

JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE

Guidelines on Managing Change and Restructuring Processes

Why guidelines?

The following guidelines have been jointly prepared by the Staff Union and management representatives on the Joint Negotiating Committee. They are intended to promote good practice in the Office by providing guidance to managers, staff representatives and officials on managing change in a positive and constructive way. Both the Staff Union and the management recognize and accept the need for change as an integral part of any organization which has many challenges to meet. Both the Staff Union and management understand that the ILO's capacity to manage change effectively is essential to ensuring that the ILO is responsive to the needs of its constituents, provides efficient and high-quality services and maintains a productive, secure and healthy working environment for staff.

Change and restructuring often provide opportunities to improve work organization and the content of jobs and for changes in roles and responsibilities which may enhance skills and career development while leading to better and more efficient use of staff resources as well as other resources. However, change and restructuring may also impact on the stability of staff-management relations and create concerns among staff affected by the change or restructuring. These guidelines aim to promote an approach which optimizes the interests of both staff and the Office. More concretely, the guidelines aim to:

- (i) improve the transparency of the decision-making process by ensuring that all staff affected by change are informed at the earliest opportunity of any potential changes in their work area and the reasons behind such a change,
- (ii) ensure that staff are consulted on options and have the opportunity to input into the manner in which the change or restructuring will be implemented,

- (iii) enable staff and their representatives to raise any concerns which staff may have so that these can be taken into consideration by management in the decision-making process,
- (iv) avoid problems by identifying and discussing matters of actual or potential concern as early and as close as possible to the level of the problem,
- (v) improve the overall level of understanding and cooperation between management and staff in handling change or restructuring.

Information

Failure to share information with staff in a timely manner can lead to a high level of anxiety, frustration and low morale. Staff may fear changes in their functions, transfers or even termination of the contractual relationship. The stress is particularly severe for those having short-term contract arrangements. The negative effects on staff of rumours and misinformation can be avoided by the responsible chief directly advising staff, at the earliest opportunity, of any proposals or decisions for change. In keeping with the Standards of Conduct of the international civil service, managers should be open to all views and opinions,¹ and communicate effectively with their staff and share information with them.

Once the changes or restructuring are officially announced, a meeting should be organized with all staff concerned to inform them of the reasons behind the proposed change, the expected outcomes and a list of key areas to be affected. In that meeting, staff should be given the opportunity to express their views concerning these organizational changes. Individuals should also feel free to have direct meetings with the manager and she/he should encourage this.

¹ Standards of Conduct of the international civil service: “Managers and supervisors are in positions of leadership and it is their responsibility to ensure a harmonious workplace based on mutual respect; they should be open to all views and opinions and make sure that the merits of staff are properly recognised. They need to provide support to them; this is particularly important when they are subject to criticism arising from the carrying out of their duties. Managers are also responsible for guiding and motivating their staff and promoting their development. (...) It is naturally incumbent on managers and supervisors to communicate effectively with their staff and share information with them.” (paras 15 and 17).

Planning for change

It is important to plan for the process of change. This initial planning period will set the tone for the complete process. It is important, while not raising expectations or arousing unreasonable fears, to follow familiar and accepted processes and procedures involving all staff. For both general and professional staff, it is useful to share facts at every opportunity; to use formal and informal means to keep staff informed at every stage; and to maintain staff confidence levels. It is therefore clear, that the planning process should be conducted in a participatory manner. At the planning stage, the following main areas should be addressed:

1. *Purpose*: What is the reason(s) for the change or restructuring? What is it designed to achieve?
2. *Budget*: Changes in the budget of the unit and its potential impact on human resources and its programme of work.
3. *Timing*: Establishment of a timeframe for the implementation of the changes.
4. *Costs*: Any costs associated with implementation of the changes should be identified and included in the planning process.
5. *Structure*: Clarify implications of any changes in the size or organizational structure of the unit/department.
6. *Individual jobs*: Clarify new roles, responsibilities and functions of jobs which will be affected by the change or restructuring and establish a process for reviewing work organization, job design and content.

Some staff may be adversely affected by the uncertainty often triggered by change or restructuring. Managers should consider organizing discussion groups or workshops very early in the process to help staff deal with change and uncertainty.

In line with ILO policy on job security, managers should ensure that any issues around employment security are addressed with a clear commitment to minimizing the impact of the change or restructuring on job security and ensuring that all opportunities for training and/or redeployment are fully and actively explored. The impact of the proposed changes on gender

balance also needs to be considered and measures should be taken to minimize any disproportionate impact.

Consultation

As already stated, managers should involve staff as early as possible in the planning process. Staff should be encouraged and given the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making. This should assist the manager to better evaluate the different choices and to get a deeper knowledge of the tasks and work of his/her team. The manager and the union representative(s) should communicate regularly to ensure, in particular, that any staff concerns are effectively and speedily communicated to the manager. The involvement of a union representative at an early stage should add value to the process, not only in terms of knowledge of the units concerned, but also facilitating meetings with the staff concerned to identify any potential problems and solutions and prevent conflicts.

Consultation can take many different forms. General meetings can be held with the participation of all staff. In order to ensure maximum participation, such meetings should be announced in advance, the agenda set and the duration established. It is important that staff feel free to participate, express concerns and make proposals.

Smaller working groups can also be organized. It is more likely that all staff, regardless of their grade, will contribute when discussions are held in smaller groups. Such groups can be assigned specific tasks. They should have access to all relevant information to enable them to fulfil their tasks.

E-mails or individual meetings can also be useful for staff consultation. Managers should take into account different cultural backgrounds, which are often reflected in the way a staff member communicates with the manager; while some might prefer written communication, others may favour individual meetings. Both ways of consulting should be used by the manager, as appropriate.

The consultation stage should result in a clear agreement and understanding of the change plan, the implementation stage and the timeframe.

Implementation

It is the joint-responsibility of management and staff to ensure that change is implemented smoothly and effectively. Proper planning and consultation should assist in minimizing difficulties at the implementation stage. During this phase, there should be a mechanism to monitor progress, identify difficulties and devise appropriate solutions through regular contacts between the manager, the staff and the union representative(s). Solutions to any problems that may arise during a change or restructuring process, such as training or transfers or redeployment, should be sought in close consultation with the staff member concerned and the union representative(s), as required by the staff member. HRD, PROGRAM and FINANCE are departments that can assist with the development of suitable solutions.