

# Airports aren't just concrete but a community of people

THE HEARTS & MINDS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP



## BRIEFING

Airports are bustling hubs of activity, with an incredibly diverse range of people and equipment. There are passengers, friends and relatives, airside workers, landside workers and, of course, those who work for the airport themselves. Everyone is operating in the same precinct, and we all know that sometimes the stress levels are high.

While well-designed infrastructure and equipment, policies, procedures and technology systems are crucial for ensuring operational safety, human factors such as leadership, teamwork, communication and psychosocial safe workplaces —will make all the difference.

At the heart of safety within an airport is the concept of “looking out for your mates.” In practical terms, this means every worker should be empowered and encouraged to take responsibility not only for their own safety but for the safety of their colleagues and the travelling public. This can involve simple actions such as checking in on a colleague, identifying hazards before they cause harm, or stepping in to stop unsafe behaviours, acting if they see unattended luggage etc.

Building a community-driven safety culture requires effective leadership, open communication, and a commitment to both operational and psychosocial safety. Leaders must model the behaviours they expect from others, create open dialogue, and ensure that all team members, regardless of their role, feel valued and included in safety initiatives.

## CALL TO ACTION

### 1 Prioritise psychosocial safety

Actively monitor for signs of stress, burnout, or fatigue in yourself and your colleagues. Encourage the use of available mental health resources, and cultivate an environment where seeking support is not stigmatised but encouraged. Recognise that mental well-being has a direct impact on safety outcomes.

### 2 Empower a team-based safety culture

Reinforce that safety is a shared responsibility. Encourage open communication and a “no blame” approach to reporting hazards or near-misses. When team members feel comfortable looking out for one another and raising concerns without fear of retribution, the entire operation becomes safer.

### 3 Foster inclusivity and open communication

Airports are possibly some of the most diverse workplaces in the world, with individuals from various cultural, linguistic, and professional backgrounds having to work together possibly as total strangers. Leaders must promote an environment of inclusivity where everyone feels empowered to have a safety voice regardless of their job title or background.

### 4 Leadership in safety

Leaders at all levels should be visible, approachable, and actively involved in safety initiatives. Strong leadership helps reinforce the message that safety is non-negotiable and that every team member, from executives to frontline workers, has a role to play in safety leadership.

## 5 Commit to continuous learning and development

Safety culture is not a “set-and-forget” endeavour. Ensure that all team members regularly engage in training, refresher courses, and open discussions about both operational and psychosocial safety risks. This reinforces the importance of remaining vigilant and proactive in all aspects of safety.

## STORYTELLING GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY DRIVEN SAFETY CULTURE

### Schiphol Airport's Community-Driven Safety Culture

Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands is a good example of successfully fostering a community-driven safety culture. Schiphol recognised that maintaining operational safety in such a dynamic and complex environment required more than just adherence to policies and procedures – it built a culture where everyone felt responsible for safety. As part of its Safety Culture Program, Schiphol launched several initiatives aimed at encouraging all employees, from ground handling staff to airport management, to report safety concerns, share best practices, and engage in shared safety training.

One of the standout initiatives at Schiphol is the Safety Leadership Program, which focuses on empowering leaders at all levels to foster open communication about safety concerns, including psychosocial safety. Schiphol's leadership places a high value on mental health, recognising that stress and fatigue are significant contributors to unsafe behaviours. Through regular mental health workshops, stress management resources, and a Just Culture approach to incident reporting, Schiphol has created an environment where safety is everyone's responsibility.

Moreover, Schiphol regularly integrates feedback from employees across different functions, ensuring that safety measures are inclusive of the diverse workforce. This feedback loop helps the airport continuously improve its safety protocols while fostering a sense of community, where everyone—regardless of their role—feels empowered to contribute to the safety conversation.

Schiphol's focus on fostering a collaborative, inclusive, and psychosocially aware safety culture has led to a significant reduction in safety incidents and a higher level of employee engagement in safety practices. By recognising that airports are not just concrete but are made up of people working together, Schiphol has built a world-class safety culture that continues to evolve and improve.

You can read more about Schiphol's safety approach here:  
<https://www.schiphol.nl/en/work-at-schiphol/page/safety/>



## Questions for Team Discussion

1. How can we foster a stronger sense of community and shared responsibility in our airport's safety culture?
2. What actions can we take to ensure psychosocial safety is prioritised alongside operational safety in our daily practices?
3. How can we empower every employee, regardless of their role, to feel comfortable reporting safety concerns and looking out for their colleagues?