

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

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**AGENDA ITEM 3: AVIATION SAFETY**

**TRUST AS A CORNERSTONE FOR A POSITIVE SAFETY  
CULTURE**

(Presented by ICAO)

**SUMMARY**

Trust is an essential element of a positive safety culture, which forms the basis of a robust safety management system, encouraging individuals to proactively report safety-related data and information without fear of punishment. SSPs and SMSs are sustained by safety data and safety information that is necessary to address existing and potential safety deficiencies and hazards in the process of safety risk management.

This paper is to enhance the safety awareness and commitment by high- and middle-management of aviation communities to establish the right environment for continuously improving and effective safety management through enhanced trust and Safety Culture.

## TRUST AS A CORNERSTONE FOR A POSITIVE SAFETY CULTURE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ICAO Annex 19<sup>1</sup> – *Safety Management* SARPs requires that “both States and service providers promote a positive safety culture with the aim of fostering effective safety management implementation through the State Safety Programme/Safety Management System (SSP/SMS)”. It is also required that “States shall take necessary measures, including the promotion of a positive safety culture, to encourage safety reporting through both mandatory and voluntary safety reporting systems”.

1.2 Having a positive safety culture is also emphasized in the ICAO *Asia/Pacific Seamless ANS Plan (V.3)* to ensure that new changes arising from all ANS modernization derived from global and regional ANS Plans are implemented in a safe manner.

1.3 A positive safety culture relies on a high degree of trust and respect between personnel and management. Time and effort are needed to build a positive safety culture, which however can be easily damaged by management decisions and actions, or inactions. Thus, continuous effort and reinforcement are needed. The ideal situation is a fully implemented and effective SSP/SMS and a positive culture. Hence, an organization’s safety culture is often seen as a reflection of the maturity of its SSP/SMS. Effective safety management empowers a positive safety culture and a positive culture empowers effective safety management.

1.4 Trust is one of the main features a positive Safety Culture promotes amongst other cultures that are generally expressed by aviation communities as:

- **Trust:** Trust where all are encouraged to feed in information and everyone knows where the line is;
- **Reporting:** Preparedness to report errors and near-miss events;
- **Learning:** A willingness and competence to draw the right conclusions and have the will to implement reforms;
- **Flexible:** A culture in which an organization is able to reconfigure itself (hierarchical structures are inherently inflexible); and
- **Informed:** A knowledgeable educated culture aware of the human factor, technical & organizational factors that determine the safety of the system.

1.5 States should establish a safety policy and safety objectives that reflect their commitment regarding safety and facilitate the promotion of a positive safety culture in the aviation community.

### 2. DISCUSSION

2.1 If an organization has instituted all the safety management requirements but does not have a positive safety culture, it is likely to underperform and ineffective.

2.2 A healthy trustworthy environment plays a vital role in a successful safety culture by encouraging employees to report safety incidents and hazardous conditions. This information enables the proactive identification of safety-related problems and allows for the identification of safety trends. The critical part is also the responsibility to be consistently intolerant of willful misconduct or reckless behavior. Clearly defined policy and programme including the disciplinary actions will benefit the safety management of each aviation organization.

2.3 Front line operators and others are not punished for actions, omissions or decisions

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<sup>1</sup> Annex 19 Sections 3.2, 3.5, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.3, and Annex 19 Appendix 2 Section 1.1

taken by them, that are commensurate with their experience and training, but where gross negligence, willful violations and destructive acts are not tolerated. All personnel from top to bottom knows the lines between the acceptable and unacceptable, and the consequential disciplinary actions against the unacceptable.

2.4 Safety management principles are related to systems thinking, which emphasizes that mistakes are generally a product of faulty organizational cultures, rather than solely brought about by the person or persons directly involved. Therefore, it is both attitudinal as well as structural, relating to individuals and organizations. After an incident and during the investigation, the question asked is, “what went wrong?” rather than “who caused the problem?”, and what should be done to prevent the reoccurrence rather than who should be punished.

2.5 For effective safety risk management, ICAO recognizes voluntary safety reports by staff as one of the most valuable sources of safety data/information for the hazard identification in the process of safety risk management and for establishment of the State safety intelligence. To receive as many reports as possible, organizations must foster a culture in which staff feels secure that the organization will treat them fair and square even when they do report their own mistakes and errors.

2.6 Most importantly, in order to ensure the confidence of employees or others in the safety-related reporting system of the organization, the information contained in the occurrence reports should be protected and should not be used for purposes other than maintaining or improving aviation safety. To this end, States might need to coordinate closely with the national judiciary authority.

2.7 When the organization has a strong and positive Safety Culture policies and procedures, and this is visibly supported by upper- and middle-management, front-line personnel tend to feel a sense of shared responsibilities towards achieving the organization’s safety objectives by fulfilling their duties in reporting safety issues without fear of getting punished, so that the management can exercise informed, data-driven and effective decision makings.

### 3. CONCLUSION

3.1 An organization’s safety culture can be strengthened by making visible the commitment of high-level management and actively involving personnel in the management of safety risk on the foundation of a sense of trust with open communication throughout the whole organization. When top management actively, vividly and consistently endorses safety as a priority, it is typically well-received by personnel and becomes the normal way of doing things without undermining the trust in the whole system of the organization.

3.2 As per the ICAO Annex 19 and Doc 9859 – *Safety Management Manual*, the below, but not limited to, needs to be ensured as one of the top management responsibilities to foster trust:

- secured legal protection of the confidentiality of safety reports;
- the appropriate regulations;
- development of the related procedures and supporting tools;
- strong willingness and commitment to sufficient resource supports;
- middle management fulfilment; and
- continuous monitoring, assessing and improving.

3.3 In addition, it is important for high-level management to note that it is much about the people as it is about the process. Operational staff can provide great solutions to safety risks with reports on even their own errors and mistakes, thus management is highly encouraged to help them to help the management to achieve positive operational outcomes with “walk the walk” commitment to create the right environment and positive safety culture with clear policies and procedures considering human factors to accomplish the continuously improving safety performance.

**4. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE**

4.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in the paper;
- b) encourage States and aviation organizations to continue efforts with strong commitment from top management to cultivating trust and respect between personnel and management for effective safety management; and
- c) encourage States and aviation organizations to strengthen collaboration to share and exchange best practices in developing and promoting a positive safety culture.

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