

Think Your Safety Culture Is Rock-Solid? Here's Why You Might Be Wrong



In a recent article, former NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt emphasizes that cultivating a robust safety culture is an ongoing journey, not a final destination. He warns against complacency, highlighting the importance of a continuous "preoccupation with failure" to anticipate and prevent potential issues.

Key Attributes of a Healthy Safety Culture

According to Sumwalt, an effective safety culture includes:

- **Management Commitment** – Genuine support from top-level leadership is crucial. Without it, achieving a thriving safety culture is unlikely.
- **Robust Reporting Culture** – Employees must feel safe reporting safety concerns without fear of reprisal. This requires trust and establishing a just culture where honest errors are met with understanding, not punishment.

Building on Sumwalt's insights, exploring additional perspectives and best practices from the aerospace industry is essential to understanding how organizations can foster and sustain a strong safety culture.

Case Studies in Safety Culture

- **Boeing's Cultural Shift** – Following significant safety incidents, including the 737 MAX crashes, Boeing has been urged by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to prioritize safety and quality over profits. Efforts to address these concerns include increased facility inspections, extensive employee training, and simplifying production processes. The FAA has emphasized the need for a "fundamental cultural shift" within Boeing to enhance safety standards. ([MarketWatch](#))
 - **South Korea's Transformation** – Historically, South Korea faced challenges in aerospace safety, primarily due to a hierarchical cockpit culture that hindered effective communication. Reforms in the late 1990s, including overhauls in training and hiring practices, significantly improved their safety standards, transforming the nation into a global exemplar in aerospace safety. ([Business Insider](#))
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Characteristics of an Effective Safety Culture

A strong safety culture is characterized by several key attributes:

1. **Comprehensive Hazard Reporting** – A robust hazard reporting system is foundational, allowing organizations to collect critical data, identify new concerns, and facilitate continuous improvement of their Safety Management System (SMS).
 2. **Just Culture & Employee Engagement** – A just culture ensures employees feel safe reporting errors without fear of punishment, fostering an environment where learning and accountability coexist. Encouraging employees at all levels to take responsibility for safety ensures safety remains top-of-mind. Open communication and collaborative problem-solving are essential.
 3. **Leadership Commitment** – Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping safety culture. A combination of commitment and action from leaders influences others to prioritize safety, thereby fostering a positive safety culture.
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The Importance of a Just Culture

A strong safety culture thrives in an environment where employees feel empowered to report hazards and mistakes without fear of punishment - this is the foundation of a just culture. Instead of blame, a just culture promotes open communication, learning, and continuous improvement. WYVERN supports this philosophy by helping operators develop reporting systems prioritizing learning and accountability.

WYVERN's Comprehensive Safety Solutions

WYVERN members benefit from exclusive tools and training designed to enhance safety culture while optimizing costs:

- **Complimentary SMS Software** – WYVERN members receive access to cutting-edge Safety Management System (SMS) software at no additional cost, ensuring seamless safety oversight and risk management.
- **Annual Complimentary Safety Culture Analysis** – Members receive a detailed analysis of their safety culture each year, helping them identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Safety Leader Training** – WYVERN members are invited to attend our Safety Leader Training annually at no charge*, equipping them with the latest insights and strategies in aerospace safety leadership. (**Organizations can send one member every year at no cost.*)
- **Virtual Safety Officer (VSO) Program** – For organizations looking to optimize resources without compromising safety, WYVERN's VSO program offers expert safety oversight at a fraction of the cost of a full-time safety officer.



Watch our Virtual Safety Officer Video. [Click Here!](#)

Conclusion

Developing a robust safety culture requires continuous effort, leadership commitment, and a proactive approach. WYVERN's services align with industry best practices, ensuring that aerospace organizations remain at the forefront of safety excellence - without added financial strain. By fostering a just culture and leveraging WYVERN's tools and training, operators can create an environment where safety is not just a requirement but a shared value.

If you are not subscribed to our weekly newsletters, subscribe now at the bottom of this page. For further resources and guidance on implementing Safety Management Systems, contact WYVERN, THE industry expert. Attend our [SMS Training Workshops](#) or ask about our SMS software. [Contact us for a FREE SMS demo!](#) Together, we can elevate aerospace safety and create a safer future.

References

Visit our [Resource Center](#) for this and other interesting documents:

Sumwalt, R. (2022). [*Convinced That You Have a Good Safety Culture?*](#) Informa PLC.