

## **Sofema Aviation Services Leadership Webinar Presentation October 2025**

### **Introduction - 25 Aviation Leadership Best Practices Presented by Sofema Online (SOL)**

#### **What makes aviation leadership different from generic leadership?**

- Aviation leadership connects technical specifics with human systems—therefore leaders need regulatory awareness, operational understanding, and people skills to make credible, safe decisions.

#### **Why must leaders possess technical awareness?**

- Without grasping items like AD compliance, open findings, or system reliability, leaders risk poor decisions and performance shortfalls. Technical fluency underpins authority.

#### **How should leaders decide when commercial and safety pressures collide?**

- Use an explicit decision hierarchy: safety > compliance > reliability > schedule > cost, and document the rationale for trade-offs.

#### **What does “leading the interfaces” mean?**

- Most failures occur at seams—handover content, document versions, contractor boundaries, taking explicit responsibility for the handoffs between teams, systems, and suppliers so nothing is missed, reworked, or delayed.

#### **How can leaders build credibility with technical teams?**

- “Walk the hangar” and speak to the staff to understand their challenges. Credibility grows when leaders engage with real work constraints.

#### **How should leaders engage with regulators?**

- Demonstrate ownership of competence management, SMS, and human factors. Being able to explain embedded systems signals accountability.

#### **What are the must-have habits for cross-functional collaboration?**

- Anchor to a shared outcome, use Interface Control Documents for recurring workflows, and make debriefs routine, brief, and blame-free.

#### **How do I prevent KPI conflicts from undermining safety?**

- Set and enforce a clear decision order: Safety > Airworthiness/compliance > Operational continuity > Cost/OTP. Make it visible in every plan and review.

#### **What “leader standard work” helps stabilize operations?**

- Daily cross-team brief, end-of-shift debrief, weekly interface review, monthly skills/currency checks—consistency beats intensity.

**How do I turn experts into capability builders, not firefighters?**

- Provide time, ownership, and feedback loops aimed at prevention.

**How can mentoring scale beyond ad-hoc shadowing?**

- Structured pairings (4–6 weeks), specific competencies, protected time, 3-minute pre-task huddles, 5-minute debriefs, and rotation for breadth—captured in a simple log.

**How do we accelerate competence without compromising safety**

- Break each job into small skills. For every skill, move through clear steps: read about it → watch someone do it → try it with supervision → do it with backup on call → do it alone.

**What communication structure improves decisions under pressure?**

- Use a quick, fixed brief every time, consider situation → risks → options → your recommendation → what decision is needed and by when.

**What's the right way to manage stress and pressure from the top?**

- Translate goals into capacity-aware plans, create two operating speeds (normal vs surge), and protect training/rest as safety controls.

**How do we normalize early escalation and stop-work?**

- Give explicit triggers and authority to all roles; celebrate correct escalation—even when it hurts the plan—ensure visibility.

**What metrics show pressure is healthy, not toxic?**

- Leading: early escalations, fewer handover defects, training on plan, short explained overtime spikes. Lagging: less rework, fewer precursors, stable turnover.

**How do emerging leaders move from “doing” to “enabling”?**

- Redefine success (others' hands through stable processes), design interfaces, coach deliberately, and learn the financial ROI behind operations.

**What common traps should new aviation leaders avoid?**

- Trying to be the “hero” who fixes everything yourself.
- Believing a new tool or software will solve the real problems.
- Ignoring handovers and team boundaries where work often fails.
- Focusing only on KPIs and missing safety or context.
- Making decisions quietly without telling people or writing them down.
- Avoiding tough conversations and clear feedback.

**How can we protect knowledge as the workforce ages?**

- Make knowledge transfer a safety goal with a clear plan: what to capture, who owns it, deadlines, version control, and regular checks.
- Turn expert tips into simple tools: one-page job aids, hazard cue cards, decision trees, and “red-flag” checklists.
- Build habits that capture and share: short debrief notes, quick how-to videos, and structured handovers from seniors to juniors.

**What motivates mixed-generation teams?**

- Respect for craft and impact (seniors), growth and visible progress (juniors). Use dual career ladders and publicly celebrate improvements to standards/training assets.

**How do we measure if knowledge transfer works?**

- Track handover defects, time-to-isolate recurring faults, first-time fix rates on mentored tasks, mentoring hours vs protected, and update speed of documents post-review.

**What does a credible personal portfolio look like for staff in constrained environments?**

- Steady, verifiable outputs with standard terminology, clear improvement over time, and evidence of feedback—compiled in a clean, versioned folder/PDF.

**Which practical rituals increase psychological safety with accountability?**

- Two-challenge rule: Anyone can question a decision twice. If the concern remains, it must be escalated to a higher authority.
- Gratitude close in debriefs: End reviews by thanking someone for a specific action that improved safety or teamwork.
- Clear escalation ladder: Publish who to contact, for what issue, and how fast—so people know exactly how to raise concerns.
- Visible recognition of cross-team help: Call out and reward assists that reduced risk during briefs, dashboards, or newsletters.

**What does “good” look like at organizational scale?**

- Clean handovers, fewer surprises, earlier calm escalations, shorter meetings, proactive regulator engagement, and performance that holds when the leader is off shift.

## How do I lead cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary teams without losing safety or speed?

- Anchor everyone to a shared outcome (airworthiness assured, hazards controlled, schedule achieved through disciplined process), create a single operational language.
- Use short pre-task briefs and post-task debriefs to keep intent and interface risks explicit.

### Building Health & Safety (HSE) Competence into Aviation Leadership

**Introduction** - Aviation Leaders set the Cultural Tone. If leaders treat safety as “how we work,” people copy it. If leaders treat safety as a box to tick, people copy that too.

**Important Note** - Do not treat HSE and your core management activities as separate. Use your business knowledge to design simple, practical safety steps that people will actually use. That keeps operations safe, steady, and efficient.

### The Main Challenges

- **Competing goals:** Hitting deadlines and cutting costs can push people to take shortcuts.
- **Mixed messages:** One manager says “safety first,” another says “get it out the door.”
- **Silent risks:** People see hazards but stay quiet because they fear blame or think “not my job.”
- **Patchy skills:** New leaders know the rules but not how to apply them under time pressure.
- **Poor handovers:** Mistakes often happen at the joins—between teams, shifts, and contractors.
- **Paper vs practice:** Procedures exist, but everyday work drifts away from them.
- **Weak learning loop:** Incidents repeat because lessons aren’t captured or shared well.

### Best practices (what good looks like)

- **Make safety part of daily work,** not a separate thing. Ask about risk and controls in every planning meeting.
- **Use short, structured briefs and debriefs.** Before: “What are we doing? What could bite us? What will we do about it?” After: “What surprised us? What will we change tomorrow?”

- **Invite challenge.** Set a simple rule: if someone raises a safety concern twice, the task stops until a leader decides.
- **Standardize handovers** (what, who, when), keep one “source of truth” for documents, and publish clear escalation paths.
- **Recognise good behaviour**, not just bad outcomes. Praise people who slow down to check, who help another team, who report weak signals.
- **Keep controls visible.** Simple checklists, hazard cue cards, and “red flag” lists at the point of work.
- **Learn fast from small misses.** Treat near-miss reports like gold—review weekly, share one takeaway, and close the loop.
- **Lead by walking around.** Short floor walks with two questions: “What could go wrong here?” and “What do you need from me to make this safer?”

### Development methodologies (building competence)

What leaders are accountable for:

- Set direction: Safety is “how we work,” not a project. Write it down in 3 lines: what we value, what we will not accept, who decides what.
- Provide means: People get time, tools, and training to work safely. If not, work pauses.
- Check reality: What is written matches what is done. If not, fix the gap fast.
- Learn and improve: Small signals (near-miss, delay, rework) trigger action before harm.

### Core oversight moves (works in Ops, MX, Ground, Flight)

- One page per high-risk task: What can go wrong, key controls, who can stop work.
- Short, standard brief & debrief:  
Before: Task, biggest risk, control, who calls stop.  
After: What surprised us, what we’ll change tomorrow.
- Clear escalation ladder: If a concern is raised twice, stop and escalate—no penalties.
- Tidy interfaces: Standard handovers (what, who, when), single source of truth for documents.
- Visible controls: Checklists and “red flag” cues at the point of work, not hidden in a folder.
- Leaders in the field: Regular short walks: What could hurt us here? What do you need from me?

### Building competence

- Simple skill steps: Learn → Observe → Do (supervised) → Do (with standby) → Do (solo).  
Fast “what-if” drills: Situation → Risk → Options → Recommendation → Decision by when.

## **What leaders review**

- Daily (duty/shift): Top 3 risks today, one action owner, one check item.
- Weekly: One interface defect fixed; one near-miss closed with a lesson shared.
- Monthly: Time-to-competence trend, overdue actions burn-down, top repeat issues.
- Quarterly: Independent check that “paper = practice” on 2–3 high-risk activities.

## **Measures that matter (few, clear, cross-domain)**

### **Leading (before harm):**

- % shifts with brief/debrief done
- near-misses reported and closed on time
- Interface defects found/fixed
- Time-to-competence for key roles

### **Lagging (after harm):**

- Rework / delays linked to safety controls not used
- Tool/FOD, equipment damage, ground/ramp events
- Repeat findings from audits/occurrence reports

### **Behaviour check:**

- People felt safe to challenge
- Stop-work used when needed—and backed by leaders

## **The Role of Technical Knowledge in Aviation Leadership**

### **In aviation, leadership is always connected to Specific Competence.**

Aviation leadership is about connecting the technical with the human. Leaders who understand both the operational detail and the broader organisational picture are best placed to inspire teams, make sound decisions, and lead their organisations with credibility.

- Senior Managers are expected to combine regulatory awareness, operational understanding, and people skills to guide their organisations safely and effectively.
- Leadership here is not abstract; it is built on the ability to apply Specific and technical knowledge to real-world situations.

### **Day-to-Day Operations: Decisions That Matter**

Everyday operational choices depend on more than management instinct.

- For example, an Accountable Manager in a maintenance organisation is responsible for the team who certifies that an aircraft can be returned to service after a heavy check.
- Without understanding the full significance of open findings, AD compliance, or system reliability, the decision related risks may lead to a critical disconnect or shortfall in performance.
- A leader who grasps these details brings confidence and authority to the decision-making process.

### **Leading Cross-Functional Teams**

- Aviation organisations bring together specialists from engineering, operations, finance, and compliance.
- Each group sees challenges differently. When a leader understands the technical landscape, they can bridge these viewpoints.
- For instance, during discussions about extending maintenance intervals, technical knowledge helps explain to financial teams the potential cost savings, while also addressing safety concerns raised by engineers.
- This ability to connect disciplines encourages collaboration and trust.

### **Business Development: Seeing Beyond the Numbers**

- Commercial negotiations are not purely financial. A long-term maintenance contract might look profitable until you factor in “on-condition” components that lack performance monitoring. A technically aware leader recognises the operational risks hidden in the fine print and insists on including clear reliability measures. This foresight avoids disputes and protects the business from unexpected costs.

### **Credibility with Teams**

Leaders earn respect when they can speak the same language as their staff. A Maintenance Manager who can walk the hangar and discuss the realities of a structural repair—considering both downtime and fatigue impact—shows they understand the work. This kind of credibility strengthens motivation and reinforces professional standards across the team.

### **Accountability with Regulators**

Senior leaders are also judged by how they engage with oversight authorities. During an audit, being able to explain how competence management, SMS, or human factors are

embedded within the organisation shows both accountability and ownership. It signals that leadership is more than delegation; it is about taking responsibility for outcomes.

## **Developing as a Leader**

- Building leadership capability in aviation requires more than relying on natural ability. It means committing to continuous learning, reflecting on real-world examples, and steadily building cross-disciplinary awareness.
- Consider the Head of Flight Operations faced with schedule disruption.
  - Choosing whether to divert, cancel, or delay involves more than commercial impact it requires understanding crew duty limitations, alternates, aircraft performance margins, and passenger rights.
  - A leader who can weigh these factors quickly and clearly ensures safe and compliant outcomes while protecting the airline's reputation.
- Training programmes, mentoring opportunities, and structured development pathways — such as those provided through online learning — can support this journey by combining regulatory knowledge with leadership practice.

## **Key Qualities for Emerging Leaders in Today's Aviation Industry**

Aviation remains one of the most complex and fast-moving industries in the world. For emerging leaders, technical competence is important, but the real differentiator today lies in how you manage people, shape business processes, and engage across functions.

Emerging leaders in aviation should see their role not as direct overseers of technical detail, but as enablers of people and processes. The most critical skills are:

- People leadership that inspires trust and accountability.
- Process development that balances compliance with efficiency.
- Cross-functional engagement that breaks down silos and builds shared solutions.
- Business awareness that links operational actions to strategic outcomes.
- Change leadership that supports culture and guides organisations through uncertainty.

**Take Away** - Leadership is less about standing over the work and more about creating the environment in which people and processes can succeed.

**People-Centered Leadership** - Many new leaders slip into micromanagement, believing control equals safety. In reality, empowering staff with clear roles and accountability produces better outcomes.

**Why it matters:** Aviation is a system of people as much as machines and regulations. Leaders who can motivate, guide, and support diverse teams will build stronger performance and resilience.

**How to build it:**

- Invest time in understanding what motivates your staff — career progression, recognition, or stability.
- Use open communication channels such as regular town-halls or cross-department “listening sessions.”
- Show consistency between words and actions; credibility builds trust.

**Example:** A Head of Ground Operations launches a mentoring programme pairing junior supervisors with experienced turnaround coordinators.

- The initiative boosts morale, reduces errors, and builds internal leadership capacity.

**Developing and Streamlining Business Processes** - Processes are often designed for compliance rather than usability. A leader must balance regulatory needs with practical efficiency.

**Why it matters:** Aviation organisations are heavily process-driven. Leaders who can simplify, standardise, and improve processes unlock both efficiency and safety.

**How to build it:**

- Map key workflows (e.g., disruption management, staff rostering, customer recovery) with the teams who use them.
- Look for unnecessary hand-offs, duplication, or unclear accountability.
- Apply a continuous improvement cycle: trial changes small-scale, measure impact, then roll out wider.

**Cross-Functional Engagement and Collaboration** - Aviation leaders must connect everyday actions to organisational goals. Understanding how safety, efficiency, and profitability interact enables better decisions.

**Why it matters:** No area of aviation works in isolation. Leaders who can engage with finance, safety, operations, and commercial teams add enormous value by breaking down silos.

**How to build it:**

- Establish cross-functional working groups for recurring challenges (e.g., winter operations or irregular operations recovery).
- Share business context with teams — explain why finance cares about fuel uplift margins or why operations resist aggressive schedules.
- Practice “translation”: make technical issues understandable to non-technical colleagues, and vice versa.

**Building Business Awareness and Strategic Thinking** - Emerging leaders may remain locked in their own domain. To progress, they must look outward and appreciate the wider commercial and strategic context.

**Best Practices**

- Learn key business metrics: cost per flight hour, disruption cost per passenger, ancillary revenue contribution.
- Always link process or people improvements back to business impact.
- Take part in strategic planning sessions to see how long-term direction shapes today’s priorities.

**Change Leadership and Culture Building** - Resistance to change is normal. Leaders who treat resistance as feedback rather than defiance succeed in embedding sustainable improvements.

**Why it matters:** Aviation is evolving — new technology, sustainability targets, cybersecurity, and shifting customer expectations. Leaders must guide people through change while safeguarding culture.

**How to build it:**

- Communicate the *why* behind every change, not just the *what*.

- Pilot changes in one area, collect feedback, and adapt before wider rollout.
- Celebrate small wins to maintain momentum.

## Navigating a Career in Aviation Engineering

Aviation attracts people from all walks of life. Some follow the traditional pathway into licensed engineering (EASA Part-66, FAA A&P, etc.), while others take on equally critical roles in production planning, logistics, or workshops

### Success in aviation follows the same important pattern:

- **Knowledge:** Build a foundation in regulations, systems, and safety culture.
- **Experience:** Seek out hands-on exposure — in the hangar, workshop, or logistics chain.
- **Process:** Improve workflows and reduce friction while maintaining compliance.
- **People:** Cultivate communication, leadership, and collaboration skills.
- **Mentorship:** Leverage guidance and networks to navigate an otherwise complex and demanding industry.
- licences do not exist for all roles nevertheless the responsibilities are just as vital.
  - In all cases success requires a mix of knowledge building, practical competence building, where possible hands-on understanding, together with process awareness, and strong mentorship.

### Building Credible Knowledge

The central challenge and goal is to build credibility through knowledge that can be applied in practice.

- Whether by completing recognised training and examinations while proving the ability to translate theory into real maintenance scenarios and managing airworthiness related tasks.
- Or focusing on developing strong technical awareness of frameworks like Part-M, Part-145, and SMS, combined with skills in human factors, quality, and production planning and supply chain management techniques to ensure decisions consistently support compliance.

## Developing Transferable Skills

- Whether pursuing licensed or non-licensed roles, success in aviation depends on more than technical expertise alone:
  - Licensed staff must complement their engineering skills with leadership, teamwork, and clear communication to ensure their authority is trusted.
  - While non-licensed professionals rely on strong organisational and analytical abilities to plan checks, forecast parts, and manage tooling with precision, effectively linking operations with the wider supply chain.

## Gaining Hands-On Experience

- Nothing replaces time in the hangar or on the line. Exposure to routine checks, troubleshooting, and defect rectification builds not just skill but confidence.
- “Hands-on” means shadowing operations and understanding how your work impacts the frontline.

**Process Awareness and Continuous Improvement** Aviation thrives on process. Leaders who can see bottlenecks, reduce errors, and make systems more user-friendly add tremendous value.

## Practical Considerations

- Understand end-to-end processes (e.g., from defect report to return-to-service, or from part request to installation).
- Be able to identify delays, duplicate steps, or unclear ownership.
- Consider how you would introduce improvements in a controlled way and measure impact.

## Mentorship and Networking

- Mentorship is the single most powerful accelerator for people entering aviation from non-traditional backgrounds. It provides guidance, context, and credibility.
- Be proactive, share your goals, and demonstrate commitment.
- Offer your own skills in return — IT, data analysis, or process management can enrich the mentor’s perspective too.

## Challenges to Consider

- The pathway may be long and demanding. Be aware of the risk of over focusing on technical authority allowing people skills to lag behind.

## **How to Recognise Development Opportunities When Training Access Is Severely Limited**

### **Sofema Aviation Services (SAS) considers challenges to maintain normal development in difficult environments**

In conflict-affected environments, traditional training pathways pause or collapse: schools close, exams are postponed, internet and electricity are unreliable, and access to aircraft, tooling, and supervisors is scarce.

**Guiding principles** - Progress depends on three disciplines:

- Learning the right things,
- Documenting that learning,
- Behaving safely and ethically.

### **Building a resilient knowledge base**

Construct a compact library (available offline) – Sofema currently provides a downloadable resource of over 600 documents - <https://sassofia.com/download-area/>

Prioritise public, foundational material:

- Aviation human factors and safety culture,
- Basic legislation overviews (how ICAO, EASA, FAA frameworks relate),
- Organise files carefully, keep versioned notes with dates, and back up to at least two devices.
- Where bandwidth allows, download once and study many times; where power is unreliable, print short reference sheets and personal crib-notes.

### **Documentation that builds credibility**

Treat documentation as a professional product. Maintain a continuing professional development log with dates, topics, objectives, and outcomes; archive photo evidence of practice activities with short captions;

- Write brief technical reflections explaining what went wrong, how you detected it, and what you changed.
- Compile these artefacts into a single, well-named portfolio folder or PDF.
- Include a skills matrix that maps your current confidence across domains and shows how you are addressing gaps.

- Add any external feedback, even brief comments from experienced technicians, to demonstrate peer review.

**Understanding Regulatory Pathways** - Stay oriented on how recognition works in your target market,

- Adopt strict personal safety rules for every practice activity;
- Avoid activities beyond your current level of competence.
- Ethical conduct protects people and preserves your long-term credibility.

**Staying connected to a professional community** - Professional isolation is a career risk.

- Use low-bandwidth channels to follow reputable maintenance organisations, MROs, and technical forums.
- Share concise learning updates so that peers can see your consistency.
- Ask for narrowly scoped feedback,
- Offer value in return by summarizing public technical talks or distilling complex topics into one-page explainers (usefulness attracts mentors).

**Preparing for eventual assessments** - Practice documentation clarity by rewriting procedures in your own words and then comparing them to authoritative texts.

- Identify two or three areas where you can demonstrate visible improvement over time; examiners and interviewers respond well to clear before-and-after evidence.

**Finding or creating micro-opportunities** - Look for remote or local micro-tasks that match your study:

- Digitising checklists,
- Cleaning document libraries,
- Short engagements can help bridge gaps until jobs return.

### **Funding, equipment, and resource acquisition**

Keep a one-page personal statement ready that explains your situation, your documented progress, and your goals;

- This may make it easier to request fee waivers, donated textbooks, or second-hand tools.

- When others are willing to help, be specific about what would unlock the next step.

**Personal resilience and time management** - Work in short, regular sessions and finish each with a concrete output.

- When power or connectivity appears, batch-download study materials and sync backups.
- Protect your health, sleep, and eyesight; these are professional assets.
- When interruptions occur, restart with a tiny task that produces an immediate artifact so momentum returns quickly.

### **Common pitfalls to avoid**

- Do not accumulate more PDFs than you can read.
- Do not misrepresent practice as certified experience.
- Do not risk injury by improvising unsafe setups.
- Do not isolate yourself; even minimal peer interaction improves judgement and motivation.
- Do not neglect writing—clear technical communication is as employable as hands-on skill.

### **What “good” looks like in this context**

- Good practice produces steady, verifiable outputs;
  - use standard terminology and structures;
  - demonstrate safety awareness and ethical judgement; and
  - show improvement over time with feedback loops.
- A lean but well-organized portfolio can persuade training providers and employers that you are serious, reliable, and ready to benefit from scarce opportunities when they arise.

## **Cross-Cultural, Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration in Aviation—Challenges & Best Practices**

Sofema Aviation Services (SAS) Considers key business communication best practices

**Introduction** Aviation work is inherently multi-disciplinary (operations, maintenance, engineering, ground services, security, safety, compliance, finance) and increasingly multicultural.

Most performance shortfalls including safety events typically occur at the interfaces:

- Where teams, shifts, disciplines, or contractors hand work to each other.
- Effective leaders ensure interfaces are managed so information, intent, and accountability are clearly communicated.
- Lead the seams, protect the people, and make it easy to do the right thing—every shift, every handover, every time.

## **Encouraging collaboration across multicultural, multi-disciplinary teams - Common Challenges**

- Different “safety languages.” Each discipline uses jargon, systems, and standards (ATA chapters, MEL/CDL, SMS/HF, reliability metrics, contracts). Meaning gets lost in translation.
- Cultural distance & hierarchy. High power-distance cultures can inhibit speaking up or escalating concerns; “face-saving” can hide uncertainty.
- Conflicting KPIs. On-time performance vs. maintenance depth, cost vs. redundancy, throughput vs. training—misaligned incentives fracture teamwork.
- Shift and handover risk. Rotating personnel, fatigue, and compressed handovers create knowledge gaps and rework.
- Siloed data & document sprawl. Multiple versions of procedures, drawings, and work orders; unclear “single source of truth.”
- Outsourcing/contractor interfaces. Differing standards, documentation norms, and accountability models across partners.
- Language proficiency & accents. Operational nuance can disappear, especially under time pressure or radio/phone quality.
- Blame-centric legacy. Historical “find the culprit” habits suppress learning, candor, and early hazard detection.

## **Leadership practices that work - Anchor everyone to a shared outcome.**

Frame goals as “airworthiness assured, hazards controlled, passengers and staff safe, asset value protected, and schedule achieved through disciplined process.” Repeat this “north star” until it becomes team shorthand.

- Create a single operational language and a shared picture.
- Define who hands what to whom, when, and in what form.
- Use simple *Interface Control Documents* (ICDs) for recurring cross-team workflows (e.g., MEL deferral coordination; parts no-go decisions; return-to-service gates). Require read-backs for critical handovers.

**Institutionalize briefings and debriefings** - Short, structured pre-task briefs (intent, hazards, roles, timebox) and post-task debriefs (what went as planned, surprises, fixes) build team memory.

- Make debriefs routine, blame-free, and time-boxed.
- Normalize “stop-work” and escalation. (Publish a visible escalation checklist granting stop-work authority to all roles.
- Keep safety-critical communications simple, short, and specific. Encourage “Say-Again/Repeat” and “Check my understanding” phrases.
- If KPIs clash, create a decision rule hierarchy (safety > compliance > reliability > schedule > cost), and make it part of every planning meeting.
- Track handover defects, rework due to interface error, late discovery of mismatched assumptions, and near-miss reports about cross-team issues.
- Review monthly. If you don’t measure the interfaces, they will own you.

Important Note - Apply the same briefs, handovers, document versions, and escalation rules to contractors and partners. Assign a single internal owner for each contractor interface with named deputies per shift.

**Build psychological safety** - Introduce a “two-challenge” rule (if a concern isn’t acknowledged, repeat once and then escalate) and a “gratitude close” in debriefs (call out one helpful cross-team action). Small rituals change behavior faster than posters.

## **Mistakes future aviation leaders should avoid early**

**Treating compliance as the destination.** - Compliance is the floor, not the ceiling. Leaders who equate “passed the audit” with “we are safe” miss weak signals and under-invest in learning.

**Hero culture and micromanagement.** - Solving everything personally creates bottlenecks and hides systemic fixes. Build processes and teams that succeed when you are off shift.

**Ignoring the interfaces** - Optimizing your own department while starving or surprising neighbors (ops, maintenance, ground, security, or finance) guarantees rework and conflict.

**KPI myopia.** Driving one metric (on-time, cost, utilization) without explicit trade-off rules breeds unsafe shortcuts and silent workarounds.

**Weak handovers and undocumented decisions.** If decisions aren't timed, recorded, and rationalized, they can't be defended to regulators or learned from by successors.

**Neglecting frontline voice.** - Failing to ask technicians, dispatchers, and load controllers what's fragile in the system loses the cheapest risk detection method you have.

**Over-reliance on tools, under-investment in clarity.** - New software won't fix unclear roles, version chaos, or missing decision rules. Solve who/what/when/where first; then digitize.

**Avoiding hard conversations.** - Tolerating incivility, poor documentation, or chronic non-conformance to "keep the peace" trades short-term comfort for long-term risk.

**Ethics and data discipline slippage.** - Cutting corners on training records, shift logs, or information security may look expedient; it permanently damages credibility and can escalate into legal or safety exposure.

**What "good" looks like.** - Agree on minimum content for verbal and written handovers: status, open risks,

You'll know collaboration is working when:

- Handover errors and rework decline; people escalate earlier and more calmly; decisions are easier to reconstruct; contractors operate like extensions of your teams; and post-event reviews surface learning rather than blame.
- You'll know your leadership is maturing when your area performs well without your direct intervention because interfaces, incentives, and rituals are doing the heavy lifting.

## **Bridging the Gap Between Aviation Technical Expertise and Leadership Skills**

Sofema Aviation Services (SAS) Looks at how emerging aviation professionals can move from doing the work to enabling the work

### **Introduction - Why This Transition is Uniquely Hard in Aviation**

Aviation rewards precision, evidence, and rule-following whereas leadership adds ambiguity, trade-offs, and people dynamics.

- The shift isn't from "junior to senior technician," it's from owning tasks to owning systems—processes, interfaces, people, risk, and time horizons.
- Many new leaders try to lead by being the best technician in the room; that stalls teams, weakens safety margins, and hides systemic issues.

### **Typical Challenges to be Met During the Transition from Doing to Managing**

- The first challenge is redefining success: output used to be your hands; now it's others' hands working through stable processes.
- Second, decisions move from "right/wrong by the manual" to balancing safety, compliance, reliability, schedule, and cost under pressure.
- Third, influence must cross silos—ops, maintenance, engineering, ground, safety, commercial, and suppliers—where incentives and vocabulary differ.
- Finally, the cadence changes: you must think ahead (seasonal, fleet, regulatory cycles) while still protecting today's operation.

### **Critical leadership Competencies which are Often Overlooked**

**Systems thinking and interface design.** Great leaders fix the seams—handover quality, contractor alignment, version control of documents—not just local tasks.

**Decision framing** Making trade-offs explicit (safety > compliance > reliability > schedule > cost), documenting why, and escalating early protects people and credibility.

**Coaching and feedback that builds competence.** Moving from "I'll do it" to "I'll grow you to do it" with clear standards, practice, and timely, specific feedback.

**Financial literacy for maintainers and operators.** Understanding unit cost drivers and the ROI of safety and reliability actions.

**Change and risk leadership.** Running after-action reviews, harvesting weak signals, and converting lessons into procedure, training, and dashboards so the organization learns, not just the individual.

**Information governance.** Version control, record integrity, and cyber hygiene are leadership duties; sloppy data erodes safety and trust.

**Time-horizon management.** Protecting the day of ops while shaping the next quarter (training, manpower, tooling, vendor performance).

**Psychological safety with accountability.** People must raise concerns without fear and still meet standards. Leaders set that tension correctly.

### **Mistakes to avoid early**

**Staying the hero technician.** You become the bottleneck and kill succession. Delegate, standardize, and audit.

**Managing by slogans or tools.** Culture posters and new software don't fix unclear roles, messy handovers, or KPI conflicts. Design the work first; then digitize.

**Ignoring the interfaces.** Optimizing your department while surprising neighbors guarantees rework and friction.

**KPI tunnel vision.** Driving on-time or cost without explicit safety/compliance guardrails pushes unsafe shortcuts underground.

**Silent decisions.** If it isn't written—owner, rationale, due date—it can't be defended or improved.

**Avoiding hard conversations.** Tolerating poor documentation, chronic lateness, or incivility trades short-term comfort for long-term risk.

**Neglecting the pipeline.** No 1:1s, no cross-training, no back-ups—then you're trapped on duty forever.

### **A practical playbook for the first steps**

**Redefine "how we decide."** Publish a one-page decision hierarchy and use it in planning, daily briefs, and post-ops reviews.

**Install leader standard work.** Daily cross-team brief, end-of-shift debrief, weekly interface review, monthly skills check (training, currency, supervision). Consistency beats intensity.

**Make documentation a product.** One repository, versioned procedures, named owners, expiry dates on old docs, and visible change logs.

**Run short, respectful 1:1s.** Purpose: clarity of expectations, removal of blockers, and coaching on one capability per week.

**Build your financial lens.** Sit with finance or planning; learn cost drivers, contract terms, and how maintenance and ops decisions show up on P&L and reliability metrics.

**Practice calm communications.** Replace long technical monologues with a predictable structure: situation → risk → options → recommendation → decision needed by when.

**Reward cross-team help.** Publicly recognize actions that protected another team's safety or schedule; what you reward pays dividends in return.

### **What “good” looks like**

- Handovers get cleaner, surprises drop, and rework declines.
- People escalate earlier and more calmly; meetings shorten because roles, rules, and data are clear.
- Regulators and partners hear from you before they need to ask.
- Your team performs well when you are off shift because interfaces, incentives, and routines—not heroics—carry the load (That's the moment you've crossed from expert operator to effective leader.)

### **Troubling Times Ahead - Aging Workforce & Knowledge Transfer in Aviation**

Steve Bentley FRAeS CEO of Sofema Aviation Services discusses the challenge of maintaining safety, quality, and strong and effective engagement as more experienced employees retire

### **Where we are in 2025 - The core problem to solve**

Aviation organizations today are relying on a shrinking pool of highly experienced technicians, engineers, and Operational Controllers, many of whom are nearing retirement.

The risk faced today is twofold:

- Silent loss of know-how (the judgement you only get for example after several thousands of hours on task), and
- Uneven performance as less-experienced staff shoulder complex tasks too soon.

Leaders must convert personal expertise into organizational capability, keep retirees engaged without creating single-points-of-failure, and accelerate the growth of younger colleagues—without compromising safety or compliance.

## **Typical challenges leaders should expect**

First, we know that much know-how is not written down. It includes simple fault-finding tips, small warning signs, and the unwritten rules—like when not to use an MEL deferral, or how to read a vendor manual that is unclear.

Second, workloads and shift patterns often challenge mentoring opportunities; senior people become firefighters trying to cope with skill dilution and overall workload.

Third, sometimes incentives misalign where aging employees may feel used for “hard jobs only,” while juniors feel stuck on repetitive tasks with little progression.

Fourth, documentation systems can become messy with weak ownership

- Means even when knowledge exists, people often cannot find the current, correct instruction.

Finally, cultural friction appear with subject matter experts dismissing new digital tools at the same time younger staff may undervalue legacy wisdom.

- If unaddressed, this mix erodes psychological safety and drives errors into handovers and interfaces.

**Leadership approach – How to Address** - Consider knowledge transfer as a safety objective, not an HR nicety.

- Treat it like any other controlled process: scoped, scheduled, versioned, and audited.
- Define what must be taught (role-critical tasks and interfaces), who teaches it (named mentors with time protected), how learning is evidenced (Task performed under observation, or scenario outcomes reviewed), and where knowledge lives (a single, version-controlled repository).
- Explicitly state the order of priorities—safety, compliance, reliability, schedule, then cost—so speed pressures never trump training discipline.

## **Converting know-how into teachable assets**

Short expert captures - Meet a senior colleague and record key points (names and identifiers redacted).

- Ask simple questions:
  - “What makes you stop and look again?”
  - “What went wrong on this task before?”
  - “What do you always check—even if the procedure doesn’t ask?”

Turn notes into simple job aids

- One-page checklists (do/verify/record).
- Hazard cue cards (what to watch for, immediate actions).
- Decision trees (yes/no steps to isolate faults).
- “Red-flag” lists (signs to halt or escalate).
- Link each aid to the relevant ATA chapter or task code.

## **Mentoring that actually scales**

Build a repeatable system that protects time, defines outcomes.

Structured pairings

- Assign each junior to a named mentor for a fixed period (e.g., 4–6 weeks).
- Define 2–4 competencies per cycle (e.g., torque discipline, MEL logic, ATA 24 basic troubleshooting).
- Block protected mentoring time in the roster for both parties.

Before the task: 3–minute huddle

- Intent: what success looks like today.
- Hazards: top risks and escalation triggers.
- Plan: who does what; where the current data/procedure lives.

After the task: 5–minute debrief

- Junior: “what surprised me,” “what I’d do next time.”
- Mentor: one reinforcement, one improvement.
- Capture a short note (Mentor [REDACTED] / Date / Task Ref / Version 1.0) in the approved library.

Rotation for breadth

- Rotate pairings every 6 weeks to expose juniors to different styles, aircraft, and systems.
- Keep a simple exposure log (systems/ATA chapters touched).

## **Accelerating competence without compromising safety**

Use a modular competence framework that lists observable skills (from basic tooling and documentation to advanced troubleshooting).

- For each skill, set a simple learning path: read → observe → do under supervision → do with remote standby → do independently.
- Define the evidence needed at each step (e.g., checklist signed, photo/notes, mentor observation).
- Practice on low-risk setups (rigs, mock-ups, scrap units, sims) and add short scenarios that force safe trade-offs under time pressure.
- Teach juniors a standard decision brief—situation, risk, options, recommendation—so mentors can judge thinking, not just outcomes.

**Optimize the Use of Subject Matter Experts (SME)** - Identify SME's as “capability builders” rather than “firefighters.”

- Create rosters that allocate part of their hours to capture, coaching, and standard improvement, not only to AOG recoveries.
- Give them ownership of two or three high-leverage assets—such as a troubleshooting playbook for a chronic system, an IPC/use-of-data workshop, or a recurring cross-team interface review—and recognize those contributions publicly.
- Pair each retiree with a junior “shadow author” who co-writes job aids and runs refreshers; this builds succession and reduces single-point risk.

### **Culture: psychological safety with standards**

Encourage “two-challenge then escalate” behaviors so juniors can question respectfully and seniors expect it.

### **Motivation that works for both generations**

Older Staff tend to value respect for craft, meaningful impact, and flexible work; juniors value growth, recognition, and visible progress.

- Build recognition around these known factors.
- Celebrate improvements to a standard or training asset with the same energy you celebrate on-time performance.
- Offer dual career ladders so technical mastery and people leadership are both valid routes.
- Give juniors rapid, visible wins and acknowledge SME contributions that reduced risk or taught a hard lesson well.

### **Measuring whether transfer is working**

- Look for leading indicators: fewer handover defects, shorter time-to-isolate recurring faults, improved first-time fix rates on mentored tasks, and increased use of the current job aids.
- Track mentoring throughput (hours scheduled vs. protected, competencies signed off) and audit whether lessons from post-event reviews are converted into updated documents within set timelines.

### **Avoiding common pitfalls**

- Do not treat knowledge capture as a one-off project; make it a standing routine.
- Do not overload SME's with urgent tasks that crowd out mentoring.
- Do not assign juniors to repetitive low-value work without a visible progression plan.

### **What good looks like**

In a healthy knowledge-transfer system, senior expertise is visible in short, current aids that people actually use;

- Juniors progress from supervised to independent work with well-evidenced competence;
- SME's feel respected as teachers and standard-setters, not just emergency muscle;
- Safety reviews discuss learning and fixes more than blame.
- Handover defects fall, troubleshooting becomes faster and calmer, and documentation improves because the people who do the work co-own it.
- That is how organizations preserve craft while renewing capability—keeping safety, quality, and engagement high as the workforce ages.

### **Managing Stress and Pressure from the Top—While Balancing Company Goals and Individual Well-Being**

#### **Why this is hard in aviation**

Aviation is deadline-dense, risk-intolerant, and highly regulated. Targets (safety, compliance, reliability, schedule, cost) collide daily with real constraints (manpower, parts, weather, ATC, airport curfews, AOG events). Pressure naturally flows downhill: executives set outcomes, middle leaders translate them, frontline teams absorb them. If

leaders don't manage this translation carefully, stress turns into shortcuts, silence, and errors. The goal is **productive pressure** (clarity, focus, urgency) without **toxic pressure** (fear, confusion, overload).

### **Major challenges leaders must anticipate**

**Ambiguity at the top meets scarcity below.** High-level goals lack the detail needed for safe execution when time, tools, or skills are thin.

**Conflicting KPIs.** On-time performance, cost control, and customer promises can undermine maintenance depth, training time, or documentation quality.

**Cascade distortion.** Each layer adds tasks without removing others; "everything is priority" becomes no priority.

**Hidden work and quiet overload.** Rework, after-hours admin, and unplanned troubleshooting are invisible in dashboards but heavy in human cost.

**Fear of escalation.** Teams under pressure under-report risk to "protect the plan." Weak signals are lost until they bite.

**One-speed culture.** The organization applies the same urgency to routine and abnormal operations, exhausting people and increasing error rates.

**Uneven leaders.** Some managers "squeeze" people rather than systems: they push hours harder instead of fixing interfaces, planning, or vendor performance.

**Incentive misalignment.** Bonuses and praise tied only to schedule or cost crowd out the safety/compliance mindset everyone says they value.

### **Best practices that make pressure productive**

#### **1) Make trade-offs explicit and consistent**

Publish a simple decision hierarchy—**safety > compliance > reliability > schedule > cost**—and use it in every planning and review. When targets clash, show your work: state the risk, options, and rationale. This builds trust and teaches judgment.

#### **2) Translate goals into capacity-aware plans**

Turn "improve OTP by 5%" into named work with owners, start/finish, and the **load shed** required to make space. If you add a program (e.g., reliability blitz), remove or defer something else. Pressure without capacity equals burnout.

#### **3) Engineer the interfaces, not just the individuals**

Most stress comes from **seams** (handover defects, version confusion, parts delays). Fix the system: one source of truth for procedures, clear handover content, read-backs for critical tasks, and a visible escalation ladder. People relax when the process holds under stress.

#### **4) Create two operating speeds**

Define a normal operating cadence (predictable briefs, debriefs, and standards) and a surge cadence (shorter cycles, tighter comms, more frequent risk reviews). Declare when you are in surge and when you exit it. Constant surge is failure of planning.

#### **5) Protect training, currency, and rest as safety controls**

Schedule training and rest into the plan, not around it. Treat them as barriers in your risk model. If you must borrow time from training to recover an AOG, record the debt and pay it back on a fixed date.

#### **6) Use short, high-quality communication loops**

Run brief pre-task huddles (intent, hazards, roles, timebox) and tight end-of-shift debriefs (what changed, what worked, what failed, who needs to know). This surfaces weak signals early and reduces rumination stress.

#### **7) Normalize early escalation and “stop-work”**

Give every role explicit stop-work authority for defined triggers (unclear data, tool out-of-cal, fatigue, environmental risk). Celebrate proper escalation—even if it hurts the day’s plan—so people believe the hierarchy.

#### **8) Reward the right behaviors**

Recognize actions that **reduced risk, protected another team, or improved a standard**, not just heroic recoveries. Reputations shape behavior under pressure faster than memos.

#### **9) Make workload visible and adjustable**

Use simple visual queues (work-in-progress limits, on-call rosters, overtime caps). When a limit is breached, leaders decide: add resources, delay scope, or change the plan. Don’t silently push the pain to the floor.

#### **10) Keep personal well-being practical, not performative**

Offer actionable supports: predictable rosters, protected breaks, quiet rooms for post-incident decompression, rapid access to peer support, and short “reset” briefings after high-stress events. Small, reliable practices beat large, rare initiatives.

## **Balancing company objectives with individual benefits**

### **Align objectives with role meaning**

Connect each target to the **why**: safer returns to service, fewer night call-outs, less rework, higher asset health. People accept stretch when they see the benefit to **their** work life and to safety.

### **Personalize development without favoritism**

Use transparent competence matrices and progression paths. Agree two growth objectives per person per quarter tied to actual work (e.g., specific ATA systems, MEL decision practice, or documenting a new job aid). Development becomes a benefit, not an extra burden.

### **Build choice and control where possible**

Offer input on shift preferences, cross-training options, and project assignments. Small amounts of control buffer stress and increase commitment.

### **Share gains and shield pain**

When teams beat a target without compromising safety and quality, return time (early finishes, training credits) or budget (tools, amenities) to the people who did the work. When plans slip, leaders absorb public heat; teams get coaching, not blame.

## **Practical leader actions for the next 60–90 days**

**Clarify the north star.** Write and circulate the decision hierarchy; open each planning meeting by restating it.

**Run an interface review.** Pick one fragile handover per week; fix one defect at a time

(owner, due date, proof).

**Install a surge protocol.** Define entry/exit criteria, roles, and comms for abnormal ops; rehearse on a small event.

**Start a load-shed habit.** For any new ask, identify something to drop or delay—and publish the change so stakeholders learn the cost of new work.

**Introduce pulse checks.** Two questions every fortnight: “What pressure feels unsafe or unmanageable?” “What one system change would help?” Close the loop publicly.

**Protect decompression.** After high-stress events, run a 10-minute structured debrief and release people from non-critical admin that day.

## Metrics that tell you if pressure is healthy

Leading indicators: early escalations increase then stabilize; fewer handover defects; training completion stays on plan; overtime spikes are short and explained; sick leave doesn't creep. Lagging indicators: rework trends down; incident precursors (near misses, documentation errors) fall; staff turnover stabilizes; regulator findings shift from “basic” to “systemic improvement.”

## Common mistakes to avoid

**Slogans instead of systems.** “People first” without load shedding or rest protection is noise.

**Punishing escalation.** If messengers get blamed, stress goes underground and risk rises.

**KPI tunnel vision.** Driving OTP or cost without visible safety/compliance guardrails creates silent non-compliance.

**Permanent crisis mode.** Never exiting surge normalizes corner-cutting and erodes trust.

**Delegating only tasks, not authority.** People feel squeezed and powerless; quality drops.

## What “good” looks like

Targets are clear, trade-offs are explained, and the plan matches real capacity. People escalate early, debrief candidly, and still leave shift with gas in the tank. Training and rest are protected, not optional. Handover defects fall, incident precursors decline, and

morale surveys cite **clarity, fairness, and voice**. That is productive pressure—where company objectives are met because individuals are respected, skilled, and sustainably engaged.

### **Nest Steps - Sofema Online's Aviation Leadership & Management Skills**

**Development Diploma** is a comprehensive, self-paced program built from 16 certificate courses designed to elevate current and aspiring senior leaders in aviation.

- The pathway develops core capabilities across leadership fundamentals, body language and public speaking, communication and assertiveness, mentoring, team building, facilitating effective meetings, performance coaching, measuring training ROI, Six Sigma awareness, operational excellence, marketing basics, negotiating skills, and strategic persuasion.
- Together, these modules strengthen decision-making, stakeholder influence, and day-to-day management effectiveness in regulated aviation environments.
- The diploma is particularly suited to Accountable Managers, Nominated Postholders, and department leads seeking structured, practical upskilling with clear, course-by-course certification along the way.
- Delivery is fully online for flexible completion

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