



*International Civil Aviation Organization*

**Sixth Meeting of the Aerodrome Safety, Planning & Implementation Group**

*(ASPIG/6) (Muscat, Oman, 27-29 May 2024)*

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**Agenda Item 2: Implementation of Aerodrome Safety priorities and objectives**

**EXAMPLES AND INDICATORS OF A POSITIVE SAFETY CULTURE**

*(Presented by ACI, CANSO, IFALPA and IFATCA)*

**SUMMARY**

This paper attempts to facilitate and encourage discussions on safety culture, a rather abstract concept, by providing concrete examples and indicators of a positive safety culture from the industry's perspective.

Action by the meeting is at paragraph 4

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Annex 19 requires that States promote a positive safety culture. This is laudable because aviation is a system that consists and functions through constant collaboration and interdependence between humans, technology and preparation through procedures and guidelines. How humans act and react is critical to the safe functioning of the system, hence the importance of safety culture.

1.2 Yet safety culture is a rather abstract concept that may be difficult to grasp and define although after years of promotion most in the industry have a general idea of it.

1.3 During cross industry discussions on runway safety held in 2022 and 2023, ACI, CANSO, IFALPA and IFATCA agreed that a positive safety culture was fundamental to runway safety and one way to help promote it was to give concrete examples and indicators of a positive safety culture that members of these International Organizations had witnessed at their workplace and felt useful for sharing amongst service providers and States.

1.4 This paper provides such examples and indicators and in doing so attempts to facilitate and encourage discussions on safety culture and help define safety culture.

**2. DISCUSSION**

2.1 Much good effort has been spent to define, assess and promote a positive safety culture, the most recent example of such effort being [IP5](#) on voluntary safety reporting, safety culture, and management of risk submitted by United States to RASG-MID/9 and MIDANPIRG/19 in February 2022.

2.2 This paper presented to ASPIG/6 attempts to look at the issue from a different angle, i.e. to provide examples and indicators of a positive safety culture at the aviation workplace so as to:

- a) Aid a common understanding of safety culture across industry sectors and States;
- b) Encourage discussions and thereby facilitate learning from each other between Industry and States;
- c) Help understand the broader context of safety culture, i.e. the environment in which employees perform their jobs and interrelate with each other beyond the systems and tools that are already working; and
- d) Encourage the senior leadership of aviation stakeholders to add their voice and demonstrate behaviour that showcase commitment toward an ever-evolving safety culture and a strong governance of that.

2.3 *Indicators of a Positive Safety Culture.* Here are some examples that the four associations presenting this paper came up with based on experience of their members, categorized at different work levels of the organization.

a) *Regulator-level positive safety culture indicators:*

1. There is a relationship with the local or national judiciary to explain a positive safety culture.
2. There is collaboration between the aviation industry stakeholders and the judiciary.
3. There are guidelines for the industry on how to deal with the media in light of protection of identity and the media's impact on reporting and safety learning.
4. Legislation is published on the protection of safety data as well as of the individuals involved in accidents or incidents in the interest of safety improvement and learning.
5. Investigators are trained in the application of positive safety culture during investigations.

b) *Corporate-level safety culture indicators:*

1. Safety culture defined and published with explanations of how the various aspects of a safety culture integrates and compliments each other, e.g. setting a positive safety culture to improve the reporting culture leading to a Learning Culture while embracing a flexible culture to accommodate understanding of contextual constraints of scenarios that leads to a better informed culture.
2. There is a positive safety culture policy.
3. Safety culture surveys regularly conducted (organisations should caution against survey fatigue as well, although the average survey frequency is recommended to be anywhere between once per annum to once every 4 years).
4. Anonymous safety culture surveys explore the reasons behind why staff report or do not report, e.g. out of fear or because they do not believe in the value of safety reporting.

5. The absence of reports is not an indication of a good safety performance/culture.
6. Specifically positive safety culture and more broadly safety culture promotional materials produced and effectively communicated to all staff  
A positive safety culture that has a positive safety culture as the foundation.
7. Benchmarking and sharing about activities and information to learn from other safety stakeholders to improve the existing safety culture of the organization. Translating such activities into objectives to be monitored by senior management may spark the effort of safety culture transformation.
8. The actions to be taken published in the event of at-risk behaviours as well as reckless behaviours. Managers are trained and coached in implementing a local positive safety culture through engaging staff on the topic.
9. Investigators are trained in the application of positive safety culture.
10. Managers are trained in the corporate definition of a positive safety culture as well as a positive safety culture vocabulary by avoiding punitive and judgmental language.
11. Managers trust their staff to report safety occurrences. This is usually determined through the results of a safety culture survey where such a question can be posed to managers and staff and they answer anonymously.
12. Managers to be equipped to create and demonstrate an environment of trust and respect creating a positive safety environment within which prevention will prevail.
13. Systems are designed in such a way that it is easy for staff to do the right thing.
14. In principle the organization follows a systems-based approach to investigations that is not primarily focused on the human errors and failures. Keeping track of systemic evidence versus individual evidence may further promote reporting when communicated to the business.

c) Managerial indicators:

1. Leadership exhibit SMS competency.
2. Evidence of leadership commitment to safety in communications and actions can be provided.
3. All levels of leadership express, demonstrate and reinforce in all communications the commitment to safety.
4. Level of involvement of senior management in safety initiatives and promotion events.

d) *Operational staff-level positive safety culture indicators:*

1. Staff having a common understanding of the meaning of a positive safety culture in a similar fashion to the corporate definition.
2. Frequent reports of safety occurrences and hazards and monitoring/sharing of such reporting trends (on an anonymous basis) to encourage further reporting. Moreover, a reporting culture should include errors and mistakes made even when no one was watching, e.g. reflecting on non-mandatory reports being filed.
3. All staff trained on Reason's (1998) five elements of a safety culture and its application.
4. All staff recognised for the role they play in delivering a safe service to customers.
5. Staff adhering to written procedures unless, in the clear interest of safety, it is necessary to deviate from these procedures.
6. Staff trust their managers to report safety occurrences to them.
7. Evidence is visible that staff are supported by their managers following a safety occurrence or accident.
8. Staff feel comfortable discussing errors and mistakes in order to improve safety, as long as the data sharing and discussion complies with data protection policy (this also refers to the need for psychological safety to speak up).
9. Staff are not concerned about being 'indirectly punished' for raising safety concerns and reporting safety incidents. Indirect punishment includes peer-pressures and blaming of the staff involved in incidents. In some scenarios, actions aiming to improve safety can be interpreted by some staff as indirect punishment. For example, removing staff involved in an incident from a roster for 2-3 days is intended to help them cope with stress related to the incident. This removal can be interpreted as indirect punishment if not adequately explained to the staff member involved.

*e) Organized labour/labour union-level positive safety culture indicators:*

1. The union is involved in the drafting of the positive safety culture policy and co-signatory on the positive safety culture policy.
2. The union promotes a positive safety culture amongst its members through their own communication channels.
3. In the interest of learning, the union is at least informed of the outcome of any review of negligent actions of a member. Ideally, they may even be invited to partake in safety review.

*f) General indicators:*

1. Establishment and availability of a viable 2-way communication channel for reporting safety concerns by staff and communicating safety initiatives and expectations by the top management. Such channels are easy to

access, facilitated by information technology, multilingual, if necessary, and provide feedback on safety reports and action taken.

2. Feedback mechanism to inform the action taken on the concern being reported and that tracks actions, timeframe and evidence of completion (this will encourage the personnel to report further in future).
3. Mechanism to understand the contextual constraints and contributory factors behind repetitive violations: Central repository of safety concerns from various internal committees (common dashboard)/comprehensive safety occurrence database.
4. Safety information is viewed as an opportunity for improvement, not for retributions.
5. Adequate relevant training and resources are provided to safely execute tasks.
6. Availability of a mechanism to recognise staff for voluntary reporting of hazards.
7. Presence of a well-defined safety accountability with appropriate authority of all key personnel at all levels.
8. Safety roles are monitored for staff turnover trends that may negatively impact the safety image and performance of the organisation.
9. The safety department is positioned as coveted positions in the organization and candidates are required to have higher education/training in safety or prior safety leadership experience. The organisation cautions against it becoming a mere steppingstone to other higher levels in the organization.
10. Investment is made into the education and training of the safety department beyond operational experience as to set the foundation for corporate safety.
11. A strong healthy reporting culture is indicative of positive safety culture and positive safety culture. Some companies make safety reporting mandatory, which is counter to the concept of voluntary safety reporting programs. Quality safety reports which generate valuable information and insights for the organization is the hallmark of a positive safety culture and positive safety culture.
12. Peers (with an understanding of the operational constraints) are involved in the review of at-risk actions that may be deemed to border on gross negligence, recklessness or sabotage in the line of duty. Outcomes of such peer reviews are deidentified and shared within the organization for the purposes of learning.

2.4 Examples of Positive Safety Culture. Here are some selected concrete examples of positive safety culture practices with the names of operator withheld:

- a) Airline A encourages its employees, from flight crews to ground personnel, to report safety concerns, incidents, and even near-misses. They have established channels for reporting, and employees are assured that they can report without fear of punitive measures.
- b) Airline B invests heavily in training its employees in safety-related procedures, risk management, and the principles of a positive safety culture. They also provide ongoing support and counselling to employees who may have been involved in stressful situations or incidents.
- c) Airline C focuses on a no-blame approach to safety reporting. When an incident occurs, the emphasis is on understanding the underlying causes and systemic issues rather than assigning blame to individuals. This encourages employees to report issues candidly. The airline has safety committees that include representatives from various departments within the organization. These committees review safety reports and work collaboratively to identify and address safety issues. Airline C's leadership, including its CEO and top management, actively promote safety culture. They regularly communicate the importance of safety and set a tone that prioritizes safety above all else.
- d) An ANSP has dedicated resources to receive and investigate safety reports. The reporter is involved in the investigation by sharing his or her experience of the situation and constraints. There is also a practice in the organisation to return the feedback to the reporter following an investigation. Thereafter, the safety recommendations are implemented, and these success stories are transferred to the knowledge management team to craft lessons learned and safety achievements into corporate success stories that promote and encourage further reporting. Beyond the immediate location of the occurrence, the learning culture is further bolstered through local aviation professionals with their management engaging each other in possible cross pollination of such lessons to improve their system and skills where applicable.

## 2.5

### Indicators of a Weak Safety Culture.

- a) **Repeated Violations:** Some airlines have been found to repeatedly violate safety regulations or standards. These violations may range from maintenance deficiencies and inadequate pilot training to lapses in safety procedures during flight operations.
- b) **Inadequate Reporting:** Employees within these airlines may be hesitant to report safety concerns or violations due to fear of retaliation or a perceived lack of response from management. This reluctance to report can lead to ongoing safety issues going unaddressed.
- c) **Pressure from Safety Targets:** An organization sets unrealistic safety targets or safety goals, for example, 'zero go-around' or 'zero incident'. This kind of unachievable targets may put pressure on front-line operators not to file a safety report, fearing that their actions may damage the organization's safety reputation.
- d) **Regulatory Scrutiny:** Regulatory authorities, may increase scrutiny of these airlines due to their track record of safety violations. This can result in sanctions, fines, or increased oversight.

- e) **Public Perception:** Incidents involving safety violations can damage an airline's reputation and erode public trust in air travel. Passengers may become apprehensive about flying with the airline, impacting its financial performance.
- f) **Organizational Culture:** The safety culture within these airlines may be perceived as more focused on operational efficiency and cost-cutting than on safety. This can manifest in decisions that prioritize economic considerations over safety concerns.
- g) **Training and Compliance:** Gaps in employee training programs, compliance with safety protocols, and the lack of communication of safety-related information to employees.

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 In the last two years the four associations: ACI, CANSO, IFALPA and IFATCA learnt much from each other on safety culture by sharing positive and negative instances and indicators of such.

3.2 The associations now wish to share their learning experience and thereby raise awareness, arouse interest in the matter, encourage discussions and eventually help develop best practices in the promotion of a positive safety culture.

### 4. ACTION BY THE MEETING

4.1 The Meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information in this paper;
- b) encourage States and Industry to share examples and indicators of a positive safety culture;
- c) discuss assessment and promotion of a positive safety culture in general; and
- d) discuss the need for defining a positive safety culture with a view of better assessing and promoting it.

— END —