Hidden Safety Intelligence™

The Next Evolution in Aviation Safety Assurance

A Discussion Paper

For a Framework for Complete Safety Assurance

Version 1.0

Developed by Flight Safety Group

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3
1. Introduction 5
2. The Current State of Aviation Safety Assurance 7
3. The Assurance Gap 11
4. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ 16
5. The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology 21
6. The Science Behind Hidden Safety Intelligence™ 27
7. Measuring Hidden Safety Intelligence™ 31
8. Practical Applications 37
9. Benefits to Aviation Organisations 42
10. Challenges and Considerations 47
11. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ within the ICAO Safety Management System 49
12. Future Development 52
13. Invitation to Participate 55
14. Conclusion 57

Executive Summary

Purpose

The aviation industry has achieved an enviable safety record through decades of continual improvement in regulation, technology, operational standards and Safety Management Systems (SMS). Compliance auditing, regulatory oversight and structured safety assurance processes have formed the cornerstone of this success by ensuring organisations maintain documented systems, meet regulatory obligations and implement recognised safety controls.

However, as aviation operations continue to evolve in complexity, so too must the methods used to understand and manage organisational risk.

While traditional audits remain essential for verifying compliance and assessing the effectiveness of documented management systems, they primarily evaluate what can be seen, measured and verified. Documentation, procedures, records and operational observations provide valuable evidence of how an organisation is designed to operate, but they may not always reveal how work is actually performed in practice or the human factors that influence operational decision-making.

Within every aviation organisation exists another valuable source of safety knowledge that is often underutilised. Pilots, engineers, maintenance personnel, aircrew, ground staff, operational managers and support personnel collectively possess an immense body of operational experience. They understand the daily realities of workload, operational pressures, communication challenges, leadership effectiveness, procedural practicality, resource constraints and countless other influences that shape safe operations. Much of this knowledge remains undocumented, unreported and therefore invisible to conventional assurance processes.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ (HSI) has been developed by Flight Safety Group to provide a structured methodology for capturing, analysing and integrating this operational knowledge into existing aviation safety assurance activities. Rather than replacing audits or Safety Management Systems, HSI enhances them by introducing an additional layer of organisational intelligence based upon confidential workforce insights and recognised human factors principles.

The methodology is founded upon a simple but powerful premise:

Traditional assurance reveals how the system is intended to operate. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ helps reveal how the system actually operates.

By combining these complementary perspectives, organisations can develop a more comprehensive understanding of operational risk, identify latent organisational weaknesses earlier, and make better-informed safety decisions before hazards manifest as incidents or accidents.

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology integrates conventional compliance assurance with confidential Human Factors Intelligence through a structured eight-stage process encompassing organisational context, visible safety assurance, operational reality assessment, confidential workforce intelligence collection, intelligence analysis, evidence validation, risk prioritisation and organisational improvement. The result is a continuous intelligence cycle that supports proactive safety management and strengthens organisational resilience.

For aviation operators, the potential benefits extend beyond regulatory compliance. HSI seeks to strengthen safety culture, improve leadership awareness, identify emerging operational risks, enhance organisational learning and provide executives with richer evidence upon which to base strategic safety decisions. By transforming workforce experience into measurable organisational intelligence, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ enables operators to identify trends and vulnerabilities that may otherwise remain concealed until revealed by an occurrence or formal investigation.

This discussion paper has been prepared for accountable managers, chief executive officers, safety managers, quality managers, human factors specialists, operational leaders, regulators, auditors and other aviation professionals with responsibility for organisational safety performance. It is intended to stimulate discussion regarding the future evolution of aviation safety assurance and to explore how confidential workforce intelligence may complement existing Safety Management Systems and regulatory oversight.

Importantly, this document does not propose replacing established safety management practices, nor does it claim to introduce entirely new human factors concepts. Rather, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to provide a structured framework that integrates recognised principles of human factors, safety culture, organisational

psychology and risk management into a practical aviation assurance methodology capable of revealing risks that conventional assurance activities may not consistently detect.

Flight Safety Group recognises that meaningful advances in aviation safety are achieved through collaboration, research and continuous improvement. Accordingly, this white paper is presented as a discussion document and an invitation to industry stakeholders to contribute their expertise, challenge the concepts presented, and participate in the ongoing refinement of the methodology.

The future of aviation safety assurance may not lie solely in becoming better at auditing systems. It may equally depend upon becoming better at understanding the people who operate within them.

Seeing the System. Hearing the People. Understanding the Reality. Preventing the Risk.

That is the vision underpinning Hidden Safety Intelligence™ and the next evolution in Complete Safety Assurance.



1. Introduction

Revealing the Hidden Layer of Aviation Safety

"Compliance demonstrates how the system is designed to operate. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ helps reveal how the system actually performs."

The aviation industry is widely recognised as one of the safest and most highly regulated industries in the world. This achievement has been built upon decades of continuous improvement in aircraft technology, operational procedures, regulatory oversight, accident investigation and the systematic application of Safety Management Systems (SMS). Together, these elements have transformed aviation into an industry that continually learns, adapts and improves.

At the heart of this success lies the principle of safety assurance. Through audits, inspections, surveillance activities and operational monitoring, organisations seek to verify that established standards are being maintained and that hazards are identified and controlled before they contribute to an occurrence. Compliance remains fundamental to aviation safety and will continue to be an essential component of every effective Safety Management System.

Yet aviation itself has changed significantly.

Modern aviation organisations are increasingly complex. Operations are conducted across multiple locations, often involving contracted service providers, rapidly changing technologies, evolving regulatory expectations and increasingly demanding commercial environments. Decision-making is distributed across numerous organisational levels, while frontline personnel are continually required to balance competing operational priorities including safety, efficiency, customer service and commercial performance.

Within this environment, organisational risk does not arise solely from technical failures or regulatory non-compliance. Increasingly, accidents and serious incidents are understood to result from the interaction of multiple organisational, operational and human factors that develop gradually over time. These influences may remain largely invisible within conventional assurance processes until they combine under particular operational circumstances.

For this reason, many safety professionals have shifted their attention from asking ***"Are we compliant?"*** to asking the more fundamental question:

"How is work actually being performed?"

The answer to this question often cannot be found within manuals, procedures or audit records alone.

It resides within the workforce.

Every day, aviation professionals adapt to changing operational conditions. Pilots manage workload and operational pressures. Engineers develop practical solutions to technical challenges. Ground personnel identify inefficiencies that may never be formally reported. Supervisors observe emerging behavioural trends. Managers recognise resource limitations that influence operational performance.

Collectively, these experiences form an extensive body of operational knowledge that rarely exists within formal organisational documentation.

Most organisations already possess this knowledge.

The challenge is that they often lack a structured mechanism for capturing, analysing and integrating it into their safety assurance processes.

Traditional safety reporting systems provide one avenue for gathering operational information, but they inevitably depend upon individuals recognising hazards, choosing to report them and doing so within established reporting frameworks. Numerous studies within aviation and other high-reliability industries have demonstrated that not every concern is formally reported. Some issues are considered too minor, too frequent or simply "part of the job." Others may be influenced by time pressures, reporting fatigue, uncertainty regarding outcomes or concerns about organisational response.

As a result, valuable safety intelligence frequently remains embedded within the collective experience of the workforce rather than becoming organisational knowledge.

This represents an important opportunity for the continued evolution of aviation safety assurance.

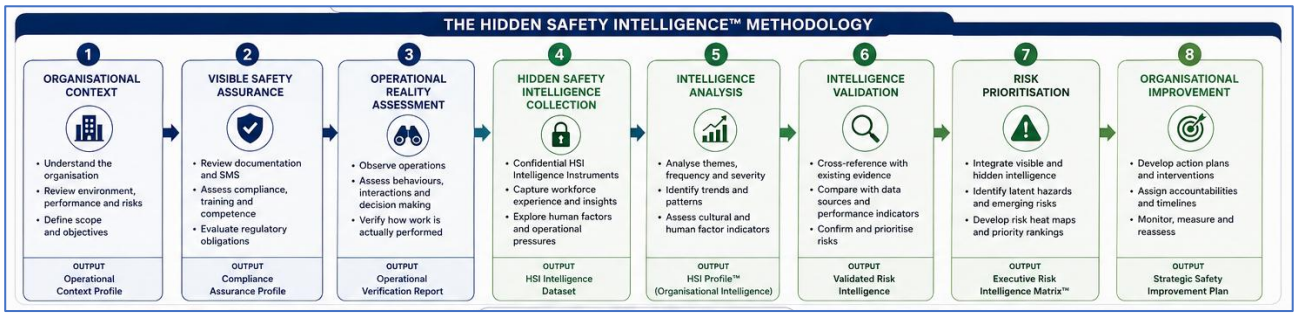
Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has been developed to help organisations systematically access this largely untapped source of organisational intelligence.

Rather than replacing existing audits or Safety Management Systems, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ complements them by introducing a structured methodology for collecting confidential workforce insights, analysing human factors information and integrating those findings with conventional safety assurance activities.

The methodology recognises that documentation describes the organisation's intended system of work, while the workforce experiences the operational system as it actually functions. Neither perspective alone provides a complete understanding of organisational safety performance. Together, however, they create a significantly richer and more accurate picture of operational reality.

This concept is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Complete Safety Assurance



The figure illustrates the relationship between two complementary assurance processes.

1 to 3 is the **Visible Safety System**, which encompasses documentation, compliance and operational observation. This represents the traditional focus of regulatory oversight and organisational auditing.

4 to 8 is the **Hidden Safety System**, comprising confidential workforce insights, human factors intelligence and latent organisational risks that may not be readily visible through conventional assurance activities.

When these two sources of information are combined, organisations gain a more comprehensive understanding of both how the system is designed to function and how it performs in practice. The resulting intelligence supports more informed decision-making, earlier identification of emerging risks and stronger organisational resilience.

This white paper introduces the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology as a discussion framework for the aviation industry. It is not intended to redefine existing safety management principles, nor to replace recognised human factors disciplines. Rather, it proposes a structured means of integrating well-established concepts into a practical and repeatable methodology that complements current aviation safety assurance practices.

The chapters that follow examine the evolution of aviation safety assurance, explore the limitations of traditional compliance-focused approaches, describe the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology in detail, and outline how confidential workforce intelligence may contribute to more proactive, evidence-informed organisational decision-making.

Ultimately, the objective is straightforward:

To assist aviation organisations in moving beyond simply verifying compliance towards achieving a deeper understanding of operational reality.

Because the earliest indicators of future accidents are not always found in audit findings.

Sometimes they are found in the experiences of the people who have already seen them.

2. The Current State of Aviation Safety Assurance

Building on a Strong Foundation

The aviation industry's remarkable safety record has been achieved through the continual evolution of safety management principles, regulatory oversight and organisational learning. Over many decades, accident investigation findings have driven significant improvements in aircraft design, operational procedures, maintenance standards, crew training and regulatory frameworks. The result is an industry that continually seeks to identify hazards before they contribute to incidents or accidents.

Modern aviation safety assurance is no longer based solely upon compliance with regulations. It encompasses a broad range of interconnected processes designed to monitor operational performance, evaluate organisational effectiveness and support continuous improvement. These processes form the foundation of contemporary Safety Management Systems (SMS) and provide organisations with structured mechanisms for identifying, assessing and managing operational risk.

Today, aviation organisations employ numerous complementary assurance activities, each contributing valuable information regarding the health of the safety management system.

Regulatory Compliance

Compliance with aviation legislation and regulatory requirements remains the cornerstone of aviation safety assurance. National aviation authorities establish minimum standards for aircraft operations, maintenance, personnel competency, training, organisational governance and operational oversight.

Compliance audits verify that organisations have implemented systems and processes capable of meeting these regulatory obligations. They provide confidence that documented procedures exist, responsibilities are defined, records are maintained and statutory requirements are being satisfied.

Compliance assurance answers an essential question:

"Does the organisation meet the required standard?"

This remains a fundamental requirement for every aviation operator.

Safety Management Systems (SMS)

The introduction of Safety Management Systems represented one of the most significant advances in modern aviation safety.

Rather than focusing exclusively on regulatory compliance, SMS introduced a systematic framework for managing safety risk through four interconnected components:

- Safety Policy and Objectives
- Safety Risk Management
- Safety Assurance
- Safety Promotion

Within this framework, organisations are encouraged to move beyond reactive responses to occurrences by proactively identifying hazards, assessing risk and continuously monitoring safety performance.

The SMS philosophy recognises that safety is not achieved through compliance alone, but through continual monitoring, learning and organisational improvement.

Internal Quality Assurance

Most aviation organisations also maintain internal quality assurance programs designed to evaluate compliance with documented procedures and organisational standards.

These programs typically include:

- Internal audits

- Process reviews
- Documentation assessments
- Corrective action monitoring
- Continuous improvement activities

Quality assurance provides valuable assurance that organisational systems continue to function as intended while supporting regulatory compliance and certification requirements.

Operational Surveillance and Observation

Observation remains one of the most valuable methods of verifying operational performance.

Through line observations, workplace inspections, operational monitoring and supervisory oversight, organisations can compare documented procedures with actual operational practices.

These activities provide important insights into:

- Operational behaviours
- Procedural compliance
- Environmental conditions
- Equipment utilisation
- Human interactions
- Workplace practices

Observation helps bridge the gap between documented procedures and operational implementation.

However, observation typically captures only a limited snapshot of operational activity and may not always reveal the underlying reasons why personnel behave in particular ways.

Occurrence Reporting Systems

Voluntary and mandatory occurrence reporting systems provide another critical source of organisational learning.

Safety reporting enables personnel to notify the organisation of:

- Hazards
- Incidents
- Near misses
- Unsafe conditions
- Operational concerns
- Procedural issues

When supported by a strong Just Culture, reporting systems contribute significantly to proactive safety management by allowing organisations to identify trends and implement corrective actions before more serious events occur.

However, reporting systems depend upon individuals recognising hazards, choosing to submit reports and believing that meaningful action will result from their participation.

Consequently, not every operational concern is formally reported.

Flight Data Monitoring (FDM) and FOQA

Many operators supplement traditional assurance activities with Flight Data Monitoring (FDM) or Flight Operational Quality Assurance (FOQA) programs.

These systems analyse recorded flight data to identify operational trends, exceedances and deviations from established operating parameters.

FDM provides objective operational evidence and has become an important source of predictive safety information for many fixed-wing and rotary-wing operators.

However, flight data explains *what* occurred during an operation. It rarely explains *why* operational decisions were made or what organisational influences contributed to those outcomes.

Line Operations Safety Audits (LOSA)

Many larger operators have adopted Line Operations Safety Audits (LOSA) to observe normal flight operations and identify threats, errors and crew responses.

LOSA has significantly advanced the understanding of operational performance by examining how flight crews manage routine operational challenges rather than focusing solely on accidents or non-compliance.

Its contribution to Threat and Error Management (TEM) has strengthened industry understanding of operational resilience and human performance.

Nevertheless, LOSA generally examines operational behaviour during observed activities and is not designed to systematically explore broader organisational perceptions relating to leadership, reporting culture, communication or workforce confidence.

Safety Performance Monitoring

Modern Safety Management Systems increasingly rely upon Safety Performance Indicators (SPIs), Safety Performance Targets (SPTs) and organisational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor safety outcomes.

These indicators allow organisations to assess whether safety objectives are being achieved and whether risk controls remain effective over time.

Typical measures include:

- Incident rates
- Hazard reports
- Audit findings
- Training completion
- Risk assessments
- Safety action closure rates
- Operational performance trends

Performance monitoring supports data-driven decision-making and forms an essential component of continual safety improvement.

Safety Culture Assessments

Many aviation organisations also undertake periodic safety culture surveys to better understand workforce attitudes towards safety.

These assessments frequently examine:

- Leadership commitment
- Communication
- Trust
- Reporting culture

- Organisational learning
- Employee engagement

Safety culture assessments provide valuable snapshots of organisational climate and can identify opportunities for improvement.

However, they are often conducted periodically as standalone initiatives rather than being systematically integrated into ongoing safety assurance activities or directly correlated with operational evidence.

A Mature and Effective Safety Assurance System

Collectively, these assurance activities have contributed to one of the safest industries in the world.

They provide multiple layers of protection by combining regulatory oversight, operational monitoring, performance measurement and organisational learning.

Each element contributes unique and valuable information regarding organisational safety performance, and together they create a robust framework for managing operational risk.

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology fully recognises the importance of these existing assurance mechanisms and is founded on the principle that they should remain the primary framework for aviation safety management.

The purpose of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is therefore not to replace compliance audits, Safety Management Systems, occurrence reporting or other recognised assurance activities.

Rather, it seeks to complement them by addressing a simple but important question that existing assurance processes may not consistently answer:

What valuable safety intelligence already exists within the workforce but has not yet become organisational knowledge?

As aviation continues to embrace predictive and data-informed safety management, the ability to capture and understand confidential operational insights from the people closest to the operation may represent the next natural evolution in safety assurance.

The following chapter explores this concept by examining what may be described as ***the assurance gap*** – the difference between what organisations can readily observe through conventional assurance processes and what personnel experience in the reality of day-to-day operations.

3. The Assurance Gap

What Traditional Safety Assurance May Not Detect

"The greatest organisational risks are not always those that have been reported. Often, they are the risks that have become accepted as normal."

The aviation industry has long recognised that no single safety assurance activity can provide a complete picture of organisational safety performance. Compliance audits, operational observations, occurrence reporting, flight data analysis and Safety Management Systems each contribute valuable information from different perspectives. Together, they form a comprehensive and highly effective framework for managing aviation safety.

However, despite the strength of these systems, there remains an important distinction between *what an organisation knows* and *what its people know*.

This distinction represents what Hidden Safety Intelligence™ describes as the Assurance Gap.

The Assurance Gap is not a failure of existing safety management systems. Rather, it is the natural difference between information that becomes organisational knowledge through formal assurance processes and information that remains embedded within the day-to-day experiences of the workforce.

Every organisation contains operational knowledge that has never been documented, reported or discussed through formal channels. Frontline personnel frequently observe subtle changes in operational behaviour, emerging pressures, procedural inefficiencies and human performance challenges long before these issues become evident through traditional assurance activities.

These observations often remain informal because they are perceived as minor, isolated or simply part of normal operations.

Over time, however, these small observations can reveal significant patterns.

The Difference Between Compliance and Operational Reality

Traditional audits are designed to determine whether an organisation complies with documented requirements.

They answer questions such as:

- Are procedures documented?
- Are personnel appropriately trained?
- Are records maintained?
- Are regulatory requirements being met?
- Are safety processes being followed?

These are essential questions.

Yet another set of equally important questions often remains unanswered.

For example:

- Do personnel believe existing procedures are practical?
- Are operational pressures influencing decision-making?
- Are supervisors consistently applying safety expectations?
- Do employees feel comfortable raising concerns?
- Have informal workarounds become accepted practice?
- Are resource constraints affecting operational performance?
- Do staff believe reported hazards receive meaningful attention?
- Are there issues that personnel discuss privately but rarely report formally?

These questions explore organisational reality rather than organisational design.

Both perspectives are necessary to understand overall safety performance.

The Nature of Latent Organisational Risk

Many significant organisational risks develop gradually.

They rarely emerge as isolated failures.

Instead, they evolve through the interaction of numerous small influences, including:

- Increasing operational workload
- Resource limitations
- Staff shortages
- Communication breakdowns
- Leadership inconsistency
- Procedural drift
- Fatigue
- Production pressure
- Normalised deviations
- Reduced reporting confidence

Individually, each factor may appear relatively insignificant.

Collectively, however, they can weaken organisational resilience and increase exposure to operational risk.

Because these influences often develop progressively, they may not immediately appear within audit findings or occurrence reports.

Instead, they become part of everyday operational experience.

Normalisation of Deviance

One of the most widely recognised human factors phenomena is the gradual acceptance of practices that differ from documented procedures.

When deviations do not immediately result in adverse consequences, they may slowly become regarded as normal operating practice.

Personnel often adapt to operational realities in order to complete tasks efficiently or overcome practical constraints.

Examples may include:

- Informal procedural shortcuts.
- Acceptance of equipment deficiencies.
- Routine workarounds.
- Minor deviations from standard practices.
- Informal communication methods.
- Temporary risk controls becoming permanent.

These adaptations are seldom introduced with the intention of reducing safety.

More commonly, they represent practical responses to operational demands.

Without ongoing organisational awareness, however, such adaptations may gradually become embedded within workplace culture.

Traditional audits may identify these behaviours during observation.

However, many remain unnoticed because they occur intermittently or outside the period of audit activity.

Personnel themselves are frequently the first to recognise when operational drift is occurring.

Organisational Silence

Another contributor to the Assurance Gap is organisational silence.

Most aviation organisations actively encourage safety reporting and strive to develop positive reporting cultures supported by Just Culture principles.

Nevertheless, research across high-reliability industries consistently demonstrates that individuals do not report every concern they observe.

Reasons may include:

- The issue appears too minor.
- The concern has become routine.
- Time pressures.
- Reporting fatigue.
- Uncertainty about whether the issue represents a reportable hazard.
- Previous experiences where little visible action resulted.
- Concern about creating additional work for colleagues.
- Belief that management is already aware of the issue.

In many cases, personnel continue discussing these concerns informally among themselves while they never enter the formal safety reporting system.

Consequently, valuable organisational knowledge remains fragmented across individuals rather than contributing to organisational learning.

Human Adaptation

Aviation professionals continually adapt to changing operational conditions.

Pilots adjust to weather, workload and operational complexity.

Engineers develop practical maintenance solutions.

Ground personnel respond to changing aircraft schedules.

Dispatchers manage operational disruptions.

Managers balance competing organisational priorities.

These adaptations are not inherently negative.

Indeed, the ability of experienced personnel to adapt safely is one of aviation’s greatest strengths.

However, adaptation also provides valuable information regarding the suitability of procedures, resources, organisational support and operational design.

When many individuals adapt in similar ways, those adaptations may indicate opportunities for organisational improvement.

Unfortunately, adaptation itself is rarely measured.

The experience remains with the individual unless organisations deliberately seek to understand it.

Leadership Blind Spots

Senior leaders make decisions using the information available to them.

That information commonly includes:

- Audit reports.
- Safety reports.
- Investigation findings.
- Performance indicators.
- Regulatory correspondence.
- Operational statistics.

While these sources are essential, they may not fully represent the lived experience of frontline personnel.

Leaders may therefore remain unaware of:

- Declining reporting confidence.
- Increasing operational pressure.
- Emerging communication issues.
- Procedural impracticalities.
- Resource concerns.
- Informal behavioural changes.
- Workforce perceptions regarding leadership commitment.

This should not be interpreted as ineffective leadership.

Rather, it reflects the challenge of making decisions within complex organisations where not all operational knowledge naturally reaches executive levels.

Providing leaders with richer organisational intelligence supports more informed and proactive decision-making.

Bridging the Assurance Gap

The existence of an Assurance Gap does not suggest that existing safety assurance systems are inadequate.

On the contrary, modern Safety Management Systems provide an exceptionally strong framework for managing aviation safety.

The opportunity lies in complementing these systems with an additional source of organisational intelligence.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ proposes that confidential workforce insights can serve as an important leading indicator of organisational performance when collected systematically, analysed objectively and validated against existing operational evidence.

Rather than relying solely on documented information or isolated observations, HSI seeks to understand how personnel collectively experience the operation.

It recognises that those closest to the work often detect subtle changes in organisational conditions long before they become visible through conventional assurance activities.

By capturing this intelligence in a structured, confidential and evidence-informed manner, organisations may identify emerging risks earlier, strengthen safety culture, improve leadership awareness and enhance the effectiveness of existing Safety Management Systems.

This concept forms the foundation of the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology, which is introduced in the following chapter.

Figure 2 – The Assurance Gap



4. Hidden Safety Intelligence™

The Concept

"Every aviation organisation possesses more safety knowledge than it formally captures. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ provides a structured methodology for transforming that knowledge into organisational intelligence."

Aviation safety has traditionally relied upon information that can be observed, documented, measured and verified. Compliance audits examine documented procedures, operational observations assess workplace practices, occurrence reports identify hazards, and performance indicators measure safety outcomes. Collectively, these sources provide essential information regarding the effectiveness of an organisation's Safety Management System.

Yet organisations continually generate another form of safety information that is rarely measured with the same degree of structure or consistency.

Every day, personnel make operational decisions, adapt to changing conditions, identify emerging concerns, observe procedural limitations and develop practical solutions to operational challenges. These experiences create a rich body of organisational knowledge that often remains distributed across individuals rather than becoming part of the organisation's formal safety intelligence.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has been developed to systematically identify, capture and analyse this information, enabling organisations to better understand the relationship between documented safety systems and operational reality.

The methodology recognises that safety is influenced not only by technical systems and regulatory compliance, but also by the complex interaction of people, leadership, organisational culture and operational conditions.

Rather than introducing a new philosophy of safety management, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ integrates recognised principles from human factors, organisational psychology, safety culture and contemporary Safety Management Systems into a practical framework for organisational assurance.

The objective is simple:

To convert workforce experience into actionable safety intelligence.

Two Parallel Safety Systems

A central principle of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is that every aviation organisation operates through two interconnected safety systems.

Neither exists independently.

Neither is sufficient on its own.

Together they provide a more complete understanding of organisational safety performance.

The Visible Safety System

The Visible Safety System represents the formal framework through which safety is managed and demonstrated.

It consists of documented and observable elements, including:

- Regulatory compliance
- Policies and procedures
- Safety Management Systems
- Training programs
- Competency management
- Operational manuals

- Records and documentation
- Audit findings
- Operational observations
- Safety reports
- Risk registers
- Performance indicators

These components describe how the organisation intends to operate and provide evidence that appropriate governance and safety controls have been established.

Traditional safety assurance activities are primarily designed to evaluate this system.

It represents the foundation of organisational safety. Without it, effective aviation operations would not be possible.

The Hidden Safety System

Alongside every formal safety system exists another system that is less visible but equally influential.

The Hidden Safety System exists within the collective knowledge, perceptions and experiences of the workforce.

It is continually shaped by day-to-day operational realities and includes factors such as:

- Practical experience
- Human performance
- Operational workload
- Fatigue
- Communication effectiveness
- Leadership behaviours
- Decision-making processes
- Resource constraints
- Informal workarounds
- Normalised deviations
- Reporting confidence
- Trust
- Safety attitudes
- Organisational learning
- Operational resilience

Unlike documented procedures, these factors are dynamic.

They evolve continuously as organisations respond to changing operational environments, commercial pressures and workforce experiences.

Although they may not always be formally documented, they exert considerable influence over organisational safety performance.

Importantly, the Hidden Safety System should not be viewed as something negative or secretive.

Rather, it represents the operational knowledge that naturally develops within every organisation as people perform their work.

When understood appropriately, it becomes *one of an organisation's most valuable sources of predictive safety intelligence.*

Hidden Does Not Mean Unknown

The term Hidden Safety Intelligence™ does not imply that information is deliberately concealed.

Instead, it refers to safety knowledge that has not yet become organisational intelligence.

In many cases, this information is already known by frontline personnel, supervisors or operational managers.

Examples may include:

- Procedures that are difficult to apply in practice.
- Operational pressures that gradually influence decision-making.
- Resource limitations affecting operational resilience.
- Communication barriers between departments.
- Leadership behaviours that influence reporting confidence.
- Emerging risks recognised informally but not formally reported.
- Small adaptations that have become accepted as normal practice.

Individually, these observations may appear insignificant.

Collectively, however, they can reveal emerging patterns that assist organisations in identifying latent organisational risk before more serious consequences occur.

The challenge is not discovering new information.

The challenge is systematically collecting information that already exists but remains fragmented across the organisation.

From Data to Intelligence

Modern aviation organisations collect vast quantities of safety data.

Examples include:

- Audit findings
- Hazard reports
- Investigation outcomes
- Flight data
- Maintenance reliability information
- Training records
- Safety performance indicators
- Risk assessments

Data alone, however, does not necessarily produce understanding.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ distinguishes between three progressively more valuable levels of organisational knowledge:

Safety Data

Individual pieces of information collected through operational activities.

Examples include audit findings, hazard reports, survey responses or flight data.

Safety Information

Data that has been organised into categories, trends or summaries.

Examples include quarterly safety reports, occurrence statistics or audit summaries.

Safety Intelligence

Information that has been analysed, interpreted, validated and integrated to support strategic decision-making.

Safety intelligence enables leaders to understand not only *what* is happening, but *why* it may be occurring and *what action* should be taken.

The purpose of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is to elevate workforce observations from isolated data points into validated organisational intelligence.

Workforce Experience as a Leading Indicator

One of the defining characteristics of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is its emphasis on workforce experience as a leading indicator of organisational performance.

Personnel frequently recognise subtle changes long before they become measurable through traditional performance indicators.

Examples include:

- Increasing workload.
- Declining morale.
- Reduced confidence in reporting systems.
- Communication breakdowns.
- Procedural complexity.
- Emerging operational pressures.
- Leadership inconsistency.
- Growing acceptance of informal workarounds.

While these observations may not initially appear within audit findings or occurrence reports, they often represent early indicators of broader organisational trends.

By systematically collecting and analysing these experiences, organisations may identify opportunities for intervention before risks become embedded within operational practice.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ as an Intelligence Layer

It is important to recognise that Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is not intended to replace existing safety assurance processes.

Instead, it functions as an additional intelligence layer that complements established systems.

Rather than asking only:

- Are we compliant?
- Are procedures being followed?
- Have hazards been reported?

HSI also explores questions such as:

- What concerns are personnel experiencing?

- What operational pressures influence daily decision-making?
- Where do employees perceive barriers to safe performance?
- What adaptations have become normal?
- Which organisational risks are emerging but not yet visible through conventional indicators?

When combined with traditional assurance activities, these perspectives provide a more complete understanding of organisational performance.

A New Perspective on Safety Assurance

The concept of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is founded upon a simple proposition.

Every aviation organisation already possesses valuable safety intelligence.

The opportunity lies in capturing that intelligence systematically, analysing it objectively and integrating it with existing evidence to strengthen decision-making.

By viewing workforce experience as a strategic source of organisational intelligence rather than simply anecdotal information, organisations can enhance their understanding of operational reality and improve their ability to anticipate emerging risk.

In doing so, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to extend the principles of contemporary Safety Management Systems beyond compliance and observation, towards a richer understanding of how safety is experienced, influenced and sustained throughout the organisation.

This philosophy provides the foundation for the methodology described in the following chapter, where the eight-stage Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology is introduced as a practical framework for integrating confidential workforce intelligence into aviation safety assurance.

5. The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology

A Structured Framework for Complete Safety Assurance

"Effective safety assurance requires more than verifying compliance. It requires understanding how the organisation functions in practice, how its people experience risk, and how that intelligence can be transformed into informed leadership decisions."

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ (HSI) has been developed as a structured methodology that complements existing aviation Safety Management Systems (SMS) by integrating confidential workforce intelligence into the organisational assurance process.

The methodology does not replace regulatory oversight, compliance auditing or existing safety assurance activities. Rather, it enhances these established processes by providing an additional source of organisational intelligence that may reveal emerging risks before they become evident through traditional assurance mechanisms.

HSI is founded upon a systematic, evidence-based approach that combines information from both the *Visible Safety System* and the *Hidden Safety System*. It recognises that compliance data, operational observations and documented evidence represent only part of the organisational safety picture. Equally valuable insights exist within the lived experiences of those who perform the work.

By integrating these complementary perspectives, organisations gain a richer understanding of operational performance, organisational resilience and latent risk.

The methodology consists of eight sequential stages, each building upon the previous stage to create an ongoing cycle of organisational learning and continuous improvement.

Although presented sequentially, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is intended to operate as a continuous assurance process rather than a one-time assessment. Intelligence gathered through each cycle informs future assurance activities, enabling organisations to identify trends, measure improvement and strengthen organisational resilience over time.

The Eight Stages of the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology

The methodology comprises the following interconnected stages:

Stage 1 – Organisational Context

Understanding the organisation before evaluating its performance.

Stage 2 – Visible Safety Assurance

Assessing the documented safety system and regulatory compliance.

Stage 3 – Operational Reality Assessment

Observing how work is performed in operational environments.

Stage 4 – Hidden Safety Intelligence Collection

Capturing confidential workforce intelligence using structured Human Factors Intelligence instruments.

Stage 5 – Intelligence Analysis

Transforming workforce insights into measurable organisational intelligence.

Stage 6 – Intelligence Validation

Cross-validating HSI findings against operational evidence and existing safety data.

Stage 7 – Risk Prioritisation

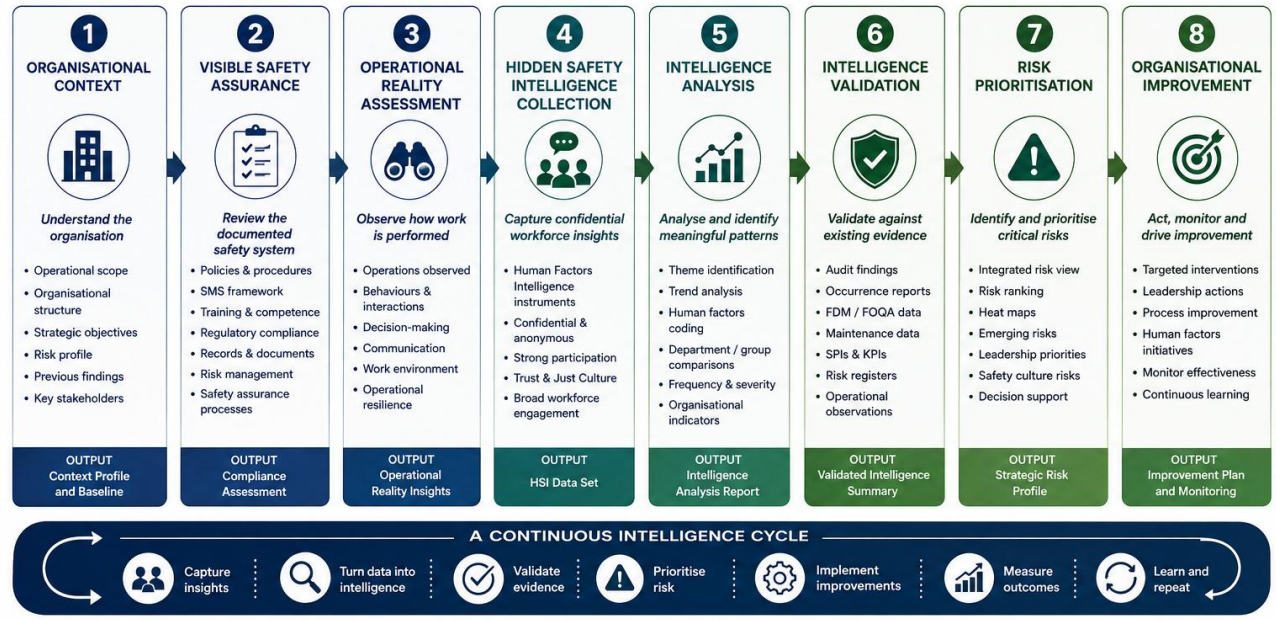
Integrating visible and hidden intelligence to identify strategic organisational risks.

Stage 8 – Organisational Improvement

Implementing targeted interventions and measuring organisational improvement.

Each stage contributes unique information to the overall assurance process while strengthening the value of the stages that follow.

Figure 3 – The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology



Stage 1 – Organisational Context

Every aviation organisation operates within a unique operational environment.

Fleet composition, operational complexity, geographical locations, regulatory obligations, organisational structure, commercial pressures and workforce characteristics all influence organisational risk.

Before meaningful assurance activities commence, it is essential to understand this context.

The first stage establishes the operational baseline against which subsequent observations and intelligence can be interpreted.

Typical activities include:

- Understanding organisational objectives.
- Reviewing operational scope.
- Identifying key operational risks.
- Examining organisational structure.

- Considering previous audit outcomes.
- Reviewing recent organisational changes.
- Understanding strategic priorities.

This stage ensures that subsequent findings are interpreted within the correct organisational context rather than in isolation.

Stage 2 – Visible Safety Assurance

The second stage evaluates the organisation's formal safety framework.

This includes reviewing the documented systems that demonstrate regulatory compliance and organisational governance.

Typical areas include:

- Safety Management System documentation.
- Policies and procedures.
- Operational manuals.
- Training programs.
- Competency management.
- Regulatory compliance.
- Safety assurance processes.
- Record management.
- Risk management systems.

The objective is to establish confidence that the organisation has implemented appropriate safety controls consistent with regulatory requirements and recognised industry practices.

This stage reflects traditional assurance activities and remains an essential component of the overall methodology.

Stage 3 – Operational Reality Assessment

Documentation describes how work should be performed.

Operational observation demonstrates how work is actually performed.

This stage focuses on observing operational activities, workplace interactions and behavioural patterns within the normal operating environment.

Areas of observation may include:

- Flight operations.
- Maintenance activities.
- Ground handling.
- Dispatch functions.
- Supervision.
- Team interactions.
- Communication practices.
- Decision-making.
- Operational resilience.

Rather than seeking isolated examples of non-compliance, this stage aims to understand how operational systems function under normal working conditions.

It provides valuable context for interpreting workforce intelligence collected during later stages.

Stage 4 – Hidden Safety Intelligence Collection

This stage represents the defining feature of the methodology.

Using confidential Human Factors Intelligence Instruments, organisations systematically collect workforce insights relating to operational experience, organisational culture and human performance.

Unlike conventional employee surveys, the objective is not to measure employee satisfaction.

Instead, the emphasis is on identifying operational intelligence relevant to safety assurance.

Topics may include:

- Leadership effectiveness.
- Communication.
- Workload.
- Fatigue.
- Operational pressure.
- Reporting confidence.
- Procedural practicality.
- Resource adequacy.
- Organisational learning.
- Safety priorities.
- Operational resilience.

Confidentiality forms the cornerstone of this process.

The methodology seeks to create an environment in which personnel can provide honest observations without concern that their responses will be attributed to individuals.

By encouraging candid participation, organisations gain access to operational knowledge that may otherwise remain unavailable through conventional assurance activities.

Stage 5 – Intelligence Analysis

The collection of workforce responses represents only the beginning of the intelligence process.

Meaningful organisational intelligence emerges through systematic analysis.

This stage examines workforce data to identify:

- Recurring themes.
- Emerging patterns.
- Organisational trends.
- Common operational concerns.
- Human factors interactions.
- Leadership indicators.
- Safety culture characteristics.
- Potential systemic weaknesses.

Rather than focusing on individual comments, analysis seeks to identify consistent organisational signals that may indicate latent risk or opportunities for improvement.

The outcome is a structured organisational intelligence profile that supports evidence-based decision-making.

Stage 6 – Intelligence Validation

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is its commitment to validation.

Workforce perceptions are not treated as isolated evidence.

Instead, they are compared with existing organisational data, including:

- Audit findings.
- Occurrence reports.
- Safety investigations.
- Flight Data Monitoring (FDM).
- Flight Operational Quality Assurance (FOQA).
- Maintenance reliability data.
- Safety Performance Indicators.
- Risk registers.
- Operational observations.

Validation strengthens confidence in the findings while helping distinguish isolated concerns from broader organisational trends.

This integrated approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of organisational performance than either source of information could provide independently.

Stage 7 – Risk Prioritisation

The seventh stage integrates all available intelligence into a strategic assessment of organisational risk.

Visible evidence and hidden intelligence are considered together to identify:

- Critical organisational vulnerabilities.
- Emerging operational risks.
- Human factors influence.
- Leadership priorities.
- Organisational resilience.
- Safety culture issues.
- Areas requiring executive attention.

The objective is not merely to produce additional findings.

Rather, it is to assist leadership in understanding which risks warrant priority action and why.

Outputs may include risk matrices, organisational intelligence profiles and executive dashboards designed to support informed decision-making.

Stage 8 – Organisational Improvement

The final stage converts intelligence into action.

Organisational improvement is achieved through targeted interventions designed to strengthen both the Visible Safety System and the Hidden Safety System.

Possible improvement initiatives include:

- Leadership development.
- Communication improvements.
- Procedure refinement.
- Human factors interventions.
- Resource allocation.
- Safety promotion activities.
- Targeted training.
- Enhanced reporting processes.
- Cultural improvement initiatives.

Importantly, improvement does not represent the end of the methodology.

The effectiveness of interventions should be monitored through subsequent Hidden Safety Intelligence™ cycles, allowing organisations to evaluate progress, measure cultural change and identify emerging risks over time.

This transforms safety assurance from a periodic compliance exercise into a process of continuous organisational intelligence and learning.

A Continuous Intelligence Cycle

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology is not intended to be conducted as a single assessment.

Its greatest value lies in repetition.

Each application generates new organisational intelligence, enabling comparisons over time, measuring the effectiveness of improvement initiatives and identifying trends before they develop into significant operational risks.

This continuous cycle supports one of the fundamental principles of contemporary Safety Management Systems:

The objective of safety assurance is not simply to confirm compliance, but to continuously improve organisational safety performance.

By integrating confidential workforce intelligence into this cycle, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ extends the capability of existing assurance systems, enabling organisations to move beyond periodic evaluation towards a more dynamic, intelligence-led approach to safety management.

6. The Science Behind Hidden Safety Intelligence™

Building Upon Established Safety Science

"Hidden Safety Intelligence™ does not seek to replace established safety theories. It provides a structured methodology for integrating recognised human factors, organisational psychology and safety management principles into aviation safety assurance."

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology has been developed upon a foundation of internationally recognised safety science rather than entirely new theoretical concepts. Over the past four decades, significant advances in aviation safety have transformed industry understanding of how accidents develop, how organisations influence operational performance and how human behaviour contributes to both safety and risk.

Research conducted across aviation, healthcare, nuclear power, offshore energy and other high-reliability industries has demonstrated that accidents rarely result from a single error or isolated equipment failure. Instead, they emerge through the interaction of organisational conditions, human performance, operational complexity and latent system weaknesses.

Modern safety management increasingly recognises that understanding these interactions requires organisations to look beyond technical compliance alone.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ builds upon this body of knowledge by providing a structured process for capturing organisational intelligence that may otherwise remain fragmented within the workforce.

The methodology draws from several complementary disciplines that have shaped contemporary aviation safety management.

Human Factors

Human Factors has become one of the cornerstones of modern aviation safety.

Rather than focusing solely on individual error, Human Factors examines the interaction between people, technology, procedures, organisational systems and the operational environment.

Human performance is influenced by numerous interacting variables, including:

- Workload
- Fatigue
- Stress
- Communication
- Situational awareness
- Leadership
- Training
- Organisational culture
- Environmental conditions
- Resource availability

Many of these influences are not readily visible during conventional compliance audits, yet they directly affect operational decision-making and organisational resilience.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to better understand these influences by systematically capturing the experiences of personnel who encounter them during normal operations.

Organisational Psychology

Safety performance is shaped not only by individual competence but also by organisational behaviour.

Organisational psychology examines how leadership, communication, trust, motivation, decision-making and workplace culture influence performance across complex organisations.

Research consistently demonstrates that organisations with strong psychological safety, effective leadership and open communication are more likely to identify hazards early, encourage reporting and respond proactively to emerging risks.

Conversely, organisations experiencing declining trust, communication barriers or excessive operational pressure may inadvertently create conditions where important safety information fails to reach decision-makers.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ recognises that understanding workforce perceptions provides valuable insight into these organisational dynamics.

James Reason and Organisational Accidents

Professor James Reason fundamentally changed aviation's understanding of accident causation through his work on organisational accidents and the Swiss Cheese Model.

Reason demonstrated that accidents rarely result from a single active failure. Instead, they occur when multiple latent conditions align across an organisation's defensive layers.

These latent conditions may include:

- Organisational decisions.
- Resource constraints.
- Procedural weaknesses.
- Communication failures.
- Supervision.
- Human performance limitations.

Many latent conditions exist long before an accident occurs.

One of the objectives of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is to assist organisations in identifying these conditions earlier through confidential workforce intelligence before they align to produce adverse outcomes.

Safety Culture

Safety culture has become an increasingly important element of aviation Safety Management Systems.

It reflects the shared attitudes, values and behaviours that influence how safety is managed throughout an organisation.

A positive safety culture is characterised by:

- Leadership commitment.
- Mutual trust.
- Open communication.
- Learning from experience.
- Continuous improvement.
- Reporting confidence.
- Shared accountability.

While many organisations undertake periodic safety culture surveys, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to integrate cultural intelligence directly into ongoing organisational assurance rather than treating it as an isolated assessment activity.

Just Culture

Just Culture recognises that individuals should feel able to report safety concerns without fear of inappropriate blame while remaining accountable for reckless or deliberate violations.

Successful reporting systems depend upon workforce confidence.

If personnel believe reporting is valued, confidential and leads to meaningful organisational improvement, organisations are more likely to identify hazards before they contribute to incidents.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ extends this principle by recognising that confidential workforce intelligence can reveal concerns that individuals may not consider appropriate for formal occurrence reporting but which nevertheless provide valuable organisational insight.

Safety-II and Everyday Performance

Traditional safety management has largely focused on understanding why things go wrong.

More recently, Safety-II has encouraged organisations to also examine why operations succeed under varying conditions.

Personnel continually adapt to changing operational environments, balancing competing demands while maintaining safe outcomes.

These adaptations provide valuable information regarding organisational resilience.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ captures these experiences not simply to identify problems, but also to understand the practices that enable safe performance under real-world conditions.

This broader perspective supports continual organisational learning rather than focusing exclusively on failure.

Resilience Engineering

Resilience Engineering examines an organisation’s ability to anticipate, monitor, respond and learn in the face of changing operational conditions.

Rather than viewing safety as the absence of accidents, resilience considers an organisation’s capacity to continue operating safely despite variability and uncertainty.

Understanding workforce experience contributes significantly to this capability.

Personnel often recognise subtle operational changes before they become measurable through traditional safety indicators.

These early observations can provide valuable intelligence regarding emerging organisational vulnerabilities.

High Reliability Organisations

High Reliability Organisations (HROs) operate successfully within environments where failure can have catastrophic consequences.

Research into HROs has identified several common characteristics, including:

- Preoccupation with failure.
- Reluctance to simplify.
- Sensitivity to operations.
- Commitment to resilience.
- Deference to expertise.

Perhaps most relevant to Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is the principle of *sensitivity to operations*.

High Reliability Organisations actively seek to understand what is occurring at the operational level rather than relying solely on management reporting.

HSI provides one practical mechanism for strengthening this operational awareness.

From Safety Science to Practical Assurance

Each of these disciplines has significantly advanced aviation safety.

However, organisations often apply them independently through separate initiatives, including:

- Human Factors training.
- Safety culture surveys.
- Leadership programs.
- SMS implementation.
- Occurrence reporting.
- Operational audits.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to bring these recognised concepts together within a single, structured assurance methodology.

Rather than introducing another standalone program, HSI integrates workforce intelligence into existing organisational safety assurance activities, allowing recognised safety science to directly inform executive decision-making.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ as an Integrating Framework

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology should therefore be viewed not as a replacement for established safety principles, but as an integrating framework.

It combines:

- Human Factors.
- Organisational Psychology.
- Safety Culture.
- Just Culture.
- Safety-II.
- Resilience Engineering.
- High Reliability Organisation principles.
- Contemporary Safety Management Systems.

Through this integration, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to transform dispersed workforce experience into structured organisational intelligence that supports more proactive safety leadership.

As aviation continues to evolve towards predictive, intelligence-led safety management, the ability to systematically understand the lived experiences of the workforce may become one of the most valuable additions to existing safety assurance practices.

7. Measuring Hidden Safety Intelligence™

Transforming Workforce Experience into Organisational Intelligence

“Information becomes intelligence only when it is systematically collected, objectively analysed and used to support informed decision-making.”

One of the greatest challenges in organisational safety is not the availability of information, but the ability to convert dispersed knowledge into meaningful intelligence.

Every aviation organisation possesses a wealth of operational experience distributed throughout its workforce. Pilots, engineers, maintenance personnel, dispatchers, cabin crew, ground handlers, supervisors and managers collectively observe thousands of operational decisions, interactions and adaptations every day.

Individually, these experiences provide useful observations.

Collectively, they represent an extraordinarily valuable source of organisational intelligence.

The challenge lies in capturing this knowledge in a manner that is structured, objective, repeatable and meaningful.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has therefore been designed not simply as a confidential feedback process, but as a measurement methodology capable of transforming qualitative workforce experience into measurable organisational intelligence.

Rather than relying on anecdotal comments or isolated perceptions, the methodology examines organisational patterns, recurring themes and collective indicators that provide leaders with evidence-based insight into organisational performance.

The objective is not to measure employee satisfaction.

The objective is to measure organisational conditions that influence operational safety.



Figure 4 – The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Transformation Model illustrates the central principle of the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology. Workforce observations, operational experiences and human factors knowledge are systematically captured through confidential intelligence processes, analysed for recurring themes and validated against existing organisational evidence. The resulting intelligence provides leadership with a richer understanding of organisational performance and supports more informed safety decision-making.

Unlike traditional feedback mechanisms, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ does not simply collect opinions. It converts dispersed operational experience into structured organisational intelligence that can be integrated with existing Safety Management Systems and organisational assurance processes.

Traditional surveys frequently focus on attitudes, engagement or employee satisfaction.

While these provide valuable organisational information, they are not necessarily designed to identify latent operational risk.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ takes a different approach.

It seeks to understand:

- How personnel experience operational safety.
- What factors influence safe performance.
- Where organisational barriers exist.
- Which operational adaptations have become normal.
- Where leadership may unintentionally create risk.
- Which issues remain largely invisible within formal reporting systems.

This distinction is important.

HSI does not ask personnel whether they are happy at work.

It seeks to understand whether organisational conditions support safe operational performance.

Intelligence Domains

Rather than evaluating isolated issues, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ examines multiple organisational domains that collectively influence safety performance.

These domains provide the framework for analysing workforce intelligence and identifying systemic trends.

Indicative domains include:

Leadership and Governance

Examining perceptions of leadership visibility, commitment to safety, accountability and decision-making.

Possible areas of consideration include:

- Leadership commitment.
- Safety priorities.
- Executive communication.
- Decision transparency.
- Organisational trust.

Operational Environment

Understanding the practical realities of everyday operations.

This may include:

- Workload.
- Staffing.
- Operational pressure.
- Equipment availability.
- Environmental conditions.
- Shift patterns.

Human Performance

Assessing the organisational factors that influence human performance.

Examples include:

- Fatigue.
- Workload management.
- Situational awareness.
- Decision-making support.
- Stress.
- Resource availability.

Communication and Information Flow

Examining how information moves throughout the organisation.

Topics may include:

- Cross-functional communication.
- Reporting pathways.
- Feedback mechanisms.
- Information accessibility.
- Operational coordination.

Reporting Culture

Understanding workforce confidence in organisational reporting systems.

Areas of interest may include:

- Reporting confidence.
- Just Culture.
- Psychological safety.
- Perceived organisational response.
- Learning from reports.

Operational Learning

Assessing how effectively organisations learn from operational experience.

Including:

- Lessons learned.
- Continuous improvement.
- Sharing operational knowledge.
- Organisational responsiveness.
- Safety promotion.

Organisational Resilience

Understanding the organisation's ability to respond to changing operational conditions.

Examples include:

- Adaptability.
- Resource flexibility.
- Recovery capability.
- Team cooperation.
- Preparedness.

Looking for Patterns, Not Individuals

A fundamental principle of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is that organisational intelligence emerges from collective patterns rather than individual responses.

The methodology is specifically designed to protect confidentiality while identifying consistent organisational themes.

Analysis therefore focuses on:

- Trends.
- Repeated observations.
- Organisational indicators.
- Departmental comparisons.
- Emerging themes.
- Human factors interactions.
- Organisational strengths.
- Opportunities for improvement.

Individual responses are not intended to be investigated in isolation.

Instead, aggregated intelligence enables organisations to understand broader organisational conditions without compromising confidentiality.

This approach encourages candid participation while supporting objective analysis.

From Indicators to Intelligence

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ does not seek to generate additional data for its own sake.

Its purpose is to create intelligence that supports decision-making.

The analytical process transforms workforce observations into organisational indicators that can be considered alongside existing assurance information.

Potential intelligence outputs may include:

- Emerging risk themes.
- Leadership indicators.
- Human factors trends.
- Reporting confidence profiles.
- Communication effectiveness indicators.
- Organisational resilience observations.

- Cultural strengths.
- Areas of latent organisational vulnerability.

These outputs provide executives with a richer understanding of organisational performance than compliance data alone.

Future Development of HSI Metrics

As the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology continues to evolve through industry application and research, the Flight Safety Group intends to develop a suite of structured intelligence metrics to support benchmarking and longitudinal analysis.

Potential future measures may include:

- **Hidden Safety Intelligence Index™ (HSI Index™)** – An overall indicator of organisational safety intelligence maturity.
- **Leadership Trust Index™** – Measuring workforce confidence in leadership commitment to safety.
- **Reporting Confidence Index™** – Assessing confidence in reporting processes and organisational response.
- **Operational Reality Index™** – Evaluating alignment between documented procedures and operational practice.
- **Human Factors Maturity Index™** – Measuring organisational integration of human factors principles.
- **Safety Intelligence Maturity Model™** – A framework describing the evolution of an organisation's capability to identify, understand and act upon hidden organisational risk.

These concepts remain under development and are presented within this white paper as future opportunities for discussion and refinement through industry collaboration.

Measuring What Matters

Traditional safety assurance measures many important organisational characteristics.

Compliance is measured.

Training completion is measured.

Occurrence rates are measured.

Audit findings are measured.

Safety performance indicators are measured.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ proposes that organisations should also seek to measure another important dimension:

How the workforce collectively experiences the organisation's safety system.

When viewed in isolation, neither compliance data nor workforce intelligence provides a complete picture.

When interpreted together, they create a more comprehensive understanding of organisational performance and provide leaders with stronger evidence to support strategic safety decisions.

Ultimately, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is not about replacing existing measures.

It is about measuring an additional dimension of organisational safety that has historically been difficult to quantify but may contain some of the earliest indicators of future operational risk.

8. Practical Applications

Applying Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Across Aviation

"Every aviation organisation possesses unique operational challenges. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ provides a flexible assurance framework that can be adapted to different operational environments while maintaining a consistent objective: transforming workforce experience into actionable organisational intelligence."

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology has been developed as an organisational assurance framework rather than a sector-specific audit program. Although conceived within the aviation industry, the underlying principles are applicable wherever complex operations rely upon people, procedures and organisational decision-making to manage safety risk.

Because HSI complements rather than replaces existing Safety Management Systems, it can be integrated into a wide range of assurance activities regardless of organisation size or operational complexity.

The methodology is intentionally scalable.

A small regional helicopter operator may use Hidden Safety Intelligence™ to strengthen internal safety assurance and better understand workforce concerns. Conversely, a large international airline may apply the methodology across multiple departments to identify organisational trends that may not be visible through conventional reporting systems alone.

The methodology can also be adapted to support specific operational objectives, including internal audits, management reviews, organisational change programs, merger integration, safety culture improvement initiatives and independent assurance activities.

The following examples illustrate how Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may be applied across different sectors of the aviation industry.

Air Transport Operators

Airlines operate within highly complex environments involving multiple operational departments, contracted service providers and geographically dispersed personnel.

While airlines routinely collect extensive operational data through Safety Management Systems, Flight Data Monitoring (FDM), Flight Operational Quality Assurance (FOQA), occurrence reporting and internal auditing, understanding the workforce's operational experience can provide an additional layer of organisational intelligence.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may assist operators to:

- Identify emerging operational pressures before they influence safety performance.
- Better understand communication across operational departments.
- Evaluate workforce confidence in reporting systems.
- Assess leadership visibility and safety engagement.
- Monitor organisational resilience during periods of operational change.
- Identify latent organisational risks that span multiple departments.

Rather than duplicating existing safety data, HSI complements operational performance information with human-centred organisational intelligence.

Helicopter Operators

Helicopter operations frequently involve diverse mission profiles, remote operating environments and high levels of operational variability.

Whether supporting offshore energy, emergency medical services, firefighting, utility operations or charter activities, helicopter personnel continually adapt to changing operational conditions.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may provide operators with deeper insight into:

- Operational decision-making.
- Workload and fatigue.
- Resource constraints.
- Communication between flight and ground personnel.
- Operational adaptations.
- Risk perception across different mission types.
- Leadership support in remote operating environments.

For smaller operators in particular, HSI may assist accountable managers in understanding organisational risks that are not readily apparent through formal reporting mechanisms.

Offshore Aviation

Offshore helicopter operations involve a unique combination of aviation, marine and energy-sector influences.

Personnel often operate within isolated environments where organisational culture, communication and leadership significantly influence operational resilience.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may support offshore operators by examining:

- Interface management between operators and clients.
- Helideck operations.
- Operational pressures associated with offshore logistics.
- Contractor communication.
- Emergency preparedness.
- Reporting confidence.
- Human factors associated with remote operations.

The methodology provides an opportunity to better understand the operational realities experienced by both flight crews and offshore personnel.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Emergency medical operations are characterised by high operational tempo, unpredictable tasking and significant time pressure.

Decision-making frequently occurs under dynamic operational conditions.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may assist EMS organisations to better understand:

- Operational workload.
- Crew coordination.
- Fatigue management.
- Decision-making under pressure.
- Communication between aviation and medical personnel.
- Resource adequacy.
- Psychological wellbeing.

These insights may contribute to improved organisational resilience while supporting existing risk management processes.

Flight Training Organisations

Training organisations play a critical role in shaping the safety culture of future aviation professionals.

Beyond regulatory compliance, HSI may help training organisations understand:

- Instructor perceptions.
- Student reporting confidence.
- Learning culture.
- Communication effectiveness.
- Practical application of procedures.
- Organisational support for instructors.
- Human factors within the training environment.

Understanding these factors may strengthen both training quality and organisational safety performance.

Airports and Vertiports

Airports and emerging vertiport operations involve the interaction of numerous independent organisations operating within shared environments.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may assist airport operators in examining:

- Cross-organisational communication.
- Airside coordination.
- Contractor interfaces.
- Operational workload.
- Ground handling practices.
- Safety leadership.
- Organisational learning.

As Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) continues to develop, understanding human interactions across complex operational interfaces will become increasingly important.

Maintenance Organisations

Maintenance organisations operate within environments where technical excellence, procedural compliance and human performance are closely interconnected.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may provide additional insight into:

- Workload management.
- Shift handovers.
- Resource availability.
- Maintenance planning pressures.
- Communication.
- Safety reporting confidence.
- Organisational learning.

These insights complement traditional maintenance quality assurance by exploring the human and organisational factors influencing maintenance performance.

Regulators and Oversight Authorities

Although Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has been developed primarily as an organisational assurance methodology, aspects of the framework may also support regulatory oversight activities.

Without replacing surveillance or certification processes, HSI concepts may assist regulators to better understand:

- Organisational maturity.
- Safety culture trends.
- Leadership engagement.
- Reporting confidence.
- Organisational resilience.
- Emerging industry themes.

Such intelligence may contribute to more risk-informed oversight and improved understanding of systemic issues across the aviation sector.

Supporting Organisational Change

One of the most valuable applications of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ may be during periods of significant organisational change.

Changes such as:

- Organisational restructuring.
- Fleet expansion.
- Introduction of new technology.
- Operational growth.
- Leadership transition.
- Acquisition or merger.
- Regulatory change.

can all influence workforce confidence, communication and organisational resilience.

Applying HSI before, during and after major change initiatives enables organisations to monitor how change is experienced by the workforce, identify emerging concerns early and evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation strategies.

In this context, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ becomes not only an assurance tool, but also a mechanism for supporting safe organisational transformation.

Flexible by Design

Although the examples presented in this chapter focus on aviation, the principles underpinning Hidden Safety Intelligence™ are intentionally adaptable.

The methodology is designed to integrate with existing organisational systems rather than impose a single prescribed model.

Its flexibility allows organisations to tailor the scope of intelligence collection while maintaining a consistent analytical framework and assurance philosophy.

Whether applied during an annual safety audit, a strategic organisational review or a targeted human factors assessment, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to answer the same fundamental question:

What organisational intelligence already exists within our workforce that could strengthen safety if we understood it better?

By providing a structured means of answering that question, HSI offers organisations a practical pathway towards more informed leadership, stronger organisational resilience and more proactive safety assurance.

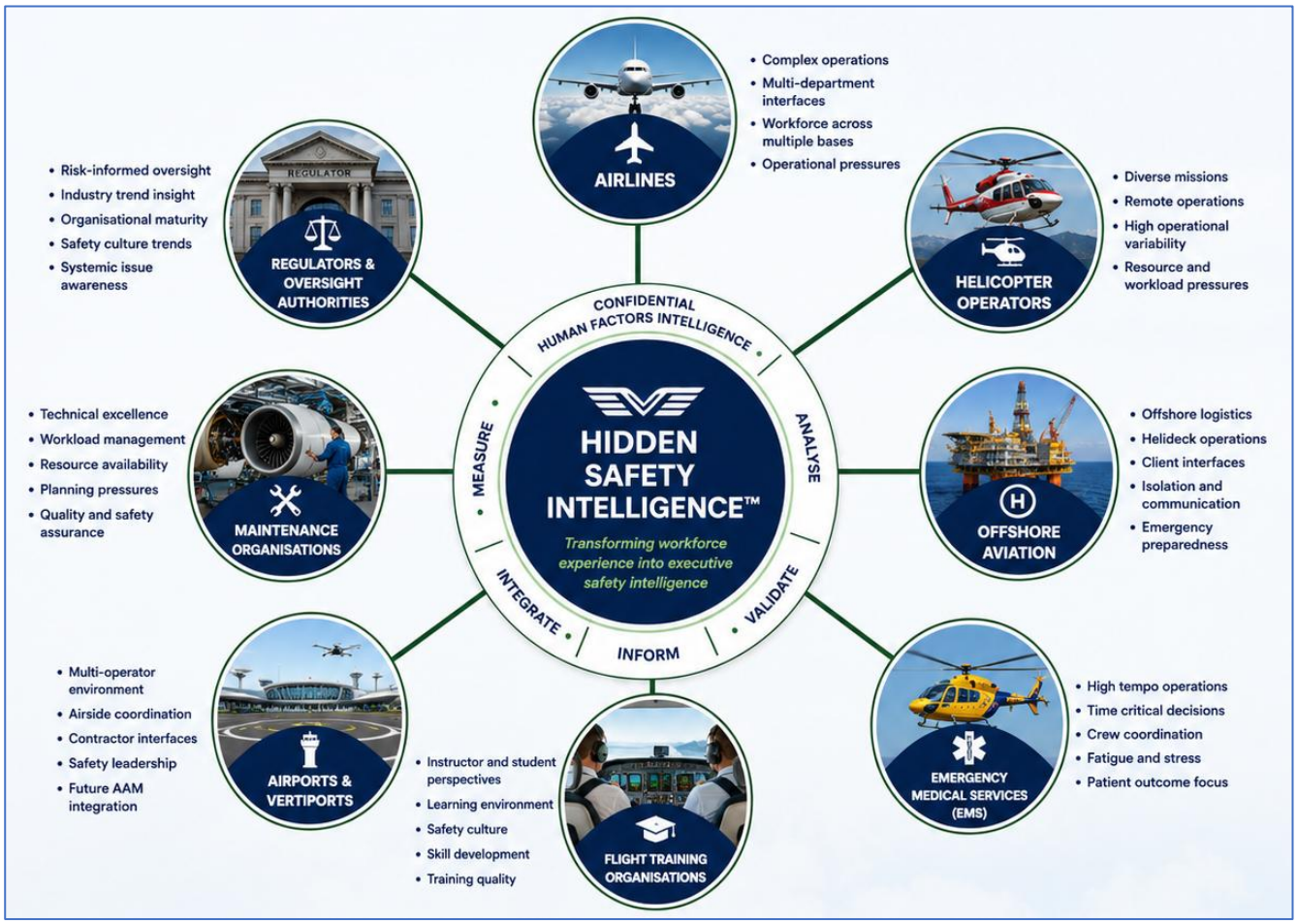


Figure 5 – Integrating Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Across the Aviation Lifecycle

One methodology. Multiple aviation applications. One objective: Complete Safety Assurance.

9. Benefits to Aviation Organisations

Strengthening Safety Through Better Organisational Intelligence

"The value of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is not that it replaces existing assurance processes. Its value lies in strengthening them through a deeper understanding of organisational reality."

Every aviation organisation seeks to improve safety performance while maintaining operational effectiveness, regulatory compliance and organisational resilience. Considerable investment is made in Safety Management Systems (SMS), quality assurance, training, occurrence reporting, operational monitoring and continual improvement initiatives to support these objectives.

These systems have contributed significantly to aviation's exceptional safety record and remain fundamental to effective organisational governance.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ does not seek to replace these established practices.

Instead, it enhances their effectiveness by providing an additional source of organisational intelligence that may assist leaders in understanding not only how the organisation is designed to operate, but also how it is experienced by the people responsible for delivering safe operations every day.

By integrating confidential workforce intelligence with existing assurance activities, organisations may gain a more complete understanding of operational performance and strengthen their ability to anticipate, prioritise and manage risk.

The benefits described in this chapter should therefore be viewed as complementary to existing Safety Management Systems rather than independent outcomes.

Earlier Identification of Emerging Risk

One of the greatest opportunities presented by Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is the ability to identify emerging organisational issues before they develop into more significant operational risks.

Traditional safety assurance frequently identifies hazards once they become observable through audit findings, safety reports, operational events or performance indicators.

Workforce intelligence may reveal many of these issues much earlier.

Personnel often recognise subtle changes in operational conditions long before those changes become measurable through conventional safety metrics.

Examples may include:

- Increasing workload.
- Communication breakdowns.
- Declining reporting confidence.
- Leadership inconsistency.
- Procedural complexity.
- Resource pressures.
- Operational workarounds.

Understanding these indicators allows organisations to respond proactively rather than reactively.

Improved Executive Decision-Making

Executive leaders are responsible for making decisions that influence the safety and performance of the entire organisation.

Those decisions are only as effective as the information available to support them.

Traditional assurance provides valuable evidence regarding compliance, operational performance and safety outcomes.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ complements these sources by providing insight into workforce experience and organisational dynamics that may otherwise remain invisible.

This broader evidence base enables leadership to make more informed decisions regarding:

- Resource allocation.
- Operational priorities.
- Organisational change.
- Safety investment.
- Leadership development.
- Human factors initiatives.
- Risk treatment strategies.

The result is more informed governance supported by a richer understanding of organisational reality.

Strengthening Safety Culture

Safety culture is widely recognised as a critical contributor to organisational performance.

Strong safety cultures are characterised by trust, open communication, learning and shared commitment to safe operations.

Because Hidden Safety Intelligence™ encourages confidential workforce participation, it provides organisations with greater visibility into how safety culture is experienced across different operational areas.

This intelligence may help leaders to:

- Understand barriers to reporting.
- Identify communication gaps.
- Monitor organisational trust.
- Evaluate leadership effectiveness.
- Recognise cultural strengths.
- Identify opportunities for improvement.

Rather than relying solely on periodic culture assessments, organisations can integrate these insights into ongoing safety assurance activities.

Enhancing Human Factors Integration

Human Factors principles are now embedded throughout modern aviation regulation and Safety Management Systems.

Despite this, many organisations continue to find it challenging to measure how human factors influence everyday operational performance.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ provides a structured means of integrating human factors intelligence directly into organisational assurance.

By examining themes such as workload, fatigue, communication, leadership, procedural practicality and operational adaptation, organisations gain a clearer understanding of the human influences affecting operational resilience.

This supports a more balanced approach to risk management by considering both technical and organisational contributors to safety performance.

Supporting a Just and Reporting Culture

An effective reporting culture depends upon confidence.

Personnel are more likely to share concerns when they believe:

- Their views will be treated fairly.
- Confidentiality will be respected.
- Meaningful action will follow.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ complements existing reporting systems by providing an additional confidential mechanism through which workforce intelligence can be gathered.

Importantly, HSI is not intended to replace formal hazard reporting.

Rather, it captures broader organisational experiences that may not meet the threshold for formal occurrence reporting but nevertheless contribute valuable organisational insight.

This distinction strengthens rather than competes with existing reporting systems.

Identifying Organisational Blind Spots

Every organisation possesses areas where leadership visibility is naturally limited.

Large organisations, dispersed operations, multiple departments and geographically separated workforces can all contribute to gaps between executive understanding and frontline operational experience.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ assists in narrowing this gap by systematically capturing perspectives from across the organisation.

The methodology may reveal:

- Emerging operational pressures.
- Inconsistent leadership practices.
- Communication challenges.
- Cross-functional coordination issues.
- Resource concerns.
- Variations in organisational experience.

These insights enable leadership to address issues before they become embedded within organisational culture.

Strengthening Organisational Resilience

Resilient organisations anticipate change, adapt effectively and recover from disruption while maintaining safe operations.

Understanding how personnel experience operational variability contributes directly to organisational resilience.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ supports resilience by identifying:

- Areas of operational adaptability.
- Sources of organisational strength.
- Emerging vulnerabilities.
- Opportunities to improve coordination.
- Human factors influencing recovery capability.

This intelligence assists organisations in strengthening their capacity to respond to future operational challenges.

Supporting Continuous Improvement

Safety Management Systems are founded upon the principle of continual improvement.

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology aligns closely with this philosophy by establishing an ongoing intelligence cycle rather than a one-time assessment.

Repeated application enables organisations to:

- Measure organisational change.
- Monitor improvement initiatives.
- Track emerging trends.
- Evaluate intervention effectiveness.
- Identify new areas of opportunity.

This longitudinal perspective allows organisations to move beyond isolated audit findings towards a continuous understanding of organisational performance.

Complementing Existing Safety Assurance

Perhaps the greatest strength of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is that it builds upon existing assurance systems rather than competing with them.

The methodology complements:

- Regulatory oversight.
- Internal auditing.
- Safety Management Systems.
- Occurrence reporting.
- Flight Data Monitoring.
- Quality Assurance.
- Human Factors programs.
- Safety culture initiatives.

By integrating workforce intelligence into these established systems, organisations gain a broader evidence base for strategic safety decision-making.

A Strategic Investment in Organisational Intelligence

Modern aviation organisations collect extensive operational data.

The next opportunity may not be collecting more data; it may be making better use of knowledge that already exists within the organisation.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to unlock this potential by transforming workforce experience into structured organisational intelligence.

The result is not simply additional information.

It is a deeper understanding of how the organisation functions, where risks may be emerging and how leadership can respond more effectively.

In this way, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ supports a shift from measuring compliance alone towards understanding organisational capability, resilience and operational reality.

For accountable managers and senior executives, this represents an opportunity to strengthen governance through one of the organisation’s most valuable but often underutilised assets:

The collective knowledge of its people.

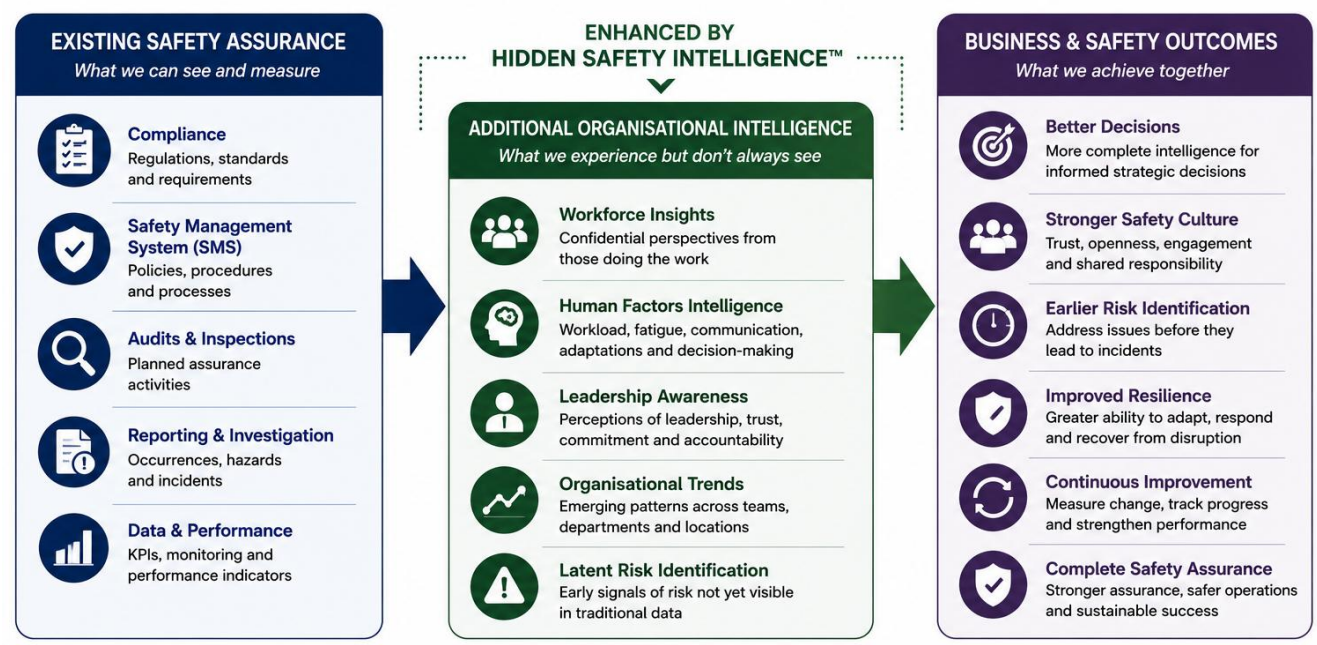


Figure 6 – The Value Proposition of Hidden Safety Intelligence™

HSI does not replace existing assurance – it strengthens it.

10. Challenges and Considerations

Implementing Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Effectively

"The effectiveness of any safety assurance methodology depends not only on the quality of the process, but on the willingness of an organisation to listen, learn and act."

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ (HSI) has been developed to complement existing aviation safety assurance processes by providing organisations with additional insight into operational reality through confidential workforce intelligence. Like any organisational improvement initiative, however, its effectiveness depends upon thoughtful implementation, leadership commitment and the confidence of the workforce.

The methodology should not be viewed as a standalone survey or a substitute for existing Safety Management Systems. Rather, it is an organisational intelligence framework designed to strengthen decision-making by integrating confidential human factors insights with established safety assurance activities.

Successful implementation requires careful consideration of several key factors.

Confidentiality Builds Trust

The success of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ depends fundamentally on workforce confidence.

Personnel must be confident that their responses will remain confidential, that individual comments will not be attributed to identifiable individuals, and that the purpose of participation is organisational learning rather than individual performance assessment.

If confidentiality is compromised, the quality and authenticity of the intelligence collected will diminish.

For this reason, confidentiality is not simply an administrative requirement of HSI – it is one of its core principles.

Leadership Commitment

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is most effective when supported by visible leadership commitment.

Senior leaders establish the organisational environment in which workforce intelligence is valued, respected and acted upon.

Employees are more likely to participate openly when they believe that leadership is genuinely interested in understanding operational reality and committed to addressing identified issues.

Equally important, leadership must be prepared to receive findings that may challenge existing assumptions or reveal previously unrecognised organisational vulnerabilities.

Intelligence Requires Context

Workforce perceptions provide valuable organisational insight, but they should not be interpreted in isolation.

Individual observations may reflect local circumstances, temporary operational pressures or unique experiences. The strength of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ lies in identifying consistent organisational patterns rather than responding to isolated comments.

Accordingly, HSI findings should always be considered alongside existing organisational evidence, including audit findings, occurrence reports, operational observations, Safety Performance Indicators and other sources of safety assurance.

This integrated approach strengthens the reliability of organisational decision-making.

Supporting, Not Replacing, Existing Systems

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has not been developed as an alternative to regulatory compliance, Safety Management Systems or internal auditing.

Its purpose is to strengthen these established processes by providing an additional source of organisational intelligence.

Organisations implementing HSI should therefore integrate the methodology into their existing assurance framework rather than treating it as a separate or competing initiative.

This approach reinforces one of the central principles of the methodology:

HSI enhances existing safety assurance. It does not replace it.

Continuous Learning

Organisations evolve continually.

Operational environments change, personnel change, leadership changes and organisational priorities change.

Consequently, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ should not be viewed as a one-time assessment.

The greatest value is achieved when workforce intelligence is collected periodically, allowing organisations to identify trends, evaluate improvement initiatives and monitor organisational change over time.

This longitudinal perspective transforms Hidden Safety Intelligence™ from a diagnostic exercise into an ongoing source of strategic organisational intelligence.

Looking Ahead

The aviation industry has demonstrated repeatedly that meaningful improvements in safety are achieved through continuous learning, collaboration and the willingness to adapt.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to contribute to that ongoing evolution by providing organisations with a structured methodology for understanding an often-overlooked dimension of safety performance – the collective operational knowledge of the workforce.

Like any emerging methodology, HSI will continue to develop through practical application, industry collaboration and ongoing research.

Its long-term success will ultimately depend not on the methodology itself, but on how effectively organisations use the intelligence it provides to strengthen leadership, improve decision-making and continually enhance safety performance.

11. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ within the ICAO Safety Management System

Strengthening Safety Assurance Through Organisational Intelligence

"Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has been designed to complement existing Safety Management Systems by enhancing organisational understanding rather than replacing established safety management processes."

Introduction

Since the introduction of Safety Management Systems (SMS), the aviation industry has progressively moved from reactive safety management towards a proactive and increasingly predictive approach to risk management. ICAO Annex 19 and the ICAO Safety Management Manual (Doc 9859) provide an internationally recognised framework that enables organisations to systematically identify hazards, assess risk, monitor safety performance and promote continuous improvement.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has been developed within this philosophy.

The methodology does not introduce an alternative safety management framework. Instead, it provides an additional source of organisational intelligence that supports the existing objectives of an effective SMS.

By integrating confidential workforce insights into organisational assurance, HSI strengthens leadership awareness, enhances organisational learning and contributes to more informed safety decision-making.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ and the Four Components of SMS

The ICAO Safety Management System is built around four interrelated components:

- Safety Policy and Objectives
- Safety Risk Management
- Safety Assurance
- Safety Promotion

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ supports each of these components by providing a structured mechanism for understanding how the safety management system is experienced throughout the organisation.

Safety Policy and Objectives

An effective safety policy establishes leadership commitment, organisational accountability and a positive safety culture.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ assists leadership by providing confidential insight into how these commitments are perceived by the workforce.

Rather than relying solely on documented policies, executives gain a clearer understanding of:

- Leadership visibility.
- Workforce trust.
- Organisational communication.
- Safety priorities.
- Employee confidence in leadership commitment.

These insights enable leaders to evaluate whether organisational safety objectives are being effectively translated into operational practice.

Safety Risk Management

Effective risk management depends upon identifying hazards before they result in adverse outcomes.

Traditional hazard identification relies upon operational reporting, audits, inspections and risk assessments.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ complements these activities by identifying emerging organisational conditions that may not yet be evident through formal reporting systems.

Examples include:

- Increasing workload.
- Operational pressure.
- Communication barriers.
- Procedural complexity.
- Informal workarounds.
- Declining reporting confidence.

By identifying these organisational influences earlier, HSI provides an additional source of information to support proactive risk management.

Safety Assurance

Safety Assurance seeks to determine whether safety risk controls remain effective and whether the organisation continues to achieve its intended safety performance.

This is the area in which Hidden Safety Intelligence™ provides its greatest contribution.

Traditional assurance activities primarily examine documented evidence and observable operational performance.

HSI expands this evidence base by incorporating confidential organisational intelligence relating to human factors, workforce experience and operational reality.

This additional intelligence assists organisations in:

- Validating existing assurance findings.
- Identifying emerging trends.
- Understanding organisational influences.
- Measuring changes over time.
- Supporting continual improvement.

Rather than replacing audits, HSI enhances the effectiveness of existing assurance activities by adding an additional layer of organisational understanding.

Safety Promotion

Safety Promotion encourages communication, learning and the continual development of a positive safety culture.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ supports this objective by actively engaging personnel in the safety assurance process.

When employees see that their experience contributes to organisational improvement, confidence in the safety management system may be strengthened.

This encourages:

- Organisational learning.
- Leadership engagement.

- Open communication.
- Shared responsibility.
- Continuous improvement.

In this way, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ contributes not only to the collection of safety intelligence but also to the promotion of a stronger organisational safety culture.

An Intelligence Layer Within Existing SMS

The relationship between Hidden Safety Intelligence™ and the Safety Management System can be viewed as complementary rather than hierarchical.

The SMS remains the organisation's primary framework for managing safety.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ functions as an intelligence layer that enhances the quality of information available to the SMS.

Rather than creating additional management systems, HSI strengthens existing decision-making by providing a broader understanding of organisational conditions.

This approach aligns closely with the industry's continued transition towards predictive safety management, where multiple sources of safety information are integrated to support proactive leadership decisions.

Supporting the Future of Predictive Safety

Modern Safety Management Systems increasingly seek to identify risk before operational events occur.

Data analytics, Flight Data Monitoring, occurrence reporting and safety performance indicators all contribute to this objective.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ complements these initiatives by recognising that one of the richest sources of predictive information already exists within the workforce.

When confidential workforce intelligence is analysed alongside operational data and existing assurance activities, organisations gain a more complete understanding of organisational performance.

The result is not simply additional information.

It is better organisational intelligence.

12. Future Development

The Evolution of Hidden Safety Intelligence™

"Like aviation safety itself, Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is intended to evolve through continual learning, research and industry collaboration."

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ (HSI) Methodology presented within this white paper represents the initial development of a structured framework for integrating confidential workforce intelligence into aviation safety assurance.

While the core principles have been developed from established safety science and practical aviation experience, the methodology is intended to continue evolving through operational application, industry consultation and ongoing research.

Flight Safety Group views Hidden Safety Intelligence™ not as a finished product, but as the beginning of a long-term program of innovation aimed at strengthening organisational safety assurance.

Developing Organisational Intelligence

As organisations begin applying the methodology, opportunities will emerge to refine how organisational intelligence is measured, analysed and presented.

Future development may include enhanced analytical models capable of identifying long-term organisational trends, comparing intelligence across operational areas and supporting more informed executive decision-making.

The objective will remain unchanged:

To transform workforce experience into meaningful organisational intelligence that strengthens proactive safety management.

Intelligence Maturity

A longer-term objective is the development of an **HSI Maturity Model™**, enabling organisations to assess the maturity of their organisational intelligence capability over time.

Rather than measuring regulatory compliance alone, such a model may assist organisations in evaluating their ability to:

- Capture workforce intelligence.
- Understand organisational risk.
- Integrate human factors into decision-making.
- Monitor organisational resilience.
- Demonstrate continual improvement.

This capability would complement existing Safety Management System maturity assessments rather than replace them.

Emerging Technologies

Advances in data analytics and Artificial Intelligence offer significant opportunities to enhance the future capability of Hidden Safety Intelligence™.

As appropriate technologies mature, they may assist organisations in:

- Identifying recurring themes across large datasets.
- Detecting emerging organisational trends.
- Monitoring changes over time.

- Supporting predictive safety analysis.
- Producing executive intelligence dashboards.

These technologies should be viewed as decision-support tools rather than substitutes for professional judgement.

Human interpretation will remain essential to understanding organisational context and operational reality.

Education and Professional Development

As the methodology matures, Flight Safety Group intends to develop supporting education and professional development programs.

Potential initiatives may include:

- Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Practitioner training.
- Auditor familiarisation programs.
- Executive awareness workshops.
- Human Factors Intelligence seminars.
- Industry guidance material.

These programs would support consistent application of the methodology while encouraging broader understanding of intelligence-led safety assurance.

Research and Collaboration

The continued development of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ will depend upon collaboration across the aviation community.

Flight Safety Group welcomes engagement with:

- Aviation operators.
- Regulators.
- Universities.
- Human factors researchers.
- Safety professionals.
- Industry associations.

Constructive feedback, practical experience and independent research will all contribute to refining the methodology and ensuring that it continues to reflect recognised safety science and operational best practice.

Looking Forward

The aviation industry has continually evolved by embracing new knowledge, challenging established assumptions and learning from operational experience.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is intended to contribute to that ongoing journey.

By integrating confidential workforce intelligence into organisational safety assurance, the methodology seeks to provide leaders with a broader understanding of operational reality and an additional source of information to support proactive decision-making.

Its future development will be guided by the same principles that have shaped aviation safety for decades:

Continuous learning, evidence-based improvement and collaboration across the industry.

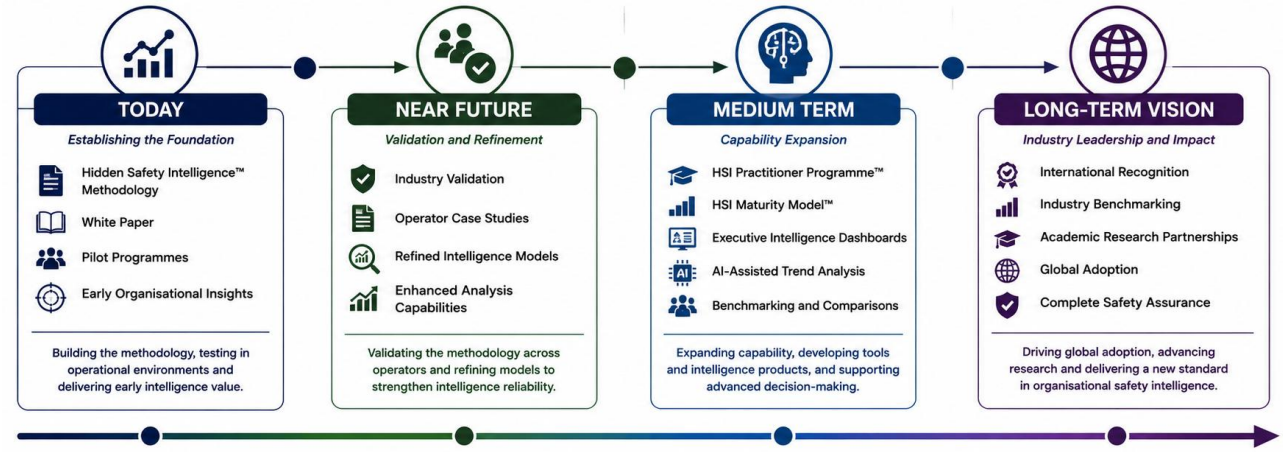


Figure 9 – The Future Evolution of Hidden Safety Intelligence™

A methodology that evolves through evidence, collaboration and continual improvement.

13. Invitation to Participate

Shaping the Future of Aviation Safety Assurance

"The strongest safety solutions are developed not in isolation, but through collaboration, experience and continuous learning."

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ (HSI) Methodology has been developed from many years of aviation operational experience, auditing, safety management and human factors observation. It is also informed by established safety science and the aviation industry's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.

This white paper represents the first formal introduction of the methodology.

Rather than presenting Hidden Safety Intelligence™ as a completed framework, Flight Safety Group has chosen to publish this document as a discussion paper to encourage constructive industry engagement.

The purpose is not simply to present an idea.

It is to begin a conversation.

An Invitation to the Aviation Community

Flight Safety Group welcomes feedback from organisations and individuals across the aviation industry who share an interest in advancing proactive safety management.

This includes:

- Aircraft operators.
- Accountable Managers.
- Safety Managers.
- Quality Managers.
- Human Factors specialists.
- Regulators.
- Auditors.
- Flight crew.
- Engineers.
- Ground operations personnel.
- Training organisations.
- Airports and vertiports.
- Universities and research institutions.
- Industry associations.

Each group brings valuable experience that can contribute to the continued refinement of the methodology.

Pilot Organisations

A key next step in the evolution of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is its practical application across a range of operational environments.

Flight Safety Group intends to work with selected aviation organisations to evaluate the methodology under real-world operating conditions.

These pilot programs will assist in:

- Refining the methodology.

- Validating intelligence models.
- Evaluating organisational outcomes.
- Identifying opportunities for improvement.
- Building practical case studies.
- Supporting future research.

The lessons learned through these early applications will play an important role in shaping future editions of the methodology.

Research and Independent Evaluation

Meaningful innovation requires independent evaluation.

Flight Safety Group encourages collaboration with universities, research organisations and aviation safety professionals to examine the effectiveness of Hidden Safety Intelligence™ and its contribution to contemporary Safety Management Systems.

Independent research will help ensure that the methodology continues to evolve in a manner that is evidence-based, transparent and aligned with recognised aviation safety principles.

A Shared Commitment

The aviation industry has achieved its remarkable safety record through a willingness to learn from operational experience and to continually improve.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ seeks to contribute to that tradition.

Its success will not be determined solely by the methodology itself, but by the willingness of the aviation community to share knowledge, challenge assumptions and work collaboratively to strengthen organisational safety.

Flight Safety Group welcomes that dialogue and invites organisations and individuals to participate in the ongoing development of Hidden Safety Intelligence™.

Together, we can continue building a more complete understanding of aviation safety – one that combines regulatory compliance, operational evidence and the invaluable experience of the people who make safe aviation possible every day.

14. Conclusion

The Next Evolution in Aviation Safety Assurance

“The future of aviation safety may not depend upon collecting more information. It may depend upon making better use of the intelligence that already exists.”

The aviation industry has never stood still.

Throughout its history, every significant improvement in aviation safety has been achieved through continual learning, rigorous investigation and a willingness to evolve. From advances in aircraft technology and regulatory oversight to the introduction of Crew Resource Management, Human Factors and Safety Management Systems, the industry has consistently sought better ways to understand and manage operational risk.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is presented in that same spirit.

It does not propose replacing established safety management principles, nor does it suggest that traditional audits, regulatory compliance or Safety Management Systems are insufficient. On the contrary, these systems have formed the foundation of one of the safest transport industries in the world and will continue to do so.

The opportunity presented by Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is different.

It recognises that every aviation organisation already possesses an extraordinary source of safety knowledge within its workforce. Every pilot, engineer, dispatcher, air traffic professional, ground handler, operational manager and support employee experiences the organisation in ways that cannot always be observed through documentation, audits or operational data alone.

Collectively, these experiences represent a valuable form of organisational intelligence.

When captured systematically, interpreted responsibly and integrated with existing assurance processes, they provide leaders with a broader understanding of operational reality and a stronger foundation for proactive decision-making.

This is the central proposition of Hidden Safety Intelligence™.

Not that organisations require more data. But that they may benefit from a more complete understanding of the data, knowledge and experience they already possess.

As aviation continues its transition towards predictive and intelligence-led safety management, success will increasingly depend upon an organisation’s ability to integrate multiple sources of information into a coherent understanding of risk.

Compliance evidence.

Operational observations.

Safety performance indicators.

Occurrence reporting.

Flight data.

Human factors.

Workforce experience.

Each represents only part of the organisational picture. Together, they provide a richer understanding of how safety is created, sustained and continually improved.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ has been developed as a methodology to help bring these perspectives together.

Its purpose is not to create another management system. Its purpose is to strengthen the systems that already exist.

To assist leaders in seeing not only how the organisation is designed to operate, but how it is actually experienced by the people responsible for delivering safe operations every day.

The methodology described within this white paper represents the beginning of that journey.

It will continue to evolve through practical application, independent research and collaboration across the aviation industry.

Flight Safety Group welcomes that evolution. Indeed, it depends upon it.

The future of aviation safety will continue to be shaped by organisations that remain curious, challenge assumptions and seek to understand not only where risks exist today, but where they may emerge tomorrow.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ is offered as one contribution to that continuing evolution.

Not as the final answer.

But as another step towards a more complete understanding of organisational safety.

A Final Reflection

For decades, aviation safety assurance has asked an essential question:

"Does the organisation comply?"

That question will always remain fundamental.

Hidden Safety Intelligence™ simply proposes that another question deserves equal attention:

"What is the organisation trying to tell us through the experiences of its people?"

When both questions are asked together, organisations move beyond measuring compliance.

They begin understanding reality.

And when leaders understand reality, they are better equipped to prevent risk before it becomes an occurrence.

The Vision

See the System.

Understand how safety has been designed.

Hear the People.

Capture the operational knowledge that exists throughout the workforce.

Understand the Reality.

Transform experience into meaningful organisational intelligence.

Prevent the Risk.

Make better decisions before hazards become incidents.

Complete Safety Assurance

Traditional audits reveal what can be seen. Hidden Safety Intelligence™ reveals what can be understood.

Together, they provide a more complete picture of organisational safety than either could achieve alone.

That is the vision of **Complete Safety Assurance**.

That is the purpose of **Hidden Safety Intelligence™**.

And that may represent the next evolution in aviation safety assurance.

About the Author

Colin Weir is the Principal Developer of the Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology and CEO of Flight Safety Group. With more than six decades of experience in the aviation industry, including extensive work in aviation safety, auditing, helicopter operations, human factors and Safety Management Systems, he has dedicated his career to advancing practical approaches to aviation risk management.

The Hidden Safety Intelligence™ Methodology reflects that experience and Flight Safety Group's commitment to helping aviation organisations move beyond compliance towards a deeper understanding of operational reality.