



Institutionalizing Airline Operational Dismality

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At a recent Pentagon briefing about the evacuation of Afghanistan, the General speaking kept referring to bottlenecks and increasing throughput.

AIRLINES WOULD DO well to pay attention, as they suffer the same basic problem — bottlenecks and increasing throughput — in the airspace and airports around the world.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the movement of the aircraft and the airline “day of” production process — especially for the movement of the aircraft — bottlenecks, throughput, and other well understood logistical concepts are completely foreign — and mostly ignored — by the airline industry.

And, contrary to conventional wisdom, the biggest bottleneck to dramatically increasing “day of” airline throughput — more available seat miles (ASMs) per aircraft per day, more landings/takeoffs per airport, reduced irregular operations — is not airline schedules, airports, air traffic control (ATC), or weather.

Variance — the Biggest Bottleneck

The biggest bottleneck to dramatically increasing airline “day of” throughput is variance, again, completely foreign, mostly ignored, and easily controllable internally by individual airlines.

Further, consider the cost of this unacceptable, but accepted variance within the airline “day of” operation as outlined in this comment by Greg Wells at Southwest Airlines:

*“It would cost us approximately eight to 10 airplanes of flying per day if we were to add just a couple of minutes of block time to each flight in our schedule.”**

With around 20 minutes of schedule buffer per flight today (flight and gate), this equates to around 80 to 100 aircraft per large airline — flying around, increasing costs, wasting fuel,

and generating CO₂ — simply because of the airline’s antiquated, 1950s “day of” production process.

Operational Dismality Defined: “the quality or state of being dismal”

And while wasted aircraft productivity and CO₂ are the most visible symptoms of Operational Dismality, it does not stop with the aircraft. The ridiculously high level of Operational Dismality within each airline literally touches every aspect of that airline, as much more of everything is needed:

Much more flight time, aircraft, fuel, runways, taxi ways, gates, gate time, ramp space, jetways, airport concourse space, customer service desks, re bookings, overnight hotels, APUs, start carts, lav trucks, tugs, fuel trucks, regular trucks, baggage carts, bag make up areas, bag sorting tools, cars, gasoline, electricity, hangars, spare parts, spare engines, storage for the extra spare parts/engines, tools, office space, paper, pencils, pens, computers, telephones, radios, pilots, flight attendants, mechanics, ramp personnel, customer service agents, accountants, VPs, labor productivity across the board, ATC services, maintenance on all of the above, planning, etc. Given how pervasive “day of” Operational Dismality is within an airline — touching literally everything — it also represents an airline’s largest controllable cost.

Finally, as we have tried to convince airlines (sadly unsuccessfully), this is completely unnecessary and easily fixable by 2025 for a few \$10s of millions — yet here we are. ■

* “As Southwest Airlines tries to cope with its success, problems at Midway will get team’s attention,” Chicago Tribune, March 3, 2011).

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Hermes Creative Awards

Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals

2021, Gold; 2020, Gold; 2015, Gold; 2014, Platinum; 2013, Platinum; 2012, Platinum; 2011, Gold; 2010, Platinum; 2009, Gold; 2008, Gold; 2007, Gold

MarCom Creative Communicator Awards

Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals

2021, Gold; 2020, Gold; 2017, Platinum; 2015, Gold; 2014, Gold; 2013, Platinum; 2012, Platinum; 2011, Gold; 2010, Platinum; 2009, Platinum; 2008, Gold; 2007, Gold; 2006, Platinum; 2005, Gold; 2004, Platinum

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League of American Communications Professionals

2020, Silver & Competition Class Winner; 2012, Bronze; 2011, Bronze; 2010, Silver; 2009, Platinum; 2009, Silver; 2009, Top 50 Communications Materials; 2008, Silver; 2007, Silver; 2006, Silver; 2005, Silver; 2004, Top 100 Publicity Materials of 2004; 2004, Silver

Summit Creative Awards

SIA Summit International Awards

2020, Bronze; 2014, Bronze; 2009, Bronze

Communicator Awards,

Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts

2017, Silver; 2016, Silver; 2014, Silver; 2013, Silver; 2013, Silver; 2012, Silver; 2011, Silver; 2010, Silver; 2009, Silver

Inspire Awards

League of American Communications Professionals

2010, Top 50 Communications Materials; 2010, Bronze; 2008, Top 50 Communications Materials; 2008, Silver; 2007, Platinum; 2007, Top 50 Publications of 2006; 2006, Bronze