SAFETY LEADERSHIP — A CRITICAL ENABLER TO THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF SMS IN AVIATION

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The Aviation Insurance Association (AIA) and the AIA Safety Committee strive to enhance safety education within the insurance segment. It's in all stakeholders' best interest to improve safety and reduce risk of injury, asset damage, environmental damage, or reputation damage. Embracing Safety Management Systems (SMS) is critical toward this end.

Since its successful introduction in the nuclear power industry, SMS has proven itself as a framework to deliver continuous improvement in safety performance. Airlines soon recognized the benefits that could be leveraged from effective SMS usage; early adopters saw reductions in occurrences leading to a decline in the overall aviation accident rate. Aviation regulators also realized the benefit of SMS and international standards followed. These are now firmly established within aviation.

Successive SMS refinements enable organizations to become better equipped to understand and mitigate systemic hazards including the impact of human performance on the operation. An effective SMS not only improves safety performance but also increases operational resilience. For example, robust risk assessments for operators with a mature SMS in place during COVID-19 were better placed to manage the significant challenges that emerged during the pandemic — including new hazards and risks — through a process that required continuous change management.

The benefits of a mature SMS are widely recognized and its successful implementation by airlines has provided the springboard to roll out SMS into other parts of the aviation industry. While SMS has been mandatory for Part 121 operators in the US for some time, SMS is voluntary for Part 135 operators. Extending regulations to Part 135 operators will require the same critical enablers to deliver the successful implementation of SMS across a wider section of the industry.

when no one is watching." Safety culture is not something you get or buy; it is something an organization acquires as an outcome of combined efforts.

Its essence is in what people believe about the importance of safety: knowing that an individual's peers, superiors and leaders believe that safety is more than a priority — it's a value of the organization. When an organization is positioned to deliver a continuously evolving positive safety
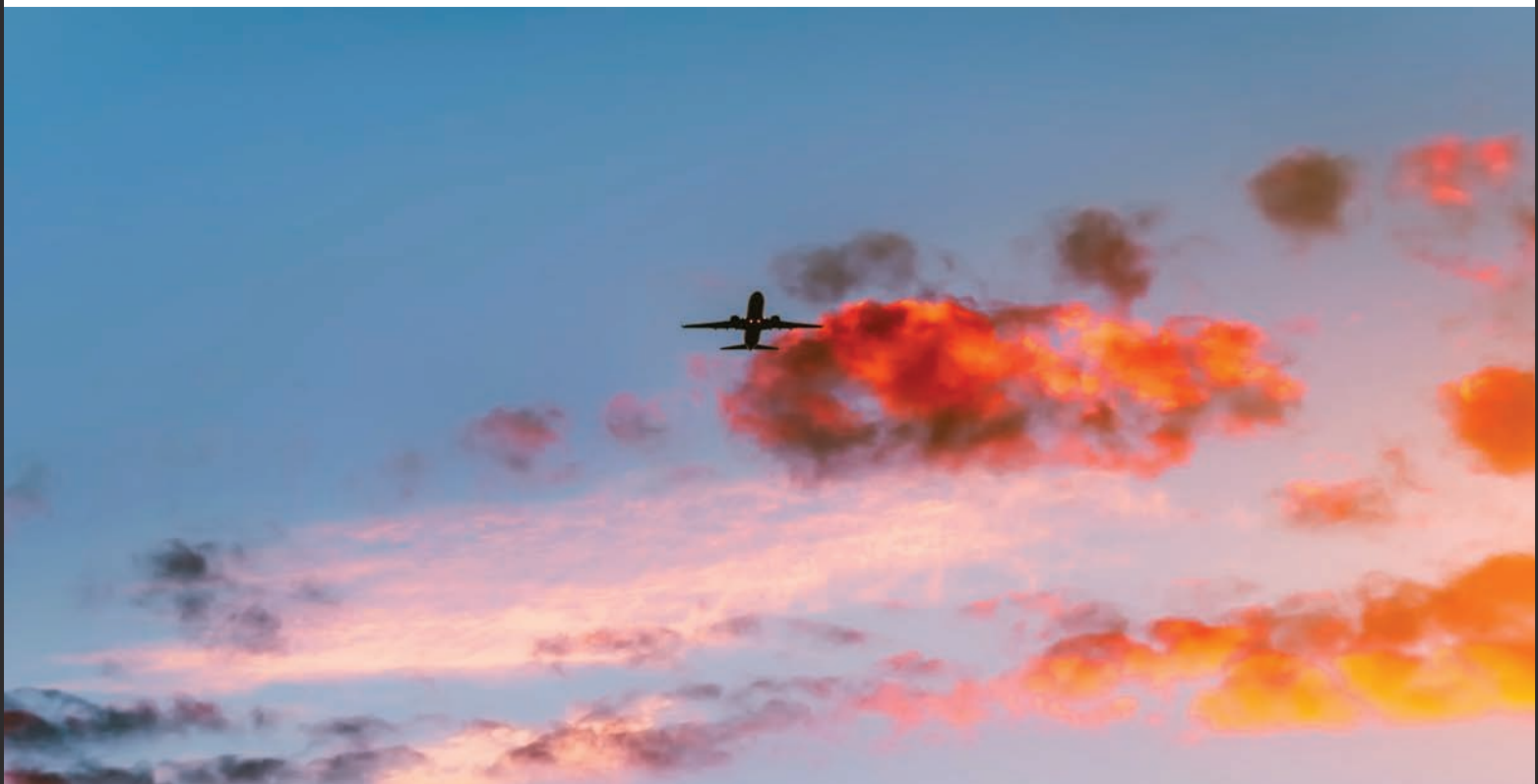
One, if not the most important, critical enabler for successful implementation is an effective organizational safety culture (i.e., the way that safety is perceived, valued and prioritized within an organization). It reflects the real commitment to safety at all levels in the organization and has been described as "how an organization behaves

culture, employees feel more engaged, safety conscious, and inclined to report safety observations and occurrences that they see. This in turn provides data and intelligence to further enhance the entity's SMS.

Safety leadership — an approach to positively impact safety behaviour and culture — is critical to deliver this success.

A strong organizational safety culture requires continual application of all employees at every level, but commitment from top executives is essential as leadership direction and actions cascade down the organization and influence the actions of all employees. Internalizing the importance of safety in employees develops deep shared values regarding safety, which is foundational to a positive safety culture.

The IATA Safety Leadership initiative is focused on the criticality of the CEO in setting the direction to deliver and continuously evolve an organizational safety culture. The IATA Safety Leadership Charter provides the principles developed by industry to assist CEOs in developing safety cultures. The IATA Safety Leadership initiative is collaborating with the AIA and the AIA Safety Committee to further enhance safety education within the insurance segment.

IATA SAFETY LEADERSHIP GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Lead obligation to safety through words and actions.
- Foster safety awareness with employees, the leadership team, and the board.
- Guide the integration of safety into business strategies, processes, and performance measures.
- Create an atmosphere of trust, where employees are encouraged and confident to report safety-related information.
- Establish a working environment in which clear expectations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors are communicated and understood.
- Create an environment where all employees feel responsibility for safety.
- Regularly assess and improve organizational Safety Culture.

The focus on safety leadership, and the continuous promotion of a non-punitive or "Just" culture within an organization, is probably more critical now than at any point over the past few decades. The COVID-19 pandemic saw many seasoned safety professionals with safety culture in their blood leave the industry. To fill the void and meet the needs for future industry expansion, significant recruitment across multiple domains is underway; this means attracting talent from outside aviation is vital.

It's essential that new entrants to aviation, whether individuals or organizations, understand the underlying value of safety leadership and safety culture in delivering continuous improvement to aviation safety and operational resilience.

The introduction of SMS provided a pivotal moment in the management of safety hazards and risks in aviation. The roll-out of SMS to other parts of the industry, if correctly implemented, will deliver further improvements in aviation safety. This continued and evolving focus will allow aviation to remain an "ultra-safe" industry focused on the continuous reduction in aviation accidents and fatality risk.

The result: passenger confidence continues and the industry thrives.

RESOURCES

IATA provide various tools and initiatives to support industry in implementing an effective SMS:

- IATA Safety Strategy
- IATA Safety Leadership Charter
- IATA Global Safety Risk Management Framework

As IATA Global Director – Safety, Mark Searle leads work to deliver continuous improvement in aviation safety. Mark previously led the UK CAA Safety Strategy team responsible for the safe integration of new, and evolutionary, technologies. He has twenty years experience as a commercial airline pilot. Mark was Chair of the British Airline Pilots Association and has held numerous Board positions within financial services.

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