



5 Recurring Trends in Aviation Safety Culture

Insights from IATA's Safety Culture Assessments (I-ASC)
Across Aviation Organizations Worldwide



What years of safety culture assessments show

Across regions, fleet types, and business models, aviation organizations demonstrate a strong commitment to safety. Policies are established. Training is delivered. Reporting systems are in place.

Over the past years, IATA has conducted aviation safety culture assessments across airlines and aviation service providers worldwide through its **IATA Aviation Safety Culture Survey (I-ASC)**. This structured and confidential assessment is designed to capture how safety efforts are perceived and experienced across aviation organizations.

When analyzed collectively, the findings reveal a consistent pattern. Regardless of size, region, or level of maturity, similar themes emerge across the industry. These patterns are observed even in organizations with well-established Safety Management Systems (SMS) and strong compliance performance.

In this document, we highlight **five** of the **most common trends** identified across years of conducting safety culture assessments. These reflect recurring dynamics observed across the industry and provide a practical lens to examine safety culture in your own organization.

They do not point to a lack of commitment. Instead, they highlight subtle gaps between how safety is designed and how it is experienced in daily operations. These gaps require ongoing attention, as even a strong safety culture can gradually weaken if not actively monitored and reinforced.

Understanding these trends helps organizations to:

- Identify gaps between intention and perception
- Prioritize improvement efforts more effectively
- Strengthen safety culture before issues escalate



Why strong safety cultures still have blind spots

Most aviation organizations perform well on compliance and structured safety processes.

Yet IATA's I-ASC assessments consistently show that this alone does not guarantee how safety is experienced in practice.

The difference lies in day-to-day execution. Safety is shaped by leadership behaviours, communication practices, and whether people feel confident speaking up, especially under operational pressure.

This is where gaps emerge. What is designed at a policy level can be experienced very differently at the frontline, particularly in high-pressure situations.

These gaps are rarely visible in standard safety reports. They become clear only when safety culture is assessed systematically and compared across the industry.



Five recurring safety culture trends

Across IATA's Aviation Safety Culture (I-ASC) assessments, a consistent set of trends emerges. The following themes highlight where safety culture is most often shaped, and where gaps between intention and experience can begin to form.



TREND 1

Leadership commitment is strong, but not always experienced consistently

What organizations believe

Senior leadership is clearly committed to safety and consistently reinforces this priority.

What the assessments show

Based on statistical analysis completed with results of the individual IATA Aviation Safety Culture Survey (I-ASC) assessments, leadership commitment is consistently one of the strongest drivers of overall safety culture.

At the same time, safety culture perceptions are often less positive among frontline employees than those of senior management.

This reveals a recurring gap between how leadership commitment is intended and how it is experienced in day-to-day operations.

While intent is typically strong, employees may observe trade-offs in operational or commercial decisions. These moments often shape perception more than formal messaging or stated priorities.

Why this matters

Safety culture is defined less by formal statements and more by visible actions and consistent behaviours. When employees observe inconsistencies, even occasionally, it can weaken trust and create uncertainty about what is truly prioritized.

Over time, this affects how safety messages are interpreted and how confidently they are acted upon; it ultimately shapes behaviors.

Self-check

- ✓ Do operational decisions consistently reinforce safety as a priority?
- ✓ Would employees describe leadership actions as aligned with organization's safety values?



TREND 2

Even when safety risks are well managed, operational pressures can increase overall safety risk.

What organizations believe

Operational performance and safety are managed as parallel, complementary priorities, in a balanced way.

What the assessments show

Across I-ASC assessments, fatigue, workload, resource constraints, and time pressure emerge consistently as influencing factors. Employees often describe a tension between maintaining operational performance and effectively managing safety risks, particularly in high-pressure environments.

These challenges are not isolated to specific roles, business units, or regions. They reflect broader system conditions that shape behavior across the organization.

Even in organizations with strong safety culture foundations, these factors remain present in the background, subtly influencing decisions and actions.

Why this matters

Safety culture cannot be separated from operational reality. When operational pressure increases, decision-making becomes more constrained, trade-offs become more frequent, and the likelihood of error increases.

This makes continuous attention to operational conditions essential for sustaining safety performance.

Self-check

- ✓ Are workload and fatigue treated as safety risks or operational constraints?
- ✓ Is there visibility on how operational pressure affects decision-making?



TREND 3

While employees know how to report safety issues, confidence varies

What organizations believe

A Just Culture framework and established reporting systems ensure openness and learning.

What the assessments show

Across I-ASC assessments, employees generally understand how to report safety concerns and recognize the importance of doing so. However, confidence in how reports are handled is less consistent.

Employees often express uncertainty about how errors are treated in practice. Perceptions of inconsistent application, fear of negative consequences, and limited visibility on outcomes are recurring themes.

In many cases, the gap is not in awareness, but in trust.

Why this matters

A reporting system only delivers value when employees trust it. When confidence is low, reporting becomes selective, and important information and insights remain unshared.

This reduces the organization's ability to identify risks early and limits opportunities for learning and improvement.

Self-check

- ✓ Do employees believe that reporting leads to constructive outcomes?
- ✓ Is the handling of reports consistent and transparent across the organization?



TREND 4

Communication is active, but not always effective

What organizations believe

Safety is well communicated and regularly reinforced across the organization.

What the assessments show

Across I-ASC assessments, employees consistently value safety communication and recognize its importance. At the same time, they often highlight gaps in relevance, clarity, and timing.

Common themes point to the need for more role-specific communication, clearer rationale behind decisions, and faster sharing of lessons learned. There is also a consistent request for more opportunities to engage in dialogue on safety matters, including across operational areas.

In many cases, information is available, but it is not always perceived as relevant or actionable.

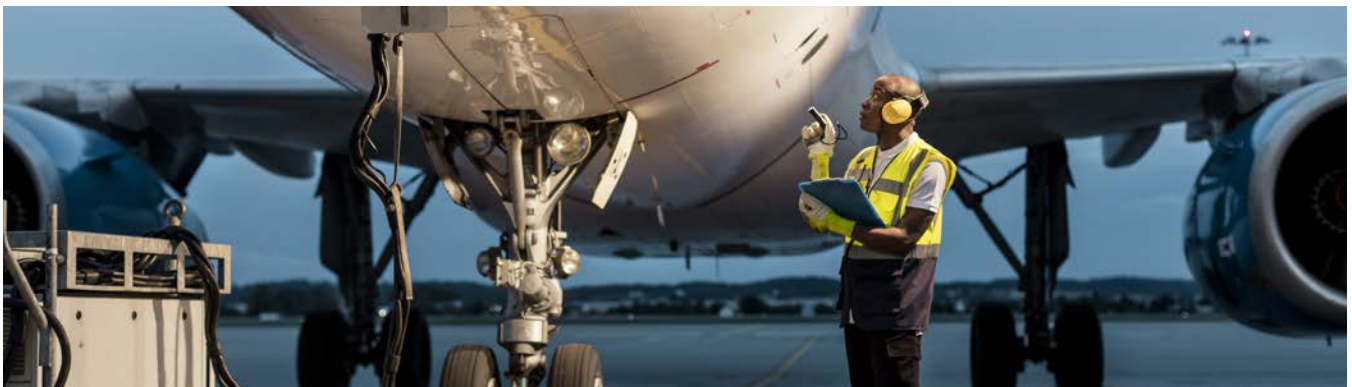
Why this matters

Communication shapes how safety is understood and applied in practice. When it feels generic or one-directional, engagement declines and key messages lose impact.

This can lead to misinterpretation, reduced alignment, and missed learning opportunities.

Self-check

- ✓ Are safety messages tailored to the realities of different roles and functions?
- ✓ Do employees have opportunities to ask questions and contribute feedback?
- ✓ Is safety communication effectively curated and prioritized so that key messages don't get lost?



TREND 5

Procedures and training are robust, but not always aligned with operational reality

What organizations believe

Existing procedures and training are well aligned with operational reality and contribute to safe and consistent performance.

What the assessments show

I-ASC assessments show that policies, processes, and training programs are generally well established and positively perceived. However, employees tend to highlight challenges when applying them in real operational conditions.

Recurring themes include process complexity and limited involvement of frontline teams in the development and update of procedures. Training is valued, but there is a clear preference for more practical, scenario-based learning that reflects real situations.

These gaps become more visible under time pressure or in complex operational environments.

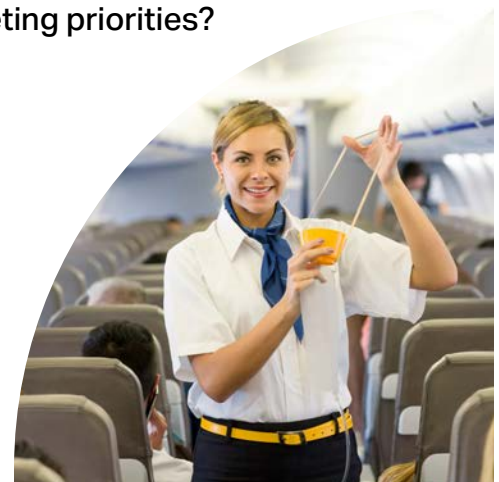
Why this matters

When procedures are not fully aligned with operational reality, employees make informal adjustments to get the job done. This can introduce practical drift and contribute to increased risk over time.

Without practical, scenario based learning grounded in real operational situations, training runs the risk of remaining theoretical, limiting employees' ability to respond effectively, and proactively, to real world challenges and known hazards.

Self-check

- ✓ Are procedures regularly reviewed with input from frontline teams?
- ✓ Does training reflect real world scenarios and decision-making under time constraints, workload, and competing priorities?



Seeing safety culture clearly

The trends observed across IATA's Aviation Safety Culture Survey (I-ASC) assessments point to a broader and recurring pattern. Safety culture is strongest when it is actively monitored, discussed and enhanced, but most at risk when it is simply assumed.

Organizations that are committed to maintaining high safety standards share the following view:

The gaps and drifts in safety culture are difficult to identify without structured, systematic, independent, and benchmarked insight.

Internal assessment provides valuable input, but without a standardized framework, industry benchmarks, and independent analysis, it is difficult to determine whether issues are isolated or part of a systemic, broader picture.

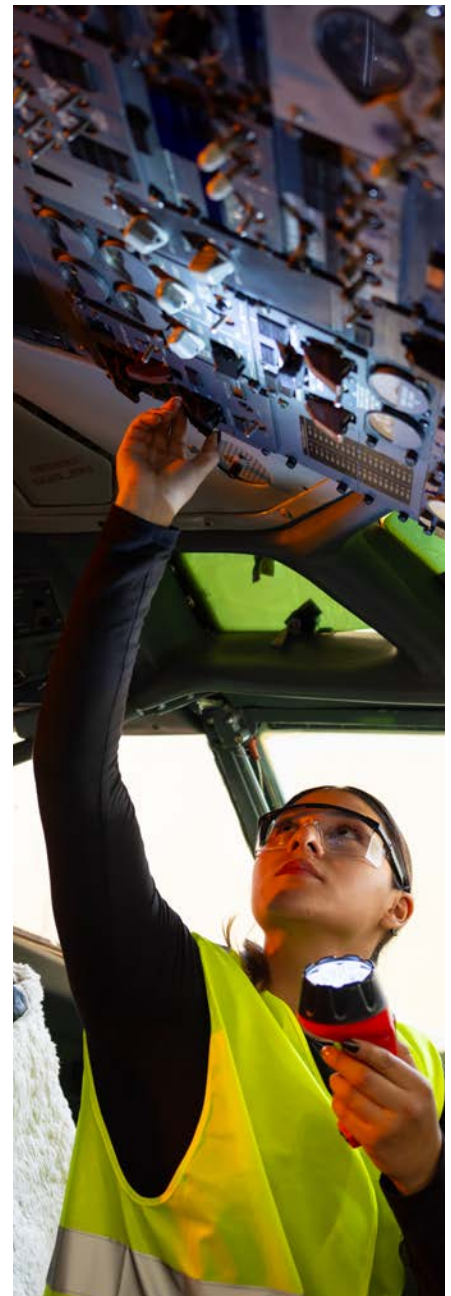
For results to be meaningful, employees must feel able to respond openly and honestly. This is not always guaranteed in internal surveys. An independent, third-party approach helps create more candid feedback and a clearer, more objective view of how safety is experienced.

Benchmarking adds further depth by enabling comparison across departments, functions, and employee groups, as well as against industry peers, helping identify where alignment is strong and where attention is needed most.

Before investing in additional policies, training, or tools, consider the following question:

Which of these trends might already exist in your organization, but remain largely unseen?

Understanding safety culture means recognizing areas of strength, while, above all, identifying where attention and action are needed most.



Understand your safety culture in context

I-ASC supports aviation organizations to:

- Benchmark safety culture against industry peers
- Compare perceptions across IOSA organizational sections, departments, and employee groups
- Identify gaps between leadership intent and employee experience
- Focus improvement efforts where they have the greatest impact



Compare your safety culture
against industry benchmarks

Explore I-ASC

