



## Nine signs of a Cuckoo in the Management System

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In nearly 20 years of working in aviation management, I've encountered many common hurdles that compromise success. One of the most damaging is what I call a **Cuckoo in the Management System** – a senior figure in the organisation whose motivations or personal biases undermine compliance and safety programs and create risks for everyone.

This figure can emerge in any organisation, and their actions often prevent teams from building and sustaining momentum towards an effective safety culture. If you've worked in aviation management, you've likely met someone like this. If you're a CEO or senior executive, you might not realise the extent of the harm being done.



We call them cuckoo's because in the end their actions will drive away the staff needed most for the organisation to prosper.

### SIGNS OF A CUCKOO

Here are nine signs you may have a Safety Saboteur within your organisation:

1. **Constant Overruling of others:** They frequently overrule or argue with other managers or safety/compliance teams on safety leads and corrective actions, even if those professionals have a proven track record.
2. **Loss of Passionate Safety Advocates:** Talented professionals with a passionate mindset on safety refuse to work for them or leave the organisation due to frustration, leaving behind only those who "go along to get along."

3. **Negative Feedback Without Alternatives:** They criticise plans or policies but fail to offer constructive suggestions or solutions.
4. **Self-Serving Priorities:** Their focus is on goals or metrics that directly benefit them, even when those priorities compromise broader organisational objectives - particularly if they feel information shared as threatening.
5. **Ignoring Data and Expertise:** They dismiss evidence-based approaches or recommendations from qualified personnel in favour of personal opinions.
6. **Unclear Direction:** They reject proposed corrective measures but cannot articulate what changes they would prefer, leading to delays or paralysis.
7. **Lack of Recognition:** They rarely credit the efforts of team members, demoralising the group working under their supervision.
8. **Micromanagement on Trivial Issues:** They focus on minute, irrelevant details (e.g., wording in reports, regulatory references) instead of dealing effectively with critical concerns.
9. **Shifting Justifications:** They contradict themselves to oppose measures or actions they find threatening, arguing against proven strategies without consistency.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE CUCKOO'S ACTIONS

A Cuckoo in the Management System can derail efforts to create a culture of safety, delay critical initiatives, and even increase the probability and consequence of events with a negative impact for the organisation. Their interference undermines morale, leads to higher turnover among safety-conscious staff, and hampers the organisation's ability to meet compliance and operational goals.

## STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH A CUCKOO

Managing this type of personality depends on the political dynamics of your organisation. Here are four effective approaches:

1. **Foster Collaboration:** Create a culture where the management system is integrated with other business priorities. Help the Cuckoo see that the management system supports overall business goals rather than

conflicting with them. Collaboration can alleviate their fears of measures disrupting other objectives.

2. **Exclude Them from Decision-Making:** If collaboration fails, restrict the Cuckoo's influence over compliance and safety decisions. If morale improves, and progress accelerates, it's a clear sign this was the right move.
3. **Empower Your Compliance and Safety Team:** Place trust in your compliance and safety professionals. Encourage them to proceed with initiatives without undue interference. Over time, this confidence will diminish the Cuckoo's influence.
4. **Consider Termination:** If the individual's behaviour threatens not just safety but the broader functioning of the organisation, it may be necessary to remove them. This step is often a last resort but can be essential for maintaining a safe, efficient workplace.

## CONCLUSION

A Cuckoo's controlling behaviour can put an organisation at risk, both in terms of compliance and the well-being of its people. Recognising the warning signs and taking decisive action can help preserve the integrity of your safety efforts and ensure a healthier, more secure work environment for everyone.

