

REPOSITIONING INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN ATM

I started my ATM journey in 1995 at BULATSA, Sofia ACC. At the time we still had only one radar, which was one more than our colleagues in Athens. Now I work in Maastricht ACC where we use 49 radars. During my career I witnessed a massive change in the technology we use (see also Technology 2.0 by Tony Licu in *HindSight* 33), tremendous traffic demand and developments in safety such as human factors, fatigue management, work as done vs work as imagined, automation, and resilience.

In parallel, another demographic shift also happened: ATM welcomed more women as controllers, engineers and managers. The professional careers stretched, and so now more generations work together. We also witnessed changes in society such as advancement of gay rights and the rights of people of

colour. Migration waves within and to Europe made the big cities melting pots of different religions and ethnicities. We now take for granted that we must accommodate in the workplace people with visible and invisible disabilities. These societal changes transformed the fabric of the ATM workforce, calling for a deliberate effort for more inclusion in the workplace. Yet, ATM still has to reflect on how these changes influenced its workforce and organisational cultures. I hope this *HindSight* column will help to fill this gap by presenting good practices, different viewpoints and human stories.

But why focus on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)? First, we need talented people. Many ANSPs try to attract, select and retain young people to specialise in our niche industry as ATCOs, ATSEPs,

experts or managers. Compared to 20 years ago, many ANSPs have to work harder on recruitment so that we can staff our ranks. Collectively, we could exchange good practices and realise economies of scale. We could improve our industry and the perception of it, so that we can compete effectively on the labour market.

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Second, diversity can help with the digitalisation that has already changed profoundly the ways we track aircraft, exchange data on ground and air, communicate, and work from home. We know that we – the whole network of airline operators, airports, ANSPs, and the Network Manager – need to innovate and implement different technologies to cope with the demand for more ecologically sustainable air transport. A diverse workforce will bring along people with different backgrounds with more knowledge and different approaches to understanding and resolving problems. Some companies recruit diverse teams already as a core of their HR and innovation strategies. However, without inclusion, people will not feel safe to voice unorthodox ideas. Non-inclusive companies will lose the benefits of diversity. We need to understand how we can increase the feeling of inclusion to make best use of the existing diversity.

Third, the question we need to ask ourselves is not if we want more diversity but how we deal with the increased diversity. Cities such as Paris, London, Amsterdam, and Brussels are already (or about to become) 'super-diverse'. This means that the biggest ethnicity of their population is less than 50%. In addition, we see a generational

workforce overhaul where younger people are influenced more by values and culture than financial reward when choosing a workplace.

Finally, there is our contribution to the society we serve beyond our immediate mission to provide safe air traffic management. Organisations and communities cannot flourish and progress in a society torn of inequalities. We not only live in diverse societies but also in a hyper-connected world that is changing the how we live and work.

For these reasons, we need to engage and exchange with one another about the myriad aspects concerning the EDI topic.

I also want to acknowledge the strong backlash caused by clumsy equality, diversity and inclusion efforts. I get it. The most frequently received lines, when people dare speak openly about it, are "I've had enough of the women issue!" or "It really does not concern me at all." A lot of people feel they have been accused implicitly with a discriminatory attitude toward gender, race or religion. A thoughtful effort on inclusion will avoid this polarisation.

Dennie Coumans did not think too much about inclusion either. Dennie is a 1.93 m (6'4") tall active Dutchman and

a customer service engineer. For many years he had worked in Lagos, Nigeria to support the maintenance of Dash8-400 and CRJ900/1000 aircraft and enjoyed a very successful career. That was until one day, back in 2017 when he suffered pneumonia. He had to be admitted to the hospital and within three hours lost mobility up to his chest. Life changed abruptly and profoundly. Suddenly, Dennie and his family had to adjust to a very different life. He also had to retrain and transfer his knowledge to Safety and Quality to continue working. When Dennie and I had a chat, I asked him: *"Do you think your company would have hired you in the first place at Safety and Quality if they did not know you before?"* It's worth thinking about.

If you want to see and hear Dennie, you can watch the first episode of the Inclusion and Diversity series in the EUROCONTROL Learning Zone (<https://learningzone.eurocontrol.int>). And you can read an interview with Dennie by *HindSight* editor Steven Shorrock in this issue.

In this and the next articles, I will try to shed a light on how we can bring up the topic in a constructive and inclusive way and highlight some of the best practices in the field. 



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