



# Safety Evolution Guide: The Austrian Just Culture Journey

Evolution Guide based on an SMS practice that has been  
recognised as Optimised by the CANSO Safety Standing  
Committee

# 1. OBJECTIVE OF GUIDE

Members of the Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO) are committed to the improvement of their services. As part of this commitment, organisations share their practices in efforts to transfer learning across the industry.

This guide captures:

- the practices of an Air Navigation Service Provider (ANSP) in one element of the CANSO Standard of Excellence (SoE) in Safety Management Systems (SMS). The practices of this ANSP have been recognized by their peers as being an optimised practice within the industry (see Figure 1).
- the optimized practices have been selected on the basis of their novelty, innovation or the recognition of their potential to manage operational risks; or
- proposed practices that are based on contemporary thinking in the safety management sphere. These proposals have yet to be fully adopted by any ANSP, but they are viewed by the CANSO Safety Standing Committee (SSC) as having significant potential in the industry's efforts to evolve how safety is managed.



Figure 1. CANSO Standard of Excellence – Maturity Pathway

Given the dynamic nature of safety management, the practices presented in this document may be superseded. CANSO will publish updated best practice guidance.

# 2. APPLICATION OF THE GUIDANCE

CANSO recognizes that this guidance will not be relevant to all ANSPs. The maturity of any ANSP's Safety Management System will be dependent on their specific context. This context will be a reflection of factors including the size and complexity of the organisation, domestic regulations and the risk appetite of the organisation.

ANSPs do not necessarily need to adopt all the practices and processes promoted by CANSO, but consider the relevance of the practices promoted in this guide to their operational environment.

### 3. OPTIMISED PRACTICE

This guide addresses the Just Culture process of Austro Control that was identified as being optimised in 2017. The approach was reviewed by a panel of experts from the Future Safety Working Group of the SSC.

### 4. SCOPE OF GUIDE

**This guide provides insight into Austro Control's just culture process, including the path that was taken and the lessons learned during the implementation phase. Just Culture is – and must remain - an ongoing process in which the organisation is continuously learning and improving.**

### 5. APPLICABLE STANDARDS

The CANSO Standard of Excellence in Safety Management Systems is the applicable standard. Excerpt from the CANSO Standard of Excellence, '5. Outline of the CANSO Standard of Excellence in SMS':

#### 5.2 Safety Culture

5.2.1 Effective safety management requires a genuine commitment to safety on the part of everyone in the organisation. Contemporary thinking is that organisations are not immune from cultural considerations.

5.2.2 The success of a SMS is completely dependent on the development of a positive and proactive safety culture in the ANSP organisation.

**5.2.3 Safety culture is presented within the CANSO SoE in SMS as a system enabler in that it has the most significant influence on the overall integration and evolution of SMS elements within the ANSP organisation.**

### 6. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

#### **Austro Control's Just Culture Process – A 'Best' Practice for Assessing Safety Behaviours**

##### **6.1. Introduction**

Austro Control started the Just Culture (JC) journey in 2006 with a program called "Fair-Play". "Fair-Play" was introduced by the ATM department to bring about a cultural change which should result in improved trust and communication between management and staff within and across all departments.

## 6.2. Elements of Just Culture

Complementing the Fair Play Programm, Austro Control set to establish the following main elements of Just Culture:

### JUST CULTURE IN SAFETY INVESTIGATIONS

JC principles were embedded in the Safety Reporting and Investigation process aiming to encourage:

- reporting to ensure organisational learning.
- Safety investigators to use “blame-free” language in the course of investigative interviews and report writing.

The investigation team received JC training to best support the process, and today apply the Austro Control Just Culture Tool, based on the JC model by David Marx © Outcome Engenuity, as part of the investigation process.

### JUST CULTURE TASK FORCE 2008-2013

In 2008, a dedicated “Just Culture Task Force” (JCTF) consisting of operational staff, union representatives and safety experts was founded. This task force was responsible for setting up the JC process, ensuring training of staff and promoting Just Culture throughout the organisation.

In recognition of JC as a Safety Performance Indicator (SKPI) at EU level in 2010, Austro Control took a decision to place even more emphasis and effort into developing just culture, through a re-invigorated Just Culture task force, which then included HR and legal experts, in addition to the safety experts, operational staff and Union representatives. A JC Policy and Guidelines were delivered and instated in 2013.

### THE AUSTRO CONTROL JUST CULTURE POLICY

The JC Policy and Guideline promote an open environment for reporting safety concerns without fear of retribution. The Policy and Guideline draws a clear line in the between behaviours that are tolerated and those that are not. The evaluation of people’s behavioural choices is made by an independent Just Culture Committee (JCC) using a JC Tool to provide a fair, objective and consistent approach.

### THE JUST CULTURE COMMITTEE (JCC)

The JCC consists of five independent experts which all have voting rights in the committee, thereby objectively evaluating people’s behavioural choices. These are:

1. Operational Safety Manager (providing operational expertise and a view of the ATM system as a whole)

2. Local Safety Committee Member (providing knowledge about local operational practices)
3. Human Resources Expert (providing HR expertise and ensuring compliance with employment law)
4. Operational Business Unit Manager (providing operational expertise from a management perspective)
5. Safety Manager (providing safety management expertise and ensuring compliance with safety regulations)

In addition there are two more observer roles, which do not have voting rights: a Staff Union Representative and a JC Facilitator.

### THE JUST CULTURE TOOL

The JC Tool is based on the JC model by David Marx © Outcome Engenuity. The tool consists of three decision trees asking a standardised set of questions to be answered (yes/no format) by members of the JCC. The questions are related to duties of personnel involved in an event. The JC Tool:

- ensures that each behaviour is assessed in an objective and transparent way;
- considers repetitive behaviour; and
- provides actions to be taken ensuring a fair and consistent treatment of staff.

### THE THREE BEHAVIOURS © OUTCOME ENGENUITY

Outcome Engenuity defines three behaviours:

1. Human error (unintentional act, unintentional consequence)
2. At-risk behaviour (intentional act, unintentional consequence)
3. Reckless behaviour (intentional act, intentional consequence)

Astro Control draws the line between a single human error (tolerated) and repetitive errors, at-risk behaviour and reckless behaviour (not tolerated). The legal terms "negligent behaviour" were defined to be related to "at-risk behaviour", while "gross negligence" and "wilful misconduct" are defined as "reckless behaviour".

According to the Astro Control JC Policy, a single human error being the product of system design will not have any individual disciplinary consequence, whereas repetitive error, at-risk- and reckless behaviour will.

### 6.3. What are the consequences of unacceptable behaviour?

The consequences of unacceptable behaviour were agreed in the JCTF and may range from:

- individual coaching to increase risk perception
- removal of incentives that make unacceptable behaviour more likely

- providing a warning
- removing staff from safety-critical tasks (relocation/ degradation)
- removal of rewards
- dismissal.

#### **6.4. How does it work in practice?**

The JCC convenes based on a written report about unacceptable behaviour submitted by a line manager, the safety manager or a lead investigator. The JCC meets within 40 days of the report.

A full investigation report including a statement by the involved employees on why their behaviour made sense at a time must be available to the JCC. All information and the names of the involved personnel are treated as confidential.

At the beginning of the JCC, the facilitator presents all information based on the safety investigation. The members then have the opportunity to ask questions for better understanding and have a facilitated discussion about the facts. In case some facts are missing, the lead investigator is on call to complete the picture. If the facts cannot be completed, the JCC may adjourn.

Once all members have reached an understanding of the facts, the facilitator poses the standardised questions in the JC Tool. Each member provides answers in a concealed “vote” including a short argumentation / evidence. The result is determined by the majority.

Based on the result, the JCC recommends certain actions to prevent reoccurrence of unacceptable behaviour. In case the committee recommends individual disciplinary action, the facilitator reveals the identity of the relevant persons towards their line manager. The identity of other involved personnel remains protected.

#### **6.5. What are the lessons learnt so far?**

- The quality of the safety investigations improved as investigators were trained to gather more facts as needed for the JC Tool.
- The awareness of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and associated consequences has increased.
- The awareness of managers with respect to JC principles has increased.
- The general attitude towards professionalism at work has improved.

## 7. SUMMARY

Austro Control has established a Just Culture Process and uses a tool to support objective decision. The success of the approach is based on there being a clear JC policy and guidelines, trained staff, a dedicated Just Culture Task Force and a tool which supports objective decision making.

The setup of the Just Culture Committee and Task Force will need to be tailored to the needs of the organisation, it is however recommended to take an interdisciplinary approach.

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