Organizational culture, systems, and resources can either enable or block a shift toward results-based protection practices. This handout for humanitarian managers and staff explains how culture affects results-based protection.

Culture shapes the way employees behave.

Culture is the collective values, beliefs, and principles of an organization. It shapes the way employees behave among themselves and with people outside the organization.

Placing the affected population at the center of humanitarian action prioritizing learning, flexibility, listening and an environment that values collaborative action and creative problem solving is key to achieving results and reducing risk.

Cultural barriers to results-based protection:

▶ A knowledge and learning deficit on protection across the humanitarian system, as well as a lack of confidence in the knowledge that non-protection actors do have on protection risks.

▶ Working in sectoral "silos," with little multi-disciplinary collaboration.

▶ Hierarchical decision-making authorities that prevent frontline staff from contributing valuable insight and participating in decision making.

▶ Rigid design and implementation processes, often driven by donor systems.

▶ Processes that prioritize efficiency and programmatic effectiveness over engaging in the analysis and creative problem solving.

▶ The growing responsibility for frontline staff to report, manage information, and coordinate activities, which diverts resources away from analysis and problem solving.

▶ A focus on vulnerability, with broad assumptions and generalizations about who is vulnerable, and less attention to threats and unique impacts of threats on different people.

▶ Resistance to the notion that risks and protective impact can be measured.

▶ A belief that specific do-no-harm or safety measures (commonly referred to protection mainstreaming or risk mitigation) equate to protection.

INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERING CULTURE

In Sierra Leone, International Rescue Committee field teams systematically reviewed their project's progress toward goals. They also discussed challenges encountered and identified solutions and best practices, in consultation with community stakeholders. These sessions occurred at least monthly and were initially established by the field-based project manager to encourage staff to reflect on successes, obstacles, and ways to mitigate problems. The iterative approach to project learning, alongside management's efforts to empower and mentor staff, has given field staff and the affected population great ownership over the project.

If your organizational culture presents barriers to results-based protection, you can overcome that by shaping the culture within your sphere of influence—your team, your program, your area. See which practices you can adopt now, and then keep building a culture that better enables results-based protection.

Organizational cultures enable results-based protection when:

▶ Leadership places the affected population at the center of humanitarian action by exploring and supporting participatory, human-centered programming approaches.
▶ There is a shared understanding of what a protection outcome is and the organization's role is in achieving it.
▶ The organization actively seeks internal and external collaborators to work on protection issues.
▶ Management adapts to changing contexts and changes plans based on contextual changes and program learning.

Humanitarian coordination forums enable results-based protection when they:

▶ Create opportunities for genuine participation and give voice to local as well as international actors.
▶ Build trust among different actors to promote mutual learning, shared analysis, and collective problem solving.
▶ Encourage a focus on results in addition to outputs and activities.
▶ Identify issues in a strategic manner.

Donors enable results-based protection when they:

▶ Engage in a dialogue with partners to understand the barriers what they may be experiencing in relation to contractual requirements.
▶ Explore collaborative and creative ways to address these challenges.
▶ Grant agreements that allow for flexibility in design and approach, including moving funds within budgets, project timeframes, reporting requirements, and other internal processes that impact programs on the ground.

CREATING A CULTURE OF ADAPTIVENESS

Mercy Corps was keen to embed a learning culture throughout the organization and developed a **team-based dialogue** called the People with Possibility (PwP) program for managers and staff.

PwP draws on neuroscience, organizational design, and systems thinking to offer practices for building innovative and adaptive teams. The six-week program begins with a meeting attended by the manager, their team, and Mercy Corps headquarters staff. Each week the manager leads their team in a discussion on one of six themes. Teams discuss how they react to stress and to change, how they communicate changes with one another, and how they take decisions in the team. They also reflect on the value of adaptation.

PwP changes the working culture of teams by focusing on the psychological aspects that can shape team dynamics and communication, which in turn impact motivation and individual performance. The end of the program focuses on practices to support adaptive learning and programming.

The initiative was developed iteratively over 12 months and has been piloted in Mercy Corps' headquarters and its Jordan and Myanmar country offices. It helped identify why changes to programs were taking place, and how different departments—logistics, finance, programming—could communicate and work with each other more effectively.

Initial feedback on PwP has been extremely positive. To sustain its benefits, teams need to be resourced adequately to **engage in routine reflection** in their day-to-day work, outside of the program.