

Episode 3.2: How do we make change happen?

Guests: Oliver, Anna and Kathryn

Karen: Hello, welcome to the first episode of this new CashCast series. I'm Karen Peachey and I will be your host today.

In the last series we asked big questions about the journey of humanitarian cash and voucher assistance – asking ‘What did we expect at the start?’, ‘Where are we at now?’ and ‘Where do we need to be?’.

Now we dig into questions about what it takes to make change happen in the humanitarian world when it comes to cash and voucher assistance, or CVA for short.

To do this, we picked four hot topics and talked to six people with different experiences and perspectives, to reflect on how to make change happen in practice.

In this series, we speak to Sindhy Obias, who leads the Accord, an organisation from the Philippines who reflects on what change looks like in practice for a national organization, reflecting on issues that are cash specific and some that are broader. We speak to Anna Kondakhchyan from NORCAP/Norwegian Refugee Council, and Kathryn Taetzsch from World Vision, who have worked with various international NGOs and other agencies who have been working to increase the use cash transfers. They tell some interesting stories about how they fought for the use of cash, and the lessons we can learn.

We also speak to Lydiah Wangechi, from GiveDirectly, a relatively new international organisation and one which started out as a proponent of cash and didn't have to deal with the transition from an organisation rooted in in-kind assistance.

Irfan Khan of Muslim Hands, a large international NGO, shares some interesting thoughts about the some of the challenges they faced, as a faith-based organization, in adopting and increasing the use of cash as part of their work. And, finally, we spoke to Oliver May, who offered valuable insights from his 20 years of experience in the humanitarian and development sector helping organisations tackle strategy, governance and risk. If you'd like to know more about the different speakers, do read their bios – in the write up that accompanies the series.

So, let's get started!

In this first episode, we begin by looking at what it takes to start making change happen. Is it about a light bulb moment? Is it about big leadership commitments? or is it driven from somewhere else?

Once change starts, what then? What needs to happen to ensure cash assistance is used to its full potential?

Oliver: There's relatively well-established practice around what features an organizational transformation program needs. But I think there are a few things that you need to have before you even start in order to make sure that you succeed. And the first is clarity. So you need a clear vision that's going to resonate with people. People need to see where they're going. And it's not the same as a two

sentence vision statement, although there is part of it. It's painting a tangible picture for people of what the new destination is going to look like. What is the new thing?

Karen: That's Oliver May, talking about what he's seen as some of the conditions needed to ignite change of any sort.

Oliver has worked across many countries, with a particular focus on integrity risks like safeguarding, fraud and counterterrorism. Most recently, he was a partner in Deloitte Australia where he led the Australian International Development Practice.

So, according to Oliver, the first thing you need to make transformational organisational change happen is clarity, a clear vision that resonates with people. What else?

Oliver: I think the second thing is courage. It's going to be hard. Organizations are ecosystems. They are full of agendas and subsystems and interest groups and personalities and cultures. It's going to be a roller coaster. We always want to take as many people with us as we can, but not everyone's going to come and we have to accept that.

Karen: And what would be your third thing?

Oliver: I think that it's also about having a compelling case for change. You know you have it when even those who oppose what you're doing recognize the facts of it.

I like Myam Hussain's definition of organizational culture, which is that culture is how we think, feel and act as we go about our work in our organizations. And I think as purpose led organizations, we are very strongly values led. You know, we're not profit motivated. Our decisions don't boil down to brutal equations about, you know, the most return on investment for the lowest investment. And there's a lot of strengths in that.

But there are also a lot of risks around it as well. And I think one of those is where we have initiatives or modalities that might nudge against those values, we need to watch out. And this is what I think has been happening with things like data and technology and biometrics. That's not to say, you know, they don't contain risks, they definitely do, especially around vulnerable communities. But if there seems to be a tension between some of our values that we don't explore readily enough, we can tend to deprioritize them, put them in the too difficult bin. And then we make slower progress than we do with, you know, the tried and tested old stalwart modalities.

And I think CVA has been affected by this. I think we've seen that in kind of the technology adoption, because there have been these concerns around things like privacy...I think we need to keep our foot on the gas in exploring these new approaches and keep challenging ourselves around our assumptions.

Karen: Ok, to recap, so far we need clarity, courage and a compelling case to make change happen. Plus we need to deal with the risk of things not happening because they get labelled as ideas that are just too 'too difficult'.

Once change starts, how can we get the momentum going?

Anna: You need to have people who really have the vision, people who are not afraid of setbacks and who will stick to the vision when the going gets tough because in all likelihood it will...

Karen: That's Anna Kondakhchyan, Head of Cash and Markets at NORCAP/Norwegian Refugee Council. She has lots of experience in change management for humanitarian aid organisations and networks. She talked to us about when she was working with one of the first international organisations to get behind the use of cash about 15 years ago and what helped kick start things.

Anna: It felt like the movement started with practitioners who saw the promise of cash, maybe saw other colleagues experimenting with it in the field. Practitioners within the livelihoods and food security part of the organization actually started it. But they also quickly realized that in order to move forward, they need to collaborate with colleagues in supply logistics as well as colleagues in finance. And again, here it was very much a collaboration between like-minded practitioners who believed in what cash could do for the people affected in crisis and by crisis.

It started there with a small coalition of the willing, sitting together, looking at ways that markets could be mapped, also looking at how existing supply chain management and financial management procedures need to be adapted to enable cash as a modality, while at the same time keeping a good handle on the risks.

I think senior leadership buying and policy commitments followed much later. That's my memory.

Karen: So in this case, things started being pushed forward by staff who had a vision and got on with driving forward change. Was there a pushback from leadership?

Anna: Actually, I don't remember significant moments of pushback from management. What I do remember is that spirit of innovation, of trial and error, of accepting that we don't have all the answers, but that's also not the reason to stop trying. The spirit of building the car as you drive it a little bit. That would sound familiar to many change and also cash management practitioners.

What I also observed at the time and have since come to recognize as an important part of change making is that none of these practitioners were sitting around waiting for permission from senior leaders. And just one more thought. Often we hear that to get to the leadership commitment stage, you need to build a case.

As a change maker, you need to accept that what seems like a no-brainer to you, and certainly cash felt like a no-brainer to me at the time, it will likely need more evidence to be compelling to others. Building a case takes time and guts. Sometimes you need to accept that you won't always be able to build it, and that's okay. That's not a reason to not try it, in my books anyway.

Karen: So in this case, the vision didn't start at the leadership level, but from practitioners who saw what was needed, pushed things forward, with ideas that then radiated to other stakeholders in the organization. While it didn't start with them, leaders still had a pivotal role to play – with the right mindset, “a spirit of yes” – to push change forward.

Let's look at this idea of mindset a bit more. How can you get people on board who have the keys to make change happen?

Anna: It's about how you go about building the case that really matters. And...I think we have to remember, maybe I'm kind of at risk of stating the obvious, but we are people and we work with people and we work for people. So if we're guided by that, how we go about building that management commitment, is about remembering what made us excited about the change in the first place. How do

you then transfer some of that excitement to leaders are also just people at the end of the day, right?... What it is helpful if you have processes and systems that are already somehow set up that can help you to build on? But it is never, never to be underestimated what leadership says. The tone at the top still has massive influence on how people perceive or follow through, or at least are more confident to do something they've never done before.

And so leadership buy-in took a long time, took a lot of cultivation, sensitization and you know engagement and challenging as well. And therefore being part of CALP for example has helped us to always refer to you see what others are doing it's not so dangerous you see what others are doing should we try this or should we learn from what has not worked and that has been absolutely fantastic for us and we continue to really build on that and benefit from that and hopefully contribute to that.

Karen: So whether change is being driven by passionate staff at different places in the organization or leadership setting the tone to give people the confidence to do something new, the need to cultivate the right mindset seems to be a key to sparking momentum for change and for it to radiate out from a niche area into something that changes the whole organisation.

But, of course, mindsets also have the potential to impede change...

Kathryn: I think it always starts with mindset. Many organizations that have been for a long time in this field, right, have developed certain routines, certain approaches, technical approaches, we call them also project models that have proven to be really solid and from a, let's say, sector and standard perspective, really impactful over time. However, context change, right?....

So overcoming mindsets that are probably very linear very often in our sector still, is one key challenge that I think we continue to battle through with evidence, with, you know, often also failure....For many people, one of the key issues in the beginning was, and I think we were not alone with that, many of our field staff was very hesitant to say, we'll give out cash.

Karen: That was Dr. Kathryn Taetzsch, World Vision International's Snr. Director, global Humanitarian and Development Capacity and Capabilities, talking about the early adoption of cash at WVI. She explains how concerns were overcome and mindsets gradually changed.

Here's Kathryn again.

Kathryn: So diversion of aid is an issue. And obviously, if you have cash and it's very visible, if it's not mobile money that is less visible, there are people that for very good reasons would like to have a share of that, even if they're not necessarily entitled. So staff was risk averse, very risk averse....

We had to have a lot of one-on-ones with sector specialists, with people that are managers in the field to explain and provide evidence that other organizations had collated, including CALP, and done fantastic and continues to do fantastic references and webinars on that. And so we used many of those tools and resources. And we also engaged with people to try it out themselves and see what would happen at small scale and people gained more confidence.

Karen: We'll hear more from Kathryn in the next episode. But for now, let's go back to Oliver who illustrates that, although the theory of change sometimes sounds easy, it's actually very complex given you're talking of hundreds of changes across a whole organisation.

Oliver: Some modalities...are part of almost a human industrial complex where, you know, some of our traditional modalities, we've just been doing them for so long. But they're just so ingrained in our organizations and our way of thinking.

For example, you can, and I've seen this happen, you can do a needs assessment or a program design and it will be robust and it will be empirical and it will be independent and it's gonna hit all of the indicators that it needs to, but it will tend to recommend the same interventions. And that's because the mindset of those who are designing and doing the assessments, take it in that direction or the dominant capabilities of the organization that asks for the assessment.

Your mindset and the capabilities around you lead you to the answer. And that is a strategic and organisational development issue for individual agencies. And that is where big decisions may need to be made around who needs our help and what are the capabilities and capacities that we should be building to give it to them.

Karen: So how do we go about shaking things up?

Oliver: ...first is the need to get super practical. Everything that we're doing is about humans, you know, that human helping that human. What we should really be doing, of course, is that human helping that human to help that human and being really practical about what we're offering, how it's getting done and making sure that it's fully locally led.

The second thing, and this is related, I think, is not waiting for systemic change to happen, but pushing change wherever we happen to be in whatever way that we can. And we can do that wherever we are in our organizations and wherever we are in the sector.

And the third thing I think is not underestimating power of doing that or the power of advocacy. The example I'd give here would be the place of human trafficking on the development and the political agenda. It's pretty high up there, it's pretty ubiquitous. It wasn't there 15 years ago. It was not. When I was in what's now the National Crime Agency in the UK, it was really difficult to get resources to do any work on human trafficking. Now, of course, it's a massive part of what the NCA does, and there's loads of human rights organizations and other organizations that are devoted to it. And what changed that was public pressure. There was huge mobilization across particularly church networks that pushed it up the agenda, lots and lots of advocacy.

So, you know, change is possible just because we can't do it in six months doesn't mean, you know, we won't be sitting here in 10 years talking about what's next after cash now that CVA is the dominant form of development and humanitarian assistance all over the world.

Karen: Let's end with this optimistic note.

We all can contribute to the change that we are looking for in the use of cash, and as our guests have said, we can achieve it with a clear vision, passion, and courage, understanding that this is a journey which needs action from all levels.

Let's continue the conversation, we want to hear from you, feel free to share your thoughts or questions with us through our different channels indicated in the description of this episode. Especially stories of how change happened in your organisation in regards to cash.

I hope we meet again in the next episode of this series, we are going to talk about some of the nuts and bolts of change – about policies, processes and partnerships. I hope you'll join us again to unravel these questions. Until next time!