



HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON COVID-19 (HLCC 2021)

SAFETY STREAM

Montréal, Canada, 12 to 22 October 2021

Agenda Item 3: Standardization
3.2: Risk management

SAFETY LEADERSHIP

(Presented by the Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) and International Air Transport Association (IATA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This information 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 business, particularly in times of crisis.

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 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 the global vaccine efforts continue and borders start opening, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and industry stakeholders are focusing on initiatives to enable a restart and recovery of the aviation sector that is both safe and sustainable.

1.3 It is critical for aviation executives to demonstrate safety leadership and their commitment to a positive safety culture within the organization to maintain the fragile balance between safety, operational priorities and the massive financial pressures, to enable sustainable operations.

1.4 The leadership team must assure 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 struggling to survive.

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 in an organization is a pre-requisite for a positive safety culture, leading to not only a safer operation but also a more efficient and resilient business.

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 programme (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 organizational safety culture requires buy-in and continual application by all employees at every level, but to remain effective, commitment and leadership from 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 of on safety, particularly where safety and business priorities might conflict.

2.5 Culture change is an organizational change that requires time to develop but will foster long-term benefits. In positive safety cultures, leadership validates their commitment to safety through their actions and how they empower others throughout the organization to be successful with their safety initiatives. It results in more engaged employees 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; 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 In addition to higher levels of commitment to safety, a positive safety culture also contributes to higher productivity, lower employee turnover, and increased employee engagement, not only improving safety performance but also a better business as a whole.

2.7 Yet, 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, 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 importance for the aviation industry to strengthen its safety leadership globally, across service providers and regulatory agencies, to continue maintaining and further improving its safety performance.

2.10 With the goal to build industry recognition of safety as a critical core business value, rather than an obligation or burdensome aviation expense, as an initial step, IATA, together with its members and the Flight Safety Foundation (FSF), is developing initiatives to:

- a) increase industry awareness on the importance of safety leadership, and its role in the management of safety risks;
- b) provide practical means to support industry leaders in developing and maintaining a positive safety culture; and
- c) prepare future safety leaders.

3. **CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 The Conference is invited to note the information provided in this information paper.

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