

SOCIAL PARTNERS FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Changes can affect us personally and socially, as well as in our work activity. So how can organisations and staff associations work together on change to ensure that all needs are considered and met, as far as possible? **Aaron Curtis** outlines a new set of guidelines produced by a European collaboration, which may help form a more united approach.

KEY POINTS

- **Getting change management wrong can be extremely costly and disruptive. Getting it right can benefit all stakeholders.**
- **Change can also involve social changes and working arrangements, such as changes to working patterns or relocation, yet the involvement of staff is haphazard and there are often inadequate skills embedded in the organisation to deliver change appropriately.**
- **ANSP management and their staff associations need to work collaboratively, with the right level of social dialogue to work through the change process.**
- **As part of a European Commission-funded project, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), the Air Traffic Controllers European Unions Coordination (ATCEUC) and the Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO), have produced a set of guidelines, designed to be used by ANSPs and their staff organisations.**

An arrival management tool was introduced into an operations room to aid in arrival sequencing for an airport. But it wasn't anywhere near fit for purpose as far as the staff were concerned. The specification for the tool had been met precisely by the contractors, but what the tool did in comparison to what it should have been able to do were a long way apart. For instance, the capture area for the tool was inaccurate. Traffic leaving a hold, for a reason such as weather, would drop out of the arrival sequence list, leading to an inefficient arrival order. The accuracy of the data was also questionable. Particularly when landing on a certain runway, the tool would show a delay when the aircraft had already left the hold to begin an approach. It 'did what it said on the tin', but it was the wrong tin!

Change management is becoming more important in air traffic management (ATM), particularly given the rapid pace of new and emerging technologies such as remote towers and the increasing use of drones. The importance of effective change management can be seen in many projects over recent years. Getting it wrong can be extremely costly and disruptive.

The SESAR program – the technological pillar of Single European Sky – is starting to move from a research and development program to deploying new technologies. These will have



far reaching consequences in to how ATM operates. Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) and their staff will need to adapt to and introduce these technologies. Change is not limited to technology, but can also involve social changes and working arrangements, such as changes to working patterns or relocation.

While often criticised, the conservative attitude to change by front-line workers in the aviation industry provides a check and balance to ensure that the change is safe and fit for purpose. Front-line workers are aware of the consequences of getting it wrong. They tend to inherit the result.

Change is often emotive, creates uncertainty and can have various operational and social impacts. The attitude to change and the involvement of staff is haphazard around Europe, and until recently has had little focus from policy makers. This has to change. Change management and change leadership must be embedded from the policy-making stage, with political initiatives, the regulatory framework and economic arrangements all taking into account change management principles, through to implementation.

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If the ATM system is to be modernised, improving capacity and cost-efficiency, ANSP management and their staff associations need to work collaboratively, with the right level of social dialogue to work through the change process. Front-line staff understand the work and the operation, and with the right level of involvement, will ensure a more favourable outcome.

Another crucial element of change management is having the appropriate skills embedded in the organisation to deliver the change appropriately. Often, organisations don't have the appropriate skills to manage the change process and run into problems because of this. Managers and decision-makers need to be competent and supported by dedicated change management teams. Following implementation, new skills may be required, and thought should be given to in-house reskilling.

Recognising the importance of appropriate change management processes in the delivery of change has been a key focus for the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF). As part of a European Commission-funded project, the EFT, Air Traffic Controllers European Unions Coordination (ATCEUC) and Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO), came together over the last two years to consider how they may be able to support their affiliated

members to structure change, with best practice guidance.

Working together, a set of guidelines has been agreed, designed to be used by ANSPs and their staff organisations. These offer voluntary best practice for the management of change, and are an aid to be used with other established change management methodologies.

The guidelines are broken down in 7 areas:

1. Importance of Social Dialogue

- A key precondition for effective change management. Well-functioning social dialogue, with early engagement, can help manage change in a socially acceptable manner.

2. Building trust

- Managers and staff representatives value each other's contribution. There is a shared responsibility for resolving issues, and local problem solving is recommended.

3. Pursuing the development of a shared vision and a cooperative culture

- Identify and understand the interests of both parties. Outline the objectives of the change management process. This approach should lead to an agreed shared vision set within a culture of cooperation.

4. Social Dialogue Toolbox

- Stable industrial relations are crucial to effective change management. In 2015, the ATM Social Partners created a toolbox for successful social dialogue. This toolbox gives best practice aimed at improving social dialogue and suggests tools to aid in dispute resolution (see <https://www.etf-europe.org/resource/etf-toolbox-march-2016/>).



5. Establishing clear targets and organisation of the process

This is further subdivided into:

- **Establishing a senior leadership project team.**
 - The primary role of the senior leadership project team should be to manage the change process at a strategic level.
 - The senior leadership project team may establish subgroups where the need is identified to address specific elements of the project, e.g. Social Impact Subgroup, Safety Subgroup, etc.
- **Identifying the reasons for change.** Generally, this will be because of a strategic decision, with the senior leadership team informing and consulting with senior staff representatives.
- **Social impact subgroup to identify the social impact of the change.**
 - The Social Impact Subgroup (comprising appropriate and mandated representatives of human resources, relevant ATM operations and staff unions), should be fully briefed on the change initiative and may carry out an assessment of the social impact of the change for staff.
 - Where changes are identified that may impact on staff, e.g., re-organisation of service provision, redeployment of personnel,

downsizing of operations, outsourcing, etc., the mandated representatives of HR inside the Social Impact Subgroup may negotiate with the union officials and agree upon solutions to address the social impact identified.

- In the first instance, measures to avoid or minimise compulsory redundancies should be explored, such as re-deployment to another location within the ANSP, re-skilling, re-training, etc.
- Where redundancies are unavoidable and are permitted by local regulation, the Social Impact Subgroup should agree upon a mechanism to manage the process.

- **Communication strategy.** A coordinated communication strategy should be agreed to ensure all staff are kept fully apprised. Continuous and timely information should be provided including communication on any negative impact.
- **Identification of quick wins.** Irrespective of the long-term goal of the project, sub-groups should identify short-term targets in order to ensure that quick wins, which are clearly linked to the change process, are identified and acknowledged.
- **Build on the change.** Each short-term success should be assessed to identify improvements to build on the momentum.

- **Resolving blockages.** Where disputes arise that impact on the change management process, these should be dealt with as quickly as possible and in line with best practice and established procedures.

6. Equality of treatment

Any agreement reached between the employer and the unions should take account of equality requirements and be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner.

7. Adjusting agreements

Agreements reached between the employer and staff unions should be formalised and signed by both parties.

Each topic has an explanatory paragraph which can be used as guidance to help ANSPs and their staff associations to manage change. It also provides suggestions for employers and employees about how to discuss the change and its impact. These guidelines complement and build on the social dialogue toolbox that was successfully developed between the three organisations and is currently being promoted across Europe.

While we can never be certain of the future, the guidelines can help ANSPs and other organisations to achieve effective change.



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Reference

ATCEUC, CANSO & ETF (2018). Change management in the ATM industry: Principles and process. Available at: http://www.etf-atm.org/WP/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/brochure-change-management_final.pdf or <http://bit.ly/CMATM>.