



EAC

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Communications and Coordination Between Flight Crewmembers and Cabin Crew

1. Purpose

This EAC presents information on common problems associated with crew communications and coordination between cockpit crewmembers/cabin crew and provides suggestions on how these problems can be avoided.

2. Background

There have been numerous research projects conducted on cockpit and cabin crew coordination. The purpose of this research was to review problems that have arisen with crew coordination and generate specific recommendations for training and standard operating procedures to help ensure that crewmembers work together effectively.

3. General

In certain circumstances, it is important for cockpit crewmembers and cabin crews to act as one cohesive group, even though they are trained, scheduled, and generally regarded as two independent crews.

When it is necessary to act as one crew, the activities of the cockpit and cabin should be coordinated. One of the prerequisites for crew coordination is effective communication between all crewmembers. In a recent survey of pilot safety representatives and cabin crews, only 37% of cabin crews and 60% of the pilots said they thought communication between the cockpit and cabin was adequate; 17% percent of cabin crews and 12% of pilots said their training did not cover each other's duties during emergencies; and 51% of cabin crews and 24% of pilots said they did not cover each other's duties before takeoff and landing.

The key to improving coordination lies not only in improving communications, but also in familiarizing each crewmember with the normal and emergency duties of the other crewmembers. This instills awareness and sensitivity to each other's workload. This knowledge helps to avoid miscommunication, unrealistic expectations, and inappropriate requests. During emergencies, each crewmember should be aware of what to expect from the other crewmembers in order to work effectively as a team.

4. Communications From Flight Deck To Cabin

Takeoff and Landing: It is vitally important that cabin crews are given adequate time to prepare the cabin and themselves for takeoff and landing, especially since many accidents occur during these two critical phases of flight. Even when cabin crews are informed that takeoff is imminent, problems can arise that result in cabin crews not being properly seated for takeoff, particularly with unusually short taxi times. Similar problems arise when cabin crews do not have adequate time to prepare the cabin for landing. The potential for problems is heightened when meal or beverage service is offered on very short flights. The most effective remedy for these problems is to have the purser inform the PIC, either directly or by intercom, that the cabin is secured and ready for takeoff or landing.

5. Turbulence: It is important that cabin crews receive timely notification of turbulence. Cockpit crewmembers generally warn cabin crews of anticipated turbulence so this is not usually a common problem. However, it is one that can result in severe injury, particularly to cabin crews, since the majority of the serious injuries that occur as a result of turbulence are incurred by cabin crews.

The cabin crew should be briefed on anticipated turbulence prior to the flight. This is best accomplished by discussing enroute weather in the cockpit/cabin crew preflight briefing. While airlines consider this practice to be standard operating procedure, it is not always completed.

During the flight, cabin crews need to be informed of the immediacy and severity of unexpected turbulence so that they can determine whether to secure the cabin and/or be seated immediately.

On large turbojet airplanes, turbulence experienced in the flight deck may be much less than that experienced in the cabin. In this case, the cabin crew should advise the cockpit crew and request that the seat belt sign be illuminated.

Emergencies: The most common problem encountered during an emergency is the cockpit crew's failure to inform the cabin crew of the nature of the emergency, the time available for preparation, bracing signal and any special instructions. The quality and timing of this information is extremely important and should be clear, precise, and instructional. A vague description of the situation without specific instructions may be misinterpreted and result in inappropriate actions.

In all cases, the cabin crew should be informed before the passengers.

6. Communications From Cabin To Flight Deck

Cabin crews should convey timely and specific information to the cockpit crew. The most common problems associated with cabin-to-cockpit communications are failure to convey important safety related information and requests for information at inappropriate times. Both problems are related to the "sterile cockpit" issue.

Sterile Cockpit: It is difficult for the cabin crews to know when sterile cockpit procedures are in effect. They have no way of knowing when the aircraft is above or below 10,000 feet unless they are verbally informed or signaled.

Cabin crews should receive instructions on the sterile cockpit environment during initial and recurrent training. This training should cover the purpose/meaning of a sterile cockpit and what type of information merits contacting the cockpit crew during this period. Non-safety related information or requests can distract cockpit crewmembers and have a detrimental effect on their performance.

Many operators instruct their cabin crews not to contact the flight deck with information unless it is "safety related." This directive is open to individual interpretation. Even though it would be impossible to describe all the relevant safety information that should be relayed to the cockpit crew, specific examples should be provided during training. However, they should never be hesitant or reluctant to contact the cockpit crew with any information that they feel will affect the safety of the flight.

The quality of the decisions (as to whether or not to contact the cockpit crew) made by a cabin crew is directly related to the information received in training. The clearer the cabin crew's understanding of sterile cockpit procedures and flight operations, the better these decisions will be.

Note: Cabin crews should be aware that it is always important to report unusual noises and abnormal situations to the flight deck as soon as possible.

7. Emergency Procedures

Training is regarded as the most effective means of improving crew coordination. Statements in manuals without the appropriate training may lead to improper responses in an emergency.

Crew coordination training should include instructing crewmembers on each other's emergency procedures, codes, signals, and safety related duties. Emergency procedures for cockpit/cabin crews should be compatible and should be identified in appropriate manuals. When manuals for cockpit crewmembers and cabin crews are written and revised by different departments, they should always be cross-checked for consistency.

Proper handling of emergency situations requires that the appropriate procedures be stressed in training for all crewmembers so they will function as a well coordinated crew.

8. Normal Operations

Crewmember coordination during normal operations also requires relevant training to avoid miscommunication, unrealistic expectations and inappropriate requests. This training should stress the types and quality of information that each crewmember expects. This is best accomplished either by having cockpit crewmembers and cabin crews attend training together or having the instructors coordinate their lesson plans so identical information is presented to each group. A videotape or slide presentation on each crewmember's duties can be an extremely effective aide for class discussion.

Crew resource management programs present an ideal opportunity to cover crewmember communication and coordination in both normal and emergency situations.

9. Practices and Procedures

There are many practices that will enhance the working relationship between cockpit and cabin crewmembers.

These practices include: respectful introductions, common courtesy, announcements regarding delays and support from the PIC when problems arise in the cabin.

The preflight briefing sets the tone for crewmember coordination. A good briefing will provide the cabin crew with the names of the cockpit crewmembers, in-flight weather, estimated flight time, cockpit entry procedures, emergency communications and any unusual circumstances expected during the flight. The briefing also encourages everyone to ask questions and provide information they feel is relevant to the flight.

In addition to the preflight briefing, the following practices are recommended to enhance crew coordination:

Cabin crew notification concerning short taxi times and arrivals that will occur ahead of schedule. This information will assist the cabin crew with their take-off and landing preparations.

Flight deck notification when all takeoff and landing duties have been completed and the cabin is secured.

Take-off/landing signals or announcements to allow sufficient time for the cabin crew to be seated.

Public address announcements to alert the cabin crew and passengers of anticipated in-flight turbulence.

Cabin crew notification of anticipated severe turbulence. Meal and beverage service will normally be suspended and the cabin crew will be seated. The PIC should notify them when it is safe to resume their normal duties.

Cabin crew notification when sterile cockpit procedures are in effect. Each operator should develop an effective technique for this notification.

Effective communications/coordination between the flight deck and cabin crew will ensure a team effort that will support a safe and efficient flight for both the passengers and crewmembers.