

The Intensification of Work for Cabin Crew and Its Consequences

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Abstract

This article aims to document the work intensification of cabin crew in recent years in the context of increased competition. It does so by examining the perceived impacts of these changes on the organization of onboard work and the service delivered to passengers in terms of customer service and safety, for two groups, a Canadian and a German cabin crew. The research is based on a qualitative method, i.e., semi-structured interviews. The article is structured as follows: first, an analysis of the work of cabin crew to situate the context, then the concept of work intensification, followed by a detailed analysis of the changes in work organization and impacts on intensification of work, as concerns different issues, such as working time, physical effort, and safety issues. Finally, the paper reflects on the impact of teamwork in cabins, and puts forward some recommendations for airlines.

Keywords

Cabin Crew, Airlines, Work Intensification, Work Organization, Working Time

1. Introduction

To maintain their market share, major airlines have developed cost-cutting strategies, including significant internal labor cost reductions (Bacharach et al., 1996; Gil, 1990; Shalla, 2004), and it is expected that they will intensify these strategies in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In various countries, employees have had to make numerous concessions regarding their salaries (Crémieux & Van Audenrode, 1996; Gittell et al., 2016), and their workload has increased, particularly for the cabin crew group (Gil, 1990). The increase in the number of seats on new aircraft, the gradual reduction of onboard staff, and the greater maximization of their working hours through the computerization of

route planning services are all indicators of the increased efforts required from employees during their working hours, or, in other words, work intensification (Burchell, 2002).

In Canada, the Ministry of Transport authorized in 2015 a reduction in the minimum number of commercial cabin crew members (PNC) on board aircraft in the country, changing the ratio from one flight attendant per 40 passengers to one per 50. This measure was implemented with the objective of allowing airlines to increase their competitiveness in the context of heightened international competition (Desjardins, 2017). This strategy aimed to adjust to the context where major Western airlines have had to adapt to the new challenges set by low-cost business models (Charitou & Markides, 2003; Lehmann-Ortega & Moingeons, 2010) and are increasingly threatened by emerging global airlines, particularly those from the Middle East (Belobaba et al., 2016).

While there have been many studies of work intensification in the manufacturing and particularly automobile sector with Lean management (Huo et al., 2022), there are fewer studies in the service sector and even fewer in the airline industry, and on cabin crew specifically. In an article, Shalla (2004) shows how the maximization and use of the workforce of flight attendants of the national Canadian carrier contributed to the increased commodification of these employees and the deterioration of their bargaining power. In a more recent study conducted in Europe, Bergman and Gillberg (2015) observed an important sense of work intensification and vulnerability among seven Swedish flight attendants. The research is thus scarce and there is a literature gap as concerns recent developments of work intensification in cabin crew's work, in particular following the financial crisis of 2008, which brought about economic challenges, and the increased competitive pressures from emerging global airlines.

This article aims to fill this research gap as it concerns the work intensification of cabin crew by examining the perceived impacts of these changes on the organization of onboard work and the service delivered to passengers in terms of customer service and safety. Post-pandemic resumption has undoubtedly increased the importance of monitoring and this likely accentuates cabin crew stress due to new cleaning and health constraints as well as emotional work, due to the increase in passengers' stress and questions (Gillet & Tremblay, 2022). The article is structured as follows: first, an analysis of the work of cabin crew to situate the context; then, the issue of work intensification and finally, results as concerns impacts on intensification of work, in relation to different issues, such as working time, physical effort, and safety issues.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Work of Cabin Crew

Cabin crew members are shift workers operating in a workplace remote from management and relying on a system of peer self-regulation based on standardized operational procedures (Barnier, 1999; Gueudar Delahaye, 2012). Their

primary duty is to ensure passenger safety, conducting thorough checks of the aircraft before boarding, identifying potentially disruptive passengers on the ground before they disturb the cabin order later, and, if necessary, controlling threatening behaviors before arrival at the destination (Chen & Chen, 2014; Barnier, 1999; Berkley & Ala, 2001). During the flight, the cabin crew provides commercial service, and their basic function is to maintain order during the flight (Dubey & Martin, 2001: p. 91). Thus, the work of cabin crew is characterized by a dual dimension of authority and service, or a “double bind” due to sometimes contradictory requirements (Barnier, 1999) and new constraints (Egen, 1984; Gillet & Tremblay, 2020a), including working time constraints (Gillet & Tremblay, 2021; Nogues & Tremblay, 2019). As researchers Dubey and Martin put it in an analysis of this profession: “The customers are king as long as they do not misbehave” (Dubey & Martin, 2001: p. 92).

During the flight, the cabin crew works as a team, not only in the cabin but also with the technical staff in the cockpit, for safety reasons, as safety depends on both the “front” and the “back” part of the aircraft (Egen, 1984). Given that 70 percent of air accidents are due to human error, studies have shown the importance of constructive communication, open to suggestions and remarks between crew members (Kanki, 2010; Tjosvold, 1990). This implies an ability to understand each other’s work, one of the objectives of crew resource management training, which aims to develop non-technical and interpersonal skills of crews (Flin et al., 2002). This aspect is even more critical as crews change with each flight in most airlines, requiring cabin crew members to demonstrate the ability to adapt and communicate effectively with new colleagues, or “team up” (Gueudar Delahaye, 2012). Cabin crew also have a strictly commercial function: as the primary point of contact with customers, this group of employees holds a strategic position for the quality of service provided and passenger satisfaction (Etemad-Sajadi et al., 2016; Park et al., 2006; Yeh, 2009). By managing emotions and using their emotional intelligence, they can recover dissatisfied customers (Gountas, Ewing, & Gountas, 2007; Jeon, 2016; Gillet & Tremblay, 2022), and they can promote the company’s brand image (Miles & Mangold, 2005; Erkmen & Hancer, 2015).

Certain conditions seem necessary to optimally fulfill these numerous functions. In a study on flight attendants’ safety behaviors, Chen and Chen (2014) reveal the significant influence of job demands (e.g., workload and emotional demands) and resources (e.g., autonomy, colleague support) on the likelihood of adopting safety behaviors, whether formally expected or organizational citizenship behaviors that go beyond what is prescribed (Chen & Chen, 2014; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008). For example, in cases of increased emotional demands and fewer resources, flight attendants are unlikely to engage in communication with the cockpit and may even forget some more essential safety principles (Chen & Chen, 2014). Similarly, the performance of high-quality commercial service depends on a supportive work environment offering resources such as a

degree of autonomy and training (Gillet & Tremblay, 2020b), providing support groups for various problems encountered by employees (Karatepe & Vatankha, 2015; Moon et al., 2013; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008), as well as encouragement for decision-making, and a team spirit among colleagues by recruiting individuals with this character trait (all the more important as the crew will find themselves together in multiple locations, between flights: cf Tremblay and Gillet (2024)). In this context, the announcement of reduced onboard personnel, which objectively constitutes a loss of workforce and colleague support, leads us to question whether cabin crew have sufficient resources at work. The post-pandemic context also imposes new responsibilities for monitoring and enforcing health safety standards. Air Canada has adopted the Cleancare or CleanCare+ program, and other airlines, including Air France Lufthansa and many others, have also implemented measures to address the effects of COVID-19, especially as the virus seems to still be present after the pandemic, with some resurgence, and passengers are now conscious of all health risks related to various viruses.

2.2. Work Intensification

Work intensification has been an important issue, especially in the last few years. It has been observed first in the manufacturing sector, often in relation to the application of Lean production (Huo et al., 2022) and more recently in service sectors, especially those considered as purpose-driven or High Performance Work Systems, with strong implications required of workers (Dupret & Pultz, 2021). Work intensification has primarily been analyzed in relation to a few concepts, such as workload, long work hours, and time pressure (Barry, 2010; Gittell et al., 2016; Gillet & Tremblay, 2020a, 2021; Niazia et al., 2023; Mauno et al., 2019; Tremblay & Gillet, 2024). Research shows that there can be positive and negative outcomes associated with work intensification, the positive impacts being mainly better productivity for employers, while the negative outcomes are on the side of workers (Gittell et al., 2016; Gillet & Tremblay, 2020a, 2021; Niazia et al. 2023; Mauno et al., 2019; Syndicat Canadien de la Fonction Publique, 2016). The research on this theme is thus very significant given the strong impact it can have on workers in terms of workload, long work hours, and time pressure, which can translate into stress and health issues (Gittell et al., 2016; Gillet & Tremblay, 2020a, 2021; Niazia et al., 2023; Mauno et al., 2019; Tremblay & Gillet, 2024).

Indeed, individual efforts cannot be stretched infinitely (Green, 2004; Green & McIntosh, 2001), whether in terms of the number of hours worked or the physical and mental contributions required (Green, 2001). In this sense, we understand that there is a breaking point beyond which the employees cannot perform their work to their full potential. Work intensification is generally associated with personnel restructurings, cost-cutting strategies chosen in response to an unfavorable economic context, or it can also occur as a consequence of technological changes accelerating employees' work pace (Green & McIntosh, 2001).

Studies have reported the negative consequences of work intensification on employees' well-being and health (Burchell, 2002; Fairris & Brenner, 2001). In particular, work intensification seems to lead to worker exhaustion and stress (McCormick & Cooper, 1988; Burchell et al., 1999). In an article on the effects of organizational restructuring on employees, de Vries and Balatzs (1997) show that these lead to a breach of the psychological contract between the employee and employer and a generalized decline in morale, particularly due to the workload left to those who remain.

Some research has documented the increased workload of cabin crew in the deregulation era, through indicators such as compressed workspace (Whitelegg, 2007) or the maximization of hours worked (Shalla, 2004), or their optimization by reducing layover times, as indicated by our results. Almost 30 years ago, it was predicted that European flight attendants would be required to perform more tasks, work longer hours, and see their rest time reduced to a minimum (Gil, 1990). In a study dating back to 1996, Bacharach and his collaborators reported the discourse of American union representatives alarmed by the widespread exhaustion caused by increased working hours of cabin crew. In 2015, Bergman and Gillberg made similar findings among seven Swedish flight attendants, but given the small number here, it seems there is a gap in terms of more recent studies on this issue.

Knowing that cabin crew is also a group of employees at risk in terms of well-being and mental health (Bacharach et al., 1996; Ballard et al., 2006; Wahlstedt et al., 2010), the situation can be considered concerning. According to industry experts' analyses, competitive dynamics between airlines will intensify (Belobaba et al., 2016), which, in the absence of innovative measures, is likely to result in further labor cuts in employee numbers. A handful of airlines have managed to mobilize their employees to achieve superior performance while preserving employee morale (Wirtz & Heracleous, 2016; Miles & Mangold, 2005); however, it is often observed that such a human resources management model through engagement is challenging to implement and to keep in the long term (Bamber et al., 2009).

Thus, given that we can expect new forms of work intensification for airline employees, particularly among cabin crew (CC), especially during the post-pandemic period, as airlines are already announcing their intention to further reduce costs, it seems important to us to focus on the concrete impacts of these working conditions and requirements in the cabin, which have been deteriorating over the years.

In this context, we ask ourselves what the manifestations of work intensification for cabin crew are as perceived by the individuals affected. While some studies indicate an impact on the well-being and health of flight attendants in other countries, we wonder if Canadian and German cabin crews perceive an influence on their ability to perform their jobs and on the product delivered to passengers in terms of safety and service. Indeed, our literature review suggests this might be the case. Therefore, in this context of apparent increased work

demands, we ask how significant this issue is for cabin crews, to what extent they feel capable of performing their job properly, and at what cost.

3. Method

We first conducted a literature review in English-language management databases (mainly ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals, Google Scholar) and French-language databases (Cairn.info), as well as specialized journals in air transport (Journal of Air Transport Management, Tourism Management), using the following keywords: cabin crew/flight attendants; airlines; work/job intensification; performance; safety; customer service; working conditions. This is the basis of the literature review, which supported the development of the semi-structured interview grid.

Following the collection of quantitative data from flight attendants of various airlines across Canada and Europe, in partnership with associated Canadian and European Union divisions, we contacted individuals who expressed interest in participating in a semi-structured interview. The criteria for selection were to be working for one of the companies in Canada or Europe, and given the response rates, we chose to do interviews with Canadian and German flight attendants to see if there were managerial or cultural differences (Hofstede, 2003). We wanted to have a certain diversity of profiles, men and women, of various ages, although the main object here is the work itself, so demographic characteristics were less important than if we were dealing with work-family balance issues, which was done elsewhere (Tremblay & Gillet, 2024; Gillet & Tremblay, 2021). It is difficult to say the respondents are representative as there is no portrait of the cabin crew population along these lines, but we conducted interviews until we had the saturation level and in this way, we can say the interviews are quite representative of the whole group.

The first series of interviews took place in 2016 with 41 Canadian flight attendants and cabin supervisors, in person and by phone, depending on participants' availability. A second series of interviews was conducted by phone and video conference in 2017 with 18 German cabin crew members. This alternative data source allows for a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study by putting it into perspective (Patton, 1999). The interviews lasted, on average, 75 minutes.

Before each interview, a consent form was presented to participants. We asked each participant if they agreed to audio recording, which no one refused. Once the audio files were collected and a sense of data saturation was reached, meaning a feeling of redundancy (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the interviews in French and English were transcribed by two research assistants. Codes were assigned to each participant to anonymize the data. For the purposes of our article, we assigned fictitious names to participants to make the reading more enjoyable and immersive.

The data was analyzed using the qualitative content analysis technique, iden-

tifying common themes or patterns emerging from participants' discourse (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) and basically following the themes of the interview guide, and the subtitles below: work organization, fewer breaks, more physical effort and safety issues.

We thus aimed for a deep understanding of the interviews, grounded in the perceptions and meaning that interviewees give to their reality (Savoie-Zajc, 2003). Once the list of themes was established and reworked several times through frequent back-and-forth with transcripts, field notes, and reports (Patton, 1999), a comparative analysis between countries and airline crews was conducted.

4. Results

In Canada, two airlines are represented: a large national regular line (Company 1) and a smaller company specialized in vacation travel, mainly operating over-seas flights to Europe or flights to warmer Southern destinations during the Canadian winter (Company 2). The new ratio authorized by the Ministry of Transport was not applied uniformly when the interviews were conducted: its implementation was limited following collective negotiations, at least in Company 2. Although this change was not generalized to the entire fleet of companies, it was a concern for most of our participants (34/41): over six years, there was a reduction of three flight attendants from planes, and cabin crew says that "the impact is visible". If the change had not been applied to their flights, some participants nevertheless mentioned their anticipation of this change. First, we analyze the perceived impacts of this change on the organization of work and the workload on board. Next, we study the perceived impact on the ability to perform well and the quality of the service offered in terms of customer service and safety. Finally, we compare these results with data from interviews with cabin crew from a major German airline (Company 3).

4.1. Impacts on Work Organization and Intensification

Our results indicate a phenomenon of work intensification manifesting itself as a perceived reduction in break times on board and an increase in physical efforts required, which also has impacts on safety, as we will see further on.

4.1.1. Theme 1: Fewer Breaks

The reduction in the number of crew members on board has reduced the number and length of break times at work. These were already precarious due to the inability to be together and isolate from passengers, and many participants regretted that their legal breaks were only respected "if we have time." One participant observed a general reduction of 25 minutes of break time on the long-haul flights she usually works on. In the excerpt below, Carole describes the difficulty of taking a break during a flight where there was one less flight attendant. Employed for less than ten years as a flight attendant, she perceives a noticeable difference:

“...so that’s three fewer flight attendants in six years. So it’s still a big difference, you can feel it during flights. Like, we have fewer breaks, I really have to say... I was coming back from Paris, so it was maybe seven, or seven and a half hours of flight, and I didn’t even sit down for half an hour, it’s like... it’s a bit exaggerated.” (Carole, flight attendant, Company 2)

If the cabin crew faces disruptive passengers, a medical case, or more frequently prolonged turbulence, their breaks are likely to be shortened to limit the impacts on service. Furthermore, the reduction in break times for cabin crew on board impacts the atmosphere within the crew, which is one of the main factors of work motivation according to our research. There’s no longer really time to sit down and have a coffee together, which harms the atmosphere and the bonds between cabin crew where “everyone is in their own bubble” increasingly. The chief purser has less time to ensure the well-being of the crew.

It is thus perceived as difficult to take the time to meet essential needs in a context where passengers are increasingly anxious and stressed and solicit the cabin crew more. One participant reported recently returning home from a rotation to realize she hadn’t eaten for two days. The chief pursers seem to have—or rather allow themselves—some leeway regarding break time management, by expressing during the briefing that the well-being of the crew is a priority. In this case, the service can be adapted to give more time to the flight attendants, but this is not systematic. Indeed, it depends on the “leadership style” and values of the chief purser. This may also imply not strictly adhering to company standards for commercial service. The chief purser may feel like they have to choose between ensuring their crew’s well-being and functionality or strictly following employer’s requirements, which is experienced by some as a dilemma since it is unclear to what extent the company tolerates adjustments. Without them, however, it seems the cabin crew can hardly rely on their legal breaks.

4.1.2. Theme 2: More Physical Effort

The decrease in on-board personnel has resulted in a perceived increase in workload. This was particularly visible in certain positions, notably the galley position and the chief purser’s role. The latter must “redistribute the work” and participate even more in the service:

“We lost three flight attendants on a plane. We have to redistribute the work, it’s huge.” (Barry, chief purser, Company 2)

“So you want to eliminate somebody, well guess who’s going to be doing the extra work? It’s going to be me! And I’ve already been running around like a lunatic, now I’m doing canisters...” (Alex, chief purser, Company 2)

This indicates a shift in the chief purser’s role, increasingly adopting a working position during the flights. Consequently, their supervisory role is reduced: they often stay at the front of the aircraft to perform their tasks and may not always be aware of what is happening at the back of the cabin until long after

takeoff. In Company 1, which operates very long-haul flights, an assistant chief purser is sometimes present, but this remains an exception as this position has disappeared over time on many routes, which some chief pursers see as the “loss of an ally.”

We also observe an impact on the person working in the galley. This position is inherently physically demanding due to the numerous containers of drinks and food to handle, as well as the speed required to maintain service pace. The reason some flight attendants prefer it to a cabin position is the retreat it allows from passengers, offering a “refuge” for those more prone to emotional exhaustion. However, with one less flight attendant, the person in this position now also has to participate in the service, combining physical efforts with increased emotional labor, which is “too much” and “inhuman”, according to some interviewees.

4.2. Theme 3: Safety Issues

The reduction of cabin crew authorized by the Ministry of Transport is perceived by the majority as counterproductive to improving on-board safety, which is extremely important in passengers’ and cabin crews’ views. While the minimum of one flight attendant per door is maintained, the main concern described is the exhaustion of the crew resulting from this measure. In the following excerpt, Valerie, who often works on small aircraft where the new ratio has been applied, explains that the increased workload negatively affects the vigilance that flight attendants must constantly maintain:

“We just had an incident where a trolley came flying down the aisle of the aircraft because that trolley wasn’t secured... Well, I’ve been flying for twenty-one years and I know why these types of incidents happen. These types of incidents happen because crew members are tired, and because at the end of the day, a long day, it’s one thirty in the morning, and now they’re not having three crew members on that plane but only two.” (Valerie, flight director, Company 1)

Similarly, Alex mentions that in an emergency, it’s crucial to be alert and fully capable of calming passengers and preventing panic, which he sees as incompatible with the work pace imposed by the company on their cabin crew:

“I already had one flight emergency on my plane. And you know, it’s good to be on the ball, it really is when you want to calm down your crew and your passengers who are crying, and you know you’re dealing with certain issues, you don’t want to overload them to exhaustion. You can’t maximize people, shift them off to Europe multiple times a month and think that they’re going to be like, all okay (...) I think that sleep deprivation and overwork in my company is the biggest safety issue.” (Alex, flight director, Company 2)

The reduction in cabin crew numbers also increases a sense of insecurity on

board, in a context of perceived increased passenger aggressiveness. The cabin crew feels safer with more colleagues to rely on in case of a problem. Participants also reported having to perform tasks related to commercial service on the ground, while at this stage, they are supposed to carry out only safety-related tasks according to the Ministry of Transport regulations. Consequently, some safety-related tasks, such as briefing parents traveling with a baby, may be neglected:

“We can’t talk to people about their babies... It’s not professional, that’s how it goes now, before we had more time.” (Barbara, flight attendant, Company 1)

We also notice some negative impacts of reduced cabin crew on the relationship between the cabin crew and the cockpit. Indeed, the reduction of the flight attendant ratio is compounded by a recent safety procedure requiring the presence of a flight attendant in the cockpit whenever one of the pilots is absent. This new requirement causes frustrations for both parties:

“... when the captain has to go to the bathroom, one of us has to go babysit with the first officer, you have to accompany him, it’s unpleasant, it interrupts our task... we can’t tell him to hold it or do it in a bottle...” (Frances, flight attendant, Company 2)

“It has changed a lot because now you have to go to the cockpit to replace the pilot in the cockpit when he wants to go to the bathroom or take a little break. It has changed... they don’t like it... I don’t know what’s going to happen, they really don’t like it.” (Naomi, flight director, Company 2)

As a result of these measures, pilots are increasingly seen as people who serve just like passengers rather than as support on board, which does not seem to fit within a team work dynamic.

5. Elements of Comparison

Contrary to what we found with our Canadian participants, the theme of work overload did not dominate the discourse of participants from the German company. This lesser emphasis on workload compared to our Canadian participants must be partly explained by the novelty of the 1/50 ratio in Canada, while it has already been in effect in Europe for several years. However, our analysis suggests that other factors contribute to this result.

Many German participants stated that the workload was “manageable” or “doable,” although they noted difficulty in ensuring excellent service given the available resources. Just like in Canada, participants described a depletion of resources over the years, whether in terms of material or human resources, which no longer allows for the same level of service as before:

“... there’s been a decrease in the recent years obviously in terms of the material and the personnel that is provided to do the job. We are supposed

to achieve even higher targets with less material, and uh...with less staff, yeah (...) I considered it a nicer job when there was more staff on board and more material to satisfy the customers with, yes.” (Max, flight attendant, Company 3)

However, the theme of exhaustion was much less prevalent. This might be associated with the fact that German participants seemed to have more generous rest times than their Canadian counterparts, as well as numerous ground resources for psychological support regarding any issues encountered. In this sense, many described Company 3 as a “social” company concerned with the well-being of its employees, or at least allowing for many peer-managed groups to offer adequate support. Most participants felt “lucky” to work in this company because the working conditions offered were perceived as better than elsewhere in the industry. For example, many reported their satisfaction with the flight request system and the numerous part-time options available, facilitating work-life balance. In the following excerpt, Marion describes a form of compensation between the work demands in terms of customer service and the generous rest times found within the company:

“When I see what they demand for what goes on board, as far as service is concerned, they want everything. But on the other hand, they offer all these schemes for part-time. You can fly every second month. You can fly six months in a row and have the rest of the year free, which is fifty percent part-time. You can have full-time, you can have senior part-time, two months free in a year... they have forty-two days of holidays during the year, which is a lot. How much vacation do they have in the United States? I think it is only two weeks, right? So our company is pretty generous. And this is a contribution to keeping the flight attendants sane and healthy.” (Marion, former flight director, Company 3)

This leads us to think that the workload on board is not necessarily less than what is found in Canada, but that German cabin crew have better options to cope with these work requirements. Participants indicated that it was rather rare to fly with a minimum of one flight attendant per 50 passengers, as this ratio was most often exceeded. Additionally, trainee flight attendants occasionally provide extra support on board. Finally, the German cabin crew had the support of ground supervisors, which Canadian participants seemed to lack. These ground supervisors or “team leaders” closely monitor flight attendants, especially flight directors, and seem to have some leeway to provide support to the crew if needed. For example, a flight director reported that her supervisor granted an extra day of rest to her entire crew as compensation for having to perform a flight with one less flight attendant. The flight directors themselves had some flexibility to adjust the service, as they were told to prioritize taking care of colleagues and encourage them to make decisions independently in the cabin.

However, our German respondents generally perceived a decrease in on-board

resources in terms of material and personnel, which affected their job satisfaction and raised concerns for the future. Nevertheless, the morale was apparently better, and there was no reported widespread exhaustion as seen among our Canadian respondents, which could be due to the support available to German participants in terms of rest time and organizational support.

6. Discussion

Through the discourse of Canadian flight attendants and flight directors, our research captured several factors of work intensification and demonstrated their consequences on cabin work organization, as well as on the level of service and safety delivered to passengers. Crew exhaustion affects not only their availability and friendliness but also their state of vigilance and capacity to assume safety requirements. Our results contribute to research on working conditions and cabin crew performance, as very few studies have previously concretely examined the consequences of work intensification on individuals' ability to perform their jobs correctly.

6.1. Summary

The majority of our Canadian participants described an exaggerated workload, which has increased over time. In addition to maximizing their working time with longer days and more challenging rotations (Bergman & Gillberg, 2015; Shalla, 2004), respondents reported an increase in the intensity of physical and mental efforts required at work (Burchell, 2002; Green, 2001). Several factors of work intensification were reported to us, the most common being the reduction of the number of flight attendants on some aircraft, a reduction of three attendants over six years. Participants also mentioned the increase in the number of seats and the number of passengers on board, as well as a safety measure requiring the presence of a flight attendant in the cockpit whenever one of the pilots is absent.

While the number of passengers may have been reduced for a few months after the pandemic, there has been a clear recovery and not only is there an increase in passengers, but passengers are apparently more stressed and demanding as concerns cleaning and distancing measures after their experience with the pandemic. Furthermore, technological progress allows for new, faster but more demanding routes, intensifying work efforts. Similarly, the computerization of communications allows for more experiments and changes in service, with several memos now being sent to employees in a single day. Finally, societal changes are not to be overlooked, with a perceived increase in passenger aggressiveness that needs to be managed (Berkley & Ala, 2001), adding to the emotional demands of the job and the risk of exhaustion (Moon, Jun, & Jar, 2013).

As in all studies, there are limitations to this research, which will lead to future research. One first limitation is that the research was conducted before the pandemic, and even if it was updated with a few informal interviews following the

pandemic, in order to confirm a few aspects concerning work intensification, it would be ideal to pursue more interviews, which we would like to do in future research. Another limitation is the number of respondents. While qualitative research offers detailed explanations of the causes for observations as well as a better understanding of the relations between various factors or results, it is generally based on a more restricted number of respondents as saturation is attained after a certain number, a little under 60 in this case. As we have also done a quantitative online survey, this limited number is partly compensated by the large numbers in the survey, although the data is more limited, being of a quantitative nature. However, we plan to pursue this mixed method approach in future work, as both aspects complement each other.

Along with these observations, our main contributions can be synthesized on the theoretical and practical levels, as is done below.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

In terms of work organization, the dynamic of “teamwork” among cabin crew (Gueudar Delahaye, 2012) is disrupted and seems to be giving way to individualism. Our research identifies the concept of functional centralization to describe the organization implemented on board by Company 1, as well as in other companies with fewer crew members. Functional centralization is characterized by increased specialization and segmentation of tasks (Gueudar Delahaye, 2012). The traditional hierarchy found among cabin crews persists, but task delegation among flight directors appears more as a distribution of specific responsibilities than as a coordination and unification of tasks. This centralization has several consequences on work performance and employee relationships. Cabin crews have become dependent on flight directors, who are the only ones to have control over the whole service. Consequently, flight directors are often overwhelmed and stressed, having to ensure the proper execution of tasks they have less control over. This type of hierarchy also negatively impacts relationships with other crew members, who rely more on flight directors for instructions and support, creating a more individualized rather than cohesive team environment. This shift may have repercussions for passenger service quality and overall on-board safety, as stressed and overburdened crew may struggle to meet the necessary standards and respond effectively in emergencies.

Our comparative analysis with the German company reveals that similar issues of reduction in resources exist, yet they seem less severe, likely due to the company’s better organizational support and resources provided to their crew. The German company’s practices, such as allowing more generous rest times and part-time work options, as well as maintaining additional staff or trainees, apparently contribute to a more balanced workload and higher job satisfaction. These practices highlight the importance of organizational support in mitigating the effects of work intensification and ensuring the well-being and performance of cabin crew. Our findings highlight the need for airlines to consider the im-

pacts of staffing changes and workload increases on their employees' health, job satisfaction, and performance, particularly in safety-sensitive roles like those of flight attendants.

6.3. Practical Implications

Given the observed effects of work intensification on the health and performance of cabin crew, airlines should prioritize implementing measures to ensure a better balance of workload requirements and provide adequate support for their employees. This could include:

1) Adequate Staffing Levels: Maintaining sufficient crew numbers to ensure both safety and service quality, avoiding over-reliance on minimum staffing ratios.

2) Generous Rest Times: Providing ample rest periods and opportunities for part-time work to help manage fatigue and prevent exhaustion.

3) Organizational Support: Offering robust support systems, including psychological assistance and flexible scheduling options, to help crew manage work requirements effectively.

4) Training and Resources: Ensuring that flight attendants have access to necessary training and resources to handle both routine and emergency situations competently.

5) Monitoring and Adjustment: Regularly monitoring workload and performance metrics to identify areas of concern and adjust staffing and support mechanisms accordingly.

By adopting such measures, airlines can enhance the well-being of their cabin crew, improve job satisfaction, and ensure a high standard of passenger service and safety. These steps are crucial for sustaining the overall performance and reputation of the airline industry, particularly in the face of ongoing challenges and evolving passenger expectations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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