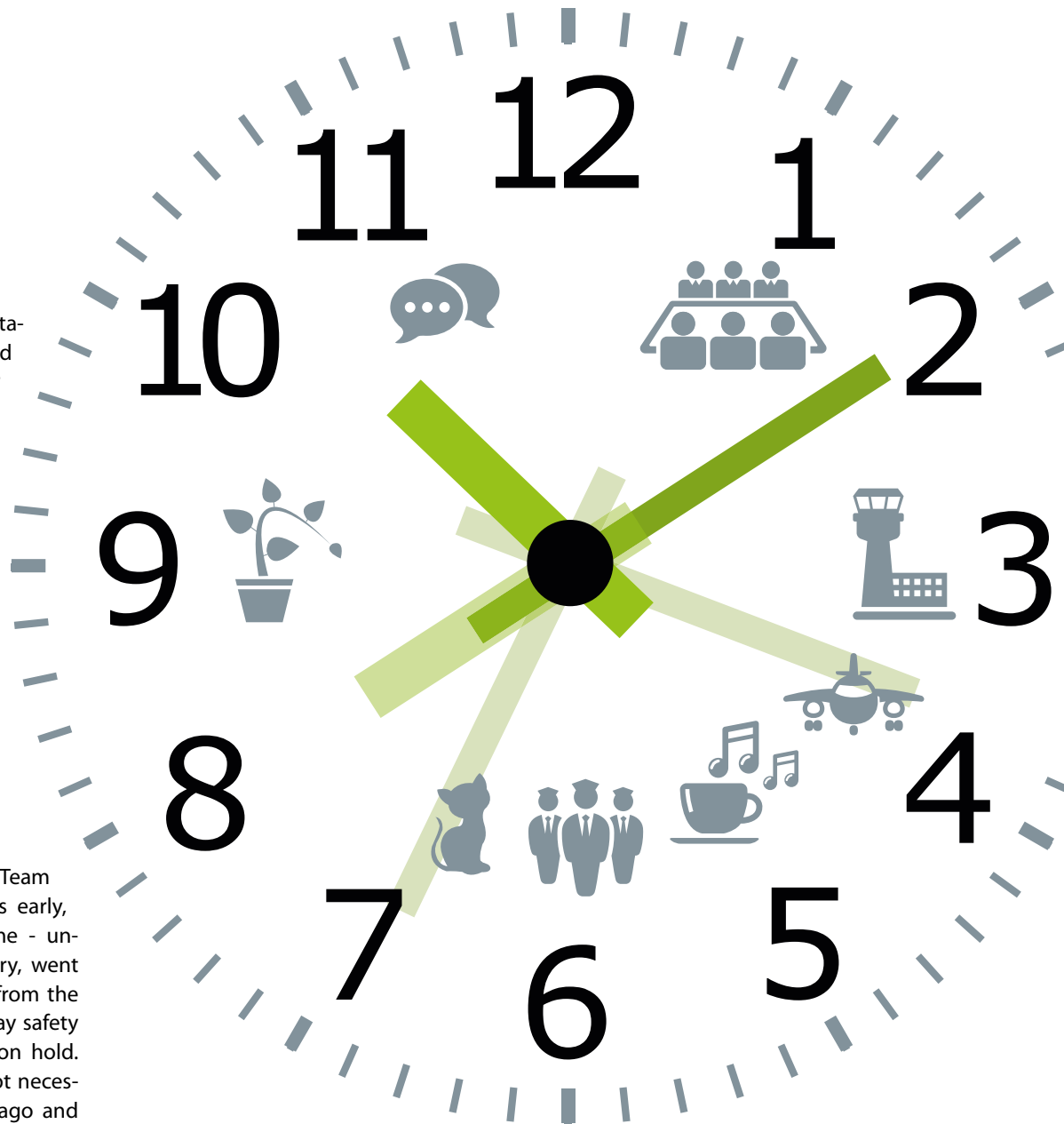
“That was the next item on the list of action, I suppose we need to keep it for the next meeting then” Chris replied. “What about the proposal for the vehicle driver training Alan? As you explained to us, that was also urgent” Sid, the Chairman seated at the far end of the table, asked Alan.

“Same thing I’m afraid, no money” Alan replied. “We still have the old training method from the days before the re-modelling of the airport”, he continued. I’ve read in an article about the new simulator for vehicle drivers at Brussels. They can train their drivers for difficult situations in various scenarios which are impossible to train live. It would be perfect for us, but no”.

A distinct aroma of coffee spread around the room. This will be a short meeting Liza thought as she suppressed a gasp. It’s been a long day, but it still wasn’t over, she had to return to the Tower for duty for at least four more hours.

15.28

Liza, being in charge of the runway, was sitting in front of three relatively large screens. The electronic strip system was very new, they had started using it operationally two weeks ago. Like all the other systems it was a stand-alone system. Originally it was planned to be integrated with the airport surveillance system, but due to technical problems this had been delayed for at least a



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year. She had to work with different inputs for everything and not working every day, she found it not exactly difficult but certainly a bit complicated. I wonder if it'll ever get integrated Liza thought, looking down on one of the screens and the taxiways in front of her. At the other end of the cabin she could hear the conversation of two colleagues about the television program they had both watched. "This song is really annoying" one of them said, starting to sing, completely out of tune, "Samba Sambero, Samba Samberio, mitt hjärta dansar, kärleken i mitt blod". For a second Liza thought of asking them to leave, they really disturbed her and besides that they couldn't sing. But better wait until the Supervisor returned from his meal break, he'd been away for an hour, maybe more. She continued her work by giving an aircraft a departure clearance.

16.01

Their last turn around lasted thirty five minutes, adding another ten minutes to their total delay. The head wind on their last flight of the day made it impossible to claw any time back. His First Officer asked for descent. It was quiet in the flight deck, neither of them was in the mood for a chat. He tried to stay focused on what to do. He was tired.

16.16

The assistant controller replied to the vehicle driver calling. The driver had phoned ten minutes earlier, explaining the urgent need to replace some centre line lights. They had a small gap in both the inbound and outbound traffic, better to fix the problem immediately rather than waiting till later. He coordinated with Liza, but the vehicle driver used a completely dif-

ferent intersection to the one cleared and coordinated. He chose not to correct him, after all no one else was around and anyway, he knew about the incorrect signs. He returned to his coffee and newspaper, hoping no one would disturb him in the near future - he wanted to check the results for his favourite team Wolves.

16.17

Liza had problems with the electronic strip system. How did you mark the runway as occupied? She had done it in the training but that was a long time ago, at least four months earlier. Due to their roster, the training could not be delayed when the system was. She would ask Peter when he returned from his break, he would certainly know how to do it.

16.26

On four mile final they were instructed to contact the Tower. An alert sounded. Both pilots looked at the accompanying flashing amber light, the sound was irritating. It took a few seconds before they realised where the problem was and neither of them knew exactly what to do. "Check the Manual please" he said to his First Officer, "I'll continue flying."

16.28

"Peter, how do you show that there is a vehicle on the runway", Liza asked? Peter walked up to her, they both looked down on the electronic strips, Peter started to explain, pointing on the strips. An aircraft landed on the runway, missing the vehicle by two metres.

16.29

We got the landing clearance didn't we? I'm sure we did, the First Officer replied. I was busy looking up the drill,

it's something to do with the flap setting, so it's good we didn't overrun the end of the runway - there was a risk we might given that the braking action was far below what reported. It was rather slippery and certainly not the reported "good" braking action. "We should report this", his First Officer commented in a concerned voice! Forget it, the Captain replied. After a day like that, the last thing I want to do is write a report on the braking action, I want to get home as soon as possible. I have an early start tomorrow.

18.24

The head lights from his car were a sharp contrast to the dark area around his dark house and the dark road in front of it. He didn't think about it though, he opened his front door. He was so tired, he went in to the dark empty house and cuddled his Persian cat. Finally back home after a long LONG day. Samba Sambero, he started singing... 