



Leaving Failure as an Option

I read with great interest the article discussing SMS by William Voss (ASW, 5/12, p. 1), and the letter by Jeff Whitman (ASW, 6/12, p. 8), and I have to agree with both of them on their assessments. However, I want to add some thoughts on the role of innovation in framing the future of SMS.

The definition of innovation is “a new idea, device, or method, or “the act or process of introducing new ideas, devices, or methods.” It has been my observation that most innovation does not come from government or academia, and, in fact, they often suppress creativity. Many of the initiatives passed through academia and the government are led by individuals who don’t want to challenge the status quo. Additionally, we in the aviation community tend to be “rule followers,” which makes us mostly compliant. This is a good thing, but I’m not sure that it lends itself to innovation and creative thinking (at least in my case). That said, I believe that any progress in SMS in the business aviation community will come from the rank-and-file operators such as maintenance technicians, flight attendants, pilots and schedulers who have a vibrant SMS in place and who see a real need for improvement.

For innovation to occur in SMS, we must leave failure as an option. Innovators use their failures to learn and

improve their processes. We also need an avenue to share both our failures and our successes with each other. The many safety round tables that have grown up around the country are excellent conduits for the exchange of ideas and creative thinking. Last, we should consider bringing in individuals from our companies who have no background in aviation, and allow them to serve as “interpreters” to look at our SMSs. You might be surprised at the insights that they bring to the table. They may view the world from a different paradigm.

The French were very close to beating the Wright brothers in the development of the first airplane. However, the paradigm that the Europeans were using was that of a “coach” design for an aircraft. In other words, they believed that the airplane would fly on two axes, yaw and pitch. The paradigm that the Wright brothers were basing their design on was that they had been riding and building bicycles most of their lives, and as such they were very comfortable with leaning into the turn, i.e., roll. The *Wright Flyer* was therefore designed with three axes, yaw, pitch and roll. The rest is history.

SMS is already improving safety. It will continue to evolve as innovative flight departments develop their own creative ways to address SMS and challenge the paradigms in place. There will be some failures as well as some

successes along the way, and I suspect that ASW and gentlemen like Mr. Voss and Mr. Whitman who care about business aviation and safety will be there to articulate the processes and help improve aviation safety on a global scale. For the time being, those of us on the front line of business aviation must be willing to experiment with our SMSs, and to pass along our results to our colleagues in the field. When this happens we will see real improvements in SMS. Thank you.

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