

PURPOSE-DRIVEN INNOVATION

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PURPOSE-DRIVEN INNOVATION

Lessons from Managing Change in
the United Nations

By

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PREFACE

Idea In Brief

The United Nations (UN) manages change to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, overcome digital era dislocations, and address pandemic disruptions. You can do the same by learning how to deploy the most recent UN lessons, models, and cases.

Why Read This Book

For the UN, reform and managing change have often proved challenging. New UN research and case studies show managers how to account for evolving social norms, digital era dislocations, and pandemic-disrupted ways of working. A purposive theory of change helps managers to innovate by matching their intentions to meet societal objectives with precedents from successful change campaigns.

Purpose-driven Innovation provides a unique, inside look at case studies from the UN Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge. Cases are presented together, arranged according to the UN change framework, and analyzed within the innovative perspective of management as a design-oriented professional discipline. Relevant to all managerial efforts to transform organizations, *Purpose-driven Innovation* shows how the UN accelerated a shift to practical solutions not problems, actions not contemplation, and innovation rather than introspection.

Readers learn how to be modern effective managers who contribute consequentially to societal goals. Any manager, if able to adapt rather than copy what was done before, can achieve a meaningful purpose for herself, her managerial practice, and her organization. *Purpose-driven Innovation* is for anyone interested in management, especially change management, for good.

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The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of the authors' past or present employers or affiliations. Examples of frameworks, models, and case materials within this book are examples based on limited and clearly referenced sources in the public domain. Nevertheless, we have sought and received permission from the United Nations System Staff College to use all frameworks, models, change graphics, and cases cited. The United Nations (UN) kindly provided us permission to reference and use the graphics of the sustainable development goals. Assumptions made within the book are our own and not reflective of the position of any of the sources cited. The content of this publication has not been

approved by the UN and does not reflect the views of the UN or its officials or Member States.

Jens Flanding thanks his family members for their support and patience with yet another academic project during these trying times of global health challenges and upheavals.

Genevieve Grabman thanks her family members, who are even more exhausted than she is with the writing of this work.

ENDORSEMENTS

“From two authors with first-hand experience comes the most innovative answer to the formidable challenge of managing change in a complex organization. A must read for anyone interested in the United Nations and in change management.”

– *Francesco Mancini, Associate Professor in Practice and Vice Dean, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore*

“Besides providing access to valuable UN data and experiences, the authors’ unique analysis gives organizations a timely set of lessons and tools to better navigate these turbulent times.”

– *Toni Castro-Cosío, PhD, Senior Behavioral Researcher, Center for Advanced Hindsight, Duke University*

“It’s great to see a very tangible and timely outcome from the UN Lab on Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK). A case based approach to organizational change makes this book a must read for everyone interested in understanding and navigating organizational change in the context of the SDG’s, the UN and other large international organizations.”

– *Joel Nielsen, Chief Of Leadership Development in UNHCR*

“Though not everyone has yet realized (or accepted it), we are long past the days when organizations could treat their decision making as purely technical exercises aimed at generating success by narrow definitions (like profit or shareholder value). Resilience, societal concerns and objectives, the actions of governments and NGOs, and the views of all stakeholder must increasingly be considered. This book provides lessons from the worldwide organization that has confronted this reality most directly – the United Nations. The authors were there, on the front lines. Open-minded leaders will find much here to think seriously about.”

– *Robert D. Austin, Author and Professor, Ivey Business School*

“This is a valuable reference for change management in multi-cultural organizations with a global presence.”

– *Dr. Jingbo Huang, with 20 years of experience working in the UN system*

SECTION 1

A PURPOSEFUL APPROACH TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Campaigns to affect change within the United Nations (UN) system have modernized managerial practices and contributed to global development goals. In this book, we explain how a change case study's design precedents might be extracted and applied to future change initiatives. Learning to analyze and design better change initiatives is an enhancement to the practice of management, which we discuss in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, we expand and refine the UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK) Change Management Framework to clarify its principles and to incorporate it in the lessons from the UN's case studies, which are found in Chapters 4–9. Learning change management in this way will permit any manager to exercise leadership around change and become a modern change manager.

The case chapters will amplify the UNLOCK theory of change management to encompass a design-oriented, purpose-driven approach “superior for learning from experience.”¹ Change management literature focuses on “observed differences over time,”² so this book also presents research on more recent cases in Chapter 10. These new, never-before-described cases show application of the purpose-driven UNLOCK change management model increases the effectiveness of strategies and program delivery, efficiently implements twenty-first century culture and behavior expectations, and drives leadership through new technology adoption and adaptation. Finally, this book will discuss how leaders can

use the UN case studies when developing organizational change management initiatives in Chapter 11. These will guide new ways of working.

This book concludes where it began, explaining change management's utility and usefulness beyond the UN system. The UN system has transformed management of its strategies, culture and behavior change, and technology adoption. The authors hope *Purpose-driven Innovation* serves as an inspiration for managers within and outside of the UN and will build these leaders' capacity and skills to respond to demands of digital technology, evolving social norms, and post-COVID-19 pandemic expectations.

NOTES

1. M. Barzelay, *Public Management as a Design-oriented Professional Discipline* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019): 157.
2. A. H. Van de Ven and M.S. Poole, "Explaining development and change in organizations", *Academy of Management Review*, 20, no. 3 (1995): 510–540.

TOWARD PURPOSE-DRIVEN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A growing culture of innovative transformation is taking root across the United Nation (UN) system, where UN agencies have sought to renovate their practices to advance organizational change, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic laid ruin to old ways of management and work. Purpose-driven innovation posits a theory of change management intended to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), contextualizes what that theory looks like in practice, and proposes cases to demonstrate which aspects of change management designs are effective. Purposeful, as we use the term, refers to our examination of what change management is for, what it consists of, and how it works.¹

Our theoretical and empirical exercise contributes UN case studies to purposeful change management efforts at any organization, whether local, national, or international. The case studies, and the methods we propose here for analyzing case lessons, serve as essential knowledge for change management practitioners. This knowledge contributes to the formal education and professionalization of management at purpose-driven, innovative organizations. No matter in what type of organization she works, any manager can benefit from these findings of how to pilot the changes necessary to achieve sustainable objectives.

Our work intends to help managers who want to incorporate change management in their professional practice. Our central integrating argument is that every manager is capable of being a

change manager; indeed, being a change manager is the only path to success for the modern leader. But more is expected from managers-as-change-managers than rote recitation of a change management theory. Effective, modern managers use the lens of societal purpose to understand the practice of change management and how to hack change management techniques to achieve intentions.

In this book, we employ “purpose” as a double-entendre, as it is the root of both purposive and purposeful. Being “purpose-driven” means being compelled to innovate because of the gravity of the challenges that we face. To address climate change or to diversify a workforce, the same-old change management approach will not do. Instead, a manager rises to today’s expectations and needs by applying the UN’s change framework to the delivery of change management campaigns and analyzing what, exactly, would cause the sought-after change. Past happenings can instruct the present. Through study of past change management campaigns, managers can learn “mechanism-intent” thinking and analysis, which can then be rehearsed for the manager’s next change project – or when a manager is called upon to sustain the never-ending reinventions that typify today’s organizational transformation.²

A purposive approach contrasts with finding a best practice, where one identifies a series of steps that could be copied to achieve success in future campaigns. For purpose-driven innovation, copying best practices is not sufficient. The sheer complexity of management reform initiatives, the constancy of societal change, and the practical need to design changes to suit new circumstances means that change managers must innovate. Innovation presumes adaptation of practice, rather than replication of what was done before. With every effort, managers contribute to professionalizing change management so that it can evolve to be a sincere, purpose-driven endeavor aligned with global development goals.

To be proficient change management practitioners, managers first confirm the ultimate intention of a change initiative. With the purpose of action clear, then the manager contemplates how to apply a change framework. The manager next consults studies of past successful change management cases to design an initiative that is meaningful to her circumstance. Sorting the wheat from

the chaff, the manager determines what has worked before, the “design-precedents” from these cases.³ Finally, using knowledge gained from change framework and skill strengthened through practice, the manager applies the design-precedents from past cases to her own scenario. The cardinal rule is to design a response for each new situation, but not to copy what has been done before.

Managers are under constant pressure. They must direct their team’s application of one or more change frameworks. They sift through raw, real-time data about their organizations’ change campaigns. With no time to seek formal managerial education (which generally does not include change management, anyway) organizational leaders learn by doing, guiding themselves through change frameworks and models. The authors of this book have walked this path when presented with overwhelming and unexpected demands to lead complex organizational reforms.

For managers, it is difficult to leave behind a reflexive focus on process efficiency and effectiveness. We argue for a better approach, however. Purpose-driven innovation is the design, but no the copying, of change campaigns based on substance. Pedagogically, we ask managers to focus on seeking knowledge from a new change framework and design-precedents with a purpose. The manager’s intention should be to improve our common existence through alignment with the SDG. The SDG change management cases of the UN system can inform the practice of change management within and beyond the UN system organizations.

THE SDGs

Set by the UN General Assembly in 2015, the 17 SDG are the global blueprint for a better and more sustainable future for all.⁴ They address the challenges all peoples and nations face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. The primary role of UN agencies is to provide support to the SDG priorities set by national governments, but implementing SDG also requires adjustment to UN policies and institutions to buttress national priorities and systems.⁵

The UN system’s internal transformation effort proposes to meet the SDG by 2030. Attaining the SDG promise of dignity, prosperity, and peace on a healthy planet and meeting the Goals’ 169 incremental targets, requires the UN to make radical changes to its own ways of working.⁶ UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres mandated the entire UN development system modernize through adopting new technologies and adapting to the demands and expectations of the post-COVID-19 era.⁷ Guterres’ predecessor, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, directed, “Innovation is one of the means through which we can achieve a greater effect in [the UN] mission.”⁸ Notwithstanding these orders from above, the UN has not situated change management as essential to the innovation necessary to follow the plan for meeting the SDG, the Sustainable Development Agenda.⁹ Internal UN training has not presented change management in such a way that would permit UN managers to exercise consistent leadership around purpose-driven change.



Source: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

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The SDG, which are the UN's reasons for working, have evolved at the same time as a recast of how the UN works. Adoption of cloud computing-based working has been transformational in ways the UN is only now beginning to appreciate.¹⁰ Given the newness of the situation, the UN system also has not yet envisioned what change campaigns will look like to a shell-shocked post-COVID-19 UN staff and leadership. But months of struggling to deliver at the frontline while working virtually from home during the COVID-19 emergency demonstrate that managing change is critical for modern leaders.

Learning the practice of designing for purposive change is not just for UN managers, but for all managers. The address of "change" is needed due to our society's constant upheavals, but the "management" in change management also requires additional examination. Situating managerial practices within the idea of purpose-driven transformation, we draw out the idea of management as a design-oriented professional discipline.¹¹ We also walk with the reader through developments in organizational change management knowledge.¹²

Today's managers are challenged to respond to continuous, digitally driven, organizational change rather than a one-time reform project.¹³ More, it is expected that change serve a transformational purpose. Managers can prepare for and overcome these challenges through studying competing theories of change management and cases of how organizations designed successful transformation efforts. The tools, techniques, and analytical skills we identify professionalize managers, who might not have benefited from formal education in public management or practiced change management. We hope to empower managers to design new change cases right for their organizations, rather than merely copying what worked elsewhere.

Intention to achieve the SDGs has moved the change exercise from a mainly technocratic efficiency approach that focused on the change of one computing system to the next¹⁴ to a more values-driven and informed organizational approach. Managers will succeed through understanding the transformation of change management theory from static to strategic and consciously

planned according to a set of design principles. Change management to achieve a high-level purpose, like the SDG, involves designing future change initiatives by applying principles from change management frameworks and precedents from successful change cases.

What principles should be applied and from which of the many change management models?¹⁵ We suggest a versatile, broadly applicable, and purposive-driven approach to change management, the UN Lab for Organization Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK) framework. The UNLOCK theory of change management builds on life-cycle models of change to emphasize continuous change approaches. Cyclical change models stand in opposition to John Kotter's linear change project approach¹⁶ and have evolved in response to managerial needs to address the threats and opportunities of accelerating, global, and societal challenges.¹⁷ This philosophy of change management is "purposive" because it supports the UN system's SDG mandates and because it does not prescribe specific steps but flexes to respond to each new demand for change.

A gradual emphasis on continuous change approaches, rather than traditional, project-focused, "burning platforms"¹⁸ is seen in the UNLOCK framework's evolution. The framework was initially conceived in 2016 as a dialectical model of change for singular UN change projects. Then, UN system organizations managed change on a discrete, case-by-case basis. The UNLOCK therefore developed a series of steps to follow. The steps of this prototype framework explained change phenomena in terms of the purpose steps served. The earlier framework never quite addressed the cause by which these arise: constant change.

UNLOCK's change management framework is ever evolving in response to managerial needs for interventions that respond to the threats and opportunities of accelerating and global challenges while meeting the SDG. Chief among these risks are modern technologies, societal inequities, ecological sustainability, and administrative practices adequate to the UN's COVID-19 response, as well as more classic public administration concepts of value for money.