



## Case study

### World Vision International – Exiting with dignity

An organisation which is seen by staff to be acting according to its values increases retention and motivation. In this case study WorldVision (WV) remained true to its values at a time of retrenchment and transition – and gained benefits. The Evaluation results of Project Merlot show that staff exited WV feeling valued by the organization and proud of their work.

#### The Objective:

Project MERLOT, as the initiative was called, was designed to meet the Human Resource challenges facing Tsunami Response Teams as programs moved into transition, and employment contracts for significant numbers of staff were to end. Based on a determination to translate World Vision (WV) core values into practice, the project's goal was to help staff feel their value and worth with practical implications for their personal and professional development by ensuring they exited with dignity and with improved occupational prospects.

Specifically in Indonesia the project was described as a basic HR activity to help ensure the image of the organisation was not badly affected, while in Thailand MERLOT was planned to help defuse potential issues associated with staff hearing that the project was to close earlier than anticipated.

The questions senior WorldVision HR staff asked themselves were:

- a) *How can WV ensure that exiting staff feel valued for their contribution to the tsunami response work and leave with dignity and a sense of pride?*
- b) *How can WV ensure exiting staff are better equipped to seek new employment?*
- c) *How can WV identify and retain those staff with the 'right' competencies and match them with the 'right' posts across the Partnership to help strengthen the organisation's human resources?*

#### The Activities:

HR staff in each country undertook the following:

- a) A two-day workshop designed to enable reflection and develop skills. The agenda covered:
  - i. Preparation for future job search – CV review and writing, CV cover letter writing, interview techniques and practice, provision of job-seeking reference materials and guidance
  - ii. Skills assessments – Completing confidential skills assessments to inform personal feedback and feedback for others, which address skill strengths and areas for further

development. The skills assessment tools included: Skills Review - self assessment; Upward

Review - feedback on supervisors; and Employee Review - downward feedback for subordinates.

iii. Reflection on personal achievements and skill development – individual and group games and exercises.

b) Skills Assessment Summary Feedback: Through group and individual sessions, staff received their Skills Assessment Summary Feedback Form, with the opportunity for discussion with an HR staff member.

## The Outputs and Outcomes:

1282 staff participated in 63 workshops while 465 staff completed the MERLOT process. 174 of these participated in the evaluation which showed that:

- a) 94.8% of respondents indicated that MERLOT contributed to them feeling valued by WV.
- b) 86.8% of respondents reported that the project contributed to their feeling proud about the work they did for WV. The proportion of responses varied from a low of 80.6% (Indonesia) to high of 96.7% (Thailand). There was no significant difference in responses between the levels of staff.
- c) The provision of CV writing (65.9%) and interview technique workshops (72.3%) and Skills assessments were identified as the most effective activities in preparing staff to leave WV in search of new employment
- d) Although it was a new experience for most people, taking part in the skills assessment process was reported as a positive and worthwhile experience
- e) The workshops helped build the capacity of staff to market and prepare themselves better to find new employment. Of the 163 respondents who answered the question concerning their current employment, approximately 81% had a job and approximately 70% of respondents reported either moderate or major contribution of the MERLOT process in getting a new job.
- f) WV had had litigation issues when closing down programmes after previous responses. The number of litigation cases following this project was very low in comparison with previous relief operation but the evaluation team concluded that the extent of the Merlot's contribution to this was not clear.
- g) Capacity building of HR staff: HR staff from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand completed ToT courses on skills assessment or giving skills assessment feedback.
- h) Curriculum support materials were produced, for example Job Aids covering CV writing, CV cover letter writing, skills assessments, interview skills and the preparation and delivery of skills assessment feedback. These Job Aids included suggested learning activities and learning materials and step-by-step guidance to support delivery.
- i) Significantly there was no litigation resulting from the closure of these programmes, and it is believed by WV that Project Merlot was a major contributor to this.

## Inputs

were mostly HR team time. The core project team members from the Asian Tsunami Response Team (ATRT) head-office in Singapore developed the material, and local HR staff who were trained to implement the project activities.

The total cost was USD 250,000 (about USD 200.00 per participant) which included: Project staff salaries; travel to/from workshops; staging the workshops; consultancy fees to Accenture (Accenture provided the software for the Project).

## Lessons learnt:

The evaluation of the project recommended:

- a) More attention to cultural issues. More attention was needed to address the disparate needs of staff within different cultural contexts, while the process of self-assessing and completing skills assessments on others is an unfamiliar concept for many people, and in some settings, challenges existing cultural norms and practices.
- b) Promoting and facilitating the skills assessments as a 'learning experience' would increase motivation and make it more meaningful.
- c) Communications is very important: ensuring staff know in advance what the purpose of the workshops is, whether they are compulsory. Also ensuring that the language used is not too sophisticated.
- d) local HR staff who are to implement the exit support services need to be provided with appropriate training and ongoing monitoring and coaching support
- e) Consider regular skills assessments, either once or twice per year or during the middle of their contract. The reasons suggested included:
  - it would be more relaxed (not about to leave) and give more time to prepare to find new job
  - it would help staff and supervisors understand each other more
  - reflection would help motivate staff

WV's own evaluation states: "Project MERLOT is an example of an HR initiative that has effectively translated into practice WV's core value 'we value people'. It has also demonstrated that basic practices, such as 'reflection', 'skills assessment' and 'feedback to staff' can be applied and make a positive difference for staff within a variety of WV contexts."

People In Aid thanks WorldVision for making their evaluation available to People In Aid, particularly Jeff Brunt, Tony Culnane and Joseph Cheah.