Change Agent Networks in the UN System

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The UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK) is an initiative of UNSSC devoted to organizational change and transformation. It is managed by the UNSSC Knowledge Centre for Leadership and Management. For further information and to download the case studies, please visit: www.unssc.org, or contact:

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Executive Summary

This report explores the ways in which five different UN entities are developing and using change agent networks as a mechanism for both engaging staff in change and increasing the likelihood of change being successful.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach on the set-up and use of change agents and change agent networks. Each entity has built, evolved and uses change agent networks in different ways. This report explores the differences, highlights the similarities and draws out the lessons learned in setting up, developing, sustaining and using change agent networks in the UN system. For all those wondering where to start in setting up a change agent network, a clear scope, and a clear-enough purpose are both essential. 'Clear-enough', because the real purpose may only emerge over time. There are operational considerations such as network structure and budget to pay attention to, and as with any other change, securing senior level engagement at this early stage is vital.

The next phase is about building the network, defining the change agent role, clarifying the capabilities of change agents, and attracting and recruiting staff as members of the network. The case study found that change agents have multiple roles, as initiators of change, fixers, facilitators, community builders, coaches, mentors and communicators. The most important capabilities of change agents are an openness towards change, good relational skills and an effective use of self as a change agent. Processes for the recruitment of change agents vary, from targeting named individuals to an open invitation extended to all staff; whatever process is chosen, transparency is essential to perceptions of legitimacy and trust in the network. Building the capabilities of change agents is critical at every stage, providing both formal and informal learning and development on topics such as how change happens, and use of self in enabling change.

The third phase is about sustaining the network. Securing the support of line managers is critical; line managers can act as enablers or as barriers to the work of individual change agents and the change agent network as a whole. Communicating directly with line managers from the outset, giving them some say over the release of staff from their teams to join the change agent network, and providing evidence of the 'what's in it for me' for managers are all essential practices. All change agent networks have a culture, whether intentional and explicit or not, which shapes its work, effectiveness and sustainability. Change agent networks represent an opportunity to experiment with group culture and innovative working practices such as self-organisation and alternatives to hierarchical decision-making.

The range of activities undertaken by change agent networks in the UN system is significant. Whether it's supporting the introduction of new technology-enabled ways of working, facilitating communication between staff and leadership in the development of a new department, conducting a survey, crowd-sourcing feedback, or strengthening the UN's COVID-19 response, it's clear that the change agent networks play an important role not just in engaging staff in change, but in defining and shaping the nature of change itself.

Change agent networks are typically established in contexts of disruption and change, so there is a lot about networks – including their purpose, role, activities, and impact – that are emergent, dynamic, and evolving. That said, the report concludes with 14 distinct steps that we hope will be useful to anyone contemplating setting up a change agent network in the UN system.

Introduction

There is plenty of evidence that engaging staff in change makes successful change more likely. Programmes that encourage employees to take the initiative and contribute to change have five times the success rate of those with a 'purely top-down thrust' (McKinsey & Company, 2011)[1] .

This report explores the ways in which UN entities are developing and using change agent networks as a mechanism for engaging staff in change and increasing the likelihood of the change being successful. Over the past five years, the UN System Staff College (UNSSC), thanks to its UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK)[2], has noted the increasing use of change agents and change agent networks across the UN system, and with good reason. A recent report on change management in the UN found that the presence of change agents 'dramatically improved the depth with which change management was embedded' and reforms that use change agents are 'twice as likely to have good depth across the critical areas of change management' (Joint Inspection Unit, 2019). The report concluded that 'all United Nations system organisations should consider identifying and using change agents across their reforms'.

The aim of this case study is to share the experiences and learning from five different UN entities United Nations Department of Operational Support (DOS) in the UN Secretariat, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), World Food Programme (WFP) and Young UN: Agents for Change (Young UN)) about what works, and what doesn't, in the use of change agents and change agent networks in enabling change.[3] The insights in this report come directly from the experience and perspective of staff at the front-line of setting up and sustaining change agent networks in these five entities.

The report itself has five main sections.

Section 1, Getting the Basics in Place, looks at the set-up of a change agent network, starting with fundamentals such as network scope and purpose, senior-level sponsorship, network structure and budget.

Section 2, Building the Network, focuses on the recruitment of change agents, their roles and the capabilities required for change agents to be effective.

Section 3, Sustaining the Network, explores the factors that contribute to network sustainability, and how to decide when it's time to draw the network to a close.

Section 4 digs deeper into each of the five entity networks in practice, describing their work and highlighting different approaches taken in enabling change.

Section 5 concludes the report by drawing out some of the main learning points across all five entities on the key steps in using change agents and change agent networks to support change. What's clear from this case study is that there really is no one-size-fits-all approach, but we hope that both the similarities and the differences in approach between the different entities will be useful input for anyone in the UN system contemplating setting up a change agent network in support of project, entity or system-wide change.

Finally, a note on definitions. In this report we use the term 'change agent' (also sometimes referred to as a change champion, change leader or change ambassador) to describe someone who is purposefully engaged in enabling change, in relation to a single project, an entire entity, or indeed the whole of the UN system. We use the term 'change agent network' to describe an intentional coming-together of change agents with a shared purpose and sense of engagement in change.

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[1] See References for further details

[2] The UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK) is part of the UNSSC Knowledge Centre for Leadership and Management at the UN System Staff College. It was created in 2016 to promote a culture of change and innovation across the UN system.

[3] See Appendix for details of how UNSSC worked with the five entities in gathering the material for this report.
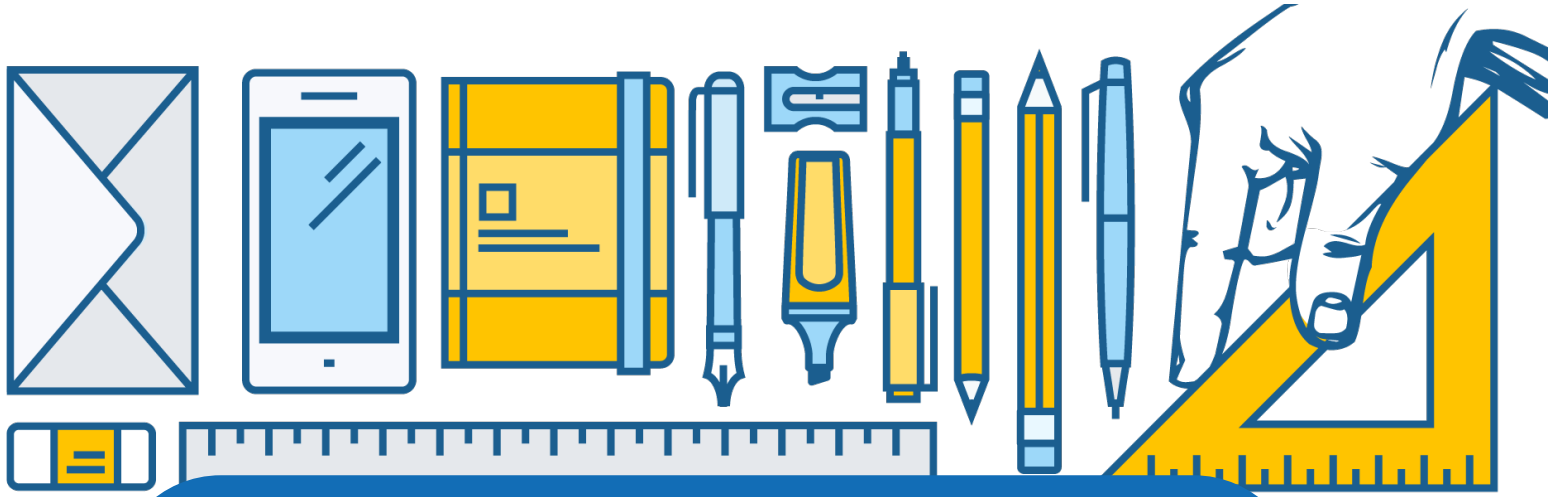
1. Getting the basics in place

We begin this report by looking at two fundamental steps in setting up a change agent network – clarifying the scope and purpose of the network, and securing senior sponsorship and engagement. We also look at two further significant considerations at this early stage – network structure and budget.

1.1 CLARIFYING SCOPE AND PURPOSE

One of the first points to address in setting up a change agent network is its scope and purpose. By scope we mean the type of change that the network is intended to support; by purpose we mean the primary reason for which a network is being set up. Getting clear about scope and purpose at this early stage provides a solid foundation on which to build the network for the future.

The case study found that change agent networks are being used in the UN to support three different types of organisational change:

• **Project-specific change.** UNOPS and WFP use change agent networks to support internal clients with specific change projects. As an example, UNOPS set up a change agent network specifically to support the work of an internal team seeking to improve health and safety on construction sites.

• **Entity-wide change.** DOS and OCHA used change agent networks to support whole-organisation change, encompassing restructuring, budget cuts, efficiency targets and new ways of working. The DOS network was set up to support the establishment of the new department as part of the UN's management reforms. The OCHA network was established to support an entity-wide functional review.

• **System-wide change.** The Young UN network was set up to support system-wide change, seeking to shift mindsets and behaviours across the UN as a whole.

As well as getting clear about the type of change the network is intended to support, it's also important to define at the outset the intended purpose – or purposes (there are likely to be more than one) - of the network. We found that change agent networks are being set up with one or more of the following five purposes in mind:

• **To support organisational performance** and help deliver on broader organisational goals and purpose. All of the change agent networks in this case study have this as one of their objectives, linking the work they do to improve organisational performance.

• **To develop ideas and offer solutions** in support of change. Again, all of the change agent networks have this as one of their core purposes. The aim of the UNOPS and WFP networks is to develop ideas and offer solutions to internal clients on specific change projects. The DOS network was established to both solicit and generate ideas from staff - and from within the change agent network itself - in support of the establishment of

the new department. Young UN was set up to crowdsource ideas for change bottom-up from its members (based in UN entities in more than 80 countries), pilot new approaches and bring these to the attention of senior decision-makers. Their philosophy is to not only advocate for change but also create the change its members want to see in the UN.

• **To enable two-way dialogue** about change between staff and senior leadership. Young UN aims to be in ongoing dialogue with senior leadership on a wide range of issues relating to policy, practice and culture from the future of work, ethics of Artificial Intelligence or corporate environmental sustainability to

sustainable pensions investments. The DOS and OCHA networks were established to facilitate dialogue about change between staff and senior leadership. In both cases the network acted as a two-way intermediary, distributing communications from leadership to staff, gathering and interpreting staff feedback (particularly from "silent voices"[4] in HQ or the field), and sharing the feedback with senior leadership, as input into future leadership decision-making and behaviour (Figure 1).

START — Communication **issued** from senior leadership

END — Inputs incorporated into future thinking and practice

Staff inputs shared with senior leadership

STAFF

Distributed by change agent network to staff

Staff responses and other **inputs gathered** by change agent network

Sense-making of staff **inputs** by the change agent network

Figure 1: Change agent networks as two-way intermediaries

• To be available as a **focal point for staff** on the change. This means network members operating in both formal and ad hoc contexts share information and progress on the change with staff on a one-to-one or group basis, gather stories from staff about how the change is being received, listen to staff concerns, address anxieties, provide reassurance, or redirect queries that were unanswerable or outside the scope of their role.

• To **support the implementation** of change. Not all change agent networks are involved in implementing change, although for some change agents the boundaries between

supporting change (as a change agent) and implementing change (in their day jobs as managers for instance) are fuzzy. The change agent network in OCHA was involved in both the conceptualisation of entity-wide change and the roll-out of those changes, and change agents in UNOPS are often involved in both identifying and implementing solutions for their internal clients. The change agent network in DOS was actively involved in the implementation of management reforms from the outset. And Young UN is both focused on ideas-generation as well as running pilots to test initiatives.

[4] Double quotation marks indicate quotes from case study interviewees

Figure 2: The five main purposes of change agent networks

NETWORK PURPOSE

The DOS change agent network defined its purpose as 'helping facilitate implementation of change through support to staff and communications'. This approach intended to:

- Help create understanding and ownership of the change across all staff in the new department
- Identify concerns within the department and develop solutions that are in line with the expectations of all staff
- Form a two-way communication channel between staff and the implementation project and department management, providing key messages that resonate and cascade in all directions throughout the new department 'CITATION com18 \l 2057 (DOS, 28 October 2018).

Young UN defines its purpose as 'Working towards a shared vision of a UN that fully embodies the principles it stands for'.

Figure 3: How networks define their purpose

There are two potential pitfalls to be aware of as you define the purpose of the network.

1. Don't assume that there is a shared understanding amongst stakeholders about the purpose of the network - even when its purpose on paper seems clear. Despite both DOS and Young UN networks having a clear set of intentions as described above, several change agents in both networks described feeling confused about its aims and objectives in the early days. The DOS network spent around 30% of its set-up time exploring questions of purpose, and continued to revisit what it should 'stop-start-continue doing' on a regular basis.

2.   Pay attention to the boundaries of the network. In DOS, ambiguity around boundaries sometimes meant change agents were asked for advice on issues more appropriately dealt with by staff representatives, such as the future of roles, terms and conditions. In OCHA there was some confusion between the role of the change agent network and that of managers in communicating about change.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Be clear about the intended purpose of the network at the outset, whilst accepting that clarity over the actual purpose often emerges over time. Revisiting questions of purpose on a regular basis helps minimise ambiguity.

- Invest time in articulating the purpose of the network with network members and other stakeholders at the outset and ongoing.

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1.2 SECURING SENIOR SPONSORSHIP

Senior leaders play a vital role in the set-up and sustainability of change agent networks. Securing senior sponsorship for the network from the beginning is crucial to its functioning and to its effectiveness in enabling change.

• In both DOS and OCHA senior leaders were instrumental in establishing the change agent networks. Both networks were initiated "top-down" by leadership as one of a series of mechanisms to support significant structural and cultural reform. Following the set-up, senior leadership continued to meet regularly with network members to share updates on the change process, hear feedback about staff concerns, engage in dialogue about solutions and collectively work to define the way forward. In OCHA, the change agent network met face-to-face with the Under-Secretary General (USG) and other senior leaders regularly over a 12-month period, in addition to attending two two-day joint retreats for leadership and members of the change agent network. In DOS, the change agent network met at least monthly with the senior leadership team for about a year.

• Young UN was not initiated by senior leadership in the same way. It was established 'bottom-up' by staff, who were motivated and inspired to initiate change that would help achieve the vision of a UN that "fully embodies the principles it stands for." But here too senior leaders have had an important role to play in providing system-wide sponsorship, support and a platform for the network. As one Young UN member described it, "[We have] no mandate, but we do have purpose, mission, vision. Our legitimacy comes from the fact that at the beginning we went to the very top", directly approaching the Secretary General and offering to work with him as change agents in the new management reforms.

• In UNOPS it's a different picture again. Senior leadership did not initiate the establishment of the change agent network but instead act as 'change sponsors', communicating the big picture vision and benefits of change and providing advice and input on the prioritisation of internal change projects.

One significant insight from the case study is the importance of investing time and energy in developing an effective working relationship between senior leadership and the change agent network both during set-up and throughout.

There may be anxieties and concerns on both sides. Not all senior leaders understand or are supportive of change agent networks, and some may be concerned about the network role, scope and purpose, or unclear about how to work most effectively with the network. On the other side, network members may require support to feel empowered to speak as equals with senior leadership, particularly where the context of the network is hierarchical.

So how did the entities in this case study build an effective working relationship with leaders? Here are two examples:

• They focused on common interests. Young UN's ethos is positive and solutions-focused, and they approach senior leadership with the same mindset, not just bringing problems but also offering ideas for the way forward. They adopt an empathetic approach to leadership, building alliances over a common interest in change, recognising that, as one Young UN member described it, "a lot of senior management have been trying to drive change for years."

• They created ground rules for working together. The DOS network worked with the senior leadership to co-create ground rules for working together, a process facilitated by the DOS network coordinator. One change agent described how at the first meeting between the change agent network and the senior leadership team "it didn't feel like a team of equals, it felt formal and rigid." Recognising that this formality could threaten the quality of the dialogue with senior leadership, the DOS network coordinator helped the group come up with some ground rules – "things like 'everyone put away their phones" and "use first names not titles like Mr." These small shifts made a significant difference to the relationship – as the change agent described it "meant I could have a conversation with senior people and add in my own ideas, not just feel I had to agree with what they said."

One potential pitfall to be aware of is how the relationship between the change agent network and senior leadership is perceived by staff. There's a risk that staff interpret a close relationship with senior leadership as the network becoming the "mouthpiece of management" or management "spies", which would undermine trust in its role and purpose.

LESSONS LEARNED

• **Securing the sponsorship of senior leaders is critical to the success and sustainability of any change agent network. Without senior sponsorship, the effectiveness and impact of the network will be limited.**

• **"Breaking the ice on the hierarchy" between members of the change agent network and senior leaders doesn't happen easily but it's transformative when it does. Don't be tempted to shortcut or sidestep the time and energy required to build a meaningful working relationship**

between senior leadership and network members.

• **Continue regular check-ins with senior leadership to ensure the relationship remains close and aligned on intentions and objectives post set-up.**

• **Communicate clearly with staff about the nature of the relationship between the change agent network and senior leadership to prevent misinterpretation and distrust.**

1.3 NETWORK STRUCTURE

In addition to scope, purpose and leadership sponsorship, it's important to think about the structure of the network as it's being set up. By this we mean the way the work of the network is to be coordinated and led, and network size and composition.

One feature that all the networks have in common is someone who leads or coordinates its work, but there are significant differences in how the leadership and coordination roles work in practice.

The DOS and Young UN networks are both supported by individuals who describe their role as that of network "enabler" or "facilitator". In

both cases the skills, experience and interests of the coordinators significantly shaped the direction and approach of each of the networks.

• The network facilitator in DOS was a temporary position reporting initially to the Project Implementation Team for the reforms, and subsequently to the Office of the USG in New York. The facilitator was recruited externally and brought to the role experience in organisational development, systemic change, and group dynamics. The network itself was set up as one of three staff groups overseen by a Project Implementation Team supporting the establishment of the new department (see Figure 4 below).
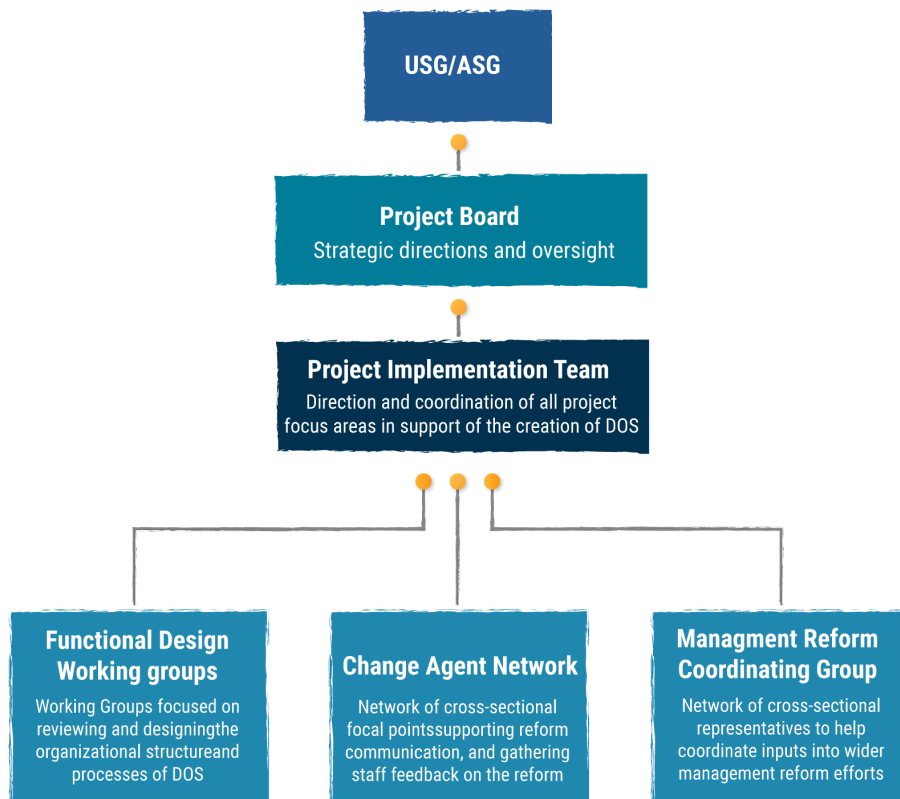

Figure 4: Change agent network within the organizational structure of DOS

• During its early years, Young UN operated without any dedicated staff capacity, but its size, complexity and the number of change projects it is engaged in all pointed towards the need for some sort of enabling role to help the network become more impactful and sustainable. The network enabler in Young UN is one of its founder members and brings to the role significant on-the-job experience of enabling and empowering change. It is a temporary position, funded in 2019 by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) as a 50% role, with the remaining 50% of the role closely connected and co-funded in 2020 as a full-time position by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNOG and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), located in Geneva.

• The network in OCHA had a more traditional coordination structure, where the change agent network was coordinated by the Director of the Change Unit who also led a dedicated team of change professionals working alongside in support of the functional review. The networks at UNOPS – on the other hand - are organised in both formal and more ad hoc ways. They are set up and coordinated on a project basis by the change management team in the entity's People and Culture Group; each project team has a designated project lead. At the same time, there is a permanent network of more senior, permanent change advisers. The change agent networks are comprised of change agents (project-specific and general), change advisers and change sponsors. Figure 5 below describes this structure in more detail:

UNOPS CHANGE AGENT STRUCTURE

• **Change Sponsors.** UNOPS Senior Executives leading business transformation initiatives, skilled in defining vision, communicating the change and realising the benefits for the organisation. Change Management is an integral skill to their leadership role.

• **Change Advisors.** A UNOPS network of key personnel in mid-to-senior, influential positions, sharing good change management practices and experience, contributing to the development of UNOPS Change Capability and areas of focus, performing expert roles in change engagements.

• **Change Agents (General).** A permanent network of UNOPS 'influencers', with a semi-formal Champion role, familiar with key change management techniques and practices, responsible for advising internal change projects, sharing good practice and forming the grass roots level of the change management capability.

• **Change Agents (Project).** Time-limited UNOPS project Champions, tasked with supporting change management initiatives through the duration of the project or initiative. Project Agents may be part of the General Change Agent pool or their Change Management role may be limited to the project life-span.
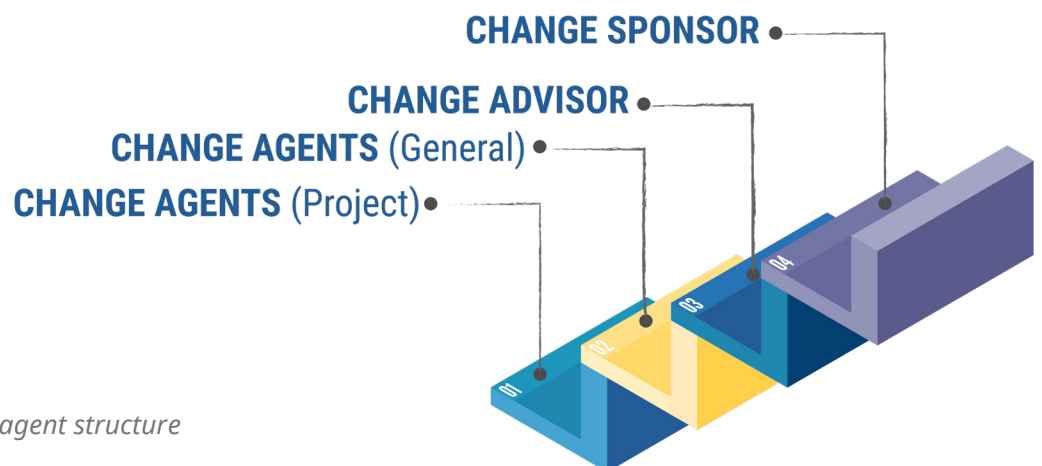

CHANGE SPONSOR

CHANGE ADVISOR

CHANGE AGENTS (General)

CHANGE AGENTS (Project)

Figure 5: UNOPS change agent structure

The work of change agent networks is typically structured according to workstreams. The change agent network in DOS worked with the senior leadership team to identify four areas of collaboration. These were: organisational values, workplace policies, learning and staff/ management dialogue. Young UN has a flat global networked project-driven and action-focused structure, operating "like a messy room" along the lines of projects (system-wide), hubs (geographically located) and partnerships (with other stakeholders in the UN system).

As a guideline on network size, the DOS and OCHA networks, both set up to support entity-wide change, had around 30 to 35 members. Project-specific networks in UNOPS typically comprise around 20 people. In all three cases members of the network were drawn from a single entity. Young UN by contrast draws its membership from across the UN system and has around 1900 members (and growing).

In terms of network composition, all change agent networks typically include members from across the grades. The DOS network membership was drawn from all grades from General Service, Trades and Craft to those in P5 roles, and project-specific change agent networks in UNOPS include senior executives as project sponsors as well as change agents from across the grades. The OCHA network included staff from across all grades and duty stations, and

Young UN welcomes members from across the grades but typically attracts members who are relatively new to the UN who are more likely to be in non-managerial or more junior management positions.

Most change agent networks operate with matrix reporting systems. Members of the DOS, OCHA and Young UN change agent networks maintain their formal reporting lines to their manager for their day jobs, and report informally to – and are accountable to - each other for their work as change agents. UNOPS change agent networks, which support internal clients on specific projects, have a more formal system of reporting and accountability to the project lead for the duration of the project, with reporting lines reverting to their manager once the project is concluded.

LESSONS LEARNED

• The effectiveness of change agent networks is significantly helped by having someone whose day job it is to enable and coordinate its work. As one change agent in DOS explained, "having a facilitator made a huge difference. Most of us didn't know what we were doing when we started off."

• It is critical to consider and clarify reporting lines – for the change agent network as a whole, and for its members – as the network is being set up, to avoid confusion over accountability further down the line.

1.4 NETWORK BUDGET

The evidence from this case study suggests that change agent networks operate with very limited budgets. However, setting up and sustaining a change agent network does have a number of budget and resourcing implications and it's important to address how these will be covered. The most significant network spends are:

• **Salary costs for network facilitators.** As described above, two of the networks have a dedicated network facilitator (Young UN and DOS). The Young UN facilitator is a full-time position since 2020; the DOS facilitator spent around 30% of the week working with the change agent network.

• **Staff time.** Change agent network members are volunteers, who take on the role of change agent over and above their day jobs. Their time – which equates to between 10 and 50% of the working week – is given either formally ("bought" on the basis of an estimated number of client projects per year, as in UNOPS) or informally (with no

formal agreement on the number of hours committed). The volunteer model works well in general, but it does come with challenges, in particular the varying levels of activity between members, and the risk that volunteer work comes second to the demands of the day job.

• **Learning and development.** A dedicated budget will be needed to support the building of network capability and learning and development for change agents. Depending on the extent of capability building this may be the most significant network spend; most of the network budget for DOS for instance went on learning and development. For Young UN, the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at UNOG provided financial support and guidance to pilot a 'Changemakers of the UN' 3-day programme in 2019; the programme is also offered to other colleagues looking to drive change in the UN and beyond.

- **Technology support.** There are likely to be technology costs associated with the functioning of a change agent network, for instance in setting up and maintaining remote communications systems and on-line peer-to-peer exchange forums. Young UN's monthly subscription to Zoom is paid by one of the core members out of their own pocket.

- **Travel**. There are also likely to be travel costs associated with a change agent network, for instance in bringing members together for learning and development or dialogue. In UNOPS internal clients are responsible for covering the travel costs of project-specific change agent networks. Young UN seeks to minimise climate impact and travel costs with geographical proximity to the location of the meeting, a key factor in Young UN's selection process to nominate representatives to participate in meetings and events on behalf of the network.

LESSONS LEARNED

- There are resourcing implications in setting up a change agent network. The biggest resource required is staff time, but dedicated budget is also needed for change agent learning and development.

- Change projects should set aside budget or time for the involvement of change agents and change agent networks, but do not routinely do so at present.

2. Building the Network

In this section we look at some of the key steps in creating the network itself. We start with the recruitment of change agents to the network. We describe the kinds of capabilities to look out for in recruiting change agents, and at the different approaches taken to the process of recruitment. We explore the role of a change agent – what does it mean to be a change agent in practice? Finally, we delve into approaches to building network capability, and at the learning and development of change agents.

2.1 WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN CHANGE AGENTS

What are the capabilities to look out for as you consider the recruitment of staff to the change agent network? The literature describes a huge array of skills, behaviours, knowledge, characteristics required for effective change agents. Drawing on insights from this as well as from the five entities suggests there are seven essential capabilities to recruit for. These are:

1. A positive mindset or openness towards change. This was frequency cited as the most important characteristic of effective change agents: a 'can-do' attitude, an understanding of change as a constant, an awareness of the systemic and inter-related nature of change, and an ability to operate in contexts of ambiguity and uncertainty. As one change agent described, it's mostly about having enthusiasm and the passion for change."

2. An interest in communication. This was frequently mentioned as an essential characteristic of change agents. Several change agents in the five entities came from professional communications backgrounds, but even those that didn't talked about the need to be able to communicate with both leaders and with staff, to influence and persuade, to gather and share stories, to bust myths and build understanding across grades, functions and different perspectives.

3. Relational skills are also key. Change agents need to be two-way relationship-builders, empathetic listeners, have emotional intelligence and be capable of 'proactively and sincerely engaging resistors' (Joint Inspection Unit, 2019). They need to be able to secure the trust of staff. As one change agent explained: "At the start the biggest challenge was securing trust." An important quality of successful change agents is their personal networks and their interpersonal relationships with colleagues, including fence-sitters and resisters as well as endorsers (Harvard Business Review, 2013). Change agents may operate either as 'central connectors' (people who have multiple informal networks themselves) or as 'brokers' (people who build relationships across different informal networks) in the organisation (McKinsey & Company, 2007).

4. An essential set of behaviours for the effective change agent are those relating to 'use of self'. The term 'use of self' describes a wide range of skills and behaviours including: self-awareness and the capacity for self-reflection, self-management in situations of ambiguity and unpredictability (managing one's emotions, staying grounded and confident, maintaining energy, believing in

one's abilities), using one's cognitive and emotional skills with courage, and adhering to relationship-centric values and behaviours (Cheung-Judge & Jamieson, 2020). The DOS network coordinator also sought to build the capacity of change agents to use 'self as instrument', developing their ability to use all of their senses, their intuition as well as their heads, 'in the moment' to better understand what was happening in a group, and to use those insights to inform how they intervened.

Organisational development pioneer Herb Shepard's seminal work Rules of Thumb for Change Agents offers up guidelines for change agents on the attitudes and behaviours that enable better 'use of self.' The rules are summarised in Figure 6 below.

RULES OF THUMB FOR CHANGE AGENTS

Rule 1: Stay alive. This rule 'counsels against self-sacrifice on behalf of a cause that you do not wish to be your last', as well as 'staying in touch with your purpose'.

Rule 2: Start where the system is, also known the 'empathy rule'. This rule is about 'understanding how clients see themselves and their situation'.

Rule 3: Never work uphill. This rule is about not working in a way that builds resistance, working in the most promising area, building resources ('many change agents lose effectiveness by becoming spread too thin')

Rule 4: Innovation requires a good idea, initiative and a few friends. That is, 'little can be accomplished alone'

Rule 5: Load experiments for success. Conditions for successful experimentation include ensuring 'participants feel ownership'.

Rule 6: Light many fires. 'If many interdependent subsystems are catalyzed..the entire system can begin to move'.

Rule 7: Keep an optimistic bias, 'be especially alert to the constructive forces, which are often masked and suppressed, in a problem-oriented, envious culture'

Rule 8: Capture the moment. That is, pay attention to the 'multiple potential of the moment' for change.

Figure 6: *Rules of thumb for change agents* (Shepard, 1975)

5. Linked to this is the need for change agents to be creative, to be able to think outside the box, to have the capacity for innovation and positive disruption, not attached to the past or the present. 'Active disruptors, heretics, radical and mavericks' make good change agents (Bevan & Fairman, 2018), those activists and experimenters with the 'courage and compassion to take on knotty problems' (Denning, 2020). Young UN describe their approach to change in this way: "the usual approaches to change don't work, so we educated ourselves on alternatives. We were inspired by others to think differently." Their energetic ability to "shoot out ideas and see where they land" is significant in the success of the network.

6. Some knowledge is useful – knowledge of the organisation or function, an understanding of its culture, networks and hierarchies and how to navigate these, knowledge about how change happens (in theory at least), an understanding of resistance, and knowledge of the organisation's processes and technologies. Project-specific knowledge will be particularly relevant for change agents in UNOPS and WFP, who are typically selected to work on projects for their professional background. But change agents from other entities emphasised the importance of knowledge too: an interviewee from Young UN described a change agent as "someone who understands process and

challenges, behaviours in organisations and sees opportunities to make it more efficient, effective." However, whilst useful and important, it's clear from this study that other competencies matter more than knowledge when it comes to recruiting effective change agents.

7. A final essential capability of change agents is the ability to manage the demands upon time and the additional workload of the change agent role. In UNOPS and in WFP change agents may be allocated full-time to a change project for the duration of the project, but more generally change agents do their change work over and above their day jobs, taking between 10 and 50% of their time. The additional workload was often a surprise to change agents and cited as a reason for some deciding to step down from the role – "the workload was overwhelming on top of an already demanding job" – or being unable to contribute as much as they would like.
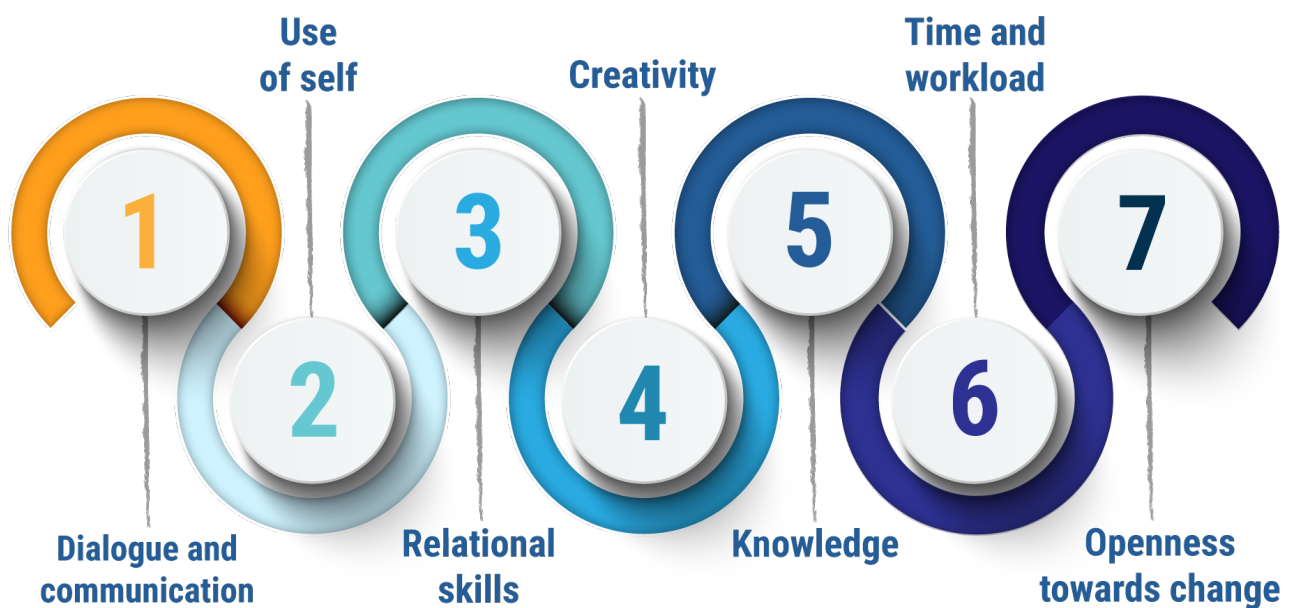
Figure 7: Skills and behaviours of effective change agents

LESSONS LEARNED

• There is no one profile for effective change agents in the UN system, but interviews with change agents revealed seven broad sets of capabilities: an openness towards change, communication skills, relational skills, use of self, creativity, knowledge, time and workload management.

• An openness towards change, good relational/ interpersonal skills and effective use of self are more important than hierarchy, or technical or functional expertise in the effectiveness of change agents.

• If the change agent role is in addition to the day job, the capacity to manage time and additional workload needs to be discussed openly with potential change agents and with the managers of change agents. The risk of burnout and stress for change agents doing the role over and above their day job is somewhat mitigated if managers are willing to reduce their expectations of change agents in their day job for the period they are in the change agent role.

2.2 HOW TO RECRUIT CHANGE AGENTS

As with other aspects of the change agent role, there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to the process of recruiting staff to the change agent network. In this section we look at the pros and cons of four different approaches, which we describe as: self-nomination, nomination by others, targeted recruitment, and networked recruitment. In practice the four approaches often overlap, and the entities in this case study tended to use a combination of methods. We focus primarily on the recruitment of change agents to a new network, but also highlight some points for consideration in recruiting new change agents to an existing network.

Whichever approach is taken to the recruitment of change agents, clarity and transparency are crucial. The JIU report highlights the importance of recruitment processes in shaping perceptions of the legitimacy of change agents. The extent to which change agents are regarded by other staff as legitimate is significantly influenced by 'perceptions of fairness in how they were selected, what their role is and how others are expected to relate to them' (Joint Inspection Unit, 2019).

In the table below we describe each of the four approaches, what each approach means in practice, and some of the opportunities and challenges to be aware of in implementation.

APPROACH	MEANING	PROS	CONS
Self-nomination in response to management invitation (taken by DOS, OCHA, UNOPS)	• A call for change agent volunteers is issued from senior management • Interested staff self-nominate • The process of self-nomination includes submission of a personal statement about the reasons for volunteering	• The recruitment process is clear • Open recruitment encourages all staff to engage in the change • Helps create a pool of potential change agents	• May have more nominations than change agents needed • There is a risk of dis-engaging change agents who do not get selected • Self-nomination of people without the capabilities to be an effective change agent
Nomination by others (OCHA, DOS)	• Change agents nominated by others • Nominations are often top-down, but peer nomination or 'snowball sampling' is also used, where employees are asked who they would go to for information and advice, or whose advice they trust and respect (McKinsey & Company, 2014)	• Higher trust levels likely in those appointed through peer nomination rather than top-down • More buy-in from managers/senior leaders if change agents are nominated by senior management	• If nominations come from senior management, it may risk undermining the credibility of nominees and staff trust in change agents • Nominees may feel under pressure to accept the nomination even if not interested to do so

Targeted recruitment (UNOPS, WFP)	• Recruitment of a small number of named individuals as change agents • Named individuals approached for their skills, experience or other characteristics such as the extent to which they are likely to be impacted by the change	• Enables the recruitment of change agents with specific skills or experience, geographies and grades, and those likely to be impacted by the change	• Targeting of known individuals means less likely to attract 'disruptors, heretics, mavericks, radicals' (Bevan & Fairman, 2018) who often bring creativity and innovation to the change process
Networked recruitment (Young UN)	• No criteria for recruitment • No application process, open to all • Recruitment via word of mouth (often contacts with existing change agents)	• Easy to join the network, open to all • Attracts members who are highly motivated by the purpose of Young UN • Builds on professional and personal contacts and relationships	• Risk of homogeneity, recruiting 'people like me' via existing connections • Risk of recruiting people without the capabilities of effective change agents

"I became a change agent in response to a call for nominations. I'd never heard anything like it, an outreach to staff like this. I saw the ad, I still wasn't clear what it meant, it was a new concept. But I was curious, and I thought I could contribute to change, and be in the know too" (DOS).

"There was an email inviting staff to apply. I believed in the change, passionately. There were some fundamental issues and I wanted to be part of the change" (OCHA).

"Young UN is a network of like-minded people joining together to make a difference', 'We take anyone to be a member, anyone can join" (Young UN)

EXAMPLE: DOS INITIAL CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Dear Colleagues,

Change Agents will play a key role in supporting all staff of the new Department of Operational Support (DOS) through the transition that is underway from DM and DFS. With staff members now aware of their placement in the new structures, we are renewing our call for nominations to establish a network of Change Agents throughout DOS.

If you are interested in becoming a Change Agent, please use this online form to nominate yourself (or support a colleague) by COB, Monday, 29 October 2018.

What is expected of a DOS Change Agent? Change Agents will serve as the connection between the project team and staff. They will play a role specific to the functional area in which they are nominated, but collectively form a network across the new department. They will provide expertise and guidance to department management and colleagues regarding the needed changes and help create understanding and ownership of the change within the new department. Specific examples of

the role expected of DOS Change Agents include:

- Supports and facilitates transformation activities to embed change within the immediate functional area of the new department.
- Acts as a positive role model for colleagues in establishing the new department's culture and values.
- Should be open minded to think of how changes and new ways of doing business can help colleagues and client groups alike.
- Contributes to open and honest dialogue with the DOS Implementation Team about progress and views.
- Exhibits, commitment, engagement, team behaviors and maintains confidentiality at all times.

How to nominate yourself?

- This invitation applies equally to all staff, in both DM and DFS, who will soon join the new DOS. With the above in mind, we are looking for staff in DFS and DM who will be part of the new Department and are interested in becoming change agents. We are looking for a mix of staff at different levels and different types of work.

If you feel like you meet the profile and are interested, kindly submit your nomination online.

What happens next?

- Following receipt of nominations, we will then quickly work with the future directors in DOS to create a small group of Change Agents for each functional area of the new department, with an emphasis on ensuring a balance and sufficient Change Agents across each area. You will appreciate that in some functional areas, where the change is more significant or where more staff will work in the future, more Change Agents are required. All this needs to be considered.
- Later next week, all volunteers will be informed. A kick-off workshop for the DOS Change Agent Network is planned for early November.

Thank you for considering becoming a DOS Change Agent.

Figure 8: DOS all-staff email inviting self-nomination as change agents (extract)

The recruitment of change agents to a change agent network is unlikely to be a one-time event, and new members may need to be recruited during its lifecycle.

The experiences of three of the entities in this case study offer up useful insights on the recruitment of new members to an existing network:

- First, the recruitment of new members is an opportunity to re-orientate the network to ensure it meets its purpose. New leadership of the change agent network in OCHA led to a one-year period of expansion of the change agent network from around 30 members to around 50 in order to give it a much stronger field-focus. Up to this point the network had primarily been HQ-focused, and the new change agents helped facilitate communications with and gather feedback on the impact of the changes from staff in-country.

- Second, recruiting new members to an existing network can be disruptive and also bring benefits. Ten months after its launch, there were some changes to the membership of the DOS network, with about one third of members rotating out of the network, and new members joining. Existing members of the network were involved at every stage of the recruitment process for new members. At the invitation of the UNLOCK network coordinator, UNSSC facilitated workshops with the first and second cohorts of change agents separately and together, to explore the values, principles and practices of the network in the context of a reconfigured membership. Despite these efforts to align both cohorts, there

were substantial differences of perspective and opinion between 'old' and 'new' change agents, and the dynamics of the network were significantly disrupted. For some time, the reconfiguration of the group dominated network meetings and the group invested quite a bit of time into working through the changing dynamics. There was commitment amongst the network coordinator and its members to finding solutions and keeping the network together, and they remained a "tightly knit group." The recruitment of new members also saw the introduction of new thinking and practices into the group, helping ensure it stayed innovative and relevant in a changing context.

• Third, differences of opinion and approach amongst members are to be welcomed. Members of Young UN - while pointing to the network members as "like-minded people joining together" - also described experiencing disruption and conflict between members, including when new members join. "We have a lot of fights within ourselves."; indeed, rather than shying away from differences of opinion, the network seeks to welcome disruption as an enabler of new thinking. "It's an open network, anyone can join. People who don't share our values either don't last, or they last and create disruption – and our challenge then is how to respond."

LESSONS LEARNED

• As with any other recruitment process, it is essential to ensure the process is fair, transparent and inclusive, and proactively encourages a diversity of applications in terms of demographics, grade and experience, including deep experience in the field

• The recruitment process needs to be able to clearly define, attract, identify and select people with the mindset and capabilities of effective change agents as described above. Including an assessment process will mitigate the risk of appointing change agents without the capabilities to be effective.

• The recruitment of new members to the network can be disruptive and difficult, but disruption can also be positive in ensuring the network remains relevant and open to new ideas and practices.

2.3 THE CHANGE AGENT ROLE

In building the change agent network and recruiting change agents you will need to be able to articulate your expectations of the change agent role so that change agents understand the role they are taking on, even as the role itself may evolve over time. What does it mean to be a change agent in practice?

It's clear from this study that it doesn't mean just one thing; there are multiple ways of being a change agent, and multiple roles that change agents take up, or are given, in the UN. Change agents typically occupy one or more of the following six roles:

• Change agents as initiators of change. Initiators of change may be in senior positions, initiating change from the top down. Or they may be people at any level who seek to catalyse change – 'change activists' who are 'committed to their organisations and want them to succeed but also want them to go about change in different more radical ways'

(Bevan & Fairman, 2018). Many change agents in Young UN describe their role in these terms, as someone who "takes responsibility for driving change, not seeing change as something just for senior management but seeing myself as an active agent in a complex system."

• Change agents as fixers, providing 'technical know-how', they 'fix problems' as well as 'detect and diffuse' potential issues (McKinsey & Company, 2017). They are expert "sparring partners" on change. The change agent-as-fixer describes what it means to be a change agent for some change agents in UNOPS and in WFP, where they are commissioned by internal clients to help them find solutions on internal challenges.

• Change agents as communicators about change. Many of the change agents in DOS and OCHA in particular saw communication as the most significant part of their change agent work. Their role is to act as a conduit for

communication about the change with senior leadership and with staff, or to encourage dialogue between senior leadership and staff, or between different staff groups. "I see myself as a conduit, passing on information and concerns from my colleagues to senior management so they are aware and can act, and helping them with the feedback back to my peers." Change agent communicators often see their role as truth-tellers, speaking 'truth to power', amplifying the voices of the under-represented, gathering input from 'colleagues who would not otherwise have been heard, including those in field offices, and views that people are often hesitant to voice' (Joint Inspection Unit, 2019).

• Linked to this is change agents as facilitators, convening and hosting conversations with groups of staff over the changes, across differences of grade, function, experience, perspective. Many change agents in this study mentioned their group facilitation role; facilitating exchanges among staff was a particularly important feature of the

change agent role in DOS, with the network coordinator additionally facilitating regular exchanges between the network and the senior leadership team.

• Change agents as community builders. In this role change agents focus on building relationships and creating communities of people united behind an aspiration for change; they use relational skills and techniques such as story-telling to build empathy and create a sense of purpose and belonging around change (Saltmarshe, 2018) Building community is a an essential part of what it means to be a change agent in DOS and Young UN.

• Change agents as coaches and mentors, coaching local leaders in the adoption of change (UNOPS), helping build the courage and confidence of staff to engage with peers and with senior leaders, and role-modelling the desired behaviour change. As one change agent described it, "Being a change agent meant we had to act as role models, especially in terms of culture and behaviour."

Figure 9: The six roles of change agents

EXAMPLE: DOS CHANGE AGENT ROLE

• Supports and facilitates transformation activities to embed change within the immediate functional area of the new department

• Acts as a positive role model for colleagues in establishing the new department's culture and values

• Should be open-minded to think of how changes and new ways of doing business can help colleagues and client groups alike

• Contributes to open and honest dialogue with the DOS Implementation Team about progress and views

• Exhibits commitment, engagement, team behaviours and maintains confidentiality at all times.

Figure 10: DOS change agent role (communication from Rick Martin, 25 October 2018)

LESSONS LEARNED

• There is no definitive description of the change agent role in the UN, but in practice change agents tend to hold one or more of six different and inter-related roles: initiator, fixer, communicator, facilitator, community-builder and coach

• Clear-enough role boundaries are needed at the outset to be able to attract potential change agents, and to define what a change agent is not (it is not for instance the same as a staff representative), as well as what it is or is anticipated to be

• The change agent role is often an emergent one, and it may take time for both the individual and the network to develop clarity about what the role means in practice.

2.4 BUILDING NETWORK CAPABILITY

In developing an effective change agent network, it is very likely that you will need to take action to build the capabilities of network members and the network as a whole. Providing learning and development opportunities for the change agent network contributes to improving network performance and potential and builds capacity in the organisation itself. In this section we look at what to focus on in terms of building network capability, and at the range of formal and informal approaches taken by case study entities to learning and development. We also hear from change agents themselves about their growth and development in the change agent role.

Learning and development priorities will vary according to the needs of individual change agents and the network overall, but the experience of the entities in this case study suggest that there are five key areas to keep in mind in terms of building network capability. These are:

• Learning about the *context and rationale* for the change. Ensuring all change agents can articulate a compelling rationale for change

is fundamental to their ability to engage in conversation with both leadership and staff. Understanding the reasons for change, the departmental change vision and its strategy for change was a core component of the DOS change agent training programme.

• Learning about *change processes*. Change agents in UNOPS' 'Reimagined Work' project were given training on the broad principles of change management, described as the "UNOPS approach to change – first you do the impact assessment, then you bring stakeholders together, then you get the tools in place." This was subsequently extended to include learning and development on the people side of change, such as "how to bring colleagues along." UNSSC provided initial training to the DOS change agent network on UNLOCK's own change model and principles for change, later supplemented by the network coordinator by skills development on other approaches to understanding change and transformation in organisations. Supported by the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism at UNOG, Young UN

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developed a pilot 'Changemakers' programme for change agents in the UN system, focusing on the perspectives, skills and tools they need to drive change in the UN and beyond. The programme addressed the strengths and limitations of different approaches to change, as well as sharing tools and techniques which the network has leveraged in its own work, such as human-centred design, self-managing teams and inclusive meeting practices. Partly designed for the purpose of building the capabilities of members of Young UN, the process of developing the pilot helped the network by "raising the question of how we should conceptualise change."

• *Learning about being a change agent network.* The DOS network coordinator saw this as essential to building network capability. UNSSC was engaged to design and facilitate two consecutive two-day development workshops for new change agents with the aim of developing change management capacities within the group as well as building the structure, culture and practices of the change agent network from the bottom up (Figure 11). The initial sessions were used to introduce the new organisational structure, to share lessons learned from other change agent networks, to map skills, define network roles and discuss approaches to change management. UNSSC was subsequently engaged to support the network through a period of change as some of the initial members left and new members joined. Here a series of two-day sessions were organised for the original members, for the new members and for the newly evolved change agent network. "We've gone through and continue to go through self-discovery as a group. The first step was for us to have training, group discussions, to understand the role, how to conduct ourselves as a group, our ground rules, how we wanted to work together with each other, and with the leadership team."

WORKSHOP 1 (2 days)

• Create the change agent community
• Clear understanding of the DOS change vision and strategy
• Shared understanding of organisational readiness
• Clarify role as a change agent
• Arrive at an agreed to coordination mechanism
• Consolidate asks from the group to the change sponsor and change team: what do we need to be successful?

WORKSHOP 2 (2 days)

• Check-in on current status of the change agent role and experiences to-date; connect to work done to-date and role clarity
• Complete a skills assessment of change agents in the room to get a better understanding on what knowledge and experience exist in the group
• Gain an overview on what Change Management is
• Explore different approaches to change (planned, emerging) and their impact
• Understand emotional responses to change and how to deal with them
• Practice skills to work with resistance

Figure 11: DOS change agent training programme, delivered by UNSSC

• *Technical skills development*. UNOPS provides its change agents with project-specific technical learning and development. For instance, its network of Reimagined Work ambassadors, established to support the introduction of new technology into the organisation, were given training on the technology leading to formal certification. Active chat rooms and Google communities also enable change agents to support each other and exchange "tips, tricks and success stories." In addition, UNOPS is offering learning learning journeys for its change agents, including change management certifications in 2020.

• *Learning about use of self*. Paying attention to the 'use of self' and the inner well-being of change agents delivers improved outcomes at individual and organisational levels, encouraging greater resilience, more collaboration and support. In contrast, poor use of self (defined by lack of confidence, self-doubt and self-criticism) undermines the effectiveness of change agents (Cheung-Judge & Jamieson, 2020). The DOS network paid particular attention to building the self-confidence of change agents to be able to speak with colleagues at all levels. As one network member said, "We were helped to embolden ourselves, to use our voice."

For many of the entities, building network capability meant combining both formal and informal approaches to learning and development. As described above, DOS, UNOPS and OCHA all provided formal learning and development for their change agent networks. The downside of formal learning and development is of course its cost, so alongside formal learning a number of informal approaches can be deployed which also contribute to building network capability. These include:

• *Coaching and mentoring*. The DOS coordinator played a significant role in coaching and mentoring network members towards becoming a more effective and impactful force for change in the organisation, including through developing their own skills and capabilities as mentors and coaches. As one DOS change agent explained, "Learning how to be a peer coach is the best experience I could think of without getting formal training."

• Peer-to-peer exchange. All of the networks facilitate peer-to-peer exchange for their members, either in person or online. OCHA established a system of monthly calls for its change agents to exchange experiences and ideas, and also set up an on-line repository

for tools and good practices. UNOPS runs quarterly themed peer exchanges for its change agents, as well as an annual summit with external guest speakers, and also supports an active community of practice open to anyone interested in change (it currently has around 500 members). As a global online network, Young UN leverages technology such as Slack in lieu of emails, to enable its members to exchange ideas and work collaboratively wherever they are located in the world. The DOS change agent network met at least once a week in various large and small group forms.

• *Reflective practice*, reflecting on success stories, challenges, and lessons learned as a network. This is a significant feature of the development of some change agent networks such as DOS and OCHA, and DOS network members include regular reflection time in network meetings. For others such as Young UN, reflective practice is still being embedded: "We try to capture the lessons learned but we mostly act reactively, we're not capturing lessons learned in a very comprehensive manner."

• *Learning from others*, gathering insights from other change agent networks across the system on what works and what doesn't in supporting change. The UNLOCK Peer Exchange Network offers regular opportunities for cross-entity learning and exchange.

There is no doubt that being a change agent is a developmental experience for many of those involved. Change agents described significant shifts in the own and others' personal and professional development through both formal and informal learning and above all through gaining on-the-job experience. Examples cited by change agents included:

• *Better understanding of organisational politics and the priorities of senior leaders*. Being in dialogue with senior leadership raised the awareness and understanding of change agents about the priorities, concerns and approaches of senior leadership. "I took away a lot of learning about the organisation and about how HQ operated, about the vision of the USG. I got a lot out of it", said one change agent from OCHA.

• B*uilding cross-functional personal and professional relationships*. Many change agents referred to the impact of the role on extending the depth and reach of their own networks. "It's a chance to meet people I wouldn't normally talk to" (OCHA), and "I've made real friends through the network" (Young UN).

• *Acquiring new skills*. Change agents described acquiring a range of new skills in the role, both inter-personal (in terms of use of self) and technical. "I'd never drafted a proposal before but I ended up being one of the main leads for this piece of work. We don't name individuals when we submit things but I was so proud." Others described learning increased patience ("I learned to be patient, to repeat the same messages over and over again"), improved self-awareness and self-confidence ("I'm normally a quiet person but I learned I can be very sociable talking to colleagues in small groups"). One Young UN change agent talked of acquiring a strong feeling of "inner legitimacy" through their work with the network.

• *Broadening horizons*. A number of change agents described how the role had helped broaden their career horizons, helping them to reimagine a different future career, such as qualifying as a coach or pursuing their new interest in change through study.

LESSONS LEARNED

• Attention needs to be paid to the learning and development of change agent networks in order to maximise capability and effectiveness. As a minimum the learning and development curriculum needs to include: learning about change models and how change happens, learning about the human response to change, any technical skills development, and learning and development about working together as a change agent network.

• Formal learning and development need to be supported on a regular basis by informal mechanisms enabling peer-to-peer exchange. One potential pitfall to be aware of is that change agents may need encouragement and reassure to share their learning – "members are often quite sensitive when it comes to sharing."

• Regular reflective practice is necessary in order that change agent networks learn from the successes and challenges of their work.

• The opportunities for personal and professional development for change agents are significant and it will be helpful to highlight these in attracting people to take up the role.

• It may not be obvious to all change agents how they can leverage the skills and experiences they acquire in their future careers; they may need mentoring, coaching or other support to help achieve this.

3. Sustaining the Network

Now with the basics in place, and having built the network, we turn to some of the factors which contribute to sustaining an effective change agent network in practice. Three factors really stand out from this case study: supportive managers, evidence of impact, and the culture and values of the network itself. We also explore the question of when a network may no longer be sustainable, and the factors which may lead to a decision to draw the network to a close.

3.1 SUPPORTIVE MANAGERS

The collective support of managers can make a significant difference to the effectiveness of the network as a whole. Individual managers can act as enablers or as barriers of individual change agent effectiveness. Line managers who are enablers offer encouragement, provide support in terms of workload management, and are engaged and interested in the change work.

Securing line manager engagement is also significant in the implementation of change. What are some of the steps you can take to help secure and sustain line manager support and engagement for change agents in your network? Manager engagement is built through:

• Communicating directly with managers from the beginning: Engaging in dialogue with managers as a group from the outset so they understand the rationale for the change and for the existence of a change agent network.

• Requesting their support: Direct appeal to managers, asking them for their support for the network and for individual change agents from their teams, sharing with them information on the role of individual change agents, and the anticipated time commitment and duration of the change agent role. This is the approach that OCHA took to securing manager support for time out of the day job

for change agents.

• Involving them in decision-making: Giving managers some say over the identification and release of staff from their teams to join the change agent network. This was the approach taken by DOS: when the request for change agent volunteers was oversubscribed, managers were asked for their views about applicants for the roles.

• Recruiting managers as members of the network: Having managers part of the change agent network and making the engagement of managers an integral part of the work of the network. All of the change agent networks in this study included at least some managers as change agents.

• Engaging directly with managers about their concerns: Change agents from DOS described both practical concerns of managers (for instance about the impact of the change agent role on workload and delivery) and more personal concerns, for instance how some managers felt their position was being side-lined by the change agent network, and that they were "caught in the middle" between the network and senior management. To address this, the network catalysed the creation of a series of 'Management Dialogues' for mid-level managers hosted by OUSG to focus on

issues typically affecting staff and to keep them up-to-date and informed about the change.

Empowering change agents in their conversations with managers happens through:

• Sharing what works: Encouraging change agents to share tactics for securing line manager support. One change agent described the efforts she went through to engage and reassure her manager: "My manager has come a long way, but had to be helped to get there. I helped her by being very transparent after each meeting, making sure she was in the know, I'd tell her the network had met, provide updates, make sure she knew where I was, made sure my day job didn't fall through the cracks."

• 'WIIFM': Helping change agents create a compelling case for their managers about the 'what's in it for them' of team members taking on change agent roles. Benefits include access to information and to senior people. As one change agent explained, "My boss became supportive when it tapped into her interests… it's good for her if I'm in a senior meeting."

• Documenting the work: Supporting change agents to discuss with their line manager the opportunity to include their change agent work in their performance reviews, in order that it is recognised as a core component of their work

and their development.

• Offering support: Offering to directly intervene with the manager if necessary. A one-to-one approach can sometimes be effective. One change agent described how "There was a letter that went to my senior boss to ask for me to be released to take part in non-work activities. I don't know what was said but I got released during working hours."

LESSONS LEARNED

• All change agents need the support and understanding of their line manager to be effective in their role.

• To help achieve this, managers need to be engaged early on in the process of establishing the change agent network.

• Don't leave it to individual change agents to navigate and secure line manager support for their work; the network also has an essential role to play, including leveraging its relationship with senior leadership to engage managers.

• Keep managers informed on an on-going basis, both as managers of change agents and as stakeholders impacting by the change.

3.2 DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

There will be interest in the difference that the change agent network makes. For senior leaders, demonstrable evidence of impact is likely to influence ongoing sponsorship and therefore the sustainability of the network. Agreeing with senor sponsors what evidence of impact they will be looking for is important. Staff also need to see evidence of the difference that their input makes in order to sustain their engagement with the network.

There is no clear or agreed methodology for measuring the impact of change agent networks. However, the following (largely anecdotal and qualitative) measures, drawn from the five entities in this case study, may be useful:

• Impact in terms of the original purpose of the network. The DOS network was set up to help facilitate implementation of change through creating understanding and ownership of the change across all staff in the new department and build a two-way communication channel between staff and

senior leadership. There is plenty of evidence that the DOS network achieved this, increasing the visibility amongst staff of what happens at senior leadership level, sharing staff feedback with leadership and contributing to improved communications at all levels. As a result of the work of the change agent network, staff felt they "have a voice, ideas will be heard."

• Impact on internal clients. As an interviewee in UNOPS said, when describing the impact of the project-based change agent networks on clients, "We've proved the concept over and over again. It's not mandatory for people to use us but we have earned the right to get involved. When we get left out in the beginning, they often come back to us and ask us to get involved." A Young UN interviewee described how the network is seeing an increase in interest in their work from senior leadership, and how the people they work with always talk about the "enthusiasm" and "creativity" of Young UN's approach. "Clients would see our value in terms of new ideas and

showing up blind spots, revealing perceptions, biases and mind-sets that are set in stone."

• Impact on the entity. In OCHA the network contributed to tangible outcomes such as improved communications between HQ and the field, cross-collaboration between different divisions, more investment in leadership development, and to the development of OCHA's People Management Strategy. It also helped deliver "real changes on the admin side of things", such as increasing petty cash limits for officers, improved HR processes, and regularisation of staff contracts. In DOS the work of the change agent network led to significantly increased take-up of flexible working arrangements (FWA) in the entity.

• Impact on the system. System-wide changes are hard to measure, and Young UN is reluctant to overstate its impact, but as one interviewee explained, "we have created partnerships and relationships that led to change" (Young UN). The general perception by some members who were interviewed is that often times being part of a project, is being part of creating the change itself. By running pilots, or by having conversations that were not had before, it initiated a shift

and created the space to question how things are done.

• Impact on how change is delivered. All of the change agent networks have had an impact on the process by which change is approached, in projects, in entities and across the system as a whole. They have significantly increased staff engagement in change projects and brought staff and leadership together to deliver change that has real ownership from both sets of stakeholders. As one Young UN member explained, "Change management is typically decided at senior level, with no outreach, no communications, no ownership. Young UN takes a different approach, we have a lot of ownership."

LESSONS LEARNED

• There is no one way to measure the difference that having a change agent network makes. However, the sustainability of change agent networks will be impacted by ability to provide evidence of impact. It is critical to agree – and revisit on an ongoing basis – impact measures with senior sponsors and with members of the change agent network.

3.3 NETWORK CULTURE

The culture and values of change agent networks are important factors in network sustainability. They influence the kind of work the network does, how the work is conducted, the retention and engagement of change agents, and how change agents behave and work together.

Not all change agent networks prioritise the development of a distinctive network culture. However, in DOS and Young UN, significant attention has been paid to nurturing network culture, and there are notable similarities in the kind of culture being developed. Both networks are characterised by flat structures, self-organisation, distributed decision-making, experimentation and enthusiasm for change. In both cases change agents are clear that culture and values are core to the purpose, impact and sustainability of the network.

Young UN was founded in New York by a small group of staff who wanted to shift some of the existing work practices, policies, etc., and who were striving for a culture in the UN that more

clearly "embodies the principles it stands for." The network founders were intentional about the ways of working of the network reflecting its aspirations for the culture of the wider UN system. Members describe the network culture as decentralised, inclusive, non-hierarchical, solutions- and action-driven, crowd-sourced, experimental, bridge-building and embodying democratic decision-making. "There's a lot of humility but also a lot of determination that we're not going to stay quiet for fear of upsetting authority." The values and culture of Young UN are heavily influenced by new thinking and practice on organisational hierarchies and structures, in particular the work of Frederic Laloux (Laloux, 2014) on self-managing organisations where information and decision-making are shared, and Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans (Timms & Heimans, 2018) on the distinction between new and old power (see Figure 12 below).

Old Power Values

- Formal (representative) governance, managerialism, institutionalism
- Competition, exclusivity, consolidations
- Confidentiality, discretion, separation between private and public spheres
- Expertise, professionalism, specialization
- Long-term affiliation and loyalty, less overall participation

New Power Values

- Informal (networked) governance, opt-in decision-making, self-organization
- Collaboration, crowd-wisdom, sharing, open-sourcing
- Radical transparency
- Maker culture, 'do-it ourselves' ethic
- Short-term conditional affiliation, more overall participation

Figure 12: New power and old power values

The culture of Young UN is intentionally 'new power'. Its members collaborate according to an agreed set of values which shape how the network operates (YoungUN, 2020). These include:

- Transparency in what we do
- Accountability for what we do
- Solutions-oriented
- Collective thinking and action using our combined strengths
- Embrace change and creativity
- Constant learning.

The DOS change agent network also had a self-organising culture and shared leadership, meaning all members share responsibility for the behaviours, practices and outputs of the network. The network culture, shaped by the network coordinator, was one which values openness, transparency, dialogue, empowerment and courage in noticing and naming "the elephant in the room." The network sought to act as a role model for behaviours across DOS through embodying the following principles (DOS, 2019):

- Self-organization and shared leadership: all members of the change agent network contribute as equally as possible, without a hierarchy, and assume shared responsibility for keeping the group process task-oriented and reflective at all times.

- Task-oriented facilitation: the change agent network has a full-time facilitator who helps the group stay focused on its primary task and reflect in and on action within the group's own dynamics.

- Co-creation: all tasks and their frequent iterations are co-created by members and interested staff across all levels. No interventions are designed without participation of the respective target audience.

- Dynamic, flexible and iterative decision-making: Decisions around task, process and structure are frequently reviewed and adjusted as necessary and meaningful to avoid rigidity.

- Rotation: One third of network members are replaced every 6-9 months to ensure dynamic representation of the whole department and regular insertion of fresh ideas.

LESSONS LEARNED

- All change agent networks have a culture, whether it is created intentionally or not. The culture of a network shapes its work, its effectiveness and its sustainability.

- There is no one-size-fits-all on the ideal culture of change agent networks. The network culture will typically reflect that of the broader context in which it operates, unless determined efforts are made to build an alternative culture.

- Change agent networks represent an opportunity to experiment with the development of innovative working cultures, such as non-hierarchical self-organisation, radical transparency and co-creation. These approaches have definite benefits in terms of collective ownership and engagement but also come with challenges. As one change agent explained, it can be more time-consuming: "getting everyone to agree can be a challenge."

3.4 ENDING THE NETWORK

Of the five networks in this case study, the OCHA network has been phased out, and the DOS network has undergone a significant shift in its structure and purpose, disbanding to form a series of smaller thematic networks focusing on issues such as organisational performance, staff engagement, learning and innovation. In UNOPS and WFP the project-specific networks are constantly re-forming to meet client needs, and the Young UN network is growing.

One of the phrases repeated by interviewees throughout this case study is "change is a constant." Given this, what can be learned from the case study entities about when is the right time to draw a change agent network to a close?

• When the change project - for which the change agent network was set up - has come to an end. Some of UNOPS' change agent networks are fixed-term project oriented, with change agents engaged by internal clients to deliver a specific change project, and once each project is concluded, the change agent network is disbanded.

• When the purpose of the network is no longer clear. At the end of 2019 OCHA transitioned out of using change agents to enable its functional leads and managers to have full ownership of the organisation's new operating model. Strengthening functional leads and teams had always been a goal and as that became the case, it gradually lessened the utility of the change agent role. At this point, continuing with the use of change agents risked undermining the role of functions in leading communication efforts across the organisation and with the field. At the same time, OCHA was strengthening its staff representative network which required soliciting staff focal points from across the organisation, causing some confusion between the roles of both networks. Both issues contributed to the decision of the organisational development team to discontinue the use of change agents.

• When senior sponsorship is ambivalent or missing: as one interviewee said, for any change agent network, "without proper leadership support it is hard." For many of the networks, moving forward without senior sponsorship makes it hard to continue and once sponsorship wanes or even discontinues, it is important to review the rationale and sustainability of the network.

LESSONS LEARNED

• The decision to conclude a change agent network is often a contested one. To some change agents the ending of the network may come as a relief, and to others, as a significant loss.

• Agreeing up-front with stakeholders (and in particular senior sponsors) how evidence of impact will be measured helps with decision-making about whether the network should continue or not – and if it continues, how it may need to evolve for the future.
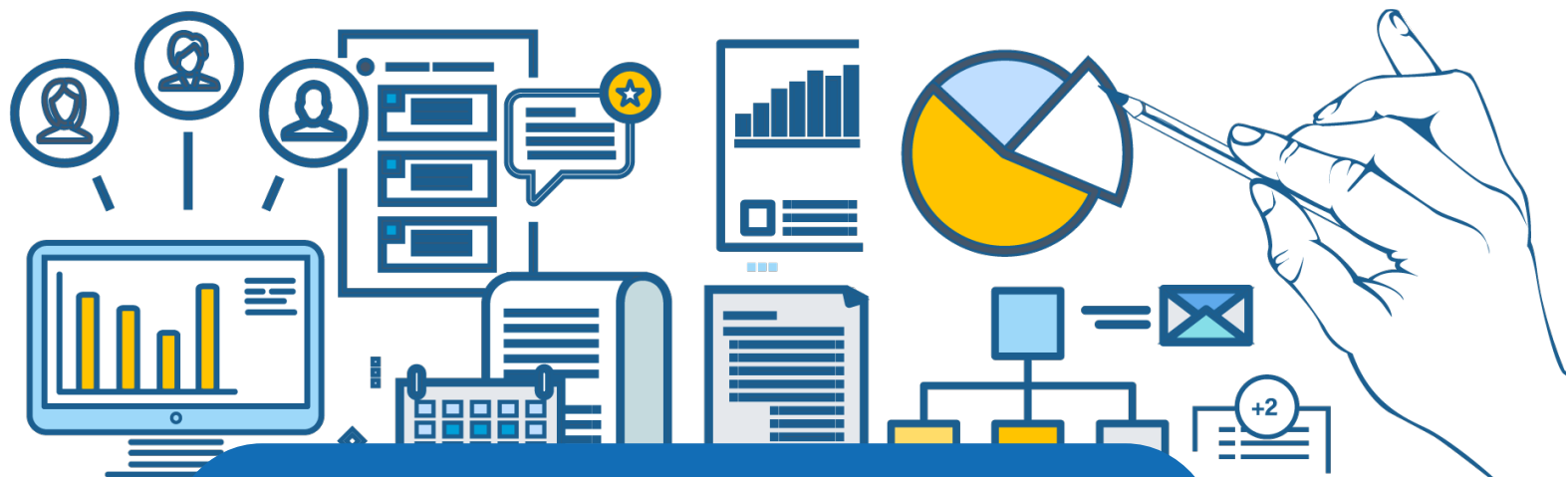
4. Networks in Practice

In earlier sections of this report we've looked at how change agent networks are set up and sustained. In this section we look at the projects and activities of the different change agent networks in practice. During the course of gathering material for this case study, the world was changed by the coronavirus pandemic, and we also include in this section examples of interventions by change agent networks related to Covid-19. We start with an example of the work of a project-specific change agent network (UNOPS and WFP) and then look at the activities of entity-specific change agent networks (DOS and OCHA). We conclude this section by looking at Young UN's activities in support of system-wide change.

4.1 PROJECT-SPECIFIC CHANGE AGENT NETWORKS (UNOPS AND WFP)

The activities of UNOPS' and WFP's project-specific change agent networks are driven by the needs of internal clients.

In UNOPS, projects are prioritised in discussion with the senior management team through regular change portfolio dialogues; examples include client projects on health and safety, IT transformation and team restructures and performance.

A recent example of a project-specific change agent network in UNOPS is the network of Re-imagined Work ambassadors. The network was established in response to a request from IT colleagues to support the shift to a new technology platform - from Microsoft to G-suite – and the introduction of new ways of working implied by new technology. The support of the Change Management Team was requested as the IT team faced increasing challenges in influencing staff to adopt the new ways of working.

To establish the change agent network, an all-staff email was issued by the G-suite project team asking for volunteers to act as Re-imagined Work or G-suite ambassadors. In line with the broader culture of UNOPS, the network focused on the operational side of change, taking a process-driven approach. As one interviewee said, "UNOPS people are very familiar with thinking in terms of processes so we speak a language that's familiar to them by talking about change this way too."

The activities of the network of Re-imagined Work ambassadors include:

• Acting as a focal point for helping staff reimagine work following the introduction of G-suite

• Delivering face-to-face training on new ways of working

• Responding to staff queries (not on the technology but on the new ways of working implied by G-suite)

• Gathering success stories

• Sharing successes, challenges and other staff feedback with the project team.

To support their work, ambassadors were given access to resources and training on G-suite, offered the opportunity to study for G-suite certification, and received some learning and development around change management and "how to bring colleagues along." In addition, a number of on-line communities were set up where ambassadors can share amongst themselves tips, tricks and success stories. Three challenges that change agents faced in their work were:

• Managing the workload. Staff in UNOPS vary considerably in their IT confidence and capabilities, and in some locations supporting a shift in mindset and practice was unexpectedly time-consuming for the change agents.

• Addressing the resistance of managers and

colleagues to the shift to a new platform and new ways of working.

• Securing trust of staff. One ambassador commented, "It took time to make sure I knew enough to explain to staff. I did sessions in small groups, trying to build trust, to show their concerns were myths, not real."

In WFP, change agents were involved in a project to support a new integrated approach to achieving Zero Hunger which was rolled out to six regional offices and over 80 country offices in a multi-year period. A Project Management Office (PMO) was set up to coordinate implementation. The PMO included staff from the Innovation and Change Management Division working in collaboration with an external strategy consulting firm. The PMO was responsible for providing analytical capacity, with change agents supporting the effort.

4.2 ENTITY-SPECIFIC CHANGE AGENT NETWORK (DOS, OCHA)

The OCHA change agent network was established in 2017 to support the outcomes of a functional review and organisational redesign. Over a period of 12 months the network was engaged in activities to support two-way communications between leadership and staff on the reforms. Change agents were tasked with communicating with staff about the proposed changes and roll-out, and gathering feedback through consultations and brainstorming sessions in HQ and the field.

Change agents also contributed to specific workstreams or projects linked to the reform. Examples included the design and set-up of improved coordination and governance for middle managers, a review of administrative processes, a shift towards being more field-focused, the delegation of authority from HQ to the field and design of the HR/ people strategy for the department.

The DOS change-agent network was established in 2018 to facilitate the formation and development of the new Department through supporting leadership communication and gathering and sharing staff feedback. Much of the activity of the network in practice involves facilitating conversations with and between different stakeholder groups, including:

• Meetings (approximately monthly) with the DOS Senior Leadership Team, in which the network shared staff feedback and experiences and was updated on the progress and direction of change

• Facilitating conversations with staff in multiple settings (meetings, happy hours, open floor discussions) to "check the temperature" of change, gathering feedback, concerns, ideas and proposals for future action

• Facilitating feedback-gathering through other means such as emails and feedback boxes

• Catalysing a series of "Management Dialogues" for mid-level managers hosted by OUSG

• Contributing to the design and facilitation of team-building events across DOS.

A key initiative for the DOS change agent network was the design and implementation of the Department's Workplace Culture Initiative. The purpose of this initiative was to gather feedback from staff on DOS culture as well as ideas on the culture changes needed, and how to deliver them. Feedback was gathered from around 300 staff through more than 560 group discussions, in which staff were asked for their

views on three questions:

1. What kind of workplace do you want DOS to be?

2. What needs to change?

3. How can you contribute to those changes?

Three major themes emerged from staff responses:

• A shift was required in mindset and behaviours, to increase respect, fairness and inclusion and reduce fear, hierarchy and bureaucracy

• Management practices needed attention, particularly in relation to flexible working, performance management and information-sharing

• More attention needed to be paid to staff development and career progression.

Four working groups combining members of the change agent network and senior leadership team were then set up to take forward the following ideas from staff:

1. A compendium of workplace values in DOS

2. A review of the application of workplace policies.

3. A portfolio of learning opportunities open to DOS staff

4. A weekly staff dialogue was established with 8-10 staff members per session from across DOS, co-facilitated by rotating members of the change agent network and the senior leadership team. "We sit in a circle, with an open agenda, no topics."

The DOS change agent network also initiated its own response to Covid-19 by leveraging what it does best – enabling connections, facilitating dialogue, encouraging the exchange of perspectives and experiences between staff and senior leadership. For the first nine weeks of the pandemic the network had a daily check-in call, to help members stay connected and cohesive as a group, plus a weekly meeting. The network also hosted weekly virtual 45 minute "watercooler" conversations open to all staff. Other than the town-hall meetings hosted by the USG these were the only all-staff forums held during this period. Up to 70 staff attended the sessions including senior leadership. The work of the DOS change agent network also contributed to entity preparedness for virtual working during the pandemic. Over the previous year the network had focused on fair implementation of flexible working practices. Significant progress had been made with the USG writing directly to all managers to remind them about the rights of staff to work flexibly, resulting in a noticeable increase in flexible working take-up. Familiarity with remote working put DOS at an advantage when it came to staff working from home during the pandemic. As one change agent commented, "If we hadn't made as much progress on flex it would have been disastrous for the division."

4.3 SYSTEM–WIDE CHANGE AGENT NETWORK (Young UN: Agents for Change)

Young UN describes its purpose as: "crowdsourcing fresh perspectives, piloting new approaches and driving a movement for change towards a UN that fully embodies the principles it stands for."

The Young UN change agent network is a hive of activity, with its work driven by three core criteria – that it should be solutions-oriented, system-wide and in line with UN principles. All its activities are geared towards changing the way people think, within the overall vision of helping to create a UN that "fully embodies the principles it stands for." Decisions about which activities to prioritise are made collectively and collaboratively, with all members encouraged to propose ideas and respond to calls for contributions. Projects are

resourced based on the availability and the enthusiasm of people to lead, and the process of identifying team members is informal and collaborative. Furthermore, the network recently established a nomination process to select Young UN representatives to participate in official meetings and working groups, such as the High-level Steering Committee for implementation of the UN's 2030 Youth Strategy.

The network describes three broad types of activity it undertakes to 'catalyse, amplify and accelerate' change (Young UN, 2020). These are:

• *Starting a conversation* about the challenges the UN faces and possible solutions

• *Leading by example*, by piloting practical

changes and sharing our experiences

• *Advocating change*, by bringing fresh ideas to key decision-makers.

Some examples of Young UN activities include:

• *Crowd-sourcing input*. In 2019 Young UN conducted a survey asking UN employees about their experiences and expectations of the workplace and for their ideas on how the UN needs to adapt for the future of work. 859 employees responded from 34 UN entities in 91 countries.

• *Acting as advisers and sounding boards for senior management*. The network drew on the survey findings to prepare a report at the request of the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) as input to their discussion on "The Future of the UN System Workforce" (38th Session, October 2019), such as moving away from hierarchies to self-managed teams. The resulting report Navigating to the Next UN - A journey full of potential has been taken up and referred to widely, for example by the UNSSC's course on change management and Learning Managers Forum.

• *Enabling skills-based collaboration and networking*. The network has initiated the development of an on-line peer-to-peer network called 'conecta' which enables staff to search, connect and communicate with each other from across the whole of the UN system, and to seek out those with specific skills, experience, interests etc, similar in concept to LinkedIn.

• *Taking action on climate change*. In 2019, Young UN initiated an Open Letter to the UN Secretary-General calling for even stronger climate action in the UN system. The letter gathered signatures from nearly 2,700 UN system employees. An on-line hub was launched to encourage dialogue and gather examples of best practices. Young UN's vision for accelerated action on climate change included a call for sustainable investing by the UN pension fund and ensuring all UN buildings are green.

• *Building change capability*. In Geneva, Young UN, with support from the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism, developed a three-day pilot for 20 changemakers based around the key messages from the 'Navigating to the Next UN' report, and hosted a 'Changemakers Exchange' to bring together changemakers at all levels in the UN system to exchange tips and ideas, as well as to update champions and partners of Young UN on the innovation time pilot and upcoming Changemakers programme.

All of Young UN's activities are system-wide, but not all have global reach. Some examples of more local 'hub-based' activities undertaken by Young UN change agents include:

• 'Co-working Wednesdays' in Geneva, where Young UN located and hosted a space on a weekly basis for any Young UN members wanting to co-work with each other.

• Hosting youth dialogues in Addis Ababa, working with the Office of the Youth Envoy.

• Supporting cross-functional collaboration as input into the strategic planning process in Vienna.

• Hosting 'Open Mic Diplomacy' series to support the dialogue around multilateralism between UN Senior Officials and young UN professionals and delegates in New York.

Young UN's initial response to the pandemic was to create opportunities for its members to connect, launching a series of 'viral virtuals', using Slack to host open-space conversations on themes such as the impact of the pandemic on the climate as well as on personal and professional lives. Initially these discussions took place twice a week for 30-35 minutes. Over time the themed discussions became more personal, offering members support through sharing books, articles and playlists.

Other ways in which the network is responding to the pandemic include:

• Developing conecta4covid, in a similar vein to conecta, with the aim of matching skills and needs for the UN Covid-19 response. The platform recorded 145 volunteers and twenty live projects, with the team connecting needs and skills across organisations and around the world.

• Partnering with the UN Innovation Network, #NewWork, , the Development Coordination Office (DCO), UNSSC and the Office of Information and Communications Technology to co-create the #ReimagineTheUNTogether Challenge, drawing on a Pulse Check around ways of working during COVID-19, and with other organisations (for instance Greening the Blue) around the implications for green recovery

• Revisiting the network's recent report Navigating to the Next UN (Young UN, 2019) to consider the implications of Covid-19 for its key messages and ideas

• Raising awareness, sharing resources and piloting the ideas and practices of self-managed teams in the context of the pandemic, inspired by other thought-leaders on the agility of small and self-organised groups.

Conclusion

One thing is clear from the five entities featured in this report: there really is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to using change agents and change agent networks to support change in the UN system. Change agent networks are typically established in contexts of disruption and change, so there is a lot about the networks – including their purpose, role, activities, impact – that is emergent, dynamic, evolving. That said, there are some commonalities and plenty of lessons learned in the approaches adopted by all five entities that we hope will be useful to anyone contemplating setting up a change agent network, in support of project, entity or system-wide change. We summarise these in the 14 points below.

GETTING THE BASICS IN PLACE

1 *Define the scope and purpose* of the network – whilst recognising that these are likely to evolve over time. What is the rationale for setting up a change agent network, and what is it intended to do and achieve?

2 Ensure there is *support* for the network at the most senior level. Be prepared to invest time and effort in engaging senior leaders as genuine partners in the work of the change agent network, seeking to build a "relationship of equals" between leadership and members of the change agent network.

3 Don't overlook the operational *practicalities* of a network at the outset, such as how the activities of the network will be coordinated, structured and funded.

BUILDING THE NETWORK

4 Identify the *capabilities* of change agents you are looking for. We found that seven capabilities are key: an openness towards change, communication skills, relational skills, use of self, creativity, knowledge, and time and workload management.

5 Define the process for *recruiting* change agents to the network. Four main approaches are featured in this case study: self-nomination, nomination by others, targeted recruitment and networked recruitment. Whichever approach you choose, transparency and clear communication about the recruitment process and criteria are essential.

6 Scope the anticipated *role* of change agents as far as you are able to at this early stage, recognising that clarity over the role in practice will also emerge over time. The primary roles of change agents in this case study included: initiating change, finding solutions, communicating about change, facilitating conversations, building community, coaching and mentoring.

7 Pay attention to both the *development* needs of the change agent network as whole, and the development needs of individual change agents. Learning for both may be needed in relation to the context and rationale for change, how change happens, how to be a change agent, any technical skills development needed, learning about use of self as a fundamental tool for enabling change. Make use of formal as well as informal opportunities to build the capabilities of network members.

8 Pay attention to the *well-being* of network members, as most change agents do the work of change over-and-above their day jobs, and the time and effort involved can be stressful. Ensure mechanisms for providing emotional as well as practical support are in place.

SUSTAINING THE NETWORK

9 Work with *managers* from the very beginning and continue to engage with them on an ongoing basis. Develop a plan to build manager engagement and to support individual change agents in securing the support of their managers. Recognise that they play multiple roles in change, as managers of change agents, as employees likely to be impacted by change, and as key stakeholders in the implementation of any future change.

10 Consider *how the impact* of the network can be demonstrated and when. Although there is no agreed methodology for measuring impact there are a number of qualitative impact measures you could use, including impact in terms of the original purpose of the network, impact on internal clients, and impact on the wider system. Think about timing for communicating impact, not too early, and not too late.

11 Invest time with change agents in defining the values and building the *culture* of the network. Take the opportunity to experiment with network working practices, drawing on the positive experiences of project-based working, self-organisation and collaboration of change agent networks in this case study.

12 Consider how you can ensure that the network *remains innovative* and *committed* for instance by recruiting new members. Be aware that the introduction of new members may be disruptive, and plan for this.

13 Together with your stakeholders, agree to the *indicators* that would signal the need to draw the network to a close in its current format. Acknowledge both the sense of loss and relief that may be experienced by change agents and other stakeholders when the network is ended.

14 *Don't reinvent the wheel* in setting up, sustaining or using change agent networks. Build on and learn from the experience of existing change agent networks – and record and share your learning for the future too.
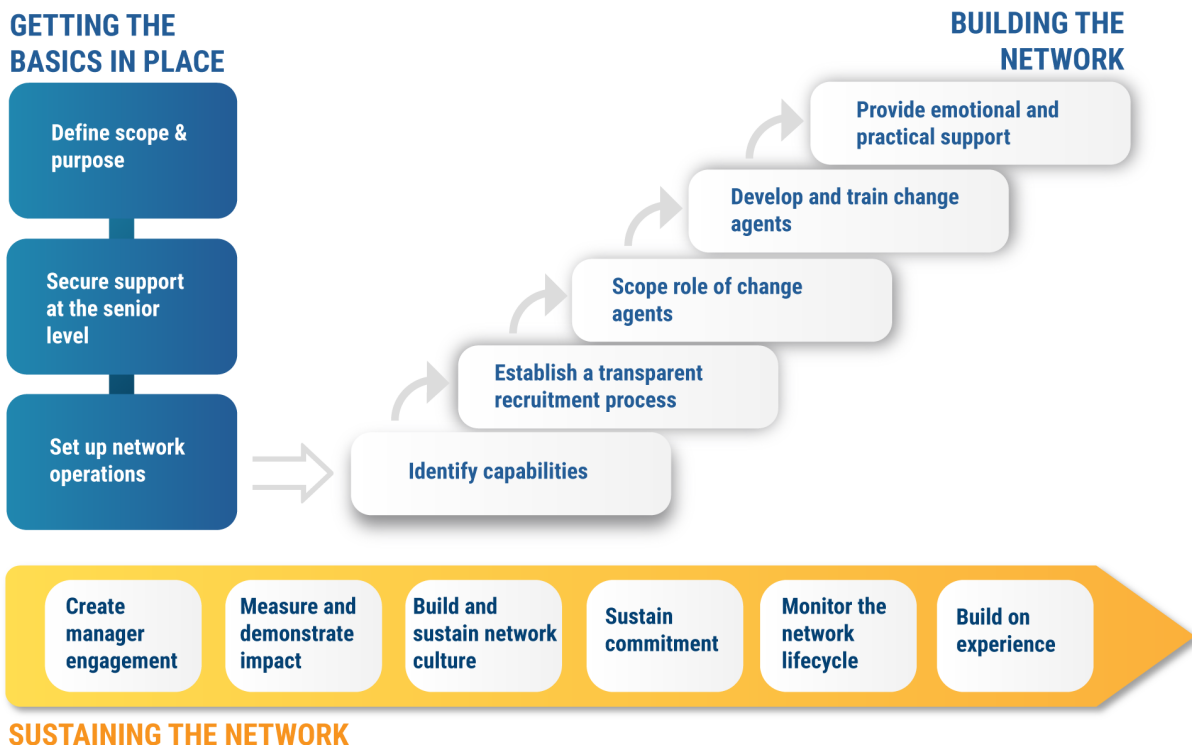

GETTING THE BASICS IN PLACE

- Define scope & purpose
- Secure support at the senior level
- Set up network operations

BUILDING THE NETWORK

- Provide emotional and practical support
- Develop and train change agents
- Scope role of change agents
- Establish a transparent recruitment process
- Identify capabilities

SUSTAINING THE NETWORK

- Create manager engagement
- Measure and demonstrate impact
- Build and sustain network culture
- Sustain commitment
- Monitor the network lifecycle
- Build on experience

Figure 13: Common principles and approach to change agent networks in the UN system

APPENDIX: ABOUT THIS REPORT

Five UN entities took part in this case study by sharing their experiences of change agents and change agent networks. They are: DOS, OCHA, UNOPS, WFP and Young UN. The five entities were identified by UNSSC to participate because of their different experiences of and perspectives on the use of change agents and change agent networks in enabling change.

A representative from each of the entities joined an Advisory Group that met five times during the course of case study development. The role of the Advisory Group was to act as a sounding-board on methodology and approach to the case study, to help identify colleagues to take part in interviews and focus groups, to contribute to sense-making from the findings, and to help ensure that the final case study is relevant and useful. The group was consulted throughout the sense-making, writing and sign-off of the report between January and September 2020.

The process of preparing the case study began with a short literature review on enablers and barriers to effective change agents and change agent networks. Conducting the literature review helped ensure that the case study is informed by current thinking and practice on the topic. Supporting documentation was also provided by participating entities where available.

The case study was largely based on qualitative data gathered in interviews and focus groups conducted between March and May 2020. All interviews were conducted virtually. Interviewees were nominated by members of the Advisory Group, with between three and ten stakeholders from each of the five participating entities. More than 30 people were interviewed in depth, with interviews lasting around one hour. Interviewees came from across the range of grades, roles, functions and were visibly diverse in terms of gender, geography and ethnicity. All interviewees were assured of confidentiality in the case study and no interviewees are quoted by name in this report.

UNSSC would like to thank all interviewees for their time in contributing to this report. Particular thanks go to members of the Advisory Group for their support, input and advice in the development of this case study:

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UNSSC offers learning solutions around change management for various groups in the UN system. This includes teams or departments, change managers, team leaders and senior leaders. As you are reflecting on how you may set-up your change agent network, or what type of skills you will need to build among your change agents, we co-create learning solutions and accompany the process with advisory services. On a broader level, we support teams and organizations that face culture change, restructuring or organizational transformation.

Specific related UNSSC programmes available now include: *(i) Leading Transformational Change in the VUCA world; (ii) Introduction to Change Management; and (iii) Navigating Continuous Change: Resilient Managers | Agile Teams | Evolving Strategies.* Each target different needs and groups. From how to lead transformational change in a volatile and complex reality, a programme for senior leaders; to understanding mindset and skills needed for change leaders and how to develop a strategy to drive change as part of project implementation or organisational change processes; to exploring practical, concrete tools to manage agile teams, make decisions and develop strategies in times of uncertainty for team leaders.

We look forward to hearing from you. www.unssc.org