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Streamlining staff recruitment and consultant hiring



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Dr Abdinasir Abubakar

Equipped with leadership skills and a desire for change, WHO Representatives are helping to drive WHO's work to enable "best-in-class" processes in the Region, with the support of the Regional Director.

Enabling services is a priority action for WHO transformation in the Region, as laid out in the regional transformation road map.

Through a series of discussions, WHO Representatives, country office teams and Regional Office colleagues from the



WHO Representatives

- Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain, Islamic Republic of Iran
- Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, Acting WHO Representative in Lebanon
- Dr Elizabeth Hoff, Libya
- Dr Maryam Bigdeli, Morocco
- Dr Palitha Mahipala, Pakistan
- Dr Iman Shankiti, Syrian Arab Republic
- Dr Adham Abdel-Moneim, Yemen

Facilitators

- Ms Tarja Turtia, Transformation Team Lead
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Business Operations/Human Resources team

- Mr Gerard McDonnell, Regional Human Resources Manager
- Mr Franclin Tomtebaye, Human Resources Business Partner

WHO Health Emergencies Programme representative

- Ms Nelly Bertrand, Programme Manager

Business Operations and Human Resources departments found common ground on streamlining the processes for staff recruitment and hiring of consultants. During the collaborative discussions, pain points were identified, suggestions were heard and methods for working in parallel were brought to the table. In September 2022, WHO Representatives submitted a report to the Regional Director with 30 recommendations for enabling services.

On staff recruitment, designated working groups proposed ways to fast-track the process. An important solution was condensing the 25 steps involved in the recruitment process down to 17. Additionally, the Regional Office is continuing to engage with WHO headquarters to improve the prime candidate screening tool and implement outcomes of the process in the Region. This is important to quickly spot qualified candidates and avoid extended delays.

On hiring of consultants, the working groups suggested ways to accelerate the process, such as incorporating the use of generic terms of reference to avoid unnecessary delays and reduce the turnaround time from 60 to 32 days.

Another positive outcome was the establishment of benchmarks for turnaround times. Ultimately, this will serve as a tracking modality for WHO country office staff to effectively monitor and evaluate the recruitment process, recognize areas for improvement and strengthen accountability.

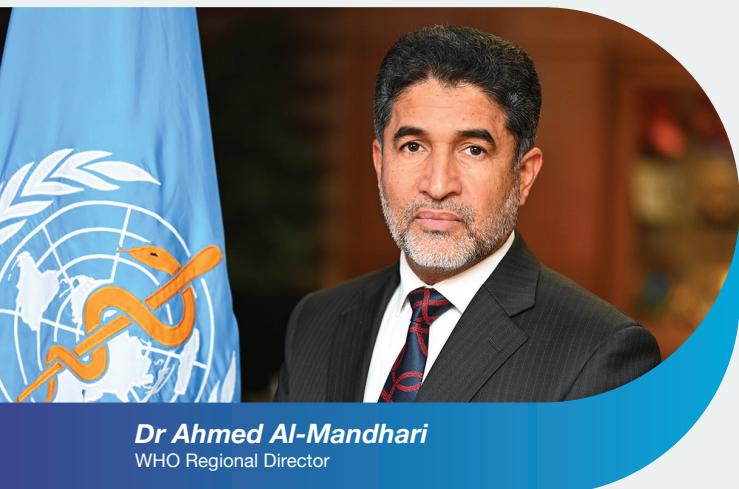
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WHO TRANSFORMATION

Acknowledgement is given to the following individuals for their extensive participation:

Ms Samar Hammoud, Operations Officer, WHO Country Office in Lebanon; Ms Nadira Shanti, Administrative Assistant and Mr Wojciech Adomas, Human Resources Officer, WHO Country Office in Libya; Mr Ghassane El Falah, Operations Officer, WHO Country Office in Morocco; Mr Mushtaq Ahmed, Human Resources Specialist, WHO Country Office in Pakistan; and Mr Muhammad Sajjad Shafiq, Human Resources Officer, WHO Country Office in Yemen.



Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari
WHO Regional Director

The Regional Director's open-door policy

The open-door policy serves as a cornerstone in maintaining a positive work environment under Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. Through regular communication and feedback with senior management, staff and colleagues can form a deepening sense of connection to the Organization. Dr Al-Mandhari reflects on how the policy continues to expand his own understanding and approaches for constructing a welcoming environment at the Regional Office.

How do you see the open-door policy promoting a positive work environment at the Regional Office?

“ This policy serves as one of the pillars for real transformation and carries numerous benefits for the Organization and its staff. It allows staff to share ideas, thoughts and concerns in constructive ways, making them feel that they are participating in the development of WHO's Regional Office. It also helps senior managers and leaders to identify areas that need to be strengthened and developed, through listening to all staff members' suggestions. Ultimately, incorporating this type of staff involvement in

the Office helps to establish a positive and constructive work environment, resulting in us better serving our Member States and their communities.

What important lessons have you learnt after listening to staff?

“ There are many examples of important lessons. I've learnt that a lot can be uncovered and unveiled within the work environment, which may not be identified and explored through traditional ways of communication. For those starting a leadership post, an open-door policy is a must in order to get oriented on the Organization and its culture. It makes staff feel heard and respected, it enables them to participate in the planning for the Organization, and occasionally in decision-making. The open-door policy is one of the best tools for spotting great ideas, and opens the door for creative thinking and innovation. To make sure its purpose is served, I believe prompt actions should follow, based on the ideas and thoughts that have been collected.

How does this policy support your leadership at the Regional Office?

“ The open-door policy has helped me in pinpointing areas and issues within the working environment that require immediate action, without delay. It has allowed me to meet staff for targeted discussions, and created an environment where I can acknowledge their interests and earn their trust. In addition, the open-door policy creates a direct line of communication that helps us avoid harmful bureaucratic processes and hierarchies, and pushes leaders and managers in the Office to initiate action accordingly.

The Regional Director's open-door policy was initiated in April 2019 and is ongoing.

Transformation bears fruit with staff at the centre

Maintaining staff momentum during the transformation process is an essential component in internalizing change, so that transformation becomes an intrinsic part of the Organization rather than just a topic of interest. To assist in this, Ms Sabine Bhanot, Change Management Specialist from the United Nations System Staff Colleges (UNSSC), shares her inputs on implementing reform.

To realize effective change, Sabine emphasizes the need to establish a framework for milestones – recognizing them and celebrating achievements along the transformation journey. She notes that change is a continuum, and so actions for long-term change should be explained coherently and have a feedback loop so that everyone can take stock of where they are.

According to Sabine, incorporating a safe space for staff to feel valued and heard should be rooted in the change process. This will allow room for discussion to determine which approaches are working or those that may require further analysis. With enough investment and time, Sabine says WHO reform will bear fruit among the Organization's staff, and progress will be seen.

To ensure effective human resource management, Sabine highlights three aspects: strategy, process and people. Involving a diverse group of colleagues in the process is a key tool in dealing with resistance to change – a common obstacle that surfaces in the transformation journey – and is pivotal for implementing change initiatives jointly, to avoid working in silos.

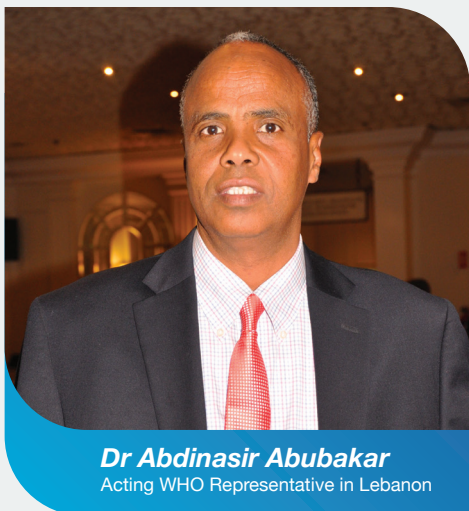


Ms Sabine Bhanot
Change Management Specialist (UNSSC)

“ A sign of change taking place is feeling it. People are excited. ”

Sabine delved deeper into the crucial role of change agents within the Organization to further drive transformation and cultural change in the workplace. Four sets of actors are needed to ensure a tangible change process, she says – a dedicated senior management team, a transformation team for coordination, fully engaged managers and a team of change agents. Healthy leadership engagement with staff paves the way for a positive climate of staff involvement, where the workforce feels appreciated within the Organization. Through regular dialogue and brainstorming among teams, a united approach becomes second nature in determining what change means for each team, and the direction they're headed.





Reflections from a former IMST leader

Based at the Regional Office for over 7 years, Infectious Hazard Prevention and Preparedness Manager for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, Dr Abdinasir Abubakar reflects on the core skills and processes he learnt as an Incident Management Support Team (IMST) leader. He describes how these skills have enabled his work while serving as the acting WHO Representative in Lebanon.



Open-mindedness

Equipped with a firm foundation in technical and leadership skills, the former IMST leader thinks that open-mindedness has also helped to provide a smooth transition for his shift to a country office. He notes that he has become a more attentive listener and continues to learn daily from his team and other partners. By listening to ideas and harnessing their technical aspects, these ideas can be packaged to take work forward.

Maintaining momentum

With his experience of the finite nature of an IMST life-cycle, Dr Abubakar encourages using collaboration to maintain momentum gained during an emergency context in normal areas of work. This revolves around strong leadership, sustained engagement and providing all players with regular updates to demonstrate their relevance and clear-cut roles. After witnessing the IMST's united approach during COVID-19, he aims towards a more results-oriented strategy.

“ We need leaders to push forward this spirit of collaboration

The high levels of engagement and synergy between WHE and other departments during the COVID-19 pandemic was a crucial element for success, and it should continue, alongside mentoring, training and guiding of key players.

Being an influencer

To pave the way for WHO's work in the Region, Dr Abubakar stresses the importance of building one's diplomatic, technical and negotiating skills, within and outside the Organization, and being open to receiving guidance. By nurturing these skills, donors in particular can better avail resources during emergency situations.

Team building

As part of a dynamic team, Dr Abubakar's role at the Country Office in Lebanon has empowered him to put his leadership skills into practice to advance the health agenda. Touching on his work coordinating the response to COVID-19 as well as other emergencies, he underlines the importance of cross-departmental cohesion and aligning senior management and technical departments towards shared goals.

“ To include a variety of expertise, a strong multisectoral team should be built

Networking

Dr Abubakar believes that by establishing networks within and outside WHO, and sustaining these collaborations, WHO's core mandate can be implemented as a WHO Representative and an IMST manager. By uniting donors, United Nations agencies, embassies and nongovernmental organizations, health can be prioritized on national agendas, alongside WHO's role in achieving health for all.



WHO mission reviewing IPC at Atbara Teaching Hospital's COVID-19 testing and triage room, Sudan, 15 June 2022 © WHO / Victoria Bélorgeot

Are you a boss or a leader?

by **Gemma Vestal**
Regional Ombudsperson

What's the difference between a boss and a leader? Can bosses learn to become good leaders? Can people lead even when they are not bosses? This era of organizational transformation is a good time to be asking these questions.

Let's start with some definitions. A "boss" is someone who is placed in charge of personnel in a work setting. A "leader" may not actually be supervising anyone, yet inspires followers simply by the nature of their personality or their broad sphere of influence. However, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. A boss can be a leader and, with practice and unwavering commitment, a boss can become a great leader.

In the context of increasing demands – both internally and externally – for WHO transformation, we need bosses who are also effective leaders. This combination is an absolute necessity for our Organization to continue to deliver on its mandate, improve its credibility, and maintain its global relevance and preeminence. Let's dissect the differences between the two concepts. See where you land below.



BOSS

A boss criticizes

A boss tears people down

A boss micromanages

A boss is quick to blame others

A boss creates circles of power

LEADER

A leader encourages

A leader builds people up

A leader empowers

A leader takes accountability

A leader creates circles of influence

If you are a leader already – congratulations, and keep it up! If you aren't a leader just yet, don't worry. Any personal improvement starts with self-awareness and the acknowledgement that there is something to work on. And any one of us can start, at any time, to work on our leadership potential.

Where can you start? Look at the leadership qualities listed above and begin to embody them one by one. If needed, you can seek out professional leadership coaching. In addition, if there is someone you identify as a good leader in WHO, reach out and ask them to be your mentor. Learn from that person. Read up on leadership in books and get involved in leadership training, wherever and whenever available. Invest in yourself. Your leadership journey starts with you.

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Dr Jamela Al-Raiby
WHO Representative in Jordan

Jordan's Country Office embraces change

Driven by the motivation to break down silos, realign communication and ensure that all staff feel heard and secure, the WHO Country Office in Jordan is piloting the Region's first country transformation team.

Heralding this new era of change, Dr Jamela Al-Raiby, WHO Representative in Jordan, stresses the urgent need for recognizing communication gaps and challenges. And so after the reinstatement of the Regional Transformation Team, Jordan's Country Office has stepped up to put transformation into action at the country level. Volunteers from all units, both national and international staff, and of all ages and genders, came forward to vouch for change.

“ *The volunteers are the champions of change* ”

To achieve the Ministry of Health's goals and to make positive impacts on the health of Jordan's population, the Country Office took note of work fragmentation and developed their own road map for change.

Internalizing Vision 2023: health for all by all required central action, particularly for opening up a pathway for dialogue between staff and their supervisors in the Country Office. A consultant on team building and communication



Jordan Country Office staff retreat, 2022



Jordan Country Office staff, 2022

was invited to hear staff concerns, expectations and needs. The team retreat in June 2022 also resulted in more transparent communication among staff, with the help of the consultant. As the understanding of staff grew, so did their confidence, performance and motivation. Dr Al-Raiby acknowledges the difficulties of change, stating that the focus on communication was centred primarily on those needing support throughout the transitions.

“ *Smiling makes all the difference in the work environment* ”

Dr Al-Raiby underlines the importance of incorporating the respectful workplace initiatives of PRSEAH, DEI and PAAC in the Office's day-to-day work. She adds that the need for their thorough translation into practical action should be communicated among teams.

Upholding WHO values within the context of a respectful workplace was prioritized in the regional transformation road map as the first action point for WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. By embodying WHO values, and with the support of team members, Dr Al-Raiby believes the Country Office will remain on the right track. The overall objective for the country transformation team is to empower and motivate staff, while improving professionalism to better respond to country needs. As staff willingness for change is evident, Dr Al-Raiby believes that WHO's connection with the community it serves will deepen.

A staff counsellor's guide to well-being

Maintaining your mental health and creating a good work-life balance means paying attention to both organizational and individual factors.

To support the mental health and well-being of WHO staff, the first regional staff counsellor, Mr Athanasios Chirvatidis, provides some examples of practical action.

“ *People often come in when everything is already on fire. We need to work on prevention, psychoeducation and raising awareness around mental health and well-being at the workplace* ”

He explains that setting healthy boundaries and following an organized schedule after working hours is essential. Some issues that staff may face include difficulties in the workplace, personal issues or even critical incidents. The new virtual working modalities can also present challenges to staff well-being, so additional support mechanisms to alleviate these stressors are helpful.

Some signs of stress and burnout can readily surface and be easily recognized, while others are more subtle. Staff should try to monitor their stress levels and be aware of how they react mentally, emotionally and physically to stress. Physical symptoms include muscle tension and headaches,



Athanasios Chirvatidis
Regional Staff Counsellor

while emotional and cognitive symptoms can manifest as difficulty in concentrating, memory problems, or experiencing unusual and heightened anxiety. To prevent escalation of stress, none of these symptoms should be ignored. From an organizational perspective, strategies need to be implemented to reduce staff burnout – which requires transformational changes to prioritize staff well-being.

Athanasios suggests entrenching some personal preventive measures for stress – by pausing, reflecting and recalibrating, and making a habit of self-care in our daily activities. Practising meditation in the workplace and at home, routinely doing physical exercise and introducing a “mental commute” when teleworking, by taking a break for reflection, are scientifically proven examples. Realigning a person’s perspective on the tasks at hand and help with issues in our personal lives can be sought by approaching the staff counsellor, the regional ombudsman or any relevant actor. Athanasios is also available for managerial consultations, to help leaders and managers support best practices for team well-being. In addition, it may be helpful to visit WHO’s newly launched mental health platform for extra support, guidance and awareness.



[mentalhealthatwork.app](https://www.who.int/mentalhealthatwork)



Legal training in country offices: Islamic Republic of Iran and Libya

Following a request from WHO Representatives during their retreat in November 2021, the Office of the Legal Counsel (LEG) conducted training sessions on legal issues for country offices in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. To date, 19 of the country offices have participated in these trainings, which revolve around four main elements: governance and political issues; corporate and commercial matters; privileges and immunities; and sanctions.

For the WHO Country Office in the Islamic Republic of Iran, deeper insight was gained into the legal parameters and frameworks surrounding privileges and immunities of WHO staff within the context of the country. It was evident from the sessions that these issues must be resolved on a case-by-case basis. Reference was also made to the effects of sanctions on staff's ability to use opportunities offered through privileges and immunities, particularly with regard to personal bank accounts. The Country Office learnt about seeking advice from LEG as a preventive measure to avoid escalation, and overall feedback was positive as staff felt reassured by the information LEG provided.

In the Libya Country Office, staff gained a well-rounded understanding of issues related to political instability in conflict-affected countries. Given the national divide in Libya, these sessions proved especially useful. Of particular interest were the examples for resolving disputes between signatories to a donor agreement, as well as the process for arbitrating any breaches of WHO contracts by outside contractors. Moreover, understanding how operations at country level fit into the bigger picture of WHO's impact on the ground will help to provide a basis for implementing future decisions.

Conducting country-specific team training on legal issues is one of the priority actions in the regional transformation road map. WHO Representatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in Libya recommend that additional sessions on legal issues be embedded as a core component in WHO's induction programme for new staff, particularly for project managers, reporting officers and award managers.



Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain
WHO Representative in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Staff views



"I can feel transformation happening at the country level, including having access to new operational processes and information-sharing between the three levels of the Organization. Transformation is taking place with the change in our mentality, understanding the role of WHO in United Nations reform, working towards the same goals, witnessing WHO working on addressing staff issues and making their voices heard by putting policies in place."

Wallaa El-Moawen
WHO Country Office in Egypt



"When all staff are involved in the transformation and help direct the outcome."

Maroun E. Karam
Operational Support and Services/Business Operations



"Transformation means improved efficiency."

Quamrul Hasan
Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and Polio Transition/
Communicable Diseases



"Prioritizing communication, expanding the communication workforce, and modernizing our communication approaches is transformation."

Gulalek Soltanova
WHO Country Office in the Syrian Arab Republic

