



# General Assembly

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Agenda item 141  
**Joint Inspection Unit**

## **Review of change management in United Nations system organizations**

### **Note by the Secretary-General**

#### **Addendum**

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled “Review of change management in United Nations system organizations” ([JIU/REP/2019/4](#)).



*Summary*

In its report entitled “Review of change management in United Nations system organizations” ([JIU/REP/2019/4](#)), the Joint Inspection Unit looks at the role and practice of change management in organizational reforms across the United Nations system over the past decade.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of input provided by organizations that are members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and partially supported its conclusions.

## I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled “Review of change management in United Nations system organizations” ([JIU/REP/2019/4](#)), the Joint Inspection Unit looks at the role and practice of change management in organizational reforms across the United Nations system over the past decade. In the report, the Unit examines what change management is, whether it is an important factor in achieving successful reform outcomes and how it has been applied across United Nations system organizations. Drawing on data related to change management practices from 47 organizational reforms carried out across 26 United Nations system organizations between 2010 and 2018, the report provides evidence, lessons and recommendations to guide United Nations system organizations in ongoing and forthcoming reforms.

## II. General comments

2. The organizations of the United Nations system welcomed the report and its findings and the opportunity it provided to review and learn from good practices in change management across the United Nations system.

3. The organizations found the report relevant, as change management played an integral role in ensuring the success of reform initiatives and large-scale organizational changes.

4. The organizations acknowledged that the tone set from the top was critical in fostering change. Increasing managerial attention to change management, ensuring dedicated resources, and improving standardized tools and methodologies to that end were all important elements in improving the adaptability and effectiveness of reform and transformation efforts across the United Nations system.

5. The organizations further recognized that staff at all levels were an integral part of any reform journey, and underscored the importance of engaging with them, as staff were drivers of results.

6. Change management approaches were most successful when dynamically tailored within a specific context over a period of time. Many organizations emphasized the essential role that change management played within broader organizational change and transformation efforts and noted that any mandatory reporting to their governing bodies should occur without the risk of compromising the dynamic and critical aspects of change management.

7. The Secretariat noted that the report served as an important resource for ongoing efforts to develop a robust knowledge management system to support change management, as detailed in the report of the Secretary-General on shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: implementing a new management architecture for improved effectiveness and strengthened accountability ([A/72/492/Add.2](#)).

8. The organizations noted that they would have further benefited from a deeper analysis of enabling factors, such as post and salary structures, and internal performance management structures at the United Nations and at other international or multinational entities.

9. The organizations partially supported the proposed recommendations.

### III. Comments on specific recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

**Governing/legislative bodies are encouraged to ensure that executive heads embed change management approaches and methods in their organizational reforms and report on the results.**

10. The organizations noted that the recommendation was addressed to the legislative and governing bodies.

11. Several organizations stated that they were already implementing the proposed approach, while others observed that change management depended more on the commitment of the governing bodies and senior management than on the incorporation of approaches and dedicated change management resources. A few other organizations noted that the proposed mandated reporting might limit the latitude of management to constantly adapt its change management approach.

#### Recommendation 2

**Executive heads should embed structured and comprehensive change management approaches in their ongoing and future organizational reforms and report thereon to their governing/legislative bodies.**

12. The organizations supported the recommendation, underscoring that executive heads ought to retain the latitude to decide, in consultation with their governing bodies, how such change management approaches were reported. Some organizations confirmed that that was already being done.

#### Recommendation 3

**Executive heads, through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should support the development and standardization of organizational staff surveys across the United Nations system.**

13. The organizations underscored that each of them enjoyed different mandates, rules, regulations and funding constraints, among other things, and that, in order to support the proposed recommendation, a more explicit reference to specific types of surveys would have been preferable.

14. While many organizations agreed that common standards could enhance comparability, others referred to recurrent efforts in the area, showing that the success of such efforts was linked to the organizations' ability to customize the surveys on the basis of specific issues over time.

15. While some standardization helped in tracking trends over time, many organizations observed that system-wide standardization risked reducing the ability of executive heads to generate the specific data needed in specific circumstances.

#### Recommendation 4

**Executive heads should ensure that resources allocated to change management are clearly earmarked and the intended results are measured, tracked and evaluated.**

16. The organizations partially supported the recommendation. While the majority favoured the proposed text as it related to measuring, tracking and evaluating change management, others expressed concern about the earmarking of resources for change management, as such earmarking could vary on the basis of the governance structure of each entity.

17. Some organizations stated that change management was an integral part of projects and initiatives, and that project budgets included resources for change management activities and therefore could not and should not be separated from the substantive implementation of business or organizational changes.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**Executive heads should give greater prominence to the role that their strategic human resources management functions play in organizational change management. This would include promoting changes in individual attitudes and behaviours, establishing mechanisms to reinforce these, and creating channels to communicate feedback across all personnel.**

18. The organizations supported the recommendation. They considered that, in order to build a more flexible and adaptable United Nations system, human resources functions needed to be strategic, rather than transactional, and focused on asset management. To that end, further investment in human resources was required, including to build change management expertise into that function for the purposes outlined in the recommendation.

19. Some organizations noted that change management initiatives were not only of a reorganizational nature but were also often linked to programme and operational activities; they therefore required appropriate coordination and synergies among change management initiatives.

20. Lastly, other organizations underscored that, given the diverse nature of organizational reforms and the different operating model of each organization, organizations should customize the positioning of change management expertise within themselves as per their requirements.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**Executive heads should include an item on the agenda of the next meeting of the High-level Committee on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to consider how to support the United Nations Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge to play a greater role in United Nations system reforms.**

21. The organizations partially supported the recommendation. While, on the one hand, they recognized that many of them faced common challenges and would benefit from a common body of change management practice and expertise, they considered that the report did not fully elaborate on the costs and benefits of the recommendation and noted that further experience and evidence of the impact of the United Nations Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge change model was needed before they could endorse such a role.

22. They further observed that the reform needs of each organization differed, as such needs were based on the expectations of the governing bodies, and that the reforms should be guided by their constituencies and should take into consideration other organizations' experience accumulated and distributed by the Joint Inspection Unit, as was currently the practice.