Management briefing

4 ways to turn pilot staffing and training into a competitive advantage

Solve complex transition, vacation, and simulator planning challenges – optimally

WORKFORCE OPTIMIZATION
Leading airlines such as KLM are benefiting from next-generation cockpit crew planning systems. Here’s what the future holds.

Cockpit crew planning is a complex juggling act.

In our experience, many airlines are dropping the ball – and losing millions from their bottom line every year. Their planners can’t cope with:

- The pace of change created by fluctuating demand and economic uncertainty
- The fact that each transition also affects vacation planning and training capacity – and vice versa

Instead of creating transition plans that achieve your business goals, planners struggle just to avoid violating hundreds of rules and constraints.

There is a better way.

Read on to discover how to slash the time spent on transition planning, and minimize:

- Training costs and time
- Crew costs
- The number of new hires
- Violations of seniority rules
- Simulator shortages

When dealing with supposed shortages, planners tend to focus on solutions that minimize the number of transitions. This is a costly oversimplification.
Four ways

The approach described here is being implemented at KLM Royal Dutch Airlines to plan 700 pilot transitions, 8000 holiday awards, and 11,000 simulator slots each year.

Here, then, is what it will take to turn one of your most complex planning challenges into a powerful competitive advantage.

1. You have immediate feedback on how your transition plans affect business goals – even before those plans are implemented

Consider what happens when planners believe there is a shortage of pilots in a certain posting.

The first thing to note is that the notion of a shortage is often nothing more than a hunch about what’s operationally feasible.

Another mistake: When dealing with supposed shortages, planners often attempt to reduce crew costs by focusing on solutions that minimize the number of transitions.

This is a costly oversimplification.

The total cost of a transition depends on a variety of factors, such as:

• Whether pilots have been passed over
• Current and future postings
• Whether pilots can be teamed up for training
• The length of the required training program
• Simulator capacity and the availability of examiners and instructors

All these factors determine if a certain transition makes sense.

A good decision support system should help planners focus on your business goals without being distracted by the complexity surrounding the planning puzzle.

Such a system should:

• Propose ideal candidates for a posting, and when they should be moved
• Check all rules and constraints automatically
• Flag violations of rules, such as those that – relate to seniority and promotions – require pilots to remain in their posting for a certain length of time
• Provide real-time KPI feedback so planners can assess the quality of proposed plans before they are implemented

Focus on creating the best transition plan – not on the complex rules surrounding it.
2. You know exactly how each transition affects simulator and trainer capacity – instantly

Do your planners assess training capacity only after transitions have been planned?

This sub-optimal approach is surprisingly common.

Most planners are planning transitions in the dark: They lack real-time insight into whether the relevant simulators, instructors and examiners will be available.

This leads to time-consuming planning and re-planning as plans move back and forth between those planning transitions and those planning training.

An effective decision support system should give you immediate insight into:

- Simulator requirements and availability
- The number of instructors and examiners required, and when they will be available

These insights enable planners to:

- Tweak plans in response to immediate, accurate feedback
- Optimize the use of expensive resources
- Avoid the unnecessary costs that result from postponements or the need to hire additional training capacity

Make training requirements an integral part of your transition plans – not just an outcome of them.
3. There are no expensive surprises: You factor the impact of vacations and leave balances when making transition plans

Awarding vacations while taking all the relevant rules and regulations into account is a superhuman feat in itself.

When transitions enter the picture, there's a real risk of creating unintended consequences.

For example, pilots who transition to a new posting are entitled to take their vacations and leave entitlement with them. This can result in expensive manpower shortages in postings where all the available leave slots have already been allocated.

Planners should be equipped with the ability to:

- Visualize how best to match capacity with demand
- Incorporate all relevant rules and regulations easily
- Foresee how vacations and leave balances affect the feasibility of a proposed transition

Factor the consequences of vacations and leave balances in your transition plans.
4. You easily assess the financial and operational impact of changes to your fleet size and routes

Can you swiftly determine if a proposed change will:

- Lead to higher crew costs?
- Result in training capacity shortages?
- Affect the number of new hires required?
- Change the buffer capacity needed to cope with unplanned absences?

What-if scenarios help you explore various assumptions and gain immediate insight into their consequences. The key lies in being able to do this rapidly.

- Prepare for the future by considering various demand patterns and their impact on the cockpit crew plan.
  - If you suspect that certain routes will be closed, or that the fleet will be reduced or expanded, why wait for the decision to be taken? Scenarios help you anticipate what needs to happen.
  - If you believe that your premises may be flawed, why not run what-ifs to explore how your costs are affected by your assumptions?

- Offer prompt, informed feedback on flight demand proposals by the network planning department. Without this, network departments often settle on a demand scenario before its impact on your bottom line has been evaluated.
- Negotiate effectively with unions with fact-based insights into the consequences of changes to labor rules.

Explore the consequences of proposed changes with on-the-fly scenario planning.
4 WAYS TO TURN PILOT STAFFING AND TRAINING INTO A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Why juggle when you can master the complexities of pilot staffing and training and achieve your business goals? To find out more, contact us or visit www.quintiq.com.