

Ergonomics 2019: Three reasons why the Milan incident and the Germanwings accident are similar- Paola Tomasello- Giustino Fortunato University, Italy

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Abstract

On the 20th March, nearby Milan (Italy), Ousseynou Sy, an Autoguidovie bus driver, hijacked his bus with two groups of young students onboard. Thanks to the prompt Italian Police intervention, all passengers survived and nobody was severely injured, although it will take time to manage the post-traumatic stress effects.

Ousseynou declared he wanted to protest against the dramatic deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. The Italian Public Prosecutor stated that his action is an individual criminal initiative and cannot be categorised under the organised Islamic terrorism.

Someone may have recalled the Germanwings accident. Without prejudice to the differences, three analogies between the two events may be identified:

- On duty crime execution: there was evidence that Lubitz had suffered from a kind of hostility towards Germanwings/Lufthansa. It is still not clear why Sy decided to commit the sabotage while on duty, namely if there are any links between the protest and the willingness to strike back at Autoguidovie. Nevertheless, both Andreas and Ousseynou represented an insider threat for the transport organizations they were employed in. Current approaches only address the risk related to “external killers”, but what if the killer is already “inside the cockpit”?
- Lack of organizational controls of fitness-for-duty: there was evidence that Lubitz had undergone psychiatric treatment in the past. Similarly, Sy’s history includes two criminal records: temporary suspension of the driving license due to drink-driving and a prison term for children sexual abuse. How was it possible for Sy and Lubitz to keep the driving license despite these evidences?

- Premeditation: both Sy and Lubitz had been planning the disaster for a while, so their actions are the result of an intentional violation of safety rules and procedures, conceived to cause damage and potentially linked to the presence of a psychopathological disease. Is it possible to predict the social dangerousness level of a person suffering from psychopathology?

The Germanwings and Milan events introduce the issue of insider threats as a new safety risk for transport industry. What barriers can transport organizations build? The question is not trivial if we consider that incidents/ accidents due to insider threats are not “typical” incidents and accidents, because they break the natural assumption that drivers would do their best to ensure safety and also break up the natural relationship of mutual trust between passengers and drivers.

The recent European Regulation 1042/2018 establishes the requirements to mitigate the safety risk related to social dangerousness due to psychopathological issues of the cabin crew: psychodiagnostics assessment protocols and psychological support programs will be mandatory for airline companies soon. The Regulation intends to address the insider threat topic while hindering stigma and trivialization towards psychopathological disease, as well as delivering a message in which the safety of aviation operations corresponds to the health of professionals in charge of generating it. The author hopes that this direction will be followed up by the other transport domains and specified both at regulation and at praxis level.

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