

FLIGHT DISPATCH- THE ‘HEART OF THE AIRLINE’

The importance of flight dispatchers has been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. As airlines navigate changing travel restrictions, political mayhem, weather disruptions and the resurgence in passenger and cargo demand, flight dispatchers are essential in determining which flights are still viable and safe to operate. They also work to minimize the risk of exposure for both passengers and crew.

There is a significant amount of ‘backroom’ activity that occurs at an Operations Control Center (OCC); usually during the 3-4 hours prior flight departure in flight/route preparation. This is followed by the Dispatch Release and once airborne, flight safety is supported by exercising the Operational Control function.



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Dispatchers work closely with pilots, air traffic controllers, and other airline personnel to make sure that every flight is operating smoothly. They ‘synthesize’ a multitude of flight safety-related data and software and weather forecasting tools to make informed decisions about 4D flight routings and plan fuel loads in ensuring that each flight is as safe and efficient as possible., Large volumes of diverse data need to be absorbed and technology tools

are used by Dispatchers, where a plethora of data is synthesized to create information in order to make it useful for aeronautical decision-making. As my esteemed colleague D.H. Porter has so aptly put it,

“Dispatchers are purveyors of information...they take it in, rack and stack it, and make decisions with it”.

THE ‘OODA LOOP’

Dispatchers inherently have to be self-starters. They also have to work in collaboration with each other. In working together within a Operational Control environment, they follow a work flow process called an OODA loop. The OODA loop is a decision-making process commonly used in military strategy and adapted to various fields, including aviation. It stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. In the context of flight dispatchers, the loop begins with observing and gathering information related to weather, aircraft performance, airport conditions, and airspace restrictions. Then, the dispatcher must orient themselves and evaluate the impact of the information on the flight plan, including factors such as fuel requirements, payload, and route selection. Based on this evaluation, the dispatcher must decide on the safest and most economic route, and then act by filing the flight plan, issuing a release, and exercising operational control. The OODA loop is a continuous process that requires ongoing observation, evaluation, and decision-making to ensure the safe and efficient operation of flights.

O= Observe. Gather and validate a variety of MET, Performance, MEL, Airport & Airspace, Airport, Air Traffic Management information

O=Orient- Evaluate the impact on a given flight in terms of minimum fuel requirements, minimas, alternate selection, route reserves, payload etc.

D=Decide – On the safest and economic route

A=Act – File the Flight Plan, Issue a Release, Flight Follow and exercise Operational Control.

ICAO STANDARDS & INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that develops international standards and recommended practices (SARPs) for the safe and efficient operation of aircraft. Annex 6 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation outlines the minimum standards for the operation of aircraft and the responsibilities of Flight Dispatchers.

The SARPs developed by ICAO are not legally binding, but member States are required to implement them through their own national regulations. This means that member States are responsible for ensuring that their airlines comply with the SARPs contained in Annex 6, including the requirements for Flight Dispatchers.

Airlines typically develop their own internal policies and procedures based on the SARPs contained in Annex 6, as well as any additional requirements imposed by their national regulations. These policies and procedures are used to set up Dispatcher roles, functions, and responsibilities within the airline.



UNDERSTANDING ANNEX 6 REQUIREMENTS

Overall, ICAO Annex 6 provides a framework for the operation of aircraft and the responsibilities of Flight Dispatchers, which member States are required to implement through their own national regulations. Airlines use these regulations to set up their Dispatcher roles, functions, and responsibilities, and ensure that they comply with international safety standards.

ICAO Annex 6 contains international standards and recommended practices related to the operation of aircraft. In particular, it provides guidance on the responsibilities and duties of Flight Dispatchers, who are responsible for planning and monitoring flights to ensure they are conducted safely and efficiently. Annex 6 requires that Flight Dispatchers have appropriate training, experience, and qualifications to carry out their duties, and specifies the information they must provide to the pilot-in-command during flight planning and monitoring. The document is relevant to the definition, designation, and role of Flight Dispatchers, as it provides a framework for their duties, responsibilities, and qualifications in the context of international aviation regulations.

DUTIES OF A DISPATCHER

Flight Dispatchers have a range of duties according to ICAO Annex 6.

- > Firstly, in normal flight operations, they assist the pilot in command with flight preparation, including assembling and filing the operational flight plan.
- > Secondly, when specified in the airline operations manual, the dispatcher is also responsible for providing inflight support for the safe conduct of the flight, which is commonly known as Operational Control.
- > Finally, Annex 6 requires that airline operations manuals provide clear and unambiguous procedures for Dispatchers to initiate emergency procedures and convey safety-related information.

To summarize, Flight Dispatchers are responsible for ensuring safe and efficient flight operations, from pre-flight planning to emergency response procedures, while adhering to the standards and recommended practices set out in Annex 6 of the ICAO. The ICAO Provisions are referenced by State Regulators in the promulgation of State AIPs. Airline operators in turn are regulated by States issuing their AOC's by means of Operations Specifications issue and providing such oversight through the promulgation of Airline Operations Manuals.

LICENSING

The ICAO Annex 6 defines a 'Flight Operations Officer/Flight Dispatcher' as a person designated by the operator to engage in the control and supervision of:

- a) flight operations, whether licensed or not,
- b) suitably qualified in accordance with Ann.1

The phrase "**whether licensed or not**" in the context of this SARP means that a person who is engaged in the control and supervision of flight operations may or may not hold a valid Dispatcher license. However, regardless of whether the person is licensed or not, they must be suitably qualified in accordance with Annex 1 of the ICAO.

This phrase recognizes that there may be situations where a person who is not licensed as a Flight Dispatcher may still perform some of the duties of a Dispatcher, such as flight planning and monitoring. For example, in some

smaller or regional airlines, the role of Flight Dispatcher may be combined with other operational duties, and the person performing these duties may not hold a specific Dispatcher license.

However, it is important to note that while the person may not hold a Dispatcher license, they must still meet the minimum qualification and training requirements specified in Annex 1. This is to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties safely and effectively.

CERTIFYING AS A FLIGHT DISPATCHER

To become a Flight Dispatcher, individuals must meet the qualifications and training requirements specified in Annex 6 and any additional requirements set by their national regulations. This typically includes completing an approved training program (conducted by approved Instructors) and passing a certification exam.

Once certified, Flight Dispatchers are responsible for planning and monitoring flights to ensure they are conducted safely and efficiently. They work closely with pilots to provide them with the necessary information for flight planning and monitoring, such as weather reports, fuel requirements, and other operational considerations.

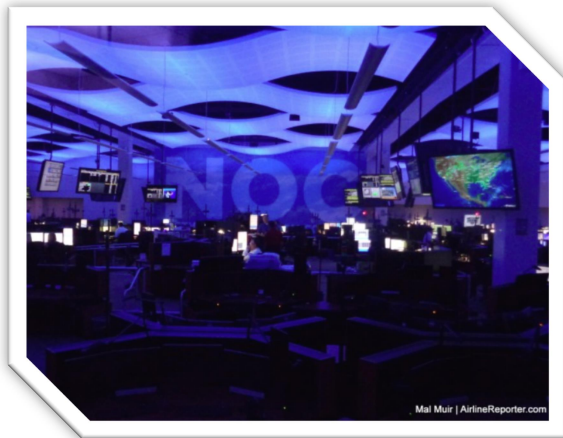
FLIGHT DISPATCH- THE HEART OF THE AIRLINE!

Despite the critical role they play, flight dispatchers are often overlooked in the aviation industry. Southwest Airlines, however, recognizes the importance of these unsung heroes.

Herb Kelleher, Co-founder of Southwest Airlines was a firm believer in the importance of flight dispatchers and the crucial role they played in the success of an airline. He knew that without them, the airline would not be able to operate safely and efficiently. He believed that the Network Operations Control" (NOC), where flight dispatchers get to work, was truly



the heart of the airline, as it was where every flight's route and operation were carefully planned and coordinated.



Kelleher famously referred to the NOC as the "heart of the airline," and it's not hard to see why. Flight dispatchers work tirelessly behind the scenes, making sure that every flight is planned and executed flawlessly. Without them, the airline would be like a body without a heart - not exactly a recipe for success! Dispatch and the NOC was a key part of Kelleher's leadership philosophy, and it is what led him to coin the phrase "heart of the airline."

Herb Kelleher's belief in the importance of the "heart of the airline" and his laser-focus on employee satisfaction helped

to create a company culture that prioritized the NOC for operational excellence and customer service. This leadership style has had a lasting impact on Southwest Airlines and the aviation industry as a whole.

FINAL THOUGHTS

But let's be real, flight dispatchers don't always get the recognition they deserve. They're like the unsung heroes of the airline industry, quietly ensuring that everything runs smoothly while often the front-liners get all the glory. Flight dispatchers truly are the heart of an airline. Their tireless work behind the scenes ensures that every flight is safe, efficient, and on time. As we continue to navigate the aftermath and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we should not forget the vital role that these unsung heroes play in keeping our skies safe.

So, next time you're flying, take a moment to appreciate the hard work of the flight dispatchers who made your trip possible. And if you happen to run into one, be sure to thank them for being the heart of the airline - just don't try to give them a hug, they're probably busy staring at a computer screen!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernard Gonsalves is passionate about Flight Dispatch and deeply involved with IFALDA (International Federation of Airline Dispatchers Associations), where he serves as the Director of Global ATM. Bernard is an accomplished aviation professional with over 35 years of experience in the aviation industry. He has worked with major global airlines including Air France, Singapore Airlines, and Emirates Airlines, managing diverse flight operations teams and programs related to airspace, fuel savings, environmental initiatives, and air traffic management. Bernard has also been involved in industry representation with organizations such as IATA and CANSO, and has worked on strategic global aviation planning programs in the US and Europe. Additionally, he has served on the ICAO Air Navigation Commission as Observer representing over 90 air traffic agencies worldwide and has supported Transport Canada with a policy for Enroute Airports. Bernard is also the Founder and CEO of fliteX, which was recognized by Boeing, HorizonX, and the Canadian Trade Commission as one of the top 10 AI/Technology companies in Canada in 2021. fliteX optimizes aviation emissions, flight costs, and revenue to benefit over 400 airlines and air traffic agencies worldwide, leveraging proprietary algorithms, big data and delivering savings insights through cloud-based processes.

