Change Leadership – Part 1:
Key steps and common pitfalls in managing organizational change

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Introduction
In order to successfully implement new processes, products and business strategies while minimizing negative outcomes, particularly in the context of COVID-19, civil society organizations should be ready to deal with change. The organizational change management approach is a useful tool for non-profit organizations' leaders to both manage risk and prepare for their next organizational opportunities. This panel, the first of a series of two sessions on change leadership, examined some of the key steps in managing significant organizational changes and common pitfalls to be avoided. This is part of Cooperation Canada's ongoing virtual series on shifting cooperation paradigms: adapting to a changing context in the COVID pandemic.

Some highlights
Panelists' presentations and following discussions focused on the topic of change and how to effectively implement it at the organizational level. One highlighted aspect was that effective change management goes beyond project management and technical tasks undertaken to enact organizational changes. Moreover, organizational change management involves defining and adopting corporate strategies, structures, procedures and technologies to handle changes in external conditions and the environment of civil society organizations. In this sense, leaders should be aware of a number of elements while promoting change, such as being strategic and having a people-oriented approach. Other reflections in the panel focused on the importance of prioritizing change, of communicating decisions regarding change, and of monitoring change after it has been implemented. Apart from comments around these steps, panelists also referred to the topics of participation and transparency. By taking these aspects into account, leaders may ensure that the people involved in the organization have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes regarding change, and that these same people are fully informed of the changes being carried out.

Fundamental aspects of change management
1) **People.** No change can be done without people. At the same time, change has different meanings for different people. Therefore, change management also involves leading the "people side" of major change within organizations. Leaders should consider aspects such as how to identify supporters to champion the change, how to communicate change effectively, and how to manage people and support those for whom change might be challenging.
2) **Participation.** In order to ensure transformational change, leaders should base their decisions on consultations with those involved in the organization so that they are heard and can have a say on the change process. This shows that aspects such as transparency and power balance are being taken into consideration within the organization.
3) **Process.** Change is a continuous process. It requires monitoring and reporting of progress in a way that both reflects the challenges and reinforces the successes. Seeing change as a process helps creating a smoother transition so that change is institutionalized at the systemic level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has gotten civil society organizations challenged in many ways. As the international cooperation and humanitarian assistance sector's leaders grapple with important decisions in these challenging times, change management becomes essential. While taking both risks and opportunities into account, organizational change is a key tool for leaders to implement change in a participatory, transparent, and people-centered way.