

# HUMAN AND ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

# Q&A

# JUST CULTURE FOR ALL, BY ALL



Lea Sophie Vink  
at Austro Control

## What is a significant change planned within your organisation that has relevance to human and organisational performance?

Over the last few years, we have been working on expanding our Just Culture concepts and policies to the entire organisation. Just Culture continues to be one of our most important areas of development. We are proud to have had a relatively mature policy since 2015 in the Air Traffic Management department. However, since last year we have now expanded it to cover every employee in the company. This represents a major philosophical and practical shift in the way we manage and administer Just Culture. Specifically, it means changing the way we think about occurrence investigations, human error analysis, lesson learning and improvement processes. The main goal is to build stronger trust between operators and staff with management as we, like so many others, come out of the Covid pandemic.

## Why is this change necessary? What is the opportunity or need?

Our original Just Culture policy applied to front-line operators only. Specifically, it was implemented exclusively through our Air Traffic Management department. The policy was developed around the concept of occurrence management investigations which focuses heavily on the 'last line of defence.' This means most investigations focus on what the ATCO did or did not do and their contribution to occurrences. However, it is well established that safety events are precipitated by many contributing factors and often these are further away from the ATCO. Increasingly, engineering and technological issues mean that ATCOs are having to deal with different kinds of scenarios. This means we need to be able to investigate further away from the front line. To do this, however, we need to improve the quality and frequency of reporting from other departments and areas of the company. So there was a strong need to implement Just Culture ideas to everyone. Added to this, our human performance research showed through the Covid period that 'trust' and 'acceptance of change' were two areas we could improve on across the company. Building a stronger Just Culture concept allows us to tackle both issues together.

### **What are the main obstacles facing this change?**

Many ANSPs will be familiar with the idea that safety and Just Culture 'ownership' tends to diminish further away from front line operations. Teaching these ideas to staff who are not facing daily tactical situations is a challenge. Understanding how systematic factors and decision-making can contribute to acute safety events is also challenging since many of these concepts are abstract and foreign to staff who are not exposed to all the parts of our system. We have also had more practical challenges, such as, how exactly do you investigate a safety occurrence that may not result in mandatory reporting? And when you do investigate, who should do it?

Just Culture looks at concepts such as 'at-risk' or 'reckless' decisions being made, but how far back in the system should you go? For example, does a decision to force through a change even when it is not ready or mature enough and it results in a safety event constitute an 'at-risk' behaviour? Our new Just Culture policy now attempts to reconcile these challenges by looking at everything from decisions being made for future strategy through to project management and even training and recruitment behaviours.

### **What is the role of front-line practitioners? How is their expertise incorporated into change management?**

Our Just Culture policy is a living, breathing policy that is constantly being moderated by our front-line staff. Our investigators and human factors staff have contributed to enhanced use of tools for more objective occurrence investigation. For example, as part of the process of triggering Just Culture committees we have developed a new human error analysis procedure which is now being rolled out in other areas. This was developed using expertise and data analysis from these practitioners.

### **What do they think about the change?**

Our staff have been very enthusiastic about the changes. This year, we held a mandatory human factors training day for every ATCO in the company. They were all introduced to the new policy and shown how it will lead to our company taking greater responsibility for systematic issues, protection of individuals, and more objective lesson learning.

### **What has been learned so far, more generally?**

Just Culture needs to be 'owned' company-wide for it to prosper. As automation rises and occurrences involve more decisions away from the ops room, people's behaviours and attitudes need to be held accountable and reporting maximised to maintain the highest safety standards.