

**57<sup>th</sup> CONFERENCE OF  
DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION  
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS**

*Incheon, Republic of Korea*

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**AGENDA ITEM 3: AVIATION SAFETY**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP AND  
A POSITIVE SAFETY CULTURE**

Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

**SUMMARY**

This paper calls attention to the importance of safety leadership within an organization, and how it directly supports a positive organizational safety culture that drives an effective safety management system (SMS) and consequently a safer, more efficient, and resilient aviation system, particularly in times of crisis/recovery from crisis.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP AND A POSITIVE SAFETY CULTURE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and widespread impact on civil aviation, particularly commercial passenger airline operations, at a level never experienced before. The combination of travel restrictions, border closures, quarantine and testing requirements, and public concerns of contracting COVID-19 from travel-related activities has resulted in substantially reduced air travel demand, around the globe, since March 2020.

1.2 As borders start opening, all industry stakeholders are focusing on initiatives to ensure a restart and recovery of the aviation sector that is both safe and sustainable.

1.3 It is critical for CEO's with the support of their executives and senior managers, across all parts of the aviation sector, to clearly demonstrate safety leadership and a commitment to a positive safety culture within their organizations in order to maintain the fragile balance between safety, operational priorities and the massive financial pressures all parts of the sector are under.

1.4 These leadership teams must ensure that safety is a steadfast value, foundational to the culture of the organization, so that it is always front-of-mind and part of the decision-making process, even when under financial and other critical pressures.

### 2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Empirical findings in safety research have identified leadership as the strongest factor affecting an organization's safety performance, especially in high-risk sectors, such as nuclear, medical and aviation. Additionally, aircraft accident investigations have identified poor safety culture as a factor that increases the probability and severity of accidents.

2.2 Strong safety leadership from the very top of an organization, and across the sector is a pre-requisite for a positive safety culture, leading to not only safer operations, but also a more efficient and resilient sector.

2.3 Recognizing the importance of safety culture and its direct impact on the effectiveness of a safety management system (SMS) and a State safety program (SSP), *Amendment 1 to Annex 19 – Safety Management* introduced recommendations for States to promote and support the development of positive safety cultures.

2.4 It is acknowledged that establishing a positive safety culture within an organization requires buy-in and continual application by all employees at every level, but to remain effective, commitment and leadership from the CEO and the supporting top executives is critical. It is particularly critical now, as the industry restarts after its deepest crisis in history, to keep industry decision-makers' focus on safety, particularly where safety and business priorities might conflict.

2.5 Culture change is an organizational/systemic change that requires time to develop but will foster long-term benefits. In positive safety cultures, all levels of leadership validate their commitment to safety through their actions, including how they empower others throughout the organization/system to be successful with their safety initiatives. It results in more engaged participants who:

- think and act in more safety-conscious ways;
- feel personal responsibility for the safety performance of the organization;
- know everyone plays a critical safety role; and

- helps identify and protect their organization and passengers against risks that could result in fatalities and casualties, as well as operational, reputation or financial damages.

2.6 A positive safety culture contributes to higher productivity, lower employee turnover, and increased employee engagement, not only improving safety performance but also better total organizational performance.

2.7 The intended interpretation and full adoption of safety culture principles remains a challenge, as identified by the industry and International Air Transport Association (IATA) Aviation Safety Culture survey results, with recurrent examples of punitive safety management practices being applied in some regions of the world (including APAC), significantly reducing the pace of global safety culture improvements in the industry.

2.8 There is also an immediate concern, as raised by the aviation community, that aviation safety culture has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of particular concern is the considerable reduction of safety reporting, affecting airlines' ability to identify and manage safety risks effectively.

2.9 To conclude, it is of paramount global importance for the aviation industry to strengthen its safety leadership and support of a positive safety culture across all parts of the sector, including regulatory agencies, to continue maintaining and further improving overall safety performance.

2.10 The Directors General of the APAC region are encouraged to promote initiatives within their organizations and across the aviation system that:

- increase industry awareness on the importance of safety leadership, and its role in the management of safety risks;
- support the development and maintenance of a positive safety culture; and
- prepare future safety leaders.

### **3. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE**

3.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) Discuss the information contained herein; and
- b) Acknowledge the important roles played by safety leadership and a positive safety culture in ensuring a safe and sustainable post-COVID restart of aviation.

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