

Safety Management System

Safety Bulletin

No. 02/24

20th March 2024

Safety Differently 2 – Improving Collective Safety

Purpose. This Bulletin provides information for ALL members on positive collective safety strategies that can build safer outcomes. Collective safety includes behaviours that encourage vigilance and interventions to ensure well-being of others, beyond our own safety. This bulletin is intended to foster positive safety dialogue within and between clubs, underpinning improvements in safety culture.

Introduction: Building on Safety Differently.

Nobody, ever, prepares to launch a towplane or glider, perform maintenance on a tug or glider, or work in an aerodrome environment, with the intention of coming to harm. Most times we get it right, despite environmental factors and threats, despite inevitable human errors and omissions, or unintended glitches in our operations and safety procedures. Sometimes it goes wrong... Let's strive to get it right!

In 2020 my predecessor Professor Sidney Dekker, in his role as GFA National Safety Advisor, published [Safety Bulletin No 01/20, Safety Differently](#). It's worth re-reading, an insightful discussion of insights into building positive safety capabilities, rather than being transfixed by errors and weakest links. Prof Dekker is a world safety authority, with major contributions in aviation, medical and industrial safety, academic studies, and culture change.

Gliding Australia has recently been approved by CASA as a Part 149 Approved Self-Administering Aviation Organisation (ASAO) for gliding. As Safety Manager, I contributed to a new CASA-approved [MOSP Part 5](#) Safety Management Systems (SMS) and accompanying safety documents. We had healthy dialogue about building safety systems working in a dispersed, volunteer-based sporting organisation (in contrast with tightly regulated environments in commercial aviation). The SMS addresses both worst case emergency responses and measures to build positive safety culture.

Yet all this paperwork doesn't change safety outcomes unless applied in practice, on flight lines and operating points, in hangars and workshops, clubrooms and airfields, clubs and competitions.

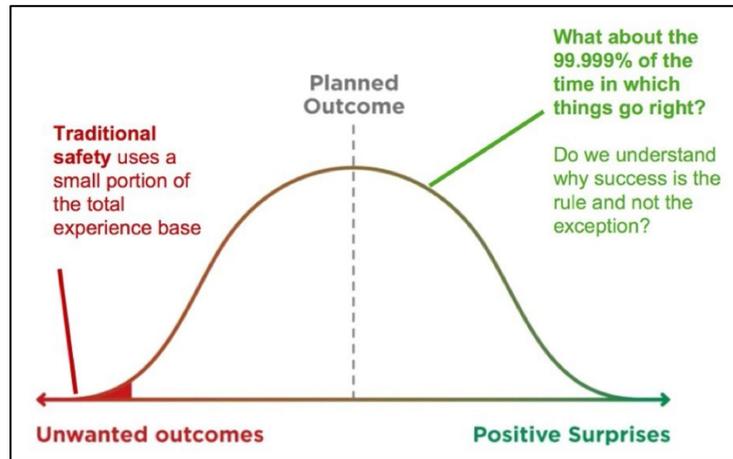
We know that improving safety is as much about human behaviour, attitudes, culture, and dialogue, as it is about detailed procedures and systems for training, operations, airworthiness, competition, and governance.

Here we explore what has changed and needs to be continued, to build our capabilities for positive safety outcomes. Safety Differently 2 – Improving Collective Safety.



Building Positive Safety Ingredients.

Prof Dekker described a bell curve model of outcomes either side of planned outcomes. He highlighted that errors, shortcomings, organisational glitches, shortcuts, and *common negative ingredients* exist in environments where things go wrong AND go well, so there are limitations in pursuing human error minimisation strategies.



What he DID find was the presence of more *positive ingredients for safety* in environments where things go well, where *positive safety capacities* were built.

The *positive safety ingredients* were summarised in [SB 01/20](#) as including:

- Diversity of opinion and the possibility to voice dissent,
- Keeping discussions about risk alive, not taking past success as a guarantee for safety,
- Deference to expertise, people who know, not necessarily those in charge,
- Ability to say stop,
- Broken down barriers between hierarchies and departments,
- Not waiting for audits or inspections to improve,
- Pride in workmanship and standards.

It is noteworthy that all these ingredients are enabled by *inclusion and respectful dialogue, diverse communications, recognising volunteers, collective behaviours, positive culture, and anticipatory mindsets.*

Some, like “Stop Stop Stop” doctrine are well embedded in gliding clubs. Others need work, development, positive leadership, and role modelling.

So, this begs the question, how can we cultivate these positive safety ingredients? Prof Dekker offered some answers, including:

- Capacity to show curiosity instead of judgement when confronting non-conformances,
- Capacity to anticipate changing risks,
- Capacity to respond and manage risks in ways beyond rulemaking,
- Capacity to share accounts and insights,
- Capacity to proactively learn and keep risk conversations open,
- Capacity to analyse occurrence data,
- Capacity to respond justly to incidents mindful of broader impacts of events.

Yet there's more we can do, if we consider the underpinning enablers of positive ingredients highlighted above. Let's consider this; what can be done in our clubs to cultivate these? How do we shift clubs and our members up the spectrum of success?

Note that even if you reach Nirvana, complacency and passive behaviours can drive your club into Risky!

Collective Safety Behaviours, Strategies and Risk Responses

It's ok to *look after your colleagues*. It's good to *intervene on any risk issue* to prevent others coming to potential harm. It's better to have *shared standards* and *risk appetites*. It's powerful when we *share our insights* as a group and help each other improve.

With collective approaches, we share collective obligations to improve safety for others, not walk past problems, instead allow positive collaborative interventions, to combine efforts to treat risks. Single solutions are questioned, layered risk responses are encouraged, with preventive mindsets. Risk responses include addressing root causes, not just errors or deficiencies.

For example, fixing the unreliable ground towing vehicle, to ensure clear runways and taxiways, reducing fatigue and dehydration risks for duty crews walking gliders back to the launch point. The panel might refer safety impacts of maintenance funding and effort to the committee.

For example, not allowing gliders to launch with known defects, organising assistance to fix battery and radio gremlins and clear airworthiness issues that might cause operational problems. Airworthiness status communications and repair coordination in the club might be improved.

For example, offering share a high-performance dual flight with a fatigued member, rather than them flying solo tired and frazzled, not having a good day. Then later openly discussing with others why that member was overworked early in the day, how that might be avoided in future.

Collective safety behaviours are enabled by recognition of volunteer effort, and by positive role models cultivating a positive, anticipatory safety culture. It also helps mitigate the creep effect of living with multiple minor risks, of normalised deviance.

Respecting talent, expertise, and volunteerism.

Being taken for granted, or ignored, or dismissed is morale sapping. Authentic expressions of thanks, positive recognition, help to motivate volunteers to renew their efforts.

Many organisations, many gliding clubs, are coming to see the corrosive problems of volunteer attrition, and disrespectful behaviours demotivating potential successors. We must respect talent, encourage development, and provide authentic reward and recognition of the critical volunteers who keep us operating safely. A respectful and inclusive culture, with dialogue involving all members, helps encourage volunteer participation.

People do not make significant volunteering decisions in a discouraging environment. For them to commit to a role, they need tangible evidence that their talents, ideas, and efforts will be appreciated and rewarded, that their voices will be respectfully heard. They need to be valued. Ensuring this happens takes real individual leadership plus group commitment to supporting them. This also means bad apples and grumpies disparaging emerging talent must be curtailed.

Sharing resources across club boundaries.

Harsh resourcing realities limit capacity to develop key people to take on instructing, coaching, maintenance, and airworthiness roles. Regional associations need to achieve economies of scale in funding travel, training, resources for courses. Smaller clubs may not have the in-house capacity or expertise to develop new talent, achieve better standardisation and safety practices, renew volunteer officers. Clubs are not islands, they must collaborate with others, with national and regional officers providing support.

The training example is obvious, yet there are other means by which safety is improved via sharing resources and insights. For example, bulk safety equipment purchases, fabricating improved ground towing equipment, inter-club supervision of Form 2 activities and repairs, avionics diagnostics, shared access to test equipment, airfield upkeep, pilots' nights, and multi-club safety presentations.

Risks are less likely to remain untreated when we shift the boundaries of the problem and possible resolution to include other clubs. Clubs might also share resources, insights and data with other aerodrome users and operators, develop collaborative actions to improve safety.

The clubs that do this well also have positive multiplier effects in developing good talent and expertise. Cross-pollination of expertise builds enthusiasm and broader learning experiences.

Partnerships with other clubs can ease pressures on overworked club members. Combined efforts are a great alternative to living with problems, going backwards slowly. Sometimes there are bonus outcomes, with members now routinely supporting two clubs. Win win!

Respectful safety dialogue and inclusion via diverse communications channels.

Better safety outcomes arise from positively hearing and seriously considering others' insights, outside club hierarchies and departments. Multilevel dialogue enhances collaboration and volunteerism, education, and awareness. Shared commitments are then built through inclusive dialogue to treat risks and keep standards high. Collective safety outcomes are improved by positive participation, in stark contrast to apathy, stove-piping and normalised deviance.

Clubs do and can work to improve information flows and awareness of risks and safety issues. Sometimes this leads to huge efforts on IT and web pages, reports, and processes. They can help, improve the communications *means*, but are not the whole solution.

There are key differentiators in clubs that do well. Communications channels are more diverse and participative, not just hierarchical. Dialogue is bottom up and between groups, not just single channel top down. Messages are positive, not just error-focussed or hypnotised by barriers and problems. Dialogue is respectful and inclusive, not derisive nor dominated by cliques.

In the best clubs, all members see how they can contribute usefully, improve their sense of belonging and feel valued. People listen and are receptive to lateral ideas.

Expectations management, role models and setting the bar on standards.

Great communications via multiple channels enable clubs to reinforce required standards and safety boundaries, describe safety policies and risk appetite. These are important club and panel management obligations.

Beyond spoken and written words, nothing speaks louder than actual behaviour and examples of key people, role models who exemplify both the culture and the standards to be applied. When members see respected role models make precautionary risk-based decisions, or give effect to risk appetite limits, they are much more inclined to adopt these behaviours and standards.

The converse is true. If members push a "near enough" mindset, accept unnecessary risks that are easily treated, demonstrate poor airmanship or workmanship or safety example, that can have a contagious negative effect.

Some people may have expectations that they are special or superior, that standards do not apply to them. Such unrealistic expectations cannot be condoned. Punitive sanctions may be a last resort; positive interventions to modify risk appetite and enforce standards with problem people reinforce a common bar for all members. Re-read [Darker Shades of Blue](#) by Kern.

Panel processes, safety briefings, safety stand-downs, seminars and occurrence reports may reinforce these insights and standards. Respectful dialogue is a must!

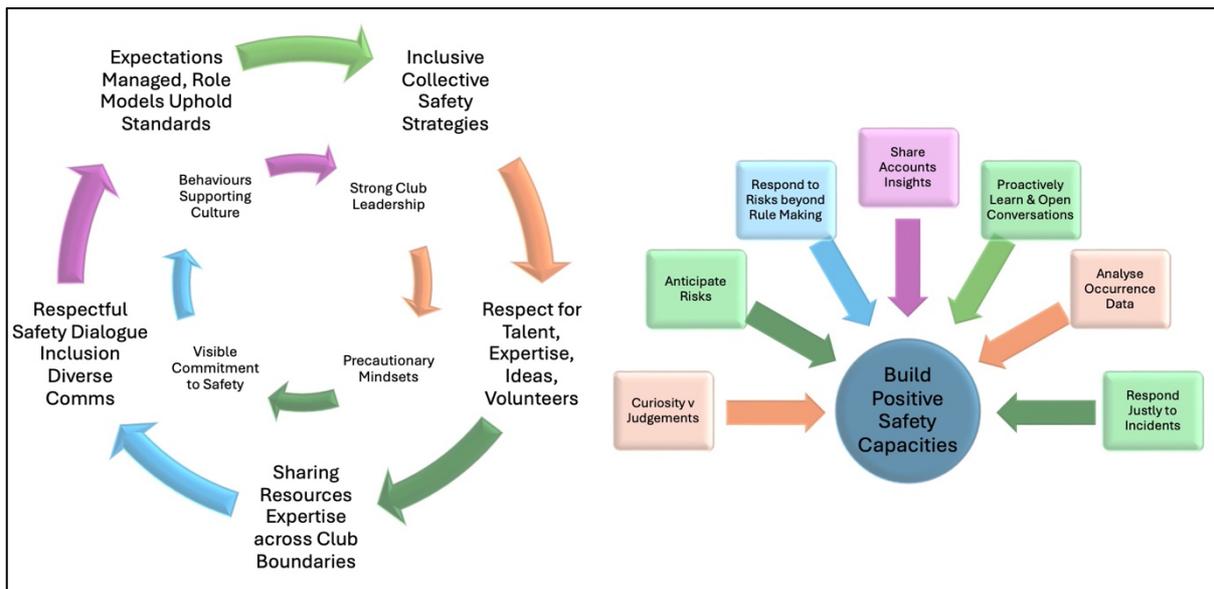
Favouritism and double standards suck. It's good to see senior people in the club admit they stuffed up, discuss then fix their errors. Upholding standards matters, it makes a safer club.

Where to from here?

In [Safety Bulletin No 01/20, Safety Differently](#), Prof Sidney Dekker highlighted the power of positive safety ingredients that help organisations overcome inevitable errors and shortcomings and achieve better safety results most of the time. Here we have re-examined these positive safety ingredients, noting that these are enabled by *inclusion and respectful dialogue, communications, collective behaviours, positive culture, and anticipatory mindsets*.

Clubs might achieve better safety outcomes on the Spectrum of Success by targeted efforts to cultivate these enabling factors. Collective Safety Strategies are offered for members, panels, committees to consider adopting and adapting. National, regional officers, other clubs may help.

Analysing what goes wrong is important. We need this information to develop safety changes, adapt to emerging risks, set priorities for treating risks and common occurrence types. Understanding human error remains important. These “what goes wrong” approaches must be supplemented by collaborative, collective, positive safety strategies, to help build “what works right” and success in safety. Strategies and Capacities for success are depicted below.



I appreciate dialogue with all members on your insights. Happy soaring, happy landings.


A.R. (Drew) McKinnie
 Safety Manager
 20 March 2024

