



When People Speak Up: Understanding What We Hear

Patnaree Piraphatnapong, Aviation Safety Standards Group, Aviation Safety Management and Standards Assurance Office, Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand

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This article is a special contribution from the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT). It reflects the ongoing exchange of perspectives and experiences between CAAT and the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) on fostering a positive safety culture in support of aviation safety and regional collaboration.

Turning Safety Culture Survey Findings into Dialogue and Action

Safety culture surveys seek to provide insights into how people perceive and experience safety in their organisations – whether they

feel able to raise concerns, whether safety is given priority, whether reporting is encouraged and whether mistakes are treated fairly.

A respondent who is asked whether they feel comfortable reporting an error is not necessarily answering only from their own personal experience. Their response may be shaped by what they have seen happen to colleagues, how supervisors react when concerns are raised, whether they trust the reporting process and how comfortable they feel speaking up to someone more senior.

This raises two practical questions for regulators and aviation organisations alike: how should we interpret what people tell us through a safety culture survey and what should happen after they have told us?

These questions reflect an area of shared interest between CAAS and CAAT, where safety culture and Just Culture were among the areas discussed during the dialogue held in Singapore in July 2026. Both authorities conduct sector-level safety culture assessments, albeit within different aviation and organisational contexts. Their experiences provide complementary perspectives on how survey findings can be used to deepen understanding and inform subsequent action.

A Survey Tells Us Where to Look

CAAT's Safety Culture and Just Culture Survey sought views from across Thailand's aviation industry on areas including safety policies, reporting, training, Just Culture, feedback and the protection of reporters. More than 2,000 personnel responded, with operational personnel forming the large majority of participants.

The overall picture was positive. One finding, however, stood out: perceptions between management and operational personnel differed most noticeably on the protection and fair treatment of people who report their own errors or safety occurrences. The significance of this result lay less in the score itself than in the question it raised.

Why might operational personnel feel differently from management about what happens when somebody reports an error?

A survey alone cannot fully answer that question. The explanation could lie in how policies are communicated, previous experiences with reporting, the way safety investigations are conducted, confidence that reports will be handled confidentially or how accountability is applied in practice. The reasons may also differ considerably across organisations and occupational groups. For CAAT, the finding therefore became less a score requiring an immediate response than a

signal pointing towards where further understanding was needed. This distinction matters. A survey can identify where perceptions diverge but understanding why usually requires looking beyond the score.

How People Speak Up is Shaped by Context

Organisational and socio-cultural context also deserves attention when interpreting such findings. CAAS' Safety Culture Framework recognises that behaviour is influenced not only by formal policies and procedures, but also by social factors such as hierarchy, cohesion, control and achievement. The wider environment in which people live and work can affect how safety is perceived and how concerns are communicated.

This does not mean that the willingness to speak up can be explained by culture alone. Within any aviation system, there can be substantial differences between organisations, professions, teams and individuals. It does suggest, however, that speaking up may not always take the same form.

Some personnel may be comfortable filing a formal report about an equipment defect or a concern involving an external organisation but feel differently when the report concerns their own error or the actions of somebody higher in the organisational hierarchy. Others may first raise an issue informally with a trusted supervisor or peer before using a formal channel particularly when the concern involves a more senior colleague.

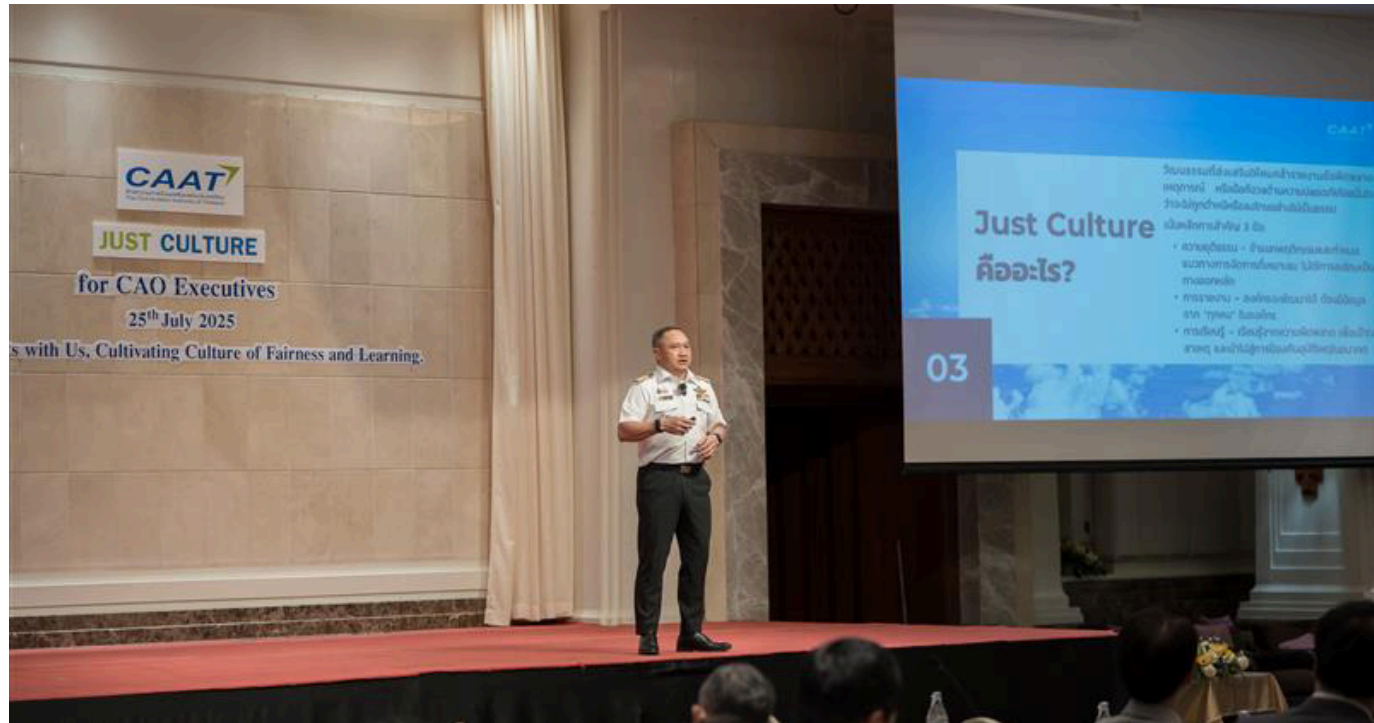
These distinctions matter when interpreting survey findings. They also matter when designing reporting systems. A reporting channel may be accessible, confidential and technically well designed, yet its effectiveness still depends in part on whether people feel comfortable using it.

Turning a Finding into a Conversation

CAAT's response to the survey findings provides one example. Rather than treating the management-operational perception gap as a standalone result, CAAT placed greater emphasis on Just Culture within its safety

promotion activities. The rationale was straightforward. If personnel are uncertain about fair treatment when reporting mistakes, improving the reporting system alone is unlikely to address the underlying issue. Greater attention also needs to be given to

how organisations distinguish errors from unacceptable behaviour, how leaders respond to reports and whether staff can see that reporting contributes to learning and improvement rather than blame.



CAAT used findings from its Safety Culture and Just Culture Survey to bring Just Culture into direct discussion with CAAT management and industry leadership.



Aviation executives shared practical approaches to reporting, accountability and organisational learning during CAAT's Just Culture seminar in Bangkok.

In 2025, CAAT provided training to aviation safety inspectors and other State safety personnel. This was followed by two dedicated national seminars, organised with support from France's Directorate General for Civil Aviation: one for senior management in CAAT and other government agencies, and the other for executives of civil aviation organisations. Together, the sessions brought more than 250 senior executives and leaders into the discussion.

The focus on leadership recognised that the conditions for speaking up are shaped well before a report is submitted. Policies and reporting channels matter, but so do the everyday decisions and behaviours that personnel observe from those above them.

For industry executives, the discussion moved from principle to practice. Senior representatives from Thai aviation organisations shared how their organisations approached reporting, accountability and learning. Several themes surfaced: visible leadership support, transparent communication, confidence that reports will be used constructively and the need to distinguish human error from reckless or deliberate unsafe behaviour.

Participants also raised issues that would have been difficult to capture through a survey alone, including procedural complexity, operational pressure, fear of punishment and situations in which employees may see little visible benefit from making a report. In this way, the discussions went beyond the survey findings themselves. The survey had identified a difference in perception; subsequent dialogue helped explore what might lie behind it.

Closing the Feedback Loop

This leads to the second challenge of safety culture measurement: what happens after people have shared their views?

When organisations invite people to provide feedback, respondents may reasonably expect that what they say will at least be considered. That does not mean every survey finding should result in immediate action. Some results may require more analysis and understanding. Others may reflect issues that cannot be addressed immediately or may fall outside the organisation's direct control.

Closing the feedback loop is therefore not the same as promising action on every response. It means providing appropriate visibility of what was heard, how it has been considered and what, if anything, is being done as a result. Where action is not immediately possible or appropriate, explaining how the feedback has been considered and why a particular approach has been taken can help maintain confidence in the process.

Visible follow-through also matters over the longer term. Where personnel repeatedly provide feedback but see little connection between what they have said and what happens subsequently, confidence in the value of participation may erode. The way an organisation responds after a survey can therefore influence how personnel view the exercise itself.

Building on What We Learn

CAAT is applying a similar principle to the next phase of its safety promotion work. The 2025 Just Culture seminars provided encouraging feedback, particularly on participants' confidence in applying Just Culture principles. At the same time, the evaluation indicated that conceptual understanding could be deepened further.

That feedback is informing the direction of subsequent activities. Future engagement can place greater emphasis on scenario-based exercises, case studies and facilitated discussions, giving participants opportunities to work through the grey areas in which Just Culture principles are tested in practice.

This illustrates a broader point: learning need not end with the survey or the intervention that follows it. Reports, surveys, workshops, discussion groups and operational data each reveal a different part of the picture. Used together, they can help authorities and organisations identify areas requiring further investigation and consider where promotion, guidance, training or other interventions may be useful.



Feedback from the 2025 seminars is helping CAAT shape the next phase of safety promotion, with greater emphasis on practical discussion, case studies and scenario-based learning.

Learning Over Time

A single survey provides only a snapshot of how people perceive their environment at a particular point in time. Those perceptions can change as leadership changes, operational pressures evolve, new personnel enter organisations and previous safety experiences accumulate. Recurring assessments can therefore help provide a view of how perceptions evolve over time and monitor whether areas of concern persist, improve or shift. But even then, interpretation requires care and context. Changes in survey scores do not necessarily prove that a particular intervention succeeded, just as an unchanged score does not automatically mean that efforts had no effect.

This is where CAAS’ experience provides a useful perspective through its biennial surveys. Building on the 2023 and 2025 survey findings, CAAS drew on insights from focus

groups and engagement with industry and union partners to identify emerging trends and developments and develop supporting initiatives such as enhanced outreach sessions for workers in airside and operational functions and the publication of a “[Handbook on Aviation Safety Culture](#)”. The latest 2025 survey also prompted further collaborations with tripartite partners to develop more targeted training courses and reference materials in collaboration with the Singapore Aviation Academy and safety culture experts.

A Shared Question for Aviation Safety

Singapore and Thailand operate in different environments, but their experiences raise a common consideration: safety culture cannot be understood through a survey score alone. Scores are useful because they can reveal patterns, differences and areas that deserve attention. Their value increases when organisations place those findings alongside

other sources of information and, crucially, continue the conversation with the people behind the responses.

Building that fuller picture is a shared responsibility. Regulators establish frameworks and protections; organisations shape the working environment in which safety decisions are made; leaders influence how reporting and mistakes are treated in practice; and frontline personnel provide insights into the hazards, pressures and experiences encountered in day-to-day operations. Each contributes a different perspective that can deepen our understanding of safety culture.

The Singapore–Thailand Dialogue on Aviation Cooperation provides a platform for CAAS and CAAT to compare experiences and perspectives, recognising that common principles such as trust, openness, accountability and learning may be experienced differently across organisational and socio-cultural settings.

A safety culture survey is therefore better viewed as the beginning of a conversation than its conclusion. When people speak up about safety, collecting their responses is only the first step. The greater value lies in understanding what those responses are telling us, continuing the dialogue where questions remain and using what is learnt to inform what comes next.

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Editor

Ong Chun Yang

Assistant Editors

Michelle Teo
Nadine Kang

Contact

CAAS_Safety_Promotion@caas.gov.sg
www.caas.gov.sg

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