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Management response to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2018

Management acknowledges the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2018 and continues to value the contribution made by the office in providing an informal and confidential process for addressing conflicts, disputes and complaints among employees. Management also acknowledges the reported increase in the number of visits to the Ombudsman, particularly on matters related to harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination. Other entities within WFP dealing with these issues have also witnessed a sharp increase in reports, which is seen as evidence of the success of the 2018 revised policy on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination and to a growing trust among employees that the organization is listening.

Respectful communication, listening and feedback

1. Management concurs with the report regarding the importance of improving communication, feedback and dialogue within WFP. The 2018 global staff survey results confirmed this need, with only 44 percent of employees perceiving there to be open and honest two-way communication.
2. At the 2019 global management meeting (GMM), the Human Resources Division (HRM) and the Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division led a half-day session on "high-performing teams". The central tenet of this session was that "safety to speak up" – defined as a situation in which employees feel comfortable in voicing their opinions and ideas freely without fear of being judged unfairly, embarrassed, humiliated or sanctioned –

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is the most important driver of team performance.¹ Senior managers attending the GMM learned that using active listening with staff at all levels fosters a greater sense of safety to speak up, promoting dialogue, bringing forth ideas and creating a more vibrant workplace with contributions from all employees.

3. WFP makes available to its employees a significant number of training resources related to improving listening skills:
 - The WFP leadership development programme includes a module on coaching skills, which emphasizes the importance of active listening and communication. The programme has been in place since 2015 and 420 staff members have completed the course in the last two and a half years.
 - The supervisory skills programme available to frontline managers focuses on interpersonal communication, understanding the other party's point of view and building effective working relationships. The programme offers a range of tools for helping managers to get to know their team members, obtain inputs on planning, remain in contact with their teams, give and receive feedback, manage difficult conversations, use after-action reviews, brainstorm and pilot approaches. In the last two and a half years, about 800 WFP staff members have completed this course.
 - In the first three months of 2019, 2,088 WFP employees were given face-to-face training on how to give feedback. Listening skills were highlighted as vital to the provision of effective feedback.
 - The April 2019 edition of the HRM learning newsletter – sent to all WFP employees – focused on “crucial conversations” and covered effective feedback, enhancing communication skills, better workplace conversations and managing difficult conversations.
 - WFP's online learning platform, WeLearn, hosts a wealth of resources related to active listening and effective communication that are available to all employees. Annex I lists the 11 training courses that aim to enhance listening skills. The WeLearn channel designed for all of WFP's management and leadership also contains resources related to improving two-way communication.

¹ This concept is based on Project Aristotle, a research project on organizational and team dynamics undertaken by Google. It is also encapsulated in an earlier paper, written in 1999 by Amy Edmundson, Novartis Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School, and entitled “Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams”. http://web.mit.edu/curhan/www/docs/Articles/15341_Readings/Group_Performance/Edmondson%20Psychological%20safety.pdf.

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
<p>The Ombudsman recommends that staff complete, at minimum, one time per year, the E-learning course entitled "Enhance your listening skills" available to all staff.</p>	<p>Partially agreed.</p> <p>Management agrees that there is a need for employees at all levels of WFP to enhance their listening skills.</p> <p>Management does not, however, support the idea of making courses on listening mandatory. WFP employees already undertake six mandatory online training courses and management does not consider singling out listening skills as a seventh mandatory course to be the right approach.</p> <p>Management considers the existing suite of courses outlined above to be sufficient in both number and scope. To increase the focus on listening, management will underscore the importance of this skill within the programmes currently being carried out as a follow-up to the new policy on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination and the global staff survey – namely the Respect Campaign and the outreach missions being conducted by HRM in WFP offices globally.</p>
<p>Management should be provided with <i>ongoing training</i> related to interpersonal skills, effective communication, conflict management and cultural competencies.</p>	<p>Partially agreed.</p> <p>The management response to the 2017 report of the Ombudsman outlines the array of training courses for managers that address these competencies.</p> <p>In response to findings from the global staff survey, HRM is planning a training course for middle managers, which will also seek to develop these competencies.</p> <p>A challenge for any organization is the impracticality of conducting such training initiatives on an ongoing basis. Management believes that initiatives such as the Respect Campaign, in tandem with the periodic management, supervisory and performance management training that it already carries out, will contribute to the important cultural change that WFP has embarked on.</p> <p>Annex I lists the 17 courses hosted on the WeLearn platform on effective communication, together with 22 courses on conflict management and 7 related to cross-cultural competence.</p>
<p>WFP should consider implementing tools that allow managers to receive anonymous feedback from their direct reports, colleagues and supervisors on their managerial and communication style.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Over the past year, HRM has conducted 360 anonymous feedback processes for 131 managers around the world. At present, this involves a customized approach that requires dedicated follow-up and support to the managers and units concerned. Feedback on the process and the outcomes has been very positive and requests for the service have been increasing.</p> <p>HRM is already working on making this approach more systematic by building into its redesign of the annual performance appraisal system additional means of acquiring and using feedback on performance and competencies from a wider range of sources. For managers, these sources will include direct reports, peers and supervisors.</p>

Sexual harassment

4. The upward trend in reporting of all forms of misconduct, including sexual harassment, is seen as an encouraging signal of the growing trust in WFP's capacity to deal effectively with cases. As not all employees may wish to make a formal complaint, the 2018 revised harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination policy and subsequent outreach initiatives emphasize complementary channels of reporting such as employees' supervisors or other managers, human resources officers and delegated human resources focal points, staff counsellors, the Ombudsman or respectful workplace advisors, peer support volunteers, staff representatives, members of the security team and any other trusted colleagues. Many of these channels have seen a sharp increase in the number of employees approaching them since 2018.
5. There is still more to be done on enhancing communication with the involved parties once a disciplinary process has commenced. As part of this effort, the HRM worldwide outreach campaign organizes awareness-raising sessions with employees at all levels to give them an overview of the entire disciplinary process. These sessions explain why the process takes time and that it is confidential. The Inspector General will also consider providing information on the duration of and required steps in investigations in outreach initiatives by the Office of Inspections and Investigations (OIGI).

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
<p>In the realm of listening to victims of sexual harassment, the Ombudsman recommends a <i>confidential repository</i> that can be utilized by employees. A repository would allow an employee to input or deposit details about an incident and not make a formal allegation.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Management has consulted the Inspector General on this matter. OIGI already acts as a confidential repository for complaints of sexual harassment (when victims of sexual harassment provide information to or consult investigators while not wishing to go forward with an investigation). However, as concerns have been raised that this practice is not well known to WFP employees, the Inspector General will consider incorporating the confidential repository function into WFP's new hotline system, which is scheduled for implementation in 2019. OIGI could then examine the confidential database to identify repeat offenders and contact the affected persons to determine whether they wish to join a larger group in making a formal complaint.</p>
<p>In the realm of listening to complainants who submit an SH or SV formal report to HR, the Ombudsman recommends that the Organization invests in a <i>confidential support person</i> who is able to explain the investigation process and answer queries through-out the lengthy investigation.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Management has consulted the Inspector General, who proposes having a dedicated OIGI officer liaise with the parties during an investigation. The officer would keep the complainant and the subject of the allegation (after he or she has been notified of the allegation or has been suspended pending investigation) informed of progress in the case. This liaison officer would only be able to provide very limited information and could not share information that might prejudice the investigation or create legal risks.</p> <p>Once the investigation report had been issued and the case passed to HRM, the HRM Staff Relations Branch would perform a similar role for the remainder of the disciplinary process.</p>

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
In the realm of listening to separated employees, the Ombudsman recommends implementing a protocol for all separated staff to receive a confidential <i>exit interview</i> .	Partially agreed. HRM occasionally conducts exit interviews with employees who are leaving WFP and concurs with the Ombudsman that such interviews can be beneficial. However, it is not realistic to make exit interviews systematic. Between 3,000 and 5,000 employees leave WFP every year and HRM does not have sufficient capacity to conduct exit interviews on that scale. Nonetheless, consideration will be given to other ways of collecting information on employees' experience of working at WFP.

Conclusion

6. Management is committed to improving respectful communication, listening and feedback within WFP and sees this as an area where improvement is needed among not only senior managers but also employees at all levels. Measures taken since the 2018 global staff survey, including the launch of the Respect Campaign and stronger messaging regarding the expectation that managers create and contribute to a respectful workplace, reflect increased attention to these elements of WFP's culture and represent good initial progress. WFP is committed to continuing to focus on respectful communication, listening and feedback as a foundation of a respectful workplace.
7. The progress made regarding the reporting of abusive conduct, including sexual harassment, is also encouraging and management welcomes the Ombudsman's recommendation on establishing a confidential repository into which employees can input information, and the recommendation on creating a liaison function throughout the disciplinary process in order to ensure a better flow of information to complainants and the subjects of investigations.

ANNEX I

Relevant training resources available on WeLearn

Active listening

Title	Type
Enhance your listening skills	Interactive learning resource
Active listening	Interactive learning resource
Interpersonal Communication: Listening Essentials	Interactive learning resource
Practising active listening	Reading Document
Encouraging active listening in your team	Reading Document
Listen before you answer	Videocast Faculty
Develop the ability to listen effectively	Videocast Faculty
Mastering the power of listening	Action tip
You'll learn more by listening than talking	Videocast Faculty
The Listening Leader	Reading Document
The Importance of Listening	Interactive learning resource

Communication

Title	Type
Developing an Interpersonal Communication Strategy	Interactive learning resource
Getting to know the different levels of communication	Interactive learning resource
Interpersonal Communication: Communicating with Confidence	Interactive learning resource
The Three Pillars of Interpersonal Excellence	Interactive learning resource
Remote Communication across cultures	Reading Document
High-impact communication: shaping your message	Interactive learning resource
Key principles of communication	Interactive learning resource
Identify the different styles of communication	Interactive learning resource
Improve communication within your team	Videocast Faculty
The importance of face-to-face communication	Videocast Faculty
Understanding the basics of communication	Interactive learning resource
Improving Communication Skills	Interactive learning resource
Intercultural Communication and Conflict Resolution	Interactive learning resource
Humanitarian communication: Addressing key challenges	Interactive learning resource
Three Routes to Good Communication	Interactive learning resource
Interpersonal Communication	Learning Channel
Analysing the effectiveness of your communication efforts	Reading Document

Conflict Management

Title	Type
Conflict Management Project	Interactive learning resource
Conflict Management	Interactive learning resource
Introduction to Negotiation and Conflict Management	Interactive learning resource
Spotting ineffective attitudes in the case of a conflict	Action tip
Understanding the process of conflict	Session
Conducting a conflict resolution meeting	Action tip
Developing a long-term plan for dealing with conflict	Action tip
When conflicts arise, "slow" communication is best!	Videocast faculty
Asking yourself the right questions when conflict arises	Videocast faculty
How to use constructive conflict to boost social learning	Videocast faculty
Neutralise conflict	Videocast faculty
Establishing conflict norms for your team	Videocast faculty
Resolving conflicts	Videocast faculty
5 techniques for solving conflicts	Action tip
How to Avoid and Manage Conflict	Interactive learning resource
Handling Conflicts in High-Value Relationships	Interactive learning resource
Conflict Resolution Skills	Interactive learning resource
Negotiation, Mediation, and Conflict Resolution - Capstone Project	Interactive learning resource
Types of Conflict	Interactive learning resource
Intercultural Communication and Conflict Resolution	Interactive learning resource
Mediation and Conflict Resolution	Interactive learning resource
Resolving Conflict	Interactive learning resource

Cross-cultural competence

Title	Type
How can you reconcile a cultural dilemma?	Videocast Faculty
How to implement solutions to reconcile cultural differences	Videocast Faculty
No intercultural skills, no international business	Videocast Faculty
Home, work, travel: develop your intercultural mindset	Videocast Faculty
Be aware of cultural nuances	Videocast Faculty
Intercultural Management	Interactive learning resource
Intercultural Communication and Conflict Resolution	Interactive learning resource