

A new paradigm- The need for cross cultural training of instructors.

by Capt. Amit Singh FRAeS

With the advent of new technology and the rapid pace of growth in aviation, the biggest drawback is that, training has not kept up with the pace. Ideally technological development does constitute training of personnel for optimum utilization and safe operations of the systems. This time it is not only the training of personnel in using the technology but training is also required for imparting training to new personnel, the "generation y". Cross cultural training is training in communicative, behavioral and attitudinal skills required for successful interaction with individuals of other cultures.

We need to analyze the changes which have taken place in the last decade which have forced us to think that there is a need to change the instructional styles as well as the content. The most significant change was the introduction of glass cockpit and the quantum jump in increased levels of automation. Generation Y found it easier to deal with the change as compared to the generation X and the baby boomers. An example was the introduction of A-320. In India it was a saying that the 320 was flown by the first officers. The captains who were more of the, masters of stick and rudder flying were found wanting in many areas, especially when interacting with automation. There was a gap in the behavioral and attitude of the new generation of pilots which made them communicate and relate better to the new technology.

This led to an awkward situation wherein the first officer was more proficient than the captain or the old timer trainers. Teaching soon took a new name, that of learning. The primary difference was that learning was a method of facilitation. Teaching was considered one way, wherein the trainer used to impart training in the form of transfer of knowledge. This was a form of one way communication. In learning the trainer stood besides the trainee and helped him learn. In this form, the trainee comes prepared with the subject and the trainer checks the understanding and the level of knowledge. The trainer then fills in the gaps in the trainees understanding. The concepts are clearer for the trainee since he has carried out research and applied his mind in understanding the subject. Trainer is now playing the supporting role.

The other aspect of the new style of training is that the trainers need to, firstly understand the learning style of a trainee and thereafter alter their instructional styles to meet the trainee's demands. The trainer has to give the trainee certain rights so that both the trainer and the trainee are equally involved and responsible for the outcome of the training. Rights like, right to be treated with respect, right to make mistake, right to ask for more information etc. It, however does not end here, the trainee also has certain responsibilities along with the rights, like the need to come prepared, carry out self analysis, be open to criticism etc.

There is a global shortage of trainers. In the name of cost saving the TRTO's are hiring mostly retired pilots since they are agreeable to work at low salaries. There is no selection procedure to ensure that only good caliber pilots are selected, those who are willing to change and adapt. The best method used to sift the good from the bad is a general interview, followed by a simulator check. Is the trainer here to fly himself that his skills are being checked? Or the objective should be to determine if the trainer can teach in a way that purpose of training is fulfilled and all objectives are met with.

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These trainers are not trained on the soft skill aspect and how to handle the pilot of the next generation. They are only given a short capsule course to standardize the SOP. There is a huge compromise in the quality and standards of trainers resulting in poor training. Typically the Airline should train their own pilots. Again due to their own shortage of trainers, the training is outsourced to TRTO'S globally. The challenges here are:

Poor quality of trainers

Old school of thought and training styles

Cultural differences amongst the trainers and trainees

Language barriers affecting the understanding of instructions

Generic training rather than customized training as per the airline SOP and training manual

Transfer of the burden of additional training back to the airline since the trainees do not meet with the standards

Language barriers are quite common and affect the quality of training. A trainer with a Hispanic accent will be compliant with ICAO level 6, proficiency in English language since the examiner is also from the same region. But for the trainee who comes from a different part of the globe, this becomes a challenge since the English spoken by the trainer is not understood by him. To add to this if the power distance index between the trainer and the trainee is high, the trainee will never question or raise any doubts. The net result will be that, if there is a failure or decline in performance, it would be blamed on the trainee's lack of ability to understand the subject.

The attitude of "I am correct" is prevalent amongst a lot of trainers and training organizations. A failure of the trainee should be considered, the failure of the trainer or the TRTO to impart training. Instead the trainee is blamed for the failure and ostracized. There is no introspection by the trainer or the TRTO to determine the failures. This again is due to a heavy cultural influence in certain parts of the globe.

The focus now needs to be on the background of the trainer and the cultural aspect since it determines the behavior and the character of the trainer. The regulators need to ensure and enforce that trainer's continued qualification also addresses the change in the training styles and cultures in training. There is a lot of training at various levels (Abinitio and type rating) taking place in the USA and certain parts of Europe. Trainees from the Asian region are mostly affected since their cultures are rich but vastly different.

There is a need for the trainer to understand this aspect and incorporate this in the training methodology since these challenges will keep coming up. If we need to develop a well rounded pilot, we need to give him exposure to what is happening around the world. There is a need to prepare the trainee for these challenges too before he embarks on a training sojourn.