PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE FOR ROTORCRAFT: A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH WITH MACHINE LEARNING ALGORITHMS FOR ENHANCED AVAILABILITY

Gianbattista Dario Natale
Leonardo Helicopters
Milan, Italy

Federico Guglielmin
Leonardo Helicopters
Milan, Italy

Andrea Ricci
Leonardo Helicopters
Milan, Italy

Domenico Andreocci
Leonardo Helicopters
Milan, Italy

Alessandro Scandroglio
Leonardo Helicopters
Milan, Italy

Nicolò Vallana
Leonardo Helicopters
Milan, Italy

ABSTRACT

Predictive maintenance represents a critical advancement in rotorcraft fleet management, offering substantial improvements in operational availability while reducing unscheduled downtime costs. This paper presents two complementary data-driven approaches utilizing machine learning algorithms for enhanced rotorcraft component monitoring. The first methodology addresses transmission system health monitoring through an unsupervised Principal Component Analysis algorithm that consolidates approximately one thousand health indices from accelerometer data into a single normalized health score. This approach successfully detected transmission failures an average of twenty-four flight hours in advance across a fleet of approximately seven hundred aircraft, achieving false positive rates below one per ten flight hours and false negative rates below one per sixty flight hours based on millions of flight hours of operational data. The second methodology employs virtual sensor technology combined with machine learning models to predict wear indices and remaining useful life for rotor components that cannot be directly instrumented during service operations. Gradient boosting and convolutional neural network approaches were implemented using flight data and inferred virtual sensor measurements to estimate component degradation. Both methodologies demonstrate fleet-wide applicability, providing maintenance organizations with actionable insights for proactive component replacement scheduling and logistics optimization.

NOTATION

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Symbols

HS Health Score

RUL Remaining Useful Life, hours

DI Damage Index

TIS Time in Service, hours

FH Flight Hours

FPR False Positive Rate

FNR False Negative Rate

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Acronyms

ERF European Rotorcraft Forum

HUMS Health and Usage Monitoring System

PCA Principal Component Analysis

CNN Convolutional Neural Network

LSTM Long Short-Term Memory

HPC High Performance Computing

VSDE Virtual Sensor Development Environment

MGB Main Gear Box

SME Subject Matter Expert

ML Machine Learning

AI Artificial Intelligence

EASA European Union Aviation Safety Agency

FAA Federal Aviation Administration

INTRODUCTION

Modern rotorcraft operations face increasing pressure to maximize availability while maintaining strict safety standards and controlling operational costs. The complexity of helicopter systems, combined with stringent regulatory requirements established by authorities such as EASA and FAA, necessitates sophisticated maintenance strategies that balance safety, efficiency, and economic viability. Traditional maintenance approaches, which rely primarily on scheduled intervals and manual inspections, often result in conservative component replacement practices that may not reflect actual component health or operational requirements. The evolution from traditional scheduled maintenance to condition-based approaches has been extensively documented, with prognostic enhancements to diagnostic systems showing substantial improvements in maintenance effectiveness (Ref. 1).

The transmission gearbox represents one of the most critical subsystems in rotorcraft operations, serving as the primary mechanism for mechanical torque delivery from the engine to the rotor system. Component defects within the transmission, including cracks and pitting damage, present significant challenges for early detection through conventional monitoring techniques (Ref. 2). When transmission failures occur, the consequences extend beyond immediate safety concerns to encompass substantial operational disruptions, including aircraft grounding, complex logistical coordination for replacement component delivery, and extended downtime periods that directly impact customer operations and business continuity. Recent research has demonstrated the potential for predictive maintenance approaches specifically applied to helicopter main gearboxes using operational data, showing promising results for condition-based maintenance strategies (Ref. 3).

Current Health and Usage Monitoring Systems, while providing valuable diagnostic capabilities through accelerometer-based vibration analysis, face inherent limitations in their implementation and interpretation. These systems generate hundreds of health indices from strategically positioned sensors throughout the transmission gearbox, creating a complex monitoring environment where determining reliable threshold values becomes challenging. Expert-defined limits frequently result in either false positive alerts that trigger unnecessary maintenance actions or false negative conditions where actual developing failures remain undetected. Furthermore, the natural variability between individual aircraft necessitates customized threshold settings, complicating fleet-wide monitoring strategies and reducing operational efficiency. Recent advances in HUMS-based proactive analysis for predictive maintenance have highlighted both the potential and challenges of current monitoring approaches (Ref. 4).

Rotor system components present an entirely different set of monitoring challenges that conventional sensor-based approaches cannot adequately address. Components such as damper links operate within the rotating reference frame of the rotor system, where direct instrumentation faces significant practical obstacles. The installation of physical sensors on rotor components requires sophisticated data transmission systems, such as slip rings, which are both expensive and prone to failure after limited operational exposure. Additionally, sensors mounted on rotating components must withstand harsh environmental conditions including extreme temperature variations, sand and dust exposure, high-speed airflow, and substantial gravitational forces, making them inherently unreliable and costly to maintain. These factors have led manufacturers to avoid instrumenting customer aircraft rotors, creating a significant gap in component health monitoring capabilities.

The economic implications of unscheduled maintenance events create substantial operational pressures for helicopter operators. Beyond the direct costs associated with component replacement and maintenance labor, unscheduled maintenance triggers complex logistical challenges including expedited component procurement, coordination of specialized technical support, and aircraft downtime that directly reduces operational revenue. These factors underscore the critical need for predictive maintenance approaches that enable proactive component management and logistics planning.

Contemporary advances in data science and machine learning technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to transform rotorcraft maintenance practices. The availability of comprehensive flight data repositories, combined with sophisticated analytical capabilities, enables the development of predictive models that can assess component health and predict failure modes with greater accuracy than traditional approaches. This technological evolution supports the transition from time-based maintenance schedules to condition-based maintenance strategies, where component replacement decisions are guided by actual component health assessments rather than conservative time intervals.

This research presents a comprehensive dual-methodology approach to rotorcraft predictive maintenance that addresses the distinct challenges of transmission systems and rotor components through complementary technological solutions. The first methodology employs unsupervised machine learning techniques to consolidate multiple transmission health indicators into a unified health score, enabling early detection of developing failures through anomaly detection algorithms. This approach leverages PCA to reduce the dimensionality of complex vibration signature data while maintaining the ability to identify subtle changes that indicate impending component failures.

The second methodology introduces virtual sensor technology to overcome the instrumentation limitations inherent in rotor component monitoring (Ref. 5). Virtual sensors employ sophisticated software-based models that estimate physical quantities without requiring direct measurement, utilizing available flight parameters and deep learning algorithms to reconstruct load and stress patterns experienced by rotor components. This approach enables the calculation of damage indices and remaining useful life predictions for components that cannot be practically instrumented in operational aircraft.

The integration of these methodologies provides comprehensive fleet health monitoring coverage that addresses the full spectrum of rotorcraft maintenance challenges. The transmission health monitoring system enables early detection of developing failures with sufficient advance warning to facilitate proactive maintenance planning, while the virtual sensor approach provides unprecedented insight into rotor component loading patterns and wear progression under actual operational conditions.

This paper demonstrates the practical implementation and validation of both methodologies using extensive operational data, where for the transmission model data from a fleet of approximately seven hundreds aircraft operating over multiple years of service were used, encompassing millions flight hours. The validation process includes both technical performance assessment through comparison with actual failure events and practical utility evaluation through integration with operational maintenance workflows. The results demonstrate the potential for significant improvements in maintenance efficiency, component utilization optimization, and operational availability while maintaining the highest safety standards required for commercial rotorcraft operations.

The research contributes to the advancement of predictive maintenance practices in the aviation industry by providing validated methodologies that bridge the gap between theoretical machine learning capabilities and practical operational implementation. The dual approach recognizes that different aircraft systems require tailored monitoring strategies while providing a comprehensive framework for fleet-wide health management that can be adapted to diverse operational requirements and regulatory environments.

BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Evolution of Rotorcraft Health Monitoring Systems

The development of helicopter health monitoring systems has evolved significantly since the initial introduction of Health and Usage Monitoring Systems (HUMS) in the 1980s. Early research by NASA and military organizations established the foundational principles of vibration-based health monitoring for rotorcraft applications (Ref. 6). NASA technical papers have documented the challenges inherent in helicopter transmission gear health detection, acknowledging persistent issues including limited fault data availability, dependence on expert analysis, and undefined diagnostic thresholds. Despite these challenges, systems such as the Goodrich IMD HUMS, initially developed for U.S. Navy helicopters including H-60 and H-53 platforms, demonstrated promising success rates of approximately 70% in defect detection.

The Federal Aviation Administration has conducted extensive literature surveys encompassing over 100 research papers on rotorcraft HUMS, emphasizing the integration of artificial intelligence and expert systems to enhance the accuracy of vibration-based health diagnostics. These studies consistently highlight the primary objectives of reducing maintenance costs and improving flight availability through more sophisticated monitoring approaches. The ADHER Project (Automated Diagnosis for Helicopter Engines and Rotating Parts), a major European research initiative, represented a significant advancement by targeting fleet-scale health monitoring using multi-sensor data and automated analysis techniques. This project developed innovative theoretical vibration and acoustic models for gearbox aging and failure progression, alongside auto-adaptive algorithms for anticipative health diagnosis based on operational flight data.

Advanced signal processing techniques have emerged as critical enablers for vibration-based damage detection in helicopter components (Ref. 2). Research institutions, including the University of South Carolina, have highlighted key algorithms such as Wavelet Transform, Wigner-Ville distribution, cepstrum and kurtosis analysis, and neural networks for early detection of incipient damage. These techniques address the fundamental challenge of distinguishing damage signals from operational noise while supporting the transition from rigid scheduled maintenance to condition-based approaches.

Recent studies have demonstrated the application of vibration sensors combined with machine learning for specific diagnostic challenges, such as bolt loosening in dynamic assemblies. Using unsupervised anomaly detection and harmonic filtering on HUMS data from platforms like the AH-64 Apache, researchers have achieved successful early detection of faults that are otherwise difficult to identify due to interference from strong vibration sources (Ref. 7). Additionally, structural health monitoring techniques for helicopter composite components have incorporated vibration-based modal analysis and embedded sensor technology to monitor load and damage evolution during flight operations.

Current Industry Standards and Commercial Systems

Contemporary industry standards for helicopter transmission monitoring have advanced substantially beyond basic HUMS implementations. Comprehensive monitoring approaches that integrate multiple diagnostic capabilities have shown significant promise for enhancing maintenance effectiveness and reducing operational costs (Ref. 8).

Real-time data transmission capabilities represent a significant advancement in operational monitoring. Helicopters such as the Leonardo AW189 are equipped with systems that transmit health and usage data directly from airborne aircraft to ground stations during flight operations. This capability enhances continuous monitoring and enables operators to detect anomalies with improved temporal resolution, thereby enhancing operational safety margins.

Regulatory and industry trends have increasingly mandated the adoption of advanced monitoring systems. Contracting authorities, including the U.S. Forest Service and the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers, now require operators to implement systems incorporating telemetry, flight data monitoring, and real-time communications integrated with HUMS capabilities. Regulatory bodies including the FAA and EASA have established airworthiness directives reinforcing the use of HUMS and vibration monitoring as standard components of recurring maintenance checks for transmission systems.

Emerging commercial offerings focus on health score consolidation and automated diagnostics through the integration of multi-sensor data streams into unified health scores or diagnostic indices for critical helicopter components. These systems employ multi-dimensional analytics, machine learning algorithms, and contextual flight usage data to reduce false alarms and diagnostic ambiguity. However, despite these advancements, current commercial systems continue to face challenges in consolidating multiple health indicators into actionable maintenance decisions while maintaining acceptable false positive and false negative rates across diverse operational conditions.

Virtual Sensor Technology in Aerospace Applications

Virtual sensor technology represents an emerging paradigm in aerospace health monitoring, offering solutions to fundamental instrumentation limitations encountered in operational aircraft systems. A virtual sensor is defined as a software-based model that estimates or infers physical quantities without direct measurement, utilizing data from available sensors combined with sophisticated algorithms to predict desired signals. This approach addresses critical challenges in rotorcraft monitoring where direct instrumentation is impractical due to cost, reliability, or accessibility constraints.

Within the aerospace industry, Leonardo has emerged as a leading developer of virtual sensor technology for rotorcraft applications, demonstrating capabilities for reconstructing rotor load signals and component behavior patterns using flight data and machine learning algorithms (Ref. 5). The company's Virtual Sensor Development Environment (VSDE) provides a comprehensive framework for creating, validating, and deploying virtual sensors across multiple helicopter systems and component types.

Airbus has also contributed to virtual sensor research through publications such as "Development of virtual sensors to estimate critical aircraft flight parameters," indicating industry-wide recognition of the technology's potential for enhancing aircraft monitoring capabilities. However, virtual sensor applications specific to rotorcraft remain relatively limited compared to other aerospace domains, suggesting significant opportunities for advancement and implementation.

Virtual sensor technology relates closely to digital twin concepts and model-based prognostics research, serving as a key component for data quality enhancement and operational insight generation. Within Leonardo's digital twin framework, virtual sensors enable deep investigation of product design performance and real-world usage patterns through customer data analysis, supporting improved product development and maintenance strategies.

Machine Learning Applications in Rotorcraft Health Monitoring

The application of machine learning techniques to helicopter load prediction and component wear estimation has gained significant attention in recent research. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of neural networks in predicting helicopter rotor loads, with applications to tiltrotor aircraft using harmonic decomposition techniques. Feed-forward neural networks, when trained on decomposed harmonic components, have shown capability in accurately predicting beam bending, chord bending, and pitch link loads across various flight conditions.

Advanced machine learning approaches, including adaptive channel weighted CNN methods with multisensor fusion, have demonstrated significant effectiveness for helicopter transmission system condition monitoring (Ref. 9). These approaches address the challenge of processing complex, multi-dimensional sensor data while maintaining diagnostic accuracy across diverse operational conditions. Principal Component Analysis combined with Support Vector Machine techniques has proven particularly effective for bearing fault detection under varying operational conditions, demonstrating the potential for unsupervised learning approaches in rotorcraft health monitoring (Ref. 10).

The utilization of Harmonic Time History methodology, which decomposes signals into frequency domain representations, has enabled the circumvention of more complex architectures such as Recurrent Neural Networks, LSTM networks, and Time Delay Neural Networks for time series prediction applications. This approach leverages the inherently periodic nature of rotor systems to simplify model architecture while maintaining prediction accuracy.

Despite these advancements, machine learning applications in rotorcraft health monitoring face several limitations. Research has primarily focused on main rotor load predictions, with limited extension to other critical systems including tail rotors, transmissions, and non-load related parameters. Additionally, most studies have concentrated on demonstrating technical feasibility rather than addressing the standardization and accessibility requirements necessary for widespread industrial adoption.

Gaps in Current Approaches and Research Opportunities

Current commercial and research approaches to rotorcraft health monitoring exhibit several significant limitations that create opportunities for advancement. Traditional HUMS systems, while providing valuable diagnostic capabilities, continue to rely on expert-defined threshold values that frequently result in either false positive alerts or missed detection of developing failures. The complexity of managing hundreds of health indices from transmission monitoring systems creates operational challenges for maintenance personnel and reduces system effectiveness.

For rotor component monitoring, alternative approaches that do not require direct instrumentation remain limited to manual inspections and scheduled maintenance practices. This constraint forces operators to rely on conservative time-based maintenance schedules rather than condition-based approaches, resulting in premature component replacement and unnecessary operational downtime, particularly during the early operational life of components.

The integration of multiple monitoring approaches into comprehensive fleet health management systems remains an area requiring significant development. Current systems typically address individual components or subsystems without providing unified assessment capabilities that can optimize maintenance decisions across entire aircraft or fleet operations.

Regulatory and certification frameworks for machine learning-based maintenance systems remain underdeveloped, creating uncertainty regarding the acceptance and implementation of advanced predictive maintenance technologies. This regulatory gap represents both a challenge and an opportunity for developing standardized approaches that can gain acceptance from aviation authorities while providing demonstrated safety and operational benefits.

The research presented in this paper addresses these identified gaps through the development of complementary methodologies that provide comprehensive coverage of both transmission and rotor component health monitoring. The integration of unsupervised machine learning for transmission health assessment with virtual sensor technology for rotor component monitoring offers a unified approach to predictive maintenance that addresses the limitations of current approaches while providing validated performance improvements under operational conditions.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

Dual Approach Rationale and Complementary Nature

This research presents a comprehensive dual-methodology approach to rotorcraft predictive maintenance that addresses the distinct monitoring challenges inherent in different aircraft subsystems. The fundamental recognition driving this approach is that transmission systems and rotor components present fundamentally different monitoring requirements that cannot be effectively addressed through a single technological solution. Transmission systems, with their fixed reference frame and accessible mounting locations, enable the deployment of traditional vibration-based monitoring approaches, while rotor components operating within the rotating reference frame require innovative virtual sensing technologies to overcome instrumentation limitations.

The two methodologies operate as parallel services designed to provide comprehensive fleet health monitoring coverage across the complete spectrum of critical rotorcraft components. The transmission health monitoring methodology employs unsupervised machine learning to consolidate multiple health indicators into unified health scores, enabling early detection of developing failures through anomaly detection algorithms. Simultaneously, the rotor component predictive maintenance methodology utilizes virtual sensor technology combined with machine learning models to estimate damage accumulation and remaining useful life for components that cannot be directly instrumented during operational service.

While these methodologies function as independent parallel systems, they are designed within a common data architecture framework that enables potential data sharing and cross-system insights. The shared infrastructure approach provides flexibility for future integration enhancements while maintaining the distinct analytical approaches required for each component domain. Both methodologies contribute essential information for comprehensive fleet health assessment, recognizing that effective rotorcraft maintenance requires monitoring capabilities across all critical subsystems to ensure operational safety and availability.

Data Architecture and Infrastructure Framework

The dual methodology approach is supported by a unified data architecture framework that leverages Leonardo's HPC infrastructure, specifically the "davinci-1" HPC system and its associated data lake capabilities. This centralized approach provides the computational power and data management capabilities necessary to support both complex machine learning model training and real-time inference operations across large fleet deployments.

Both methodologies utilize data from the same comprehensive data lake, which aggregates flight operations data, sensor measurements, maintenance records, and operational parameters from the entire monitored fleet. The data collection process operates on a per-flight basis, ensuring that both systems have access to complete operational information for each aircraft mission. This shared data foundation enables consistent data quality standards, unified preprocessing approaches, and coordinated validation procedures across both methodological streams.

While both systems draw from the common data lake, each methodology implements specialized data processing pipelines that refine and filter the available information according to the specific requirements of their analytical approaches. The transmission health monitoring system focuses on vibration signature data and related operational parameters, while the rotor component methodology emphasizes flight envelope data and loading condition information necessary for virtual sensor operation. This approach maximizes data utilization efficiency while maintaining the specialized processing requirements of each monitoring domain.

The rotor component predictive maintenance methodology specifically leverages the VSDE described in the companion research, utilizing its Extract, Transform, Load (ETL) pipeline capabilities and model training infrastructure. This integration demonstrates the practical application of the virtual sensor framework within the broader predictive maintenance ecosystem, providing a validated pathway for deploying virtual sensor technology in operational fleet environments.

Fleet Characteristics and Operational Context

The validation and development of both methodologies has been conducted using extensive operational data from a large-scale fleet deployment. This substantial dataset provides the foundation for robust model training, comprehensive validation procedures, and demonstration of real-world applicability across diverse operational conditions.

The fleet-scale validation approach enables assessment of both methodologies across the complete spectrum of rotorcraft operational environments, including variations in mission profiles, environmental conditions, pilot techniques, and maintenance practices. This diversity is essential for developing predictive models that maintain accuracy and reliability when deployed across different operational contexts and customer requirements.

Both methodologies are designed to accommodate different helicopter configurations and variants through adaptive model training approaches. For new helicopter types, dedicated models are trained to address the specific characteristics and operational patterns of each aircraft variant. Additionally, the framework supports fine-tuning capabilities for specific customer requirements, enabling customization of the predictive models to reflect unique operational profiles or maintenance priorities while maintaining the core analytical capabilities of each methodology.

The per-flight data collection approach ensures that both systems have access to complete mission information, enabling correlation of component health trends with specific operational events, environmental conditions, and usage patterns. This granular data availability supports both the development of accurate predictive models and the operational interpretation of health assessments in the context of specific flight operations.

Quality Assurance and Validation Approach

The validation framework for both methodologies employs a comprehensive dual-pronged approach that combines statistical performance assessment with expert technical analysis. This methodology ensures that the predictive models not only demonstrate statistical accuracy but also provide operationally meaningful insights that align with engineering understanding of component behavior and failure mechanisms.

The statistical validation component focuses on quantitative performance metrics including prediction accuracy, false positive and false negative rates, and temporal prediction capabilities. For the transmission health monitoring system, this includes assessment of health score accuracy in predicting actual failure events and the temporal advance warning provided before component replacement becomes necessary. For the rotor component methodology, statistical validation emphasizes the accuracy of damage index calculations and remaining useful life predictions compared to actual component removal data.

The technical validation component involves detailed analysis of model predictions in collaboration with SME who provide engineering insight into the physical mechanisms underlying the predictive assessments. This approach ensures that the machine learning models capture genuine engineering relationships rather than spurious correlations, and that the predictions align with established understanding of component degradation processes and failure modes.

For the rotor component methodology specifically, the technical validation process includes flight-by-flight analysis of damage accumulation patterns, enabling correlation of predicted damage increases with specific maneuvers, environmental conditions, or operational events. This detailed analysis serves both as validation of the virtual sensor approach and as an opportunity to gain insights into actual customer operational patterns and their impact on component wear progression.

The validation approach recognizes the challenge posed by limited failure event data, particularly for the transmission monitoring system where only eighteen documented failure events were available for analysis. This constraint necessitated the development of unsupervised learning approaches that can establish normal operational patterns without requiring extensive failure data for training, while still providing meaningful validation against the available failure events.

Implementation Considerations and Future Development

The current implementation of both methodologies represents the foundation for comprehensive predictive maintenance services that address the full spectrum of rotorcraft health monitoring requirements. While the methodologies operate as independent systems with distinct analytical approaches, the shared infrastructure framework provides the foundation for future integration enhancements and cross-system optimization capabilities.

The computational and infrastructure requirements for both methodologies are met through the “davinci-1” HPC system, which provides the processing power necessary for complex machine learning model training, real-time inference operations, and large-scale data analysis across the entire monitored fleet. This centralized approach ensures consistent computational performance and enables efficient resource utilization across both methodological streams.

Future development directions include the exploration of integration opportunities between the two methodologies, potentially enabling cross-system insights and coordinated maintenance recommendations. The shared data architecture provides the foundation for such integration while maintaining the specialized analytical approaches required for each component domain.

The framework is designed to support expansion to additional aircraft types and operational environments through the adaptive model training approaches implemented in both methodologies. This scalability ensures that the predictive maintenance capabilities can grow with customer fleet requirements while maintaining the validated performance characteristics demonstrated through the extensive fleet-scale validation process.

The dual methodology approach represents a comprehensive solution to the complex challenges of rotorcraft predictive maintenance, providing validated capabilities for both transmission and rotor component health monitoring through complementary technological approaches integrated within a unified operational framework.

TRANSMISSION HEALTH MONITORING METHODOLOGY

System Architecture and Data Sources

The transmission gearbox represents a critical component of the rotorcraft system with significant operational implications. As a complex and costly mechanical device, gearbox failure can result in aircraft grounding with substantial operational and economic consequences. When malfunctions occur, considerable time is required to diagnose the failure source and replace affected components. Additionally, procurement and delivery of individual parts or complete MGB assemblies may require several days, further complicating maintenance operations. These factors underscore the MGB's critical importance in maintenance and logistical planning, where early detection of potential failures several flight hours in advance can facilitate prompt logistical responses and significantly reduce operational downtime (Ref. 8).

The MGB monitoring system utilizes an array of strategically positioned accelerometers within the gearbox housing to monitor component vibrations during rotorcraft operations. The sensor configuration includes both monoaxial and multiaxial accelerometers, enabling detection of vibrational signatures along three orthogonal axes. Each sensor is associated with specific components or component groups within the transmission system. The monitoring architecture employs unique acquisition identifiers to establish precise linkages between accelerometer signals and particular mechanical elements, including bearings, pumps, and gear assemblies. The current implementation incorporates 187 distinct acquisition IDs, with corresponding signals processed through established HUMS procedures to derive approximately 1000 health indices that characterize various aspects of transmission mechanical condition (Ref. 2).

The monitoring system is further enhanced through the integration of three chip detectors installed within the gearbox housing in direct contact with the lubrication oil system. These detectors provide complementary diagnostic capability by identifying anomalous metallic debris that may indicate developing component degradation or failure mechanisms, particularly crack propagation in critical transmission components.

Machine Learning Algorithm Development

Failure Events Collection and Validation The development of the anomaly detection algorithm was constrained by the limited availability of documented failure events from operational fleet data. Utilizing field reports from chip detectors and MGB failure notifications provided by operators, a dataset comprising few documented failure events was compiled for algorithm development and validation. This limited failure event dataset served as the primary justification for adopting an unsupervised anomaly detection approach, as traditional supervised learning algorithms could not be effectively implemented given the insufficient number of labeled failure examples.

Data Collection and Preprocessing The data acquisition framework employs a dedicated ingestion pipeline that performs daily storage of signal data from the rotorcraft fleet into a proprietary data lake infrastructure. Initial data validation procedures are implemented to identify and remove anomalous acquisitions before downstream processing. The selected storage architecture was specifically chosen for its capability to handle large-scale data volumes, with individual tables reaching capacities of up to 10 billion rows.

The data architecture utilizes a structured approach where each operational event is stored with associated metadata including timestamp information, cumulative flight hour values, and flight regime classifications. This event-level data is subsequently merged with dedicated tables containing health indices and operational parameters, resulting in a comprehensive dataset incorporating approximately 1500 input parameters. Feature selection procedures, implemented through correlation analysis with SME guidance, enable identification and removal of parameters irrelevant to transmission health assessment. Signal conditioning procedures include outlier removal using established threshold-based filtering approaches (Ref. 2).

The heterogeneous nature of data acquisition presents challenges in that different measurement sources do not maintain consistent sampling times or frequencies, resulting in sparse datasets when constructing unified temporal indices. To address this limitation, signals are aggregated using hourly grouping with mean value selection to establish consistent temporal resolution across all monitored parameters.

Temporal classification procedures are applied to each data point based on proximity to registered failure events. This classification enables exclusion of failure-period data during algorithm training phases while facilitating identification of failure time windows during validation procedures. Additionally, time series segmentation is performed using gap analysis to identify periods of extended maintenance activities that may result in signal discontinuities, particularly when MGB replacement occurs. This segmentation approach enables independent treatment of each operational period, preventing maintenance-induced signal changes from being interpreted as degradation indicators.

Feature Engineering and Interpolation To address missing data point issues inherent in the sparse dataset, comprehensive data interpolation procedures are implemented. The interpolation framework begins with linear interpolation between consecutive data points, followed by signal processing using rolling mean calculations and exponential smoothing techniques to enhance signal quality and reduce noise artifacts.

The preprocessing pipeline incorporates three distinct scaler models trained according to MGB section classifications. These scaling approaches enable appropriate normalization of signal characteristics specific to different transmission subsections, with the processed data stored in dedicated tables serving as inputs for subsequent training and inference operations.

Model Training and Validation

Dimensionality Reduction and Normality Region Definition The algorithm development process leveraged SME knowledge to identify operational timeframes for helicopter subsets during which no anomalies or alarms were reported. This expert-validated dataset, combined with proximity-based event labeling, established the foundation for defining normal operational conditions. Model training data was restricted to samples collected during cruise flight regimes to minimize noise and operational variability typically associated with flight regime transitions.

The validated normal operation dataset serves as input for PCA algorithm training, enabling definition of normality regions within lower-dimensional latent spaces for each MGB section: an example of normality region is shown in Figure 1. This dimensionality reduction approach transforms the high-dimensional health index space into manageable representations while preserving the essential variance characteristics that distinguish normal from anomalous operational states.

Health Score Calculation and Model Explainability For each rotorcraft in the monitored fleet, the complete operational history is represented within the established latent spaces. Health assessment is performed by calculating Euclidean distances from individual data points to the centroid of the corresponding normality region. These distance measurements are converted to interpretable health scores using a calibrated transformation function:

$$HS = 100 - \frac{(drift - t_{range})}{(u_{limit} - t_{range})} \times 100 \tag{1}$$

where t_{range} (tolerance range) and u_{limit} (upper limit) represent tuned parameters defining the drift value below which health scores default to maximum values (100) and the drift value above which scores default to minimum values (0), respectively.

The health scoring system implements dual threshold levels for "warning" and "alert" categories, combined with a configurable counter parameter that determines the number of consecutive threshold violations required before alarm notification generation. This approach reduces false alarm rates while maintaining sensitivity to developing failure conditions.

The selection of PCA over alternative anomaly detection algorithms was specifically motivated by the requirement for model explainability in operational environments. The PCA-based approach enables identification of key features responsible for alarm generation through integration with SelectKBest algorithms that analyze PCA results relative to normality region characteristics. This explainability capability represents a critical operational requirement for supporting end-user interpretation and root cause analysis of alarm conditions.

Parameter Optimization and Training Procedures The training phase implements comprehensive grid search optimization to identify optimal parameter combinations across multiple model configurations. The optimization process encompasses:

- Selection of relevant health indices, operational parameters, and acquisition IDs
- Interpolation level determination from feature engineering procedures
- Minimum variance thresholds for PCA dimensionality reduction
- Calibration of t_{range} and u_{limit} parameters for health score calculation
- Threshold value optimization for warning and alert categories
- Counter parameter tuning for consecutive alarm point requirements

While additional parameters were available for optimization, the listed parameters were selected based on their demonstrated impact on model performance and operational requirements. The optimization objective focused on achieving acceptable false positive and false negative rates while maintaining minimum 80% detection performance on the available failure event dataset, ensuring that the validation data remained completely independent from training and parameter tuning procedures.

Inference Implementation and Operational Deployment The operational inference system processes daily collected signal data through the trained algorithm framework. Individual data points are mapped into the established latent spaces, with corresponding health scores calculated using the three independent models representing distinct MGB subsections. This multi-model approach provides comprehensive coverage

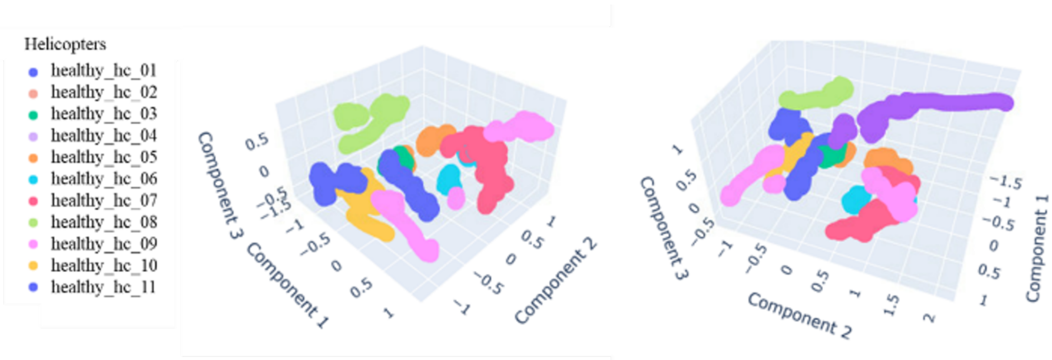

Figure 1. The multi-dimensional input space is mapped into a lower-dimensional latent space. On the left side, the ”normality region”, consisting of the points in figure, indicates the space of normal operation for the gear-boxes included in the training dataset. On the right side, the purple points in figure show an example of gearbox whose behavior starts to deviate from the healthy ”normality region”.

of transmission system health while enabling localization of developing anomalies to specific subsystem areas.

Algorithm outputs are presented through a dedicated dashboard interface accessible to maintenance personnel and fleet operators. The dashboard provides both fleet-level health status monitoring and detailed analysis capabilities for individual MGB units. The interface includes historical health score trends, active alarm notifications, and identification of health indices contributing most significantly to alarm conditions, supporting both immediate maintenance decision-making and longer-term trend analysis for fleet health management.

ROTOR COMPONENT WEAR PREDICTION METHODOLOGY

Virtual Sensor Technology Framework

Component Selection and Monitoring Challenges Rotor components present fundamental challenges for direct health monitoring due to their operational environment within the rotating reference frame of the rotor system. Unlike transmission components that operate in fixed mounting configurations, rotor components experience complex loading patterns while rotating at high speeds in harsh environmental conditions. The methodology presented addresses the predictive maintenance requirements for rotor components that require replacement due to wear and damage accumulation rather than predetermined fatigue life limits.

The target components for this methodology include critical rotor elements such as damper links, pitch links, and blade assemblies that are subject to various failure modes including debonding, wear, and mechanical damage. These failure mechanisms necessitate complex measurements, particularly during operational service, potentially resulting in a substantial discrepancy between traditional condition-based maintenance approaches and actual conditions. Component health assessment relies entirely on manual inspections during scheduled maintenance intervals, with removal decisions based on technical personnel assessments documented in maintenance reports.

The virtual sensor framework addresses these limitations by enabling reconstruction of critical loading and kinematic parameters that would otherwise require direct instrumentation (Ref. 5). Eight specialized virtual sensors have been developed and validated to reconstruct blade angle parameters (lag, flap, and pitch angles) for consecutive blade pairs, along with damper link axial loads and pitch link axial loads. These virtual sensors provide comprehensive insight into rotor system behavior, component loading patterns, and kinematic responses that directly influence component wear progression.

Virtual Sensor Integration and Data Reconstruction Virtual sensors operate as software-based models that estimate physical quantities without requiring direct measurement instrumentation. The implementation leverages data from available flight sensors combined with deep learning algorithms trained on experimental flight data where physical sensors were temporarily installed. This approach enables reconstruction of complete time history signals for each flight operation, providing detailed insight into component loading and operational stress patterns.

The virtual sensor development process utilizes the established VSDE, which provides a modular pipeline architecture for creating, training, and deploying virtual sensors across multiple helicopter systems (Ref. 5). The framework employs sophisticated ML models, including the proprietary Leonardo model specifically optimized for helicopter operational characteristics, to ensure accurate reconstruction of rotor component behavior under diverse flight conditions.

Each virtual sensor generates complete time history reconstructions for individual flights, enabling detailed analysis of loading patterns, peak stress events, and cumulative damage accumulation. The temporal resolution of virtual sensor outputs aligns with the underlying flight data sampling rates, typically providing measurements at sub-second intervals throughout flight operations. This granular data enables comprehensive characterization of component behavior across all phases of flight operations.

Damage Index and Remaining Useful Life Models

Training Dataset Creation and Component Lifecycle Tracking The predictive maintenance pipeline begins with comprehensive training dataset creation that reconstructs the complete operational history of rotor components from installation through removal. The process initiates with analysis of maintenance database records, filtering by specific part numbers to identify all relevant component installations and removals within the monitored fleet.

For each identified serial number, the system creates detailed component lifecycle records including installation dates, removal dates, aircraft assignments, and associated flight operation identifiers. Data validation procedures ensure consistency between maintenance records and actual aircraft configurations, including verification that component counts align with aircraft specifications. Serial numbers lacking complete lifecycle information or exhibiting data inconsistencies are excluded from the training dataset to maintain model reliability.

The methodology successfully tracks components that are transferred between aircraft within the fleet, maintaining continuity of damage accumulation calculations across aircraft assignments. This capability is particularly important for fleet operators who optimize component utilization through strategic component rotation and replacement practices. The damage index continues to accumulate appropriately as components accumulate flight hours across different aircraft platforms.

Flight data extraction procedures identify and retrieve all flight operations associated with each component lifecycle, creating comprehensive operational histories that span from installation through removal. Virtual sensor reconstruction is performed for each identified flight, generating the eight critical rotor parameter time histories that serve as inputs for damage accumulation modeling. The resulting dataset integrates maintenance records, flight operational data, and virtual sensor reconstructions into a unified training framework.

Machine Learning Model Architecture and Training The predictive maintenance methodology employs multiple ML approaches to accommodate different aspects of damage accumulation prediction and operational requirements. Two primary modeling strategies have been implemented and validated: rolling window regression for detailed temporal analysis and per-flight feature extraction regression for efficient operational deployment.

Rolling window regression provides fine-grained prediction capabilities by analyzing temporal sequences of operational data through sliding window analysis. This approach captures detailed short-term temporal dynamics and enables detection of subtle changes within individual flight operations. The method employs both XGBoost gradient boosting algorithms and hybrid CNN-LSTM neural network architectures to handle the complex temporal dependencies inherent in component wear progression (Ref. 11).

Per-flight feature extraction regression offers computational efficiency and interpretability advantages by summarizing flight operations through statistical feature extraction. This approach processes each flight as an independent data point, extracting relevant statistical measures including time-domain features (mean, standard deviation, RMS, kurtosis, peak-to-peak), operational severity indices (maneuver severity, acceleration RMS, climate severity), and cumulative usage parameters (TIS, flight count). The methodology implements advanced feature engineering techniques that create domain-specific indicators such as maneuver severity indices based on pitch, roll, and yaw rates, and environmental stress indicators incorporating altitude, temperature, and wind conditions.

The CNN-LSTM hybrid architecture specifically addresses the temporal nature of component degradation through convolutional feature extraction combined with long short-term memory capabilities (Ref. 12). The convolutional layers employ filter configurations of 256, 128, and 64 neurons in sequential layers, followed by fully connected layers that transform extracted features for final prediction. The architecture outputs both damage index values and RUL estimates, providing complementary perspectives on component health status. Recent advances in remaining useful life prediction using CNN-LSTM networks for machining tools have demonstrated the effectiveness of this hybrid approach for capturing both spatial and temporal features in degradation patterns (Ref. 12).

Damage Index Definition and Normalization The damage index represents a normalized measure of component degradation based on the relationship between accumulated operational exposure and expected component lifetime. The index employs a normalized scale from 0 to 1, where 0 represents a newly installed component and 1 indicates component end-of-life requiring immediate replacement. This normalization is based on the operational time between component installation and removal, expressed in terms of cumulative flight hours under actual operational conditions.

A damage index value of 0.8 represents a critical threshold indicating that the component has reached 80% of its expected operational life and has entered a condition requiring enhanced monitoring and maintenance planning. Beyond this threshold, operators must consider that demanding flight operations or critical maneuvers may accelerate component degradation and necessitate earlier replacement than initially predicted.

The damage index calculation incorporates the complex relationships between operational loading patterns, environmental conditions, and cumulative stress accumulation derived from virtual sensor data and flight operational parameters. Rather than relying solely on flight hour accumulation, the methodology accounts for the severity and variety of operational conditions encountered during component service life, providing more accurate predictions of actual component wear progression. This approach aligns with recent developments in remaining useful life prediction that emphasize the importance of operational context in degradation modeling (Ref. 13).

Model Training and Validation Framework The model training framework utilizes data from 128 component lifecycles representing diverse operational conditions and aircraft configurations. The dataset is partitioned using standard ML practices with 80% allocated for training (103 cycles), 10% for validation (12 cycles), and 10% for testing (13 cycles). This partitioning ensures robust model development while maintaining independent validation datasets for performance assessment.

Advanced feature selection techniques are employed to identify the most relevant predictors from the comprehensive dataset of flight parameters and virtual sensor outputs. Gradient boosting feature importance analysis guides the selection process, identifying parameters that contribute most significantly to component wear prediction without introducing historical dependencies that might compromise model generalization (Ref. 13).

The training process incorporates specialized techniques to address the monotonic nature of component degradation. Monotonicity constraints ensure that damage index predictions increase consistently over time, reflecting the physical reality that component damage cannot spontaneously reverse during operational service. Both gradient boosting algorithms and neural network architectures implement monotonicity enforcement through constrained optimization approaches.

Hyperparameter optimization employs grid search methodologies across multiple model configurations, including feature selection parameters, model architecture specifications, and training parameters. The optimization process balances prediction accuracy with computational efficiency requirements for operational deployment, ensuring that the final models can provide timely predictions for fleet management applications.

Prediction Pipeline Implementation and Operational Integration

Real-Time Inference Architecture The operational inference pipeline provides component health assessments following each flight operation, enabling continuous monitoring of damage index progression and *RUL* estimates. The pipeline accepts component part numbers, serial numbers, and flight history parameters as inputs, automatically retrieving relevant operational data and generating updated predictions through the trained ML models.

The inference process integrates seamlessly with existing virtual sensor generation capabilities, ensuring that each flight operation contributes appropriately to damage accumulation calculations. Post-processing algorithms apply monotonicity constraints and smoothing techniques to ensure consistent damage index progression and provide uncertainty quantification for maintenance planning applications.

Prediction outputs include both raw model estimates and post-processed values that incorporate steady degradation rate estimation and expanding extreme calculation methodologies. The steady degradation rate approach computes data-driven wear rates from training data, while the expanding extreme calculation tracks maximum smoothed prediction values over time to ensure monotonic output behavior.

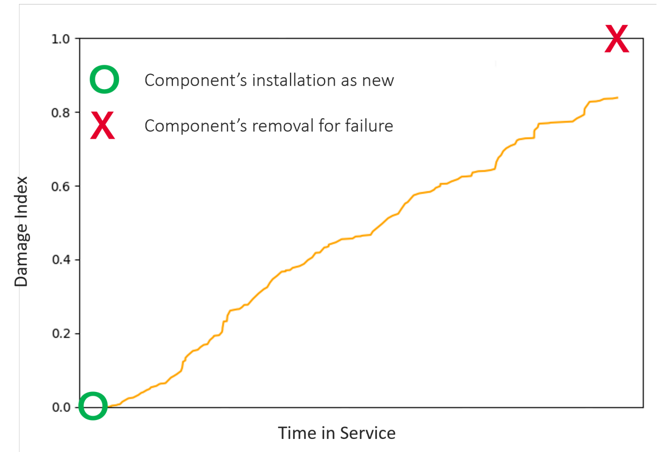

Figure 2. Example of damage index progression over component operational life showing prediction accuracy and remaining useful life estimation.

Alert Generation and Maintenance Integration The methodology implements automated alert generation when damage index predictions reach the critical threshold of 0.8 or exceed predetermined rates of change that indicate accelerated wear progression. Alert notifications provide maintenance personnel with advance warning of components approaching end-of-life conditions, enabling proactive maintenance planning and parts procurement.

Component tracking continues throughout operational service, with damage index updates occurring after each flight operation. The system maintains comprehensive historical records of damage progression, enabling trend analysis and *RUL* estimation under current operational patterns. Uncertainty quantification provides confidence intervals for predictions, supporting risk-based maintenance decision making.

When components are removed before reaching predicted failure thresholds, the system captures this information for model refinement and validation. Early removal events provide additional data points for improving model conservatism and calibrating alert thresholds to match operational maintenance practices and safety requirements.

Performance Validation and Continuous Improvement The methodology demonstrates significant improvement over baseline approaches, achieving mean absolute error values of 17.59 flight hours for *RUL* predictions compared to baseline

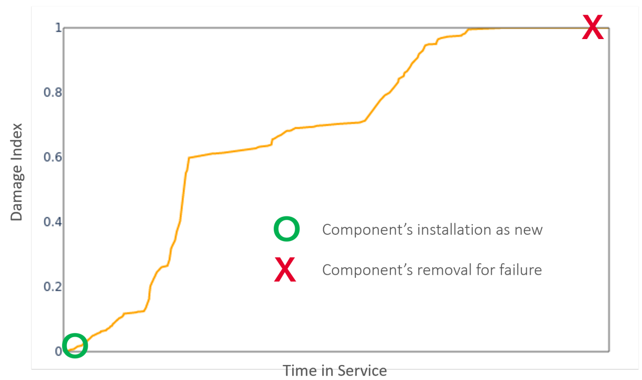

Figure 3. Comparison of damage index prediction methods showing performance of different machine learning approaches and validation against actual component removal data.

estimates of 107.936 flight hours based on average component lifetimes. Advanced feature engineering and post-processing techniques further improve prediction accuracy, with deep learning approaches achieving mean absolute errors of 22.46 flight hours for windowed analysis.

Validation procedures employ both statistical performance assessment and technical analysis with SME to ensure that predictions align with engineering understanding of component behavior and degradation mechanisms. The dual validation approach confirms that ML models capture genuine physical relationships rather than spurious correlations while providing operationally meaningful insights for maintenance decision making.

The methodology supports extension to additional rotor components through the established framework architecture, enabling scaling of predictive maintenance capabilities across the complete spectrum of rotor system components. Future development directions include incorporation of non-linear degradation modeling, expanded training datasets utilizing complete component lifecycles rather than truncated operational periods, and optimization of computational performance through feature pre-computation and caching strategies.

The operational implementation provides a comprehensive solution for rotor component predictive maintenance that addresses the fundamental challenges of monitoring components operating within rotating reference frames while providing validated performance improvements for fleet health management and operational availability optimization.

RESULTS AND PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Transmission Health Monitoring Results

Fleet-Wide Performance Validation The transmission health monitoring methodology has been extensively validated across a comprehensive fleet deployment encompassing approximately seven hundreds aircraft operating over a multiple year evaluation period, representing millions of flight hours of operational data. This substantial validation dataset provides robust evidence of the methodology's effectiveness across diverse operational conditions, aircraft configurations, and maintenance environments.

The unsupervised machine learning approach successfully achieved average failure detection capabilities of 24 flight hours in advance of actual transmission component failures. This advance warning capability provides sufficient time for maintenance planning, logistics coordination, and replacement component procurement, enabling proactive maintenance responses that significantly reduce operational disruption and unscheduled downtime events.

Performance evaluation against the limited dataset of few documented transmission failure events demonstrates the algorithm's capability to detect developing failures while maintaining acceptable false alarm rates. The methodology achieved greater than 80% detection performance on documented failure events while operating within constraints established for false positive and false negative rates that align with operational maintenance requirements.

The algorithm's ability to consolidate approximately 1000 health indices into unified health scores represents a significant advancement over traditional threshold-based monitoring approaches. This consolidation enables maintenance personnel to assess transmission health through single-value indicators rather than managing hundreds of individual parameters, substantially reducing monitoring complexity while improving diagnostic reliability.

Operational Implementation and Fleet Generalization The PCA-based approach demonstrates remarkable generalization capabilities across the entire monitored fleet without requiring individual aircraft calibration or customization. This fleet-wide applicability eliminates the operational complexity and cost associated with developing aircraft-specific models while maintaining diagnostic accuracy across diverse operational profiles and aircraft configurations.

The methodology's explainability features provide critical operational value by identifying specific health indices responsible for alarm generation through SelectKBest algorithm integration. This capability enables maintenance personnel to understand the underlying causes of health score degradation and focus diagnostic efforts on specific transmission subsystems or components most likely to require attention. Figure 4 illustrates an example of health score generated for a specific helicopter.

Dashboard implementation provides comprehensive fleet health monitoring capabilities with both high-level fleet status assessment and detailed individual aircraft analysis. The interface enables maintenance teams to monitor health score trends, review alarm histories, and analyze contributing health indices for specific transmission units, supporting both immediate maintenance decision-making and longer-term fleet health management strategies.

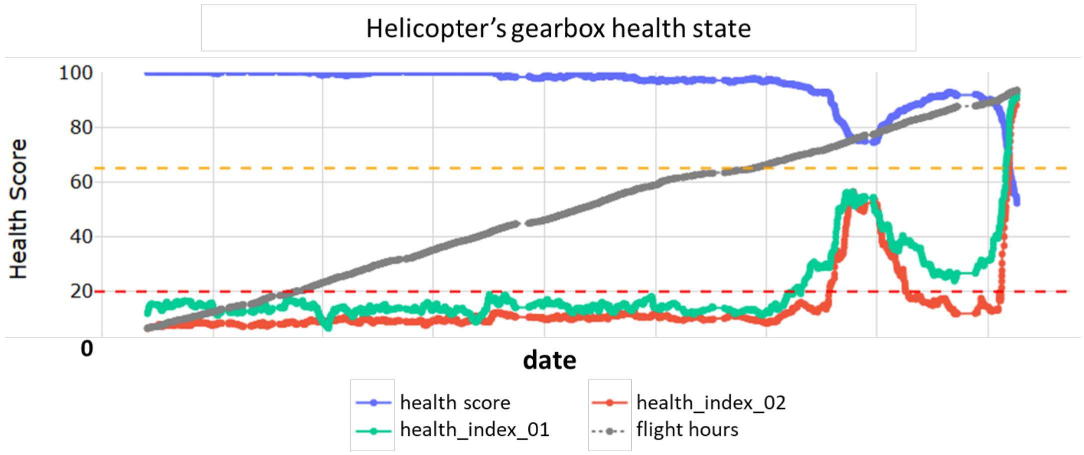

Figure 4. Health Score (blue dotted line) calculated for a specific helicopter. The two horizontal lines identify the "warning" threshold (orange) and the "alert" threshold (red). Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the contributing health indices can be performed to pinpoint the specific source of the potential failure.

Rotor Component Prediction Results

Machine Learning Model Performance Assessment The rotor component predictive maintenance methodology demonstrates significant performance improvements over conventional maintenance approaches through comprehensive validation using 128 component lifecycles. The per-flight feature extraction approach achieved mean absolute error values of 17.59 flight hours for *RUL* predictions, representing substantial improvement compared to baseline approaches utilizing average component lifetimes that yielded mean absolute errors of 107.936 flight hours.

Advanced feature engineering techniques incorporating maneuver severity indices, environmental stress factors, and cumulative usage parameters contribute to enhanced prediction accuracy. The methodology successfully captures complex relationships between operational loading patterns, flight conditions, and component wear progression that traditional time-based maintenance approaches cannot address.

Deep learning approaches utilizing CNN-LSTM hybrid architectures achieved mean absolute error values of 22.46 flight hours for rolling window regression analysis, demonstrating the effectiveness of temporal sequence modeling for component degradation prediction. The slightly higher error compared to per-flight approaches reflects the increased complexity of temporal modeling while providing enhanced capability for detecting subtle short-term changes in component behavior.

Feature selection optimization through gradient boosting importance analysis identifies *TIS*, flight count, and operational severity indices as primary predictors of component wear progression. Environmental factors including temperature extremes, altitude variations, and wind conditions contribute secondary but measurable influences on wear accumulation rates, validating the importance of comprehensive operational context in predictive modeling.

Virtual Sensor Technology Validation The integration of eight specialized virtual sensors provides unprecedented insight into rotor component loading and kinematic behavior that would otherwise be impossible to obtain from operational aircraft. Virtual sensor reconstructions of blade angles (lag, flap, pitch), damper link axial loads, and pitch link axial loads enable comprehensive characterization of component stress patterns across all phases of flight operations.

Validation procedures combining statistical performance assessment with SME technical analysis confirm that virtual sensor outputs accurately represent physical loading conditions and align with engineering understanding of rotor system behavior. The dual validation approach ensures that ML models capture genuine engineering relationships rather than spurious correlations while providing operationally meaningful insights for maintenance decision making.

Post-processing techniques including monotonicity constraints and steady degradation rate estimation ensure physically realistic damage index progression while providing uncertainty quantification for maintenance planning applications. The methodology successfully enforces monotonic damage accumulation that reflects the physical reality of component wear progression while accommodating operational variability and measurement uncertainty.

Damage Index Implementation and Threshold Analysis The normalized damage index scale from 0 to 1 provides intuitive component health assessment that aligns with maintenance personnel expectations and operational requirements. The critical threshold of 0.8 effectively identifies components approaching end-of-life conditions while providing sufficient advance warning for maintenance planning and parts procurement activities.

Validation against actual component removal events demonstrates that the methodology successfully identifies components requiring replacement due to wear and damage accumulation rather than predetermined fatigue life limits. The approach addresses failure modes including debonding, wear, and mechanical damage that cannot be detected through traditional monitoring approaches, significantly expanding the scope of condition-based maintenance capabilities.

Component tracking across aircraft transfers within fleet operations maintains appropriate damage accumulation continuity, enabling accurate health assessment regardless of component movement between aircraft platforms. This capability supports fleet optimization strategies that maximize component utilization through strategic rotation and replacement practices.

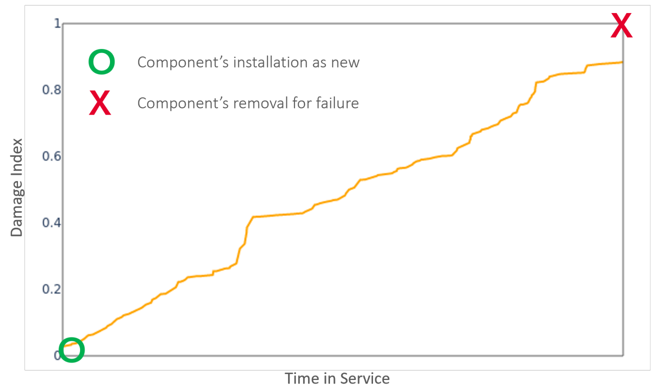

Figure 5. ***DI*** **calculation of main rotor component showing damage accumulation over operational life and threshold-based alert generation.**

Integrated Methodology Benefits and Operational Impact

Comprehensive Fleet Health Monitoring Coverage The dual methodology approach provides comprehensive coverage of rotorcraft health monitoring requirements by addressing both transmission systems through direct sensor monitoring and rotor components through virtual sensor technology. This combination eliminates the significant gaps in traditional monitoring approaches that typically focus exclusively on accessible transmission components while neglecting critical rotor system elements.

The complementary nature of the two approaches enables complete rotorcraft health assessment without requiring extensive physical instrumentation or modification of operational aircraft configurations. The transmission methodology leverages existing HUMS infrastructure while the rotor component approach utilizes standard flight data parameters, minimizing implementation complexity and operational disruption.

Integration within a unified data architecture framework utilizing Leonardo's "davinci-1" HPC infrastructure and shared data lake capabilities provides the computational power and data management necessary for fleet-scale deployment. The common infrastructure approach enables efficient resource utilization while maintaining the specialized analytical capabilities required for each monitoring domain.

Transition from Time-Based to Condition-Based Maintenance Both methodologies enable fundamental transitions from conservative time-based maintenance schedules to condition-based approaches that optimize component utilization based on actual health status rather than predetermined replacement intervals. This transition represents significant advancement in maintenance efficiency and operational cost optimization.

For rotor components specifically, the methodology eliminates the need for extensive manual inspection activities during early component lifecycle phases, enabling maintenance teams to focus inspection efforts on components approaching critical threshold values. This optimization reduces maintenance workload while improving inspection effectiveness through targeted condition assessment.

The virtual sensor approach provides unprecedented insight into customer operational patterns and component usage profiles, enabling data-driven analysis of how helicopter utilization affects component wear progression. This capability supports both immediate maintenance optimization and longer-term component design improvements based on actual operational requirements and usage patterns.

Technology Platform and Service Integration The methodologies are designed for integration as Platform-as-a-Service offerings leveraging cloud computing infrastructure, enabling scalable deployment across diverse customer fleets and operational environments. This approach provides flexibility for customers with varying fleet sizes and operational requirements while maintaining consistent analytical capabilities and performance standards.

The technology platform creates opportunities for additional revenue streams through enhanced service offerings while providing valuable operational data for component design optimization and customer satisfaction improvement. Analysis of customer operational patterns enables identification of design improvements that can reduce component replacement costs and improve overall helicopter operational efficiency.

Technical stakeholder engagement demonstrates strong interest in the methodology's potential for creating new business opportunities and enhancing customer relationships through improved maintenance services. The approach represents significant advancement in predictive maintenance capabilities that align with industry trends toward digitalization and data-driven operational optimization.

Implementation Considerations and Future Development

Validation Framework and Performance Standards The comprehensive validation approach combining extensive fleet data analysis with expert technical review establishes robust performance standards for both methodologies. The transmission approach's validation across three million flight hours provides exceptional confidence in performance reliability, while the rotor component methodology's validation using

128 component lifecycles demonstrates effectiveness across diverse operational conditions.

Performance metrics demonstrate clear improvements over existing approaches while acknowledging the pilot project status of current implementations. The methodologies provide validated frameworks ready for operational deployment once business case development and customer integration requirements are completed.

Scalability and Extension Opportunities The modular architecture of both methodologies supports extension to additional aircraft types and component categories through established training and validation procedures. The virtual sensor framework particularly enables expansion to other rotor components that present similar instrumentation challenges, providing scalable solutions for comprehensive rotor system health monitoring.

Future development directions include integration of nonlinear degradation modeling, expansion of training datasets to utilize complete component lifecycles, and optimization of computational performance through advanced caching and pre-computation strategies. These enhancements will further improve prediction accuracy and operational efficiency while maintaining the validated performance characteristics demonstrated through current implementations.

The technology platform provides foundation for advanced analytics capabilities including fleet optimization, predictive logistics, and component design feedback that can significantly enhance customer value propositions and operational efficiency across the complete product lifecycle.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Key Contributions and Technical Achievements

This research presents a comprehensive dual-methodology approach to rotorcraft predictive maintenance that successfully addresses the distinct monitoring challenges inherent in transmission systems and rotor components through complementary technological solutions. The work demonstrates significant advancement in the application of ML and virtual sensor technologies to aerospace maintenance challenges, providing validated solutions that bridge the gap between theoretical algorithmic capabilities and practical operational implementation.

The transmission health monitoring methodology achieves remarkable consolidation of complex diagnostic information by reducing approximately 1000 health indices from 187 acquisition points into unified, interpretable health scores. The unsupervised PCA approach successfully detects transmission failures an average of 24 flight hours in advance while maintaining greater than 80% detection performance across documented failure events. This early warning capability, validated across approximately seven hundreds aircraft and millions flight hours of operational data, represents substantial improvement over traditional threshold-based monitoring systems that frequently generate false alarms or miss developing failures.

The rotor component predictive maintenance methodology introduces innovative virtual sensor technology that overcomes fundamental instrumentation limitations in rotating machinery applications. The framework successfully reconstructs eight critical rotor parameters including blade kinematics and component loading patterns using only standard flight data, eliminating the need for complex and unreliable rotating instrumentation. ML models trained on 128 component lifecycles achieve mean absolute error improvements from 107.936 flight hours to 17.59 flight hours for RUL predictions, demonstrating significant advancement in predictive accuracy for components subject to wear and damage rather than fatigue-limited failure modes.

The integration of both methodologies within a unified data architecture framework leveraging HPC infrastructure demonstrates scalable solutions for fleet-wide health monitoring. The complementary nature of transmission monitoring through direct sensor analysis and rotor component assessment through virtual sensor technology provides comprehensive coverage of critical rotorcraft systems without requiring extensive aircraft modification or complex instrumentation installations.

Methodological Innovations and Technical Significance

The research introduces several methodological innovations that advance the state-of-the-art in predictive maintenance for rotating machinery applications. The unsupervised anomaly detection approach for transmission monitoring addresses the practical challenge of limited failure event data while providing fleet-wide generalization without requiring individual aircraft calibration. This capability represents significant operational advantage over traditional approaches that necessitate extensive customization for each aircraft or operational environment.

The virtual sensor technology framework demonstrates sophisticated integration of deep learning algorithms with domain-specific engineering knowledge to reconstruct physical quantities that cannot be directly measured during operational service. The approach successfully validates virtual sensor outputs through dual statistical and technical analysis, ensuring that ML models capture genuine physical relationships rather than spurious correlations. This validation methodology establishes important precedents for deploying AI solutions in safety-critical aerospace applications.

The damage index formulation provides intuitive and actionable health assessment metrics that align with maintenance personnel expectations while incorporating complex relationships between operational loading patterns, environmental conditions, and component wear progression. The normalized scale from 0 to 1 with established critical thresholds enables straightforward integration with existing maintenance planning processes while providing significant improvement over time-based replacement schedules.

Advanced post-processing techniques including monotonicity constraints and steady degradation rate estimation ensure physically realistic predictions while providing uncertainty quantification for risk-based maintenance decision making. These techniques address practical challenges in deploying ML models for engineering applications where predictions must align with fundamental physical principles and engineering expectations.

Practical Impact and Industry Implications

The validated performance improvements demonstrated by both methodologies provide compelling evidence for transitioning from traditional time-based maintenance schedules to condition-based approaches that optimize component utilization based on actual health status. For transmission systems, the 24-hour advance warning capability enables proactive maintenance planning, logistics coordination, and replacement component procurement that significantly reduces unscheduled downtime and operational disruption.

For rotor components, the methodology enables fundamental changes in maintenance practices by eliminating extensive manual inspection requirements during early component lifecycle phases while focusing inspection efforts on components approaching critical threshold conditions. This optimization reduces maintenance workload while improving inspection effectiveness through targeted condition assessment based on quantitative health indicators rather than subjective visual evaluations.

The technology platform creates opportunities for enhanced service offerings that provide additional value to customers while generating new revenue streams for manufacturers. The comprehensive operational data generated through virtual sensor technology enables analysis of customer usage patterns and component performance that supports both immediate maintenance optimization and longer-term component design improvements based on actual operational requirements.

The successful integration of advanced ML techniques with established engineering principles demonstrates practical pathways for deploying AI solutions in aerospace applications while maintaining the reliability and safety standards required for commercial aviation operations. This integration provides important precedents for broader adoption of data-driven approaches in aerospace maintenance and design optimization.

Limitations and Areas for Improvement

While the research demonstrates significant technical achievements, several limitations and areas for improvement have been identified that represent opportunities for future development. The transmission monitoring methodology relies on a limited dataset of few documented failure events, which constrains the ability to validate performance across diverse failure modes and operational scenarios. Expansion of the failure event database through continued operational monitoring will enhance model validation and potentially improve detection capabilities for specific failure mechanisms.

The rotor component methodology currently focuses on wear and damage-related failure modes, excluding fatigue-limited components that represent a significant portion of rotor system maintenance requirements. Extension of the virtual sensor framework to address fatigue life prediction would provide more comprehensive rotor system health monitoring capabilities and enable unified maintenance planning across all component categories.

Computational performance optimization remains an area for improvement, particularly for real-time applications requiring immediate health assessment updates following flight operations. Current implementations rely on HPC infrastructure that may not be readily available in all operational environments, creating potential barriers to widespread deployment.

The integration of both methodologies into unified operational workflows requires further development to address scenarios where transmission and rotor component health assessments provide conflicting maintenance recommendations. Decision support frameworks that appropriately weight and prioritize different health indicators will enhance practical utility for maintenance planning applications.

Future Research Directions

Several promising research directions emerge from the current work that can significantly extend the capabilities and applications of the developed methodologies. Integration of physics-informed ML approaches could enhance model reliability by incorporating fundamental engineering principles directly into algorithmic frameworks, potentially improving prediction accuracy while reducing data requirements for model training.

Extension of the virtual sensor framework to additional rotor components including pitch links, blade assemblies, and hub mechanisms would provide comprehensive rotor system health monitoring capabilities that address the complete spectrum of maintenance requirements. The modular architecture established through current development provides foundation for systematic expansion across additional component categories.

Development of non-linear degradation modeling capabilities would enhance prediction accuracy for components that exhibit complex wear patterns or multiple degradation mechanisms operating simultaneously. Current linear degradation assumptions, while providing good performance for many applications, may not capture the full complexity of component behavior under diverse operational conditions.

Integration of predictive maintenance capabilities with broader aircraft health management systems could enable system-level optimization that considers interactions between different aircraft subsystems and operational requirements.

This integration would support more sophisticated maintenance planning that optimizes overall aircraft availability rather than individual component replacement schedules.

Research into automated model updating and continuous learning capabilities would enable the methodologies to adapt to changing operational patterns, new failure modes, or evolving component designs without requiring extensive manual retraining procedures. This capability would enhance long-term model reliability and reduce the maintenance overhead associated with model management.

Regulatory and Certification Considerations

The deployment of ML-based predictive maintenance systems in commercial aviation requires careful consideration of regulatory frameworks and certification requirements that ensure safety and reliability standards are maintained. While current regulatory guidance for AI applications in aviation remains under development, the validation methodologies established through this research provide important precedents for demonstrating system reliability and safety compliance.

The explainability features incorporated into both methodologies address key regulatory concerns about algorithmic transparency and decision traceability that are essential for certification approval. The ability to identify specific health indices responsible for transmission alarms and the physical basis for virtual sensor predictions provide the transparency necessary for regulatory acceptance of automated maintenance decision support systems.

Future research should continue to engage with regulatory authorities to establish appropriate certification frameworks for predictive maintenance technologies while maintaining the performance benefits demonstrated through current implementations. This engagement will facilitate broader industry adoption while ensuring that safety standards are appropriately maintained.

Concluding Remarks

This research demonstrates significant advancement in rotorcraft predictive maintenance through innovative integration of ML algorithms, virtual sensor technology, and established engineering principles. The dual methodology approach successfully addresses fundamental challenges in monitoring both transmission systems and rotor components while providing validated performance improvements that enable transition from time-based to condition-based maintenance practices.

The comprehensive validation across extensive operational datasets establishes confidence in methodology reliability while identifying clear pathways for future enhancement and broader application. The technology platform provides foundation for enhanced service offerings that create value for both manufacturers and operators while advancing the state-of-the-art in aerospace maintenance optimization.

The work represents important progress toward more efficient, safe, and cost-effective rotorcraft operations through data-driven maintenance approaches that optimize component utilization based on actual health status rather than conservative time-based schedules. The methodologies developed provide practical solutions to industry challenges while establishing frameworks for continued advancement in predictive maintenance technology applications.

Future development and deployment of these technologies will contribute to improved rotorcraft safety, operational efficiency, and cost-effectiveness while providing valuable insights into component behavior and customer operational patterns that support continued advancement in aerospace design and maintenance optimization. The research establishes important precedents for deploying advanced analytical techniques in safety-critical applications while maintaining the reliability and transparency required for commercial aviation operations.

Authors contact:

- Gianbattista Dario Natale
gianbattistadario.natale.ext@leonardo.com
- Federico Guglielmin
federico.guglielmin@leonardo.com
- Andrea Ricci
andrea.ricci02@leonardo.com
- Domenico Andreocci
domenico.andreocci@leonardo.com
- Alessandro Scandroglio
alessandro.scandroglio@leonardo.com
- Nicolò Vallana
nicolo.vallana@leonardo.com

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