

# Safety Management Systems and Safety Culture

## Part 2 – How

### Introduction

Part 1 described why organisations should pursue a strong safety culture and defined why this was and how an organisation's safety culture evolves. Part 2 describes how to enhance the safety culture with the Safety Management System (SMS).

### Using the SMS to enhance the Safety Culture

If the SMS is regarded as the competence of an organisation to manage safety then Safety Culture refers to the commitment at all levels of an organisation to this safety<sup>1</sup>. A lack of a positive safety culture will preclude the operation of the SMS<sup>2</sup>. A SMS promotes a safety culture through:

- Promotion of a just culture,
- Facilitates information flow by informing staff of operational risks and hazards and how to handle them,
- Creates a continuous learning environment throughout all levels of the organisation, and
- Is wary and never comfortable<sup>3</sup>.

The creation of a positive safety culture has been directly identified as a part of the key steps (Education and Communication) to developing an effective SMS. An established SMS will, however, contribute from more areas in creating and supporting a culture of safety.

Executive management sets the environment for the organisation and creates a top-level example. Awareness and commitment is key and adds to the Informed culture. This will impact on the safety culture of the organisation in either a positive or negative manner depending on the maturity and commitment from the executive. For example, a well written safety policy is only as good as the resultant follow through action by management. Typically, most management would encourage a Reporting culture but they need to be cognisant that staff will readily be able to determine the practicalities of the associated Just culture. As too, they will of a Learning culture.

Staff will notice whether the organisation follows through on findings and recommendations.

The Safety Structure is an extension of the commitment by the executive management and adds depth to the organisational safety environment. This component of the SMS is directly related to the Informed and Reporting culture. Selection of the right Safety Officer is an important and influential factor<sup>4</sup>. The establishment of a safety committee is a direct way of gaining staff involvement and ownership of safety related issues.

Safety Data Collection and Analysis is the key driver of the Reporting Culture. Whilst it may not directly influence the organisational safety culture it can facilitate the process through the user friendly input tools and effective, robust and transparent data analysis. The sources and details of the data provided are directly correlated to the extent of the organisational Just culture<sup>5</sup>.

Education and Communication has previously been mentioned as specifically targeting the development of a safety culture. Further, this component has a direct influence on the Informed and Reporting cultures.

Continuous Improvement is clearly directly related to the Learning Culture. This is where an organisation demonstrates how willing and capable it is to learn from reported and analysed data and act upon this. Feedback is sought from all levels within an organisation<sup>6</sup>.

Simplistically this can be summarised in the following table of influence:

SMS ELEMENT	SAFETY SUB-CULTURE			
	Informed	Reporting	Just	Learning
Executive Management	Indirect	Indirect	Direct	Direct
Safety Structure	Direct	Direct	Indirect	Direct
Safety Data Collection and Analysis		Direct	Impacted	
Education and Communication	Direct	Direct	Indirect	Indirect
Continuous Improvement	Indirect	Indirect	Indirect	Direct

Whilst such a table is a neat summary, the reality of maintaining an integrated SMS and developing / enhancing a safety culture is much more complex. It would be difficult to isolate specific components and/or constituent cultures. It is much more amorphous. What can be readily illustrated is that a well developed SMS can definitely create and support a positive safety culture through a multifaceted approach.

## Conclusion

A positive safety culture is actually a subset of an effective SMS. Indeed, without a positive safety culture it is not possible to have an effective SMS. By breaking down a safety culture to sub cultures (Informed, Reporting, Just and Learning) it is easy to see how the constituent processes and components of an SMS each directly or indirectly influence the creation and support of the safety culture within an organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurocontrol, 2006, 'Understanding safety culture in air traffic management', *Safety Domain*, September 2006

<sup>2</sup> Lee, R 2007, 'Aviation Safety Management Systems: Challenges and Solutions', *Proceedings of the Safeskiies 2007 Conference*, Canberra

<sup>3</sup> Gothard, J 2006, 'Implementing safety management systems', *Proceedings of the SMS Workshop – Rome 2006*, viewed 2 June 2008, [http://www.enac-italia.it/Workshop\\_SMS/Interventi/Gothard\\_Implementation\\_SMS\\_Airports.pdf](http://www.enac-italia.it/Workshop_SMS/Interventi/Gothard_Implementation_SMS_Airports.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Zupp, O 2006, 'Simply Managing Safety' *Australian Aviation*, April 2006, pp. 46-49

<sup>5</sup> FSF Icarus Committee 2001, 'Risky Business' *Flight Safety Australia*, May-June 2001 pp. 33-35

<sup>6</sup> Ibid ref 4