

The Changing Role of the Senior Person

Some characteristics sought by the CAA in a Senior Person remain constant – experience, knowledge, and integrity among them. SMS means a Senior Person will also need to demonstrate a proactive and energetic approach to safety.

There's a new Senior Person role – that with special responsibility for Safety Management Systems.

The role will incorporate some of those associated with the era of internal quality assurance, such as overseeing an audit programme and management reviews. But the focus of the position will be overseeing the organisation's Safety Management System, including proactively identifying hazards and ensuring their associated risks are controlled.

"The sort of person we're looking for," says Mark Hughes, CAA's Deputy Director Air Transport and Airworthiness, "will have a sound understanding of safety management, including finding aviation safety hazards, mitigating risks, safety performance, and monitoring and measurement.

"It differs from quality assurance in that with QA, one person was the go-to for safety, and the various line managers would say, 'You assess my part of the organisation, you tell me what's wrong and how to fix it'."

But, Mark says, a fundamental of SMS is that everyone is responsible for applying it in their particular area.

"In a Part 119 air operation, for instance, you have a chief executive, then a Senior Person for flight and ground operations, a Senior Person for training and competency assessment, one for security, and one for investigating occurrences.

"All those Senior Persons have to have knowledge of SMS, and promote associated safety behaviours within their area. The Senior Person responsible for Safety Management Systems then makes sure the overall SMS 'machinery' is working."

Resourcing

In assessing the suitability of a candidate to be a Senior Person, of any hue, the CAA examines the time the individual will have available for the role.

"People often hold multiple roles within an organisation, or multiple roles within industry," says Mark. "With SMS now an integral part of the Senior Person role, the CAA needs to be convinced they will have enough time to be effective in all those roles.

"For instance, will they spend enough time on site? Will they dedicate enough time to the job? We need confidence that not only is the candidate capable, but they're actually going to be dedicating sufficient time to their responsibilities.

"The chief executive, of course, is responsible for providing sufficient people, resources and facilities so their employees can carry out their work effectively.

"But a candidate for Senior Person should also be assessing whether they have the time to do the job they've been employed or contracted to do.

"If the answer is 'no', they should be having a talk with their chief executive before their application gets to the CAA."

Mark says in a smaller organisation, a part time role may be appropriate, but in a larger one the Senior Person may need to be full time.

"Senior Persons don't have to be on site all the time. In the Skype and mobile phone era, a certain amount of time can be spent away from the base of operations. But if they're in a supervisory role, it's very hard to promote change, and to monitor the organisation completely, from afar.

"Vague commitments of, 'Oh well, I'll be monitoring my phone' do not demonstrate the hands-on supervision needed, nor give the CAA confidence that the Senior Person applicant can be effective in their important safety role."

Use or Lose It

Mark says the CAA is always interested in the ongoing ability of the Senior Person to do their job.

"For instance, what they are doing in terms of professional development. Are they keeping themselves updated? Are they attending user group meetings, are they up to play with rule changes, are they totally across exposition changes in their company? So all those things they need to do to keep themselves ahead of the game, that's part of the role too.

"They should never think, 'Hey, I've got through the gate, now my job is done'. Continuing to meet the fit and proper person requirements is an ongoing obligation. It's definitely not just 'once every five years, I tick a box'."

"Genuine Commitment"

The CAA also assesses the approach to safety of a candidate for Senior Person. This is especially important to achieve the benefits of SMS. Is there a genuine commitment to safety for its own sake, or is the bar they're shooting for, minimum compliance?

Mark Hughes says that's critical for him.

"An attitude is demonstrated in behaviour, so we're looking for behaviours that would illustrate they've got a positive, proactive and constructive approach to safety.

"We're also keen to assess their level of communication, with us, the regulator, and with their own people.

"Is it open and two-way? What is their attitude to employees reporting errors? To their employees offering quality improvement suggestions? To reporting occurrences to the CAA?"

"In an interview, I might ask something like, 'If you had a serious occurrence or deficiency at your organisation, who would you talk to about that?'"

"Given the critical nature of these supervisory roles in fostering a safety culture, it's important the candidate is prepared to go beyond simple compliance with the rules, and describe how they intend to raise the bar at their organisation."

The Basics

While knowledge of SMS, and a willingness to work with it, is new to the Senior Person interview, the longstanding fundamentals of a successful application remain the same.

"They have to do their research before applying," says Mark.

"They're accountable to the Director, so they need to know their way around the Act and the rules. They need to know their organisation well, its exposition, and its particular hazards and risks, and how they are to be managed.

"And of course the foundation of expertise, knowledge, experience and character remain the same if someone wants to be a Senior Person."

Read More

See the various sections on personnel requirements in Part 119 *Air Operator – Certification*. For further guidance, read AC 119-1 *Air Operator Certification*.

Go to www.caa.govt.nz, "Quick Links > Forms > Fit and Proper Person Process" for guidance on the role.

To read other Senior Persons articles published by *Vector* in Nov/Dec 2006; Jan/Feb 2012, and Mar/Apr 2012, go to www.caa.govt.nz, "Quick Links > Publications > Vector". ■



Andrew Crawford, Senior Person, Sounds Air

"Once I changed my mindset from a QA-based approach to one based on the principles of Safety Management Systems, it was relatively straightforward to pass on to staff.

"They learn more willingly and effectively from the people they know and trust. Yes, it takes time and perseverance, but it was crucial that adoption of SMS was done from the inside of our organisation.

"We are already seeing a quantum shift in thinking, and people taking genuine responsibility for SMS."