

WORK ZONE

REDUCING MISHAPS BY 50%

Culture Workshops

By Capt. Dave Quessenberry and LtCol. Rick Boyer, USMC

In 1996, following a string of high-visibility mishaps, the naval aviation Human Factors Quality Management Board (HFQMB) was chartered and tasked with reducing the number of human-factor flight mishaps by 50 percent before the turn of the millennium. One intervention strategy adopted by the board, on a trial basis, was a successful Air National Guard culture-assessment program run by Col. Alan Groben. Subsequently, the program was endorsed by the Air Board and has evolved into our current culture-workshop program.

The workshops are based on the principle that operational excellence exists on a foundation of trust, integrity, and leadership, created and sustained by effective communication. Each workshop is tailored to give individual commanders a snapshot of their unit's culture by listening to its members. Effectively employed, this program has become a powerful risk-management tool for identifying human-factor problems before they result in bent metal and broken bodies.

"Culture" includes a wide range of informal rules and attitudes that profoundly affect how we work and train. It is affected by events in our local communities, as well as by state, national, and international politics. Leadership styles, formal and informal and of past and present leaders, greatly influence the attitudes

and operating rules that form a specific culture. Squadrons have formal and informal leaders, and these people permit certain attitudes and rules to exist, by the way they act and by what they tolerate.

Culture workshops are conducted solely for the benefit of each unit. Privacy of results—good, bad, or otherwise—is a key principle. All information collected is treated as confidential and remains within the command. The success of a workshop rests largely in the hands of the unit, and the unit's commitment to creating a sustained culture of operational excellence. Before the workshop, each member of the command should understand the upcoming workshop is not an inspection, and their candor and full engagement are the key elements to the workshop's success.

The workshop usually involves a three-person team. The unit hosting the workshop is responsible for obtaining a maintenance E-7/E-8 and a pilot or NFO (preferably an O-3) from a unit outside their direct chain of command to assist the facilitator. Ideally, these people should be professional, highly motivated, and possess solid leadership skills. After the kickoff brief and introductions, the workshop begins with individual visits and informal conversations conducted in the squadron spaces. Highly interactive group seminars composed of 10 to 15

people follow. Although squadrons sessions vary, there are generally separate seminars for E-4 and below, E-5 through E-6, E-7 through E-9, and the officers. They are led by a trained facilitator and last approximately two hours. Seminar attendees should represent a true cross-section of the command, and be prepared to fully participate in the process. The results of each group are folded into the subsequent seminars. A concluding leadership seminar compiles the results; any sensitive findings are briefed to the CO and XO separately.

Two online surveys offered by the School of Aviation Safety in Monterey—the CSA and MCAS—are now an integral and required part of the culture-workshop process. They are invaluable human-factors risk-identification tools, and should be completed before scheduling a workshop. (For an update on these surveys, turn to page 31.)

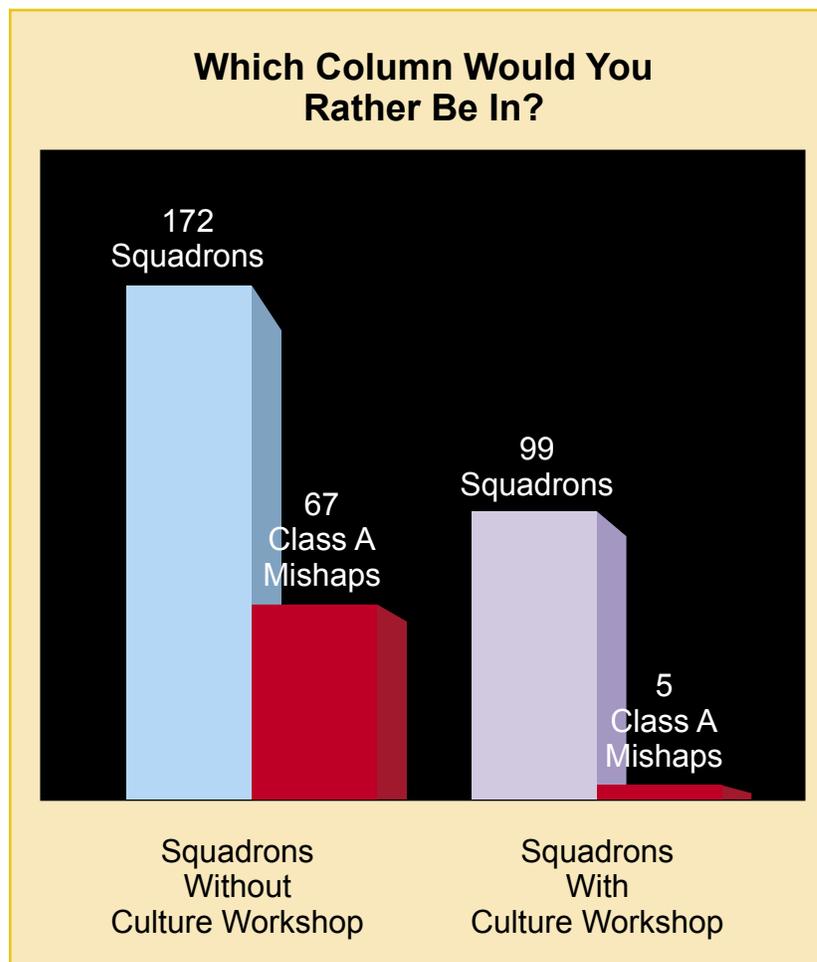
After the workshop, and in conjunction with the MCAS and CSA results, each unit will have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their underlying culture, as well as any organizational human factors that could pose a hazard to sustained operational excellence. Armed with that information, it is then incumbent upon the leadership, as well as the entire chain of command, to evaluate the risk, make appropriate risk decisions, implement controls, and then lead from the front!

In January 2003, a message from COMNAVAIRFOR required all deployable aviation squadrons to complete a Naval Safety Center sponsored culture-workshop during their interdeployment training cycle (IDTC), and non-deployable units to complete a workshop once during each two-year period. The milestone was to have unit safety officers make requests for any culture-workshops required during the next IDTC, or two-year period, directly to the Naval Safety Center. Since then, we have received 124 requests for culture-workshops; we have completed 51.

Does the process work?

During the last two years, Navy and Marine Corps squadrons had 72 Class A flight mishaps. During this period, 99 squadrons (36 percent of naval aviation) had culture workshops. Of those units, only five had Class A flight mishaps after a culture workshop, accounting for just seven percent of the total mishaps. Thus, 64 percent of the squadrons had 93 percent of the mishaps. 

Capt. Quessenberry and LtCol. Boyer are with the Naval Safety Center.



Get on Board!

Find out more about culture workshops at:
<http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/culture/default.htm>