

## ***Growing a Just Culture*** ***How to Overcome “the norm” and defeat pushback***

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Every organization focused on safety and improving its operations has, at some point, heard about growing its safety culture into a just culture. According to James Reason, a just culture will have setbacks during implementation, but that “engineering a just culture is the all-important early step; [because] so much else depends upon it”. The key to implementing a just culture in any flight or maintenance department is to persevere through setbacks and stay true to the organization’s goals. This can be accomplished with diligent effort on the part of an organization’s stakeholders. The goal of this fact sheet is to help shed some light on common setbacks and things you, as the operator, can do to help overcome them on your road to a just culture.



As you read through the next sections, keep in mind that in order to be a just culture, both the organization and the employee must be held accountable.

- **The organization** must be held accountable for the environment it has created, and for

supporting and encouraging safe choices by their employees.

- **The employees** must be accountable for their choices within the system, as well as responsible for reporting their mistakes.

A true just culture can only be built on this foundation.

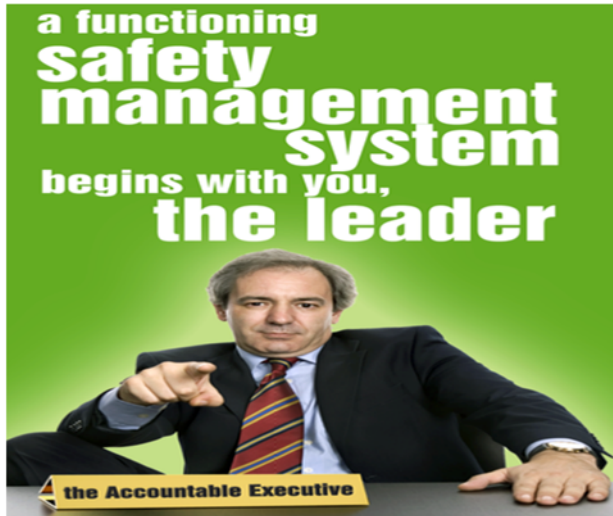
**Pushback.** One of the primary challenges your organization will likely have to overcome with the implementation of any new changes that depart from what stakeholders consider to be “normal” is department pushback. In larger organizations, it may be difficult to bring the whole department into a culture shift at the same time. Organizations

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may have to focus on different areas of the operation (flight operations, maintenance, support, etc.) and bring each segment into the changes more slowly. Through this approach, your organization can reduce the shock to the current culture (good or bad, it’s been engrained in your employees) and help gain traction for the new ideas present in the new culture being cultivated. Although this approach takes more time, as your organization brings in different groups that buy into the new just culture you will have much more support behind new culture to help with others that may resist the change.

**Give Concessions.** A key step in overcoming the challenges in shifting to, and growing, a just culture within the organization is giving

concessions. No culture shift can happen overnight, and it will take time to change an entire organization's way of thinking. Whenever there is pushback in the department, it may be necessary to make certain concessions in order to help show your employees that your organization is willing to give and take as well as learn from feedback during the change process. This is a vital step to fostering the trust between the employees and management necessary for a just culture to grow. The catch here, however, is not giving in too easily, because the organization has to continue to promote and push for a just culture throughout the organizational change.



**Lead by Example.** Perhaps the singularly most important thing you can do to help an organization achieve a culture change is to lead by example. If you expect your department employees to self-report, and to trust the Safety Management System (SMS), then organizational leaders have to do the same things. If employees see that the process works and that there are good, solid examples of successful outcomes from reporting and mitigations, they will begin to trust the non-punitive nature of the new reporting culture. This will put your organization on the right path toward creating a true just culture. If you are not filling out reports and the organization continues (or begins) to use reporting as a punitive measure, you will severely hamper any ability to ever shift to a just culture. This is where the organization has to be accountable – management has to abide by what it says and always continue working towards creating (and maintaining) a just culture.

**Promote, Promote, Promote.** In addition to leading by example, the organization should continually promote the SMS and show that it is committed to living a just culture. Celebrate your wins! As mentioned previously, use examples to

show how reporting can lead to positive changes in the organization that benefit everyone. Give recognition to employees for being willing to report, and show them that the organization is as invested in its employees as it is in its own growth.

At times, it may be necessary to use a teaching moment when something doesn't go as planned, but don't dwell on the breakdowns. Take the teaching moment for what it is, and use it to educate employees so they know how to avoid the mistake or the hazard in the future. This directly ties in with one of the primary tenets of a just culture – don't use reporting as a punitive measure, but use it to teach, train, and educate. Your employees will be better off for it, and your organization will be safer knowing your employees have had the training to avoid or mitigate the risk in the future.

**Utilize Tools and Resources.** When all else fails, use the tools and resources around you. Achieving a just culture takes a true commitment by the organization, but you don't have to do it alone! Look to your positive examples in your own organization to help build that trust with employees so that they will eventually feel comfortable reporting hazards/issue. Look to other operators that are similar to your organization and ask them what they are doing – they may have ideas or strategies that helped them along the road (or you may have something that could help them – we're all in this together). Of course, an organization can always utilize additional training to enhance safety. It is important that employees are educated on what a just culture is so that they know what they are working towards, you can use the teaching moments to avoid the same mistakes as others, and you can re-train those that made the mistakes instead of punishing them.

At the end of the day, the key to remember when trying to shift your organization's culture to a just culture is to lead by example, and hold yourself and the organization accountable. If employees don't see the buy-in from the organizational leaders and the organization and stakeholders don't practice what they preach, employees will not trust the system. The organization may have a reporting culture lacking that trust, but it is impossible to enable a just culture without it.

This document has been peer reviewed by an expert panel of the USHST SMS Working Group. More information about the USHST and IHST as well as their reports, safety tools, and presentations are available at [www.IHST.org](http://www.IHST.org).