



Behavioural Safety for Nurturing Safety Culture

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Who is responsible for safety? The response to this question in a safety-driven aviation organisation unequivocally comes as “everyone is responsible for safety”. While this may sound good and applaudable, the manner in which this responsibility is displayed in action, both personally and as an organisational whole, is the real driver of safety.

A Compliance-based Safety Management System

Traditionally, aviation companies have compliance-based safety management systems implemented within their organisation. Safety policies are translated into rules and regulations to empower employees to take ownership of safety. Enforcement and supervision, along with systems, control mechanisms, training and audits are all required to achieve compliance.

However, when enforcement is absent or lax, compliance may be compromised. This does

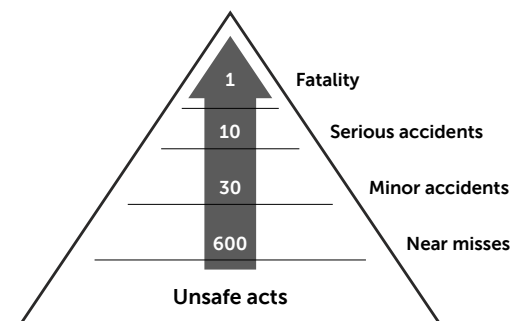
not mean that the compliance-based safety management is at fault. Rather, it suggests that such a top-down approach may be inadequate to inspire individuals. This could in turn have a trickle-down effect of causing further challenges. For example, creating rules for the safety of every situation is required and checking for compliance becomes a herculean and rather inefficient task for the organisation as a whole.

Shaping Behaviour to Manage Safe and Unsafe Acts

So, how can this responsibility for safety in action be enforced and sustained naturally, even when there is inadequate supervision? This is where an understanding of human behaviour comes into consideration, as the response to safety in action is very much linked to human nature.

However, human behaviour can give rise to unsafe acts in the form of errors and violations. An error is an unintentional action or plan that results in the failure to achieve a desired outcome. Errors happen from a slip, a memory lapse, or rule-based and knowledge-based mistakes. A violation, on the other hand, is an intentional action that disregards known rules, procedures, or norms. The aviation workforce typically encounters situational and exceptional violations, which can result in near misses, minor accidents, serious accidents, and fatalities. The accident triangle in Figure 1 below depicts the fatality statistics attached to such unsafe acts.

Figure 1



Accident triangle (Source: Frank E Bird, 1966)

Unsafe behaviours must be managed in order to eliminate such unsafe acts and thereby reduce the potential of fatalities occurring. Behavioural safety is the way forward for an organisation, where both safe and unsafe behaviours are considered for safety management. This means that organisations must simultaneously encourage safe behaviours and manage unsafe behaviours by correcting them into safe behaviours.

Fostering Behavioural Safety in an Organisation

What is behavioural safety? It is about encouraging aviation workers across the organisation to be mindful of safe and unsafe behaviours, along with their associated hazards and risks. It is important for workers to acquire knowledge and skills for sustaining safe behaviours in their work activities. This is done by engaging, motivating, assisting, reinforcing, and sustaining safe behaviours by all in the organisation. It starts with leadership commitment to create a mindset of personal accountability for safe behaviours.

Such an approach helps to ensure that everyone in the organisation recognises safe behaviours. At the same time, encouraging everyone to detect early warnings of unsafe behaviours, along with their associated risks,

gives rise to collective responsibility for safety across the organisation. This creates a safety mindset and drives voluntary reporting and timely intervention of unsafe acts throughout the organisation.

Coupled with employees carrying out hazard identification and risk assessment in all their activities, a behavioural safety culture can be progressively established, with desired safe behaviours in action.



Positive Reinforcement for a Behavioural Safety Culture

Emphasis must be placed on positively recognising safe behaviours, as well as in transforming unsafe behaviours into desired behaviours to prevent the occurrence of incidents or accidents with potentially fatal outcomes. The focus of safety performance should then shift to leading indicators in safety audits rather than being solely dependent on lagging indicators. When safety management is no longer seen as a burden of rules and supervision, it can make the workplace safe with all eyes and hands on board to nurture a safety culture.

Behavioural safety with leadership commitment fosters a safety culture by developing, demonstrating, and sustaining desired safe behaviours in action as part of the organisation's DNA. This creates the necessity, discipline, and environment to sustain safe behaviours and a positive safety culture, for the benefit of the whole organisation.



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