Passenger experience of inter-continental travel still ranks highly on the scale of stressful and frustrating long-haul return flights. The airline carrier IT card with no explanation; heavier very long security queue; an unexpected random selection for an additional personal security check; sleeping passenger in the next.
About This Is...

We are an international organisation and leadership development practice whose purpose is to help create better organisations.

This Is... offers innovative and customised support to organisations who want to develop a high performance culture. We take time to listen to and understand our clients’ businesses, aspirations and concerns - and then work in partnership with them to come up with an approach and plan which will help them achieve their strategic objectives. We provide coaching, facilitation and expert advice to help our clients on their journey of cultural change - and often build long term relationships as trusted advisors to leaders and organisations.

This Is... understands that it is essential to build leadership capability and capacity in a climate of change, uncertainty and resource constraints. We develop and deliver customised leadership development programmes which are appropriate to our clients’ circumstances. We also provide executive coaching, mentoring and support for individuals and teams.

We take pride in our thought leadership credentials and write and speak extensively. We provide education and training on leadership, change and people management in partnership with universities, business schools, and international organisations.

About Airport World magazine

Launched in 1995, and published six times a year, Airport World is the official magazine of The Airports Council International (ACI) World.

Its primary aim is to provide a forum for airport-related management issues, a vehicle for airports to promote and market themselves, and a direct route for suppliers of products and services to airports.

Interviews with the top management at airports around the world, as well as exclusive analyses of ACI data, make up a major proportion of the magazine’s content.

Airport World delivers a powerful and cohesive editorial package. The articles are concise, intelligent, and clearly written, striving to provide the airport industry with an unparalleled strategic business magazine.

About Aviation Media Ltd

Aviation Media Ltd is an independent, business-to-business communications company.

It specialises in the production of global aviation magazines, special publications, conferences, exhibitions, websites and events for the global aviation industry.

Aviation Media’s event portfolio includes ACI’s Airport Economics & Finance Conference and Exhibition and ACI EUROPE’s Regional Airports’ Conference & Exhibition.

Publications include: Asia-Pacific Airports on behalf of ACI Asia-Pacific and ACI World’s Airport World.
Worth the investment
Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Investing in people.

Welcome to the first regular ‘people’ column in Airport World where we will look at some of the key leadership, organisation and people challenges faced by airport managers and leaders around the world.

We’ll be drawing on our experience as organisers of the annual ACI Europe Leadership and Change Management Summit and as the designers and trainers of the ACI World Airport HR programme to ensure we choose relevant topics!

Let’s start with a basic question. Do airport managers spend sufficient time on people matters – in particular developing a high performance ethos and organisation culture?

Put it another way, does a relentless focus on ‘doing things’ – answering the email, ticking off the daily ‘to do’ list, attending routine meetings – get in the way of investing the time, energy and commitment needed to motivate and engage people and get the most out of them?

People are generally the second biggest cost for airports after infrastructure and capital. There’s a mass of data to show that organisations with motivated and engaged staff get much better business results than those which don’t – hardly surprising when the evidence shows motivated people are generally more committed and prepared to go the extra mile for their organisation.

Yet in our experience the investment in management time, effort and energy needed to optimise this investment in human resources is rarely adequate.

So what can be done? We see three important steps:

• Persuading the top management team that making a systematic effort in designing a high performance culture and improving staff engagement is worth spending time on and will ultimately result in dramatic improvements in business performance.
• Developing a clear and deep understanding of the current organisation culture and climate. Many efforts that are made to improve motivation are targeted too imprecisely and make very little real difference.
• Staff motivation can be affected by many factors including: leadership, clear objectives and targets, clarity of roles, communication, training, adequate systems, good support and colleagues, fairness of pay and conditions, personal development opportunities and business circumstances. So make the time to speak with people individually, use focus groups and team meetings to understand the problems and, if possible, conduct a benchmarked survey (such as the ACI Europe AirPeople Survey) to pinpoint specific issues.
• Design, deliver and communicate an action plan that is consistent with the airport business strategy – and have the courage to follow it up.

Invest more time in your people – and you will get results!
Cool head in a crisis

Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Crisis management.

The ongoing mystery around the tragic loss of flight MH370 dramatically illustrates how something completely unplanned and unanticipated can disrupt even the best laid plans, and place enormous challenges on organisations and their leaders.

Whilst crises differ in nature, duration and impact, all well run organisations need to ask themselves how well prepared they are for a crisis. How can they be sure that their leaders — who may never have faced a real crisis — will be up to the job when the time comes?

One aspect that makes handling crises difficult is that human nature means that the first instinct of people faced with unexpected danger, risk and/or uncertainty tends to be emotional rather than rational.

Psychologists describe a number of typical dysfunctional response patterns: ‘Unconflicted adherence’ — often described as ignorance is bliss; ‘Defensive avoidance’ — sometimes called wishful thinking; ‘Unconflicted change’ — a refusal to consider a fallback position; or ‘Hyper vigilance’ — more commonly described as panic.

Leadership in a crisis involves rising above these emotions and keeping a cool head. First, making sense of the situation, taking into account the facts and the data. Secondly, finding ways of communicating this effectively and bringing stakeholders on board who may themselves be distraught, in denial or afraid. And, thirdly, ensuring that accountabilities for action and decision-making are clear and accepted when multiple players become involved and traditional lines of authority don’t work well.

The best crisis leaders have the intellectual capacity to understand complexity, integrate rapidly multiple sources of information — and still remain open minded and flexible as the situation evolves.

They need to have the emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills to lead others and gain respect — collaborate, communicate clearly, delegate and trust. And, they need to have personal qualities of mental toughness, emotional self control and self confidence, as well as a commitment to a successful outcome, not their personal glorification.

The best organisations spend time preparing and practising for crises before they happen:

• They think through as many different scenarios as they can, so people have the capacity and ‘bandwidth’ to think rationally and not emotionally when crisis hits.

• They define their core crisis leadership team in advance, selecting the right people and skills for the team. They clarify roles and skills, especially those dealing with external interfaces. They then expand the team as necessary in a real situation.

• Crucially, they make the time to rehearse and practice, and make this as realistic as possible. They learn from what happens, and are prepared to adapt roles and personnel accordingly.

In crisis situations, it is impossible to get everything right. Indeed, in the case of MH370, the lack of certainty and information on what happened, the protracted nature of the crisis and the many countries, agencies and cultures involved, make the leadership task extremely difficult.

Sometimes there are no easy answers, only more questions.
People matters

Lessons from Nelson Mandela
Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Courageous leadership.

In the airport environment, there is a premium on reliable operations and keeping risks to a minimum.

Unfortunately, life does not always go smoothly, and people in airport leadership roles sometimes have to face the challenges of uncertainty, change and turbulence.

Periods of instability can arise through restructuring and reorganisation, political pressures, changing ownership, governance and leadership, commercial challenges and even crises involving physical danger and threat.

To negotiate these times successfully puts intense personal demands on those in leadership roles at all levels. In particular, it requires courage – the ability, willingness and spirit that enables people to overcome their fears and face up to risk, danger, uncertainty and intimidation with self possession, self confidence, determination and resolution.

Courage is needed when it is necessary to speak out and tell people the truth; to confront difficult situations and people; to persevere with a course of action in the face of problems and opposition, to build relationships and bridges with those who are not on your side; and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the organisation even where these involve some personal risk.

The late, great, Nelson Mandela provided a brilliant role model of a courageous leader, demonstrating principled leadership, perseverance, patience, resilience and mental toughness in his drive to achieve goals of equality and freedom. He did so over many years in the face of adversity and personal danger.

He had respect for all, and was able to build deep relationships and gain support from all kinds of people, including those who had imprisoned him.

Whilst prepared to take a tough stand where necessary, he demonstrated tolerance, forgiveness and compassion and was intensely pragmatic in his approach to problem solving. He was always looking for the ‘middle way’ – solutions which addressed the needs of all stakeholders.

What can we learn from Nelson Mandela about ‘courageous leadership’?

- Make sure you know what you stand for, communicate this clearly to others, and stand up for what you believe in – even if it is not the popular view
- Act in a way that is consistent with what you say
- Create an environment where there is mutual respect, co-operation and listening – where people are encouraged to speak openly
- ‘Reach out’ to build relationships with a wide range of people – even apparent adversaries
- Look for pragmatic solutions which preserve everyone’s interests – take the middle way
- Be patient, disciplined and persistent

Leadership is about ‘doing the right thing’ – and leadership without courage isn’t true leadership.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Miami-Dade Aviation Department (MDAD) has filled three key posts in its leadership team.

Long-time MDAD executive Gregory Owens has been promoted to assistant director for business retention and development; Joseph Napoli is the new chief of staff and senior policy advisor; and Dan Agostino has joined the MDAD team as assistant director for operations.

They join Hiram Barroso who was named as MDAD’s senior executive assistant to the director and deputy chief of staff late last year.

Director, Emilio González, explains: “Like any large organisation, MDAD is only as good as the people who lead it, and I’m confident these four leaders will keep our department on an upward trajectory.

“Each of them brings a unique set of skills and experiences to the table that will serve our organisation, our business partners and our passengers well.”

Operator of New York JFK’s Terminal 4, JFK International Air Terminal, has named Gert-Jan de Graaff as its new president and CEO, succeeding the retiring Alain Maca.

Long time Schiphol Group employee De Graaff has previously held senior roles at Amsterdam Schiphol and Stockholm Arlanda airports and has also worked for the Brisbane Airport Corporation, where the Schiphol Group is a 19% shareholder.

Mineta San José International Airport has appointed Meenakshi (‘Meena’) Singh as its new deputy director of aviation, planning and development. In her role, she will oversee the Airport’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

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People matters

Two journeys, not one

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Investing in your organisation.

Investment in infrastructure is vitally important in enabling airports to accommodate passenger growth and improve the quality of their passengers' experience. Brand-new facilities can make an enormous difference to the aesthetics and 'look and feel' of an airport, the efficiency of transit, and the cost-effectiveness of the operation.

But a modern airport operated by an outdated, old-fashioned workforce is liable to disappoint. Simply constructing and building new facilities, important though this is, won't in itself create a high-performing, efficient, customer-focused organisation.

To do that requires a parallel investment – not in 'things' but in organisation, leadership and human capital. New facilities can provide the opportunity to review and streamline work processes and organisational structure, to identify and progress the careers of talented individuals and to ensure that people are trained from the outset to work effectively.

Most importantly it provides the opportunity to transform organisation culture and promulgate a customer focus and ‘delivery’ mindset driven by engaged and motivated staff.

Where are the principal areas for human capital investment? We see three priorities:

• Review organisation structure and processes. Use the trigger of new investment to ensure that organisational processes are ‘lean’ and fit for purpose, that organisation hierarchy is minimised, staff are given autonomy, responsibility and meaningful roles, and that costs are kept to a minimum. Team working is important: restrictive practices and strict demarcation hamper customer focus and delivery mindset.

• Take a close look at your talent. Make sure that you attract and recruit people not just with the right technical skills but with positive attitudes, the ability to work well with others and the intelligence to understand the ‘big picture’. Then provide them with training and development to enhance their leadership, business and interpersonal skills and ensure they understand the organisation as a whole.

• Revamp the performance management system. Take the opportunity to review your vision, values and strategic objectives. Ensure these are properly communicated and that there is a clear line of sight between the overall strategy and both individual and team objectives. Recognise those who perform well and manage those that don’t.

Conclusion

To do all this properly requires investment in project teams, structured staff involvement, industrial and employee relations skills, training, and external expertise and facilitation. But, if you are spending many millions on investment in new facilities, ‘hundreds of thousands’ on human capital is money well spent.

Transforming an airport means transforming the organisation and its leadership as well as its infrastructure. It’s two journeys, not one.

Arrivals and Departures

It was a summer of change for many airports, with a number of key appointments across the globe. They included Fred Lam being named as the new CEO of the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK); Datuk Badlisham replacing the long-serving Tan Sri Bashir Ahmad Abdul Majid as the managing director of Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB); and John Holland-Kaye replacing Colin Matthews in the hot seat at Heathrow.

Hong Kong’s Lam, who succeeds the retiring Stanley Hui, leaves his role as executive director of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) and will take up the position for a three-year term on October 1, 2014.

Talking about Lam’s appointment, Vincent Lo Hong-sui, chairman of the AAHK, says: “This is an important moment in HKIA’s development, and Lam is the right leader to champion our plans and initiatives that will keep the airport competitive well into the future.”

MAHB has gone on record as expressing its ‘heartfelt gratitude’ to Badlisham’s predecessor Tan Sri Bashir, claiming that the company achieved ‘stellar performances’ under his stewardship. Badlisham was formerly CEO of Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC).

Elsewhere, Copenhagen Airports has announced that Peter Krogsgaard will leave his position as managing director of Fujitsu Denmark and Norway to become its new chief commercial officer on September 1.

About the authors

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey are directors of This Is... and are co-organisers of ACI Europe’s Airport Leadership and Change Management Summit in Munich, Germany, this December 1-3. For more information visit www.airport-leadership.com.
Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Sustaining high performance.

Being a high performing organisation at any given moment is great, but it counts for very little if that level of performance isn’t sustainable.

The world does not stand still. The bar is continuously being raised as competitive pressures, innovation, new technologies and stakeholder expectations combine to change perceptions of what is meant by excellence.

In airports, the speed of change has been dramatic. Over the last 20 years, competition has multiplied, ownership models have evolved and the industry has been forced to adopt a more commercial mindset.

Information technology has helped to transform business processes. Passengers have become increasingly demanding.

The best airports strive to keep ahead of the curve. Nevertheless, success can have its price. How sustainable are the changes that have been made?

Are people capable of continuing to deliver consistent high performance without burning out? And where does the enthusiasm for further change come from if things are going well?

Keep an open mindset

Airports striving to be high-performers can become very ‘task focused’ places, inward looking and with intense social, organisational and commercial pressures to show good results. But continuing high performance needs people who are driven to seek out the reality, however unpalatable.

The best organisations share learning from both their triumphs and mistakes.

They also invest time in looking outwards – looking at trends, building external networks and relationships, and learning from others.

Manage work pressures

High performing organisations make tougher demands on their staff than their lower performing counterparts. Workloads are higher, there is more demand for flexibility and work-life balance can be more difficult to achieve.

However, most people generally adapt and thrive on the challenge provided there is high quality leadership and sufficient investment in learning and development. If the changes are major, it may be necessary to bring in some new people.

Lead change sensitively

People are not machines. Imposing new processes and technology without taking into account the ‘people’ implications is rarely successful in the long run. The most successful organisations manage change in a culturally sensitive manner – and develop policies, systems and processes that allow for some flexibility.

It’s important to optimise the socio-technical system, not just the technical, and think through clearly how best to involve and engage people.

Achieving success is difficult; sustaining it can be harder. It is a journey, not a destination.

About the authors

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey are directors of This Is... and are co-organisers of ACI Europe’s Airport Leadership and Change Management Summit in Munich, Germany, this December 1-3. For information and to book your place www.airport-leadership.com
Getting the message across
Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: motivation and performance.

Dr Waleed Youssef, TAV Airports’ director for the Middle East, has announced that he will leave the company at the end of 2014 to pursue other opportunities. He told Airport World: “I have enjoyed my time at TAV immensely, but after six years with the company in various roles, it is time for me to seek a new challenge.”

London Luton Airport has announced that former Stansted managing director, Nick Barton, will assume the role of CEO from the end of 2014. He joins the gateway at an exciting time, with the airport embarking on an ambitious €126 million transformation plan to increase annual passenger numbers from 10mppa to 18mppa by 2026.

Valley International Airport in Harlingen, Texas, has named Marv Esterly as its new director of aviation. Esterly is the current director of airports for the City of Midland, Texas, and has been in that position for fifteen years. He is slated to begin his new role on January 2, 2015.

Chicago Department of Aviation commissioner, Rosemarie Andolino, has left her position to work in the private sector. Andolino, who announced her intention to leave earlier this year, said: “This move is both exciting and bittersweet. I’m looking forward to the opportunities that lie ahead, but also know that I’m leaving a position that has been very fulfilling, challenging and rewarding. “It has truly been an honour and privilege to work for a city I love and to work alongside so many talented industry experts and professionals. I have had a unique opportunity to create positive change for our city and its residents.” She will be a tough act to follow.

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Developing risk awareness

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: The psychology of risk management.

Airports that manage risk transparently well are more likely to be attractive to investors and better able to attract the capital they need to develop.

The ability to assess, manage and take well judged risk lies at the heart of successful business leadership, but to do so well is a challenge. Whilst there is an excellent body of work on risk management focusing on the objective assessment of risk and how this can be most effectively managed and controlled, managing ‘mindset’ remains difficult.

Commercial organisations can struggle to ensure that peoples’ attitudes and behaviours strike a sensible balance between excessive caution and reckless adventure. Too wary, and the business may fall behind; too risky, and ethics may be compromised and financial disaster could ensue.

The aviation industry has long been expert in finding ways of minimising operational, safety and security risks through the use of standardised processes, procedures and protocols which have a bedrock of ‘non-negotiable’ operating practices. However, as the industry continues its shift out of public ownership and becomes increasingly commercial and competitive, a different approach is required for non-safety critical systems.

Managing risk in these circumstances requires an understanding of psychology and the factors which influence individual decision-making rather than focus on regulation and organisation procedures. Initiative, pro-activity, entrepreneurial spirit and empowerment are all desirable features of the high performance organisation. These features can be stifled by unnecessary bureaucracy.

People’s propensity for risk-taking depends on the nature of the situation – the size of the risk, the degree of choice, and the likely consequences. It is also shaped by:

- Organisation culture: The organisation’s values and reward system, exemplified by the role model behaviours of leaders, managers and peers.
- The perceived risk: This is likely to be influenced by recent runs of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ (those on a winning streak take more risks), publicity, and emotional cues.
- Personality and risk appetite: People fall into different ‘risk types’ with different styles and approaches to taking risk, depending on their need for excitement, their tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity and how anxious they become when faced with the unknown.

The key to managing risk in a high performance culture is to develop an awareness of it and thus raise the standard of ‘risk intelligence’ in the organisation. This can be done by encouraging greater transparency, openness and dialogue.

Building awareness of individual propensity to take risks provides an excellent starting point to help identify and review those situations where risk judgements are critical.

Breadth and depth of knowledge and relevant expertise helps people to be more objective, confident and sound in their judgements. Invest in developing risk awareness, and reap the returns!

About the authors

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey are directors of This Is... and run top team workshops on contemporary leadership issues including the psychology of risk. They can be contacted at info@thisis.eu
Seminingly insignificant events can result in long-lasting memories and stories to be told, both favourable and unfavourable.

Two recent personal interactions brought home to us how attitudes and behaviours of frontline staff towards the customer can lead to totally different customer experiences – and ultimately influence future commercial decisions.

In the first case, the scene was the women’s restroom in a well-known London hotel. One of the authors, Terri, noticed that the soap dispenser was empty. A male attendant was fixing the adjoining sink dispenser. She mentioned the lack of soap and asked for his assistance. He replied that his task was to repair the broken dispenser and told her that she would have to talk to housekeeping about the soap, as that was their job. He seemed indifferent to her immediate plight and focused solely on his task.

The second incident took place in Terminal 2 at Heathrow Airport two hours later. On arrival at the airport, Terri needed to make an urgent call to a business colleague but found that her phone was not picking up a Vodafone signal. She approached a friendly looking woman at one of the check-in desks and asked her if the signal was OK. The woman asked a number of her colleagues if their phones were working, but none had Vodafone. Refusing to accept defeat, the woman then phoned her mother who lived nearby and learnt that the Vodafone signal had been erratic over the last few days.

She then handed Terri her own phone and suggested she use it to call her business colleague. When this number turned out to be busy, she told Terri to leave a message for her colleague to call the phone back and she would explain the situation. This all happened within five minutes.

These two stories illustrate how customer experience is very often the outcome of the interaction between the customer and the behaviour of the person in the frontline. The key behaviours that differentiate poor from outstanding experiences are:

• Taking responsibility for the customer and not just the task. It’s important to make time for the customer even when under pressure
• Empathy, listening and concern for the customer’s dilemma
• Creativity, humour and the smile
• Using a problem-solving approach
• And...going the extra mile

Competent and confident employees and stakeholders focused on the customer create the real unique customer proposition.

Never underestimate the impact of friendly, engaged, trained, customer-focused staff on reputation and ultimately the bottom line!
Building bridges

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey discuss the importance of co-operation, collaboration and partnerships.

A quotation widely attributed to Sir Isaac Newton, “Men build too many walls and not enough bridges” greets visitors to the lobby of the Aéroports de Paris (ADP) Customer Service Academy.

The words may be around 300 years old, yet the sentiment remains valid today.

Effective co-operation and partnerships are the keys to creating value, optimising efficiency and minimising risk in large complex systems. For example, Jeff Poole director general of CANSO has spoken of the need for cross border collaboration across the air traffic system.

Most people would accept that working together not only provides the opportunity for improved organisational performance, but also reduces conflict and stress. Why then can collaboration be so difficult?

The reasons are not hard to determine. Airport systems involve many different organisations, which have to work together to achieve their shared goal of transporting people safely. Each has their own set of goals and objectives and often just don’t have the time, the capability or will to focus on issues other than operational “business as usual”.

Furthermore, a longer term perspective – and a degree of patience – is necessary to allow people to invest their time in building trust, developing relationships and ensuring the quality of communication and information sharing necessary for effective cooperation.

Efforts to bring multiple stakeholders together on key issues – for example in Airport Collaborative Decision Making (ACDM) – have tended to focus on technological and infrastructural solutions. Huge investment has gone into designing systems to “talk to each other” and organisations such as IATA, CANSO and EUROCONTROL have issued a mandate for European airports to comply with a collaborative approach. Despite this, gains have sometimes been difficult to achieve.

It is on the “people” side where most work remains to be done. An interesting initiative, the EU FP7 PROSPERO project (16 organisations across eight countries led by Trinity College Dublin), analyses risk from a whole systems perspective. The research has shown that effective collaboration requires:

- A whole system approach: taking into account the “socio-technical” system and understanding the risks associated with new technology and change
- Sharing information and knowledge: ensuring that relevant information is available to the right people in a timely, understandable format at key process and decision points
- Building social cohesion: ensuring efforts are made to build trust, encourage interdependent working, and ensure mutual respect and accountability
- The quality of communication and dialogue is key to success, and this can require establishing platforms and linkages to facilitate the exchange of ideas between organisations and departments.

Our own practical experience demonstrates the importance of getting people together in the same location to work through issues as early as possible, establishing common structures and processes, building a shared vision and common goal, and developing conversation skills. Build bridges, not walls!

About the authors

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey are organisers of ACI’s annual ‘Leadership and Change’ Summit, which this year will be held at Airport Exchange in Istanbul, December, 8-10. They can be contacted at info@thisis.eu
Give us a break

When was the last time you went on a holiday without your phone, iPad, iPod, laptop or other electronic communication devices?

When did you last have a real holiday where you could switch off from work related issues; where you were not contacted by some member of your team or your boss; where you had to become involved in some ‘urgent’ decision, discussion, problem, procedure, people matter?

When did you wake up in the morning to greet the day, not expecting to see an email, text, tweet, diary reminder or red-flagged item?

There was a time when people who went on holiday actually went on holiday. Organisations had developed a system called ‘acting up’. This involved someone on the team, a potential successor or report, stepping into the holiday taker’s role. They took over the position and made all the decisions in the other’s absence.

This system had a number of advantages:

• It gave the ‘acting up’ person the development opportunity to operate at the level above them, making decisions, taking the responsibility
• The system ensured cover for key operations
• The ‘holidaymaker’ could ‘switch off’ and enjoy their holiday with their family and friends and return to the job refreshed

This practice is rare today. What tends to happen now is that people never ‘switch off’; they are on constant call; their physiological state does not get as refreshed.

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang points out in his book The Distraction Addiction that our desire to remain connected at all times has become a stress-inducing burden.

Other experts agree. “We have been seduced by distraction,” says psychologist Daniel Goleman. “We are being pulled away from paying attention to the things that enrich our lives.”

Intrusive technology has created a situation whereby we can be available at all times and in all places. The UK communications regulator Ofcom’s statistics show that people spend more time looking at media than they do asleep.

Medical concerns are being expressed about the increasing adverse health effects such as obesity and diabetes. CIPD research shows that people have less downtime, are more stressed and experience burnout more frequently at work than in the past.

What can we do about it? Well, why not bring back succession planning in the form of ‘acting up’ so we can take our holidays in peace; Bring in workplace policies to insist people take their holidays and ban contacting them except in an emergency; and trust those back at the ranch to cope!

By doing so we build organisation and individual resilience, enhance the talent pipeline and encourage true engagement and trust.

As Seneca the Younger said over 2,000 years ago: “The love of bustle is not industry, it is only the restlessness of a hunted mind”.

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Terri Morrissey and Dr Richard Plenty are organisers of ACI’s annual ‘Leadership and Change ‘ Summit which will be held this year as part of ‘Airport Exchange’ in Istanbul, Dec 8-10. Contact them through info@thisis.eu
All together now

Terri Morrissey and Dr Richard Plenty provide their thoughts on: Cutting bureaucracy by empowering people.

A n international airport can be an exciting place to work with lots of variety and the knowledge that connecting people and places is a ‘grand endeavour’ and one to be proud of.

Why is it then that the results of ACI Europe’s AirPeople employee survey show that airport staff rate their working environment a little less favourably than those in other sectors?

Bureaucracy is the major cause of their frustration and concern. Airport staff are generally very positive about their industry and their employers but dislike the slow convoluted decision-making and inefficient work organisation that they experience.

Perhaps this should not surprise us. Many airports are, or have recently been, state owned entities which are rarely stellar examples of efficiency and effectiveness.

The industry is also heavily regulated with a strong safety culture, which means that formal procedures are rightly required in many safety-critical areas.

Bureaucracy is not the same as necessary procedures. Many bureaucratic procedures develop over time from well-intentioned efforts to standardise and simplify highly complex processes. Quite often these “grow legs”, get added to and outgrow their usefulness.

Steps are continually added to try to cater for all eventualities. These are rarely updated or dropped as time and technology move on. Unnecessary meetings and slow decision-making result.

People can hide behind the rules and a bureaucratic mindset can set in. Commonly heard phrases such as “I can’t do that unless it’s in writing”, “I’ll have to wait to ask my manager”, and “that’s not my job”, are used to avoid taking responsibility. This does little to help customer focus, innovation, effectiveness, or speedy response.

‘Good intentions’ should not be an excuse for burdening those parts of the business, which need agility, flexibility and the ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances.

Encouraging and developing a mindset of initiative taking and proactivity can lead to better results, lower costs and help build a more entrepreneurial organisation.

Allowing people to think for themselves and have the courage to take decisions can bring about a more engaged and committed workforce.

This can be helped along by:
• Ensuring that people understand the overall vision and direction of the company and the role they play
• Freeing people up to do their jobs so they have the authority, responsibility and skills, without the necessity for constant supervision and control
• Encouraging people to work together and across boundaries to continuously simplify and improve processes and get rid of redundant practices

People who feel that they have some control over their work are more likely to be positive about their organisations, express higher levels of engagement and perform to higher standards.

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Happy talk!

We always find it surprising that so few airport leaders take the time to recognise and celebrate success – and we don’t mean chartering private jets to go to the Caribbean!

Millions has been spent on research studies on ‘motivation’ and ‘engagement’. Yet, with hardly any expenditure at all, a whole culture can be shifted by changing mindset to a more positive approach: emphasising gratitude instead of blame, moving from fault finding and put-downs to positive reinforcement and compliments, and building on strengths rather than weaknesses.

And it really does not take that much to recognise someone’s efforts, to celebrate success and to express gratitude. Simple things like saying ‘well done’, ‘thank you’, and ‘I really appreciate it’ are phrases which can make all the difference to how people feel.

Of course these compliments must be genuine and based on real achievements to have an impact. Still, a small shift in this direction can make a huge difference. As Mark Twain said: “I can live two months on a good compliment!”

We were once asked to coach a highly driven CEO who wanted to understand why his staff were so disinclined to go the extra mile for him. He achieved excellent business results but there was a constant turnover of staff leaving for other apparently less attractive opportunities. He really did not know why.

We asked him when he had last praised a member of his team for a job well done. When had he surprised someone with a birthday card? When had he last taken the time to have a coffee with someone and not just talk about work? Had he ever taken time out to celebrate his own achievements?

Evidence from the field of positive psychology, made popular over recent years by Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, shows how accentuating the positive can help build confidence and competence.

Taking the time to reflect on success – and the competencies and qualities that are needed to achieve it – is time well spent. Altruistic behaviour has been shown to improve the resilience and health of the giver as well as the receiver.

Anne Herbert is accredited with first coining the term ‘random act of kindness’ when she wrote it on a napkin in a café in Sausalito. It’s an idea, which has been picked up by social media and has resulted in initiatives which benefit the wider community.

Evidence from the field of positive psychology, made popular over recent years by Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, shows how accentuating the positive can help build confidence and competence.

Never underestimate the long-term impact of thinking and caring about others. Invest time and effort in recognising and celebrating success if you want to achieve sustainable performance and encourage commitment.

And in that spirit, we’d like to congratulate editor, Joe Bates, and the Airport World team on 20 successful years of publication!

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Nurturing talent

Terri Morrissey and Dr Richard Plenty provide their thoughts on: Entrepreneurial spirit and innovation.

Victor Kiam once said: “Entrepreneurs are simply those who understand there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to their advantage.”

The American entrepreneur succinctly sums up the positive mindset and ‘can do’ attitude often associated with the entrepreneurial spirit.

At a time when financial pressures on airports are so intense, the creativity, resilience, enthusiasm and innovation shown by entrepreneurs are qualities which are essential and ideally should be available ‘in-house’. So what can we learn from them?

Firstly, entrepreneurs are skilled in both identifying opportunities and in capitalising on them. Consider the case of Canadian, Kyle MacDonald. Starting with one red paper clip, MacDonald wondered whether it would be possible to make enough trades to eventually buy a house. One year and one day after he started his adventure, he made his fourteenth incremental online trade for a three bedroom house in Kipling, Saskatchewan.

His learning from the experience was, “Start small, think big, have fun and get started! If you really want it, you can get it.”

Secondly, entrepreneurs share a number of personal characteristics including; a high desire to be self-reliant; an openness to new experiences; a ‘passion for action’, to experiment and try things out; high levels of self-efficacy; and a preparedness to work hard.

Those who are successful in growing sustainable businesses also manage to balance their aspirations for independence with a willingness to build collaborative networks and partnerships with a wide and diverse set of stakeholders.

So how well do established organisations – including airports – encourage people who have this kind of creative approach to join their ranks and make a difference?

Unfortunately, many traditional organisations are better at killing ideas off at birth than encouraging independent thinking and innovation. Bureaucracy, concern for hierarchy and status, the “not invented here” syndrome, protection of the status quo and demarcation lines mitigate against new ideas and change.

Many ‘lifers’ can become stuck in their ways. Such organisations lack the experience, skills and calibre of staff needed to foster creativity.

So what can be done to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit if you need to find creative ways of generating revenue, delighting customers or improving effectiveness?

- Conduct a ‘positive review’. Take stock: what’s worked well so far? What’s stopping you from being more entrepreneurial?
- Identify, develop and, if necessary, recruit people with an entrepreneurial mindset, skills and experience and support and reward them for trying out new approaches
- Encourage people to continually look outside for new ideas and best practice

See obstacles not just as problems but as challenges and opportunities for growth.

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The toxic triangle

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: The dark side of performance management on wellbeing at work.

How many of us have worked in organisations where workloads are high and we feel under continuous pressure to perform, yet there seems to be little consideration of us as people?

Many organisations faced with pressures from their shareholders for quick results end up by default with an extreme performance culture. Extremely ambitious non-negotiable targets are set from the top, with high rewards for success and correspondingly high penalties for failure.

Across the organisation there are tight deadlines and relentless time pressures. Immediate results are all that seem to matter.

The best leaders find ways to use these pressures positively to stimulate, energise and inspire those who work with them. They are focused and driven to achieve results, but at the same time respect their people and take their personal circumstances into account. They listen to their staff knowing this will help get sustainable results.

Unfortunately, not all leaders are that enlightened. Some people are primarily attracted to the power and status associated with leadership roles. The pressures of an ‘extreme performance culture’ to get immediate results can reinforce any tendencies they have to be arrogant, manipulative, and bullying. It can also encourage them to cut corners and engage in dubious business practices.

This is the dark side of performance management. In circumstances like these, many employees may not dare to challenge or speak out. Some feel that they don’t have the power to effect change. Some may be afraid, preferring to keep their heads down for career reasons. Others will have low self-esteem.

And there are always those who secretly admire their dysfunctional leaders for appearing certain and confident – and go along with them whatever they say.

The ‘toxic triangle’ of susceptible followers, over-the-top leadership and extreme performance culture is a very dangerous combination. It leads to stress, burnout, inflexibility, lack of innovation, and suboptimal, non-sustainable performance. Enron provides a classic example where it ultimately resulted in the failure of an entire corporation.

How can it be avoided? All three sides of the toxic triangle need to be addressed:

• Develop an ethical culture where how things are done matters as well as what is achieved. Use balanced scorecards to measure performance and encourage open dialogue.

• Keep leaders’ feet on the ground. Watch out for signs of hubristic behaviour and ensure leaders are held to account. Ensure governance checks and balances are in place.

• Develop courageous followers. Encourage people to be brave, forthright and speak out where necessary – and develop their mental toughness and resilience.

As Anatole France said: “It is the certainty that they possess the truth that makes men cruel.”
HUMAN RESOURCES

PEOPLE matters

Complacency – the enemy of growth

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Taking responsibility for your own development.

Past performance is no guarantee of future success in a fast changing world. Yet many of us are reluctant to invest time and effort in our own development unless we are compelled to do so.

Why risk change if what you have done already has been successful and taken you to your current level? How much time and effort would it take to learn any new skills required? Would a new way of doing things work as well in practice?

These are all legitimate questions. Yet we know that top performers in any field constantly learn, adjust and refine their approach to make sure they stay on top of their game. The world of competitive sport, for example, provides many excellent examples of the benefits of adopting a ‘continuous improvement’ mindset.

The same principles are relevant in the workplace. “Learning as you go” provides competitive advantages.

If you stand still and take little interest in your self-development, you run the risk of being left behind as technology and the world move on. By the time you are forced to make changes, you may be left playing ‘catch up’ with too much to learn in too short a time. Skills, which were once relevant, become obsolete, and performance deteriorates.

Age should not be a barrier to learning. Research shows that whilst some people are naturally more open to learning and new experiences than others, we all have the capacity to learn new things throughout our lives.

The human brain retains its ability to form new neural connections and learn at any age, so-called neuroplasticity. A lifetime of experience provides a rich database for reference. The key is to treat personal development as an ongoing priority on a par with operational delivery.

This is easier said than done. To carve out the time for personal development in a busy working environment requires considerable determination and mental toughness. Psychologist professor, Peter Clough, calls this the ‘penicillin of personal development’.

We see the following as critical:

- Take control of your time to make space for learning and don’t get bogged down in trivia. Opportunities for learning are not confined to training courses. Spend a few minutes at the end of each day systematically reflecting on lessons learned from work experiences.
- Develop the confidence to seek out feedback, listen to what others have to say and try out new ways of working. People who are embarrassed by being wrong or making mistakes don’t learn.
- Be persistent – stick at something and keep practising it until you get it right! Don’t rest on your laurels or you run the risk of getting left behind!

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) has named Diane Papaianni as its new general manager of New Jersey Airports, which includes Newark Liberty International Airport. Papaianni, Newark Liberty’s deputy general manager since 2014, replaces Richard Heslin, who is retiring from the agency after a 45-year career. In her new role, Papaianni will be responsible for both Newark Liberty and Teterboro airports and will oversee plans for a new $2.3 billion Terminal A at Newark Liberty. She joined the agency in 1979 and has held a number of senior management positions at Newark Liberty since then.

Two other PANYNJ veterans also are moving into new roles. Doug Stearns, deputy general manager of LaGuardia Airport for the last two years, is succeeding Papaianni as deputy general manager of New Jersey Airports. Anthony Vero, LaGuardia’s manager of physical plant and redevelopment, has been appointed the new deputy general manager at LaGuardia.

New Heathrow hire, Ali Jafarey, is believed to be the world’s first airport cycle officer and is tasked with persuading more of the 16,500 staff that live within a five-kilometre distance of the gateway to ride bikes to work.

Sydney Airport CEO, Kerrie Mather, is the new president of ACI Asia-Pacific, succeeding the retiring Dennis Chant. “As president of ACI Asia-Pacific, I will continue to work closely with the Regional Board and the Regional Office in promoting professional excellence in airport management and operations,” she promised.

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AIRPORT WORLD/JUNE-JULY 2016
People matter

The value of respect

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on: Respect.

Before making a final decision on recruiting someone for his senior team, James Cherry, president and CEO of Aéroports de Montréal, takes them to dinner at his local restaurant.

He’s not checking their table manners, conversation skills or knowledge of fine cuisine. Rather he takes note of how they treat the waiter. Did they treat the waiter with respect?

Jim, who is retiring later this year after a highly successful career, only hires those who do. He believes that the ability to engage stakeholders is the cornerstone of successful leadership and the key to long-term success.

Being able to motivate, influence and persuade others depends on interacting with them as human beings with different and distinct personalities and circumstances. This means treating other people, whatever their role, background or level, with respect.

Cherry’s viewpoint is consistent with current thinking on organisational leadership and is an important building block for airports aspiring to sustainable high performance:

• Leading and inspiring others in times of change requires airport leaders to be good communicators. They must be able to explain things to people at all levels in their organisation and listen carefully to what they have to say.

• The relentless focus on the ‘customer’ required for airports to be successful needs people to work together seamlessly. Collaboration and co-operation are essential for both consistent, repeatable operational performance and innovation. ‘Respect’ provides the behavioural underpinning for better organisation connectivity.

• Casting the net widely and without prejudice when recruiting and selecting people makes it far easier to attract and retain the best talent. An organisational environment where differences are valued, facilitates this approach.

Unfortunately, ‘respect for others’ is still too often put on the back burner, particularly where the stakes are high and there is intense pressure for results.

In a competitive world – whether it be business, sport or politics – there is always the temptation to shred the reputation of peers, colleagues and competitors in an attempt to gain immediate advantage.

Indeed, some businesses achieve high growth and excellent financial results – for a time – with few concessions to their customers. In our own sector, there are many airports which focus nearly all their efforts on infrastructure and pay very little attention to their people.

In practice, this kind of approach is rarely sustainable. Too many enemies are made and too many bridges burnt. Apparently simple solutions to complex issues are found not to work in practice. There is a strong resistance to change.

So making the effort to develop a culture of respect is a much better option. It takes time and may require investing in education, training and personal and professional development to give people the understanding, skills and confidence to be able to contribute fully.

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HUMAN RESOURCES

PEOPLE

matters

Learning from crises

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on what we can learn from disasters following presentations made at the ACI World Annual General Assembly in Montréal.

On March 22nd this year, 16 people were killed and 150 injured in a terrorist attack at Zaventem Airport in Brussels.

The damage to the airport was profound. Reports at the time suggested that it would be closed for many months. Yet within 12 days a first flight had departed and in 72 days it was back to full capacity. The airport had achieved an amazing recovery from a massive blow.

Brussels is not the only example of a recent crisis that has provided major challenges for airport leaders and their people. Consider, for example, the devastation caused by the raging natural wildfires at Fort McMurray or the complexities associated with the extended crisis of the missing MH370 airliner.

Few of us would want to be caught up in such traumatic and extreme events. Yet invariably those involved have a powerful story to tell about what happened and how they managed. What lessons can be learned?

• Having an inspiring vision, mission and sense of purpose which everyone can buy into – a light at the end of the tunnel – becomes really important when times are difficult. It doesn’t have to be complicated. In the Brussels case, a determination that the airport would ‘come back stronger’ proved a very effective rallying cry.

• A co-ordinated approach to communication is essential. In a world of social media and 24/7 news coverage, continuous professional support needs to be available as speculation and misinformation can swiftly fill any communications vacuum. The Malaysian authorities found that as soon as relevant and accurate information emerged, it needed to be communicated. A balance must be struck between ‘rationality and humanity’ in the tone of messaging.

• A decentralised management approach based on mutual trust is helpful. Natural leaders emerge, sometimes unexpectedly, in response to fast moving and rapidly changing local circumstances. It’s important that the organisation gets behind these leaders and teams. In Brussels, empowered and agile teams provided the energy, commitment, ideas and capacity to deal with varying situations.

• Support for people is important. In situations such as Fort McMurray and Brussels, there is a human toll with emotional and physical exhaustion, fear, and anxiety very common. People may also have financial concerns. A combination of practical and psychological support is required, provided by managers, peers and sometimes professional psychologists and counsellors. Assistance has to be tailored to individual circumstances.

These are tales of human spirit, strength and resilience. In a complex world where the unpredictable is becoming the norm, the lessons learnt from crises are directly relevant to the way we manage change and our everyday operations.

As Veronique Vogelee, human resources and corporate communications director at Brussels Airport says: “It’s the people that make the difference.”

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The human touch

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on the importance of stakeholder engagement.

Walking into the Arrivals Hall at Dublin Airport’s Terminal 2 last December was an uplifting experience. As the doors to the Hall slid open from the functional but rather soulless customs area, a wave of familiar festive tunes provided a wall of cheer for everyone, whether visiting the country or returning home for Christmas.

For the incoming passenger the warmth of the welcome was striking, the more so since the local community were taking the lead with adult choirs, choral societies, orchestras and even schools contributing to the entertainment.

There was a sense that people had turned out voluntarily in a spirited and concerted effort to make first impressions memorable.

The airport experience should be all about the joy of connecting people and places – and episodes like this remind us of that. Unfortunately, only too often all that gets remembered is the hassle of travel. Fears about personal safety, long lines at security and immigration, lost baggage, difficulty in interfaces with places, airport leaders connect operational, security and technical issues. Yet the human touch gets the attention it deserves given the number of players involved?

• Walk in the passengers’ shoes and see things with their eyes. Map their journey through the airport; identify the bottlenecks and potential difficulties in interfaces with people. Seek passenger feedback, including ASQ data and complaints. Redesign where necessary to improve their experience.

• Make the time and resources available to explain to all stakeholders the customer experience vision for the airport. Ensure training is in place for all stakeholders, not just direct employees. Aim to get people enthusiastic and engaged in the passenger experience. Involve them in the process, listen to their ideas and address any issues they may have.

Leaders don’t always give stakeholder engagement the priority it deserves. It can seem much less important than pressing operational, security and technical issues. But improvements in passenger experience depend critically on the contributions of many different groups and all stakeholders have a role to play. Investing in the resources needed to bring stakeholders on board makes good sense.

While airports connect people with places, airport leaders connect stakeholders with the customer.

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Expect the unexpected

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on: Uncertainty.

We do our very best to predict the future. In the airport industry, for example, decisions to invest in major new infrastructure are not taken lightly. A thorough business case must be prepared before money is committed.

Passenger growth projections are reviewed, business scenarios developed and cash flow forecasts examined. Environmental and social impact studies are commissioned.

Yet in reality, these plans, forecasts and projections rarely turn out as expected. Who, for instance, could have foreseen that an exploding Icelandic volcano in 2010 would result in the largest air traffic shut down since the Second World War?

And who really knows what the impact of technological innovation, environmental considerations, security concerns or social and political change will be on future demand for air travel?

The fact is that we live in a ‘VUCA’ world – a world characterised by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity – which makes the unexpected the real predictability.

We need to be prepared not only to expect the unexpected but also to have strategies for dealing with it.

Yet most people find dealing with uncertainty difficult. Rather than face up to VUCA realities, our tendency is to look for facts and evidence that support our preconceptions or to follow people who claim confidently that they alone have the answer. Are there other approaches that might be better?

Have the courage to experiment

Old mindsets and mental models don’t always work when times are changing. As Peter Drucker says: “The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence – it is to act with yesterday’s logic.” Innovative approaches may be required. Learn from others who have had similar experiences and be ready to try out new approaches.

Prepare for the worst

People have an inbuilt ‘optimism bias’, which means we don’t like to think through worst case scenarios or indeed any potential outcomes we don’t like. This positive tendency serves us well and keeps us healthy in everyday situations, but is unhelpful in times of crisis or uncertainty.

‘Thinking the unthinkable’ saves us time and helps us be prepared when things don’t turn out as we’d hoped.

Build resilience and mental toughness

Why do some people and organisations persevere through difficulties and others give up? Research carried out to identify the characteristics which allow some people to thrive under pressure shows the importance of confidence, a sense of being in control and seeing unexpected change as an opportunity rather than a threat. These qualities can all be developed and learned.

Making plans for the future is sensible but we must be prepared for a wide range of possible outcomes and develop the capabilities to adjust and adapt speedily when the unexpected happens.

In a VUCA world, the only thing we should ever doubt is certainty.

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Searching for the truth

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on the importance of evidence in people issues.

When it comes to people, nearly everyone claims to be an expert. Many of us consider ourselves to be excellent judges of character. Understanding other people’s motivations and intentions is often seen as a matter of simple common sense.

Experienced managers in particular tend to be convinced that their view of their employees’ attitudes and behaviours is correct. Not unreasonably, many will argue forcibly that if they weren’t able to understand others, they would not have risen to positions of responsibility.

Indeed, many will say that they have a very clear insight into what motivates their people. “Trust me”, they say, “I know what they’re like!”

But common sense alone does not provide a good guide to human behaviour in large and complex systems. We may have a sound view of what motivates those closest to us, but this can be misleading in a wider context.

Our own views on others are limited by our personal experience, prejudices and perspective. People who work in airport organisations come from diverse backgrounds with values and attitudes shaped by gender, generation and ethnicities, which may differ markedly from our own.

In these types of circumstances, it can be easy for leaders and managers to misjudge one another.

In our own work we have had experience of a situation with a large multi-national organisation where there was a high turnover of talented, young skilled engineers. The general view was that this could be remedied by better induction, training, more pay and staged career progression.

These were put in place at some cost, but the engineers still kept on leaving.

It was only when the evidence from employee survey data, turnover statistics and leaver interviews were put together that it became obvious that the real reason for people leaving was that there wasn’t enough challenge in the job. People wanted more real responsibility rather than more support.

Evidence based approaches to organisation and people issues are the key to sustainable high performance. Measuring ‘intangibles’ brings them to life.

Collecting data on employee numbers, turnover and sickness absence is the starting point. This can be augmented with information on employee attitudes, behaviours and perceptions.

Modern data analytics allow this information to be used to show how these human factors are connected to, and drive, business performance and customer satisfaction.

The true value of an evidence-based approach though is that it allows us to challenge our own assumptions and beliefs.

San Diego International Airport uses people analytics imaginatively to encourage dialogue and discussion at a local level for just this purpose. Naples Airport has used the ACI AirPeople survey with great success to identify the areas that need attention.

For in the end, false beliefs about people and organisations are even more damaging than ignorance. As Mark Twain said: “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

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Is small beautiful?

Terri Morrissey and Dr Richard Plenty reflect on the pros and cons of working in small organisations.

Ambitious young people often ask us whether it’s better to work for a small organisation or to join a larger one. “Which would give me the best opportunities?” is probably the most asked question, quickly followed by “Which would give me the better prospects for growth and help develop my future career?”

With most teasers, the answer is, ‘It depends’. Not very satisfactory for someone wanting a definite answer, but there are advantages and disadvantages associated with either option.

Large organisations, simply by being large, can offer many advantages. They are likely to offer more structured jobs and career development. You can switch roles to gain more experience in a variety of work areas without having to leave the organisation.

The downside is that the jobs you are given may be very specialised. And change can be so slow. For those with ambition, it can be frustrating and difficult to leave a mark or legacy when you feel you are being treated like a ‘number’ and people don’t have the time to listen to you.

By contrast, smaller organisations provide the opportunity to make an immediate impact as one’s success is easily visible. Small organisations are more agile and flexible; they require people to take more ownership and real accountability.

Sometimes people find they can be asked to take on an enormous breadth of responsibilities with potential for personal growth that they simply wouldn’t have in a larger company. Longer term though, opportunities for promotion and development can be scarce and pay and benefits packages may be worse. And, of course, while success is more clearly visible, so is failure.

The ideal solution, of course, is to get the best of both worlds and gain experience in each type of organisation. This is becoming more of a realistic option in the airport sector as larger airport groups take over independent airports providing wider development opportunities.

And technology means small organisations are increasingly ‘connected’ to the outside world and open to learning. At ACI Europe’s recent Regional Airports Conference and Exhibition (RACE) in Cork, we chaired a session on people engagement, and were struck by the standard of work being done by small airports such as Bristol in the UK.

When it comes to ‘large or small’, consider all the factors, including your life style and values before making your decision. A wise choice can pay off. Niall McCarthy took the opportunity to move from Dublin Airport to gain experience. He is now the managing director of Cork Airport, the winner of ACI Europe’s Small Airports Award for 2017.

And as we are sure Niall himself would agree, not only does he have a challenging and rewarding role, but also he and his family now live in an attractive part of the Irish country. Small can indeed be beautiful!
Building human capital

Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on the importance of building a strong airport team.

It’s quite a challenge to finance, design and build the physical infrastructure for a new airport development. But once you’ve built it, how can you ensure that it works as well as you had hoped?

That’s not so much a question of the physical assets themselves, important though they are. It’s more to do with human capital – the people that lead, manage and operate the airport. And fundamental to that is having people of the right quality.

Yet, whilst the planning of airport physical infrastructure is rarely left to chance, the approach taken to developing an airport’s human capital can be more variable. With a few notable exceptions, there isn’t the same emphasis and intense focus on building people capacity and capability in airports as you find in companies like Google.

And could you imagine a world-class competitive sports team paying more attention to its stadium than the identification, recruitment and development of talented players?

The key to building a strong and capable airport team is strategic people planning. When people join an airport organisation, they can end up staying with it for a very long time. Indeed, twenty or thirty years of service is not unusual. In that time, much will change. Airports are a growth sector, becoming more complex and competitive, heavily influenced by technology, with sustainability and the passenger experience central to success.

Strategic people planning involves analysis of the future needs for both ‘own employees’ and ‘contractors’ and succession planning for key positions. It is also likely to include plans for:

• Attracting people who aspire to senior leadership roles with the ability to manage uncertainty and complexity, as well as delivering consistently on objectives. This places strong demands on intellectual capacity, self-mastery and relationship skills in addition to the more traditional leadership qualities of drive, energy and determination.

• Recruiting and selecting people at all levels who not only have the right technical skills, but the right attitudes and values. These are the kinds of people who are prepared to take personal accountability and ownership for their actions, are keen to develop and are open to learning.

• Developing people already in the system to reach their full potential. A systematic approach to talent management is essential. Substantial gains can be made by identifying the hidden talent that exists in most organisations, and giving such people the opportunities for development and growth.

Remember that development takes place not only through formal training but through experience in work assignments and on projects.

Investing in people is as important as investing in physical infrastructure.
Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on airport security and its impact on passengers.

What role does the security experience play in shaping the passenger experience? It has to be said that the prospect of standing in a long queue at an airport, having to submit to a body search, and then having one’s carefully packed bag taken apart piece by piece by a suspicious official is not something that most people look forward to.

So, what if anything, can be done to make the passenger experience of airport security as good as possible?

Dealing appropriately with passengers is a challenge. The prime reason for airport security nowadays is to minimise the risk to civil aviation from terrorism. The nature of the role requires security staff to remain alert and open to the possibility that any individual passenger could pose a threat.

Technology can help, but detection of dangerous items still ultimately depends on human judgement. At the same time as having to remain perpetually vigilant, security staff are under pressure to ensure efficient operation and good service. It is a difficult balance to strike.

Fortunately, most people accept that security is a necessity and will put up with a lot if they feel they are being treated fairly, reasonably and professionally. What can help to achieve this?

Educating passengers in advance

Passenger experience is shaped by the gap between expectations and reality. It’s important to find ways of increasing people’s awareness of security before they get there.

For example, letting people know about anticipated queue times helps people to prepare and can make the waiting more acceptable. More generally, those who rarely travel deserve particular attention as they don’t know what to expect, and can cause bottlenecks and problems for themselves and others.

Find ways of engaging and motivating security staff

Security is a challenging area to work in. The environment is busy and bustling with activity. Many of the jobs are shift-based, have a short cycle time and are relentlessly repetitive. Rules and regulations change frequently. As a consequence, turnover is often higher than in other areas.

In these circumstances, it’s important that airport leaders pay attention to their people. Well thought through processes are the foundations. Proper training is essential. Communication is of the essence.

A genuine concern for the wellbeing of security staff also makes a difference. Naples Airport in Italy, for example, has built a relaxation facility close to the work. Feedback on this has been very positive.

Invest in the development of interpersonal skills

People of every possible disposition, background, and culture pass through airport screening. Being treated fairly is the starting point. Thereafter, it’s amazing how much difference a smile, encouraging word, non-verbal behaviour and the style of interacting with colleagues can make.

A professional, considerate and helpful approach to security can transform the passenger experience, reducing the stress for all involved and preventing a bad start to a journey.

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Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on the importance of taking control of technology.

Writing this article together, in both London and Dublin, separated by 300 miles and the Irish Sea, we noted that technology allows us to collaborate in a way that would have been next to impossible a few years ago.

And we found ourselves wondering that if the pace of change were to continue, could this column be written eventually by robots?

There could be advantages. We are both busy and are looking forward to a break at the end of the year. It would be nice to have the option of escaping from the dark autumn days of Northern Europe a little earlier rather than having to worry about meeting tight deadlines.

We remember reading twenty years ago about a world of unlimited leisure time promised by automation. That promise has not yet been kept. Most of us feel we are busier than ever.

That may change with the latest wave of technology. The recent opening of Singapore Changi’s Terminal 4 provides one glimpse of the future. Highly automated check-in, security, immigration and boarding aim to provide a seamless service – without any people.

Technology is increasingly able to perform what were previously seen as skilled and expert activities.

Should we embrace this level of technological change or be anxious and fearful? On the one hand, there will be painful disruption as traditional roles disappear; on the other hand, we know from previous experience that ultimately new jobs will be created and exciting new opportunities will emerge.

We see the key to successful change as ensuring people feel as much as possible in control:

• **Involve people and listen to them.** The Insurance group AVIVA has asked its UK staff whether a robot could do their jobs better. Those who answer ‘yes’ are retrained for new roles. Engaging people in the selection, design and implementation of new systems develops ownership and understanding and a sense of being in control.

• **Encourage people to take personal responsibility for learning.** Acknowledge working lives are bound to change: flexibility, adaptability and new skills will be needed. Ensure teams keep up to date with developments and support them in making time for learning and relearning.

• **Prioritise technology, which empowers people.** We should design systems that facilitate people to do what people do best: meaningful work, which requires judgment, co-operation, creativity and the ‘human touch’. We need to say ‘no’ to automation, which creates a form of indentured slavery, with excessively tightly controlled duties and unrealistic deadlines.

A balance of automation and autonomy should allow us to have more time in the sun.

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Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority has named Mike Stewart as vice president and airport manager for Washington Dulles International Airport. He will transition into his new role following the December 8 retirement of Brian Leuck, who has served as vice president and airport manager since January 2017. Carl Schultz succeeds Stewart as MWAA’s interim vice president for airline business development.

Geoff Culbert is to succeed Kerrie Mather as CEO of Sydney Airport in January 2018. He has served as president and chief executive of GE Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea since 2014. Sydney Airport chairman, Trevor Gerber, said: “Aviation is one of the most dynamic and fast changing industries in the world. Geoff embraces innovation and technology and this ongoing focus will position Sydney Airport for future success.”

Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) has a new chief financial officer after interim CFO, Ian Clarke, took up the position on a permanent basis in mid-November.

Former Heathrow CEO, Tony Douglas, is the new CEO of the Etihad Aviation Group. Douglas joins Etihad from the United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence, where he has served as CEO of the Defence Equipment and Support department, responsible for procuring and supporting all the equipment and services for the British Armed Forces.
The people crunch

Terri Morrissey and Richard Plenty provide their thoughts on the importance of succession planning and talent management.

Imagine you are finding it difficult to get around. After careful thought you decide the best solution is to buy a new car.

You spend weeks researching various options before choosing the model, find out the best way of financing the deal, investigate the cheapest suppliers, and after tough negotiation, agree a delivery date.

The great day arrives, and you look proudly at the shining vehicle in the driveway. Now for driving lessons! It’s only then you discover there are very few instructors available and there is a very long waiting to take a driving test. You have invested in new capacity, but it can’t be used.

A relevant example? Well, the theme of this edition of Airport World is the ‘Capacity Crunch’. This refers to pressure on space and operations and consequently the potential inability to meet the demand for travel. It typically means lack of physical infrastructure: terminals, runways, slots, planes. Long lead times for planning and construction compound the problem.

Yet, there is another ‘crunch’ that is sometimes overlooked: having the people in place to manage and run the airport. Even if brand new infrastructure is designed and built, the parallel process of ensuring the right people, capabilities and talent are in place can often stall the operation, thus limiting its usefulness and the return on investment.

In the fast-growing airport sector there is massive competition with other sectors for the best and brightest talent. Leadership succession is also a major challenge. There are increasing demands on the skills needed to run the complex, regulated, commercial and technical organisations that airports have become.

Shortages in expert skill sets in technology and engineering run alongside gluts in areas where needs are declining, such as manual operations and administration.

Even with the best intentions, it is not always possible to upskill or retrain existing staff – and it can be difficult to find people in the external market with the specialised knowledge and experience needed. What can be done about it?

• Better workforce planning is part of the answer, even though this is not an exact science. Developments in technology, the economic environment, societal expectations and competition can make ‘supply and demand’ hard to predict.

• Retaining and engaging people through creating ‘great places to work’, where contributions are recognised and valued, helps to ensure a viable talent pool. High attrition rates erode the capacity of the operation and place further pressures on the organisation to meet demand.

• Succession planning and talent management, particularly for leadership positions and those roles critical for the operational performance of an airport, are essential. This means identifying key positions and then building a talent pipeline through individual development and training plans which provide opportunities for mobility, skills development, and increasing responsibility.

Avoid the ‘People Crunch’ by investing time and resources in talent management alongside putting into place the future infrastructure. Or you may have to invest in a driverless car!

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Enhancing the passenger experience is a worthy objective for anyone working in an airport. But what does it actually mean? Passengers come in many shapes and sizes, with differing tastes, expectations and needs. Some just want to minimise their interaction with the transit part of travelling to get to their destination as quickly as possible without any fuss.

Others wish to savour every minute of their experience, lingering in the luxury goods emporia, sipping exotic cocktails, experiencing foot massages, indulging in exciting sights and sounds. Romantics, pragmatists, grumps ... all travel through airports.

This provides quite a challenge. Understanding how people who may be very different from ourselves feel — and being prepared to modify our own attitudes and behaviours accordingly — requires empathy. Putting ourselves in other people's shoes and seeing things from their perspective is important if we are to improve their travel experience.

Recently, both authors have had personal experiences of what it is like to be a ‘Person of Restricted Mobility’ (PRM). For one of us, the cause was a broken ankle; for the other, a hip (PRM). For one of us, the cause was a "walking in the other person's shoes" never became more relevant! What an impact it made. A simple trip to the bathroom, making a cup of coffee or even a visit to the local supermarket required planning, effort, and inventiveness. Let alone international travel.

We found we had become part of a community of people in similar circumstances. Walking stick users, people with crutches, zimmer frames and electric mobility scooters, generally acknowledged us cheerfully with a nod, a smile or a wave of recognition. Neither of us had noticed before how many of us there were.

The response of the general population was more variable. Some offered assistance when we couldn't negotiate swinging doors or getting into taxis; others ignored us. We asked ourselves: should we have to experience what it is like to have reduced mobility to empathise with those who live these lives every day? Is it possible to really understand something without experiencing it personally? Well, yes, we believe that it is possible.

- It starts with empathetic design. It is not beyond the wit of woman or man to design environments for those permanently or temporarily incapacitated who still want or need to travel. It should be possible to say goodbye to escalators that are so fast or steep you can't get on or off easily; to provide seating on the long interminable walks to distant boarding gates; to loosen up stiff, unyielding doors that can't be opened; or to have other options than to climb wet, rickety steps in windy conditions on the tarmac.

- And... the human touch is as important. Empathic skills can be learnt and become habits. Every passenger should be considered as an individual with their own unique personal needs. A helping hand, a smile and small acts of kindness make a huge difference. As we found for ourselves.

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Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on how airports can attract employees.

Why would anyone be attracted to work in your airport? In a fast-growing industry where on average the number of passengers has been doubling every fifteen years, finding sufficient people of the right calibre can be quite a challenge.

Take Keflavik Airport in Reykjavik, Iceland, for example. Since 2009, a boom in tourism and connecting low cost flights has resulted in a fivefold increase in passenger numbers, from approximately two million to ten million passengers per year, and a doubling in the demand for staff – in a country with a population of less than 350,000.

How are airports tackling this issue? Well, it’s important that they are well run and have the basics in place. They need to be clear on their vision, values and ‘employer brand’.

They have to work out the kind of people and skills they need to attract. Their pay and conditions must be competitive. Most importantly, they need to be able to articulate their ‘employee value proposition’ – what it is they have to offer to potential employees.

Describing the expectations, excitement and challenges of working in airports is one side of the coin. Developing a better understanding of people’s expectations and aspirations in terms of, for example, personal development, flexibility, societal contribution and preferred style of working, is the other.

Keflavik Airport has taken this approach seriously. It has peak staffing requirements in operations over summer months and realised these needs could be met by students working over their vacation.

It has ‘reached out’ to schools, colleges and universities and built strong relationships with these institutions and their students. Recruitment programmes now fit in with college timetables, communal transport is provided (the ‘sleep bus’), and tailored social and health offerings have been developed.

In return the students have performed responsibly. Those who do well are invited back the next year. Some will become long-term employees.

Organisations also need to pay attention to ensuring that the ‘employee experience’, the overall perception that employees have about the totality of their experience at work, is a positive as possible.

How best to go about this will always depend on the specific circumstances of the organisation, the type of work and the people involved, but we have developed our own check list of items which we have found are usually important. Check out your E numbers!

• Empathy: understand what people are looking for at work
• Encouraging: consider people as individuals with diverse needs
• Expectations: make expectations clear on all sides
• Engaging: ensure work is interesting and challenging
• Empowering: give people responsibility
• Education: provide learning and development opportunities
• Evidence: agree targets, review and reward
• Experimenting: encourage creativity and innovation
• Enthusiasm: more important than skill which can be learned
• Equity: treat people fairly

Understand where people are coming from, adjust your offerings, make sure the employee experience is fulfilling, and make your airport attractive to potential employees.
Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on uncertainty, anxiety and the passenger experience.

Over the last couple of months both of us have flown independently on long-haul return flights from Europe to North America for business and personal reasons.

We have a fascination with airports and are both seasoned travellers, but comparing notes we realised that, even for us, the experience of inter-continental travel still ranks highly on the scale of stressful and frustrating experiences. And it’s not only the long duration flights and time zone changes which we need to cope with.

Our combined list of additional challenges for these journeys included a time consuming visa application process with the US Embassy; the airline carrier IT system declining to print a boarding card with no explanation; heavier than usual traffic to the airport; very long security queue; an unexpected random selection for an additional personal security check; a gate change which was not communicated and meant a rush to the correct gate at the last minute; a need to negotiate a move to a different part of the plane because of a large, head-lolling, sleeping passenger in the next seat; and a rip-off taxi ride at one of the destinations.

Travel doesn’t seem to be getting any easier! One of our flights was business class, the other economy, but the numbers of people who now travel and the growing impact of geopolitics mean that whatever class you pay for, there are bound to be frustrations. And that’s despite the tremendous effort airports have already made to improve the passenger experience.

What more could airports do? Well, from a psychological perspective we know that uncertainty is particularly difficult for people to manage. The same areas of the brain are activated by uncertainty as by danger and risk. This impacts our physiology, and it can be hard to stop ourselves becoming anxious, angry and reacting emotionally. Anything airports can do to mitigate uncertainty can help. What might this mean in practice?

- Providing clear up to date information on what’s happening is the starting point. Explanations of flight delays, queue times, and guidance for official taxis all fall into this category. The best airports should never hear their passengers say: “They didn’t even tell us what was going on”.
- Human reassurance is the second part of the equation. Having some friendly, knowledgeable people around to confirm we are on the right lines is helpful: they can answer questions, provide guidance, and respond flexibly to a wide diversity of passengers. They provide a human touch. The best airports should never hear the phrase “There was no one we could find to help us”.
- Is ‘emotional security’ on your airport’s radar?

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Wellbeing@Work

Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on how the changing nature of work can impact psychological wellbeing.

Working in paid employment can be good for us. Having a job gives us an income, and provides a sense of purpose, meaning and structure to our lives.

We have the opportunity to develop our skills and competencies, build social networks and friendships, and feel that we are contributing to society. Feeling engaged and absorbed in our work can be a wonderfully positive and fulfilling experience.

So, perhaps it’s not surprising that the evidence shows that people who are employed generally have better psychological health than those who are unemployed.

But the nature of work is changing. There are increasing demands for higher standards of performance; innovation and new technology are reshaping the workplace; and there are much higher expectations around customer service quality.

Workloads can be high and leave people with little time to reflect or recover. Jobs are less secure than they used to be as roles change and new skills and competencies are needed. And an “always on” culture means that, for many, there is work to be done outside conventional working hours. In the airport sector, simply coping with rapid growth is constantly ratcheting up the workload.

In short, organisational life is becoming more challenging. Just “keeping your head down” and looking for an easy life is rarely an option. Organisations expect people not just to turn up and do their job but to deliver results: be responsible, adaptable, show initiative, be positive about change, learn new skills, work hard, put in extra time when necessary, show empathy with the customers and embrace innovation. And be loyal and cheerful!

The good news is that it’s possible to create a working environment where all this can be the norm, where people love their jobs and can perform at levels than they hardly believed possible.

This can happen when organisations pay sufficient attention to their people and commit to creating people-friendly workplaces.

Where this is missing, psychological well-being cannot be guaranteed. Depression, anxiety and burnout become real risks. Organisations can drift towards a culture of absenteeism, high turnover and low motivation with all the attending financial and industrial relations consequences.

‘Psychological wellbeing’ needs to be a leadership priority. The key is to identify and systematically eliminate and eradicate those outmoded approaches and practices which give rise to a toxic organisation culture.

These include poorly designed jobs with unclear objectives, excessive workloads and inadequate support; lack of attention to the needs of those in the front line; inadequate communication on the reasons for change; badly trained and ‘old school’ style managers with a lack of empathy and human understanding; and an absence of ‘psychological safety’ which stifles risk taking and innovation.

Involve people; give them control of their work as far as possible; invest in the development of skills in personal leadership, resilience, relationship building and team working. People matter.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the world’s busiest airport handling in excess of 100mppa, has a new boss following the arrival of John Selden as its new general manager. Announcing his appointment, Atlanta Mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, said: “Hartsfield-Jackson is without question one of our city and state’s most valuable assets, with an annual economic impact of nearly $35 billion for metro Atlanta. It has allowed our city to become a gateway to the world and it serves as a critical cargo hub for North America. I am excited that we have identified someone with the qualifications and passion of John Selden to lead our airport into the future.” A former navy and commercial pilot, Selden moves from the role of deputy general manager of New York’s John F Kennedy International Airport, the US’s sixth busiest passenger gateway.

London Stansted has a new chief operating officer – former Virgin Atlantic COO, Steve Griffiths. Griffiths, most recently chief operating officer for the London Underground at Transport for London, will be responsible for the safe and secure day to day leadership of the airport whilst it undertakes its biggest ever capital programme.

Auckland Airport has announced the appointment of Mary-Liz Tuck as its general manager of corporate services. In this role, Mary-Liz will be responsible for leading key corporate functions including legal, people, safety and public affairs.

Groupe ADP has announced four new appointments – Aude Ferrand has become its new chief retail officer; Mélanie Carron has been promoted to the position of chief marketing officer; Eric Labrune takes up the role of chief customer satisfaction and operations officer; and Guillaume Arrigoni is its new chief marketing officer, whose role includes managing the route development strategy of Paris’s airports.

Inez Bartolo is the new airport director of Ports of Jersey, the operator of Jersey Airport in the Channel Islands. He replaces the retiring Stephen Driscoll who worked at the gateway for an incredible 44 years, initially as an electrician, before working his way up the ladder.

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Lost in transit
Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on wayfaring.

Navigating your way through an airport can be an anxiety provoking experience. It’s an activity often undertaken under less than ideal conditions – when we are tired, we have arrived late at night somewhere and the airport is deserted, or we have to rush to get another connection.

Even the most experienced of travellers, in the most well organised, well-established airports, can find it a challenge. Madrid Barajas, Paris CDG and Luton have all left members of our team confused in some way, resulting in difficulty in finding the way out, reaching our intended departure gate, and even missing a connection. That may tell more about us than the airports, but it shows that the problem remains a real one.

How can airports help us with questions such as “Where exactly am I?”; “What direction am I facing (so I don’t start walking the wrong way)?” or “How long will it take to get through security, so I don’t miss my connection?”

Wayfaring has been a challenge for centuries. The Romans in Britain solved the problem by inventing the milestone, a stone column placed at regular intervals along the long straight roads from London. In Ireland, informal conversation was the traditional folklore solution. “Go up the Dublin road to the pub at the crossroads and turn right. When you are about half a mile up the road, just past the turning on the right turn left. If you cross over a bridge then you have gone too far!”

Signs are a more recent innovation. Airport signs should be provided at key decision points, where the traveller has to make a choice. If symbols are used, they should be universally understood. Arrows should clearly point in the right direction and continue to the final destination and not mysteriously disappear midway through the route. There should be a primary path through the airport which is intrinsically obvious.

Best practice means good design. An example of designing with the passenger in mind is Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Clear, unobstructed lines of sight, angled service desks which encourage people to move the right way, well-structured paths, landmarks to provide orientation cues and clear signage all help nudge passengers in the right direction.

But even these steps aren’t always enough as airports get bigger and the variety of passengers increases. Placing shopping malls along the route may be good for the retailer but can be a source of disorientation and confusion for someone who just want to get to gate B98.

Airports concierge services which help people to their destination are increasing in popularity. And expect to see more mobile phone ‘airport map apps’ which guide people through the airport.

In the meantime, everyone who works in an airport can play a big part in helping passengers find their way. If you see someone who appears lost or disoriented, ask them if they need assistance. The human touch makes a difference.

We wish you happy orienting in 2019. Get to the airport early, follow the signs, and don’t get too distracted by the shopping!

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Invest in yourself
Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on self-development.

Earlier in our careers, we often came across organisation leaders who believed that people didn’t need to learn anything new once they had graduated from college and that any subsequent training and development was a waste of time.

In their opinion, a career should be spent putting into practice what had already been learnt at school and university. Investing in development was pointless. Learning was for the young.

These ideas are now seen as typical of leadership’s Generation ‘D’ – the Dinosaurs. Mainstream thinking has moved on considerably. In the 1990s, Peter Senge, in his book The Fifth Discipline, talked about the importance of developing a learning organisation as a primary source of competitive advantage – one that is open to new ideas, innovation and encouraging learning.

It’s an approach which has been embraced enthusiastically by many of the world’s top organisations. It implies encouraging a development ethos and ‘growth mindset’ throughout an organisation.

Formal training is a part of this. Those who take part in training courses are usually there because their organisation values them sufficiently to support their learning and invest in their development. So far, so good. But is it the whole story?

It’s a question we ask every year to the dozens of people we take through the ACI World Airport Human Resources programme. We’ve run courses in locations as diverse as Bucharest, Abu Dhabi, Johannesburg and Kuala Lumpur. Participants say formal training broadens their perspective and gives them new skills. Yet when we talk deeply with them about how they actually learn, change and develop in practice, it turns out that training, while important, is just one part of a bigger picture.

Our participants report they learn through a wide variety of routes in addition to formal education and training. For example, work experience in different roles; involvement in projects; having to face up to unexpected change and crises at work and outside; dealing with personal challenges; voluntary work, sports, hobbies and pastimes; managing difficult family situations; watching films, TV, theatre; interacting on social media; observing others; and from reflecting and learning from experience and their own successes and mistakes.

This fits with current research on neuropsychology that shows how the brain has the ability to form new connections and pathways, and hence learn new things, throughout adulthood. There are always learning opportunities and we are never too old to learn. We just need to keep our brains exercised. How can we best do this?

• Have a ‘growth mindset’ – an attitude of “Yes, I can” and “You’re never too old”
• Try new things. As we get older, we can become so worried about making mistakes and looking foolish that we restrict our opportunities to learn
• Make time for it. A few minutes each day reflecting on what went well and what might have been done differently is time well spent. Organisations should invest in their people, and people should invest in themselves.

Anna Strömwall is the new director of Goteborg Landvetter Airport in Sweden. She moves from Swedavia’s consultancy subsidiary, Swedavia Consult, and has many years of management experience in the transport and logistics sector including a previous role as head of security screening at Stockholm Arlanda.

Chad Newton has been confirmed as the new CEO of Wayne County Airport Authority (WCAA), operator of Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run airports. The WCAA board voted to appoint him CEO last November and his appointment was approved in mid-January.

London Luton Airport (LLA) has promoted planning and investment director, Alberto Martin, to the position of CEO. Before joining LLA, he gained 20 years’ experience in airports, holding a variety of executive roles across Europe, including 10 years as managing director of Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura airports.

His LLA predecessor, Nick Barton is the new chief executive of Birmingham Airport. Speaking about his decision to join the midlands gateway, Barton commented: “Birmingham Airport is on the threshold of a very exciting chapter in its development and I am delighted to have been given the responsibility to lead and shape the future of the airport.”

Canberra Airport’s new aviation director is Michael Thomson. He is best known in Australia for being the man that helped ACT Brumbles out of its financial doldrums.

Renato ‘Ren’ Camacho is the new president and CEO of Akron-Canton Airport, succeeding the retiring Rick McQueen who enjoyed a 36-year association with the Ohio gateway. Camacho moves from Cleveland’s Department of Port Control where he was chief of planning and engineering.

New Zealand’s Queenstown Airport Corporation (QAC) has welcomed experienced finance executive Andrew Williamson as its new chief financial officer and company secretary.

Bangor International Airport has appointed Brian Veneziano as its new assistant director. The joint civil-military public airport is located in Maine, USA, and is currently served by Allegiant, American, Delta and United.

Bristol Airport in the UK has named Dave Lees as its new CEO, although he won’t take up the post until August 1. He is currently managing director of Southampton Airport.

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Go into any restaurant, travel on public transport, stand in line for your coffee, walk in the street, wait in the Departures Lounge before your flight, walk through the Arrivals Hall of a busy airport and observe.

How many people are actually having conversations? Or do they seem more interested in looking at screens? Have we lost the art and science of good conversation?

The importance of human communication has been downgraded by an obsessive focus on interactions with social media: immediate feedback, hashtags and sound bites are seen as more worthy of our shortening attention spans than investing time in face-to-face interactions.

In everyday life, public discourse and, in the media itself, the consequences are beginning to emerge. Empathy is dying. We care more about our own image than really understanding where others are coming from. Slogans, yes/no debates, the search for black and white answers, simple solutions and certainty dominate. Evidence is less important than strongly stated opinion. Is this an effective approach in a world of increasing complexity?

As far as the world of work is concerned, where results count, it isn’t. Most organisation challenges need people to work together to sort things out and agree on a sensible course of action. Yet in many organisations, despite people working close to each other in an open plan environment, they never walk around to speak to their colleagues. An email, text or tweet is sent instead.

This may suffice if there is a clear simple unambiguous communication required, such as “Are you going for lunch at 12.30pm?” It is not enough where someone’s input is needed to deal with a complex issue, where priorities need to be sorted, where performance needs to be discussed, or where an innovative approach is required.

There is no substitute for the gold standard of effective face-to-face conversation if we want to address real world issues and keep everyone on board. According to the organisation learning guru Peter Senge, the starting points for a meaningful conversation are active listening (‘inquiry’) and an ability to ‘advocate’ and explain one’s position. Good conversations should be about dialogue and developing a deeper understanding rather than simply winning an argument.

‘Appreciative Inquiry’ can also be a very helpful approach. This focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses, solutions rather than problems. It accentuates the positive whilst also acknowledging the shortfalls, engaging hearts and minds and spirits in working together to focus on what works, and on the future.

It involves questioning, building relationships, listening actively and with empathy, advocating one’s position – all with the objective of building mutual understanding so as to move closer to an agreed future direction and course of action.

How can organisations encourage better conversations? By ensuring there is a commitment to dialogue; there is sufficient time and space for people to get together, meet, reflect and discuss organisational challenges; and by providing training in the skills and techniques of appreciative inquiry and effective conversations.

Let’s promote technology, which facilitates conversation rather than regulates it to a lost art.

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Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on how to encourage entrepreneurial spirit.

Back in 2012, we delivered a keynote address at ACI Europe’s Regional Airports Conference in Ljubljana on ‘Building an entrepreneurial mindset’. At the time, many airports were facing economic challenges which could not be met by simply providing ‘more of the same’. They needed to explore other sources of revenue to stay in business. Innovative thinking was required.

This requires a combination of creative thinking mixed with commercial ‘nous’. It quite often means looking at the ordinary in different ways, of putting on different lenses when viewing the day to day, of seeing new patterns or combinations or of re-imagining alternative methods of delivery.

It may also mean designing new products, services or of anticipating a new trend or demand.

Those who are best suited to this type of environment usually demonstrate characteristics such as curiosity, measured risk taking, openness to change, a willingness to experiment, perseverance and resilience.

They generally see the big picture. People who understand the customer and can anticipate customer experience and need – along with a good measure of empathy – are good candidates.

Fast forward to 2019 and an innovative mindset is still relevant. This time round it’s not just about money: it’s about sustainability in the broadest sense. Take Dublin Airport, for example. Back in 2012, they launched a scheme to sell ‘plane water’ at €1 a bottle, which was a great success.

In 2019 this popular offering has been augmented by an imaginative system of ‘hydration stations’, water fountains fitted with swan necks where passengers can fill their own bottles with less environmental impact.

So, what can be done to create a more ‘entrepreneurially friendly’ workplace environment and develop more ‘entrepreneurially minded’ employees? After all, many people who work in airports weren’t recruited for these kinds of skills, but for their ability to work in an operational environment where the priorities are consistent delivery and abiding by a rigorous set of rules and regulations.

A good place to start is to create space and time for reflective thinking and conversation. Many workplaces are far too busy, with little headspace for considering how the work is done and how it might be delivered in alternative or more effective ways.

Many day-to-day activities and experiences provide fertile material for thinking about better ways of working and of delivering new value adding services.

Creating an environment where people feel more free to express themselves and to challenge the tried and tested in a psychologically safe space can lead to surprising results. It really doesn’t require much investment except the willingness to give it a go.

A few tips:

- Review the tried and tested and see if it’s still relevant for today
- Bring the outside in by looking at what other organisations have done
- Wear new lenses when viewing the passenger experience

And most importantly, make sure you don’t just ‘think’ about things – but try them out to see if they work. ‘Trial and success’ can be a winning formula. Who knows where the new pot of gold lies?

Leeds Bradford Airport (LBA) in the UK has a new boss, former London Luton and Newcastle airport board member, Hywel Rees. He joins LBA from AMP Capital, where he has been a senior member of the asset management team for around five years, with a focus on airports. He said: “I am delighted to join Leeds Bradford Airport and look forward to working with the team to grow the airport long-term and deliver a high-quality service experience.”

Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) has announced the retirement of chief operating officer, Samson Mengistu. Mengistu enjoyed a 30-year career with the City of Los Angeles, more than 25 of them at LAWA. He has served under four Los Angeles mayors, and numerous Airport Commissions and LAWA administrations.

Brisbane Airport Corporation (BAC) has announced changes to its executive leadership team with Martin Ryan taking up the leadership of the newly created Consumers Group as executive general manager. Following an organisational restructure that came into effect on April 1, 2019, the Consumers Group was created to better serve passengers and other visitors to Brisbane Airport.

Hong Kong International Airport operator, Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK), has welcomed three new board members – Stuart Thomson Gulliver, Dr Lo Wai-kwok and Thomas Jefferson Wu. All will serve three year terms.

Keith Ludeman is the new chairman of London Luton Airport (LLA). The former CEO of Go-Ahead Group Plc joins the UK’s fifth busiest airport ahead of the December 2018 completion of its £160 million transformation project.

Tulsa Airports Improvement Trust (TAIT) has made two new additions its executive leadership team after promoting Chuck Hammum to the role of chief operating officer and appointing Jonathan Gobbo as its new director of real estate.

“Chuck and Jonathan bring over 30 years of experience to our leadership team, and we could not be more excited for their fresh perspective,” said Alexis Higgins, CEO of Tulsa Airports.

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Anger management

Terri Morrissey and Richard Plenty provide their thoughts on dealing with difficult customers.

We travel a lot. Our experience is mixed. Most of the time our journeys go without incident, but there are times when adverse weather conditions, delayed and cancelled planes and long queues can make a simple trip less than a straightforward experience.

Sometimes, though, it isn’t the conditions at the airport but people’s reactions which turn a difficult situation into a nightmare. Recently we have both had the misfortune to have been on delayed flights with a number of disgruntled and aggressive passengers who seemed to believe they had the right to take their anger out on everyone around them.

Whilst we didn’t enjoy the experience, it must be even more difficult for frontline airport and airline employees. It’s all very well being taught that the customer is ‘always right’, the customer is king, that customer service is of the utmost importance – but this is not always easy to put into practice when faced with passengers behaving so badly.

What is it about airports that can sometimes bring out the worst in people? In an insightful article, ‘Helping to reduce fights before flights: How environmental stressors in organisations shape customer emotions and customer-employee interactions’, published in this spring’s edition (2019) of Personnel Psychology, DeCelles et al investigate this issue in depth. They distinguish between two key types of stressors:

- Physiological stressors – noise; babies crying; subjective temperature; subjective levels of crowding; numbers on passengers in the waiting area.
- Situational stressors – security line, gate, terminal layout, encouraging less alcohol consumption, addressing or removing stressful stimuli.

They found that situational stressors were related to customers experiencing fear (for example, fear of missing a flight), and that these fears could be amplified by the physiological stressors. In some situations, fear can then turn into anger.

Indeed, it can be very difficult and, sometimes dangerous, to deal with angry people. In order to express empathy, we need to be able to value the welfare of the other. Service employees who have to deal repeatedly with abusive behaviour can end up with emotional burnout.

Threatening and aggressive behaviour which causes us to feel anxious and fearful is less likely to encourage us to be helpful than responding to someone who appears to be anxious or fearful.

What can be done to improve the situation? Environmental factors can be addressed through well designed spatial layout, encouraging less alcohol consumption, communication and information.

Training can support employees to deal with irate passengers by working through different scenarios in advance and developing strategies for coping. Well-trained staff are able to understand better the differences between fear and anger and are more likely to adopt the most appropriate responses.

Organisational support is vital. Employees need to feel safe in their work environment. Knowing that there are sanctions on customer’s rudeness and aggression which will be acted upon can help reassure them in their work.

The customer may be king, but the customer isn’t always right.

About the authors

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Utopia or dystopia?

Terri Morrissey and Richard Plenty provide their thoughts on artificial intelligence and robots in the workplace.

This column is called ‘People Matters’ for a good reason. People remain the key element in organisational success, even in an increasingly technological world. As Mark Littlewood pointed out in The Times (September 8, 2019), ‘Robots are on the rise but never underestimate the human factor.’

Angela Epstein made a similar point when she wrote, also in The Times (September 17, 2019), ‘Human behaviour should be the focus of airport security.’

Both writers make the point that while technological advances can enhance workplace activities, especially high precision and drudgery work, the human being cannot (yet) be replaced by artificial intelligence in terms of human interaction, observation, creativity and sense-making.

And while progress is fast in developing automated diagnostic tools which may eventually be more reliable than professional experts, caring, touch and simple everyday tasks such as folding towels and plumping pillows are a long way off.

But with the speed of advance in automation and artificial intelligence, will this state of affairs continue? Should we be concerned that we will all be deskilled and unemployed (the ‘dystopian’ view), or should we welcome technology as a way of freeing us up for better things (a utopian perspective)?

We have a sense of déjà vu about this. We remember being told about the wonderful opportunities of e-mail which would free us of the need for paper, give us oodles of leisure time and free us to pursue more creative and leisurely pursuits. Yet, at the same time, dystopians (including many typists) were more concerned about losing their jobs.

The increasing use of robots is, ironically, bringing this debate back to life. Robots can alleviate routine mundane work; carry out dirty, dull and dangerous activities; go to places no human can go to; remotely detonate explosives; deliver parcels; take aerial photographs; scan suspicious items on security checks; load and unload heavy baggage.

These are all positive contributions to making the workplace potentially more human friendly, allowing the rest of us get on with the more creative and innovative jobs. Right?

The downside to this is that these very same helpers could turn into enemies: take over our jobs, rise up and ultimately destroy us. We come from a generation that avidly followed the BBC TV science-fiction series, Dr Who, where the dystopian view of robots prevailed, Daleks, whose only message was “Exterminate”, delivered in an hysterical high-pitched tone.

This is not just the stuff of science fiction. Some eminent writers, including Stephen Hawkins, have predicted artificial intelligence could become an existential threat to humankind.

So, should our view of the future be one based on optimism or pessimism? Should we hold a benign view of how technology can be used in the workplace or a malevolent view of how it can be manipulated?

Should we consider incorporating ethical and moral values into guidelines for development and usage as Japan, South Korea and China appear to be doing.

In our view, these are not simple ‘yes-no’ questions. Technology is neutral: it is how we use it that matters. Workplaces evolve. The nature of work changes. New skills and knowledge are required to shape as well as adapt to change.

The key is that we need to be in control and in the driving seat, ensuring that workplaces can be rewarding places for people. Otherwise this column may become ‘Robots Matters’ in years to come!
A hot topic

Terri Morrissey and Richard Plenty provide their thoughts on how changing attitudes to climate change might affect airports.

We felt privileged, honoured and trusted to be asked to facilitate the first Global Summit on Psychology and Climate Change, which took place in Lisbon, in mid-November, 2019.

The Summit was attended by 44 leaders of Psychological Associations around the world in order to review how psychologists can best address this urgent global challenge.

We were joined by the President of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who spoke inspirationally on how he saw the importance of psychology in this area. He felt that psychologists should have a key role to play in helping shape and change human attitudes, habits and behaviours to climate change.

"We must have a global response to this as there is not a single country that can address this subject alone," he said.

There were graphic presentations from different countries showing the impact of global warming, and reinforcing the urgency of the situation. A Resolution signed by participants publicly reinforced the importance of psychology in this area.

There are four levels of accreditation: the first three levels have been reached by 227 airports and the highest standard, level 4 (carbon neutral) is now achieved by 61. It's a small proportion of all the world’s airports, but a step in the right direction, and a good example of foresight and collaborative working.

What else could the aviation sector be doing? We see a number of possibilities:

• Extend the Airport Carbon Accreditation programme and further promote offsetting
• Research and promote new technologies that reduce emissions at source
• Give greater weight to environmental criteria in performance and risk evaluation
• Look for new ways of working to make the aviation sector as a whole more efficient and sustainable across the whole system — airports, airline, air traffic control, regulators and others — at all organisational levels.

Still, the sector is growing rapidly, and aviation CO₂ continues to grow as a proportion of total emissions. There is likely to be increasing political and social pressure to curb growth.

‘Flygsham’ (flight shame) is a new Swedish word for the environmental guilt some passengers feel when taking flights. Aviation’s "license to operate" and grow depends on taking the environment seriously. Flying could become less acceptable if environmental issues aren’t addressed comprehensively.

All of us have a part to play. People matter.
Rethinking performance

Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on performance benchmarking.

Arguably the world’s greatest sporting event, the Olympic Games, is due to take place again this summer when Japan hosts Tokyo 2020. The Games are a wonderful experience for spectators and participants alike. It is now almost eight years since we had the opportunity to see them in London in 2012 and enjoy the athletics, cycling, yachting and beach volleyball while marvelling at the dedication, persistence and grit of the competitors.

Thinking about London 2012 also made us wonder if there was anything we could learn about organisation and human performance from events like the Olympics. This might sound strange as obviously all the participants at the Olympics are elite committed performers at a world-class standard. However, it was the nature of the overall programme that struck us. There are clear winners and losers. Results and feedback are immediate.

There is direct competition in the context of agreed formats and rules: the fastest runner, the highest jumper, the quickest time. This is, of course, very different to much of life where many situations are not so clear cut and it can be difficult to know with certainty how well we are doing. Yet, knowing where we stand compared with others, gives us the opportunity to improve our performance and keeps us sharp.

How can we ensure high performance and best practice in the world of people performance at airports? In the absence of an ‘Airport Olympics’, to do this fully would mean putting into place an objective and transparent system comparing ‘like with like’ airports. This would need to consider:

- The games they play. Airports differ greatly in their size, location, geography and climate as well as the range of services they provide and the type of traffic they deal with. They may have different strategic objectives and definitions of success.
- The rules they follow. Airports may be public or privately owned, with different views on how closely to follow regulations or acceptable standards of service. They may keep all their services in-house or outsource.
- The measures they adopt. For example, there are few standardised measures for assessing people and organisation performance.

It is no surprise then, that, in practice, ‘external benchmarking’ and measuring productivity at the airport level can seem so daunting that many airports give up and focus inwardly on their own performance over time.

This is unfortunate. While trend analysis provides some level of performance tracking it does not allow for meaningful benchmarking, league tables or comparisons between airports to be made.

Focusing on specific areas and understanding, in depth, the details of how performance is measured elsewhere can provide a better starting point and a practical route to improvement. Mutually agreed shared criteria can be developed to make comparisons more meaningful.

Having said all this, people are more than numbers and generate value through a combination of intellectual contribution, skills, relationships, attitudes and behaviours. Qualitative as well as quantitative measures can enrich the exchange through conversations, visits, case studies and exchanges.

Time for a rethink!

About the authors
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Resilience in crisis

Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey provide their thoughts on adversity and crisis management.

The COVID-19 crisis has profound implications which require global, collective and personal responses.

We live in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, and when we hit a crisis like this it can test us all to the limit. Can we learn from previous crises or are we in uncharted territory? What strategies should we adopt? How do we cope?

Remember there’s a light at the end of the tunnel
Crises don’t last forever, although it can feel like that at the time. An inspiring vision, mission and sense of purpose – which everyone can buy into – becomes really important. In the Brussels Airport terrorist incident of 2016, a determination that the airport would ‘come back stronger’ proved a very effective rallying cry. In the COVID-19 situation, we need to remind ourselves that there will be an end in sight, even if we can’t see it right now. We are all in this together.

Take personal responsibility and leadership
Quite often ‘natural’ leaders emerge, sometimes unexpectedly, in response to fast moving and rapidly changing local circumstances. We are seeing it already in local WhatsApp groups, online volunteering, supportive messaging and virtual ‘keeping in touch’.

Support others rather than behave selfishly
There is a human toll with emotional and physical exhaustion, fear, panic and anxiety are common responses. A combination of practical and psychological support is required, which is based on a strong evidence base. All of us need to think of how we personally behave: are we creating a positive spirit? Are we supporting the vulnerable? Are we being kind? Are we using our emotional intelligence? The evidence is that a positive proactive approach to helping others makes us feel better, too.

Prioritise communication
In a world of social media and 24/7 news coverage, speculation and misinformation can swiftly fill any communications vacuum. As soon as relevant and accurate information emerges, it needs to be communicated. Delivering clear messages, which people understand in the way that is intended – and which they are prepared to act on – is very difficult to do. A balance must be struck between ‘rationality and humanity’, and care taken in how information is presented. Pictures of empty supermarket shelves, for example, can just reinforce the perception that no food is available and make the situation worse.

The social isolation that will be essential to get us through this period is a particular challenge. We can all play a part in making sure we keep in touch with others, only spread accurate information, keep our emotions in check and don’t get trapped into believing and spreading fake news.

Stay rational
Crises can lead to fear, anxiety and ultimately panic as we stop thinking rationally and instead react emotionally. This is rarely effective in uncertain and crisis situations where we do better if we keep our cool. If you feel yourself starting to become anxious, a useful way of trying to prevent this is to think ‘STOPP’ – Stop: pause for a moment; Take a breath; Observe how you are thinking and feeling; Pull back and put things in perspective; Proceed: Think before you act.

Pay attention to our own wellbeing
It’s really important to take care of our wellbeing, particularly if we are isolated for long periods. Ways to do this include keeping physically active and rationing our intake of information.

In times of crises we can become overwhelmed by the volume of information that we receive. Listening to the news non-stop not only takes up an enormous amount of time that could be spent on more useful activity but also can make people feel depressed and anxious. This is especially so if the news is distressing and there is nothing that they can do about it. On the other hand, shutting out all information is not sensible either. Better to filter news so as to keep up to date and aware but not get overloaded. Control the things that you can control.

Keep the big picture in mind
Airports connect the world physically. In times of crisis, we need to connect in mind and spirit as well as body. Global collaboration, sharing information and resources, being open and transparent, working together, and taking a whole world view are all vitally important at the same time as paying attention to our local situation. There is much we can learn from others if we are prepared to take a step back, listen to the evidence, and are prepared to change our minds when necessary.

About the authors
Dr Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey are managing director and chair, respectively of This Is…and deliver ACI World’s Airport Human Resources training. Their new book, Uncertainty Rules? Making Uncertainty Work for You is out now and can viewed at https://b2L.bz/Rhjcc7

AIRPORT WORLD/ISSUE 2, 2020
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