Balance Between the Personal and Work Life of an Air Traffic Controller

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TOPIC
As I was looking into articles related to airport and entry level positions, I got more interested with the life and work of the air traffic controllers. My specific research topic is to find the balance between work and personal life of an air traffic controller.

LITERATURE REVIEW
All the three studies were written in Europe except for the article by Metzger and Parasuraman which reports on a German/US collaboration.

One of the articles shows how the air traffic controller’s competence is assessed for training. After the study, the researchers found that “…it is extremely difficult to assess the cognitive components of ATC performance” (Oprins, Burggraaf, and Weerdenburg 317). The second article shows the alertness and tension at the workplace for ATCs. “Comparisons revealed that when controllers started day duty they experienced high alertness and low tension, whereas they reported decreased alertness and higher subjective tension after several hours on duty” (Melan, Galy, and Cariou 402). These two points are important to the analysis of the personal life of an ATC. The mental strength of the ATCs are tested here which affects the physical state of the ATCs. This makes me wonder how do they relax and have a good time?

“Air traffic controllers reported more self-confidence to perform with the aid under high than under moderate traffic in the enhanced visual conditions” (Metzer and Parasuraman 358). This shows that the controllers will take help under high traffic flow so they have more eyes on the screens/runway and probably do not want the whole blame if something goes wrong. Questions arise about how the ATC’s self-confidence in personal life is affected by high risk situations; are they more stable or less stable with their personal life? Example, if they wanted to invest in the stock market, would they conduct their own research on the stock or ask experts?

“Disruptive Effective of Shift Work” (Melan, Galy, and Cariou 402) shows how the effect of not having breaks and having double eleven hour shifts does to the mind and body of the ATCs. I would like to know an opinion from an ATC about their work schedule.

REFERENCES


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RESEARCH METHODS
The methodology will include interviewing a small exploratory sample or purposive sample of air traffic controllers. The sample size is ten air traffic controllers. I would have some open ended questions and then ask some descriptive questions about the ATC’s work and personal life. First, I would collect the background information (name, age, gender, married and the level of education). Then ask the following questions:

- How does the typical work day start in the control tower?
- What is the best part of working in the tower? What is also the worst part?
- How well would you rate the communication within the tower?
- How well would you rate the communication with the pilot?
- How would you rate the tension in the tower during the dense traffic? 1 - low, 2 - medium, 3 - high
- How would you rate the alertness in the tower during the dense traffic? 1 - low, 2 - medium, 3 - high
- How would you rate the communication with the pilot?
- If a new equipment was introduced, how fast would you have to learn to use it?
- If you are married, do you have time to spend with your spouse and children?
- Finally, would you advise an young person to become an ATC? Why or why not?

These are the questions I would put forward and then after the ten interviews are over, find out how the answers varied from each other.