CHARTING CHANGE

Workers' Voices *in an* Automated World

An IAM Canada Report

SCREENING SERVICES

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I. INTRODUCTION

At the heart of our organization are our members, workers whose efforts, dedication and commitment to their jobs day in and day out sustains our economy, and builds our communities. The aerospace industry is one that is part of a highly competitive and technologically intensive business environment. Because of recent trends in this industry, and new pressures in the business environment, it was necessary to understand the impact technology could have on the industry and the future of work.

Our study was done using research methods that helped uncover trends through member experiences with automation, and more generally, technological change. Understanding automation from the perspective of our members will help our organization better represent members at the bargaining table, and advocate for policies and legislation that protect all working Canadians.

Information in this report is specific to skilled tradespeople working in the aerospace industry, the majority of which was gathered through focus groups with members.

Screening Services

This cohort of participants had the most even gender breakdown out of all the groups, with an even split of males and females. The group was also diverse in terms of age, educational backgrounds and ages. Participants noted that their jobs were repetitive and monotonous in terms of tasks, however, that their working environment was dynamic and challenging. Jobs of screening officers are much more controlled given that the jobs are regulated by the Canada Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA). Training is a regular component of work, especially when new methods and technologies are brought in.

Passenger levels are a major driver of changes to operations within airports, particularly, screening and security of passengers. External pressures like 9/11 and now COVID-19, play a role in the procedures that are

developed as part of screening and safety. Regulations and oversight from the federal government seems to have slowed the pace of automation, highlighting the importance of advocating for regulations that govern not just automation per se, but work procedures and policies, as well. De-skilling and routinization precedes full automation, which is why policies and procedures are especially important. All this forms part of the external environment that shapes the policies and procedures in the workplace.

All of the participants were unanimous in agreeing that in the last two decades, the workplace has significantly changed, and that there isn't an aspect of the job that hasn't been automated. It was clear to participants that employers are often testing ratios of screeners in certain positions in order to improve efficiency. However, workers on the ground are aware of problem areas that can be improved, but are never consulted. Participants gauged that in the next 2-7 years, many of their tasks could be fully automated.

In order to manage passenger flows, processes and automation are relied upon. Participants noted that with new technology in place, they felt the pressure to be, "faster, [and] more efficient."[100] Higher passenger levels have certainly resulted in more work, more throughput and a faster pace of work. This area of air transportation is highly susceptible to technological change, not just because tasks are repetitive, but also because of trends in air transportation. The pandemic has also placed pressures on airports and airlines to adapt to the pandemic reality and adopt contact-less methods.

Participants were aware of technological changes in their work environment, but didn't think that the job itself could be automated. Yet, facial recognition, biometrics, iris scanners, fingerprinting were all named as something that was part of the airport work environment. Unlike other workplaces, it is evident that AI type technologies are in the airport, although workers haven't been displaced.

The biggest change that was noted is remote screening. Officers are no longer near a screening line, instead they are in a room where images are reviewed on screens. This has led to a faster pace of screening for potential threats, and while it's been helpful for seasoned screeners, those with less experience struggle. The timeline screeners are

given to review an image is 15 seconds, which all participants stated added pressure and set a pace, which wasn't something they faced before. Much like in other workplaces, the pace is set by a machine making a noticeable difference in how quickly the work is done. Added pressure comes from formalized guidelines from the regulating body in CATSA.

Some checkpoints like CATSA+ are highly automated, and participants noted those lines operate with minimal staff. Body scanners have reduced the number of screeners required from two to now just one. "Wanding" of a passenger itself took 30-45 seconds, body scanning takes 4 seconds. The notion of "invisible tasks" came up in this group, too. Participants noticed that in areas where there's been a reduction of workers, those who are left take on remaining tasks that can't be automated.

Automated checkpoints have increased passenger to screener ratios of about 1:4, which has reduced their interactions with passengers. All of the participants in this cohort noted they enjoyed interacting with travelers, but had little time to do so, especially in peak periods. The NEXUS process, from the participant's point of view, wasn't considered an automated process, possibly because very few screeners work in that area.

A feature that is particular to these workers is the heightened surveillance while on the job. While surveillance stemming from new technologies is well documented, it's especially evident in the work of screening officers. This is not specific to IAMAW screeners, screening officers in the United States have noted the same experience, and that management uses tapes to search for the slightest infractions, like gum chewing, or unauthorized trips to the bathroom.[101] Regulator protocols, heavy presence of management, employee passes, camera surveillance, and monitoring of passenger processing are all ways in which workers are tracked. Participants noted that their work environment is, "surveillance to the max", and that every moment while on shift is tracked.

There's evidence to indicate that the more management watches employees, the harder they try to stay under the radar, "they try to never speak up, never stick out, do nothing that might get noticed management, leading to management growing more suspicious and feeling justified in ratcheting up

surveillance."[102] Studies of worker surveillance show that it increases stress, promotes worker alienation, lowers job satisfaction, with workers altering their behaviour to suit machines, which ultimately erodes their sense of agency.[103] In rare cases does surveillance improve productivity, so much so that it's unclear under which conditions it is useful and what the limits are.

It came across clearly that automation is not helpful in their job, but it has heightened tracking of employee productivity and compliance. On this issue, sentiments were strong, people felt that the employer, " wishes they could put GPS on us." Participants noted that it is not uncommon for supervisors to question workers about their activities during a break, whether it was a bathroom break, or whether someone took a call.

Guidelines to complete a task, like reviewing an image in 15 seconds is enforced through the machines they work on. During peak periods, in HBS (hold baggage screening system) workers are given as little as 10 seconds to analyze a bag. Failure to meet this deadline results in a review. Workers are on camera 24/7, footage which is reviewed by the regulator, CATSA, in addition to first level supervisors, CATSA personnel and at times, managers. Also, workers have passes they use to check in and out, meaning their break times, and movement around the workplace is highly controlled.

Participants also noted that the time it's taken to train screening officers has been reduced, and that the range of skills of new officers is eroded. There's some uncertainty over whether de-skilling is at play, but there is no confusion over substantial changes that have taken place, and that every aspect of the job is automated. While the job has always been repetitive, participants felt that now it's more so.

Common to both groups in airports is a continuously evolving workplace in terms of automation, an increasing pace of work, higher volumes, and less time to carry out the full range of duties. These participants also expressed that they don't believe their jobs could be automated, with the exception of checking boarding passes. They believe that human contact will continue being an important part of the travel experience.