

EVALUATION

OF THE TRAK TRANSFORMATION: SEPTEMBER 2020–JULY 2022

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ICRC



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the final report for the evaluation of the Trends and Analysis Unit (TRAK) transformation for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The evaluation was carried out from July to November 2023 by Owl RE, research and evaluation consultancy.

TRAK examines and analyses open-source information to support operational and strategic decision making. In September 2020, the Digital Transformation and Data Department’s Directorate (DTD_DIR), the management unit overseeing TRAK, decided that TRAK would be transformed into a new business model, based on the need to reduce costs. This would result in job cuts in Geneva (more than half of the TRAK team of 22 staff) and a decentralization process, which meant that a large part of the TRAK positions and services would be relocated to the Belgrade Shared Service Centre (BSSC). The new TRAK head of unit proposed a revision of this initial business model, with the major modification to reduce the foreseen BSSC staff and add six Regional Information Analysts (RIA) based in key geographic regions. This revised business model was accepted and implemented through a transformation process from January 2021 to July 2022.

The purpose of this evaluation was to support strategic decisions on the future direction of TRAK in its new structure and to capture valuable learning for the organisation on the completed delocalization/transformation process.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach including a document review, an online survey of 67 users of TRAK services and products and key informant interviews with 48 ICRC staff and one external consultant.

FINDINGS

Objective 1: Evaluate the positioning of TRAK in its new format to identify strengths and further opportunities to harness the transformation in support of the function’s aim.

The transformation required TRAK to refine its aim and focus on serving the essential needs of the ICRC. Defining this focus was part of the change management process of the transformation which produced a revised and clearer catalogue of services and products, compared to what TRAK offered prior to the transformation. This new format and aim were found to be well aligned to the revised set-up of TRAK.

The **revised set-up** provided TRAK with both the benefits of the global (Headquarters—HQ) presence and the regional presence of the RIAs; the global presence enabled TRAK to coordinate overall and be integrated in the crisis management mechanism, whereas the regional presence provided TRAK with the context and linguist diversity to make TRAK even more relevant for decision making.

Based on TRAK's strengths, TRAK users identified a **number of opportunities to further harness the transformation** and ensure TRAK's ongoing relevance, such as: ensuring that field delegations are supported by building the capacity of the delegation environmental scanning staff; developing further the synergies and complementarities with other services within ICRC that deliver analyses to avoid duplication and overlap; continuing to increase and analyse non-Western sources in multiple languages; and increasing the proactivity of the TRAK team in identifying and signalling to the operations on major emerging risks, potential challenges and opportunities.

Objective 2: Identify learning from the decentralization process and its intended and actual outcomes, to inform future organisational decisions and support replication of good practices and better reduce or anticipate risks.

This evaluation found that the TRAK transformation did achieve its three intended outcomes:

Reduced costs: The original intended outcome of the TRAK transformation was to reduce costs. The elimination of 12 posts in Geneva and the creation of six new RIA posts and four in BSSC, resulted in estimated costs savings of approximately CHF 500,000 annually, representing some 25% of the total TRAK budget (approximately CHF 2 million).

Focus scope on essential needs with existing resources: The TRAK transformation essentially refocused its scope on security/crisis response together with operational priorities within the regional contexts (with some thematic and funding focus), which was assessed by the large majority of ICRC staff as successful, despite the loss and reduction of some services. TRAK users thought that TRAK was better meeting its overall aim of *supporting operational and strategic decision making* after the transformation.

Increased readability on scope, catalogue and requests, and accountability on service delivery and client satisfaction:

The transformation led to the streamlining of TRAK services and introduction of measures to track client satisfaction, although not systematically used. The transformation changed the value and usage of TRAK's services and products positively. Crisis and security analyses followed by regional analyses on operational priorities had the highest survey ratings for usefulness. However, one third of users surveyed did not know about the range of service now offered by TRAK.

The decentralization and transformation of TRAK presented **various benefits and advantages** for TRAK and for the wider organisation. In addition to the cost savings, the most evoked benefits for the organisation were the increased connection with operations by having RIAs based in the field and the increased support provided to the crisis response mechanism at the HQ, in addition to the opportunity to refine and articulate the TRAK services and products offered. **Enabling factors to support the transformation** included the inclusive management style and leadership attributes adopted by the Head of TRAK and the presence of the Change Adviser, who managed expectations and ensured regular consultations and communication during the transformation. The revised business model also supported the transformation.

Hindering factors for the transformation included the initial resistance of the TRAK team due to the DTD_DIR's decision only being based on cost-savings, the loss of jobs and the foreseen changes not reflecting for them an appropriate way ahead for TRAK. Further, the initial decision was made without any consultation with TRAK users and was not a workable solution according to both the TRAK team and users; this was in contrast to the revised business model which was supported by the TRAK team and users. The timing of the transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic meant that staff received notification of the significant changes to their work largely through online meetings.

Disadvantages and risks included the length of the transformation process, notably the time taken between the initial announcement about staff dismissals and the formal notification (nearly four months). With the staff changes, it implied a loss of expertise and knowledge, and proximity and reactivity of services for some, such as resource mobilisation (REM). Within the new set-up, there was some lack of clarity from the side of the users in understanding where the role of a TRAK crisis analyst ends and where the role of the RIA staff begins.

Key lessons identified:

Attention to the human resource in a transformation: The importance of providing adequate, tailored and personal support to colleagues being dismissed and helping to create a smoother transition for a new team and towards an adapted structure.

Change management process: The vital role of this process in helping to mitigate the risks and leverage the benefits, both internally, managing the human relationships within the team, and externally, clarifying and communicating on aims and services of the concerned unit.

Transparency, communication and consultation: The importance of communication with concerned staff and users before and during the process in order to manage their expectations realistically, ensure the least disruption possible and maintain credibility.

Maintaining proximity: Proximity was linked with the importance of having the institutional knowledge to understand the user's needs and be able to respond to them proactively.

Concern about false economies: Compensation strategies can be used to replace the reduced services with other internal capacity, thus reducing any cost savings.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation concluded that the transformation did increase TRAK's relevance, value and use, although it was not the original rationale behind the transformation. The transformation positioned TRAK to become even better at supporting operational and strategic decision making. This was a positive result, but it should also be recognised that the transformation had a considerable impact on those TRAK staff dismissed and also on those who remained, in addition to the disruption of TRAK services for some months. It was through the dedication and motivation of the TRAK management and team that they have been able to make TRAK more valued, relevant and used following the transformation.

The evaluation was able to identify learnings from the decentralization process and the experience of the transformation has already proven useful for the TRAK management and human resources in dealing with the challenges of the 2023 financial and job cuts. The transformation experience could also prove useful in the forthcoming merger between the Communication Analytics, Impact and Research Unit (CAN) and TRAK (the merger was decided during the last stages of the evaluation and could be taken into consideration for these recommendations).

Further harnessing TRAK's transformation: The evaluation suggests that the CAN-TRAK merger will provide an opportunity to adopt a common service catalogue with shared products and services, the possibility to further communicate on these products and services, in addition to strengthening collaboration with other analytical units.

TRAK services: To build on the strengths of the transformation process, this evaluation suggests to re-introduce support for the environmental scanning staff in the field delegation; continue to increase the proactivity of the TRAK team in identifying and signalling potential emerging risks, challenges or opportunities to operations; continue to increase and analyse non-Western sources in multiple languages as part of the analytical products; review how the hand-over process is carried out between the TRAK HQ crisis team and the RIAs; review how the TRAK analysts working on analyses related to humanitarian funding can be better integrated into the REM division; introduce more regular reviews of the thematic files being treated by TRAK and reinforce further monitoring and client feedback.

Integrating learning for future similar processes: For all ICRC units considering a future decentralization or transformation processes, it is suggested to take into account a number of key lessons from this evaluation: a) integrate a change management process into the transformation and/or decentralization process; b) ensure that sustained and dedicated support from human resources is provided to staff who are implicated in a transformation and/or decentralization process; c) carry out a thorough risks and needs analysis of the transformation and/or decentralization process prior to launching the process; d) for activities that service internal clients ensure that a consultation with the client / user base is integrated into the preparation phase; e) where delocalization involves physically shifting competencies from HQ to another location, consider the model used by TRAK of integrating the RIAs both in HQ and delegations' networks, platforms and meetings.