

Dealing with the inevitable – managing organisational change

At a glance

“It was good to have MSI keeping us on track. Otherwise, the transition would have been much more difficult.”

Mission Director Steve Olive

Change is inevitable. In the international development sector, advancing technologies combined with geopolitical instability mean change seems to be occurring rapidly and seismically. In this environment, international development organisations must adapt quickly in order to thrive and remain competitive.

However, a well-established organisation, when faced with major change, cannot change direction quickly. It can even take a turn for the worse if its people – its most important asset – are not prepared or don't embrace the changes needed to adapt.

Change in the face of challenges

In 2014 the US Agency for International Development (USAID) faced its largest ever mission reorganisation.

Its mission for East Africa, Kenya and Somalia was faced with an unprecedented challenge. The Westgate Mall bombing triggered a security-driven drawdown of its international staff serving East Africa.

This meant that services previously performed by these staff needed to be transferred out of Kenya and taken up by missions in other countries such as Burundi and Djibouti. The reduction in US staff also implied a reconsideration of the employment of the local staff working with these programs, many of whom were treasured experts who had served the Mission for more than 10 years. Staff feared a major reduction in force was

coming and that everyone's job would be impacted in some way.

Mission leadership needed to understand their options and to get through the change while still managing their programs.

USAID turned to Coffey's Americas operation MSI to lead its change management and strategic communications and help transform its entire structure – so that units from each country were integrated, shared information and contributed to collaborative decision-making.

Manage organisational change, don't let change manage you

By combining the processes, tools and techniques to manage change, an organisation can achieve its goals by helping its people get through the transition.

Productivity invariably decreases when major changes occur. However, change management can help an organisation avoid any dramatic dips in productivity, return quickly to equilibrium, and reach the targeted level of organisational performance.

Transformational change requires a strong team that can work together effectively to achieving an organisation's goals. This means you have to know who you're working with during a period of transformation. Assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® and INSIGHT Inventory® can help when interpersonal understanding is key to team effectiveness.

Ultimately, a well functioning team helps you navigate the change and get back to work quickly.

Four-phased strategic approach

An integrated, customisable, four-phased strategic approach can help get people ready, willing and able to implement and sustain change.

In the first phase, baseline data is used to determine *which* staff need to be brought into the change process and how best to do that, to meet staff needs and address potential resistance to change. Performance data is also gathered so organisations can see how their performance improves over the transition.

In the design phase, the organisation's vision is translated into structures and processes to enable an organisation to achieve its goals effectively. This charts a course to building a workforce structure to meet current demands and future challenges. Activities during this phase include organisational design, business process re-engineering and workforce planning.

Importantly, organisations are supported during the implementation phase, often the most difficult stage of change. This includes navigating local and international labour laws and guidelines so that organisations understand the implications of each possible choice and financial and legal obligations. Human resource services, including position description development, training needs analysis, staff care, job transition and recruiting support the implementation.

The final phase is when these new teams, processes and ways of working come together in fresh and

positive ways. Teams are engaged in building and training, and leaders and managers are coached to support and engage staff effectively, helping their own teams to become ready, willing and able to perform in the new environment.

Achieving better outcomes through change

In the case of USAID, MSI adopted this approach to support the mission through its reorganisation.

It engaged in personality testing to help new team members understand one another better and to help teams coalesce.

With its reorganisation complete, newly formed teams throughout the mission are working together in significantly better ways. They are communicating more effectively, optimising meetings and making better use of each team member's unique talents and background, all of which leads to improved mission performance.

Get the right advice from the start

The USAID experience highlights the value of effective change management services throughout the change process.

Timing is key, and to see the best results, we suggest bringing in change management specialists when a change is in sight. The benefit is clear: change management results in getting people back working and performing better, sooner.