

BUT WE'RE STILL FRIENDS?

Major organisational changes can have subtle but powerful effects on collaboration. Separation of ANSPs from regulators and airports, even reorganisations, create new interfaces, barriers and constraints. How can we minimise negative effects on collaboration? In this article, **Paavo Puranen** reflects on recent experience in Finland.

KEY POINTS

1. **Know your work and know your neighbours' work.**
2. **Building mutual trust between interfaces (different companies, professions and departments) is essential.**
3. **Remember to keep in touch to maintain trust and collaboration. This requires active effort.**
4. **Help people to see patterns and the flow of work as a whole, using TRM with mixed groups.**

There it was, in the news, just like that. It had been rumoured for years but hardly anybody really believed they would see the day. The separation of the Finnish ANS division was being planned with the start date of operation only three and half months away – April 2017. That felt like a short time to make everything clear. Of course everybody is separated in some way, already in the company, but we are interconnected to almost everybody and people rely on each other.

It felt like a short time to build a new company, not from scratch, but from an operative division. We heard that some people would move to the new company, but who would it be? That would be made public only in the end. A building phase with those people in the new company started. Those who had done a lot of work for and with the people leaving needed to rethink their work in this new situation.

There are a lot of things a company has to do just to survive and usually these develop in an evolutionary way. It usually starts from a few generalists. Knowledge deepens and becomes more and more scattered. Many specialists emerge. Airports and ANSPs are both

so complex and big that generalists have little room. There are just too many things to do.

As the organisational structure and communication channels grow, people become separated and have less time to talk to others about their work. Knowledge becomes tacit and specialisation grows. Some people can even feel that being the only one for the job protects them from changes in the organisation and helps them keep their job.

One of the guidelines we got was to go on with "same procedure as every year" (reminiscent of the famous television sketch 'Dinner for one', 1948). Things should change as little as possible. Was it possible? No, because the new limits, barriers and constraints from the separation stop us from working as usual. The devil hides in details, or in this case new interfaces, and we will have more and more interfaces when the industry becomes more and more scattered.

The issue has been discussed in

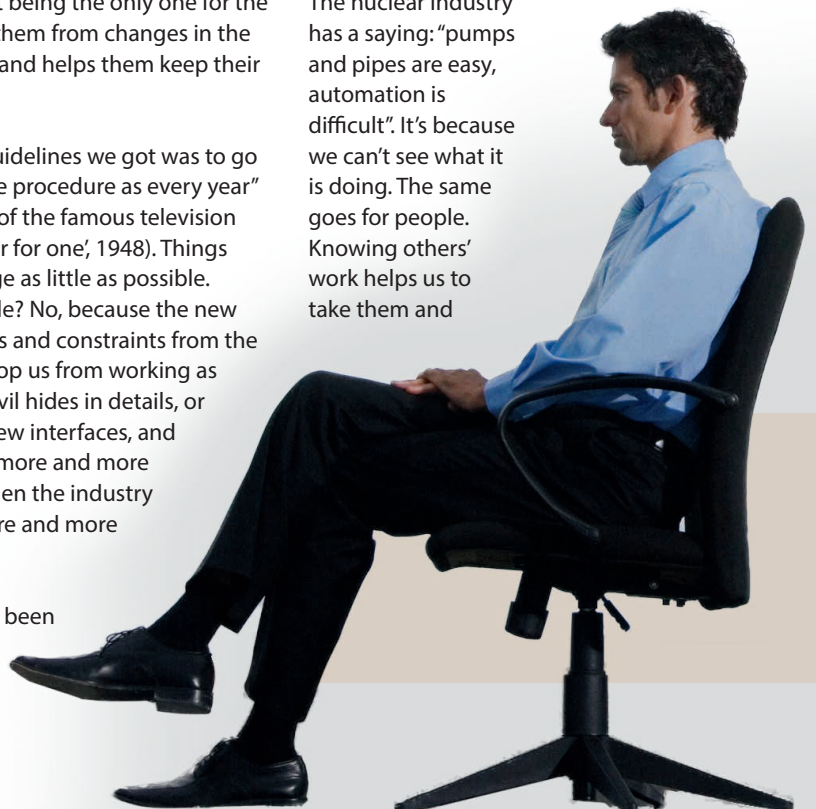
HindSight many times. People save the day when systems fail by adapting to surprises and variations. Scatter makes it difficult by hiding the information we need to adapt safely.

How can we cope with such an organisational change? Here I offer four suggestions. They do not necessarily form a sequence, but rather interact with each other.

1. Make work visible

Organisational change such as separation or reorganisation of functions can increase the gap between work-as-imagined and work-as-done (see HindSight 25). To narrow the gap, we need a clear view of each others' work. We can be visible to others and we can help them and us to learn from our work-as-done.

The nuclear industry has a saying: "pumps and pipes are easy, automation is difficult". It's because we can't see what it is doing. The same goes for people. Knowing others' work helps us to take them and



their work-as-done into account, and to adapt our work to theirs. If we don't know what others are doing and why they are doing it, it is harder to adapt as needed. Think about handing traffic over to next sector. The main principle is 'on the terms of the receiving unit'.

2. Build psychological safety and mutual trust

Transparency requires mutual trust, and an environment where it's safe to open up, safe to explore, safe to make mistakes, safe to learn and safe to let go of your own expectations – your own work-as-imagined. Otherwise we can't be open enough and we stick with 'work-as-disclosed' instead of being open about 'work-as-done'; also known as 'P.R. and Subterfuge' (Shorrock, 2016, 2017). And make it possible and safe for others, too. Building that trust takes time and effort, but it is essential. This is a requirement on all levels of the organisation, because barriers will be built the moment one loses trust. Trust and transparency suffer when it becomes 'them and us' in the new company or reorganisation, and suffer even more when there are hidden agendas that separate us.

3. Keep in touch

Trust fades away when people don't see each other as often as they used to and when people change positions.

Continuing 'business as usual' requires extra effort from everybody to keep in touch. When we were part of the



same in-group, in large scale, we had the trust, we had the talks, we had the visits.

In our case, now I know I could have done better. How do I know? It's the talks I don't have any more. The new organisational model takes time to develop and in the meantime it is too easy to just concentrate on my work, nothing extra. That 'extra' is about the interfaces with other departments, professions, organisations. If people have the opportunity and motivation to keep in touch with others, in a relaxed way, they will do that. Usually it is pleasant and brings balance to normal work. It's just that it can take a little push to accomplish that.

A few years ago, the Finnish MET service provision was reorganised. The Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) got to take care of all observations, aviation, maritime and road weather. It happened a little after an observation automation project at airports. We used to have local observers or meteorologists and, especially at smaller airports where everybody knew each other, we talked to one another. Controllers from tower could talk to observers about changes in weather. Now the organisations talk via letters and high-level meetings. Even though we were in different organisations – Finavia and FMI – everyday conversations developed the relationship between us.

4. Open up TRM


What can be done on an organisational level? One of the ways is to help people make sense of their and others' work. One of the tools is EUROCONTROL team resource management (TRM), implemented with mixed groups. It's not just talking, it's learning what the work of other's means for you, how you affect their work. It's a way to get a view from above.

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This helps to build patterns. The human brain is skilled at pattern recognition and we use just enough information to recognise the situation and then act accordingly to the pattern. But specialisation prevents us from recognising patterns, including the flow of work as a whole. It might surprise you to find out how others with different backgrounds can help you to think, to build the patterns to draw from when needed. When building a new company, reorganising or changing operations, an explicit understanding of patterns and the flow of work becomes even more important than during normal operations.

So what we need is to build a chain of collaboration through the whole flow or work – the whole chain – from start-up to arrival. TRM events between companies, often between controllers and pilots, have given good results for those participating. The next step is to spread the word, make work visible and build patterns in everybody's heads for future use. The more we know about each other, the easier it is to know what others need, and to adapt, to help each other and improve how the system as a whole works.

After a separation, reorganisation or change in operations, we need to put effort into collaboration. We all are a part of our customer's journey and we all want it to be a good one. We're in it together. 

References

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