

# Storm in the Cockpit: Tales of Conflict and Clashes

Danger Club

7 February, 2023



We've said it before, and we'll say it again – the flight deck is a weird little world to work in. We lock ourselves into our button-filled booth, with one other person, and sit there for hours on end, putting ourselves through no end of challenging things.

**I am talking things like fatigue, boredom, stress and, yep, dealing with people.**

You're one, I'm one, they're one (*if they're not then you've got an even bigger problem*). Point is, we're all people, people can be challenging. and dealing with those challenges is a big part of our jobs. But we rarely talk about it. At least not in a very *human* way.

**Well that stops now!**

**We want to talk about human stuff.** The good, the bad and the ugly stuff that makes us human, and often 'not such ok' humans from time to time.

**We wrote a little book.**

**It's just 3 stories.** Tales of things that happened to pilots (to us!) where there was a storm brewing, a conflict growing, a nugget of irritation and anger flowering.

You can download the PDF [here](#).



We want pilots (people) to share *these* stories, because these are the experiences we can all learn from, think about, probably have happen to us.

So, if you have a story, share it – please – we will even add it in (anonymously if you prefer). Send it to [team@dangerrr.club](mailto:team@dangerrr.club)

### **A normal day at work, as a pilot, is often anything but normal.**

Just think about it for a moment – everything you do is monitored, you are strapped into a little box and expected to work away for hours on end, doing things where one little error can easily escalate, where one small slip can slide you into a catastrophe. And you can't step out if you feel off.

*You can't even step out to have a simple bathroom break with having to prioritise it, and awkwardly announce it to the other person.*

The airplane "office" is a strange spot to work in at the best of times, and then we add in a whole load of challenges that make living up to the 'ok pilot' standards even more difficult.

### **What are we talking about?**

All the things that make our little, puppy brains act even more strangely:

**Fatigue** – flying at crazy hours of the day and night, across timezones, and expecting our brains to go *"yeah, ok, I'm good with this! I don't need sleep."*

**Boredom** – yeah, I've said it. Sitting in the cruise in the middle of the night, monitoring monitoring *monitoring* can get tedious, and a bored brain can be a bad (or at least not as good as usual) brain.

**Stress** – The pilot job can be a tricky one. Things happen. Often they are things we don't like having happen, but we're the only two up there in that cockpit who can sort it.

**Random pressure** – it's all over the shop. At home, from the company, from the passengers, from inside your own little brain.

**And of course... People** – The behaviour, attitude, values, ideas, smell, sounds, *way they put a glove on to fly* all impacts how we act too.

Whether it's a **'Stranger Danger'** (working with someone you don't know at all, and maybe are struggling

to find any common ground with) to the '**Friendly Foe**' (flying with the same person you always fly with, who you know really, really well...), and all the others in between. They all have their challenges. People do weird stuff from time to time, but we never talk about how to deal with it.

**Not really.**

I mean *really talk* about how to deal with someone doing something weird, or how to spot it in yourself when you're getting cranky, grumpy, grouchy, slouchy, slack or mad or mean.

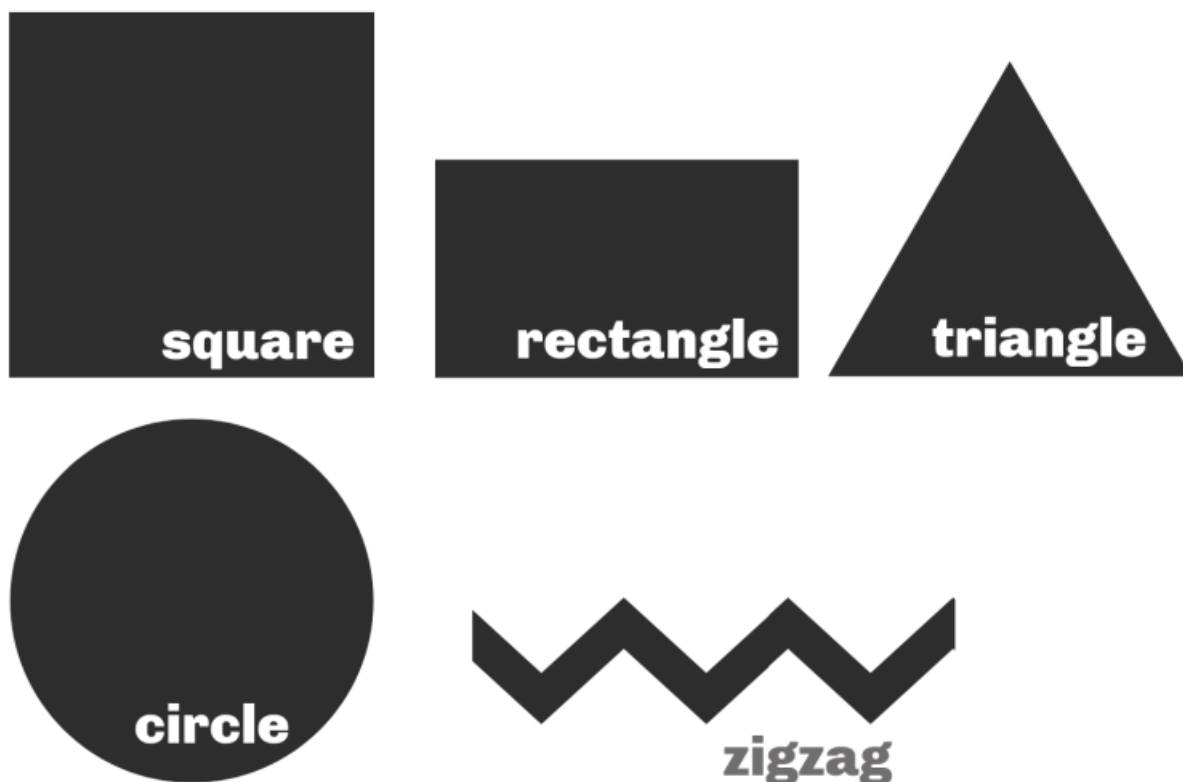
**So, we're here to talk about it.**

Now, before we do, let's have a quick chat on CRM courses. These are of course great.

*Sometimes.*

Especially the ones where you have to pick which shape appeals to you most. In fact, let's do it now quickly -

**Which shape appeals to you most?**



Pick one. Only one.

Right, so, whichever shape you have picked tells us ***so much*** about you as a person...

- **The square** is a tireless worker. Diligent, patient, methodical, neat, organised, logical. Predictable, rational, data driven.

- **The Rectangle** is a transitional shape which means this person is curious, inquisitiveness, adventurous, motivated. Always trying new things, always lively and interested.
- **The Triangle** is the shape that symbolises leadership. This person focuses on goals, analyses situations fast, is confident, thinks they're always right, assertive and argumentative. Their career gives their life meaning.
- **The Circle** is a harmonious person who loves good interpersonal relationships. They value people and wellbeing, are the glue that holds the team together. They have sympathy, and empathy, lots of emotional IQ and often super creative.
- **The Zigzag** is (not a shape!) but a symbol of creativity, imagery, conceptualism and aesthetics. They live for experience and reflection, new ideas and methods, possibilities rather than actual realisation.

I bet you fit perfectly into one, and not any others right?

**No? No! Of course you didn't!** Because we aren't defined by one shape and a couple of sentences about said shape.

We can change on a fairly daily basis (*or by the minute, if you're like me and particularly susceptible to things like hunger rage*). What's more, this does very little to actually help us establish how to work with a triangle if I'm a circle, or to deal with that flimsy whimsical zigzag while you, the square, are trying to get a basic job done.

**Human Factors has some answers though.**

They do indeed have *some*.

We have (thankfully) moved a long way from **simple symbols and SHELL models** to tell us what sort of errors and mistakes, biases and behaviours can cause concerns in the cockpit. We know about our non-tech competencies, we know about those hazardous attitudes. We know that a too steep cockpit gradient might lead to an unassertive FO not speaking up, and we even know that there is a risk of the too friendly flight deck and the risk of complacency.

The thing is, we read the reports, accident investigations, and we think about how *that crew crashed*.

But what we rarely talk about is the bits that lead to that. The off day, the slight challenge, the things we see and experience all the time which never lead to the big bad accident, but which could, one day, if we don't deal with it right. **The reason we don't is... well, why would we?** Unless you bring them up yourself then they aren't in an accident investigation report, they generally aren't covered in a CRM manual, because they just aren't big enough.

Which means we are never talking about us, each other, our experiences. **We assume we all know how to deal with them, because they are everyday human things.** But in the cockpit, in that locked chamber, these are what often amplify.

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# Safety used to be SEXY

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You know those Safety magazines I'm talking about, right?

The ones that sit in the corner of the crew room.

The ones that literally nobody reads, but might be useful to scribble on, kill a fly, or jam a window open.

These ones.



They all look the same, right?

What you probably **don't know**, is they are all the same because they are all put together in the same place.

This place.

This is Aviation Safety Publishing Ltd. They are in the south-east corner of the Croydon Business Park (between Wendy's and Push Pilates). Their Company Number is 2713662 and their VAT No. is GB444553891.

Each month, the creative team gets together in the "Lindbergh" conference room. There's free (drip) coffee and donuts (the dry supermarket ones). It's a good time.

**"Shall we do something different this month?"**, asks the intern. After a moment of silence and some side-eye, everyone has a good laugh and gets back to selecting the airplane type for the front covers. The meeting is wrapped up by eleven. Back to the desks.

It's been the same since 1990. That's when computers came along and ruined everything. Before that, pilots actually read safety magazines. Instead of "What airplane goes on the cover", the editors asked a different question: **"How can we make this engaging and actually get pilots to read this stuff"**?

That's weird, huh: in the old days, **the safety people cared whether or not pilots read it!**

They had (actual) creative meetings. They had artists, and cartoonists, and designers. They pushed boundaries. They weren't afraid to use humour, swear words, and satire. They weren't even afraid to make it **actually sexy!**





Now, chill. I'm not saying this is a perfect example. Stripes are very 1950's. But let's have a look at some of the artwork and artistry from the pre-1990 era of aviation safety!

That feels different, doesn't it?

Could it be, that if we are brave enough to **think differently** about safety, that we might get more pilots reading the very important messages that we want them to?

Here's the thing. If **safety is SEXY** (my byword for engaging, exciting, attention-grabbing, and attractive), then it cannot feel sterile, corporate, empty, and aloof. And these are the reasons I don't read the 2022 magazines.

But in the past, the whole vibe was different. It's light, it's easy, it's fun. When I read that "olden days" safety magazine, it makes me want to **participate**. I want to read the articles, enjoy the art, and get involved. I'll pass it along to a colleague. I'll leave it on the flight deck for the next person.

These days, the only reason I'd leave a safety magazine for the next person, is for that fly I didn't manage

to swat before we landed.

### Further reading

- A treasure trove of **old-time safety magazines**: Air Force Safety (but make sure to read the pre-1990 ones!)
  - A **trove** (minus the treasure) of present day ones featured in the image:
    - FAA Safety Briefing (June 2022, PDF)
    - Airbus Safety First (2013, PDF)
    - Vector – CAA NZ (Winter 2022, PDF)
    - RAF Air Clues (2021, PDF)
  - **Office pictures** are in fact from Steve Algren, view the story [here](#).
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## Danger Club is Back!

Danger Club

7 February, 2023



At the end of 2021, we ran 6 Danger Club meetings. The idea behind them? To start a new conversation on



safety **danger**.

We wanted to get people **talking about the humans in human factors** - to bring the discussion back to our own operations, to share insights and experiences, **to learn what we can be doing better**.

Because we are all just fallible humans figuring out where our faults may lie.

## **The Story so Far**

We don't want to talk about all the usual cases - The Tenerife disasters, the Kegworths. They were huge learning opportunities, but even after learning from them (at nearly every CRM session), **incidents are still happening, and we want to ask why?**

So we took a look at less known incidents and accidents, ones where the stuff that happened is stuff that could happen to any of us.



Join us for the next Danger Club



human.

Nothing technical, just

An autopilot disconnected too early and an approach not stabilised, a too steep cockpit gradient, or that day flying with your buddy where it is way too casual. . Times where one small error became two, and then became three, and suddenly wasn't so small because the crew just didn't 'get their head back in the game'.

Now We're Bringing it Back.

After a bit of delay due to many goings on at the start of 2022, we are now bringing Danger Club back. Our first meeting of 2022 will take place at **1800 UTC on Thursday March 24th**, and wherever you are in the world, come join us!

**11am LA, 2pm New York, 6pm UK, 7pm Berlin, 10pm Dubai, 7am (Wednesday) New Zealand...**

**What are we going to talk about?**

We want to stick with the 'theme' of looking at **non-fatal incidents and accidents**, and talking about the 'What ifs' that could potentially happen to us.

The first one is an interesting one because the main question we thought as we read to the end was simply "How?"

## **“How did it get that far?”**

How did a crew of a 737 end up having to carry out 7 approaches before finally managing to land? **Was there a point during their decision making process where this could have been avoided?** What was running through their heads as this progressed, and more importantly how can we all avoid making the same mistakes?

## **So put it in your diary!**

March 24th, 2022 at 1800 UTC

### **Danger Club #7: Thursday, Mar 24: 1400 ET / 1800 UTC**

11am LA, 2pm New York, 6pm UK, 7pm Berlin, 10pm Dubai, 7am (Wednesday) New Zealand...

*Incident: Jet Always B737: Lucky Number Seven*

## **And if you've not been to one before?**

Just come along and take part. We are all students in this and we all ask is you switch your camera on during the session, but how much you input is entirely up to you.

**Chris  
Shieff**

**Mark  
Zee**

**Bec  
Lougheed**

**Approach  
Number**

# SEVEN

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**Decision Making**

**Leadership**

**Teamwork**

**Communication**

**Knowledge**

**Workload Management**

**Situational Awareness**

**'A nerve-jangling thriller with a gut wrenching climax'**

**In movie theatres MARCH 24**

**11am LA, 2pm New York, 6pm London, 7pm Berlin, 7am Auckland**

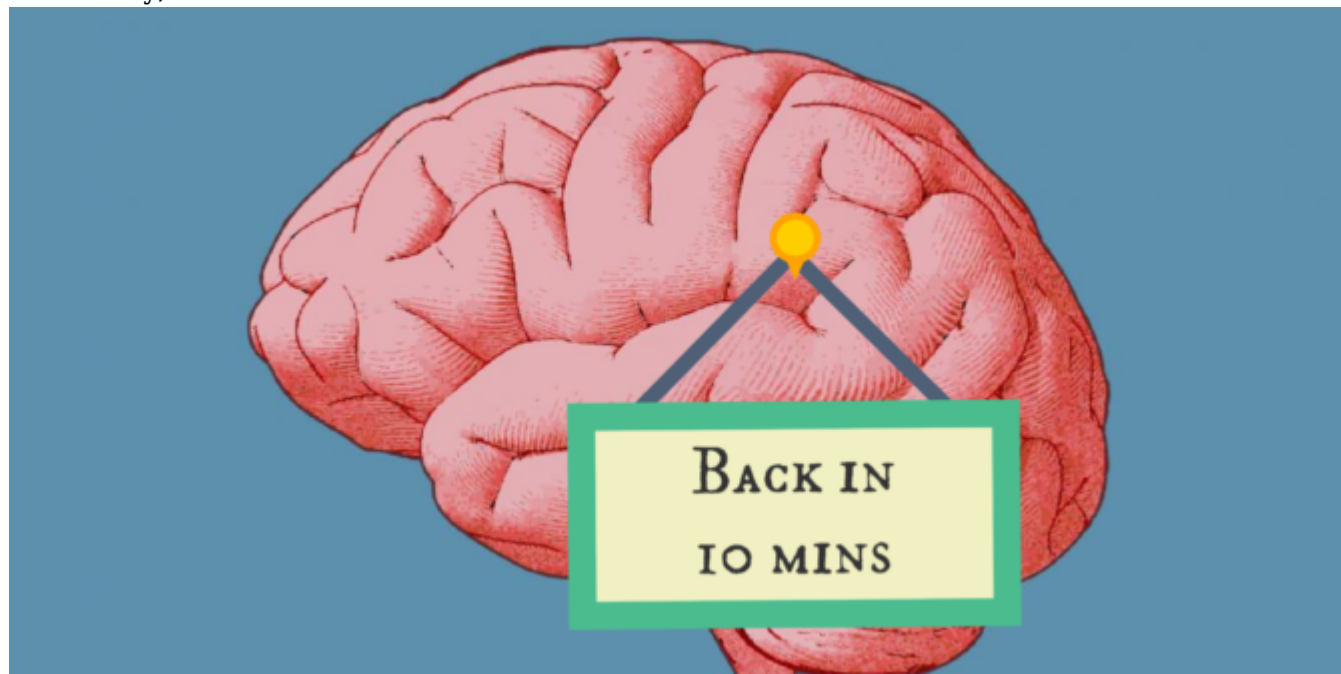


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# Getting Your Head Back in the Game

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In 2017, an Airbus 380 routing to UDD/Moscow Domodedovo had a serious incident attributed to *"Descent below Cleared Altitude during Approach and FS not reconfigured following a reset doing the Second Approach."*

What happened, in plain English (and minus 166 pages of report), was an aircraft carrying 422 passengers **descended to 395 feet AGL**, had an **EGPWS warning**, and then attempted a **second approach** which they went around from before finally landing without incident from the **third approach**.

Now, it might come as a surprise, but if we are going to talk about either of those approaches, then we actually should talk about the second one. Here's why...

## **(But before that) The Report**

A large number of the aforementioned 160 plus pages of this report discusses and analyses Airbus specific (and at times quite technical) factors involved in the second approach. Things to do with FMS sequencing, oscillations from mismatching position signals, FMC resets, multiple waypoints...

But if we sift through this technical stuff and really ask **what led an experienced crew, with a full functioning modern aircraft, into this situation** then the real root cause is simple.

## **Stress.**

Stress caused by what had happened earlier clouding their ability to do what needed to be done next.

## **We've all been there.**

We have all experienced a time where something has gone wrong and **our brain has refused to drop it**. Instead of getting to work, it's sat there reminding us what we just did, how silly it was, even when we've

tried to move on and **get our focus back on the current situation.**

You no doubt have your own examples – the first manoeuvre in a sim assessment that is so messy you spend the rest of the session dwelling on it, wondering if it was too messy to pass. The time you did something silly on the line and sat there stewing away with the “*why did I do that?!*” and the “*What an idiot I am!*” thoughts.

And out on the line, this dwelling on **what happened just now, instead of what is happening now now** is particularly critical because, as we know, a flight is a pretty dynamic beast, and it doesn’t stop at the mistake – it keeps moving on. If we don’t get with the program, then where it is going to move us to might very well be another equally or even tighter spot than the one we are still stewing over.

Now, us pilots are tough on ourselves, often our own worst critic. We are also quite detail-oriented which means if we allow our brain the freedom to, it tends to start throwing a few additional ingredients into that stew pot, until there is a nice bubbling hot soup of worry filled with self blame, bruised ego, concerns about repercussions and just a little fixation on hindsight.

But if we let this soup spill into the remainder of the flight, we can get burned very quickly. **So, how can we get our head back into the game?**

## **Time**

Yep, time is a wonderful thing. They say it heals all.

Alas, we don’t always have it, and if you don’t, then you’re going to need to do two things.

**One:** Take just a few moments to throw everything into the stew pot.

**Two:** Stop stirring it and put it aside until you do have the time to really sit and look at your reflection in the probably quite thick, dark gloop (ok, enough with the stew analogies, I promise).

You are going to have to wait until you can sit and reflect, dissect, digest. This does not mean disregarding it immediately though.

After a stressful or surprising event, it can take between **20-30 minutes for adrenalin levels to really drop** down to normal again. In the flight deck SOPs, memory items, all our years of practice are there to help bring those levels back to normal quickly. But you still need time to acknowledge something happened, and to regroup. While you may not have time for the full self-trial, you do need to **make time for your brain to get it together again.**

## **But how long do you need?**

That is very dependant on you and on the situation. A group of pilots were asked to give an estimate of how long they thought they’d need to reset and re-brief for a second approach following a “not their fault” event leading to a go-around. It wasn’t particularly scientific, there was a hypothetical pig involved, but for the most part the group seemed to feel **5-10 minutes was adequate.**

**This was a situation where they were not to blame though.** Throw in the embarrassment and concern about repercussions and the time to put all that aside may be much more.

## **Admit it, Move on.**

A key step in this seems to be simply **admitting something went wrong.** Acknowledging a mistake, out loud. Saying “*That happened, but now we need to do this...*” can be trigger to your brain to focus on that “now we need to” element which is so important to safety. It can also be the trigger to **bring the other**

**person back into the now** as well.

Without this, it is often hard to stop your brain from running through the events again and again, self-preservation kicking in as your brain *so thoughtfully* tries to find reasons, evidence, excuses as to why it wasn't really your fault.

## **We need to Rebuild**

In the A380 incident, this seems to have been what happened. Added to that was a likely loss of trust – in themselves or potentially in the aircraft – because there was not time to review and work out what had really happened. And this is the next thing you need to give yourself time to do – rebuild.

Just as we rebuild our automation after a wind shear event, or a TCAS RA, **we need to rebuild our own mental model of the situation** as well, and using a structured method – sticking to SOPs, ANC, what we know – will help reset your brain back into the 'now' far more quickly, and with far more useful context to keep you safe. By going back to basics, **starting simple with a good bit of ANC** and working up again, you can determine where to place your trust and then go from there.

## **The Process**

The process look simple:

- Give yourself time to take in what happened and to acknowledge it.
- Mentally put it aside until there is time to think on it again.
- Rebuild the situation and your own mental model, bring your brain back into the game.

But can we prepare for this even earlier?

## **Train to Fail**

We probably don't spend anywhere near as much time thinking about failing as we should. I mean, it's not nice to. Adding some Kobayashi Maru exercises into sim profiles probably isn't the way to go about it, but in fact **building resilience is something that can only really be done through practice.**

By resilience, we mean *that ability to bounce back. The capacity to recover from difficulties. Mental toughness.* Some of this can be prepared with briefings on mitigation strategies, threat and error managements and all that good stuff.

But the resilience to bounce back from a real unexpected, unprepared for event – **that only comes through actual experience** of those sort of situations.

**How can we train to fail in sims though?** And especially in the sort of scripted sims that are all many smaller operator pilots have exposure to?

## **The Element of Surprise**

Sim scenarios which involve an element of surprise are critical. It doesn't have to be something huge, but it does have to be something that actually tests the pilot's decision making, situational awareness and resilience skills. They also don't have to fail, but **they do have to experience that “not going to plan, what do you do now?” moment** where they need to reset their brain, rebuild their SA, and regroup with the other crew member.

**If Resilience is the key, how to build it is the question.**

The resilience to bounce back needs to be **developed, practiced and thought about**. And a process for doing it needs to be identified.

Resilience, or a lack of, is unfortunately what led the crew of the Moscow A380 into having to discontinue a second approach. While the factors leading to the first may seem so much more important to review because that first approach led to a so much more dangerous condition, the really critical Human Factor in this, and in so many experiences on the line, lies in the question of **“How can we get our head back in the game following an event?”**

Think you have an answer to this? We would love to hear it. You can reach us on [team@ops.group](mailto:team@ops.group).

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## **Danger Club .. the story so far**



What happens in Danger Club? Top secret of course, but very simple: we get together as pilots to talk about safety **danger**. This isn't the usual safety meeting (hence the strikethrough): we're just fallible humans figuring out where our faults may lie.

The first six meetings have been met with enthusiasm from all attending, and some really interesting discussions have resulted.

**Top topics so far:** *Taking control from the PF, finding your voice as the F/O, MAYDAY calls and emergencies, over-experienced captains, automation vs hand-flying, the risks of a too shallow cockpit, whether there is such a thing as too much experience, and the question of when do we become too comfortable with risk?*

It's been fun and fascinating. Bec wrote a great article on one of the topics after one of the sessions: Fighting for Control, and Chris wrote another one: Grandchildren of Magenta.

**OPSGROUP members** – keep an eye on the OPSGROUP forum for details of the next event!