



# Stepping Up Vigilance to Support Safe Air Travel Recovery

Alan Foo, Senior Director (Safety Regulation Group), CAAS  
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We are on the road to recovery. Changi has ramped up from just 15% of pre-COVID passenger traffic at the end of last year, to about half of pre-COVID passenger volumes today. This is expected to rise with further reopening and easing of border measures across the region.

Such a sharp increase in operational intensity after a prolonged period of low activity brings about additional safety risks. We must be cognisant and take active measures to mitigate them. This requires vigilance at the individual, and supervisory and management levels.

## Why Build Vigilance?

The classic definition of vigilance is to keep careful watch for possible dangers or difficulties. It is about being mindful of changes to the operating and business environments that could introduce new risks, and having the presence of mind to question the validity of assumptions that were made in the past.

Vigilance is especially crucial due to the multi-dimensional pressures faced by the aviation sector at this current time. Shortage of experienced manpower, coupled with an intensification of operations, skill atrophy and other factors have the potential to create an environment where errors are more likely to occur.



There are valuable lessons to be gleaned from slips, lapses, and errors made during this period. Our ability to prevent such errors from resulting in an incident is a positive reflection on the robustness of the systems that we have put in place, and the

underlying assumptions about human performance and limitations that had been built into their design. As the award-winning author of Atomic Habits James Clear writes, "You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems." Organisations' safety management systems must therefore be robust enough to play the critical roles of strengthening processes, identifying and trapping unforeseen errors, and mitigating emerging risks.

To this end, safety managers and safety leaders play important roles not only in promoting adherence to safety processes and procedures, but also in engaging and encouraging feedback from operational staff. Individuals and supervisors too must play their part and be vigilant.

## Remaining Vigilant

Individuals must feel empowered to proactively identify and report safety hazards and emerging risks. Such reporting can be done through their organisations' voluntary reporting mechanism or *Tell Sarah*, Singapore's independently administered confidential aviation safety reporting system. The sense of responsibility of vigilant individuals to engage in open sharing of information is key to identifying and addressing potential risks that might otherwise remain hidden.

Supervisors need to uphold the discipline of adhering to processes and procedures during periods of peaks and troughs in operational intensity, while being mindful of challenges presented by the current operating environment. It may have been easier to motivate teams to follow procedures during pre-COVID periods of high operational intensity, when personnel could easily gain familiarity with standard operating procedures. As disruptions to operating patterns due to the pandemic may have led to skill atrophy, supervisors must stay vigilant in looking out for deterioration in performance, degraded situational awareness and non-adherence to established processes.

Supervisors should also encourage individuals to share any temporary dips or capacity constraints they face, so that mitigating actions can be

developed and put in place in a timely fashion. Supervisors must be especially vigilant for, and encourage the reporting of, unanticipated risks that may have been introduced by changes in the operating environment, or even negative externalities arising from well-meaning mitigations that had been put in place to address other risks.



Finally, leaders must ensure sufficient allocation of resources for safety, for safety management systems to function effectively. Already, companies are keeping a close watch on manpower needs and investing more in training to adapt to the new normal. Safety leadership must be mindful that there are more new faces with limited experience, who had been operating in a low-intensity environment over the past two years.

## Vigilance as an Ongoing Practice

Vigilance is critical as aviation operations continue to intensify. Within each of our organisations, we must inculcate individual attitudes or postures of vigilance through deliberate leadership and safety management. The sector must give even more attention to aviation safety, to maintain and where appropriate, strengthen their safety management capabilities in tandem with aviation recovery and air travel demand.



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**Editor**  
Dalen Tan

**Assistant Editors**  
Tang Kok Liang  
Michelle Teo

**Contact**  
CAAS\_Safety\_Promotion@caas.gov.sg  
www.caas.gov.sg

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