

Preface

Writing a book is not an easy task. It is very easy starting with a very well-defined plan but, a moment arrives where the book decides to fly alone. The author can choose between following the book or trying to control it. I would like to explain why and how this book was started, when it started to fly on its own and the surprises that the author has encountered during the whole process.

I have been flying more than 20 years, starting with micro-lights, progressing to gliders and light planes. However, I have never flown professionally. My job has been in the field of business management as a consultant and as a Human Resources teacher.

When having a PhD became important in order to remain active in any principal business school, I decided to get it in an easy way. Since I had many contacts in aviation, it should be easy to get information about air safety – as a model of excellence – and, after that, I could export findings and methodology to the field of business management.

The first surprise came when the air safety model seemed to be not so perfect and, moreover, for many years improvement rates were decreasing. From that moment, the idea of easily getting together a thesis became impossible, at least, if one tries to be honest about the results without hiding the ones that counteract your interests!

The analysis of this fact brought me to the second surprise: there is no difference between the model in air safety and business management. Simply, the first one has more pressure and, hence, it has been forced to advance further. That was good news. It is like having a map: knowing where many businesses are going to run into problems because air safety – the more advanced model – has already arrived there.

From this situation arose the third surprise. As a consultant and professor in Human Resources and Knowledge Management fields, I was very glad that I could analyse many situations from a very privileged point of view, offering original and valid solutions to many problems in the field of organizational learning. The surprise was precisely that this idea was not embraced with the enthusiasm that I could expect from the business management field. But, the enthusiasm came from ... the aviation field.

A few months before presenting the manuscript to Ashgate, I spoke about my main findings in an ICAO meeting and they were very well received. Since then, I have been more encouraged by the aviation field than the business management field, even though my initial objective was the application of the air safety model to business management. I have found friends and interesting people in the professional aviation field who are really involved in safety and it is a real pleasure to work with

them. Perhaps the difference in behaviour between these two fields explains why the air safety model is more advanced than many business management models.

In this book, you are going to find many descriptions of accidents and attempts to establish valid conclusions from them to improve the air safety model. Many people ask me if, after this kind of research, I would keep flying, even as a passenger. Of course, I would! There are, however, two differences if I compare the “age of innocence” with the period before my research:

- Fear is not synchronised with the rest of the passengers. I have found myself in situations where people were scared while I was reading the newspaper and vice versa.
- I am now fully convinced that flying is safe not just because of the wonderful technological designs, but because of people who operate planes, fix or check them and control their flights. I think that, after reading this book, you are going to know why and, if I have been able enough to explain it, you will share this opinion.

Last but not least, this work would not have been possible without the patience of my family, especially my wife Elena.