

Safety Culture, Part 1: What It Is — and Why It Matters Now



What happens in your organization when the “written policy” says one thing—but the “real policy” everyone follows says something else?

That invisible gap is culture. And in aerospace, it can make all the difference.

Understanding that gap is key to safer operations.

What Exactly Is “Safety Culture”?

Safety culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape how people act when no one is watching. It influences whether crews speak up, whether maintenance teams raise concerns, how leaders respond to mistakes, and how decisions get made under pressure.

Recent work by the National Academies highlights that strong safety culture is essential to managing emerging risks in commercial aviation. Broader safety research reinforces that culture is foundational — something that cannot simply be mandated by policy, but must be cultivated over time.

SMICG echoes this idea: safety culture forms the environment in which an SMS either thrives or quietly struggles.

SMS provides structure; safety culture drives behavior.

SMS provides structure: the policies, processes, and tools that guide safe operations.
Safety culture determines whether people follow them, ignore them, or improve them.

A healthy safety culture shows up through:

- Open reporting without fear
- Leadership modeling the behaviors they expect from others
- Teams learning from data instead of hiding problems
- Decisions made with risk in mind — not convenience
- A commitment to continuous improvement

When culture is weak, risk increases even when the SMS appears “compliant” on paper.

WYVERN's Premium PLUS membership includes the SMS software along with a complimentary annual Safety Culture Survey.

Why Safety Culture Matters More Than Ever

Business aviation continues to face:

- Staffing shortages
- Time pressure and customer expectations
- Increasing operational complexity
- Rapid organizational change
- Mixed-experience crews and contract personnel

In this environment, culture becomes the stabilizing force — the element that ensures people consistently make decisions that protect safety margins.

Every major safety framework — ICAO, FAA, EASA, SMICG, and the National Academies — identifies safety culture as one of the most predictive factors in long-term safety performance.

What's Ahead in This Series

Over the next few weeks, we'll explore safety culture through the lens of SMICG and modern research:

1. Leadership & Accountability
2. Reporting & Psychological Safety
3. Learning Culture & Safety Performance
4. Risk-Informed Decision Making & Human Factors
5. Building and Sustaining a Strong Safety Culture

Each part connects directly to WYVERN's vision: *Every aerospace organization has a healthy safety culture*, to make better decisions, strengthen leadership, reduce uncertainty, and improve safety outcomes.

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.

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