EVALUATION OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Disclaimer

The evaluation was managed by a senior evaluator under the supervision of Director of Internal Oversight and implemented by KEK-CDC. The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team members from KEK-CDC.

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Abbreviations

BCP	Business continuity plan
CAHB	Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Buildings
CMBC	Crisis management and business continuity
CMP	Capital Master Plan
CODIR	Steering Committee (on the New Way of Working)
(the) Court	European Court of Human Rights
DG	Director General
DGA	Directorate General of Administration
DGI	Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law
DGII	Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity
DGS	Directorate of General Services
DHR	Directorate of Human Resources
DIO	Directorate of Internal Oversight
DIT	Directorate of Information Technology
DMS	Document Management System
DPAER	Directorate of Political Affairs and External Relations
DPB	Directorate of Programme and Budget
DPC	Directorate of Programme Co-ordination
DSG	Deputy Secretary General
EDQM	European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare
EQ	Evaluation question
FGD	Focus group discussion
GR-PBA	Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human resources
IT	Information technology
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit (of the United Nations System)
MAE	Major administrative entity
NWoW	New Way of Working
OAC	Oversight Advisory Committee
OECD DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OH	Outcome Harvesting
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Parliamentary Assembly	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PO	Private Office (of the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General)
RBM	Results-based management
RG	Reference Group
SC	Staff Committee
SG	Secretary General

SMG   Senior Management Group

ToC   Theory of change

ToR   Terms of reference

TST   Transversal Support Team

UN   United Nations

UNLOCK   United Nations Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge

Glossary of Terms

The glossary of terms defines the way the following terms are used in the context of this evaluation and the present report.

Administrative reform area	is one of the four areas of the administrative reform, namely the People Strategy, the digital transformation, the Capital Master Plan (CMP) and governance.
Change management	is defined as the approach used and actions taken to change practice, culture and behaviour to ensure the adoption and sustainability of changes in existing work practices implemented through reform, a management initiative or as a continuous incremental process.
Evaluation survey	is the survey conducted in the context of this evaluation by KEK – CDC and the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO).
Initiative	is one defined change intervention of the administrative reform (for example the Document Management System (DMS), the Panorama performance appraisal system).
Manager	is a staff member with responsibilities to inform and support staff with reform initiatives and changes.
Respondent to the survey	is a Council of Europe staff member who responded to the survey independently of his or her role in the reform initiatives and changes.
Staff	are all staff members directly or indirectly impacted by reform initiatives and changes, being or not in charge of and driving reform initiatives and changes.

Executive Summary

Introduction: The evaluation of change management at the Council of Europe was included in the Council of Europe's Directorate of Internal Oversight's work programme for 2022-2023 due to the strategic and operational implications of the reform process for the Organisation as a whole. While several evaluations and audits of various aspects of the reform have already been conducted, change management in the Council of Europe has never been evaluated as such, and there is no definition of what it entails in the context of the Council of Europe reform. The DIO therefore concluded that the evaluation of change management is timely and of strategic importance to ensure accountability and transparency in how the reform process is managed.

Definition of change management: For the sake of this evaluation, change management is defined as the approach used and actions taken to change practice, culture and behaviour to ensure the adoption and sustainability of changes in existing work practices implemented through reform, a management initiative or as a continuous incremental process.

Scope and purpose: The evaluation focuses on the approaches used and actions taken as part of change management in the context of the Council of Europe's administrative reform, from the establishment of the Steering Group on Reform in 2018 to the end of the first quarter of 2024. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide a picture of the change management approaches used and actions taken in the steering of the Council of Europe's administrative reform process. It aims to assess how the process of change has been managed in the Organisation from the perspective of a range of stakeholders (for example leadership, staff engaged in the reform, staff affected by the reform, external stakeholders).

Methodology: The evaluation was conducted by KEK – CDC between December 2023 and May 2024. The evaluation used a "mixed methods" approach comprising desk research, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and workshops with Council of Europe staff, an online survey and case studies. More than 200 documents were reviewed, 102 persons consulted and a 7% response rate was obtained on the staff survey. The consultations combined perspectives of men and women, internal and external stakeholders, staff based at the headquarters (HQ) in Strasbourg and external offices, as well as the perspectives of the Directorate General of Administration (DGA) and other major administrative entities (MAEs).

Overall assessment and conclusions: While the administrative reform was used as an example in collecting and analysing data, the conclusions address change management at the organisational level of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe is in a continuous state of reform, tackling relevant issues ranging from human resources (HR) and information technology (IT) to building management and governance. However, like many other organisations, the Council of Europe is prone to maintaining the status quo and initiates changes primarily in a reactive manner in response to requests made by the Committee of Ministers and the recommendations of external audits and evaluations. The difficult environment in recent years (for example the Covid-19 pandemic, the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the general financial situation of the Council of Europe) and the lack of dedicated human and financial resources available for implementing and managing the requested changes are creating a challenging context.

The term "reform" is misleading as it is used to describe compliance actions as well as initiatives aiming at truly changing the way in which the Organisation operates and performs.

The Council of Europe lacks a coherent and motivating narrative of how the Organisation should be changed and what this means for its staff, member states and partners. Moreover, there is no internal strategic decision-making mechanism directly involved in decisions regarding the prioritisation, design or implementation of specific reform areas ensuring thus the overall steering and guiding of changes at the Council of Europe. This makes it more difficult to foster a culture of change based on clear and realistic priorities and goals.

Moreover, the evaluation highlights that the reform initiatives do not follow a recognised change management approach at the level of the Organisation and there is no internal organisation-wide change management support mechanism. However, several good practices and actions have been identified, establishing a strong basis for the Council of Europe to build on, and to improve and create more synergies among initiatives and changes.

The lack of a coherent overview of the reform process in addition to the complex, fragmented steering and management of the reform makes it hard to communicate changes in a clear and coherent way and to engage with stakeholders in a relevant and timely manner. This is exacerbated by a lack of resources, including for communication, and a lack of an overall communication strategy for the reform process (for example, what the goals are, how they will be achieved, what they mean for staff and when they will be completed). This leads to a lack of transparency and limited consistency in communication with staff and other stakeholders throughout the initiatives.

Consequently, Council of Europe staff are tired of reforms, do not always understand the rationale for change and have limited trust in how their inputs are integrated into the decisions. This makes it hard to engage them effectively in ongoing and new reform initiatives and limits their ultimate buy-in and ownership of changes.

Recommendations: The evaluation team is proposing ten recommendations to improve change management at the Council of Europe in the future; thereby acknowledging and building on existing structures and good practices. The recommendations target the Organisation as a whole and are therefore addressed to the Council of Europe. Considerations of gender and special needs are mainstreamed in Recommendations 4, 8, 9 and 10.

1.   The Council of Europe should make a strategic decision either to realise the full potential of its reforms by investing in a more strategic and systemic approach to change management, option (a), or to continue with a less comprehensive and systematic approach to change management, option (b).

> ► Option (a) implies a strategic commitment to a comprehensive change management approach that will position the Organisation to realise significant and sustainable improvement, ultimately benefiting the Organisation and its stakeholders. This is the option recommended by the evaluators. The following nine recommendations outline the strategic actions needed (Recommendations 2-10).

> ► Option (b) requires that the scope, ambition and speed of reforms be scaled back to match available resources and capacities. Nevertheless, the Organisation may want to implement some of the recommendations, such as Recommendations 7, 8, 9 or 10, for punctual improvement of practices.

2.   The Council of Europe should conceptualise an internal strategic decision-making mechanism involving key actors from the Organisation to prioritise, guide and steer change in a coherent and manageable way.

3.   The Council of Europe should develop a clear and concrete road map as well as a coherent and motivating narrative of the evolution of the Organisation to be achieved by the reforms, acknowledging existing vision statement(s) and focusing on initiatives aimed at fundamentally changing the way the Council of Europe operates, its culture and performance.

4.   The Council of Europe should promote a culture of change inspired by the road map, integrating gender and special needs dimensions.

5.   The Council of Europe should plan and secure the necessary resources for implementing reform initiatives and change management in accordance with the road map.

6.   The Council of Europe should upgrade the internal support and co-ordination of change management by building on existing expertise and efforts.

7.   The Council of Europe should use a set of pragmatic guidelines for planning, implementing and assessing changes and change management approaches. These guidelines should be the basis for meaningful reflections among relevant stakeholders.

8.   The Council of Europe should systematically assess the feasibility and potential consequences of initiatives, and the outcomes of adopted initiatives.

9.   The Council of Europe should develop an integrated approach to communicating with staff about reform, initiatives and changes, in order to ensure understanding and increase buy-in.

10.   The Council of Europe should identify meaningful, timely and sustainable ways of involving its staff to ensure their substantive engagement throughout processes.

Introduction

1.   The reform of the Council of Europe was launched in 2009 and is an ongoing process designed to adapt the way in which the Organisation functions in response to evolving needs, environment and constraints on a continuous basis. The reform consists of three main tracks: (i) the political reform, (ii) the reform of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court) and the European Convention on Human Rights system, and (iii) the restructuring and administrative reform.[1]

2.   The administrative reform entered a new stage of implementation in 2017-18 and the creation of the Steering Group on Reform took place in January 2018, alongside the creation of several reflection groups on this topic.

3.   In 2020, "streamlining organisational structures and operations, including a more task-force oriented approach with greater flexibility in the assignment of our human resources to different activities" was stated as one of the expected concrete achievements of the four-year strategic period for delivering the priorities set by the Organisation.[2] The Committee of Ministers reiterated its strong commitment when approving the Programme and Budget 2022-2025, which states that "the implementation of the reform process in all its dimensions will be pursued and be guided by strategic orientations around the new four-year framework, to further optimise the efficient and effective functioning of the Organisation and the results-oriented culture".[3] The Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe welcomed the ongoing efforts, including the implementation of the Council of Europe People Strategy 2019-2023 and digital transformation, and strongly encouraged additional steps to improve the effectiveness of implementation and working methods focusing on value for money.[4]

4.   At the Reykjavik Summit in May 2023, the heads of state and government committed to continuing the reform process to achieve greater transparency, efficiency and effectiveness.[5] The continuation of the reform aims to further contribute to an increase in productivity and to the absorption of cost pressures through the identification of efficiency gains, cost reductions and cost avoidance measures.[6] The Secretary General (SG), the Deputy Secretary General (DSG) and the whole Organisation are fully committed to pursuing the reform process throughout the 2024-2027 quadrennium.[7]

5.   While several evaluations and audits of various aspects of the reform have already been conducted, change management in the Council of Europe has never been audited nor evaluated as such, and there is no definition of what it entails in the context of the Council of Europe reform. The Council of Europe's Directorate of Internal Oversight therefore concluded that the evaluation of change management is timely and of strategic importance to ensure accountability and transparency in how the reform process is managed. The evaluation of change management at the Council of Europe was therefore included in the DIO's work programme for 2022-2023 due to the strategic and operational implications of the reform process for the Organisation as a whole.

6.   The Council of Europe mandated KEK – CDC to conduct the evaluation from December 2023 to August 2024. The terms of reference are provided in Appendix 2.

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1.   Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2023), "Main elements of the reform" (DD(2023)359).
2.   Council of Europe (2020), "Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe" (SG/Inf(2020)34).
3.   Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2022), "Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2022-2025 (2023 Adjusted)" (CM(2023)1).
4.   Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2023), "Informal meeting of the Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration (GR-PBA) on reform" [Powerpoint slides].
5.   Council of Europe (2023), "Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values", Reykjavik Summit, 4th Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe.
6.   Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2023), "Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2024-2027" (CM(2024)1).
7.   Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2023), "Main elements of the reform" (DD(2023)359).

Description of the Evaluation Subject and Context

7. To ease the description of the evaluation subject, the evaluation team reconstructed, based on the review of information collected, a theory of change (ToC). This theory of change could support any reform at the Council of Europe, including the administrative reform. The model integrates both the "how" and the "what" of reforms and stresses the importance of essential inputs to both the change/reform initiative ("what") and the change management approach ("how"). While there are distinct outcomes for the reform initiative and the change management process, all outcomes contribute to the same overall impacts, namely the Council of Europe delivering its mandate in an effective and efficient manner and the Council of Europe remaining a relevant and attractive organisation.

Figure 1. Reconstructed theory of change for change management at the Council of Europe
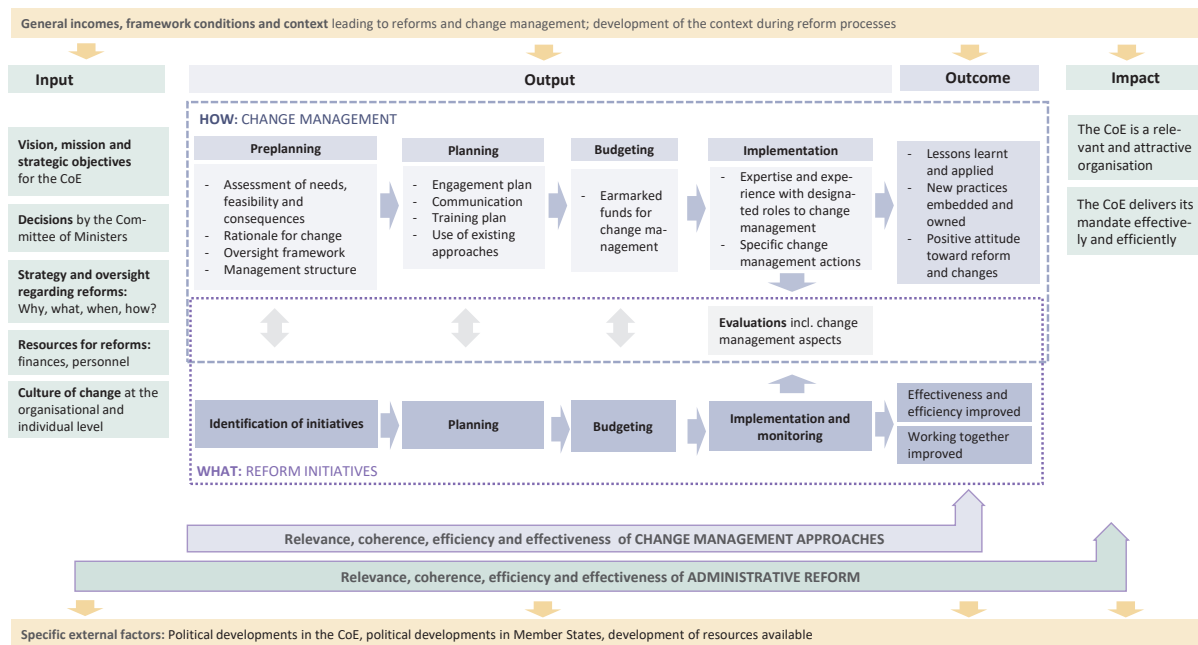
Source: own compilation based on documents and consultations.

8. The subject of the evaluation is change management in the administrative reform of the Council of Europe, namely the upper part of the theory of change on the "how".

9. The definition of change management used for the purpose of this evaluation is a slightly modified version of the definition of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System (JIU),[8] adapted to the context of the Council of Europe's administrative reform process, namely:

10. "Change management is defined as the approach used and actions taken to change practice, culture and behaviour to ensure the adoption and sustainability of changes in existing work practices implemented through reform, a management initiative or as a continuous incremental process."

11. Thus, while the JIU's definition refers to "improvements", the definition used for the present evaluation recognises that change does not necessarily imply a need for improvement but is often necessary to adapt to emerging or anticipated developments in the operating environment.

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8. Organisational change management is defined by the JIU as "the approach and actions to change practice, culture and behaviour to ensure the adoption and sustainability of improvements in existing work practice, through reform, or a management initiative, or as a continuous incremental process" (United Nations (2019) *Review of change management in United Nations system organizations, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit, JIU/REP/2019/4,* paragraph 20 on p. 3).

12.   Reforms in general and the associated change management processes are always complex. Moreover, change management may be conceptually understood and operationally implemented in different ways.[9] A risk highlighted in reforms is that of focusing on what needs to change in terms of structures, systems and processes, without sufficiently addressing how it should change, and how that change should be managed. Preparing, equipping and supporting individuals to successfully adopt the change in order to drive organisational success and thus achieve outcomes is the essence of change management.[10] The "how it should change" is the topic of this evaluation.

13.   With the new stage of the administrative reform initiated in 2018, a series of core strategic documents were produced, shaping the four areas of the administrative reform, namely the People Strategy (Council of Europe People Strategy 2019-2023 (CM(2019)58-final)), the Council of Europe People Strategy 2019-2023: Appendix II – Action Plan (CM(2019)58-add) and Strategic Workforce Plan 2019-2023 (DD(2019)498)) and the Information Technology Strategic Action Plan 2018-2022 (GR-PBA(2018)9)).[11] The Capital Master Plan was introduced in 2016 (CM(2016)81).The governance area was initiated with the Programme and Budget 2022-2025.[12]

14.   The Council of Europe reform is taking place in a challenging context, namely:

   a. **Financial challenges** – In 2017, Turkey's decision to cease being a major contributor to the Council of Europe (reducing the Ordinary Budget of the Organisation by 7%) and the uncertainty about the Russian Federation's contributions added a layer of complexity to the Council of Europe reform process. A 2018 report on the administrative reform noted that these developments, together with "the negative cumulative effects of the zero nominal growth policy over several years" led to a decision to accelerate and deepen administrative reform measures already put forward in 2017.[13]

   b. **Covid-19 pandemic** – In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a series of challenges, but also provided some opportunities (explosion in the use of online working tools).[14] The evaluation of the Council of Europe's support to member states in addressing challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic (2022) highlighted that the Organisation was able to pilot new working methods and technologies, which will be a powerful driver for the continuing administrative reform. The Progress Review Report 2021 states that the support pillar (encompassing governing bodies and support services) was affected by the pandemic, but performance remained high. Efforts were deployed quickly to support the Organisation's change in working methods and crisis management.[15]

   c. **Russian Federation/Ukraine** – The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation resulted in the latter's consequent expulsion from the Council of Europe and the loss of its annual contribution of more than €30 million. Furthermore, the invasion led to increased energy and food prices, and there was an influx of refugees into Council of Europe member states (as of December 2023, almost 6 million Ukrainian refugees had been recorded across Europe). And, of course, the invasion has seriously disrupted the Council of Europe's work in Ukraine.

   d. **Additional uncertainties** – Within the European Union, there are concerns about backsliding in the administration of justice and the erosion of human rights in some member states, which must be a concern for the Council of Europe. This is resulting in increased uncertainty regarding said member states' commitment to the Organisation. It is also possible that the ongoing (and potentially growing) conflict in the Middle East will generate shocks that have implications for the Council of Europe's budget and work.

15.   On the positive side, one should note that the heads of state and government reconfirmed their commitments to support the Council of Europe, including in its continued reform process, during the 4th Summit held in Reykjavik in May 2023. The Organisation has an increased budget under the new Programme and Budget 2024-2027.

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9. "Change management, as a term, has increasingly been referenced in United Nations system organizational reform documents, yet it is apparent that it has been understood and applied in various different ways" (United Nations (2019), "Review of change management in United Nations system organizations, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit" (JIU/REP/2019/4)).

10. United Nations (2019), "Review of change management in United Nations system organizations, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit" (JIU/REP/2019/4).

11. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2020), "Progress report on reform measures" (CM(2020)84).

12. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2022), "Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2022-2025 (2023 Adjusted)" (CM(2023)1) – Appendix III.

13. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2018), "Administrative reform of the Council of Europe – Measures foreseen for the 2018-2019 biennium. Preliminary follow-up report" (CM(2018)97).

14. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2021), "Progress report on reform measures" (CM(2021)49).

15. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2021), "Progress Review Report 2020" (CM/Inf(2021)7).

Scope and Purpose

16.   The evaluation focuses on the approaches used and actions taken as part of change management in the context of the Council of Europe's administrative reform, from the establishment of the Steering Group on Reform in 2018 to the end of the first quarter of 2024.

17.   The other pillars of the Council of Europe reform, namely the political reform and the reform of the Court, are not covered by this evaluation, although the Court, European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) and members of diplomatic missions have been consulted about the management of change in the context of the administrative reform and the general coherence of change management approaches and processes across the Organisation. This evaluation does not cover the management of changes in the context of the Council of Europe's work with member states.

18.   The purpose of the evaluation is to provide a picture of the change management approaches used and actions taken in the steering of the Council of Europe's administrative reform process. It aims to assess how the process of change has been managed in the Organisation from the perspective of a range of stakeholders (for example leadership, staff engaged in the reform, staff affected by the reform, members of diplomatic missions).

19.   The evaluation will build on the outcomes of previous evaluations and audits to provide an updated and complementary picture of the situation, analysing the relevance, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of the change management process. The evaluation is structured around 14 evaluation questions, which are presented in the evaluation matrix in Appendix 3.

20.   The evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations are expected to provide evidence to further guide the Organisation with respect to appropriate change management approaches, methods, tools and good practices for the next phases of the ongoing reform and to support learning on change management, which will ultimately help to ensure greater effectiveness and efficiency in how current and future reforms are managed.

21.   It is important to note that the purpose does not refer to the provision of an adequate change management model. Models are ways of conceptualising change management approaches and are not intended to be used as blueprints. In the context of the work of the Council of Europe, it is more helpful to think in terms of "general principles", rather than "models". This evaluation does not aim to impose a particular theoretical "model", but to help the Council of Europe apply, in a systematic way, general change management principles, taking account of the context and constraints, to facilitate the reform process. This will still leave room for different directorates and departments to do things differently to fit their specific needs and constraints.

Evaluation Design and Methodology

22.   The evaluation used a **mixed methods approach** comprising desk research, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and workshops with Council of Europe staff, an online survey and case studies. The evaluation design and methodology apply gender sensitive and human rights approaches.

23.   Existing change management models, such as those used in the JIU review (for example McKinsey & Company's 7-S, United Nations Laboratory for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK), Trigon model for organisational development) and structures (for example explicit change management network working alongside the formal organisation, by Kotter)[16] provided key elements of change management that were useful in the design of this evaluation (that is judgment criteria and structure of the case studies) and reconstruction of a proposed theory of change. The latter offers a way of visualising the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact of the "what" and the "how" of the reform being conducted at the Council of Europe. It contributed to the analysis and is proposed as a framework for future consideration by the Council of Europe.

24.   More than 200 **documents** were reviewed. These are listed in Appendix 4. They include reports to the Committee of Ministers, external audit and evaluation reports, meeting minutes, dashboards, documentation relating to individual initiatives, and announcements and news items from the Council of Europe's intranet.

25.   Qualitative primary data collection was done primarily during **two missions** to Strasbourg during which face-to-face meetings were held with a range of Council of Europe stakeholders. In addition, there were some online consultations. Discussions were held in French and in English. A total of **102 stakeholders were consulted** through eight scoping interviews in the inception phase of the evaluation, 27 semi-structured interviews, nine FGDs and three workshops.

26.   **Semi-structured interviews** were used to gather feedback from key stakeholders engaged in the administrative reform as well as with members of diplomatic missions. The sampling was based on the role of stakeholders in the administrative reform and its initiatives to ensure representation of key stakeholders. The interviews were based on guides adjusted to the interviewees' role and experience (Appendix 5).

27.   **FGDs** focused on specific aspects of the subject of the evaluation and were undertaken with homogeneous groups sharing a common role and experience within the administrative reform and selected initiatives. The sampling was based on the role of stakeholders in the administrative reform and in specific groups (for example as heads of units or volunteers in pilot teams). The FGDs were based on guides adjusted to the interviewees' role and experience and the reform initiatives (Appendix 5).

28.   **Workshops** were used to gather feedback from staff, most of whom were not directly engaged in the administrative reform and specific initiatives but were affected by some of the decisions and changes introduced. Participants for the workshops were randomly selected after applying a set of criteria to ensure representativeness (for example MAEs, gender, grade, job category).

29.   A link to the **online survey** was posted on the Organisation's intranet and 231 responses were received, representing a response rate of 7%.[17] The survey link was posted at the end of the series of interviews and FGDs and the results made available prior to the workshops to feed the discussions. An additional 9% (N=292) of staff opened/started the questionnaire but did not submit it. These responses were not used.

30.   The **case studies** provided deeper analysis of four specific initiatives, one from each of the four areas of the administrative reform. They cover different types of initiative at different stages of completion (for example completed and ongoing work). The selected case studies are the Panorama performance appraisal system, the Document Management System, the New Way of Working (NWoW) and the business continuity plans (BCPs).

31.   **Qualitative content analysis** was conducted on interview feedback and notes of FGD and workshop discussions. The analysis highlighted the main themes and recurring issues raised by stakeholders consulted on the various dimensions covered by this evaluation. Some statements were regrouped to put forward common

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16.   John P. Kotter (2012), "Accelerate!", reprinted in *Harvard Business Review* (2019), "On Change Management" (Vol. 2) (Reprint R1211B).

17.   Based on a total staff of 3 149, as indicated by the Directorate of Human Resources (DHR) on 1 April 2024.

and diverging views among stakeholders and show relevant trends and perspectives. This led to the main structure of the chapter on findings, which is structured around the criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD DAC).

32.   **Quantitative analysis** was limited to analysis of responses to the survey conducted as part of this evaluation. Overall, there was very little data available to the evaluation team that was suitable for quantitative analysis and with the potential to contribute useful insights for the evaluation. For the sake of clarity and reader-friendliness, the figures in this report summarising the survey responses combine the answers "Agree" and "Strongly agree" under "Yes", while "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree" are combined under "No".

33.   The design and methodology are presented in more detail in Appendix 3, together with the evaluation matrix. The appendix provides further information on the data collection methods, data sources, analytical methods and tools, and the judgment criteria used in the evaluation.

Opportunities and Challenges for the Evaluation

34.   In conducting this evaluation, both opportunities and challenges have been identified and are presented hereafter.

35.   **Opportunities:**

   a. **An organisation questioning the way it undertakes reform** – By commissioning this evaluation, the Council of Europe is demonstrating its commitment to better understanding and its willingness to improve the way it undertakes reform and manages change at organisational level. In undertaking this evaluation, the Organisation has opted to evaluate change management rather than the administrative reform itself. While the two types of evaluation are not mutually exclusive, the decision to evaluate change management provides a good basis for further developing the Organisation, its culture of change, change management approaches and overall steering of changes.

   b. **Readiness of many stakeholders to engage with the evaluation** – Many stakeholders (managers, staff, members of diplomatic missions and consultants) have taken time to share with the evaluators their experiences of how change is managed by the Organisation. In doing so, they have provided many insightful and helpful reflections and observations that have been essential in developing the picture of how change is managed.

   c. **Continuous engagement and support of the DIO** – The DIO has actively facilitated the evaluation throughout the process by providing documents, data and access to key stakeholders. The regular exchanges and reflections on the evaluation subject have helped the evaluation team to grasp the context and to conduct the data collection in the agreed time frame.

36.   **Challenges:**

   a. **Lack of definition** – Despite investing the necessary time at the beginning of all consultations to introduce the evaluation topic, the scope of the evaluation (change management in the administrative reform v. administrative reform as such) remained challenging, partly due to a lack of definition of change management in the context of the Council of Europe reform, but also due to the wide scope of the evaluation subject.

   b. **Diversity of terminology** – The review of documents highlighted a variety of terms used in connection with areas of the administrative reform, including drivers (mainly referring to the four main drivers of the administrative reform), projects, initiatives, areas and reform elements. This may be due to the historical development of the initiatives. While this added complexity for the evaluation team at the beginning of the document review, it also required careful use of terms in the consultation and survey to ensure adequate understanding by the consulted stakeholders. Moreover, while the term "administrative reform" is a main element of the evaluation subject, the lack of understanding of the term "administrative reform" proved particularly challenging in consultations with staff members (workshops and survey) and examples of initiatives needed to be provided in order to present the content of the administrative reform.

   c. **Survey fatigue** – The Council of Europe has conducted several staff surveys in recent years and, while surveys are important tools for monitoring and engaging with staff, "survey fatigue" was mentioned during initial consultations. Taking this into consideration, the survey conducted in this evaluation was short and remained posted among the top news on the intranet. Despite these efforts, the response rate remained low (7%) but the survey nevertheless provided useful information for triangulation with data from other sources.

   d. **Mobilisation of staff for workshops** – It was agreed with the Council of Europe that workshops with staff would be held. The evaluation team provided the Council of Europe with the required sampling criteria and other information for the selection of participants. However, it is understood that it was difficult to mobilise staff to participate in workshops that were not directly linked to their work, and invitations were sent to prospective participants only a few working days before the workshops. As a

result, and despite best efforts, attendance was lower than expected. This meant that the workshops had to be adapted at the last minute to the smaller numbers to ensure meaningful exchanges and results.

e. **Large amount of documentation** – As noted above, some 200 documents were reviewed. This was a time-consuming exercise that yielded few direct insights into how change is managed at the Council of Europe.

Findings

Relevance of change management

Tackling relevant reform areas in a reactive manner using existing resources

Key finding 1 – The Council of Europe demonstrates awareness of the need to adjust to new contexts and situations and an openness to take actions to reform. Indeed, the Council of Europe has undertaken reforms for a long time, and the new phase of the administrative reform started in 2018. Staff at all levels of the Organisation have described an organisation in a continuous state of reform, without clearly defined objectives and dedicated resources for planning and implementing the changes. The administrative reform areas tackled are perceived as relevant to the way the Organisation works and delivers its mandate in the evolving context and challenges.

37.   Managers at the senior level of the Organisation recognised the relevance of tackling several areas within the administrative reform, namely human resources, IT, building management and governance but, outside of the senior management of the DGA, interviewees considered it difficult to capture an overview of the entire reform and its initiatives.

38.   The relevance of the reform in the HR and IT areas was recognised and considered necessary for the Organisation by the HR and IT ex-ante evaluations.[18, 19] Both concluded that the planned reforms in those areas are in line with good practices, without, however, mentioning which good practices were meant. The HR reform area is described as similar to those in other international organisations.

39.   Several managers indicated a need and pressure to implement changes to address requests from the Committee of Ministers, which has diverse views and visions for the Organisation, and recommendations from audits and evaluations. At the same time, they stressed the fact that the necessary additional resources are seldom made available to manage the requested changes, which are expected to be planned and implemented using existing resources (see also 6.4.1 on the lack of dedicated resources).

40.   Mirroring this, staff perceive change as primarily reactive, being implemented in response to requests for change made by the Committee of Ministers, external audits and evaluations. Staff members have reported having a limited understanding of the rationale for change or find the messages communicated to be con-tradictory to the reality of the changes during implementation. It prevents them from fully adhering to the proposed changes and negatively affects the buy-in and ownership of changes that are introduced (see also 6.3.2 on ownership of changes).

41.   According to reports to the Committee of Ministers, the administrative reform has been guided by two principles throughout the years, the first being "value for money" and the second "aiming for a modern and attractive organisation", with its second part encapsulated in the slogan "Improving the way we work together".[20] The external audit identified a change in the reform process as of 2020: the progress report 2021 no longer mentions aspects of reorganisation of structures or a more flexible organisation but instead focuses on the optimisation of financial resources and the two major axes of the reform, namely the People Strategy and the digital transformation.[21] In 2022 and 2023, the progress reports stressed the importance and relevance of the reform for improving "working together".[22]

42.   Clearly defined objectives setting out how, specifically, the Council of Europe is expected to be trans-formed by the administrative reform and its initiatives in terms of the delivery of its mandate and what this will mean for staff, member states and the Council of Europe's partners at international and national levels, were not evident from the documents that were reviewed, nor could they be described by interviewees, both from within the Organisation and from permanent missions.

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18.   Ex-ante assessment of the reform logic in the area of information technology (Evaluation (2019)28) (internal document).
19.   Ex-ante assessment of the reform logic in the area of information technology (Evaluation (2019)28) (internal document).
20.   Progress reports on the administrative reform 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021.
21.   Cour des comptes France (2021), External audit of the Council of Europe, Audit report – Review of the administrative and organisational reform of the Council of Europe, financial years 2018 to 2021 (as of 1 September).
22.   Progress reports on the administrative reform 2022 and 2023.

Lack of clarity around the terms "reform" and "administrative reform"

> **Key finding 2** – The term "reform" is considered to be a misnomer by most of the internal and external stakeholders who were consulted because it implies a change with a clear goal that will be completed at some point. In practice there is a sense among those consulted of never-ending reforms, which leads to "reform fatigue". Staff lack a clear understanding of the term "administrative reform" and its scope.
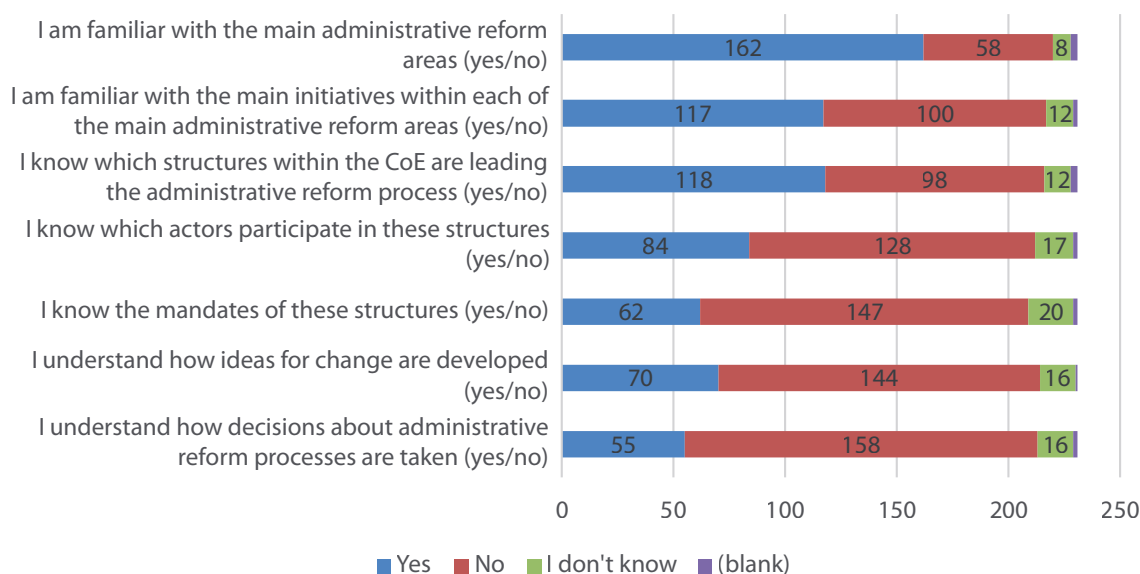
43.   The evaluation team was made aware by consulted stakeholders that staff are unlikely to recognise or understand the term "administrative reform", the four areas of the reform and some of the many initiatives presented in reports to the GR-PBA, for example. Observations by members of the reference group suggests that the term "administrative reform" is an "artificial" construct used to package together many different initiatives to demonstrate to the Committee of Ministers, through reporting and communication, that the Council of Europe is addressing its concerns and requests to reform.

44.   The members of diplomatic missions who were interviewed generally considered the term "administrative reform" to be a misnomer, as "reform" implies change in organisational structures, norms, culture and performance, with clear goals and a point of completion. Review of the different reform initiatives highlighted that the Organisation is indeed doing some things differently and taking corrective actions to address identified gaps, but in some cases changes presented as part of the administrative reform address external recommendations on specific issues and are not necessarily implemented in response to reform goals.[23]

45.   Information on the administrative reform is provided on the intranet. Nevertheless, staff members who were consulted confirmed that the term "administrative reform" remains vague if not explained using examples of individual initiatives which enable them to ground the administrative reform in their reality, although this applied to some more than others. They also referred to a reform as a process with an end, which in their view is not the case, leading thus to a "reform fatigue". In view of the challenge for staff in grasping the term "administrative reform", the survey conducted in the context of this evaluation introduced the reform, its four driver areas and its main initiatives. The responses show that most respondents are familiar with the main administrative reform areas. Nevertheless, they are less familiar with the main initiatives within each main reform area or the structures which are leading the reform processes. The DGA management acknowledges that the set-up is complicated. Fewer than half of the respondents knew about the mandates of these structures or who participates in them, and only around 25%-30% understand how ideas are generated or how decisions are taken.

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23.   For example, elements of the Council of Europe People Strategy 2019-2023, such as changes to staff contracting rules, can be considered as reforms. Changes to contracting policy will have a significant impact on how the Organisation functions and will bring security to many staff who had previously been working on annually renewed temporary contracts for many years. In contrast, the introduction of business continuity plans, while important for continuity in crisis situations, are unlikely to have a significant impact on the structure, general functioning, long-term performance or culture of the Organisation. Initiatives such as the introduction of business continuity plans can be viewed as part of an organisation's regular "maintenance" and updating which take place regularly or continuously.

Figure 2. What do you know about the overall administrative reform set-up within the Council of Europe? (N=230)

	Yes	No	I don't know	(blank)
I am familiar with the main administrative reform areas (yes/no)	162	58	8	
I am familiar with the main initiatives within each of the main administrative reform areas (yes/no)	117	100	12	
I know which structures within the CoE are leading the administrative reform process (yes/no)	118	98	12	
I know which actors participate in these structures (yes/no)	84	128	17	
I know the mandates of these structures (yes/no)	62	147	20	
I understand how ideas for change are developed (yes/no)	70	144	16	
I understand how decisions about administrative reform processes are taken (yes/no)	55	158	16	

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know ■ (blank)

Source: evaluation survey conducted by KEK – CDC and the DIO during this evaluation.

Little feedback on consideration of gender

> **Key finding 3** – Gender and human rights aspects are highly relevant for the evaluation of change management in terms of inclusion, participation and transparent communication with different groups within the Organisation. Despite systematic questions on this topic, little feedback on how reform initiatives incorporate consideration of gender and persons with special needs was received during interviews, the FGDs or from the evaluation survey. Some stakeholder feedback suggests that the potential impacts of changes on different genders are not systematically analysed, even where good representation of women and men in consultations and idea generation is reported.

46.   On gender perspectives, the 2018 ex-ante evaluation on IT reform described the role of IT as one of the potential enablers of gender equality and mentioned that there was an opportunity yet to be seized to do more for gender mainstreaming in the IT reform.[24] No further information was heard on this during the consultation nor found in the documents reviewed.

47.   Under the NWoW initiative an assessment was conducted at an early stage, including the gender perspective. The results led to the conclusion that no significant difference could be derived. Some stakeholder feedback suggests that gender is perhaps to some extent overlooked where changes are perceived as "technical" and therefore as having no gender- related dimension (for example Panorama, the NWoW).

48.   There is a sense that ensuring gender balance in consultative processes and the development of initiatives automatically ensures gender impact is addressed. However, some stakeholder feedback suggests that this is not always the case if gender impact is not explicitly considered in the process. While some initiatives considered more than other the gender or special needs factor, overall, these are unsystematically considered, analysed in the design phase of an initiative and reported on.

49.   Between approximately 30% and 50% of survey respondents were unable to provide an opinion ("I don't know") about how the administrative process addresses equality, diversity and inclusiveness. This could be due to a lack of information on the subject, which in turn might be the result of limited substantive focus on these matters within the reform process. This may also account for the relatively high proportion of respondents who expressed negative opinions about how these matters are addressed. The latter may also be attributable to respondents' negative personal experiences in the context of the administrative reform process (see Figure 3).

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24.   Ex-ante assessment of the reform logic in the area of information technology (Evaluation (2019)28).

Figure 3. Your impression of how the administrative reform process addresses equality, diversity and inclusiveness (N=229)

Category	Yes	No	I don't know
The administrative reform process favours the ideas and opinions of specifics groups…	99	63	67
The CoE systematically ensures equitable and meaningful participation of all genders…	72	56	99
The CoE systematically ensures equitable and meaningful participation of staff with…	32	78	118
There is systematic assessment of potential and actual impacts of changes on different…	28	105	96
Overall, equality, diversity, and inclusiveness are integrated into the administrative…	62	77	90

■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know ■ (blank)

Source: evaluation survey conducted by KEK – CDC and the DIO during this evaluation.

50.   Men and women who responded to the evaluation survey did not express significantly different opinions on the inclusiveness of the administrative reform process. However, the respondents who preferred not to indicate their gender, or indicated "other", generally expressed more critical views (possibly because they felt more empowered to criticise by the added level of anonymity).

A culture of change to be nurtured

Key finding 4 – A culture of change within the Organisation is perceived by staff as an important prerequisite for positive change management processes. However, observations have shown that the Organisation is rather prone to maintaining the status quo and that its culture of change requires more attention.

51.   The importance of a culture of change as a key element of successful reform is mentioned in a range of documents. It should be noted that the ex-ante evaluations in both reform areas (HR and IT) recognised the culture of change as an important driver in the reform process, underlining that initiatives aiming at cultural change and managerial culture require particular focus. The Directorate of Information Technology (DIT) indicated that it is conducting training to identify "change ambassadors" for each new initiative to support a culture of change, the EDQM also highlighted its work with "change agents". Both the DIT and the EDQM indicate that they have not co-operated in exchanging and learning from each other in designing and implementing change management steps.

52.   However, feedback received during the evaluation indicates that the Organisation is one where the culture of change is not a well-developed concept, where a certain level of resistance to change seems to be the norm, rather than a willingness to embrace or initiate change. Workshop participants highlighted that it is more popular/easier to express a certain level of resistance towards changes in meetings, rather than to accept and drive changes, or to convince other team members to be open to innovations.

53.   Staff indicated that good examples, such as "change champions" who lead by example, driving change within the Organisation forward and endorsing change through their own concrete actions and behaviour, would be helpful in developing a culture of change.

54.   It should be noted that these observations are common to many large administrations and international organisations.

Coherence of change management

Variety of entities at the Council of Europe as an important context factor for change management

> **Key finding 5** – The Council of Europe, clearly described by interviewees as being composed of diverse entities with differing self-perceptions of "independence", is a challenging environment in which to develop a coherent approach to reform and change management, and one where the realities of individual entities' work and needs need to be carefully considered.

55.   As commonly described by interviewees, the Council of Europe is made of various entities, "composed of different planets" or compared to "an archipelago" (to quote terms used by interviewees). Some Council of Europe entities are reported to consider themselves as independent.[25] Interviewees across the Organisation acknowledged that a one-size-fits-all approach to managing change is not realistic in the context of the Council of Europe and that taking into consideration the needs of individual entities poses real challenges in terms of planning and implementing changes. In some cases, interviewees recognised that insufficient attention was paid to understanding the needs of the various entities, for example with respect to recruitment, and that getting some entities to engage with certain topics was particularly challenging, for example temporary contracts.

Good practices identified, although a lack of overall coherence in change management

> **Key finding 6** – The evaluation highlighted good practices in managing changes under individual initiatives within the Organisation (for example engagement with staff in generating ideas, regular staff surveys, existing team tackling changes). Nevertheless, interviewees find it challenging to appreciate the overall coherence of initiatives and the way changes are managed. The evaluation has not identified any general change management strategy or guidance applied across the Organisation.

56.   Initiatives were reported to be implemented as stand-alone projects. Consulted stakeholders, both internal and external, find it difficult to point to an overall coherence of all initiatives and change management processes. Members of diplomatic missions in particular feel that the Secretariat provides a lot of information, but this does not always provide a coherent picture of the administrative reform and is not necessarily the information that member states require.

57.   The evaluation team has not identified any general change management strategy or guidance applied across the Organisation, across the reform areas or across individual initiatives. Other analyses made the same observation, that is, the 2021 evaluation of results-based management in the Council of Europe noted that there was "no evidence of a specific change management strategy that sets out prioritised actions for supporting the development of a results culture in the Council of Europe".[26] However, the DIT has adopted the ADKAR change management model.[27] The EDQM is undertaking a change management process involving strategy and vision development.

58.   The Reykjavik Declaration renewed a general vision for the future of the Council of Europe. However, Council of Europe staff do not see how this is translated into the administrative reform process or how previous visions have been translated into operational implementation. The presentation of the administrative reform in the Programme and Budget 2024-2027[28] is a summary of initiatives, with an emphasis on cost-cutting. There is limited forward-looking text, and it focuses on individual measures and initiatives. If the reader is not already well versed in the administrative reform, it is hard for them to understand what this means in practice. The Programme and Budget is aimed at the Committee of Ministers and the GR-PBA and cannot be considered a coherent narrative for, or a road map on, how the Organisation is expected to evolve over the next 5-10 years and how this will substantively affect staff, member states and partners. It reads more like a project progress report. On the administrative reform, it provides a very brief overview of the reform areas, with tables including performance plan, indicators and resources.[29] The indicators deal with activities and outputs, as well as

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25.   For example, one entity is reported to have expressed a desire to continue fruitful co-operation with the Council of Europe, of which it is a part.
26.   Council of Europe (2021), "Evaluation of results-based management in the Council of Europe", p. 6.
27.   ADKAR is a change management model. Its main elements are: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement.
28.   Part 1 Section d "A special focus on administrative reform: new and ongoing initiatives 2024-2025 (including efficiency gains, cost avoidance and cost reductions)".
29.   Section "General administration/Programme", p. 159.

outcomes. These details are unlikely to be particularly meaningful for anyone who does not already have a clear understanding of the administrative reform process.

59. In discussing the lack of a recognised change management approach at organisational level, members of the reference group (RG) drew attention to the Council of Europe's guides on results-based management (RBM)[30] and on strategic planning.[31] The RBM guide is about aligning external projects with strategic Council of Europe objectives, treaties and standard-setting documents. It also covers assessment of projects' contributions. The introduction of the RBM was part of the administrative reform but it was not developed for the purpose of guiding change management. Some elements of the RBM guide could be useful in reforming management in general, but it does not provide guidance on specific aspects of change management within the Council of Europe, such as stakeholder engagement. While there are linkages between strategic planning and change management, the strategic planning guide does not provide the relevant framework on how to manage change (the "how") at organisational level.

60. The evaluators developed a picture of change management approaches and actions only after reviewing many documents and discussing change management with many stakeholders at the Council of Europe. Since change management is not a well-defined concept at the Council of Europe, the evaluation team has had to cast its net wide and has reviewed some 200 documents and intranet pages, many of which were found to have only fragments of information that helped to shed light on the change process, or no information about this at all.

61. Nevertheless, a number of key elements of change management and good practices are integrated into the design and implementation of individual initiatives. See details provided on key elements of change management in the four case study initiatives in Appendix 1. However, such practices are not formalised or applied in a systematic manner at the organisational level.

62. The JIU review pointed out that, despite reference to existing change management models, organisations make limited use of existing models in the design of change management for organisational reform.[32] This makes the Council of Europe one of many organisations implementing reform without basing its whole approach to change on a clearly defined change management model.

Limited synergies among initiatives

> **Key finding 7** – Synergies among initiatives are seldom planned and fostered but rather dealt with in a reactive manner throughout the implementation phase and experiences and learning are therefore not systematically shared.

63. Interviewees see limited synergies among initiatives. Synergies were described as being handled in a reactive manner when they became obvious or necessary to deal with during the implementation phase. Interviewees indicated that issues across initiatives were dealt with "along the way" as required.

64. At the individual level, there is considerable networking and dialogue among those responsible for implementing specific initiatives. However, at the organisational level, there are examples of where the experiences of different entities have not been learnt from (for example the Court's experience in developing business continuity plans).

Systemic oversight of change management not obvious

> **Key finding 8** – Systemic overview and oversight of the entire reform from a change management perspective were not evident in documents or during the consultations. Interviewees questioned where strategic and substantive discussions and decisions are taken and should take place. Others indicated that there should be more open discussions at a high level of the Organisation before embarking on a change process.

65. The Committee of Ministers establishes the general "direction of travel" for the Organisation, but it does not provide detailed guidance on the management of the Organisation. Thus, the strategic planning, oversight

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30. Council of Europe (2022), "Results-Based Management Approach of the Council of Europe – Practical Guide" [Version 4.1], (internal document).
31. Council of Europe (2021), "Strategic Planning in the Council of Europe, Practical guide" [Version 1], (internal document).
32. United Nations (2019), "Review of change management in United Nations system organizations, Report of the Joint Inspection Unit" (JIU/REP/2019/4).

and implementation of the administrative reform are the responsibility of the Secretariat, which periodically reports on the progress of the administrative reform to the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration.

66.   A Steering Group on Reform was created by the SG in 2018 to consider all aspects of the Council of Europe's administrative reform and to "steer the project and follow measures connected with the reform but also to guarantee the necessary level of support".[33] The steering group was chaired by the DG of the DGA and comprised members of the Senior Management Group (SMG). Participation of staff was initiated with the involvement of the Staff Committee (SC) and the creation of volunteer working groups that were open to all staff. In a June 2018 Committee of Ministers document, the members of the steering group and all SMG members were described as "change management leaders" within their own MAEs and were responsible for communicating on, and providing support to, the administrative reform, according to the Steering Group on Reform's mandate, which was adopted on 2 February 2018.[34] Figure 4 presents two representations of the administrative reform co-ordination mechanisms in 2018-19, showing the central role of the steering group and how staff participation is integrated into the process.

Figure 4. Co-ordination mechanisms as defined in 2018-19
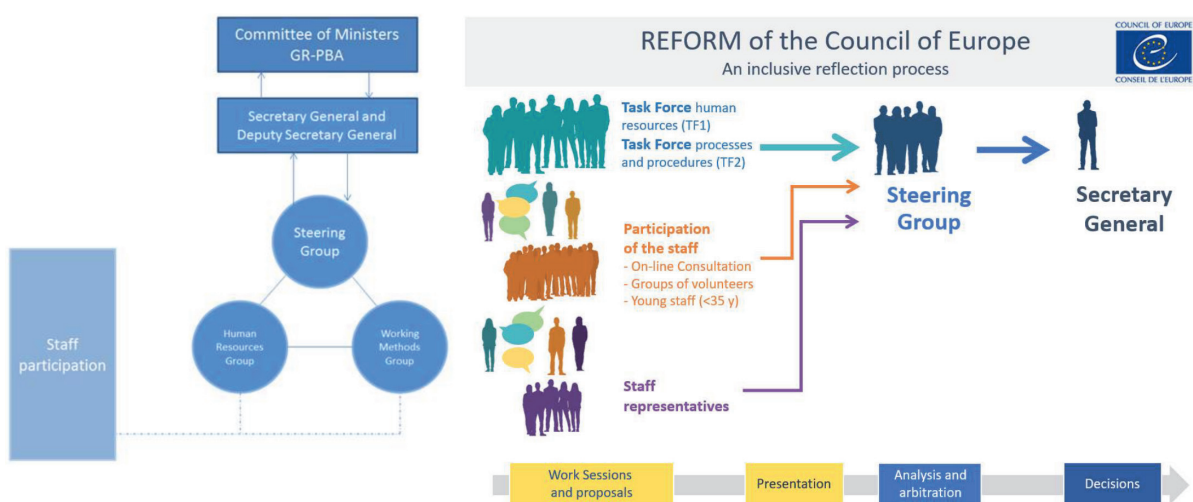
Source: CM(2018)97 Preliminary follow-up report[35] (left), CM(2019)88 Third follow-up report[36] (right).

67.   The steering group met ten times in 2018, once in 2019 and once in 2020, and was replaced in 2020 by individual steering mechanisms at various levels of the administrative reform. Interviews indicated that the need to define the "what" that is to be undertaken in the reform (defining and designing initiatives) required the engagement of a steering group, which was replaced by individual steering and co-ordination mechanisms when implementation started.

68.   Table 1 consolidates the existing mechanisms at strategic and operational level, based on a very fragmented image of the steering mechanisms provided in documents and interviews. Overall, many of the strategic steering mechanisms are composed of the SMG members (with the exception of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Buildings (CAHB)). The overview also highlights the diversity in the types of groups responsible for steering various areas of the administrative reform.

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33.   See the "Steering Group on Reform – Mandate", Appendix 3 of the "Administrative Reform of the Council of Europe – Measures foreseen for the 2018-2019 biennium. Preliminary follow-up report" (CM(2018)97).

34.   See the "Steering Group on Reform – Mandate", Appendix 3 of the "Administrative Reform of the Council of Europe – Measures foreseen for the 2018-2019 biennium. Preliminary follow-up report" (CM(2018)97).

35.   See the "Steering Group on Reform – Mandate", Appendix 3 of the "Administrative Reform of the Council of Europe – Measures foreseen for the 2018-2019 biennium. Preliminary follow-up report" (CM(2018)97).

36.   Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2019), "Administrative reform of the Council of Europe – Measures foreseen for the 2018-2019 biennium. Third follow-up report" (CM(2019)88).

Table 1. Overview of strategic and operational mechanisms used to steer the main administrative reform areas

Reform driver areas	Lead MAE	Strategic mechanism	Operational mechanism
People Strategy	DHR	Steering Group on People Strategy[37]	Task Force on Human Resources and Organisational Structure (met 15 times in 2018)
Digital transformation	DIT	IT Governance Board	IT Governance Working Group
Transformation in Capital Master Plan	DGS	Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Buildings (CAHB)[38]	For the NWoW: the Steering Committee (CODIR) for steering and the project management team for implementation
Governance	DGA	Steering of governance is not carried out by any structure but rather through a process of dialogue between the Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), the DGA and Private Office (PO)	Depends on each initiative. For crisis management and business continuity: task force and working group

Source: documents, intranet and interviews.

69. Interviewees also indicated that the SMG is not a place for in-depth discussions and decision making but a place to share information. This concurred with observations from external audits. A 2021 external audit report on administrative and organisational reform of the Council of Europe noted that the reform process is not discussed by the SMG, nor is it systematically and regularly communicated by the management to its staff within each MAE.[39] For the external auditors, the reform process is not driven at the highest level of the Organisation and seems to be entrusted to the DGA alone. The report highlighted that in the Programme and Budget 2022-2025, no MAE other than the DGA seems to play a role; the role of the other MAEs in the reform process is not evident, if they still play any role at all. It recommended that the SMG performs a greater strategic function, for instance, in an ad hoc format that defines an integrated strategy, including for the Organisation's reforms. The external audit on governance (2024) recently concluded that the SMG seems to function more as a forum for periodically sharing information than as a decision-making body.

Effectiveness of change management

Monitoring of the "what", limited evidence on the "how"

Key finding 9 – Some important outcomes of the administrative reform are recognised by interviewees but are not well supported by evidence on outcomes and impacts of change management.

70. The administrative reform is monitored using a range of indicators consolidated into dashboards. The number of dashboards has increased with the number of projects and initiatives. They are included in the annual progress reports on the administrative reform that are presented to the Committee of Ministers. The 2021 external audit indicated that additional annual indicators could be used to illustrate important objectives such as managerial culture and mobility.

71. The monitoring and reporting of the administrative reform are relevant to the evaluation of change management, as clear results and their communication are important aspects of change management that can influence stakeholders' trust in the change process and buy-in to the reforms. Documents reviewed suggest that more transparency would be helpful. This is relevant as it facilitates reflection on, and refinement of, the reforms and the change management process that generated them.

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37. Mentioned in a scoping interview, revitalised in January 2024.
38. Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2016), "Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Buildings (CAHB) – Capital master plan" (CM(2016)81).
39. Cour des comptes France (2021), External audit of the Council of Europe, Audit report – Review of the administrative and organisational reform of the Council of Europe, financial years 2018 to 2021 (as of 1 September).

72. The members of diplomatic missions who were interviewed generally consider information about impact to be limited (that is, what aspects of the Organisation's performance, culture or norms are changing).

73. Responses to the survey suggest that there is limited recognition among respondents of changes as having a positive impact on the culture, attractiveness, responsiveness, reputation and performance of the Council of Europe. Between approximately 25% and 30% of respondents were unable to give an opinion on the impact of the administrative reform process, suggesting that there may be insufficient information of the right type and/or quality on which to base an opinion. A slightly higher proportion expressed negative sentiments about the impact. This too may be in part due to the unavailability of adequate objective data about reform impacts (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. How would you assess the impact of the administrative reform process since 2018 on the Council of Europe? (N=230)
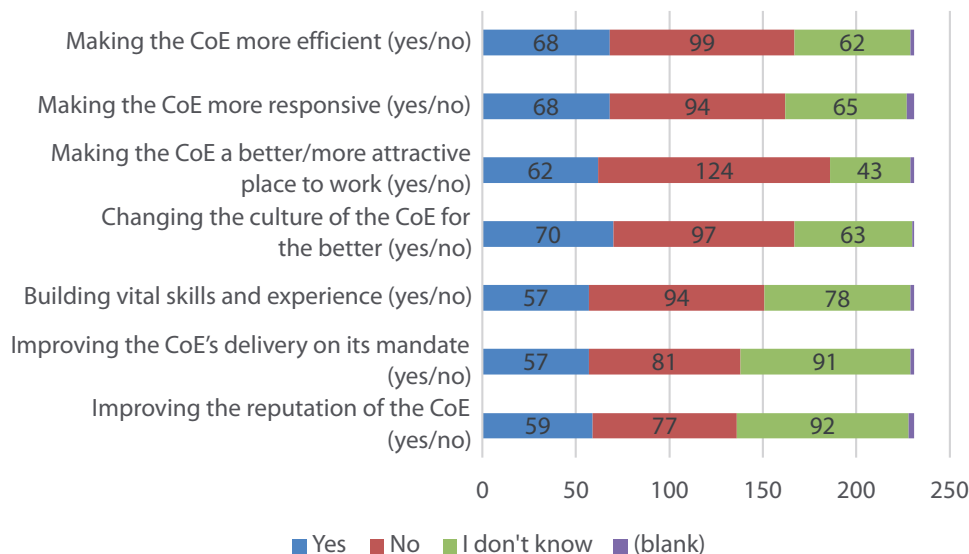
Source: evaluation survey conducted by KEK – CDC and the DIO during this evaluation.

Compliance but limited ownership of changes, against a backdrop of variable management buy-in

Key finding 10 – Consultations showed that staff comply with changes but have limited ownership of the changes, due primarily to three main factors: a lack of understanding of the rationale for specific changes, confusion regarding the initiatives aimed at reforming the administration and others targeting specific identified gaps, and a lack of transparency in the change and decision-making processes.

74. Surveys conducted by the Council of Europe in past years highlighted some inconsistency and a lack of transparency in the decision-making process. An example is the selection of the self-appraisal tool in Panorama. In the survey "What working environment for the Organisation's future?" (2021), approximately 7% of the Council of Europe's staff "voted" for self-appraisal in the new system. An October 2021 report on the "Outcomes of the experimental appraisal project 2018-2021" suggests that, based on positive experiences during the experimental appraisal project, the decision to move forward with self-appraisal may have already been taken by the time the survey was launched.[40] Staff involved in voluntary and piloting teams indicated an interruption in the information flow, including with respect to how their work was used and which inputs went into making an informed decision (a "black-box effect" was indicated). In the end the launch of a new tool with self-appraisal came as a surprise to many of the testing teams involved or did not allow for sufficient preparation.

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40. Performance and Well-being Unit, Directorate of Human Resources of the Directorate General of Administration of the Council of Europe (2021), "Outcomes of the experimental appraisal project 2018-2021 – Appraisal Board's recommendations to the Secretary General" (internal document).

75.   In the organisational culture staff survey 2023, approximately 45% of respondents felt that they were not taken sufficiently seriously due to their grades.[41] The way in which survey results are used to inform and manage change remains unclear. This may negatively affect staff engagement and buy-in to the change management process.

76.   Management buy-in was described as varying greatly depending on initiatives, in some examples a lack of leading by example was reported.

Efficiency of change management

Competent and dedicated staff challenged by general lack of resources to support change management

> **Key finding 11** – Feedback points to dedicated, competent staff implementing change initiatives and good practices in order to build capacities in accompanying changes, though the depth and timing of some training activities is considered not optimal for supporting changes. Overall, interviewees are concerned about the lack of additional dedicated resources for implementing changes.

77.   There are individual examples of resources being dedicated to change management (for example DIT, EDQM), but in general a lack of resources for designing and implementing changes has been reported (for example, savings were expected from the People Strategy but no additional resources were allocated for implementing the People Strategy). Feedback indicates that budgeting of the initiatives and activities was not even taken into consideration in the planning (for example business continuity plans).

78.   Beyond securing additional human and financial resources, interviewees also mentioned that duties of staff are seldom adjusted when contributing to participative approaches (for example co-construction work-shop of the NWoW) and engaging in reform initiatives. Those activities come on top of their regular duties, resulting in an overload of work.

79.   Roll-out of most initiatives is accompanied by training, online resources and/or dedicated staff. Staff feedback suggests that more support and more timely training would have facilitated the roll-out of Panorama and the DMS. Managers' feedback on this varies depending on the individual initiative.

Inconsistent planning and lack of an organisation-wide change management structure

> **Key finding 12** – Interviewees throughout the Organisation indicated a lack of consistent planning and implementation of reform initiatives and changes, and of an organisation-wide change management structure.

80.   At the time of this evaluation, the lack of consistent planning, implementation of reform and organisation-wide change management structure was not an entirely new issue being raised. The ex-ante evaluation on the HR reform recommended the development of a change management strategy and an implementation plan complemented by a dedicated inter-Secretariat implementation team with decision-making authority, resources and leadership support to manage the HR reform and mitigate risks.[42, 43] This body was not established, and no such body was identified by the evaluation team during the evaluation period. However, the document review and consultations with stakeholders highlighted the existence of structures within specific MAEs and directorates which performed this role at a certain level, that is, the Transversal Support Team (TST) at the DGA, the change management team at the DIT and initial reflection on a change management structure at the EDQM.

   a. The Transversal Support Team is located within the DGA's Common Services and reports directly to the Director General (DG) of the DGA. Its mandate, role and activities could be summarised based on documents, information available on the intranet and interview feedback. It has a flexible and, according to its members, a perhaps not very precisely defined mandate. The TST supports the DG in "consolidating" and implementing reforms, and it provides a "whole organisation vision". The TST does not have a formal role in change management, but this is part of its work – it supports colleagues

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41.   Organisational culture staff survey 2023 - summary of survey responses (internal document).
42.   Ex-ante assessment of the reform logic in the area of information technology (Evaluation (2019)28), (internal document).
43.   Ex-ante assessment of the reform logic in the area of human resources (Evaluation (2019)19), (internal document).

across the Secretariat to enable them to meet their objectives. It performs a core role in the governance reform area and is involved to varying degrees in the other three areas of the administrative reform. It co-ordinates and supports the implementation of specific projects across the Organisation, for example business continuity plans and risk management. The TST aims to support consistent management of practices in the DGA and to ensure the consistency and quality of DGA outputs in response to recommendations, for example from the OAC. The TST also monitors the follow-up of some 700 recommendations made by the OAC, auditors and other bodies. The TST thus has multiple different responsibilities but consists of just four staff (just three until recently).
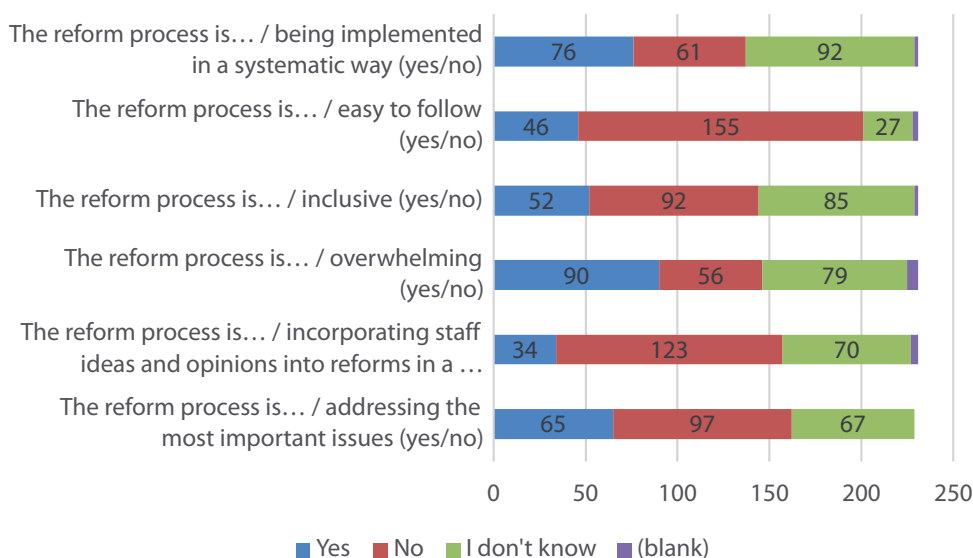
b. The change management team at the DIT is composed of DIT staff with various backgrounds in project management and training. Experience of project management and training was indicated as essential as their duties cover both the implementation of initiatives (supporting changes and the development of training content) and close contact with power users and users to ease and facilitate the integration of new technical solutions.

c. The EDQM is undergoing a change management process, supported by external consultants, and is engaging managers and staff. It is an ongoing process and feedback received indicated reflection on potential options for institutionalising change management capacities.

81.   Many of the challenges in change management at the administrative reform level that were highlighted by interviewees can be linked to the absence of an organisation-wide management structure. This primarily results in too many initiatives due to a lack of strategic prioritisation (as already highlighted under 6.2.4) and a lack of assessment of potential consequences of many initiatives, for example cumulative effects. Stakeholder feedback during the present evaluation indicated that cumulative administrative changes have increased workload and stress. The organisational culture staff survey 2023 showed that a relatively high percentage of respondents were negatively affected by their workload (33% of respondents). Respondents considered workload, number of meetings and mental overload to be the top factors affecting their managers' availability.[44] This aligns with the evaluators' observations during the present evaluation regarding the negative impact of cumulative administrative reforms and insufficient resources. The lack of an organisation-wide change management structure also leads to limited systemic learning between entities and initiatives, as this type of learning depends on the individuals involved.

82.   As shown in Figure 6, between approximately 25% and 30% of respondents to the evaluation survey were unable to provide an opinion on how the administrative reform process is managed. A large proportion do not feel that the process is easy to follow, and approximately two thirds do not feel that the process incorporates staff ideas and opinions in a meaningful way. This is relevant to change management as it may undermine trust in the process and discourage engagement.

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44.   Organisational culture staff survey 2023 - summary of survey responses (internal document).

Figure 6. Overall, which of the following best describes your perceptions of the management of the administrative reform process? The reform process is … (N=230)

	Yes	No	I don't know	(blank)
The reform process is… / being implemented in a systematic way (yes/no)	76	61	92	
The reform process is… / easy to follow (yes/no)	46	155	27	
The reform process is… / inclusive (yes/no)	52	92	85	
The reform process is… / overwhelming (yes/no)	90	56	79	
The reform process is… / incorporating staff ideas and opinions into reforms in a …	34	123	70	
The reform process is… / addressing the most important issues (yes/no)	65	97	67	

Source: evaluation survey conducted by KEK – CDC and the DIO during this evaluation.

Tangible efforts to engage stakeholders

> **Key finding 13** – Consultations highlighted good practices and innovative approaches, especially in the initial steps of initiatives. Shortfalls occur mainly in the representation of participants, timing and continuous communication throughout the various phase of the engagement.

83.   Interviewees acknowledged that there had been extensive consultation and many engagement activities, including consultations with the Staff Committee, some very innovative in nature (for example the "blank canvas" approach used for the Panorama testing teams).[45] Interviewees confirmed that those responsible for implementing initiatives generally engage with a wide range of stakeholders within the Organisation. However, in a small number of cases, feedback indicates that important stakeholders were not (adequately) consulted. Staff raised concerns about the inconsistency of the engagement throughout the planning and implementation process. This leads to misunderstanding regarding the rationale for the staff consultation and the way the inputs provided are being used. Furthermore, if there are long "periods of silence" staff are less likely to be ready for changes when they are eventually rolled out and this may well undermine smooth and consistent introduction of changes. Further details on the engagement of staff in the four case studies are available in Appendix 1.

84.   The documents reviewed indicate that staff were widely and extensively consulted on the reform process, in particular on the People Strategy, and especially in the early years when what the reform should do and achieve was being defined. The 2021 external audit indicates that "the dynamic is no longer the same as in 2018: the information is felt to be mainly top-down, leaving little time for exchange, and the purpose of the meetings is felt to be unclear, as the information is given when the decisions have already been taken".[46] The audit also mentioned that several of the persons interviewed at management, Staff Committee and volunteers' groups levels indicated that there was a real expectation of greater engagement by staff in expressing their points of view. It recommended, as a priority recommendation requiring immediate attention from the management, that the dialogue through which the reform is explained be revitalised by holding an annual direct meeting between staff and the SG or DSG on the reforms, and also recommended greater involvement of the highest levels of the Secretariat's management, including the Senior Management Group.[47]

85.   In response to the question on finding out more about the reform (Figure 7), most respondents to the evaluation survey know where to find information about administrative reform initiatives and understand

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45.   "Blank canvas" here refers to the fact that, while they had to work within certain broad parameters, the testing teams were free to experiment in any way they wished.

46.   Cour des comptes France (2021), External audit of the Council of Europe, Audit report – Review of the administrative and organisational reform of the Council of Europe, financial years 2018 to 2021 (as of 1 September).

47.   Cour des comptes France (2021), External audit of the Council of Europe, Audit report – Review of the administrative and organisational reform of the Council of Europe, financial years 2018 to 2021 (as of 1 September).

the reason behind initiatives. It is unclear why some answers seem to partly diverge from preceding findings. However, few know how to get involved and even fewer have participated in volunteer groups relating to specific initiatives. Just over half believe that getting involved is a worthwhile use of their time but few have time to get involved. Few understand why some reform ideas are adopted and others are not.

Figure 7. Finding out about administrative reform initiatives and getting involved (N=229
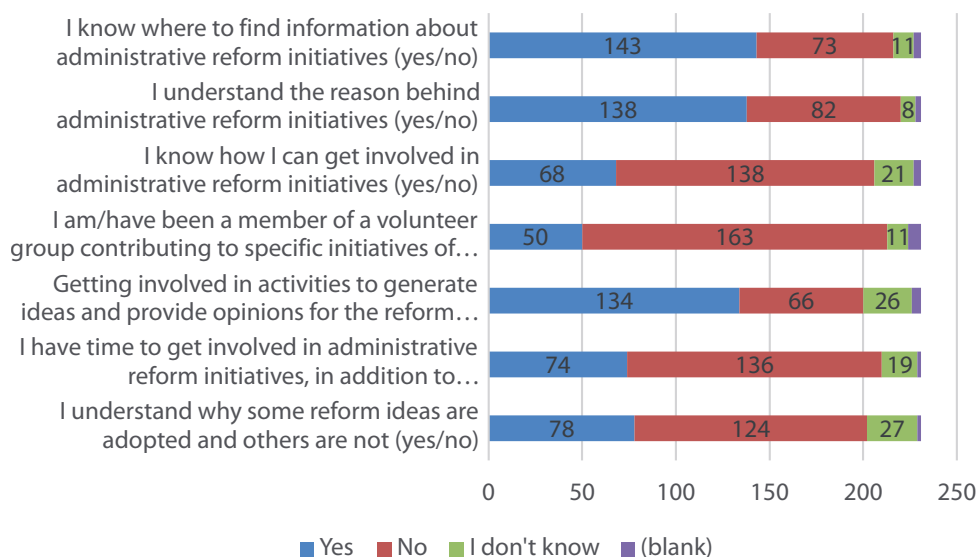
Source: evaluation survey conducted by KEK – CDC and the DIO during this evaluation.

86.   In addition to working sessions and workshops, the Council of Europe engaged with staff through online surveys. It has conducted several staff surveys in recent years, namely the DIO survey on organisational culture "The way we do things around here" (2023),[48] the survey "Help to shape our future work environment" conducted by Kardham in the context of the NWoW project (2022),[49] the DGA survey "What working environment for the Organisation's future" (2021),[50] the DIT semi-annual customer surveys and the DHR survey "Health and quality of life at work" (2023).

87.   While surveys are important change management tools as they encourage staff to reflect on the existing situation and generate suggestions for change, the analysis of the above- mentioned surveys highlighted some matters of concern from a change management perspective.

a. **Representation** – The underrepresentation of staff from external offices in the "What working environment for the Organisation's future?" survey (HQ 91.5%, field 9.5%; as a reference – Council of Europe staff: 84% in the HQ, 16% external offices) suggests that the concerns, expectations and suggestions of field staff may not be adequately reflected in the administrative reform process, assuming that the results of the survey feed into the process.

b. **Timing** – The "What working environment for the Organisation's future?" survey was launched approximately two weeks after the NWoW survey was closed, with some questions overlapping (for example well-being at work). This also supports the views expressed by interviewees regarding a general feeling of "survey fatigue".

88.   In the "Organisational culture staff survey 2023", 49% of staff did not feel that staff had a voice[51] and 39% did not feel represented by the Staff Committee.[52] These results raise important questions about staff engagement in change management, including identifying priorities and generating ideas for change.

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48.   Directorate of Internal Oversight of the Council of Europe (2023), Organisational culture: "the way we do things around here" (IA-A-CULT-draft survey-V-BIL) [survey questions only] (internal document).
49.   Kardham (2023), NWoW project [Appendix 4] – Survey "Help to shape our future work environment" [date extracted from document properties] (internal document).
50.   Council of Europe (2021), "What working environment for the Organisation's future? Quantitative results – DGA survey among staff" [presentation] (internal document).
51.   Organisational culture staff survey 2023 - summary of survey responses (internal document).
52.   Organisational culture staff survey 2023 - summary of survey responses (internal document).

89.   In contrast to this, a recent analysis by the DHR shows that about 75% of ideas and proposals made by the People Strategy volunteer groups have been implemented (in whole or in part).[53]

Problematic internal communication

> **Key finding 14** – While efforts to better communicate were mentioned, internal communication was described as rather problematic by most stakeholders interviewed (internal and external), especially with respect to a lack of both transparency and continuous communication throughout reform initiatives and changes.

90.   Effective communication goes beyond disseminating information. For the purposes of this analysis, communication covers general dissemination of information about changes, communication by example (leading by example), internal and external consultation and dialogue (with the Committee of Ministers and GR-PBA), and training and other support to accompany changes. Clearly communicating the results of initiatives and changes is an important aspect of change management that can influence stakeholders' trust in the change process and buy-in to the reforms.

91.   Some managers involved in the administrative reform considered that the Organisation has improved how it communicates information about the reform, although they also stated that there was still room for improvement. Consultations with staff highlighted rather critical views on the way the Organisation communicates. Some relevant examples lifted from surveys are as follows. The report on the survey "What working environment for the Organisation's future?" provides no information on how the results of the survey would be used, or by which entities, or how the results would feed into the administrative reform process. Some feedback from the stakeholders responsible for implementing change initiatives suggests that the results of the survey have not been acted on, for example regarding internal communication and the organisation of information on the Council of Europe's intranet. Responses to the evaluation survey are often directly critical of issues relating to communication about the administrative reform process.[54] The relatively high proportion of respondents who were unable to give an opinion on different matters also suggests suboptimal communication about the reform process.

92.   Overall, the document review (including surveys) and stakeholder consultations highlighted the following concerns regarding communication.

   a. **Information sharing is not communication** and this applies across the different levels of the Organisation. Stakeholder feedback on the way the SMG functions and is used suggests that this is more for making announcements to senior managers with little possibility for dialogue, which is an important element of effective communication. It is reported that announcements at the SMG come too late for meaningful discussions to be had regarding the changes introduced. There is a risky assumption that publishing information on the intranet equates to effective communication (see bullet point "Over- reliance on staff consulting the intranet" below).

   b. **Information and methods of communication are not always sufficiently adapted to the intended target audience**. Information provided by those managing initiatives was sometimes described as too abstract (for example business continuity) and/or too technical (for example the DMS). Limited attendance at important staff dissemination meetings suggests that the method or subject of communication are perceived as uninteresting, not relevant or not a high priority for staff. The way this was communicated to the evaluators seemed to imply that staff were at fault for not making use of opportunities to hear about important changes, while there might be in fact several underlying reasons for this (for example staff not being aware; lack of time due to workload and deadlines; perceptions of those presenting the information).

   c. **No overview of reform priorities, initiatives, processes and stages**. The limited coherence of the overall administrative reform and its change management approaches discussed earlier in this report (see 6.2.2) does not provide a solid foundation for clear communication about the reform priorities, initiatives, process and stages.

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53.   Council of Europe (n.d.), " Analysis of propositions by volunteers, young and task force 1 group and their level of implementation" [spreadsheet without title and date] (internal document).

54.   For example, Figure 2 "I know which structures within the Council of Europe are leading the administrative reform process", "I know which actors participate in these structures", "I understand how ideas for change are developed", "I understand how decisions about administrative reform processes are taken"; Figure 6 "The reform process is easy to follow"; Figure 7 "I know how I can get involved in administrative reform initiatives", "I understand why some reform ideas are adopted and others are not".

d. **Over-reliance on staff consulting the intranet**. Responses to the organisational culture survey on internal communication,[55] including the Council of Europe's intranet, are closely aligned with stakeholder feedback from the present evaluation and the evaluators' own experiences of locating information in the Council of Europe's intranet. Several of the stakeholders responsible for implementing change initiatives (for example the DIT) and managers interviewed informed the evaluators that "the information is all on the intranet". However, survey feedback from early 2023 shows that respondents were critical about internal communication, including the organisation of information on the intranet – once again, this raises the question of how the results of this survey have been used, by whom and when. Some managers explicitly suggest that some staff are simply "too lazy" to look at the information that is published, but this view overlooks other possible causes for lack of engagement with materials published on the intranet. There is recognition among some managers that the intranet is perhaps a too "traditional" method of communication and is not the best way to reach young people. Another problem is the volume of information that is published on the intranet,[56] how it is presented and the heavy workload of staff that makes it hard for them to find time to keep up with announcements on the intranet, which are soon pushed down the list by new announcements. Moreover, the use of different intranets by the Court, the EDQM and the rest of the Organisation adds an additional layer of complexity to effective communication. The Organisation also recognised that there are limited human resources available for managing the intranet. A recent report of an external audit on governance independently reached a similar conclusion and highlighted the need to improve internal communication with staff to help them proactively access relevant information (without expecting them to search for the information on the intranet themselves).

e. **Communication via staff meetings and relaying of information by managers are not always effective**. The Council of Europe relies largely on "trickle-down" communication from managers to staff, including "communication by example", but this does not always work, especially in the case of the DMS, where it is reported that managers are reluctant to use the new system, or the NWoW, where the solutions do not seem to apply to all managers. Staff also shared concerns about information being shared in a format that is hard to understand. In this regard, the EDQM shared its practice using change agents who are sensitised and trained through change readiness surveys, staff meetings for information sharing, change management workshops and making change management a regular agenda item of meetings.

f. **Lack of timeliness and consistency in communication at different stages of the process, including on use of inputs provided and decision-making processes**. The members of diplomatic missions interviewed pointed to a lack of transparency in the decision-making processes of reform initiatives. Staff who participate in volunteer and piloting teams suggest that there is a drop in communication following an initial participative phase, with the result being that some changes have taken stakeholders somewhat by surprise, for example the introduction of self-evaluation in the 2023/24 performance evaluation cycle. The low number of respondents to the staff survey conducted for this evaluation who understand how decisions are taken (see Figure 2) confirms a lack of transparency in decision-making processes relating to the introduced changes. Often, it was indicated that the engagement of relevant stakeholders and discussion of changes was being initiated too late. This was noted particularly in the case of the DMS, Panorama and the updating of the staff regulations.

g. **The Secretariat regularly reports to the GR-PBA on progress but the information provided does not clearly address the GR-PBA's questions and there are concerns about inconsistencies in messaging to the Committee of Ministers and staff**. The regular reports to the Committee of Ministers and GR-PBA, with dashboards and consolidated indicators, suggest systematic reporting of the administrative reforms (as packaged for reporting and communication to the GR- PBA, see 6.1.2). The number of GR-PBA meetings at which administrative reform is discussed was highlighted by interviewees and the RG as important for ensuring communication of progress. However, feedback from members of diplomatic missions indicates that the Council of Europe provides a lot of information, but it is difficult to make sense of it and it therefore does not clearly answer GR-PBA members' questions or address their concerns. Nevertheless, they also pointed to improvement in communication between the Secretariat and member states (Committee of Ministers and/or GR-PBA). Furthermore, at the request of delegations, several of the Committee of Ministers' decisions "welcomed" the

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55. Organisational culture staff survey 2023 - summary of survey responses (internal document).
56. The DGA's Communications Support Unit indicates that it is responsible for publishing and maintaining information on 700 intranet pages.

Secretariat's reports on the administrative reform, rather than simply "taking note" of them. However, feedback provided to the evaluation team was often critical, especially with regard to the Secretariat's responsiveness in dealings with member states and the lack of substantive dialogue surrounding the administrative reform and changes (member states are not engaged as partners).[57] Some of the members of diplomatic missions interviewed have doubts about the quality of communication by the Organisation with its staff. Feedback from staff suggests a lack of transparency, and perceptions of a hidden agenda in some cases. They highlighted discrepancies in messages sent to the Committee of Ministers through reporting and to staff in connection with individual initiatives, which may be undermining understanding of the rationale for change, and overall trust and buy-in (for example the NWoW).

93.   Workshops with staff have identified a need for improved and more effective communication, to be achieved primarily through a comprehensive communication strategy covering all aspects of reform, clear communication of the reasons for change, objectives and expected changes for individual staff, as well as communication on the monitoring of changes and their impact. With regard to specific aspects, staff voiced their need for greater transparency in communication with staff, communication that is tailored to various groups (communication tailored to field staff) and a more proactive approach to addressing rumours.

94.   As a follow-up to comments made by members of the second reference group, the evaluation team reviewed the communication guidelines for Council of Europe projects.[58] The guidelines do not provide guidance for the integrated and coherent communication of multiple internal administrative reform initiatives. The document is intended to serve as guidance for individual projects and appears to be aimed exclusively at external projects.[59] Furthermore, the document's explanation of communication is limited to publicity and disseminating information, which is just one element of communication in a critical social learning system such as the Council of Europe's administrative reform process.

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57. The apparent discrepancy in the sentiments noted here suggest an evolving relationship, with improvements acknowledged but still some areas where it is hoped that co-operation can be intensified. Furthermore, interview feedback perhaps provides a more granular perspective of the situation than is possible in the formal Committee of Ministers decision.
58. Communication guidelines for Council of Europe projects.
59. See "Section II – Target audiences" in Council of Europe (2017), "Council of Europe Communication Plan Guidelines – Project Management Methodology".

Conclusions

95.   The conclusions are the evaluation team's assessments based on the findings. While the administrative reform was used as an example in collecting and analysing data, the conclusions address change management at the organisational level of the Council of Europe.

96.   The Council of Europe is in a continuous state of reform, addressing relevant issues ranging from human resources and IT to building management and governance. At the same time, and like many other organisations, the Council of Europe is prone to maintaining the status quo. The reform process is largely reactive, driven by requests made by the Committee of Ministers and recommendations made by various oversight bodies. Moreover, the reform processes were complicated by challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as well as limited resources dedicated to reform and change management.

97.   Conducting reforms requires strategic steering and operational support mechanisms; change management should be an integral consideration of any reform. The current fragmented steering and oversight of reforms at the Council of Europe hinder the ability to implement reforms in a manageable way and to leverage good practices and synergies across initiatives. It should be noted that decision-making processes in a multilateral organisation like the Council of Europe are not comparable to other types of public administration or the private sector in terms of speed and clarity. In addition to the Secretary General, the Committee of Ministers lies at the heart of the governance system, while the Parliamentary Assembly and other institutions also play a role in decision making. The Committee of Ministers sets the general direction, but its role does not extend to specific strategic decision making regarding the prioritisation, design or implementation of individual reform initiatives that translate its expectations into reality. The SMG is rather a forum for sharing of information with limited space for substantive dialogue or decision making on reform and change management.

98.   The Organisation lacks an established internal organisation-wide change management support mechanism and dedicated resources to support coherent planning and implementation of reform initiatives, including working on gender-equitable solutions going beyond involvement of men and women in initiatives. Reform processes and initiatives should explicitly consider gender effects in a systematic and deliberate way, thereby assessing the consequences of initiatives and changes on different groups. Overall, while there are good practices of change management at the level of individual initiatives, reforms do not follow a recognised change management approach or strategy. Lack of a coherent overview of the reform process and fragmented steering and management of the reform hinder effective communication and engagement with stakeholders.

99.   The lack of a coherent and motivating narrative, based on a road map with clear and realistic priorities and goals explaining how the Organisation is expected to develop, makes it difficult to nurture a culture of change. Council of Europe staff are tired of reforms, do not always understand the rationale for change, have limited trust in how their inputs are integrated into decision making and are overwhelmed by the frequent introduction of changes in their daily work. Effective ownership beyond general compliance with changes is further hampered by inconsistent support from managers. An explicit theory of change could offer a systemic framework for both strategic and operational thinking and thus support a road map for embedding reform initiatives.

100. Clear and consistent communication of the results of reform initiatives is an important aspect of change management and strengthens both stakeholders' trust in the change process and their buy-in. The lack of transparency and limited consistency in conveying changes to staff and other stakeholders limit the impact and acceptance of reforms. Although individual initiatives are monitored, their overall impact on the Organisation is unclear, limiting the ability to communicate clear results, learn lessons and improve future reforms. Improving communication is crucial for the success of the Council of Europe's reform initiatives. An overarching communication strategy about reforms would ensure transparency and continuous engagement with stakeholders, mitigating frustration and fostering a sense of ownership among staff.

101. Based on the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, it is evident that change management has been applied only partially in implementing reforms. The Council of Europe is at a crossroad and needs to make a strategic decision, either (a) to commit to realising the full potential of reforms by allocating the required resources and putting in place the necessary structures and processes for change management, as outlined in the following recommendations, or (b) to continue with a less comprehensive and systematic approach to change management, in which case the scale and speed of reforms should be reduced.

Recommendations

102. Emerging recommendations were presented and discussed with the reference group at the end of the data collection period in April 2024. Feedback was taken into consideration in the finalisation of the report and the recommendations presented hereafter.

103. The evaluation team proposes a first main recommendation regarding the commitment of the Organisation to change management followed by nine recommendations for improving change management at the Council of Europe, acknowledging and building on existing structures and good practices.

104. All recommendations address the strategic level of change management within the Council of Europe, from strategic decision making to consideration of key elements of change management, such as staff engagement and communication.

105. While the administrative reform was used as an example in collecting and analysing data, the recommendations target the Organisation as a whole and are therefore addressed to the Council of Europe.

106. Considerations of gender and special needs are mainstreamed in recommendations addressing the culture of change (Recommendation 4), the assessment of the potential impact of reforms (Recommendation 8), the communication (Recommendation 9) and the engagement of staff (Recommendation 10).

Recommendation 1 – Commitment to change management

The Council of Europe should make a strategic decision either to realise the full potential of its reforms by investing in a more strategic and systemic approach to change management, option (a), or to continue with a less comprehensive and systematic approach to change management, option (b).

Option (a) offers the potential for reforms to be implemented effectively, achieving their intended impact and fostering a culture of continuous incremental improvement and adaptability. This strategic commitment to a comprehensive change management approach will position the Organisation to realise significant and sustainable improvement, ultimately benefiting the Organisation and its stakeholders. However, selecting this option requires an investment of financial and (to some extent existing) human resources. This is the option recommended by the evaluators. The following nine recommendations outline the strategic actions needed (Recommendations 2-10).

Option (b) implies continuing with the existing less comprehensive and systematic approach to change management, which requires that the scope, ambition and speed of reforms be scaled back to match available resources and capacities. This option will also have reputational implications, since the Council of Europe will lag behind other international organisations in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and general modernisation. Should this option be chosen nevertheless, the Organisation may want to implement some of the recommendations, for example Recommendations 7, 8, 9 or 10, for punctual improvement of practices.

107. The following nine recommendations outline the set of strategic actions required under option (a).

Recommendation 2 – Decision making

The Council of Europe should conceptualise an internal strategic decision-making mechanism involving key actors from the Organisation to prioritise, guide and steer change in a coherent and manageable way.

The internal strategic decision-making mechanism to be considered by the Council of Europe should be responsible for the strategic oversight and steering of the reform initiatives and change processes. Its core tasks should include strategic dialogue on reform and change processes, development of a road map and narrative (Recommendation 3), prioritisation of initiatives, provision of strategic guidance, initiation and fostering of a culture of change (Recommendation 4) and securing dedicated financial and human resources for introducing initiatives and changes (Recommendation 5).

The Council of Europe should consider and define the role and interactions of this mechanism with member states as well as those of the change management hub (Recommendation 6) to ensure relevant dialogue, exchanges and continuity across change management processes.

In doing so, the Council of Europe can build on experiences gained from decision-making structures that have previously existed (Steering Group on Reform) as well as existing structures (such as the SMG) and thus learn from past experiences and prevent the creation of new structures and mechanisms.

Recommendation 3 – Road map and narrative

The Council of Europe should develop a clear and concrete road map as well as a coherent and motivating narrative of the evolution of the Organisation to be achieved by the reforms, acknowledging existing vision statement(s) and focusing on initiatives aimed at fundamentally changing the way the Council of Europe operates, its culture and performance.

The road map should comprise two parts: (1) a concise, easy-to-grasp visualisation identifying the major changes to be implemented, key milestones and the sequence and timing of changes; (2) a clear, concise, coherent and motivating narrative for all staff explaining and justifying the envisaged evolution of the Organisation presented in the visualisation. The narrative should create a link between the adopted reform strategy and the need for the envisaged changes, and it should explain how the changes are expected to affect the functioning and culture of the Organisation and what, concretely, this means for staff.

The purpose of the road map is to (1) facilitate communication with staff and the Committee of Ministers about reforms, (2) provide more predictability for staff and the Committee of Ministers, (3) serve as a basis for internal dialogue and decision making, and (4) enhance accountability towards staff and the Committee of Ministers. The road map should be periodically updated to reflect progress and changed priorities ("if a new request for change comes in, other initiatives and activities may have to be put on hold").

Recommendation 4 – Culture of change

The Council of Europe should promote a culture of change inspired by the road map (Recommendation 2), integrating gender and special needs dimensions.

Based on clear priorities set by the road map and a coherent narrative, the Council of Europe should invest in a culture that drives and embraces change for the good of the vision and mission of the Council of Europe, the Organisation as a whole and its workforce. Fostering a culture of change requires time, effort and for the leadership to demonstrate its commitment to change. This leadership should come from the highest level of the Organisation and involve leading by example at different levels of the Organisation. Enabling factors that should be considered by the Council of Europe are ongoing training and development opportunities to build the skills necessary to adapt and identifying and empowering "change ambassadors/champions" within the Organisation to advocate for change and help motivate staff and colleagues. Throughout those efforts, acknowledgement of the diversity of the workforce is essential in fostering an inclusive culture of change.

Recommendation 5 – Dedicated resources for implementing change management

The Council of Europe should plan and secure the necessary resources to implement reform initiatives and change management in accordance with the road map.

The requirements for financial and human resources vary from initiative to initiative. Adequate resources should therefore be identified and secured to ensure that the implementation of initiatives does not have a detrimental effect on the Organisation's work and staff (for example overload of work) while introducing changes aimed at improving the way the Organisation operates and performs at the same time.

The road map (Recommendation 3) should be used as a fundraising tool. It should provide an overview of the full package of reforms and associated change management elements and cost them with a view to establishing transparency about what reforms can be expected for what price. The Committee of Ministers should be involved in these discussions and reflections.

Regarding the change mechanisms (Recommendations 2 and 6), the resources required should carefully be assessed and balanced with existing human and financial resources.

Recommendation 6 – Organisation-wide change management hub

The Council of Europe should upgrade the internal support and co-ordination of change management by building on existing expertise and efforts.

The change management hub should operate on an organisation-wide basis, taking on a support and co-ordination role across the whole Organisation. It should have a clear reporting link to the strategic decision-making mechanism (Recommendation 2) and should act as its operational and supporting unit.

The core functions of the change management hub should be to: support coherent planning and implementation of reform initiatives across the Organisation (including the establishment and use of change management guidelines, Recommendation 7), ensure synergies between initiatives, gather and share lessons learnt, ensure systematic assessment of gender and special needs dimensions, identify and mitigate cumulative negative impacts of change, and support the provision of evidence to demonstrate the outcome of changes (Recommendation 8).

108. Recommendations 7, 8, 9 and 10 are part of the full package to be considered under options (a) (see Recommendation 1). Under option (b), the Organisation may consider them for gradual and/or punctual improvements.

Recommendation 7 – Change management guidelines

The Council of Europe should use a set of pragmatic guidelines for planning, implementing and assessing changes and change management approaches. These guidelines should provide the basis for meaningful reflections among relevant stakeholders.

The change management guidelines should be concise, covering key elements that must be taken into consideration when planning and designing a change initiative. They should remain at a macro level to ensure their relevance and application across the Organisation as well as various reform areas and initiatives. They should be used as checklist and thus be pragmatic. A source of inspiration could be the key elements of the JIU change management framework, adjusted to the needs and requirements of the Council of Europe.

Recommendation 8 – Assessment

The Council of Europe should systematically assess the feasibility and potential consequences of initiatives and the outcomes of adopted initiatives.

A first assessment should be part of the design phase of any initiative and should ensure that potential consequences for the Organisation, its staff and any specific groups are thoroughly addressed. A particular attention should be given to the impact on gender equality and persons with special needs. This initial assessment should be commensurate to the initiative and ask questions which are relevant to the initiative and its context, meaning that assessments, while systematic, do not necessarily imply to be large exercises.

An additional assessment is needed to capture the achievements and outcomes of initiatives in view of learning and generating evidence-based outcomes for communication.

Recommendation 9 – Communication

The Council of Europe should develop an integrated approach to communicating with staff about reform, initiatives and changes in order to ensure understanding and increase buy-in.

The Council of Europe should ensure clear, consistent and coherent messaging based on existing vision(s), the road map and its narrative (Recommendation 3), and the progress and results of initiatives and changes (Recommendation 8). Regarding the culture of change (Recommendation 4), involvement of the Organisation's leadership in delivering key messages is essential. In particular, the communication strategy should ensure that staff are not overloaded with information, and this means that communication about initiatives, plans and developments should be carefully choreographed within a fully integrated communication strategy. This would require an analysis of the audiences, the identification of appropriate channels, the purposeful selection of key messages, as well as the usage of innovative and

contextualised ways of communicating with staff and specific groups in addition to using the intranet and relying on information cascading down the hierarchy. Innovative approaches might include, for example, real time feedback, personalised news feeds and similar tools and approaches. Furthermore, the "tone at the top" is important and the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General should systematically communicate on reforms, presenting them as key initiatives for the Organisation. The communication strategy should acknowledge existing communication efforts and share communication successes.

Recommendation 10 - Engagement of staff

The Council of Europe should identify meaningful, timely and sustainable ways of involving its staff to ensure their substantive engagement throughout processes.

Based on experiences gained in engaging with staff in recent years, the Council of Europe should reflect on and learn lessons regarding critical success factors and challenges. In doing so, it should identify good practices to be continued, adjusted or introduced to ensure inclusive participation, adequate representation of its staff in consultations (for example HQ/external offices, gender, special needs) and co-ordination of the various engagement activities. The type of engagement (for example survey, workshop), level of details and practical modalities (for example online, face-to-face) should be adapted to different initiatives and contexts, the target group(s) and the purpose of the consultation.

Continuous engagement throughout an initiative does not necessarily imply an ongoing consultation process, but it does require an appropriate balance between active engagement and transparent communication on the process and the decision-making process (see Recommendation 9).

Appendices

Link to the volume II appendices: https://rm.coe.int/dio-2024-44-eva-cm-volumeii-en/1680b18c5a

This evaluation examines how the Council of Europe has managed change during its ongoing administrative reform. The organization is continuously evolving, but the reform process has been largely reactive, further complicated by external challenges such as COVID-19 and the Russian war against Ukraine, along with limited resources.

Effective change management for this reform requires a strategic decision-making mechanism, a clear roadmap and narrative, a culture of change, dedicated resources, a centralized change management hub, practical guidelines, and a thorough assessment of the feasibility and impact of reform initiatives. Additionally, it demands an integrated approach to communication and staff engagement.

The Council of Europe must decide whether to allocate the necessary resources and establish the required structures and processes for effective change management or to maintain the current effort levels and scale back the reforms.

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