

Sixth Meeting of Working Group III – 29 April 2008

Organizational Culture and Culture Change

1. In its discussions on 18 and 30 January and 7 March) it is recalled that the Working Group III acknowledged that culture change was a long-term process and that there should be a more participatory culture and improved communication in FAO both horizontally and vertically. The WG considered that change was a responsibility of management and should be led from the top and that an internal WG with wide participation would make a useful contribution.
2. The Senior Management Meeting (SMM) considered the topic of culture change during nine of its meetings since January 2008, and the Joint Advisory Committee on FAO Reform (JAC/FAR)¹ during six of its meetings held in February, March and April of 2008, reflecting the importance attached to this challenge. In both fora there were detailed discussions on the mechanism recommended by the IEE for culture change i.e. the establishment of a special internal working group, the person leading it as well as the possible appointment of a facilitator/specialist in culture change.
3. During the initial discussions in JAC/FAR on 12 and 28 February, the staff representatives tentatively expressed a preference for the existing JAC/FAR to lead the overall programme of culture change.
4. Having considered the complexity of the issue, the SMM as well as JAC/FAR as well as WG III considered that before deciding on the appropriate instrument it was essential to engage an expert on culture change to advise on the best mechanism for an internally-led development of an overall programme of culture change.
5. The Geneva-based consultancy, MANNET, which has carried out organizational development programmes for several multi-lateral organizations, was requested by FAO to advise on the approach to the IEE recommendations on organizational cultural change, with particular reference to the mechanism and action plans. The consultancy was also requested to address wider aspects of culture change and provide information on best practice and the approach taken by other UN system organizations.
6. The attached executive summary of the consultant's outlines a broad approach to the challenge of transforming the culture and argues that culture change must be driven by a shared vision of the Organization and proposes internal arrangements for culture change, some immediate initiatives and an action plan. The paper has been reviewed by the SMM and JAC/FAR.
7. The SMM agrees with all of the recommendations made in the paper and in particular, supports the development of an integrated internal change process; the establishment of a change team as well as its suggested role and composition and leadership.

¹ The JAC/FAR is a joint advisory body comprising management and representatives of the FAO staff bodies – namely Union of General Service Staff (UGSS), Association of Professional Staff (APS), and Field Staff Association (FSA).

8. Both the SMM and JAC/FAR agreed with the consultant's advice that there should be a considerable investment in the change process and that the Organization must ensure adequate funding starting with the arrangements of the Change Team but envisaging also the necessary costs for implementing major change initiatives. This will be necessary to bring about change that will lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency.

9. The Working Group's views would be appreciated on the proposed establishment of a Change Team and its role, as well as on the integrated change process and its funding.

Quick impact wins underway to evolve the culture

In addition to the deliberations on culture change mentioned above, the Organization has taken some Early Actions which are closely associated with promoting an evolving culture within the Organization. These initiatives include:

- the creation of an HR newsletter and the design of an internal website, which is under construction, for the dissemination of information about the Organization, its staff, new initiatives, etc.
- the widespread distribution of minutes of Senior Management Meetings to keep staff informed of developments and issues discussed by Senior Management.
- the delegation of several approval authorities, including several that were previously held by the Director-General. These include the selection of professional staff, the extension of fixed-term contracts, and the approval of honoraria of consultants above established thresholds.
- the willingness of senior management, including the Deputy Director-General to enter into a 360 degree performance evaluation process as part of the piloted Performance Evaluation System (PEMS).
- removal of the security surrounding the Director-General's movements when he is in HQ building, and posting of the Director-General's activities.