



Making humanitarian response more flexible:

Challenges and questions

 **ALNAP**BACKGROUND PAPER

ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises.

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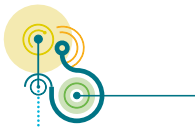
Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CLA	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
PDIA	problem-driven iterative adaptation
SCM	supply chain management
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme

Introduction

Things don't always happen the way we expect them to. In a crisis, this is generally taken as a rule: the common story told about humanitarian response is that crises are dynamic, and that humanitarian organisations must therefore be flexible and agile to deliver assistance and provide protection—within days or even hours—to those who need it most. Compared to their development colleagues, who work with longer time frames, humanitarian staff and agencies have a reputation for working quickly, and as such are looked to by others, including the business sector, for their abilities to deliver goods and services in chaotic environments (Charles et al., 2010).

But experience in many major humanitarian responses of the past 10-15 years is raising questions about the enduring strength of these capabilities. Humanitarian crises face multiple types of dynamic change: changes in population movements, changes in need or our understanding of need, changes in context, and changes in our understanding of programme performance. While humanitarian actors are good at dealing with particular kinds of change – such as those involved in the rapid onset of an emergency caused by natural hazard – their track record for responding appropriately and timely to other types of change in crisis settings is not as strong (ALNAP 2015; ALNAP 2018 forthcoming).



In many instances, humanitarian actors were perceived—by themselves and others— to be struggling to adapt to the dynamics of the crises in which they operate.

Through research conducted in 2017 and 2018, ALNAP has explored the role that flexibility –or lack thereof – is playing in humanitarian actors' ability to respond effectively to new crises and changes in crises over time. In many instances, humanitarian actors were perceived—by themselves and others— to be struggling to adapt to the dynamics of the crises in which they operate. Even basic changes, such as the location of assistance, or changes to the number or type of materials provided to affected people, can be difficult to implement.

Yet humanitarian actors have been responding to highly dynamic, unstable environments for decades. If anyone should be well-placed to adapt continuously to changes on the ground, it is humanitarian organisations. So, why is this not happening?

In answer to this question, this paper sets out the situations which lead humanitarian organisations to try to change what, where and how they operate, and explores the challenges they face in making these changes happen. It introduces work carried out primarily outside the humanitarian sector on flexibility and adaptive capabilities, to provide some initial thinking on how humanitarian agencies can improve their ability to respond to dynamics and uncertainty.

The paper suggests that humanitarian organisational systems were set up to



It is not change itself that is the challenge, but the nature of the change that humanitarians face in most operating environments that is becoming problematic.

respond with flexibility for a particular set of purposes, and that two recent trends are straining these systems.

First, expectations for humanitarian actors and assistance have shifted in some policy circles. Also, the contexts in which humanitarians operate are more complex and have greater bearing on how programming and support are delivered. This means that the types of change to which humanitarians are having to respond are different and are more complex. It is not change itself that is the challenge, but the nature of the change that humanitarians face in most operating environments that is becoming problematic.

Second, the systems used – both externally with donors and internally – for strategy, supply-chain management, performance monitoring, accountability and risk management have evolved in ways that restrict the range of options that humanitarians have at their disposal in a dynamic environment. The way in which humanitarian organisational functions are structured and managed make it harder to implement necessary changes in a timely and efficient manner.

Outside the humanitarian sector, a set of frameworks and approaches have been conceptualised and developed to help organisations respond more effectively to dynamic and tumultuous environments. These approaches, known as adaptive capabilities or adaptiveness, refer to an organisation's ability to adjust and make necessary changes to achieve a set of goals within dynamic or complex external environments. This discussion paper reviews the challenges humanitarian actors face in changing where, what and how they deliver. It considers how thinking about adaptiveness and adaptive capabilities might be relevant to addressing these challenges.

Section 1 reviews the different ways in which humanitarians change their engagement in a response and the common situations in which they must do so, highlighting challenges to making these changes, based on recent evaluations.

Section 2 discusses the organisational functions through which humanitarian organisations deliver their work and barriers to flexibility within these.

Section 3 explains why recent work on adaptiveness and adaptive capabilities can be useful for humanitarian actors and introduces the basic concepts. It concludes with a brief summary of the state of evidence on adaptive approaches and a set of questions for further discussion.

1 | The problem: Failing to change when needed

There are many dynamic factors that shape crisis situations and our understanding of how to respond to them effectively. Humanitarian adaptiveness is about implementing humanitarian interventions that are both sensitive and robust to these factors. This means changing humanitarian approaches and interventions in response to change, rather than continuing with a plan that no longer fits the problem it is trying to address. ALNAP's exploratory research on adaptiveness identified three broad categories of change that humanitarian actors undertake in order to proactively or reactively respond to new learning or changes in crisis:

Operational: Changing where and how

- **Humanitarians change the location in which they operate**
Targeted population moves, requiring a movement of operations and resources
 - » “International Medical Corps (IMC), which was mainly active on four islands in Greece, swiftly adjusted their activities to the Attica (Athens) area for NFI distributions at the end of ERR.” (Grünewald et al. 2016)
 - » “Partners and staff commended the Response’s capacity to quickly adjust to and meet the changing needs of the refugees. For example, one partner mentioned that WV was the first to address the shift to Adaševci when borders with Hungary were closed.”(Sunwoo and Cascioli Sharp 2015)
- **Humanitarians change the mode of aid delivery/how they deliver activities and services**
 - Changes in market capacity or security, including access constraints, lead to new modalities of aid distribution being adopted or to other programming changes, including temporary suspension of activities (Sheehan, 2016; Davies, 2014; Grayel, 2014; S. Murray and Hove, 2014; Conoir et al., 2017)
 - » “...the unique constraints of the NGCAs have required some important modifications to UNHCR’s modus operandi in Ukraine. Among these, we can single out that the difficulty with international NGO accreditation/ registration has pushed UNHCR into (a) more direct delivery (with targeting information provided by de facto authorities and distribution by local private sector contractors) and (b) more delivery through NNGOs whose field activities cannot be directly monitored.” (Conoir et al. 2017)

- Changes to resources, whether human or financial, lead to alterations in response planning and programming (Bousquet, 2015; Aberra, Gessesse and Alemu, 2015)

Figure 1: Operational adaptiveness: Changing the way in which aid is delivered.

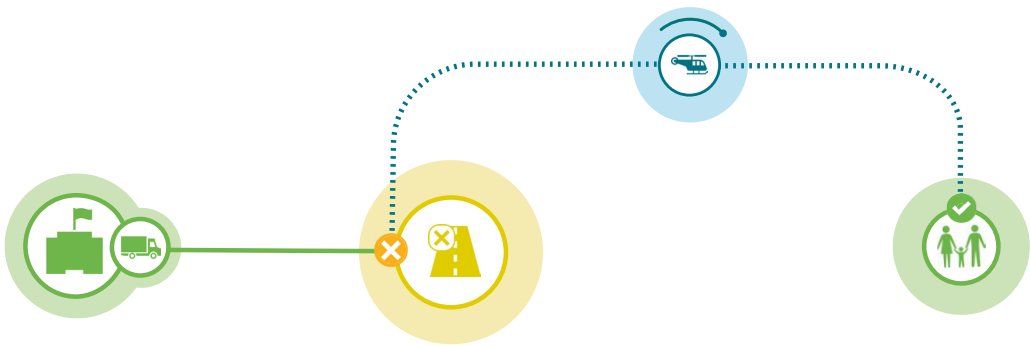
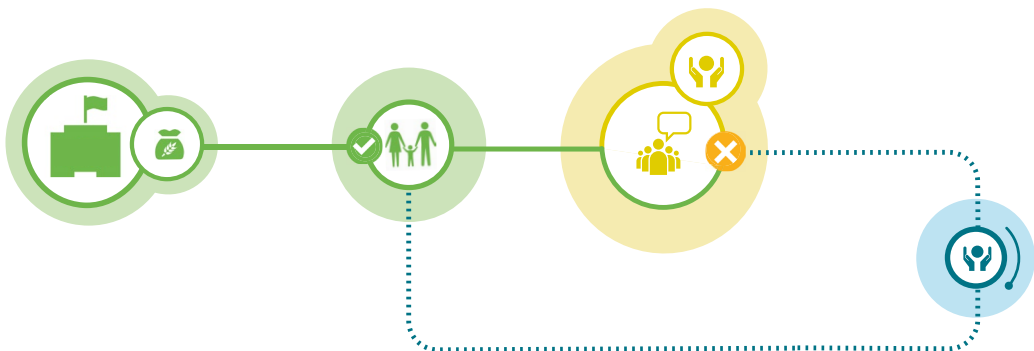







Figure 2: Programmatic adaptiveness: Changing what aid is delivered.



				
Humanitarian agency	Humanitarian response	Change	Trigger for change	Protection

Programmatic: Changing what and who

- **Humanitarians change programme design or change activities and services – the activity or service.**
 - An existing element of response is deemed ineffective, inappropriate or in need of improvement (for example, through response evaluation or, less frequently, through feedback from recipients) and is adapted or replaced altogether to better suit its purpose (Bailey, 2013; Cassagnol, 2013; Davies, 2014; Grayel, 2014; Pantera, 2013; Abdula, 2017; Advisem Services Inc., 2016; Blake and Pakula, 2016; Ferretti, 2017; House, 2016; Turnbull, 2015)
 - » “During the project implementation, health facilities were used as safe spaces for psychological support services. [...] However, those facilities were less appropriate for individual sessions especially that it needed frequent visits of targeted beneficiaries. Cultural norms and educational background of targeted groups were barriers towards provision of individual sessions at health facilities. This occurs when the beneficiary of the individual session is female. When ACF realized this challenge, it changed the approach by providing individual psychological counselling at homes or where the beneficiary is.” (Abdula 2017)
- **Humanitarians change who they target**
 - Expected needs for one population group are found to be overestimated while another population group sees a sharp rise in need, prompting reallocation of resources (Coombs et al., 2015)
 - » “In 2014, the number of people who returned to Afghanistan was much lower than expected and therefore WFP reached only 13.7 percent of their target. However, WFP was flexible and supported an unexpected influx of refugees from Pakistan to Khost and Paktika provinces. In 2015, the deteriorating security situation and a number of natural disasters led to a higher number of IDP’s than expected.” (Coombs et al. 2015)

Strategic: Changing roles and functions

- **Humanitarians change the overall objectives guiding programme and operations (response objectives)**
 - Initial scale of crisis is underestimated and a rapid scale-up and revision of relief activities is needed as a result (A. Murray et al., 2015; Darcy 2016).
 - » “Many agencies struggled to meet the challenge of shifting from small, policy-focused development programmes to larger-scale, operational humanitarian responses.” (Darcy 2016b)

- **Humanitarians change the broader organisational strategies that re-define roles or re-frame services**
 - A new type of crisis challenges the applicability and effectiveness of standard operating procedures, forcing humanitarian actors to adapt these to new realities (Shepherd et al., 2017; IFRC, 2015)
 - » “The EVD crisis required a shift in mindset within WFP from a food-insecurity entry point to a health-driven response. WFP’s internal systems, guidelines, protocols and procedures proved for the most part adequate, relevant and flexible. However, significant revisions¹⁴ were sometimes needed to make them suitable in a context where WFP staff were not confident of the best modality to respond to the crisis. In addition, country offices that had been operating in development mode were not prepared for an emergency response of such magnitude. Through a process of revision, adaptation and integration, WFP adjusted its response, applying past and emerging lessons as the crisis evolved.” (Shepherd et al. 2017)

Figure 3: Strategic adaptiveness: Changing roles and functions

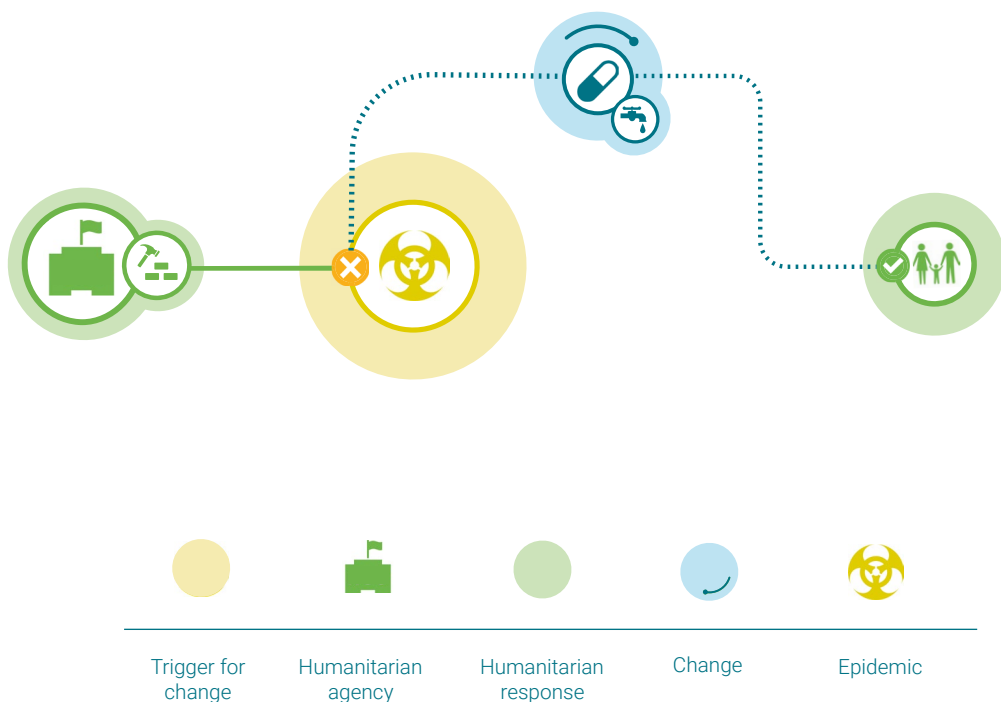
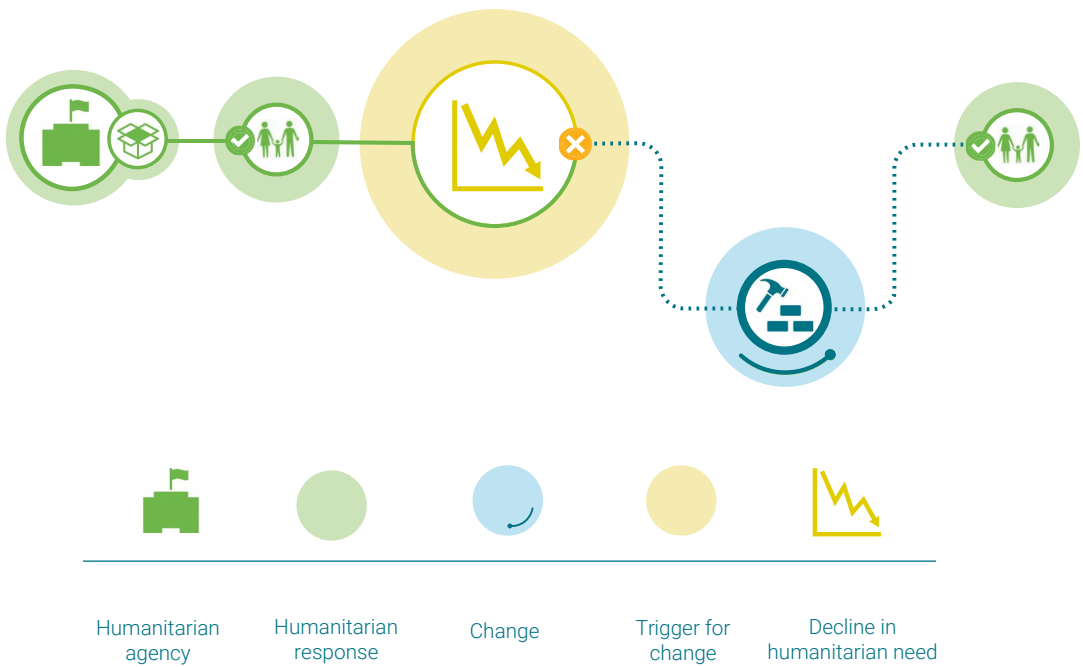


Figure 4: Strategic adaptiveness: Changing roles and functions



How good are humanitarian actors at making operational, programmatic and strategic changes, when these changes are needed for an effective, relevant response for crisis affected people? Over 2017, ALNAP reviewed 30 evaluations and more than 50 key informant interviews across two country studies (the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Kenya) to identify a list of triggers for change in humanitarian settings.

These were events or occurrences that led to either a change or a perceived need for change in a humanitarian response (which may not have been implemented). This list was cross-checked against the 120 evaluations from 2015 to 2017 that were reviewed as part of the 2018 State of the Humanitarian System Report and further triggers were added.

This work identified five main types of triggers (see Table 1), or changes, which lead humanitarians to make changes to how, what and where they deliver:

The external environment (needs, location, context) has changed: These include changes in the type of needs of crisis affected people, changes in access conditions, security, and meteorological conditions. Changes relating to socio-economic patterns, politics and stakeholder power or dynamics; changes in rules and regulations that govern a particular environment

Humanitarian organisations or systems have changed: Organisational strategic changes or changes in staff can shape a response and lead to change.

A crisis has started or is dropping off: Triggers for change that mark an increase or decline in risk of crisis, or in humanitarian need.

The understanding of how we're doing has changed: Humanitarians also collect or receive regular information on how their programmes are performing, either against planned objectives or in the feedback from crisis-affected populations. This information can be a trigger for changes.

The paradigm for humanitarian action has changed: New crisis drivers, such as pandemics or volcanic gas, or progressive change to how humanitarian roles are understood can lead to new paradigms for humanitarian actors and the services they provide.

While they handle the first two types of change better, humanitarian actors face challenges in changing in response to these five types of trigger.

Table 1: Examples of triggers for change in humanitarian action

Trigger type	Example
The crisis has started or is dropping off	Rise in acute conflict leads to an increase in humanitarian need as internally displaced persons flee the area (Davies, 2014; Peacocke, Tadesse and Tequame, 2015; Obrecht, 2018).
	Food security situation deteriorates, which leads to a scale-up of relief activities (Poulsen et al., 2015).
	A new emergency situation arises, leading to reorientation of some resources and funding from an ongoing response to address the needs of a new affected population group (Ibrahim, et al, 2016; Obrecht, 2018).
	Disease outbreaks leading to a scale-up of response and/or addition of new response elements (WHO, WASH Cluster, and Health Cluster, 2017; Obrecht, 2018).
	A new crisis (disease outbreak, natural disaster, conflict outbreak, political instability) forces organisations (e.g. dual-mandate organisations, national NGOs, civil society actors) to pause or suspend ongoing development and social impact activities and reorient towards an emergency response (Duncalf et al., 2016; Kebe and Maiga, 2015; YMCA Liberia and YCARE International, 2015; Obrecht, 2018, forthcoming; Saavedra, 2016a; Saavedra, 2016b)...
	An influx of newly displaced populations into areas inhabited by previously displaced people leads to a spike in needs for both population groups and requires a revision of response strategy (Moughanie, 2015).
	Ongoing conflict escalates, leading to an escalation in existing humanitarian needs and necessitating response revision and scale-up (AAN Associates, 2016).
	Stabilisation and peace results in internally displaced persons returning home, requiring a transition back to development programming (Lawday et al., 2016; UNICEF, 2016; Obrecht, 2018).

Trigger type	Example
The crisis has started or is dropping off (continued)	Food security situation stabilises, leading to a scale-down of relief activities and prioritisation of longer-term programming (Poulsen et al., 2015).
The understanding of how we're doing has changed	An existing element of response is deemed ineffective, inappropriate or in need of improvement (for example, through response evaluation or, less frequently, through feedback from recipients) and is adapted or replaced altogether to better suit its purpose (Bailey, 2013; Cassagnol, 2013; Davies, 2014; Grayel, 2014; Pantera, 2013; Abdula, 2017; Advisem Services Inc., 2016; Blake and Pakula, 2016; Ferretti, 2017; House, 2016; Turnbull, 2015).
	A gap is identified in current programming, which leads to actors developing solutions to fill that gap by adding new response elements or repositioning current/ongoing elements of response (Bailey, 2013; Grunewald et al., 2016).
	Additional or more nuanced needs are uncovered through programme monitoring, requiring additional resources, programming, or items to be added, dropped or substituted in the course of implementation (Turnbull, 2016; Sule Caglar et al., 2016; c; Bailey, 2013; Obrecht 2018 forthcoming).
	Initial scale of crisis is overestimated, requiring a rapid scale-down and revision of relief activities (Ovington et al., 2017).
	Initial scale of crisis is underestimated and a rapid scale-up and revision of relief activities is needed as a result (A. Murray et al., 2015; Darcy 2016).
Staff identify an opportunity to test a new approach to programming following a learning event (e.g., a real-time evaluation, an assessment, or a review) (Advisem Services Inc., 2016).	

Trigger type	Example
The humanitarian situation has changed	Targeted population moves, requiring a movement of operations and resources (Grunewald et al., 2016; Sunwoo and Cascioli Sharp, 2015; Obrecht 2018).
	Early meteorological forecasts (e.g. predicting hurricane or typhoon landfall) trigger preparedness and early action activities (Save the Children, 2015; Grünewald and Schenkenberg, 2016)
	Expected needs for one population group are found to be overestimated while another population group sees a sharp rise in need, prompting reallocation of resources (Coombs et al., 2015)
	Insufficient or inaccurate needs assessments at the design stage result in having to reassess and change planned activities at a later stage (Pantera, 2013).
	Between the time a funding proposal is submitted and the programme implementation begins, the population of interest moves, or needs change unexpectedly across targeted and non-targeted populations (Coombs et al., 2015; Abdula, 2017; Obrecht, 2018).
	Between the time of the initial needs assessment and the start of programme implementation, other agencies have begun addressing the targeted needs, thereby requiring a change in location to avoid duplication of assistance efforts. (Obrecht, 2018; Obrecht, forthcoming).
	Changes in market capacity or security, including access constraints, lead to new modalities of aid distribution being adopted or to other programming changes, including temporary suspension of activities (Sheehan, 2016; Davies, 2014; Grayel, 2014; S. Murray and Hove, 2014; Conoir et al., 2017).

Trigger type	Example
The paradigm of humanitarian action has changed	Political and legal systems require international humanitarian actors to adapt their approach to relief activities, particularly their role vis-à-vis local/national actors leading the response (Svoboda, Barbelet and Mosel, 2018; Featherstone and Bogati, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2017).
	A new type of crisis challenges the applicability and effectiveness of standard operating procedures, forcing humanitarian actors to adapt these to new realities (Shepherd et al., 2017; IFRC, 2015).
Humanitarian organisations or systems have changed	Changes to resources, whether human or financial, lead to alterations in response planning and programming (Bousquet, 2015; Aberra, Gessesse and Alemu, 2015).
	Organisational changes, such as organisational restructuring or strategic revision, necessitate adaptation (van Bruaene, Scheuermann and Lukmanji, 2011).
	Delays in implementation lead to request of non-cost extensions and prolongation of activities (Yila, 2017).

1.1 | The humanitarian situation (needs, location, context) has changed

One of the most common types of change to which humanitarian actors must be responsive is change in the humanitarian situation itself. This includes what is most needed by people affected by crisis, where those people are located, and broader contextual factors that impinge on the situation, such as conflict dynamics and socio-economic and political trends. Humanitarian actors in the past have generally been able to manage these changes well, however several areas of challenge have arisen in recent evaluations and research.



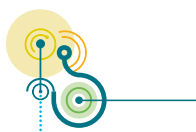
With respect to changing needs, the sector-based organisation of humanitarian support can inhibit timely changes to services and materials that meet new needs as they arise.

With respect to changing needs, the sector-based organisation of humanitarian support can inhibit timely changes to services and materials that meet new needs as they arise. For example, in an evaluation of an otherwise flexible shelter project in Ethiopia, the lead agency was unable to pivot to respond to aid recipient complaints about mosquitoes and other pests, as these were deemed ‘water, sanitation and hygiene,’ or ‘non-food-items’ concerns, and therefore outside the shelter project’s scope (Mutunga et al., 2015). While agencies can handover to others with particular sectoral expertise, these coordination processes can be slow. If other agencies do not already have a physical presence in the area or funding to respond, this can lead to significant delays (Obrecht 2018). Humanitarian agencies tend to specialise in particular sectors, and calls for proposals and funding contracts are often aligned around sector-specific indicators or outputs.

This can make it difficult for agencies to respond to affected people’s priorities when they cross multiple sectors, or when they evolve across sectors over time.

Responding flexibly to changes in location is also becoming a greater challenge, particularly in conflict-driven crises. Recent major studies (Haver and Carter 2016; Castellarnau and Stoianova 2018) have found that humanitarian actors’ presence in active conflicts and in response to displaced people is shrinking, despite these being areas in which humanitarian needs are often most acute: ‘Only a small fraction of the total international humanitarian organisations regularly respond to the most violent, conflict-driven emergencies’ (Haver and Carter, 2016).

One of the contributing factors to this trend is a loss of operational flexibility.



Ongoing context analysis, including market and conflict analysis, are increasingly seen as a factor in the speed and relevance of humanitarian response.

Operational flexibility enables humanitarian agencies to deal with an increasingly complex landscape of actors that shape the access conditions for humanitarian aid and help them make changes to how they engage with these actors when needed (Haver and Carter, 2016). Organisations with greater operational and programmatic flexibility are more capable of making changes to location and means of transport to serve people in need in the most acute settings.

Alongside operational flexibility, regular context monitoring is increasingly seen as important for designing and delivering relevant and effective humanitarian responses. Context analysis supports conflict sensitivity, helps humanitarian actors avoid duplication of services, leads to the identification of important issues that can shape a humanitarian response such as land tenure rules and power dynamics, and supports relevant and meaningful communication with affected people (Campbell 2018). Contexts are not static, but change—often unpredictably—over time, and therefore their influence on a crisis and its response can change as well.

Ongoing context analysis, including market and conflict analysis, are increasingly seen as a factor in the speed and relevance of humanitarian response. This was seen recently in the humanitarian community's delayed response to the Kasai Provinces in DRC, a country that has featured a strong humanitarian presence for more than two decades. The Kasai Provinces had been deemed relatively stable and was therefore not covered by existing rapid response mechanisms or context monitoring efforts. It took more than six months from the early warning signs of conflict in the area for a full humanitarian response to be funded and deployed. More positively, lessons learned from the 2008 election violence in Kenya meant that humanitarian agencies invested significantly in context analysis and monitoring to prepare for elections in 2017, and created preparedness plans to adapt their operations in case of conflict.

The lack of context analysis and operational flexibility was also cited as a key limitation in the early years of the Syria response, where many agencies struggled to shift into a large-scale operational response in a timely manner (Darcy, 2016). In Lebanon, international humanitarian actors struggled to respond effectively to a deterioration in political and societal attitudes to Syrian refugees (Garcia and Bassil, 2016).

1.2 | Humanitarian organisations or systems have changed

Factors within humanitarian organisations and the humanitarian architecture itself can lead to adaptations to how humanitarian assistance and protection is designed and delivered. The most common of these is changes to funding—less funding can lead to changes in targeting criteria, closure of certain project sites, and/or scaling down activities to run on a smaller budget.

Beyond funding, humanitarian agencies also make policy decisions or undergo internal change processes that lead to changes in how humanitarian action is carried out at country or field level. Recently the ALNAP network looked at how humanitarian organisations seek to change themselves, and what factors support successful change processes within the humanitarian system (31st ALNAP Annual Meeting: Changing Humanitarian Action?). These discussions and the background research that informed them highlighted many challenges to how humanitarian actors engage in ‘inward’-facing change (Knox-Clarke, 2017). However, the adaptiveness research found a consistent pattern of response-level changes that are made to how humanitarian actors operate, based on changes within humanitarian organisations, most commonly policy changes at headquarters level or policy changes made externally by key donors (Davies, 2014; Bailey, 2013; Obrecht, 2018).

1.3 | A crisis has started or is dropping off

An area of change where humanitarian actors have struggled to respond proactively is in periods where humanitarian needs are drastically increasing or decreasing. Chronic vulnerability in crisis-prone areas leads to millions of people falling between the cracks of humanitarian and development assistance – particularly during periods in which crisis drivers are increasing (early warning) or where a crisis has ended (early recovery).

Funding mechanisms are often blamed for this, as they prevent a streamlined delivery of support that covers basic needs and while also mitigating harm or helping institutions and individuals to continue on a path of forward-looking progress. However, the focus on funding instruments can mask the reality that there is very little knowledge of ‘what works’ in disaster prevention, early response/action, and early recovery.

When asked what would happen if given humanitarian funding earlier in a slow-onset crisis, agencies have found it difficult to work out what they would do differently (elrha 2018). A review of programme design approaches in livelihoods early-action found that the processes for analysis and weighing of programming options against goals was often very weak (Maxwell et al., 2013).

Similarly, best practice in early recovery emphasises the complexity of early recovery programming and the need to design and fine-tune highly-contextualised support (Global Cluster on Early Recovery 2016; FAO 2013; Econometria 2016). Panel surveys undertaken by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC), an eight-year global research project seeking to understand how people and states recover from conflict, found recent evidence of this challenge of supporting effective post-conflict recovery. In its 2017 panel survey, the SLRC found that many households had ‘flipped’ – from well-off to at-risk, or at-risk to well-off – with no discernible patterns as to why. Research carried out by the consortia on different approaches to early recovery and transitional programming suggested that ‘we can’t assume that improvements in wellbeing and livelihoods – and indeed the broader processes of economic recovery – are steady, linear or durable’ (2017: 4).

One of the potential reasons why humanitarian actors have not dedicated more attention to adapting their response to early recovery stages is that it is not clear they should continue providing services post-crisis: ‘The assumption usually is that the state should provide these services to its citizens, but the evidence is that during conflict, these services come from humanitarian agencies – whose work then does not continue very long into a post-conflict timeframe. Donors need to be more willing to continue funding humanitarian and development actors to support recovery processes. Additionally, states need to step up service provision and provide it more quickly’ (SLRC 2017: 19)

While there are principled reasons for maintaining a separate funding source to assist people in life-threatening situations independently of any political or foreign aid agenda, this needs to be done in ways that offer a more seamless transition for people returning from displacement, or facing chronic vulnerability. Humanitarian actors should be concerned with addressing the priority problems of affected people in ways that are least likely to undermine their own coping capacities and longer-term recovery.

As the duration of a crisis extends, these problems and the pathways to addressing them are likely to become more complex. This is potentially one reason why humanitarian actors have not developed more nuanced approaches to respond to declining needs, other than simply closing projects.

1.4 | The understanding of how we are doing has changed

In many cases, a stimulus for humanitarian agencies to re-think what they are doing comes from a new understanding of the humanitarian situation and the effectiveness or relevance of their programming. There are two important sources of information that agencies can use to achieve this new understanding, both of which have been characterised by high degrees of challenge.

The first source of information that can shift an agency's understanding of how well it is addressing priority needs is through programme monitoring. While monitoring plays an important role in humanitarian response, organisational approaches to monitoring are rarely systematic and tend to capture mostly output-related data (Knox-Clarke and Darcy, 2013; Warner, 2017). Recent work by ALNAP found there is a consistent pattern of weak data collection and monitoring mechanisms in humanitarian programming, which can impede the quality of evaluations and inhibit the ability to identify improvements to programmes (Warner, 2017). Monitoring data that is useful for financial accountability to donors may be less illustrative of a programme's quality or progress, as output data is not a good proxy for tracking outcomes – for instance, distributing a certain number of water filters does not automatically translate into improved hygiene outcomes (Turnbull, 2016). Donors also find the lack of better quality monitoring to be problematic as it prevents them from 'investing in the right projects and partners' (Mowjee et al., 2015: 15).

A second source of information, which is sometimes included in programme monitoring but also treated as its own distinct set of data, is feedback from aid recipients. Feedback from aid recipients can lead to a change in a humanitarian agency's understanding of the relevance and appropriateness of its programming, and hopefully motivate a change in what or how that agency delivers services.

For example, WFP's programming in the occupied Palestinian territories used a feedback monitoring system with aid recipients to make several changes to its voucher and in-kind programming, including changes to the food items in rations and additions to the voucher commodity list (Turner et al., 2016). There are several similar examples from other agencies.



And yet, these examples tend to remain the exception rather than the rule. The WFP monitoring system described above was singled out in the evaluation for its level of sophistication, implying it was outside the norm. Despite an overall rise in the use of feedback and complaints mechanisms in humanitarian response, agencies tend to fail to use this information consistently to change programming (IRC, 2017; Jean, 2014; ICRC, 2018). A main insight of this research is that the lack of responsiveness to affected people's feedback may be but one instance of a much broader problem: a general inability to routinely collect information on programme performance, interpret this information for decision-making and execute decisions in a timely manner. Agencies struggle to find appropriate ways to aggregate feedback from affected people while ensuring that feedback processes are not hijacked by elite interests within a community (IRC, 2017). Data on feedback from affected people is presented in ways that are not easily used by decision-makers to identify next actions (Jean, 2014). And significant changes to programmes requested by aid recipients are sometimes determined to be out of scope, due to either funding restrictions on changes to programmes or due to the agency's own defined areas of working (IRC, 2017).

1.5 | The paradigm for humanitarian action has changed

New and unexpected crises can create new roles and responsibilities for humanitarian actors. This can challenge, and potentially re-shape, the mental models, or paradigms, through which humanitarian action is understood (Kent, et al., 2016). Recent examples of this are the Ebola Virus Disease epidemic in West Africa in 2013-2015 and the response to the surge in migration to Europe in 2015. In both cases, the response from much of the international humanitarian community was significantly delayed and less effective than it could have been, as agencies were unprepared both to deal with specific contextual factors (e.g. faith-based practices that affected spread of disease in West Africa; the influence and role of state actors in the European refugee response), as well as with the more technical aspects of an EVD medical response or the provision of humanitarian services to refugees in middle- and high-income countries (UNICEF, 2017; Adams et al., 2015; Dubois, 2016; Grunewald et al., 2016). Evidence suggests that at the beginning of the Syrian crisis, development actors in the region struggled to shift gears from long-term development programming to emergency response (James Darcy, 2016b), a challenge that was also seen in contexts as varied as Liberia (EVD response) and Kenya (drought response). Urban environments are also frequent examples of contexts in which traditional humanitarian approaches must be re-thought entirely (IFRC, 2015a; Campbell, 2018; Kent and Obrecht, 2013).

2 | The humanitarian 'business model' and the relevance of adaptive capabilities

The previous section described situations in which humanitarians have struggled to take account of changing or new crises and to change their own operations accordingly. There are multiple potential causes for these struggles, including changing expectations for the scope and responsibilities of humanitarian action, or global trends affecting the options that humanitarian actors face when deciding whether to change plans or move location. An important set of causes for the failure to change in response to the five types of change listed above lies within the control of humanitarian actors themselves, in how they think about and implement their internal functions and processes.

Literature suggests that the humanitarian business model—how humanitarian organisations are structured and how their core functions are run—is highly flexible, but that this flexibility is structured around a particular purpose that prioritises timing (Beamon and Balcik, 2008; Charles et al., 2010). Humanitarian organisational systems are oriented towards getting assistance to a particular location within a certain period of time, and to do this, agencies must be able to shift large resources very quickly on demand. This section explores the implications of this type of business model for being flexible in response to the five areas of change described above in Section 1.

2.1 | The humanitarian business model today: oriented for speed and scale

Studies in organisational management suggest that organisations' goals or products often end up determining their destinies by creating path dependencies in organisational design and culture:

Although organizations ostensibly design products, it can also be argued that *products design organizations*, because the coordination tasks implicit in specific product designs largely determine the feasible organization designs for developing and producing those products. (Sanchez and Mahoney, 1996)

The products that humanitarian organisations offer are basic goods and services to people facing acute life-threatening situations. This leads to the development of organisational functions that are designed to provide assistance that is:

- delivered with speed
- at scale (maximal coverage)
- cost-effective
- meets good technical standards.

This has specific implications for how humanitarian organisational functions are structured.

Reducing uncertainty

The need to deliver solutions to people in dynamic crises that can be provided at speed and scale presents a high degree of uncertainty. Humanitarian organisations seek to reduce this uncertainty by narrowing the scope of what they will be responsible for, thereby creating certain rigidity and structure in their programming functions to allow for greater flexibility in their operations. This creates boundaries around the expectations of humanitarian agencies and allows them to manage their work more easily, but also presents trade-offs for their programmatic flexibility on what they can deliver. There are several strategies that agencies use to do this.

First, they *specialise* – selecting particular sectors, or problems within the humanitarian crisis space, which they will be prepared to address. This means that if latrines are needed in a community and your organisation does not specialise in water, sanitation and hygiene, you will not provide latrines. A humanitarian organisation's human resources function and supply chain system will be aligned according to these specialisations.

Second, they *proceduralise* – creating standard operating procedures and ways of working that are used to assure consistent practice across a range of country offices. Third, they *standardise* – providing a set of pre-established goods and services. These goods and services are presumed to be effective at meeting humanitarian need, although several studies have highlighted the significant gaps in the evidence used to support these decisions (Blanchet et al., 2017; Krystalli, 2017). Technical standards, such as the Sphere Project standards (Sphere Project, n.d.) or internal organisational standards, are used for quality assurance, and organisations may also have internal performance indicators that they use to assure quality of delivery.

Simplifying or ‘bracketing’ the complex

A common strategy used by humanitarian agencies to deal with the complex environments in which they operate is to simplify or ‘bracket’ complexity by defining clearly the problems to which they will respond –by using existing sector-based assessments, specific time frames, or particular definitions of humanitarian need. This places clear limits on an organisation’s responsibilities and can help it to say ‘no’ to particular forms of programming that are viewed as valuable by communities (e.g. building schools, non-urgent health care).



Bracketing the complex can mean that humanitarians focus on a narrow part of the problem, or the wrong problem, when humanitarian situations involve significant longer-term risk drivers and vulnerabilities.

While this makes for more manageable interventions, bracketing the complex can mean that humanitarians focus on a narrow part of the problem, or the wrong problem, when humanitarian situations involve significant longer-term risk drivers and vulnerabilities. Recent publications on complexity science and aid have argued that much of aid – both development and humanitarian – has exhibited ‘a widespread bias towards seeing interconnected, dynamic, open problems as simple, closed problems that can be planned for, controlled and measured.’ (Ramalingam 2013: 138). Instead of confronting the complexity of supporting people in crisis in the right way at the right time, aid agencies ‘edit their understanding of reality to suit narrow purposes’ (Morgan, in Ramalingam, 2013: 38).

In protracted settings, the question of whether humanitarian actors, by focusing on life-saving assistance in protracted settings, are guilty of ‘editing their understanding of reality to suit narrow purposes’ is an old one that may be gaining new prominence in policy discussions on addressing needs in protracted and cyclical crises. For some humanitarian actors, expecting humanitarian action to address issues of longer-term vulnerability and status is outside the scope of humanitarian skillsets and purposes, even when these longer-term issues have a direct impact on the rise of humanitarian needs. This raises a core question around coordination, and how actors that see different parts of a problem, or work at different levels of a problem in fragile settings, can ensure their efforts are harmonised and not counterproductive.

Recent work by the ICRC demonstrates that even if humanitarian actors focus on the ‘basics’ of preserving life and dignity, modern crises require them to recognise, rather than bracket, complexity in order to be effective and relevant. The increase in crises occurring in urban settings forces humanitarian actors to contend with a complex urban infrastructure that affected people rely on for survival needs. The types of needs and requests that affected people bring to humanitarian actors are also changing, one example being gender based violence prevention, which requires a more tailored approach to deal with the complexity of individualised experiences of risk and trauma: ‘A full response to sexual violence must combine risk-reduction programming to prevent violations against those at risk, community-based sensitization to avoid rejection and stigma, and multi-dimensional survivor care that reacts in a timely and sensitive way to treat each survivor individually.’ (ICRC 2016, p.44).

2.2 | Barriers to flexibility within humanitarian organisational functions

While the humanitarian business model has performed well in addressing urgent, lifesaving needs in sudden-onset crises where access conditions are not complex, it may be ill-suited for many situations in which humanitarians are now responding. This section discusses the core functions of humanitarian organisations, how these relate to the ability for humanitarian actors to change what, where and how they operate in crises. The four organisational functions discussed here are:

- Logistics and supply chain management
- Human resource management
- Funding
- Programming & monitoring

2.2.1 | Logistics and supply-chain management

Logistics ‘encompasses a range of activities, including preparedness, planning, procurement, transport, warehousing, tracking and tracing, customs and clearance’ (Thomas, 2004). Humanitarian logistics is generally seen as either interchangeable or a sub-set of functions within supply-chain management (SCM), which is understood in the humanitarian sector as:

The process of planning, implementing and controlling the efficient, cost-effective flow and storage of goods and materials as well as related information, from the point of origin to the point of consumption for the purpose of meeting the end beneficiary’s requirements (Thomas and Mizushima, 2005: 60).

How logistics and supply-chain management relates to the flexibility of humanitarian action

The professional and academic development of humanitarian logistics is fairly recent, occurring mainly within the past two decades. This trend mirrors a similar shift in the business sector, which has invested more in understanding supply-chain networks and structures, and how these can affect a firm’s ability to compete in a globalised market with increasingly niche customer preferences (Gattorna 2017).

Of all humanitarian functions, logistics and SCM are potentially the most flexible. In some instances, the business sector looks to humanitarian organisations for insights on how to create supply-chain systems that can respond well to volatility (Charles et al., 2010).

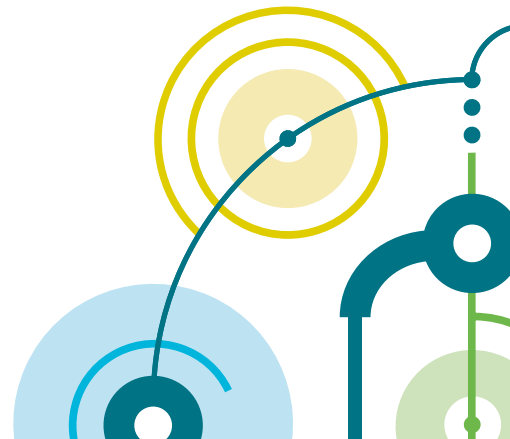
Despite this, and despite the high proportion of humanitarian funding that is spent on the supply chain (approximately 60% to 80% (Van Wassenhove, 2006)) and its importance for the efficiency of humanitarian aid, SCM receives surprisingly little strategic or policy attention in humanitarian organisations (Schulz and Heigh 2009; Blecken, 2010). Empirical work on performance measurement for SCM is also sparse, which limits the ability of agencies to make well-informed strategic choices in designing and managing their logistics and supply chains (Blecken, 2010: 678).

The flexibility of humanitarian SCM can be understood in four ways:

1. **Volume flexibility:** measures an organization's ability to respond to different magnitudes (or severity) of disasters.
2. **Delivery time flexibility:** The time required for a humanitarian supply chain to respond to a disaster
3. **Delivery mode flexibility:** The different transport modes that a humanitarian supply chain can draw on to respond to a disaster
4. **Mix flexibility:** measures the number of different types of items that the supply chain can provide during a particular time period (e.g. tarps, blankets, jerry cans, ready-to-eat meals, a variety of medicines, hygiene kits, kitchen sets, tents, and clothing).'

(Adapted from Beamon and Balcik, 2008: 19; Slack, 1991)

Flexible SCM is an integral part to a humanitarian agency's ability to address the areas of change discussed in Section 1, in particular their ability to change modalities of aid or location, or shift to meet needs as they evolve over time.



How current approaches limit flexibility

Flexibility in systems and organisations always involves trade-offs, driven by the dominant priorities or purpose of those systems and organisations. Flexibility on certain factors is often off-set by rigidity on others. This is evident in the broader literature on SCM, which increasingly suggests that firms must aim for ‘alignment’ of their supply-chain systems to different customer groups or ‘segments’, who value different types of flexibility (Gattorna 2017). For example, a customer who is flexible on when they receive a product, but inflexible on cost, may be better served by a ‘lean’ supply chain model that seeks to maximally reduce production costs. A customer who is flexible on cost and inflexible on when they receive it, or who desires greater flexibility on customising a product, will be better served through an ‘agile’ supply chain (Gattorna, 2017). Modern businesses are encouraged to explore the development of multiple supply chains to address different customers. This in turn enables them to adapt to changing markets.

In humanitarian supply chains, flexibility is oriented around speed – with some consideration also to the ‘lean’ priority of minimising costs. This imposes several limitations on the ability of humanitarian operations to proactively respond to particular triggers for change.

The most significant of these limitations is the inability to rapidly shift modalities of aid – in particular, between cash transfer programming and in-kind aid.

A review of challenges in humanitarian logistics prior to the World Humanitarian Summit noted that this type of rapid transitioning between modalities requires agencies to simultaneously monitor and manage multiple supply chains – in particular, local supply and international supply – and that this monitoring is not always carried out:

There is no real ownership within the international humanitarian architecture for continuous market monitoring in an emergency response – both to inform the continued implementation of cash-based programmes and, where necessary, switch back to in kind assistance where markets have taken a turn for the worse. (Guerrero-García et al., 2016: 13)

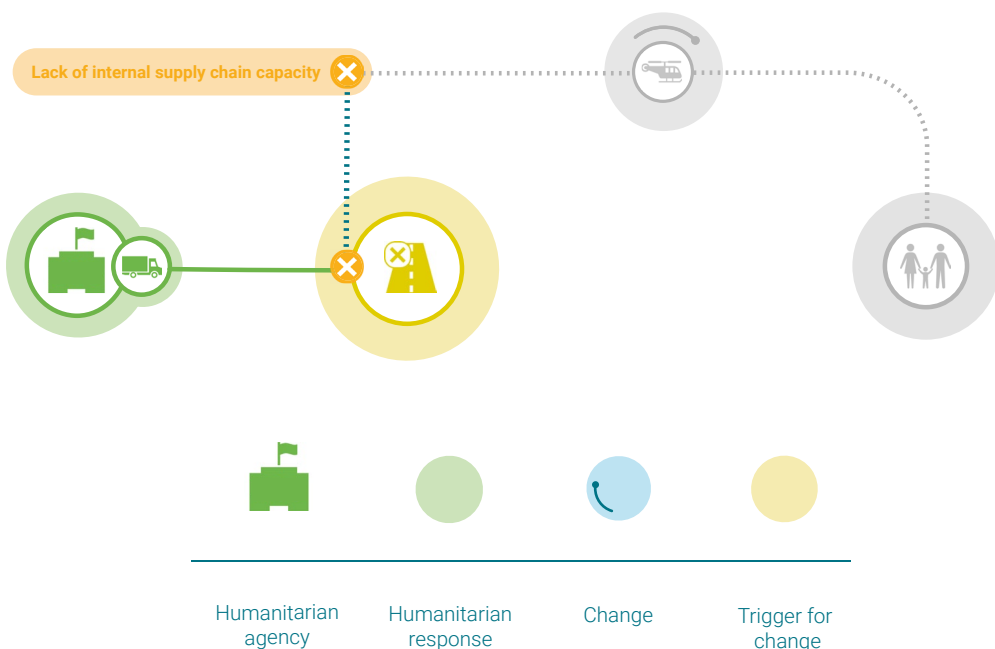
Addressing this challenge is not about selecting one form of assistance over another, but creating the capability to do what is best for each context, at a given moment in time. This requires greater ‘investments in agility, not just cash OR in-kind –and we should recognise that both will always have a place in humanitarian response’ (ibid).

A second limitation lies in the influence that humanitarian funding streams have on procurement and SCM. Despite multiple studies showing the cost savings of preparedness – including the early procurement and pre-positioning of goods for humanitarian response – many humanitarian operations must procure goods after a crisis has started or deepened. The amount of time taken for procurement—while much shorter when compared to similar processes in development programmes—can be so lengthy and time-intensive that changes are either impossible to make, or will face significant resistance from logisticians and supply chain managers.

Humanitarian supply chains also tend to be approached through single organisations, rather than as a network. While one study found that networked and coordinated approaches to humanitarian SCM offer greater flexibility and are more effective (Bhattacharya et al., 2012), there is generally a lack of evidence and practice to understand the most effective models for joint supply chain management.

Finally, most humanitarian supply chains do not consider the potential for customisation of products, or reflect what is called ‘new product flexibility’ – ‘The ability of a supply chain to introduce and produce new products’ (Slack, 1991). Due to the emphasis on speed, and the view that much of humanitarian response is oriented around serving basic, well-defined needs, humanitarian supply chains tend to focus on the delivery of quality items at scale and are not geared towards supporting more bespoke solutions.

Figure 5: Barriers to operational adaptation



2.2.2 | Human resources

Human resources structures – departments or, in smaller organisations, dedicated members of staff – are responsible for a number of processes, including human resource strategy development and implementation, human resources planning (e.g., recruitment, retention, orientation, training, promotion, separation), employee remuneration and benefits administration, performance management, and employee relations (CHS Alliance 2015).

How human resource management relates to the flexibility of humanitarian action

Human resource management structures and processes directly affect an organisation's flexibility in a number of ways.

First, human resources structures are responsible for supplying staff for regular operations across all departments of an organisation. The timeliness of humanitarian response is critical, and typically a well-functioning human resources system will ensure that a humanitarian organisation has a reliable source of surge capacity staff to respond to new crises and spikes in need among affected populations on the ground. Surge capacity does not only concern rapid-onset disasters in countries with a low existing humanitarian presence, but also countries receiving long-term humanitarian assistance that witness a spike in crisis or need and can play a significant role in how an organisation adapts to an emerging crisis.

There are different models for thinking about surge, which have significantly different implications for human resource structures within international agencies. Humanitarian surge capacity was originally defined as the 'ability of an organisation to rapidly and effectively increase [the sum of] its available resources in a specific geographic location' (Houghton and Emmens 2007). A more recent definition proposed by the Transforming Humanitarian Surge Project suggests a move away from the exclusive focus on individual organisational capacity to understand surge as collaborative and a capacity that should be as localised as possible:

Surge capacity is the ability of organisations, communities and individuals in crisis to rapidly and effectively respond to the needs of affected populations through improved local preparedness, collaborative effort and the scaling up and down of responses. (Austin and O'Neil 2018).



Evidence on adaptive programming from outside the humanitarian sector suggests that the ability to make relevant changes to a programme based on new understanding is closely linked with staff competencies

Some models for surge are within country, focused on how humanitarian actors with a long-term presence, or actors providing core services (e.g. health facilities) can position and shift internal human resources to respond to small to medium crises or peaks in need. For example, in Kenya, the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition Surge model is used by health centres to adapt to changes in demand for their services. The model uses scenario planning and detailed identification of threshold triggers and actions that will be taken to move staff between centres in order to maintain nutrition services during a heightened demand in drought periods (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2016). Other models focus on bringing staff into a country that is overwhelmed by a crisis.

Supplying the **right type of people** is also a key function of human resources. Evidence on adaptive programming from outside the humanitarian sector suggests that the ability to make relevant changes to a programme based on new understanding is closely linked with staff competencies such as critical thinking, openness to learn, willingness and ability to make informed decisions quickly and with minimal or no supervision, creative problem-solving, and others (Mercy Corps 2015; Allana and Sparkman 2014; Mistry et al. 2011; Maclay 2016; Mercy Corps and IRC 2016; Rudolph, Morrison, and Carroll 2009).

The importance of hiring and rewarding staff for flexible mindsets is also recognised in the Core Humanitarian Competency Framework created by the CHS Alliance and used by multiple humanitarian agencies in their recruitment and performance management. The Framework sets out six competency domains for all staff and, in particular, managers. It sets out the skills and behaviours required of aid workers for effective performance, of which one is critical judgement. This means that a staff member:

- analyses and exercises judgment in challenging situations in absence of specific guidance
- demonstrates initiative and suggests creative improvements and better ways of working
- demonstrates tenacity to achieve results (CHS Alliance 2017).

For managers, this competency translates into three further abilities:

- maintains broad strategic perspective and awareness of detail of situation
- acts decisively and adapts plans quickly to respond to emerging situations and changing environments
- takes informed and calculated risks to improve performance (CHS Alliance 2017).

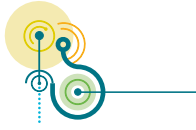
Mercy Corps' approach to adaptive programming and management has included an explicit emphasis on the need for appropriate human resource management to support flexibility and adaptiveness (Mercy Corps 2015). To recruit individuals with the necessary skills, hiring processes prioritised candidates from diverse professional backgrounds and with critical thinking skills over technical capacity, which can be developed on the job (ibid.).

Beyond critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills, Mercy Corps' work has found it is important to foster among staff a capacity for continuous learning. This cannot be achieved solely by recruiting the right people but also necessitates the right environment within teams – for example, ensuring that 'budget and staff levels are sufficient for learning', allocating time for feedback and self-reflection sessions within teams, creating roles that are 'focused on team learning', and including learning and flexibility within performance reviews alongside the completion of assigned activities (ibid.).

How current humanitarian human resources structures inhibit flexibility

Significant evidence suggests that staff recruitment processes often take too long and result in delays that jeopardise timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian operations (UNICEF, 2017; Ullah, 2015; UNICEF, 2016; Gardner et al., 2016; Mutunga et al., 2015; Sule Caglar et al., 2016; Drummond et al., 2015; House, 2016). Delays in staff recruitment pose a major challenge in humanitarian operations (UNICEF 2017; Ullah 2015; UNICEF 2016b; Gardner et al. 2016; Mutunga et al. 2015), and many key positions often remain unfilled months into programme implementation (Drummod et al. 2015; House 2016; UNICEF 2016b; Sule Caglar et al. 2016).

These factors lead to delays in programme implementation, compromising organisations' ability to respond quickly and appropriately to changes on the ground, and also increase the risk of programme plans being outdated at the start of implementation. They also lead to stressful work environments, overstretch existing staff capacities and leave teams without appropriate leadership. As a result, staff may not have the time or the headspace available for the critical reflection or learning that are necessary for identifying and implementing changes to ongoing programmes. Staff may also be discouraged from suggesting changes or improvements if they feel this runs against broader organisational culture or that they will be punished rather than rewarded.



Delays are often shaped by internal organisational barriers, as well as challenges outside of humanitarian organisations' control.

Delays are often shaped by internal organisational barriers, as well as challenges outside of humanitarian organisations' control. For example, evaluations of humanitarian programmes and discussions with human resources experts from among ALNAP membership revealed that bureaucratic barriers such as rigid visa policies, prolonged contract negotiations and absent budgets for security trainings delay and at times prevent deployment of competent staff – even when sourced from within the same organisation.

Short-term contracts, a common occurrence in the humanitarian sector, are also an important barrier to delivering an appropriate response for the appropriate moment in time, as they contribute to high staff turnover and subsequently restrict organisational learning and the build-up of institutional memory, two necessary aspects for adapting future interventions based on lessons learned from previously implemented programmes. Further, short-term contracts negatively affect organisations' ability to recruit staff with the right non-technical skills and mindsets that support adaptiveness (Obrecht 2018).

A less obvious barrier to flexibility is concerned with remuneration structures of some humanitarian organisations and expectations of field-based staff (Obrecht 2018). Because staff are often contracted to be based in a set location, when they need to be deployed outside the area specified in their contracts, they are supposed to be paid a per diem. These payments can quickly add up, particularly in a context of ever-shrinking humanitarian funding, thus making emergency deployment of staff a financial issue as well as a logistical one.

Some of the barriers noted are also common to **sourcing surge capacity** (Austin and O'Neil 2015). Other challenges are unique to surge, particularly the tendency to invest in the development of agency-specific surge mechanisms rather than contributing to shared efforts, and challenges to collaboration and partnerships between different organisations that arise due to unique organisational due diligence processes and a general environment of risk aversion (ibid.).



2.2.3 | Funding

To be responsive to changes in a crisis, including requests from crisis-affected peoples, humanitarian agencies need to have 1) the capacity to *identify, decide on and implement relevant adaptations to programmes*, and 2) the ability to mobilise and move resources to support them. The next section, on Programming and Monitoring, covers the first capacity. Funding covers the latter. Funding as an organisational function refers to the processes through which humanitarian actors obtain financial resources to pay for their work, and includes the reporting and campaigning involved in securing this income.

How funding relates to the adaptiveness of humanitarian action

Flexible funding arrangements are frequently cited as a key factor in supporting humanitarian agencies' abilities to change responses according to shifts in need or context (Castellarnau and Stoianova 2018; Stoddard et al., 2016; Mercy Corps and IRC, 2016; Grand Bargain, quoted in Cabot Venton and Sida 2017). The flexibility of funding comes down to two main factors: **scope** – the range of ways in which humanitarian agencies can use funding – and **approval costs** – the amount of time and resource it requires to approve funds or changes to how funds are used. Funding mechanisms that allow for significant changes with approval can seem flexible with respect to scope, but in practice tend to inhibit adaptiveness if approval processes are lengthy and inhibit timely changes.

Aside from direct government-to-government assistance, government donors to humanitarian response tend to use the following funding modalities (Stoddard et al., 2017; Development Initiatives 2018):

- earmarked grants for projects/programmes with a specific location and/or focus
- pooled funds, either at global level (the Central Emergency Response Fund) or at country level
- bilateral core funding or partnership/framework agreements with multilateral agencies and INGOs.

Aside from this, several INGOS rely on public donations, which they can often use as unearmarked resources. This form of funding, along with bilateral core funding from government donors, is considered the most flexible, allowing agencies to move funding to address under-served crises, populations or sectoral needs, and to fund a rapid shift in operational modalities when required. The unrestricted funding of actors such as MSF and ICRC, for example, is cited as a key determinant of these agencies' ability to work in difficult conflict areas, as it means they can make the necessary operational adaptations to continue delivering services (Haver and Carter, 2016).

While pooled funds are also cited as flexible, much of the supporting evidence focuses on the use of pooled funds for rapid response, rather than the use of pooled funding to support iterative changes to programming over time (Obrecht, 2017).

How humanitarian funding can inhibit flexibility

Humanitarian funding not only provides the material resources for response, but – in the absence of a natural accountability mechanism for crisis affected people – also serves as the primary mechanism for regulating the quality of humanitarian action and holding actors to account. This complicates the relationship between funding and the responsiveness of humanitarian agencies to changes in crisis and need.

Recent years have seen a rise in the use of earmarked grants, where an ‘ever-increasing percentage channelled through direct grants to individual agencies has dwarfed other modalities such as pooled funds and core funding’ (Stoddard et al., 2017). This has clear impacts in the field, where agencies are unable to make important and clearly relevant changes to their programmes and operations without facing potentially months-long approval processes, and as such must sometimes carry on with ineffective programming.

Several donors use pre-specified sets of indicators in their earmarked grants that are used to define and measure objectives. These indicators are often sector specific. While agencies have suggested that some donors are flexible on changing indicators within a grant, the use of globally standardised indicators in the first place can dissuade agencies from thinking about the context first, and the outcomes that are most appropriate. Even the most flexible arrangements generally allow for only certain degrees of shifting costs across budget lines, and do not allow for changes between sectors (only within sector).

While arguments have been made by agencies for longer-term or multi-year funding for humanitarian action as a way of supporting greater flexibility, the potential link is as yet unclear (Obrecht 2018; Venton and Sida 2017).

The best argument may lie in the recognition that project and programme timelines are in general relatively removed from realities on the ground, so fixing timelines independently of the achievement of outcomes will result in arbitrary programming end-dates (either too early or too late). Moreover, many actors have noted the high costs in staff turnover and uncertainty around programme closure that is created by year-to-year annual funding arrangements (Venton and Sida 2017).



In some cases, where donors have strong in-country presence, their relationship with agencies can work to encourage and support timely changes in response to changes in a situation

For protracted contexts and early response, humanitarian financing mechanisms have largely remained rigid, failing to support preventative and risk mitigating programmes, which can reduce humanitarian caseload, and limiting humanitarian agencies from providing adequate early recovery support – particularly in protracted conflict settings. Justifications for creating such boundaries around humanitarian funding are based on an appeal to the humanitarian principles and the need to prioritise life-saving support. However, there is an increasingly recognised need to explore how these mechanisms can work more seamlessly with development financing to provide a holistic, adaptive approach to serving people who experience both chronic vulnerability and periods of acute need.

The barriers that current humanitarian financial mechanisms place in front of agencies wanting to make necessary and important changes to their programmes are significant. But the relationship between funding and agency responsiveness is not as straight forward as it seems. In periods where agencies had arguably more flexibility and control over how they operated, there have been significant lapses in their ability to read contextual changes, listen to affected people and respond appropriately – most dramatically in when using unrestricted public donations in the 2004 Aceh response. In some cases, where donors have strong in-country presence, their relationship with agencies can work to encourage and support timely changes in response to changes in a situation, as donors are able to more easily monitor the context themselves and proactively solicit agencies to respond to changes (Obrecht 2018). Therefore, the donor-agency relationship is complicated when it comes to responsiveness to changes in crisis: when this works well, agencies may be more motivated by their donors to make necessary changes to programming; when it does not work well, agencies must implement outdated and inappropriate interventions that they cannot change, or are unable to take action when it would be most effective to do so.

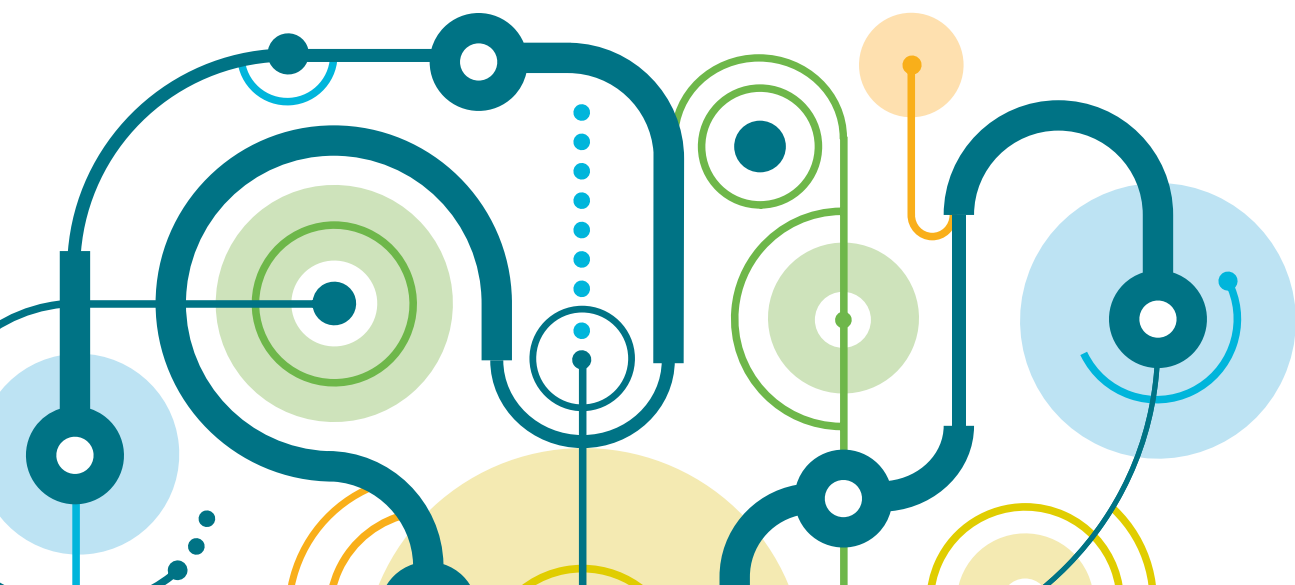
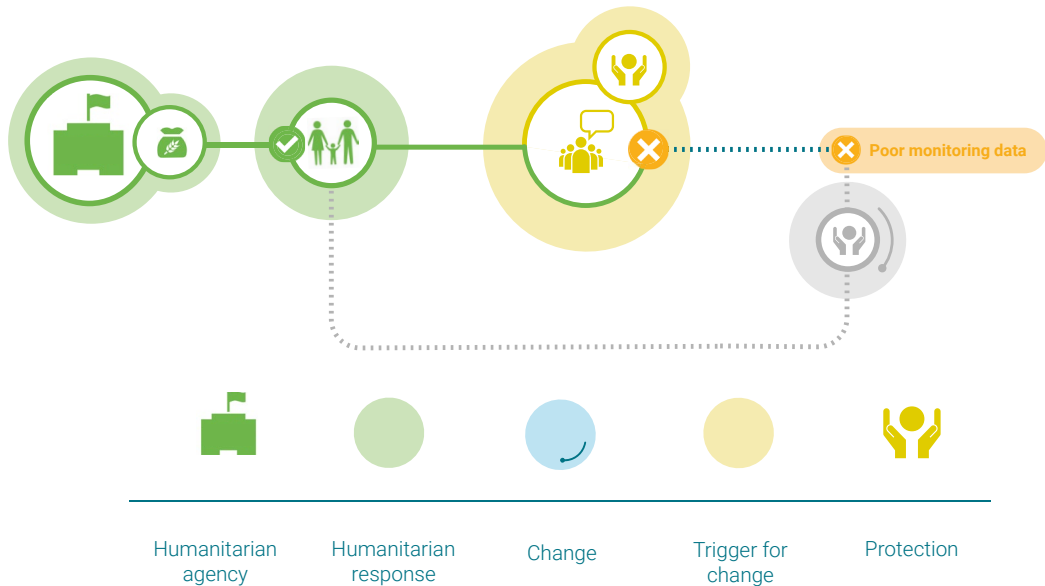


Figure 6: Barriers to programmatic adaptativeness



2.2.4 | Programming

Designing and delivering programmes is a core function of humanitarian actors. Despite this, a textbook definition of programming is hard to come by. Generally, humanitarian actors are responsible for their individual programming, which encompasses planning, designing and delivering humanitarian assistance. As part of the Transformative Agenda, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee introduced the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) to guide collective inter-agency responses to humanitarian emergencies. The HPC is a ‘coordinated series of actions undertaken to help prepare for, manage and deliver humanitarian response’ built on key five elements: needs assessment and analysis, strategic response planning, resource mobilisation, implementation and monitoring, operational review and evaluation (OCHA, 2015). The successful execution of the HPC depends on factors such as emergency preparedness, coordination with national/local authorities and humanitarian actors, and information management (ibid). Individual humanitarian actors’ approaches to programming generally follow the HPC structure.

While there are differences in monitoring practices across humanitarian agencies, a recent review by ALNAP found that the core elements of monitoring are fairly consistent across the sector (Warner 2017). Monitoring is defined by the ALNAP Guide to Evaluating Humanitarian Action as: ‘A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing humanitarian intervention with indications of the extent of progress, achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds’ (ALNAP 2016: 30).

How programming and monitoring relate to flexibility

Humanitarian organisations need to be able to deliver programmes that are relevant, appropriate and effective to meeting the needs of crisis-affected populations – and which remain as such throughout the programme’s lifespan. Response choices available to humanitarian actors affect directly how well this objective can be met, and how well humanitarian actors can respond to on-the-ground changes that may require a shift in programme activities or in orientation altogether (e.g. moving from cash-based to in-kind delivery, or from more development-type work to emergency response).

Mechanisms such as needs assessments, monitoring and consultations and feedback collection from affected populations underpin an organisation’s ability to know when a change in programming is needed. And information collected through these processes should feed the decision-making process behind such changes.

How humanitarian programming and monitoring approaches can inhibit flexibility

The ways in which decisions on programming are made can inhibit agencies’ ability to change. The processes for programme design in humanitarian action are not always clear, and tend to favour standardised approaches which can limit the ability of field staff to adapt programmes to changes in context or feedback over time, or to design wholly new solutions (Maxwell et al., 2013; Bennett, et al. 2016). If decisions regarding programme design or changes to programmes need to be approved by several levels of management, this can negatively affect the appropriateness of changes to the fast-paced context on the ground and discourage field staff to propose further changes to programming in the future.

Further, as discussed, inflexible donor contracts that specify predetermined tasks to be accomplished and indicators to achieve also restrict the ability to make necessary changes to programmes, both because the revision of contracts can often be a lengthy process and because such contracts may incentivise organisations to downplay any changes or deviations that may have taken place in favour of demonstrating compliance (Obrecht 2018; Bryan and Carter 2016; Ramalingam, Laric, and Primrose 2014). Literature on adaptive programming and management highlights the central role that evidence and learning play in programme design and in making changes to programmes to make them more effective (Andrews et al., 2012; Valters, Cummings, and Nixon 2016; Driver 2001).

Figure 7: Barriers to strategic adaptativeness

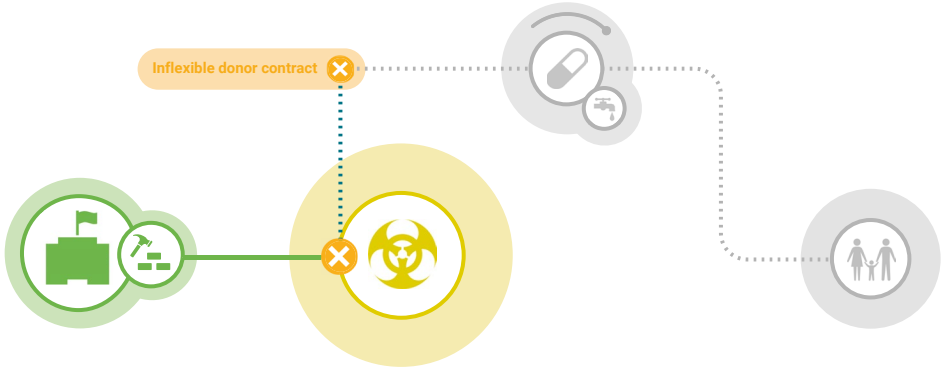
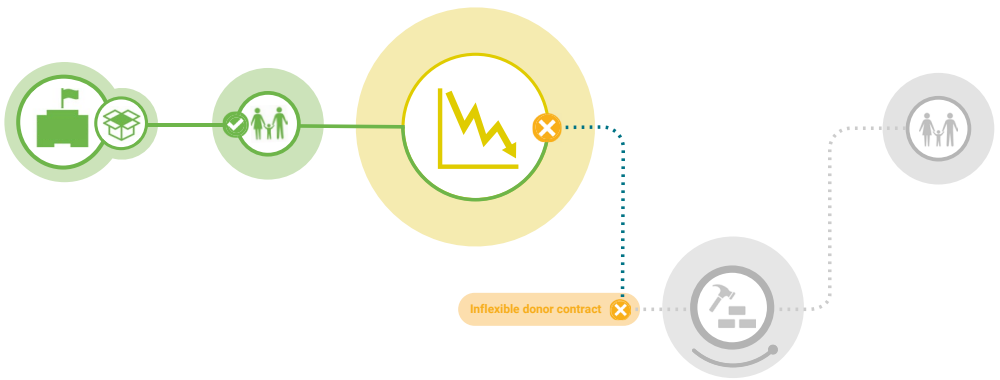


Figure 8: Barriers to strategic adaptiveness



Humanitarian agency

Humanitarian response

Change

Trigger for change

Decline in humanitarian need

Epidemic



Changes to programmes are a key element of accountability to affected populations, as it is a way of showing that feedback and complaints have been processed and actioned by a humanitarian agency...

This emphasises a strong link between programme design and implementation, on the one hand, and the various **monitoring** processes that a humanitarian agency may use to bring in new information and use it to inform decision making. Monitoring in humanitarian action plays a number of important functions. These include ensuring that programme implementation is going according to plan, improving the relevance and appropriateness of programmes, maintaining a strong contextual awareness, keeping accountable to stakeholders and enabling organisational learning between projects (Warner 2017). Yet, there are many challenges associated with monitoring as it relates to programme implementation – including the quality of collected data, which can be jeopardised by such factors as limited access, limited timeframes, limited resources and arbitrary indicators, among others (Knox-Clarke and Darcy 2013; Warner 2017; Obrecht 2018).

Without good quality monitoring data, humanitarian actors may not be able to identify changes in context that require changes to programming and operations and can be ill-equipped for making informed decisions about such changes, whether they are minor adjustments or major pivots in programming (Warner, 2017; Obrecht, 2018).

Changes to programmes are a key element of accountability to affected populations, as it is a way of showing that feedback and complaints have been processed and actioned by a humanitarian agency, and also contributes to the relevance and appropriateness of humanitarian action (UNICEF 2015; Clarke et al., 2015; James Darcy 2016a). Affected populations may be consulted at the needs-assessment stage or during implementation, but are rarely given the chance to participate in decision-making beyond the identification of needs and aid recipients, and in aid-targeting processes (Khan 2015; Poulsen et al. 2015; Moughanie 2015).

While the presence of feedback and complaints mechanisms is common in humanitarian operations, it does not equate to greater accountability or better communication with affected populations: evidence suggests that such mechanisms and systems are often weak, and at times inaccessible to communities (Adams, Lloyd, and Miller, 2015; World Vision International, 2015; IFRC and KRCS, 2015; Turnbull, 2016a; Patko, 2016; Baker et al., 2016; Save the Children, 2015; Duncalf et al., 2016; Advisem Services Inc., 2016).

3 | Humanitarian adaptiveness: Supporting humanitarians to change when needed

3.1 | Adaptive capabilities: an overview

In almost all sectors in which organisational management is studied – from ecosystem management to construction, local municipalities to hedge funds, technology firms to hospitals – the last 20 years have seen a growing interest in creating flexible organisations that can respond more effectively to complex and dynamic environments (where ‘environment’ can be a physical ecosystem, a policy space, the global market, a city, etc.). The motivations for this shift are as diverse as the sectors embracing it, but are driven by one or more of the following three beliefs:

1. Organisations that are able to learn, and which make learning a priority, are more successful or competitive in their environment.
2. Twentieth century models of organisational management – which prioritise top-down control, centralised decision-making and linear planning – are both ineffective and inaccurate for describing how management actually happens.
3. Globalisation and the internet age have changed and are changing way in which individuals interact with institutions, meaning that many modern organisations’ goals (e.g. profit, policy objectives, etc.) are not achievable without greater responsiveness to the needs, interests and incentives of their key stakeholders – all of which may be contradictory and change over time.

These insights have led to an interest in *adaptive capabilities*, which enable an organisation to be flexible and agile without succumbing to chaos (Vicenzi, 2000). Adaptive capabilities are defined as:

The ability of an organisation to adjust and respond effectively to dynamics and uncertainty (adapted from Friedman et al., 2016; Aagaard, 2012).

When applied to humanitarian action, adaptive capabilities involve three main components:

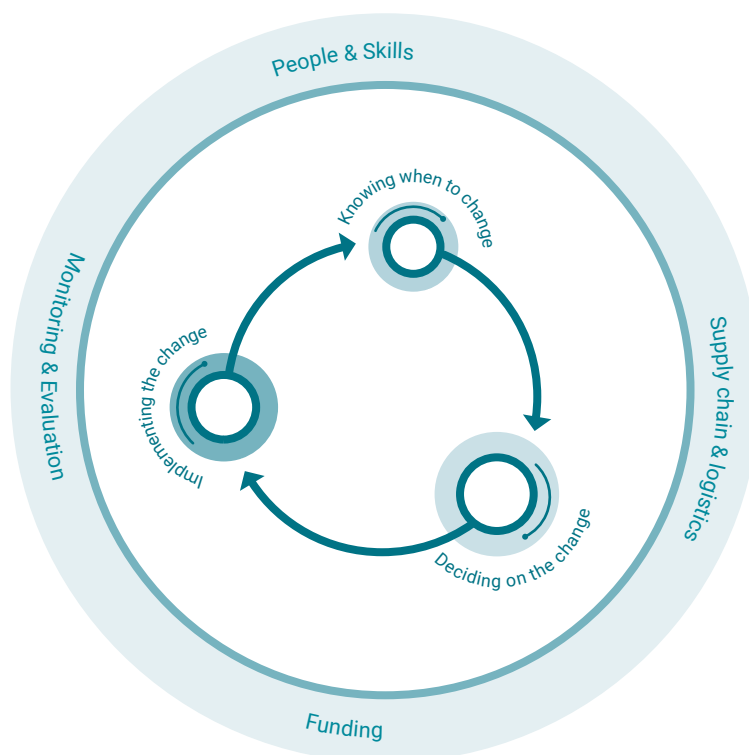
Knowing when to change: being able to identify the right time and motivation for changing what, where and how humanitarian action is delivered

Deciding on the change: Identifying the correct 'pivot' or change to make

Implementing the change: Bringing about the change through mobilisation of resources and adjustments to plans

It is useful to distinguish adaptive capabilities from three sets of related concepts: those related to how organisations deal with change, including 'flexibility' and 'agility'; adaptive management and adaptive programming; and reactive/proactive decision-making.

Figure 9: The Adaptiveness Cycle



3.1.1 | Adaptiveness in relation to flexibility and agility

The trend across the multiple industries as listed above is fundamentally about organisations developing the capacity to shift to different activities, services or strategies, to maintain or improve their performance over time. Different terms are used across the academic literature, and there have been some attempts – with contradictory results – to define and label the different capacities that organisations exhibit when they do things differently (Dubey et al., 2015).

Flexibility is the ease with which an organisation can change what it does and how it operates. Generally, flexibility is seen as a characteristic of organisations or systems which enables change to be implemented. It is a further question as to how these changes are identified and decided upon – which require analytical abilities that go beyond mere flexibility. Flexibility is considered to be ‘the foundation’ of agility and adaptiveness (Charles et al., 2010).

For those who embrace complexity theory as a framework for explaining organisations and organisational systems, there are important differences between flexible organisations and adaptive organisations. Adaptive approaches are one part of a broader set of strategies that organisations should adopt in order to operate effectively and achieve positive outcomes in complex environments (Ramalingam, 2013; Campbell, 2018; Interaction, 2016; Desai et al., 2018). Complexity theory frames adaptive approaches as occupying a middle path between highly structured, top-down and linear management approaches on the one hand, and hyper-flexible, disordered organisational environments on the other. Organisational environments that are highly flexible but have no practices for supporting integrated analysis and decision-making can be chaotic, placing too much burden on junior staff and causing burn-out. Adaptiveness is therefore considered by some to be distinct from flexibility, as it implies that an organisation’s flexibility is guided by a certain level of rigorous learning and quality of decision-making (Valters, Cummings, and Nixon 2016).

Agile working is the ability to undertake rapid and continuous iteration. The discussion of agile as an approach to dealing with unpredictable change arose from the tech sector and supply-chain management studies. It has since been applied more widely as a general management technique, especially for innovation processes.

In the tech sector, agile working can be traced back to the 1980s but was first formally articulated in The Agile Manifesto (Beck et al. 2001). This collection of principles, assembled by a group of software developers, aimed to make the process of software development more nimble, iterative and responsive to end-user needs. Agile approaches to software design are characterised by their use of short-term ‘sprints’, or implementation periods, whereby suppliers develop solutions for a client, bring them quickly to the client for testing, and then use these insights and feedback to improve the solution.

Agile supply chains in supply chain management literature are characterised by ‘minimal lead times ... [which] service volatile consumer demand with high levels of availability’ (Bruce et al., 2004: 154). As with software design, the focus is on fast feedback loops that enable a company or supply chain network to respond quickly to immediate demands or changes.

In the literature, timing is the main distinguishing factor for agility and adaptiveness: agile systems are considered to respond with speed with short time frames for each iteration, while adaptive systems are considered more medium term. But in empirical studies, the characteristics used to define agile and adaptive systems are very similar to one another, and the choice of terminology may primarily come down to the sector or discipline; as mentioned, research on supply chain and product development tend to use ‘agile’ while research from ecosystem management, organisational science and complexity science use ‘adaptive’, for example.

3.1.2 | Adaptive capabilities in relation to adaptive management and adaptive programming

Adaptive capabilities encompass the full range of organisational functions (or ‘business processes’) needed for an organisation to make appropriate adjustments in response to a dynamic and/or complex environment. Adaptive management and adaptive programming are types or examples of adaptive capabilities which have gained wide recognition recently in the development aid sector.

In the last five years, adaptive management and adaptive programming have been the focus of an active and growing movement for change within the international development aid community (Mercy Corps and IRC, 2016; Desai et al., 2018; Valters, Cummings, and Nixon, 2016; Booth, Harris and Wild, 2016; Ramalingam, 2015; Ramalingam, 2013), born out of frustrations with failing apolitical ‘good governance’ initiatives and inflexible logical frameworks and contracts.

Linear and fixed planning approaches had been considered appropriate for addressing well-defined development problems but were inadequate for more complex issues. This resulted in long-term development projects that were inappropriate for their context and incapable of making necessary course corrections, thus leading to wasted resources.

Adaptive management has several definitions centring around similar themes of learning and continuous improvement:

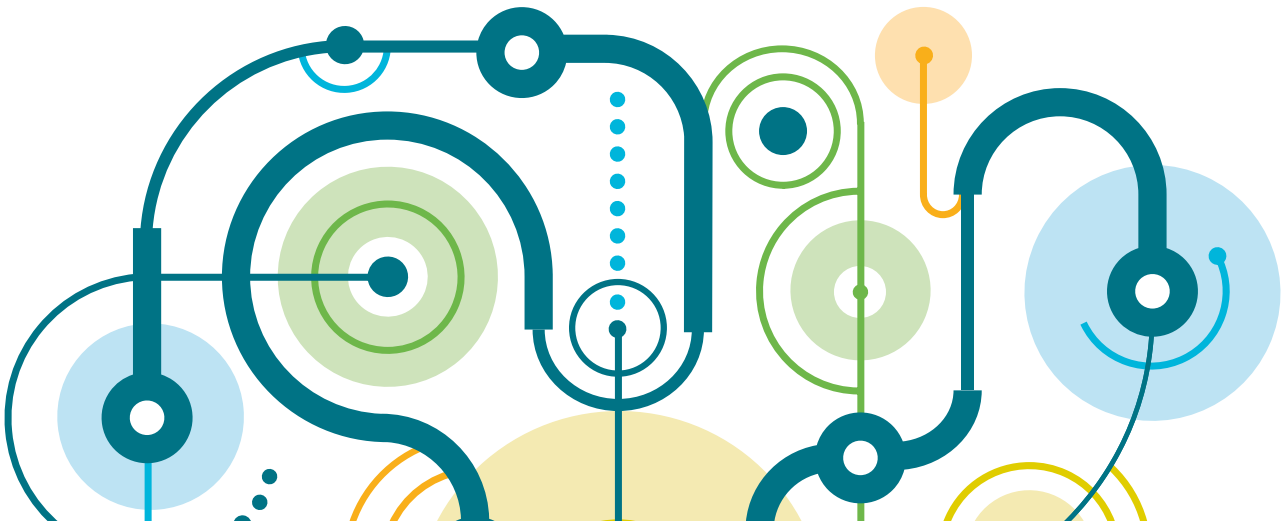
The individual, programmatic and organizational ability to access and use knowledge, information and data in an ongoing manner in strategic and operational decisions. (Ramalingam, 2015: 2)

An iterative process, calling for the integration of science and management, treating policies as experiments from which managers can learn. (Wise, 2006)

A structured, iterative process of robust decision making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reducing uncertainty over time via system monitoring ... a tool which should be used not only to change a system, but also to learn about the system. (Holling, 1978; Mercy Corps, 2018)

Managing adaptively is about accepting, working with, and learning from change, and using this learning to be more effective. (Sugden, 2016)

Adaptive management is not only promoted by development think tanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but has also been developed and promoted by two important funders of development work: the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



Over the last five years, the World Bank has used the PDIA framework to explore adaptive approaches in its engagement with governments. PDIA stands for Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation and is defined by four key tenets:

1. 'aim to solve particular problems in local contexts;
2. through the creation of an "authorizing environment" for decision making that allows "positive deviation" and experimentation;
3. involving active, ongoing and experiential learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions, doing so by;
4. engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable legitimate and relevant – i.e. politically supportable and practically implementable' (Andrews et al., 2012).

The USAID Learning Lab has developed a similar framework – the Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework – which it is using to promote stronger cultures for learning across USAID and its partners in development work. The Learning Lab has also developed and piloted a set of CLA tools to support USAID missions in enabling adaptive approaches to development at country level (<https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/cla-framework-and-maturity-tool-overview>).

Adaptive management is seen as important for supporting **adaptive programming**, which is programming that 'learns, has opportunities to use that learning to adjust, and actually adjusts' (Valters, Cummings, and Nixon 2016: 7). The two are not the same: adaptive management can often refer to broader, organisation-wide processes that relate to how well an organisation learns and adjusts its strategy, whereas adaptive programming is more focused on how individual projects or programmes are planned and implemented.

3.1.3 | Adaptiveness in relation to reactive/proactive decision-making

There are different approaches that organisations can take to shifting what they do based on change or complexity in their external environment. A common distinction in the literature is made between proactive and reactive strategies (Appelbaum and Goransson, 1997). Generally, proactive strategies identify potential responses or improvements in advance of a change, while reactive strategies respond to changes that are happening or have already happened.

Some authors align ‘adaptiveness’ with purely reactive strategies (De Jong and De Ruyter, 2004; Appelbaum and Goransson, 1997); however, other literature presents proactive strategies as a type of adaptive capability (Ashmos et al., 2000).

There are important questions as to whether one strategy is more efficient or effective than another, or whether proactive strategies are best suited for particular types of decisions, and reactive strategies for others. For example, anticipatory scenario planning and disaster preparedness sit within the family of proactive decision-making and may be more appropriate for deciding on changes to programmes in settings with cyclical crises, where potential scenarios are more predictable. Reactive decision-making – and good reactive implementation – will still be important for unexpected events that will not be captured in scenario planning based on prior experience.

We therefore understand adaptiveness to encompass both proactive and reactive strategies, as both can support humanitarian organisations to make relevant and timely changes to their operations, programming or strategies.

3.2 | Why adaptive capabilities matter for humanitarian action



...adaptive management can often refer to broader, organisation-wide processes that relate to how well an organisation learns and adjusts its strategy...

As discussed above, adaptive capabilities, in particular management and programming, have received significant attention in the development sector as critical to achieving greater effectiveness. Development practitioners work in more stable contexts and with higher degrees of certainty, due to better opportunities for context analysis and impact evaluations on the effectiveness of programmes. Adaptive management and programming are promoted within the development sector to address a sub-set of development problems – the most stubborn, complex, ‘wicked’ problems – where common forms of evidence, such as control trials, can only offer limited guidance on what will work and where. A fundamental premise of the use of adaptive programming in development contexts is that planning and assessment, however thorough and well-done, will never be able to guide the entirety of a 4+ year programme that is seeking to address fundamental barriers to growth and social development.

In contrast, there is a stronger assumption in the humanitarian sector that good quality assessments at the outset of a project will ensure the relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian programming throughout its lifespan – and therefore that significant changes to programming do not reflect good practice, but instead point to a failure in the initial assessment. Humanitarian actors already structure their organisational functions for a certain type of flexibility that is built around fast response and operational agility, which should be enough to handle unexpected challenges in their operating environment.

This points to an important question: to what extent do we think humanitarian actors should be adapting their programming over time, or do such changes reflect a poor initial investment in understanding the context and situation?

The simple answer is that there is insufficient performance data from humanitarian operations to understand the comparative contribution of strong initial planning (aided by contextual analysis and needs assessment) versus strong monitoring and adaptation (aided by continual context analysis and mechanisms to monitor the impact of programming on needs and feedback from affected people). Certainly, there is evidence that both play a role in the overall effectiveness and quality of humanitarian response. With this in mind, there are three main reasons why adaptive capabilities merit further consideration and support in humanitarian operations:

1. Sometimes, initial planning is poor due to lack of time and resources, which places greater demand on the ability to monitor and make adjustments as programming is implemented.

The lack of lead times has long been cited as a key barrier to incorporating the perspectives of crisis-affected people in programme design, and the humanitarian sector lacks a strong evidence base on effective programming. This makes it unclear what modifications to activities or programme design are needed from one context to another to achieve positive outcomes. Both the lack of lead times and strong evidence point to a clear need to monitor and learn about programming and its effects as it is implemented, and to have the ability to make necessary changes based on new information that could not have been known to an agency at the outset.

2. Even when preparedness measures are taken, operational uncertainty requires continuous monitoring and the willingness to change locations or activities to respond where need is greatest.

Even in contexts featuring strong investment in disaster preparedness, plans are made with the recognition that, in an actual disaster, situations may occur that cannot be predicted or planned for in detail. Recent research argues that 'To be appropriately anticipatory will also mean that those organisations seeking to anticipate future threats will have to be adaptive, willing to adjust not only their perspectives, but their procedures and operations as well to meet such challenges in order to remain sensitive to myriad threats and ways to offset them' (Kent et al, 2016: p10). Operating contexts can change quickly, requiring modifications to existing plans or entirely new approaches, particularly when populations move or when new and urgent needs are identified during a crisis response.

In some respects, classical operational flexibility in humanitarian agencies is becoming more limited due to how funding is provided and due to the costs of maintaining operational agility. These constraints raise important questions on how operational flexibilities in the humanitarian sector can be maintained in the most cost-effective manner.

3. For certain problems and new crisis paradigms, planning is insufficient for good performance because programme effectiveness is highly unknown. These problems are complex, requiring highly contextualised approaches with higher uncertainty as to how to achieve an intended outcome.

For certain problems, such as early action or early recovery, and for new crises such as the Ebola response or the European migration crisis response, plans either do not exist, or must remain fairly broad and open to accommodate high degrees of uncertainty on what will be most effective. This requires the adaptive ability to modify and change programming along the way, and/or look to stronger coordination and handover between humanitarians and other actors, who can offer adaptive solutions to complex problems at a collective level.



4 | Looking ahead

4.1 | What's the evidence?

The rise of adaptive capabilities in organisational science is still fairly new, and its proximity to complexity theory has made it difficult to frame in clear, observable ways that are amenable to empirical study. As such, the evidence base on how adaptive capabilities contribute to organisational performance is thin and covers a wide range of applications which are not easily comparable. Of the 400 studies ALNAP reviewed in its analysis of literature outside the humanitarian and development sectors, only two looked at empirically measuring the relationship between the adaptiveness of organisations and their performance. One study, which assessed the quality of the evidence base for the use of complex adaptive systems thinking in managing health-sector institutions, has shown that the gaps in the empirical research prevent an evidence-driven approach to developing adaptive capabilities in organisations (Health Foundation 2010).

One of the few studies that compares adaptive and non-adaptive approaches comes from the aid sector. The study, published as part of a set of case studies on Mercy Corps' and the International Rescue Committee's (IRC's) experiences with adaptive management and programming, compared two IRC projects in Sierra Leone during the 2014 Ebola response. It found that the project that used a more adaptive approach was able to respond more effectively in an unpredictable crisis, adjusting activities to deal with school closures and identifying opportunities to add value through close discussion with donors and local partners. It revealed that 'the structure of relationships surrounding each project shaped the extent to which it adapted during the crisis', where the project that had poorer relationships between implementing partners, consortia leads and donors featured sclerotic decision-making, causing it to shut down for nine months. Even after reopening, this project took much longer to make necessary changes – changes that were then irrelevant by the time they were implemented (Mercy Corps and IRC, 2016).

Given the complexity and uncertainty of the problems to which flexible and adaptive approaches respond, pursuing a single, evidence-supported ‘recipe’ for adaptiveness in humanitarian action would be both unhelpful and likely impossible to achieve. Instead, in line with ALNAP’s recent work on change management (Knox-Clarke, 2017), ALNAP aims to identify common elements of successful approaches to being adaptive, i.e. making operational and programmatic changes in response to changes and new learning within a crisis. To do this, ALNAP seeks to learn from the experiences—both positive and negative—of implementing agencies across the ALNAP network who have sought to improve their ability to change what, where and how they operate in crisis settings. The identification of these elements will be used as a starting point for further research on how adaptive and flexible approaches contribute to better humanitarian performance and the achievement of outcomes for crisis affected people.

4.2 | Further questions

Evaluations and research suggest that people facing crisis are better served when organisations are able to change what, where and how they deliver when circumstances or understandings of a crisis change over time. How agencies can create the flexibility needed to make these changes is not straight forward or clear. Further discussion of models of flexibility appropriate for humanitarian actors may achieve progress on this issue by considering the following themes and sets of questions.

1. Networks or organisations

- When faced with a need to change, agencies can choose to make those changes themselves or hand over to another organisation. Are there particular contexts or situations where one approach is better than another? What are the advantages of each approach for ensuring the greatest flexibility in location and type of support provided to people in crisis?
- Which approaches to networks, coordination and multi-agency rapid response are most effective at generating a flexible response that adapts quickly to changes in context or need?

2. Funding

- What are the core elements of a funding relationship or modality that supports the ability to make changes to a humanitarian operation when needed?
- Are there differences in the kinds of funding modalities that are needed to support changes to operations and programming, possibly based on the degree of change required, or on the type of crisis?

- How can agencies best incorporate learning into their accountability mechanisms with donors, to show how and why changes were made, and whether they were good changes?
- Why aren't we doing this as well as we could now, and what is needed to build better funding relationships and tools for greater flexibility?

3. Monitoring

- What are the core elements of a monitoring system that support the ability to use monitoring data and analysis to make changes when needed?
- Are there differences in the kinds of monitoring systems that are needed to support changes in operations and programming, possibly based on the degree of change required, or on the type of crisis?
- What internal structures and processes for decision-making are most important for ensuring that monitoring data and analysis are being regularly used to make changes?
- Why aren't we doing this as well as we could now, and what is needed to use monitoring for adaptation more consistently?

4. Human Resources & Supply Chain Management

- What funding mechanisms and modalities enable the greatest operational flexibility for humanitarian actors?
- How can we ensure accountability and rigour within adaptive and flexible responses in humanitarian settings, by demonstrating that changes to programmes and operations are made for the right reasons?

5. Programming

- When does programming need to be adaptive, and to what degree? Are there situations where programming does not need to/should not attempt major changes?
- What are the different ways to approaching the design and planning of an adaptive programme?
- What is 'within scope' and 'out of scope' when considering changes to a programme and how should humanitarian agencies set these boundaries?
- Why aren't we doing this as well as we could now, and what is needed to support more flexible programming?





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