

## **Recruiting and Retaining Talent: The Key to Success in the Aviation Industry**

(Interview with Salvatore Sciacchitano, President of the Council, ICAO)

How can the aviation industry attract new employees?

As aviation professions are increasingly not perceived as attractive enough to potential candidates, there is significant competition with other industry sectors for skilled employees. Therefore there is a need for the aviation industry to align with competition and propose attractive work conditions to potential candidates.

Furthermore, training capacity is insufficient to meet demand, and there is a lack of accessibility to affordable training. This means that we should facilitate access to affordable training to attract candidates, including through the promotion of scholarships.

ICAO's Next Generation of Aviation Professionals initiative should be mainstreamed into all global and regional strategic aviation plans of aviation, including the ICAO Global air navigation and aviation safety and security plans.

Job marketing and branding should be enhanced, including through social media, speed networking, both academic and career fairs, and mentorship.

We also need to invest in corporate social responsibility programmes that attract and retain diverse and skilled professionals. Here we can look to better recast careers in aviation to focus on the social and sustainable development benefits of flight, highlighting the industry's unique worldwide commitments to decarbonization, aviation's role in connecting people and cultures of the world, its humanitarian relief role, and its other key positive influences on sustainable development and growth, especially for lesser developed, landlocked, and small island States.

This includes the promotion of diversity, inclusion and gender equality. We need to stress the message there is a role in aviation for everyone who has the skill and the ability, and reject pushback and misperceptions on this point. We should look at creating special programmes adapted to the realities for the populations that are under-represented in our industry, including persons living with disabilities.

We also need to promote the mutual recognition of academic degrees and certifications to support a seamless flow of professionals within the global aviation eco-system.

Likewise, some aviation disciplines lack a harmonization of competencies and recognition of certification, which is an obstacle to the workforce global mobility. Harmonizing competencies will also facilitate recruitment of international employees and global mobility.

Finally, I would like to highlight that we need to better promote the life long career-development opportunities that exist within aviation – that our industry offers strong pathways of continuous career progression.

What advice can you provide to your constituent firms and organisations for successfully attracting talent, given stiff competition from many other industries?

This question is in many respects similar to the first one, and I could repeat many of the same points.

I would however like to highlight the importance of strengthening States's commitment to supporting aviation organizations and businesses in implementing appropriate policies to institutionalize HR capacity-building, taking into consideration mainstreaming of young aviation professionals and gender equality.

I would also like to use this platform to encourage member States to reinforce interaction between their aviation and education ministries and administrations, to integrate aviation into curricula, and to facilitate the marketing of aviation through new programmes. I encourage governments to start introducing aviation from the grassroots of the children's education.

Partnerships between States, academia and industry would furthermore harmonize strategies for promoting aviation careers, and help to launch educational programmes that are fully aligned with regulatory and industry needs and priorities. Facilitating the creation and implementation of specialized aviation programmes, practical training, and scholarships that are in line with industry needs is in fact essential.

We also need to promote best management practices that accommodate the needs and values of the next generation of aviation professionals to enhance their interest, commitment, productivity, performance and retention. This includes providing avenues for their continuous upskilling, to meet the accelerated pace of innovations and introduction of new technologies.

How can the aviation industry retain its current employees?

The factors I have just mentioned will help not just attract professionals, but retain them too. There are however aspects that are specific to retention.

Firstly, we need to promote transformative management systems, offer incentives and flexible working arrangements to build passion, commitment, motivate improve morale and facilitate employee performance.

This is linked to actively learning and understanding the work culture and preferences of the next generation aviation professionals, and adjust requirements that accommodate their needs to the highest extent possible.

Along with the progressive human resource policies that promote equal opportunities and diversity that I mentioned earlier, we also need to develop progressive social policies and value-added programmes to safeguard the professionals' well-being working in the aviation industry.

What advice can you provide to firms and organisations to ensure that personnel have the necessary skills to advance the industry in the 21st century?

In the first instance, the fact is that skill development will require investment. This investment needs to target research, innovation, training and development, to help aviation professionals adapt to changing technologies to remain resilient and competitive in the job market.

Training programmes on advanced technologies specifically are particularly crucial to developing the technical skills and competencies that aviation professionals will need in order to thrive.

Here, incubation programmes can help support innovation and keep organizations abreast with new technologies.

Similarly, enhanced collaborative linkages between educational and training institutions with industry will facilitate the alignment of industry capacity requirements with training and competency development programmes offered to Next Generation Aviation Professionals.

These should be supported and delivered with training centres of excellence that offer specialized courses and programmes for a diverse workforce.

How can industry associations work together with aviation firms and other stakeholders to ensure that the industry attracts and retains talent from a diverse employment pool?

Industry associations can play a key role in helping ICAO advocate for action on the points I have raised.

They can help determine potential standard industry approaches to addressing its challenges, minimize duplication of efforts and optimize utilization of resources.

They can also help identify the requirements for rare specializations in aviation, acting in liaison with academia and training institutions to foster curricula relevance in terms of industry requirements.

Associations can provide a platform for pooling resources, including for the provision of scholarship opportunities and financial support to underrepresented groups, while boosting mentorship programmes and support, and proactively supporting internship programmes, especially for so-called “hard to attract” highly specialized aviation subjects.

I would like to suggest that associations look at implementing leadership exchange programmes and enhancing other knowledge-sharing opportunities to expand knowledge and competency frameworks. This could even include the creation of a global database of specialized talent pool of experts in emerging areas of specialization, with a view of centralizing support for the development of next generation aviation professionals in these specialized fields.

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