Station #7: Safety Culture / Just Culture

Safety Culture is defined as a set of beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors that members of a group use to relate to their world and each other regarding safety.

Cultures are the product of the values and actions of the organization's leadership as well as the results of organizational learning. Cultures are not really "created" or "implemented;" they emerge over time and because of experience.

Organizations cannot simply purchase a software program, produce a set of posters filled with buzzwords, require their people to attend an hour of slide presentations, and instantly install an effective SMS. As with the development of any skill, it takes time, practice and repetition, the appropriate attitude, a cohesive approach, and constant coaching from involved mentors.

Safety Culture Elements

Informed Culture	Those who manage and operate the system have current knowledge about the human, technical organizational, and environmental factors that determine the safety of the system as a whole.
Reporting Culture	An organizational climate in which people are prepared to report safety lapses and potential safety hazards.
Just Culture	An atmosphere of trust in which people are encouraged (even rewarded) for providing essential safety-related information, but in which they are also clear about where the line must be drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.
Learning Culture	An organization must possess the willingness and the competence to draw the right conclusions from its safety information system and the will to address problems identified through the reporting culture, and possibly implement major reforms.
Flexibility Culture	A culture in which an organization is able to reconfigure themselves in the face of high tempo operations or certain kinds of hazards - often shifting from the conventional hierarchical mode to a flatter mode.

Figure 4: Safety Culture Elements (adapted from James Reason)

For an organization to be aligned and achieve a positive level of safety culture (and SMS success), there is a mutual obligation among all members of the system to be accountable for their choices. By fostering an environment in which people can speak up to address system vulnerabilities or individual errors, that accountability can truly yield a proactive outcome for the organization's ability to properly manage risk.

Just Culture

- It is a culture in which employees are not punished for actions, omissions or decisions taken by them which are commensurate with their experience and training, but where gross negligence, willful violations and destructive acts are not tolerated.
- It is a shared responsibility by the organization leadership and the employees.
- The organization is accountable for:
  - The "system" they have designed
  - Responding to the behaviors of their employees in a fair and just manner

- The employee is accountable for:
  – Quality of their choices
  – Reporting both their errors and system vulnerabilities
  – Do no harm
  – Duty to follow procedures

JUST CULTURE REQUIRES STRUCTURE

- Clear reporting channels
- Protection boundaries defined in policy
- Rapid acknowledgment (48–72 hours)
- Visible corrective action
- Leadership modeling non-punitive response

Safety Culture Success

Areas in which all levels of the organization must help to effectively manage their culture are:

- The influences that the organization can have on an individual(s)
- At-risk behaviors/decisions
- Due diligence
- Personal courage

> **"Without trust, reporting stops. Without reporting, learning stops."**

Reporting & Just Culture resources

- EU Regulation 376/2014 – Occurrence Reporting (EASA)
  – Legal foundation for EU reporting & just culture protections.
- EUROCONTROL Just Culture Resources
  – Policy guidance and boundaries for non-punitive reporting.
- FAA AC 00-46F – Aviation Safety Reporting Program
  – Explains U.S. voluntary reporting protections.
- 14 CFR § 91.25 – ASRP Protection (National Archives – Electronic CFR)
  – Regulatory protection of reports (with limited exceptions).
- NASA ASRS Electronic Report Submission
  – Direct reporting portal for crews

Leadership & Safety Culture Tools

- FAA M-SCAIT Toolkit (Maintenance safety, culture assessment, and improvement tools.
  – FAA Compliance Program (Compliance Philosophy: Regulatory framework emphasizing correction and learning over punishment — foundational to just culture leadership.)
- NTSB Party Guidance (Investigation Participation)
  – Helps operators convert investigations into learning.
- NTSB CAROL Database (Aviation Investigation Search)
  – Searchable accident/recommendation database for internal safety dissemination.