

## Thought Leadership



## SMS...Safety and Security but not what you might be thinking

**For as long as aircraft have been flying the holy grail of safety management has always been preventing loss of life, but as all incidents are a series of events or threats coming together, safety management is about mitigating or removing threats throughout the organisation's operation. It is about removing events that can cause losses. At Baines Simmons we view safety as the intentional result of good organizational management.**

Company Directors are responsible for the management of their companies. They must act in a way most likely to promote the success of the business and benefit its shareholders and employees. Good leaders create and influence environments such that losses are mitigated. As one Baines Simmons client succinctly put it:

"Accident prevention is the highest form of risk management. The SMS approach provides a comprehensive, methodical framework for building both processes and a culture aimed squarely at that goal."

ICAO has written a framework for [Safety Management System](#) implementation which will be soon be ratified into law through State Safety Programmes. This goes far beyond the average safety initiative however; it is a programme that will challenge the culture of the organisation. For companies that "get" that the key to success is the relationship between culture and systems; the payback will be reduction in loss and improvements in corporate security, the security of reputation, of customer and employee satisfaction and of liquidity. The world leading organisations will be those where SMS is engrained in the table of the board room.

## **The Baines Simmons SMARRT™ Approach to Effective SMS Implementation**

Baines Simmons has dedicated the last 4 years to assist clients in finding the optimal relationship between culture and systems that promote safety. Often referred to as “The Journey” this task entails much more than simply complying with a checklist of SMS-related items found in regulatory guidance material.

In fact, implementing an SMS has to be intentionally ‘engineered’ in a way that actually reduces risk and provides business benefit. The culture of the organisation has to be at the forefront of consideration of the right strategy to make this happen.

Baines Simmons provides industry-leading expertise in this area and guides clients through an intentional process to implement an effective SMS. The example below is from a client that is both an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and also has a number of Approved Maintenance Organisations (AMO’s). Experience with this client has shown that the following is a successful “roadmap” to implementation:

1. Know your system – assessing current safety culture and the risk within it is the first key to understanding what will need to be managed in the future SMS. This can be done several ways;
  - a. Through front-line safety culture surveys to identify key employee attitudes towards risk-taking
  - b. Through leadership safety culture surveys to identify the risk perception gap between leaders and the front-line
  - c. Through analysis of data from existing mandatory safety programs
  - d. Through analysis of data from voluntary safety programs
2. Know your existing processes – most organisations have some elements of SMS in place, the question is: how effective are they? The Baines Simmons [SMARRT™](#) Safety Management Diagnostic ([SMD](#)) is an industry-leading tool that looks at the systems *and* cultural indicators that promote better risk management and error reduction. The SMD provides an objective look at what systems and process an organisation has in relation to the International SMS guidance, but also looks at the underlying culture of the organisation to see how it actively supports the reduction of risk.
3. Build a core team - much of the work discussed here is done “behind the scenes” with a group of core implementation team members and key senior leaders leading the various engagement strategies without the visibility of the front-line workforce. This team is essential to act as the ‘hub’ of the organizations knowledge of regulatory requirements, to manage sponsorship and to properly engage stakeholders.
4. Know your stakeholders – it’s not enough to say “senior leaders have to be committed” rather, the entire leadership structure of an organisation should be formally assessed as to their level of initial understanding of SMS objectives, and how they need to be engaged for the SMS implementation effort to be most effective.
5. Raise awareness among senior ranks – once the stakeholder assessment is formalized, a range of communications and engagement strategies are then used to achieve the desired objectives revealed during the stakeholder assessment. A key component necessary in this phase is senior leadership orientation that is intentionally planned and executed prior to the “toolkit” phase. In the case of this client, an executive off-site session was the critical lever that provided the necessary momentum that allowed the implementation effort to move to the next phase.

6. Expand your team to build the SMS “toolkit” – unfortunately, this is where many organisations begin their implementation journey (neglecting the above). In the case of this client, we have seen that in order to effectively implement the “tools” associated with SMS e.g. hazard reporting/risk assessment (HIRA), effective event investigation process and “Just” post-event management of employees (to name a few); there has to be a communications and engagement strategy specific to this phase in order for the tools to fully deliver the intent of SMS. In fact, this engagement phase may be the most important one in terms of the long-term impact and sustainability of the SMS efforts. Some key tips here:
  - a. Utilize field and corporate partnerships to leverage positive relationships and create real forums for exchange of ideas
  - b. Build current and desired culture into the tools
7. Engage the front-line – When the front-line is ‘ready’ for their initial engagement, then a communications/engagement strategy is developed to provide the essentials of the SMS efforts. Some key tips here ;
  - a. Tell employees what it is and what it means to them so that they can clearly answer for themselves “what do I do now?”
  - b. Ensure that the SMS is real to them so they know what actions to take
  - c. Ensure that this part is ‘leader-led’

This may be achieved in a variety of ways e.g. formal training, toolbox talks, all hands meetings, electronic medium etc. As this is a resource-intensive phase of the SMS implementation, an organisation should plan how to achieve the objectives of this phase most economically.

8. Unleash your “Toolkit” (one bit at a time) – in the “build” part of the activity (#6 above) various key operational personnel are engaged to develop the organisation specific tools that are necessary for SMS. Since these key influencers have already been involved in the development phase, they are naturally used as the focal points for the deployment phase. However, this phase does not simply entail “throwing the tools over the fence” and hoping for the best. The deployment phase has intentional communications and engagement elements to ensure that the tools and processes have the best chance of success. Keys to this are:
  - a. Consistency in the tools across a wide range of operational environments
  - b. Standardized approach to SMS core capabilities e.g. hazard identification/risk assessment and post-event response

9. Build it to be sustainable – although the engagement and implementation process that we have discussed above positions an organisation to be successful with SMS implementation, it does not obviate the need for “care and feeding.” Once a client gets to this point, the principal element of sustainability is success. A few keys here:
- a. Leverage technology - to communicate and make use of the tools easier for the front-line
  - b. Leverage “first movers” – there will be parts of the organization that are capable of moving faster than other parts...don’t hold them back
  - c. Leverage success stories – they will appear, don’t let them get lost in the “noise” of the organization
  - d. Create forums for information sharing, knowledge transfer and even the occasional “super-user” to share positive experiences and leading practice

Metrics that indicate actual safety performance improvement and underlying cultural shift are the best tools to maintain positive engagement across all levels of the organisation.