

BRUNCH
“The UN and change: making a difference from the inside out”
September 2005

The speaker, a change management specialist at the UN, noted that there was a growing shift to the rights of public stakeholders and the issue of accountability of organizations. He proposed that the approach of organisations in making changes needed to include the establishment of a mandate, identification of where the organization wanted to go, creation of a mission statement, and then the development of a strategic plan in the form of a logical framework broken down from the organizational to the individual level. Key to organizational change was ownership of that change by a critical mass of persons, as well as leadership and commitment. He stressed that accountability in the UN was weak and that staff appraisal should focus on ongoing year-long assessments rather than at the end of the year, and with the possibility for appraisal of supervisors. In concluding, he posed the question of how to approach individual cultures of persons coming to work for the UN, and also which was more important – honesty or loyalty?

The following were the main points raised in the follow-up Wisdom at Work discussion:

- There was general agreement among the group that at the UN workplace organisational values should be clearly defined and take precedence over individual or cultural values
- It was important to measure intangibles, in addition to technical skills, in staff recruitment and appraisal processes which would ensure that staff motivation and character were consonant with the organisation’s values. One possibility in this respect was the use of weighted systems in line with the UN identified competencies, and questions developed by labour psychologists.
- In bridging the gap from the current situation to one of accountability, it may be helpful to review “stories” of best experiences in this regard, and reference was made to “appreciative enquiry” approaches. General principles which worked included good communication with management, including practices such as monthly lunches among staff, as well as increasing use of language which was closer to the values such as peace and fellowship promoted by the UN.
- Living with integrity was a challenge for a number of reasons, including job insecurity, complacent managers and manipulative politics, and made it all the more necessary to work together with others for support and effectiveness. It was possible for UN staff to make their concerns known however, and possibly approach donors with an initiative for relevant capacity building of management, incorporating UN “conditionalities”.