



Evaluation of the WFP People Strategy (2014-2017)

Approved in 2014, the WFP People Strategy (2014–2017) is now in its sixth year of implementation. This evaluation covers the period from 2014–2019. The three main evaluation questions were:

- How good is the strategy?
- What were the results of the strategy?
- Why has the strategy produced the results observed?

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The WFP People Strategy was approved in November 2014. While entitled a “strategy”, it was included in the WFP policy compendium. It is structured around four imperatives and 11 related initiatives and articulates the goal of WFP’s human resource function becoming less “transactional” and more “strategic”.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was intended to promote accountability and learning on the WFP’s approach to managing people. Primary intended users of the evaluation are the Human Resources Division (HR), regional directors, country directors and their human resource officers, the leadership group, the Legal Office, headquarters directors and staffing coordinators, the Ethics Office, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services and the Inspector General and Oversight Office.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Quality of the People Strategy

The WFP People Strategy (2014–2017) outlines an overall vision but provides only limited clarity on what its implementation would require from internal and external stakeholders and on related accountabilities. Key elements of the strategy, such as the career framework and the establishment of overall workforce planning capabilities, were not systematically reflected in the “people” dimension of country office annual performance plans, increasing the risk that country office contributions to the strategy would not be captured.

The strategy reflected various global good practices regarding human resource management at the time of its development, which remain valid today. However, it is largely gender blind and silent on issues of diversity and inclusion.

While the core issues addressed in the People Strategy were and remain relevant, its visibility has declined over time and it is outdated in the light of recent developments at WFP and the United Nations, including the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the development of a new WFP strategic plan 2017–2021 and an increasing focus on workplace culture and staff satisfaction.

Results of the People Strategy

The evaluation found that implementation of the People Strategy had addressed all the imperatives and related initiatives but without a standalone results or monitoring framework. The creation of senior human resource office positions at the P-5 level in all Regional Bureaux was positive but contrasted with varying levels and contract types for human resources offices at country level.

Imperative 1 – Reinforce a Performance Mindset

Changes to relevant tools and processes have led to improved compliance with performance reporting requirements and enhanced transparency of assessment ratings. However, WFP’s overall performance management culture is only beginning to change, and many employees do not perceive performance management as part of an ongoing professional development process. Supervisors are not rewarded for a focus on professional development and people management.

WFP has strengthened its framework and tools for dealing with underperformance. At the same time, many supervisors still try to avoid giving negative PACE ratings due to the administrative effort required and fear of retaliation. This has resulted in teams working around poor performers – a challenge also faced by other United Nations agencies.

Imperative 2 – Build WFP’s Talent

WFP has improved career development processes and made them more transparent and accessible. However, career development remains a major source of frustration for WFP employees. The results of the 2018 global staff survey and evaluation interview data indicate that most WFP employees do not see themselves as being in control of their own career development.

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at <http://www.wfp.org/independent-evaluation>

For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation: wfp.evaluation@wfp.org

WFP has made some progress in enhancing the diversity of its workforce, albeit to varying degrees depending on the level of seniority. WFP gender parity varies by geographic location – usually with lower percentages of female staff in emergency settings – and by staff category and grade. WFP has not yet reached gender parity at P-3 level or higher.

Imperative 3 – Shift the Focus

WFP has had only limited success in establishing “fit for purpose contracts” for national staff and, more broadly, for all locally recruited employees. WFP’s extensive use of short-term contracts for much of its workforce – and over extended periods of time – is an issue that urgently requires sustained attention.

There is strong evidence that WFP is investing more in staff wellness, which relates to the “creating a supportive and healthy workplace” component of imperative 3. While areas for improvement remain, wellness is the one topic on which consulted stakeholders most consistently expressed positive views. Despite this, challenges to creating a supportive and healthy workplace were noted related to abuse of power, harassment and sexual harassment.

Imperative 4 – Equipping High-Impact Leaders

WFP has invested in the leadership and management capabilities of individuals through dedicated training programmes since 2014. However, it is difficult to determine whether they have contributed to changes in leadership and management practices at WFP.

In order to approach succession planning more systematically and transparently, WFP has put in place a leadership track. It is too early to tell how this process will affect the performance of WFP’s future leaders.

It is unclear to what extent gender equality is being explored in the various training programmes currently available at WFP, beyond efforts to ensure participation by male and female employees. Other gaps include the lack of a comprehensive framework for holding supervisors accountable for their performance in relation to people management and the absence of feedback to supervisors through regular 180 or 360 degree reviews.

Factors affecting Results

Despite the commitment by some senior leaders to strengthening WFP’s people management practices, the lack of clearly defined roles, responsibilities and work plans for WFP units other than HR, and the lack of detailed implementation plan, impeded its full operationalization.

WFP’s voluntary funding model and the lack of long-term resource predictability were cited as reasons for the continued reliance on short-term contract modalities. However, similar organizations have successfully limited long-term use of special service agreements.

WFP’s evolving organizational culture has both supported and created challenges for the strategy’s implementation. There are signs of increasing awareness and acceptance of the importance

of staff wellness to organizational performance. At the same time, WFP’s internal culture has traditionally placed higher value on programme-related performance (“we deliver”) than on employee-related concerns.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The WFP People Strategy (2014–2017) was of good quality at the time it was written in that it outlined a clear vision that was relevant to the priorities of the WFP strategic plan in force at the time, was forward-looking and was coherent with other WFP policies and good people management practices. The weaknesses of the strategy were an absence of comprehensive and clear expectations as to what “success” would look like and a degree of blindness regarding gender and diversity.

As noted in the 2017-2018 MOPAN report, WFP is performing well. However, as it currently stands, the People Strategy does not provide sufficient direction to enable WFP to address all of its human resource management challenges. There is an critical need for WFP to attract, effectively use and consistently develop the skills of the best workforce possible and to do so in ways that reflect and model the United Nations system’s commitment to human rights, gender equality, diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. WFP should develop a new policy, focusing on “people”, that sets out the organization’s vision of its future workforce and the core values that should shape WFP’s workplace culture.

Recommendation 2. WFP should implement a new people policy through an organizational change management process.

Recommendation 3. WFP should revise its human resource functional strategy to continue the professionalization of the human resources function at all levels and locations of the organization.

Recommendation 4. Human resources should develop a supervisors’ accountability framework for supervisors to achieve excellence in people management and present it to the leadership group for endorsement.

Recommendation 5. WFP should conduct a comprehensive review of existing contract modalities and their use.

Recommendation 6: Human resources should further strengthen its approach to proactively sharing relevant information with WFP employees.