



Dag Hammarskjöld
Foundation



The Art of Leadership in the United Nations

Framing What's Blue



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The views and opinions expressed in these contributions are the author's personal reflections and do not necessarily represent the United Nations nor the Foundation's view. Furthermore, several authors chose to name specific individuals to exemplify certain leadership traits they exhibited. Others chose to use initials only or to refer only to an individual function. Any reference to specific individuals represents only the author's perspective on the subject matter.

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*‘Everything will be all right – you know when?
When people, just people, stop thinking
of the United Nations as a weird Picasso
abstraction and see it as a drawing
they made themselves.’*

Dag Hammarskjöld



Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General of the United Nations, photographed in his outer office, on the 38th floor of the Secretariat building, standing in front of 'Rational Look', a geometrical abstract painting by Fritz Glarner, lent to the United Nations by New York's Museum of Modern Art. The quote above is from an interview with Hammarskjöld published by Time magazine, 27 June 1955.

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Foreword

There is something indefinable in true leadership, something in its essence that cannot be fully captured, measured or easily explained. The same can be said about art: This elusive 'something' defines its core quality. Yet, neither leadership nor art should be mystified – they depend on a complex mix of skills, knowledge and experience, but also require creativity, courage and compassion. Despite their elusive qualities, art and leadership are products of hard, principled work.

There is a broad array of academic research and expert opinions on leadership. While we recognise the wealth of evidence these constitute, this publication does not claim to advance any specific theory or model. With this publication, the Foundation takes the view that leadership is an art and that, in the United Nations, its form is inimitable as its purpose is ultimately to uphold the vision and values of the Charter.

To say that leadership is an art is certainly not new; one must move beyond platitudes to frame the particular demands on UN leadership and how they relate to the broader leadership discourse. Nonetheless, let it be noted that although leadership can be hard to define and difficult to capture, we think it is marked by four distinct characteristics.

The first is that leadership can be both constructive and destructive. A strong or charismatic leader is not by default a good leader – and the good leader will have imperfections and make mistakes. Leadership must be constantly scrutinised and grounded in normative values.

The second is that leadership should not be condensed to a set of specific traits or skills. It goes beyond rules

and regulations and reflects needs driven by context, obligations and respect for values and norms. Thirdly, leadership is often confused with or reduced to management. Management is crucial for successful operations, but it is not synonymous with leadership. Leadership and management are mutually enforcing but one can never replace the other.

Finally, the public discourse on leadership often focuses narrowly on the individual, ignoring that leaders never act independently of the environment in which they exist. Leadership is also expressed through collective responsibility and actions. Leadership is therefore not strictly individual as it is participative and performed in a group for a collective purpose. It is not simply behavioural as it is defined by situations and involves formal rules, relationships and collaboration. It is also set in, and dependent on, the organisational culture. Leadership is not only about one, but also of, with, and for the many.

So where does this leave the UN and the particular demands on its leadership? We know that the UN system is permanently engaged in a process of transformation. For this reason, leadership must also continually improve to reflect changes, allowing the organisation to adapt to change and uphold core principles and continuity. It is a matter not only for the organisation but a responsibility in view of its central role of the multinational system.

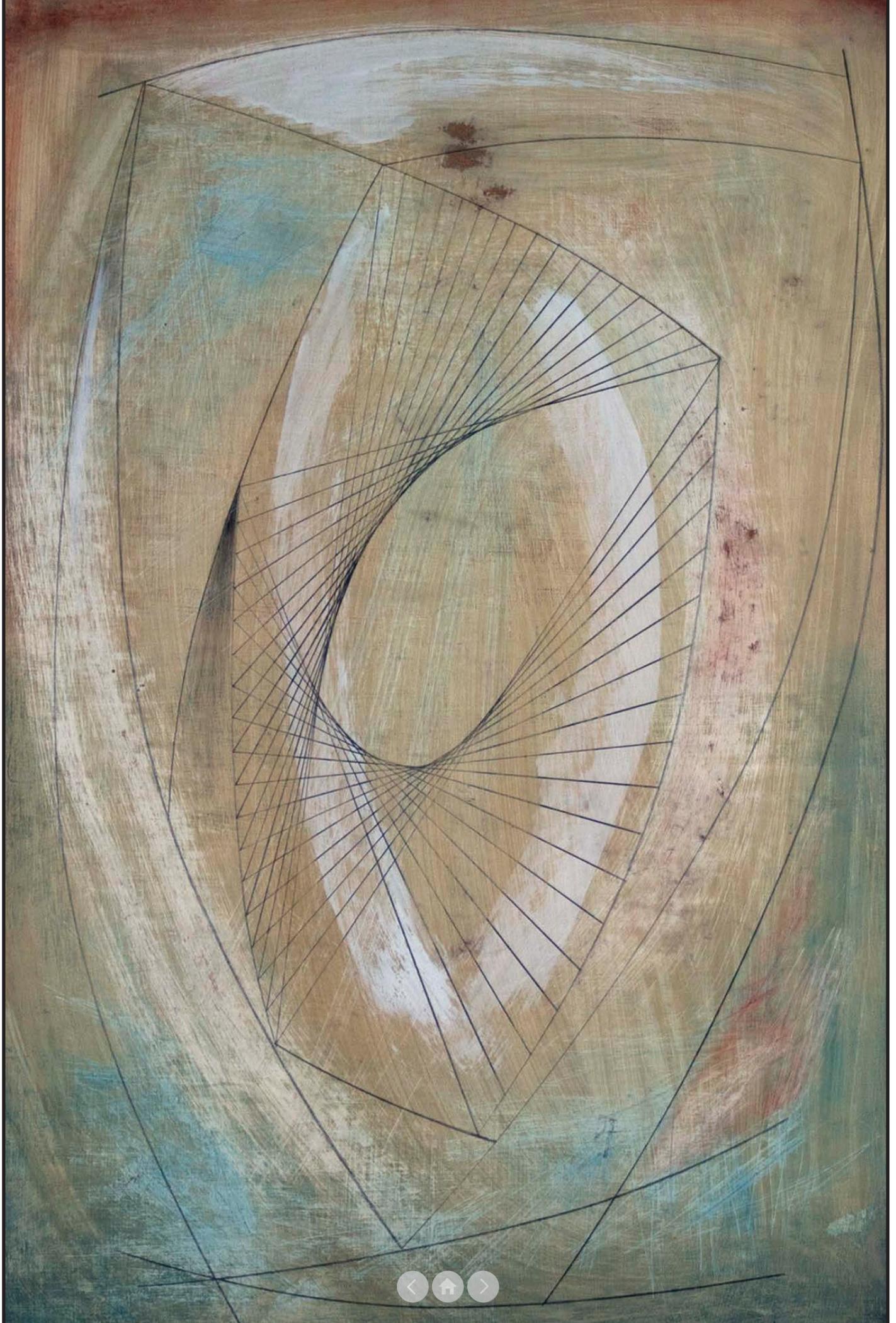
For while leadership is paramount in any organisation, owing to its global mandate and complexity, the leadership demands on the UN are uniquely challenging. Indeed, all organisations face trials but leadership failure in the UN compromises not only the individual leader

or a specific UN entity, but risks damaging the organisation and multilateral order as a whole. Therefore, the courage of principled leadership and, in particular, the courage and integrity to admit failures and act upon misconducts must be a respected and functional part of the UN leadership culture.

Our intention with this publication is to stimulate a broader conversation on how UN leadership culture, policies, and practices could be enhanced to ensure its relevance and strengthen its impact at a time when both the UN and multilateralism are being tested. It strives to support ongoing efforts within the UN to reinforce leadership through dialogue and training, and to complement our work to promote the integrity of the international civil servant.

Looking at UN leadership as an art – it should be possible to frame the quality of what's *'blue'*. This publication is an attempt in doing so by providing a gallery of leadership sketches, illustrated with artwork from Dag Hammarskjöld's private art collection. It is our hope that this report will contribute to a creative dialogue and understanding of principled and effective leadership of the Charter – within and outside the UN.

Henrik Hammargren
Executive Director
Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation



Framing leadership in the context of the United Nations

Introduction

Leadership, like art, is a fluid and lived experience, making it hard to define. Yet, efforts to understand leadership and to diagnose, even perhaps remedy, what some refer to as the lack, or the *end* or even the *death* of leadership in today's world have only intensified over the past few years. The issue seems to be on everyone's mind. No sphere of human activity and no institution escape the interrogation, and perhaps nowhere else more than at the United Nations.

If, how and when the UN exercises leadership has always retained a prominent place in the thinking around the organisation. From drafting the UN Charter, building an independent international civil service, to adapting the organisation to changing global demands, the concept of leadership looms large.

Few would dispute that better leadership is essential for ensuring trust in the UN and in multilateralism, and for delivering more effective responses to today's global challenges. Indeed, despite significant achievements since the organisation's creation, public debate tends to focus on what is not delivered instead of what has been achieved. One reason is that the UN's reputation is harmed by self-inflicted wounds. Misconduct, including discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority, features in all organisations – and the UN is not spared. But the UN's failures at times to actively prevent and be accountable for its own lapses take on an added degree of gravity when set against the UN Charter, its own discourse and the expectations of people across the world. These failures undermine its ability to act, and they exacerbate distrust both in the UN, its value and in the multilateral system as the whole.

Both the source of the doubt and the answer lie with UN – its leadership culture and in leadership manifested by its professionals. Poor leadership explains, to some extent, why the UN at times under-delivers on its promise, and why people lose faith in the organisation.

The triptych: Converging factors of this report

The reason for this Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation report on UN leadership is based on three converging factors.

The first is historical. The year 2019 marked the centennial anniversary of the international civil servant and the birth of the League of Nations. Meanwhile in 2020, the UN celebrates its 75th anniversary. These commemorations remind us of the value of the multilateral system and the norms and principles on which it is based.

Second, strengthening leadership is at the core of the UN reform process aiming to uphold the UN Charter and effectively deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A critical element of this reform is the recently introduced *UN System Leadership Framework*, which constitutes 'a call to action and a call for change' for all UN personnel regardless of their level, duties and location. Labelled as a '*leadership vision*' this framework provides the entire organisation with a common reference to a value based leadership approach. It aims to create a leadership culture that stands ready to *prevent* instead of *react* and deliver on on all of the UN's mandates. In this regard, the current Secretary-General has repeated that the success of the reforms depends on the qualities of staff, and their ability to enable and

inspire transformational and behavioural change across mandates and areas of operation.¹

Third, and perhaps more importantly, the emphasis on leadership is happening at a time of turbulence for multilateralism, and for the UN in particular. Paradoxically, in a time where governments call for and enter multilateral agreements on global development, climate change and migration developed by and through the UN, they are simultaneously challenging the UN as a central actor for advancing collective solutions to public and global goods by questioning mandates and reducing and earmarking funding to UN operations.

This context provides the rationale for this report, and the growing demand for informed discussions on leadership pervades its contributions. The aim is to frame the bigger picture of UN leadership and to present experiences and ideas that speak to both its reality and potential.

Five precepts of UN leadership

To make a case for the relevance of UN leadership in today's world, it is imperative to link it to the realities of the increasingly global world we live in – its complexity, diversity and its modernity. To argue that it can inspire people to act for transformative change, it is also imperative to look at it as a lived experience and go beyond statements of intent and declarations. Together, these imperatives provide the overall framing for this report. Within this framing, it explores the different *elements of leadership* through five starting points.

The first is the UN organisation and its mandate. Leadership in the UN system is characterised by the responsibility to uphold the UN Charter as expressed in the 'Oath of Office'. Leaders in the UN must act in the midst of and in response to endemic poverty, climate change, armed conflicts and human rights violations in a global system influenced by geopolitical interests. Actions to uphold the UN Charter and implement mandates given by Member States often meet resistance from exactly these actors themselves. The magnitude of this contradiction deserves recognition for being unique and for placing extreme demands on UN leadership.

Secondly, any effort to examine the concept and practice of leadership must recognise that no one has a monopoly of knowledge over it, and even less so in an organisation as complex and diverse as the UN. The report was therefore conceptualised and developed as a platform for different voices and viewpoints. It builds on individual text contributions and an *'eye of the beholder'* approach, recognising that what constitutes leadership for one person may not hold true for someone else. Hence, it does not offer one standard definition of leadership and

of related concepts, such as power, feminism, responsibility or identity, which a few pieces explore. It makes no claim to comprehensiveness either. The reader will find plenty to oppose or complement with his or her own understanding of many of the concepts featured in the report. Each contribution brings its own perspective, informed by the contributor's own experiences, sensibilities and temperament. Therefore, what the ensemble may lack in consistency and harmony, it compensates, we hope, with originality, diversity and constructive engagement.

A third precept is the important relationship between leadership and management. Management can, to a large extent, be taught, learned and implemented. Leadership, encompasses and requires management – but goes beyond it. It is an art whose quality builds on ethics, integrity and courage to uphold values and norms – and this is especially true for the UN. This nuance notwithstanding, leadership of an organisation such as the UN must also be managed, as partly articulated in the UN System Leadership Framework.

Fourth, leadership is not a senior-level issue only. It is to be expected, sought and nurtured at all levels of the organisation: across grades, at headquarters and country level and whether the contract indicates the status of international or national staff. Therefore, contributions to this report were solicited from a wide range of UN professional profiles. Nor is leadership just about individual attributes or about individuals. The concept of collective and team leadership is therefore examined by several contributors, while others refer to how leadership by all can be *'enabled'*.

Finally, while it may be tempting to adopt a nostalgic approach, a *'what-would-Hammarskjöld-have-done'* attitude, work on leadership must firmly be anchored in today's realities and in tomorrow's possibilities. While past inspirations have their place and surface regularly in various pieces, the report avoids a *golden age* sentimentality. After all, Dag Hammarskjöld himself stated that our *'Your duty, your reward – your destiny – are here and now'*², not in past glories. The best way to heed his advice is to focus on the here and now, on our own responsibilities and capabilities, for remaining true to the UN Charter and living up to the expectations of the UN in today's world.

A curator's guide to this report

This report builds on 26 different contributions creating a palette of different ideas, stories and perspectives. The contributions are clustered in the following four chapters:

The first chapter – The landscape:

Painting the big picture begins with an exploration of what principled leadership at the United Nations means and how compromises can be managed. It continues with a call for 'multilateralism squared', looking at how UN leadership can build consensus to address global challenges. The chapter also focuses on compassionate leadership and the role of identity, as well as lawyers, in shaping leadership within the organisation. This chapter is complemented by interviews with three senior female UN leaders discussing the depth of leadership, integrity, and authentic and relatable UN leadership.

The second chapter – The portrait:

Rendering the individual contains vibrant stories of people who have exhibited inspiring UN leadership in places stretching from Myanmar to Guatemala, from Lebanon to Afghanistan. It looks at the dynamics between power and leadership and discusses, through a number of personal contributions, various leadership traits, in particular the importance of emotional intelligence, that distinguishes great leaders from merely good ones.

The third chapter – The abstract:

Innovating and breaking the mould begins with the premise that the UN is a unique ecosystem for leadership and innovation. Its wide palette addresses the role of UN leadership in building coalitions on the ground, the importance of collective leadership, the practice of feminist leadership and its relevance to the UN. It also explores the links between innovation and leadership, with a distinct hue provided by these perspectives, notably of members of the Young UN Network.

The fourth chapter – The still life:

Depicting current arrangements presents a brief and selective stocktaking of current leadership initiatives undertaken by the UN Secretariat and a group of UN agencies, funds and programmes following the adoption of the UN System Leadership Framework. This thematic chapter ends with a slightly different approach, using data related to the UN's current human resources as a means to reveal underlying leadership realities, revisit assumptions and uncover unexamined symptoms of ailing leadership, recognising that some numbers can speak volumes.

Rather than offering specific recommendations, the conclusion highlights a number of observations and messages from the four chapters to further stimulate collective thinking on UN leadership, its forms and functions and the means to enhance it.

The end of leadership?

In her book, *The End of Leadership*, Barbara Kellerman, decries the growing gap between leadership theory and how it is understood and practiced by authors and consultants of the leadership and management industry.³ Kellerman questions the extent to which leadership can be taught, which for the purpose of this report underscores the challenges that implementation of leadership is faced with. While it is possible to surmise how contributors to this report relate to the question in a UN context, this report does not provide a simple answer.

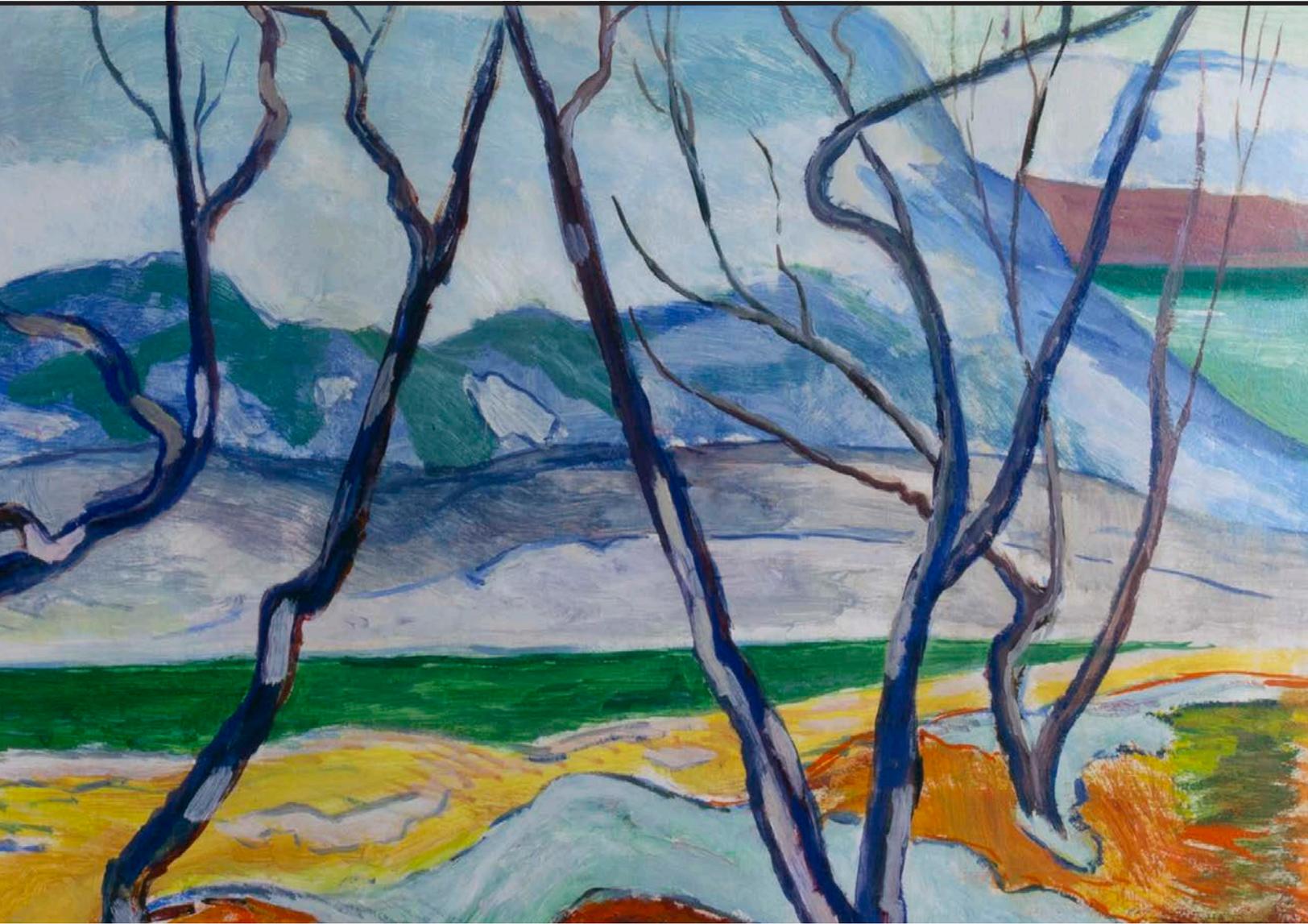
However, it does show that leadership certainly can be *thought* – with passion and sincerity, including by the people who chose to write about it for this publication because they care about the future of the United Nations. We believe that their contributions convey a degree of awareness, knowledge and inspiration that should contribute to further strengthening the promise and the practice of UN leadership.

Endnotes

¹ For further reading on the UN System Leadership Framework, see Chapter One, where Craig Mokhiber describes the process that led to the creation of the framework. Meanwhile, Chapter Four provides a status update on the implementation of the framework from the perspective of a few UN departments and entities.

² Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden (transl), (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 157.

³ Barbara Kellerman, *The End of Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).



The landscape: Painting the big picture

Chapter One

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The price of compromise: Principled leadership at the United Nations

By Craig Mokhiber

Craig Mokhiber is the Director of the New York Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and former Co-Chair of the UN Working Group on Leadership. An international lawyer and specialist in human rights law, policy and methodology, he has spent three decades in service to the UN, holding leadership positions in New York, Geneva and in the field. Before joining the UN, he worked as a non-governmental organisation activist, a human rights advocate, and a lawyer in private practice.

This article is written in Craig Mokhiber's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

When Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld presented his annual report on the work of the United Nations in 1960¹, he was approaching the final year of his second term in office and, tragically, of his life. Throughout his service at the helm of the UN, he had been engaged in a struggle with powerful states to define the very essence of the organisation and of the Secretariat in particular. For Hammarskjöld, the organisation could not rightly be viewed as merely a global conference centre or standing machinery of negotiation, and it was not the job of the Secretariat to act as executor of the will of any state or group of states. Rather, the United Nations was a constitutional organisation, established to give effect to a set of principles and norms, as defined in its Charter and in international law more broadly. He believed that all organs of the UN were bound to defend those norms and principles, lest the very idea of the United Nations be caused to wither over time, and, with it, the organisation itself. Hammarskjöld put it this way:

It is my firm conviction that any result bought at the price of a compromise with the principles and ideals of the Organization, either by yielding to force, by disregard of justice, by neglect of common interests or by contempt for human rights, is bought at too high a price. That is so because a compromise with its principles and purposes weakens the Organization in a way representing a definite loss for the future that cannot be balanced by any immediate advantage achieved.²

The UN's second Secretary-General had already discerned a tension at the heart of the UN experiment that was so fundamental that it would continue to affect leadership discussions within the organisation under its (now) ninth Secretary-General. Sixty years later, this struggle, both within the organisation and outside of it, between those who hold the principles of the Charter

as paramount and those who take a more deferential and pragmatic approach to state power, continues to rage. It is precisely this struggle that has most driven the debate within the organisation on what it means to be a UN leader.

Norm-based leadership

Nowhere has this tension been more evident than in matters of human rights – the promotion of which is one of the three principal purposes of the organisation, as defined by the Charter. For decades, UN leaders, both those working in development or peacekeeping at country level and those engaged in diplomacy and advocacy at the global level, were caught between a duty to defend UN norms on the one hand, and, on the other, pressure from governments (especially host governments) to refrain from critiquing abuses. And the pressure was real. Where governments have resented UN commentary on rights abuses, peace negotiations have been stalled, dialogue has been cut off, development projects have been threatened, humanitarian access restricted, and UN officials declared *persona non grata*.

The result was predictable. Some UN leaders simply avoided engaging directly on human rights issues. Some even remained silent in the face of wide-spread violations. Still others actively discouraged the flow of human rights information between the country level and UN human rights mechanisms in Geneva. Civil society actors were locked out, the pleas of vulnerable communities left unanswered, and the local reputation of the organisation sometimes left in tatters.

But there was another story: that of the many others who held the line, maintaining principled, norm-based and constructive engagement with government counterparts even in the most difficult of circumstances. These UN leaders honed their skills in human rights diplomacy, brought in support from the UN human rights office³, made use of the independent special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council (and its predecessor, the Commission), used technical cooperation as an entry point for human rights dialogue, worked with domestic reform constituencies, and deployed skilled public advocacy. These were the incubators of UN leadership that would lead to several successive waves of leadership reform in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Two decades of reform

In spite of the principled leadership of many within the UN system, in other cases, old, more deferential approaches by others continued to stymie effective UN action in crisis situations around the world. Unhelpful pressure from host countries and powerful states sometimes had the effect of silencing principled interventions, dividing UN actors on the ground and at headquarters, marginalising those ringing the alarm, and generally stalling more principled UN action. Confronted by large-scale atrocities in Rwanda, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Myanmar and beyond, UN peace missions and UN Country Teams were subjected to enormous pressures designed to silence them in their norm-based assessments and programming, as well as their advocacy, both public and private.

The system was split between those who urged flexible standards of *'political expediency'*, a transactional defence of humanitarian access, or the ring-fencing of ongoing development projects, and those who instead argued that, in the face of large-scale atrocities, any such trade-offs were morally unjustifiable, a breach of Charter responsibilities, and ultimately, self-defeating, as any arguments about sustainable peace, development or humanitarian protection are rendered meaningless in the face of civilian slaughter. At the same time, norm-based advocates argued, the reputational harm to the organisation would undercut the organisation's long-term effectiveness. The UN must speak up, they insisted, telling governments not just what they want to hear, but what they need

to know, and alerting the broader public to the danger of unfolding events. For this to happen, human rights would need to be more deliberately and effectively mainstreamed across the work of the organisation.

Thus, beginning in the late 1990s, the organisation underwent a series of policy and operational reforms designed to more systematically inject attention to human rights into the work of its peacekeepers, development professionals and humanitarian actors. The first wave came with a set of reforms launched by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1997, organising the Secretariat around four work streams (peace and security, economic and social affairs, humanitarian affairs and development, respectively) and mandating that human rights were to be explicitly and systematically mainstreamed throughout all four tracks.⁴ Successive efforts launched by Annan in 2002⁵ and 2005⁶ further advanced these objectives. Key system-wide policies issued between 2000 and 2015 included official human rights guidance for UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams in 2000 (*UN Guidelines on Human Rights for the Resident Coordinator System*)⁷, for UN integrated missions in 2005 (*UN Policy on Human Rights in Integrated Missions*)⁸, for the UN development system in 2008 (*UN Policy on Human Rights and Development*)⁹, for all peacekeeping missions and special political missions in 2011¹⁰, establishing human rights due diligence standards for all UN actors engaging non-UN security forces in 2011 (*UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy*)¹¹, mandating human rights screening for all UN personnel in 2012 (*UN Human Rights Screening Policy*)¹², and prioritising effective and coordinated human rights action for all UN actors at all duty stations, particularly where there is a risk of wide-scale violations in 2013 (*UN Human Rights Up Front Policy and Plan of Action*)¹³.

A harvest of principles: The new UN leadership model

As the effect of those policies filtered through the system, more UN personnel from every work stream (beyond the UN human rights programme), including political affairs and peacekeeping, development and humanitarian affairs, were empowered to more systematically integrate human rights considerations into their engagement with governments and other stakeholders, to adopt rights-based programming approaches and to undertake direct human rights advocacy with government counterparts. And yet, fundamental divisions on approach within the UN system persisted, and occasional UN leadership failures in the face of large-scale violations continued to occur. Simply put, UN action had not kept pace with developments in UN policy.

Part of the problem was that the embrace of the various policies adopted in this field was not universal

among the UN leadership. As a result, mixed signals were sent to staff and government counterparts alike. What was needed was a clear, official articulation of what was expected from UN leaders – and one that reflected the normative imperatives that underpinned the evolving policy framework.

The task for developing this fell to the UN Working Group on Leadership¹⁴, a cross-pillar, interagency body that included representatives of the agencies and departments responsible for development, peace and security, humanitarian affairs and human rights. In a two-year process of consultation and development, the Working Group harvested key principles from the Charter, UN normative instruments and from the policy framework described above, and translated these into a new UN System Leadership Framework¹⁵, effectively codifying what was expected of UN leaders at every duty station, and at every level.

According to the Framework, UN leadership is *norm-based*, that is, grounded in UN norms and standards, and all UN leaders are duty-bound to defend these in every case. It is *principled*, in that UN norms and standards must be defended without discrimination, fear or favour, even in the face of pressure from governments, and that UN leaders must never turn a blind eye to violations of human rights and humanitarian law, war crimes, crimes against humanity, corruption, discrimination, environmental degradation or other abuses, regardless of (in-avoidable) pressures to remain silent. It is *inclusive* of all personnel and stakeholders irrespective of age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, grade, contractual status and other personal characteristics. It is *accountable*, mutually within the UN system, and to beneficiaries and the public beyond, recognising that ultimate accountability is to the people that the UN serves – especially the most vulnerable, excluded or marginalised. It is *multi-dimensional*, recognising that the three pillars of the UN Charter (peace and security, human rights and development) are interdependent and therefore must be integrated. It is *transformational*, of the UN and those it serves, recognising that the mission of the UN is not to defend the status quo, but rather to achieve positive change – to bring greater peace and security, human rights, economic and social progress and development and a healthier environment. It is *collaborative*, within and beyond the UN system, with states as well as with civil society, local communities, and the marginalised and excluded within them. It is *self-applied*, that is, not just promoted by UN leaders to others, but modelled in the behaviour of every UN leader, through respectful conduct, gender sensitivity, support for diversity and fairness. And it is *pragmatic* and *action-oriented*, taking principled and practical action to deliver on mandates, balancing

administrative and operational risks and erring on the side of action to prevent and address human suffering.¹⁶

Current UN Secretary-General António Guterres described these as

‘the defining characteristics [of UN leadership] determined to be essential to fulfilling the Organization’s core mandate to promote peace and security, protect human rights, address humanitarian needs and advance the imperatives of economic and social progress set out in the 2030 Agenda’.

And all UN leaders were to be held accountable for them. Aware of the risks that the Framework, like the previous norm-based policies, could become dead letter in some parts of the organisation, he instructed the integration of the Framework into all leadership and management staff selection decisions at all levels, as well as into leadership orientation, training, mentoring and coaching programmes across the Secretariat. Crucially, he decided that a 360-degree evaluation mechanism was to be developed around the nine qualities with specific measurements included in the senior leadership compacts of all heads of departments, offices, regional commissions and missions. Periodic staff surveys would be conducted by the Secretariat to monitor staff perceptions of their leadership and managers, and measures would be introduced both to recognise excellent leaders and managers, and to hold accountable those who fail to uphold the principles of the Framework. Finally, all leadership and management development programmes for staff at senior levels as well as the competency-based framework for staff selection were to be adjusted to reflect the new UN System Leadership Framework.¹⁷

Accountability, independence and the challenges ahead

One of the most important elements of this new leadership framework is its explicit recognition of a concept of accountability that goes beyond bureaucratic accountability to organisational hierarchy, intergovernmental bodies and Member States, that is, forms of accountability most subject to political control. The new framework instead prioritises normative accountability (to the constitutional norms of the organisation, as codified in its Charter, treaties and declarations), and accountability to the people that the organisation serves, especially those most marginalised or vulnerable among them. In doing so, the new model further empowers individual UN leaders to defend the organisation’s principles – and its beneficiaries – in the face of pressure from host governments and powerful states to remain silent. Under the new Framework, standing up for the norms of the organisation, and the vulnerable and victims that they protect, is not only permitted – it is required of UN leaders.

But delivering on that obligation will not be easy. In situations of emerging crisis, many states can be expected to continue to use every possible point of leverage to push back against principled UN engagement on behalf of vulnerable groups and individuals, and to prevent human rights critique of their institutions, their armed forces, and their allies. In such cases, a vigorous defence of the organisation's values is essential. But so too is a defence of the independence of the Secretariat. Hammarskjöld himself was intensely committed to such independence, and painfully aware of the challenges in securing it. In 1953, he wrote

'the right of the Secretariat to full independence, as laid down in the Charter, is an inalienable right. But it can only be defended on the basis of full recognition by every staff member of his own unlimited obligation to remain politically independent'.¹⁸

Today, there are two principal obstacles to securing the degree of independence necessary to ensure consistent application of the Charter's values in politically charged circumstances:

1. a budgetary process that allows Member States to punish Secretariat entities for pressing human rights concerns, and
2. a process for senior appointments (Under-Secretary-General/Assistant Secretary-General) based principally on political and politicised considerations, rather than on open competition based on merit, as is the case for all other positions up to the Director level, and thus drawing senior leaders directly from powerful member governments.

The former obstacle explains the telling situation whereby the promotion of human rights is one of the three principal purposes of the organisation, while this function garners only about three-percent of the overall budget.

The latter has evolved in such a way that, today, the leadership positions of most Secretariat departments are effectively divvied up between the governments of

the five permanent members of the Security Council¹⁹, with government nominees shepherded directly into the senior-most posts of each.²⁰

Correcting these two critical shortcomings by

1. ring-fencing individual budget lines to insulate human rights action from direct political pressure, by
2. moving to a senior appointments process based on open, competitive, merit-based selection, and by
3. generally reinforcing the firewall between the Secretariat and the governments of individual Members States, would be essential to securing the level of Secretariat independence necessary to foster the vision of principled, norm-based leadership that is rooted in the Charter of the organisation, personified by Dag Hammarskjöld, and elaborated in the new, 21st Century UN System Leadership Framework.

Conclusion

The UN is no mere conference centre, no venue for the lowest common denominator, no morally neutral entity built to accommodate any state position, no matter how destructive to human dignity, or human progress. Rather, the organisation is constitutionally bound by its Charter to take sides – on behalf of human rights, equality, peace and sustainable development. Remaining true to that mandate requires leaders across the organisation who are ready to defend the norms, standards and principles of the organisation – and the peoples that it serves – even, indeed especially, in the face of pressure from governments and other powerful actors. The new UN leadership model, explicitly based on the norms of the organisation and on the hard-learned experience of UN leaders on the ground, offers new hope for a strengthened UN leadership dedicated not to political expediency, resignation to the status quo, or deference to power, but rather to the UN's founding mission:

'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', 'to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights', and 'to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom'.²¹

Endnotes

¹ United Nations Secretary-General, 'Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization', (Report of the Secretary-General, Official Records of the Fifteenth Session, Supplement No. IA (A/4390/Add.1), June 1960).

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³ Formally, since 1993, the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* (OHCHR) and, prior to that, the *United Nations Centre for Human Rights*.

⁴ See United Nations Secretary-General, 'Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/51/950, 14 July 1997).

⁵ See United Nations Secretary-General, 'Strengthening of the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/57/387, 9 September 2002).

⁶ See United Nations Secretary-General, 'In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/59/2005, 21 March 2005).

⁷ Adopted by the UN Development Group and the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 2000, and then revised and reissued in 2015 as United Nations Development Group, Guidance Note on Human Rights for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams (2015).

⁸ UN Policy Committee decision 2005/24.

⁹ UN Policy Committee decision 2008/18.

¹⁰ Joint policy adopted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the Department for Political Affairs (DPA) and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in 2011.

¹¹ Adopted by the UN Policy Committee in 2011.

¹² UN Policy Committee decision 2012/18.

¹³ United Nations Secretariat, 'Human Rights up Front Action Plan', (plan, UNDP, 2013).

¹⁴ The Working Group reported to the UN Development Group (UNDG) and, through it, to the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB), but was composed of a cross-pillar membership that went beyond the development field and addressed UN leadership challenges more generally. During the first phase of this period, it was co-chaired by Craig Mokhiber and Jan Beagle, and in the final phase by John Hendra and Craig Mokhiber.

¹⁵ See 'The UN Leadership Model', (mechanism, UNDG, UN Working Group on Leadership, 2017), as endorsed by the UN Development Group (UNDG), and then endorsed as the '*UN Leadership Framework*' the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), and the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) in 2016, and by the Chief Executives Board (CEB) in 2017, and then incorporated in the management reforms of the Secretary-General in United Nations Secretary-General, 'Shifting the Management Paradigm in the United Nations: Ensuring a Better Future for All', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/492, 27 September 2017), p7.

¹⁶ The final element of the model ('pragmatic and action oriented') was added by the Secretary-General himself when incorporating the Model into his management reform programme. See 'Shifting the Management Paradigm in the United Nations: Ensuring a Better Future for All', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/492, 27 September 2017), paragraph 17.

¹⁷ 'Shifting the Management Paradigm in the United Nations: Ensuring a Better Future for All', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/492, 27 September 2017), paragraphs 18-19.

¹⁸ <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/dag/time1953.htm>

¹⁹ China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States, respectively. The usual breakdown is China for development, France for peacekeeping, Russia for counter-terrorism and/or criminal justice, the UK for humanitarian affairs and the US for political affairs.

²⁰ One key exception among the principal Secretariat Departments (thus far) has been human rights. The post of High Commissioner for Human Rights has been held by appointees from seven different countries, including two ambassadors, two ex-presidents, two senior judges and one career UN civil servant. Even so, the appointment process is heavily political, and state pressure on successive Secretaries-General (for or against particular nominees) has been significant.

²¹ 'Preamble', *Charter of the United Nations*. 1945.

New York: United Nations, Office of Public Information.

Leadership not by title

Interview with Kanni Wignaraja

Having worked and served as a senior leader at Headquarters and at country level, Kanni Wignaraja has significant experience in leading the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) global, regional and country programme portfolios. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation sat down with her to discuss her views on UN leadership.

When you think about UN leadership, what immediately comes to your mind?

I identify the best of UN leadership with people who can speak to ideas that make things better for people who need us most, and then act on them. For me, UN leadership is about standing up for what we believe in and trying to change the world, even if in very small ways, for the better. No matter where you come from, your first instinct is to improve people's lives.

What is unique about UN leadership, and distinct from leadership more generally, or in other 'industries' and organisations?

Clearly our values. The UN Charter is our DNA, and it is this 'belief system' that drives us towards that bigger purpose. 'Doing no harm' is not enough. When you join the UN, you join this common belief system no matter where you come from, and the identities you carried with you.

What does it mean to be a UN leader to you; what specific traits do you think a UN leader needs today?

First, a leader is not just defined by a title. Everyone can be a leader in their own way. A key trait of UN leadership to me is to have courage and to be brave when it comes to standing up for what you believe in and to stand up for others, even when their opinions differ, but where they need you on their side.

A leader must have empathy, at an individual level, and at a larger social level. A good leader in the UN, therefore,

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Kanni Wignaraja was interviewed in her personal capacity and the article does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

works for the greater public good. And keeps trying, even when one gets blocked, as one often does along the way.

I also think a true leader is deeply knowledgeable and is moved by his/her area of expertise and has the capability to convey that. It helps to connect, when people see that you both know *and* you care. I have always been inspired by such leaders. You connect immediately to someone who is persuasive, knows the evidence and can also speak from the heart, rather than those who read out a prepared statement.

This conversation reminds me of an article from the Harvard Business Review, *In Praise of the Incomplete Leader*.¹ It exposes the *myth* that any single leader needs to be complete, flawless and have everything figured out. It carries an important message: good leaders recognise that they *are* incomplete. And hence cultivate and bring together others who are unlike them, to work together to make a more 'complete' team.

Only when we as leaders no matter at what level, come to see ourselves as incomplete – as having both strengths and weaknesses – will we be able to make up for our

missing skills by relying on others. A leader does well not to recruit people who are just like herself, but on the contrary, a good leader surrounds herself with people who are different and complement the team. It's interesting to look around the UN teams today, to see which ones look this way.

I have been truly fortunate to have worked with amazing women leaders when I first joined UNDP at a very young age. Early on, my then Executive Director decided that I should lead a tough country mission. The UN Representative in the country called to complain that such a young person had been sent to do the job. My Director stood by her decision, and by me, and was clear in her support. I have always remembered this and try and do the same for young colleagues as they begin their journeys. Role models have been key.

Can you give us examples of extraordinary UN leadership that you have witnessed – leadership that went beyond good management?

A great example of the UN showing strong leadership, at individual level and as a whole, was in the early response to the AIDS crisis. No one had the full science at the very beginning. No one knew exactly what was going on, and how great the challenge was going to be. Many in the UN were concerned about getting too involved and said leave it to others. And yet, the Head of my UNDP team at the time said we had to jump in and do what we can to help families and communities already devastated by this epidemic. She involved us in the decisions on who wanted to get involved and understood those who did not. And she led this team effort from the front. She was fearless, driven by trying to make even a small difference to ease the suffering we could see around us (in Southern and Eastern Africa, where we were). We were also driven by a sense of justice. She told me that if you didn't believe in a sense of justice, one should not work for the UN. This stuck with me.

Decades ago, there was a small scientific community at the UN and outside who worked together and studied the very real threats of climate change. Nobody wanted to believe them, but *they* believed that it was an issue that needed the world's attention. They kept pushing the agenda, calling for the UN and its members to take climate change seriously. It has taken such a long time to get the world to listen. But they were tireless and showed persistence in the face of daunting resistance – these are extraordinary leadership traits.

I think this can also be said for those working with the Ebola crisis. Or before that with SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). And during and after wars and disasters, and in so many lesser known difficult situations. It's also what it takes to stand for the rights of margin-

alised groups. UN colleagues have always been there, working in trying conditions, and doing their best to make things even just a bit better for those hit hardest. In my book, these are true UN Leaders.

What concrete measures could be taken to strengthen the practice of leadership at the UN and/or to promote leadership at the UN?

I think we need to be better in expressing a sense of collective or team leadership. And to value it more, and hence intentionally recognise and cultivate such traits. It is often done by rewarding these leaders and learning from them. I don't think we do it enough.

Making sure we protect a balance – of being happy and safe at work and outside – and doing so for ourselves and our teams. This is also a practice of good leadership that could be promoted more. Good leaders care about their teams, beyond being a high-performing workforce.

We could do with more self-reflection on our leadership style and skills. That means carving out some time and space to have the conversations. Being able to listen is a great trait – listening to young staff members and taking in their ideas and concerns; and also absorbing the wisdom of the older colleagues and understanding what they know. It helps to stop and ask, '*what can I do to create more open spaces to discuss and to energise those around me with these shared values that have kept me motivated all these years?*', so we don't lose sight of them along the way. I think we may just get more from these exchanges than sitting through traditional leadership trainings and online lectures.

Endnote

¹ Deborah Ancona, Thomas W. Malone, Wanda J. Orlikowski, Peter M. Senge, 'In Praise of the Incomplete Leader' (article, Harvard Business Review, February 2007), <https://hbr.org/2007/02/in-praise-of-the-incomplete-leader>

The burning priority for UN leadership?

By Ben Majekodunmi

$$\frac{M^2 + UN}{L^2} = X$$

The crucial first question when querying UN leadership is to ask what the world most needs from the UN? Amid the cascading threats of climate change, protests at broken social contracts and the anger of those *left behind* and fears of those *ahead*, a new era of global crisis has begun. The world's future hangs on delivering a quality of governance not seen since the end of the Second World War; it is a race against time¹ to do so again before another such global reckoning. In this light, the UN leadership priority today, particularly for Under-Secretaries-General (USGs) heading departments and Resident Coordinators (RCs) leading the UN at country level, is to support such governance and help build the consensus needed to deliver it. But the UN is not well-positioned for such a role, and its leadership capacity remains heavily invested in traditional activities, like programmes: UN programmes save lives, but they will not save the world. Leadership by the UN of a new multilateralism and a new *'leadership offer'* may be a way forward.

The tremendous governance challenge

The epic struggles of our time are for the climate and equality, and the myriad other concerns to which they are linked – from armed conflict to overcrowded cities. The substantive issues are increasingly well-known, but there is far less discussion on the governance difficulties they pose. Two broad governance challenges stand out.

First, the sheer complexity of governance required. The issues are so closely linked that they can be said to merge at a governance crossroads requiring *whole of government* decisions to simultaneously address multiple issues that all affect each other – each domino effect begets a new line of falling dominoes. For instance, we now know many more cities will be below high-tide by 2050² than

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This article is written in Ben Majekodunmi's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

previously thought, forcing many people, especially the poor, out. But the same tides will carry salt-water far inland, up tidal rivers, polluting vast tracts of farm land and forcing poor rural populations to seek livelihoods in adjacent cities. We are unable to support today's 70 million displaced, yet the number may rise twentyfold.³ A vast international focus on terrorism often ignores the underlying issues of inequality and discrimination. The Paris and subsequent climate agreements and Agenda 2030 require governments to adopt unprecedented global policy shifts in energy, defence, agriculture, industry, transport, commerce, education, employment, housing, water use and more, which will themselves pose huge governance challenges. If mitigating climate change requires a vast reduction in global beef and dairy use⁴ then it also requires new livelihoods for millions of workers in those industries. To be effective, governance must unite local, national, multilateral, public and private sector actors, but finding a common framework for them all is very hard. The fragility of our legal,

economic and political ecosystems render governance harder still.

Second, the challenge of ensuring consensus among states and Peoples for governance framed by human rights and a common good, because these are vital to addressing climate change, inequality and related concerns, and ensuring peoples are on-board with governance solutions. There is a deep moral imperative for human rights-based governance. There is a practical imperative: human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals together offer a map for governance. There is also a political imperative: if peoples are not reassured that their rights and future are protected then their lack of buy-in, or even mass protests, will undermine governance to stop global crises.

However, actions by governments in all regions show that there is a profound lack of political consensus on human rights in governance. Governments are squeezed in a vice between meeting immediate demands of domestic political constituents and long-term demands on climate change and a global good. There is an even deeper lack of popular consensus among Peoples – their divisions scraped raw by inequality and hate speech. Governance must respond not only to those *left behind*, in the words of Agenda 2030, but also to those who are *ahead* and who fear that the advance of others comes at their expense. The *left behind* in wealthy nations seek domestic governance solutions that may leave peoples in poorer nations even further behind. Multilateral governance also lacks such consensus. Multilateral institutions remain focused on economic rather than human progress and keep human rights at arms-length. The *Least Developed* of the G77 are pressured to balance budgets at the expense of social funding, fueling inequality and insecurity. States distrust multilateral processes so much that they feel compelled to vote in regional blocs, even if doing so goes against national and global interests. Only a small minority of states are active in multilateralism – the offer of the *missing majority* to a common good is lost. Government leaders are not solicited or rewarded for leadership that serves all Peoples.

The result of both sets of challenges is devastating to the prospects for governance on global crisis. The world may be nearing a tipping-point, not just on climate change but also on political and social stability. Without transformation in governance and consensus there is no path to overcome the catastrophic risks ahead. There is no more important UN leadership role.

UN leadership – struggling to keep pace with a changing world

The UN's broad mandate, universal membership, normative human rights-based Charter and commitment to lift all Peoples and States are exactly the governance support

that governments and multilateral institutions need. The UN leadership priority today – especially for USGs and RCs – should be building consensus and positioning the UN at the governance crossroads. It is here that the UN can best support climate change mitigation and Agenda 2030. And, at a time when peace and security, development and human rights are largely one and the same, it is here too that the leverage for prevention and early resolution of conflict lies. There are three broad obstacles to a future UN contribution along these lines.

First, the UN lacks capacities, political support and influence for broad leadership in national and multilateral governance. The UN leads in many individual fields, but dispersion of its capacities across many entities is such that – aside from the Secretary-General and Deputy – the UN is rarely able to lead in broad governance across multiple issues, negating the value of the UN's broad offer. UN leaders often lack the political support needed to play a major role at the governance crossroads: States' strong support for UN Special Representatives (SRSGs) on conflicts is not replicated for RCs, even though RCs will increasingly deal with situations that are just as serious, and sometimes more complex because of the wider range of issues and actors. The UN's continuing focus on programmes as its main instrument raises a core question as to the best use of the UN's limited resources: UN programme budgets in most countries are far too small to make a dent on climate change or Agenda 2030.

Similarly, UN influence on governance decisions is diminished: past UN pre-eminence in multilateralism, technical cooperation and programmes is today overshadowed by the roles and vastly greater financial contributions of many other actors.⁵ And, the UN lacks a means for systematic engagement with local government, especially municipalities which will soon govern most of the global population. The core of UN failures in Sri Lanka⁶ and Myanmar were not unique to conflict but rather emblematic of UN difficulty in positioning itself at the governance crossroads and positively influencing decision-making without having a Security Council mandate.

Second, the UN lacks capacities and political support for leadership in building political and popular consensus. The UN is hardwired to focus on Peoples in the greatest need, whereas to build popular consensus it needs instead to speak to Peoples more broadly, including those statistically *'ahead'*. The categorisation of UN mandates into three pillars of peace and security, development and human rights is outdated and fragments rather than unites UN consensus-building. There is no single comprehensive UN methodology to implement the Charter's vision for people's lives – from peace to rights, tolerance and economic and social advancement.⁷ Staff instead work across many disparate concepts – violent

extremism, rule of law, sustaining peace, humanitarian-development nexus, prevention, resilience, peacebuilding, protection and more. Without the full political and organisational support for a governance role, RCs must deploy jiu-jitsu-like skills to build even mediocre political and popular consensus for UN goals beyond only programmes. And these efforts can leave RCs exposed and far short of the leverage needed to ensure that governance decisions address inequalities and prevent conflict. The task facing RCs will become exponentially more complex as situations worsen. The UN's development reforms and Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) are making welcome progress in strengthening RC roles, but they cannot alone make up for broader weaknesses and limited Member State political support.

Third, the UN's international civil service framework is inadequate for today's challenge. There is no shared UN culture to give staff a common understanding of global problems. USG heads of department often feel compelled to focus narrowly on their own mandates, rather than linking with multiple mandates and the UN Charter. Given the lack of political consensus among states on human rights, much of the UN system remains uncomfortable with whether and how to reflect human rights in its work. The statutory guidance to staff does not help: terms like *'efficiency, competence, and integrity'*, *'loyalty, discretion, and conscience'* and *'the interests of the United Nations'*⁸ can seem irrelevant alongside global suffering and risks facing UN leaders. Even the words of Dag Hammarskjöld are today wanting: he said that the UN is mandated to have an opinion, a voice, and discretion in implementing the Charter, all exercised with integrity and independence⁹ as part of an essential *internationalism*.

But this guidance does not position UN leaders for the role now required, or illicit courage. The UN training on *Competency Based Interviews* to recruit new staff is devoid of any reference to people and UN responsibilities. Even the guiding principles for the international civil service are inconsistent on human rights.¹⁰

A revised UN leadership model?

In short, there is a conundrum. The world urgently needs UN leadership on governance and building on consensus around human rights to deconflict governments' and peoples' views. Instead, in most contexts UN leaders lack the political support from states and internal operational modalities needed to fully play such roles. Revising the UN leadership role could comprise two broad elements.

First, the UN could lead in designing a revitalised multilateralism – known as M^2 ('multilateralism squared') in recognition of its multiple dimensions. M^2 must not be

seen in opposition to nationalism, patriotism or sovereignty, but rather supportive of them. M^2 could:

- *Unite public, private, local, national and multilateral actors as partners* – because only this coalition has the reach and vast resources needed to address global crisis.
- *Be based on governance framed by the protection of human dignity and rights* – because addressing global crisis can only be achieved if all states and Peoples are lifted.
- *Support all states to participate as full actors in multilateralism* – because building the best consensus and governance requires greater universality in multilateral decisions.
- *Solicit a global leadership ethic from heads of government* – because individuals in these senior-most positions can transform governance and consensus faster than anyone.

Second, the UN could adjust its 'leadership offer' – L^2 – in ways that secure Member States' political support for RCs and other UN leaders in a strengthened governance role. L^2 could:

- *Position the UN at the governance crossroads and work to reconcile views and influence governance decisions* – because this is where UN leadership can make the most difference.
- *Offer governments new support in securing domestic outcomes (eg with 'whole of government' decisions and getting the best from multilateral engagement)* – because this improves governance and secures trust and good will for a broader UN governance role.
- *Propose that governments enable RCs to fill some roles similar to SRSGs (currently limited to peace and security) for problems related to the nexus of climate change, inequality and prevention* – because host governments would gain much more from the UN by trusting and empowering RCs in this way.
- *Engage Peoples more directly on issues of immediate importance to them* – because this helps the UN build consensus, prevent crisis and deliver governance solutions.
- *Reinvigorate the international civil service culture* – because this provides an enabling framework for staff of the UN and other multilateral institutions in addressing the crisis.
- *Build a new political and popular consensus on human rights* – because this is the single most important ingredient for governance to address the looming global crisis.

This equation may help critical reflection.

$$\frac{M^2 + UN}{L^2} = X$$

A new multilateralism (M^2) + adapted UN ÷ by new leadership (L^2) from both the UN and government heads = X, where X is the quality of governance and consensus needed to address global crisis and protect peoples.

Implementation would require changes to culture, selection and tasking of UN leaders. Most simply, the world needs the UN to help rebuild consensus on *human dignity* as a core purpose of governance. The 2019 Nobel winners for economics say it well:

*'Restoring human dignity to its central place ... sets off a profound rethinking of economic priorities and the ways in which societies care for their members ...'*¹¹

The UN is again called upon to offer the leadership that inspired its creation. Facing existential crisis, UN staff must be the international civil service and leaders the world needs.

Endnotes

¹ 'Emissions Gap Report', (report, UN Environment Programme, 2019). <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>

² Denise Lu and Christopher Flavelle, 'Rising Seas Will Erase More Cities by 2050, New Research Shows', (article, The New York Times, 29 October 2019). <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/29/climate/coastal-cities-underwater.html>

³ 'Groundswell: preparing for internal climate change migration', (report, World Bank, 2018), predicts 143m displaced by 2050 in three world regions alone, while Ben Currens and Charles Geisler, 'Impediments to inland resettlement under conditions of accelerated sea level rise', *Land Use Policy*, Volume 66, July 2017, pp 322-330 projects 1.4bn climate change displaced worldwide by 2060.

⁴ Elham Darbandi and Sayed Saghaian, 'Beef Consumption Reduction and Climate Change Mitigation', (Paper, Southern Agricultural Economics Association's 2018 Annual Meeting, February 2018). <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/36af/f04437d23e55dd916f60bf8bb6d80d06461a.pdf>

⁵ Eg In 2016 UN expenditure on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9 was US\$ 588, versus US\$ 130bn of infrastructure investment by IDBs.

⁶ Eg United Nations Secretary-General, 'Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka', (Report of the Secretary-General, ST(02)/R.425/Sri Lanka, United Nations Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka, November 2012).

⁷ 'Preamble', *Charter of the United Nations*, San Francisco, United Nations, 1945.

⁸ 'Article 101.3', *Charter of the United Nations*, San Francisco, United Nations, 1945 and the staff oath of office

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¹⁰ 'Conduct for the International Civil Service', (standards, United Nations, 2013). <https://icsc.un.org/Resources/General/Publications/standardsE.pdf>

¹¹ Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).

Authentic and relatable UN leadership

Interview with Fathiaa Abdalla

Having served the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for two decades in various capacities both in Headquarters and the field, Fathiaa Abdalla has managed diverse portfolios, provided able leadership and a practical, results-oriented approach in complex and demanding operations. She has built strong relationships with government interlocutors and others, consistently pursuing solutions for refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and the stateless in periods of political uncertainty and volatile security environments. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation had a conversation with Fathiaa Abdalla on her views on UN leadership.

When you think about the concept of ‘UN leadership’, what immediately comes to your mind?

UN leadership, I believe, embodies a visionary mindset with strategic insight. It is the ability to communicate the values of international humanitarian law and the principles of human rights, as well as its relevance for global cooperation, peace and stability.

In my view, a UN leader must be an inspiring advocate for humanity, justice, equality and the inclusion of all sectors of society.

What does it mean to be a UN leader to you; what specific traits do you think a UN leader needs today?

I think a UN leader must be humble and nimble, a good listener and able to make tough decisions and stand by them.

A UN leader needs to be flexible and fast on delivery. They should build constituencies, forge strong partnerships with others and make diversity and inclusion the strengths of the organisation, while safeguarding its integrity, reputation and identity.

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Fathiaa Abdalla was interviewed in her personal capacity and the article does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

Most importantly, a UN leader needs to have a human heart in order to be able to use power in a balanced way and to relate to all people – young and old, women, men and children. Having a sense of humour is also a much-appreciated quality.

In short, the UN leader of today is not only a manager, but also a fellow staff member who colleagues look up to as a model and mentor.

At the same time, for me, as a woman in a position of responsibility, leadership is about being myself, thinking ahead and being accountable for my decisions.

During my long career with UNHCR I have worked with managers who come across as natural leaders. They provide a vision and direction, think outside the box and are not bogged down by daily tasks. They are authentic, relatable individuals who, above all, care about others. I salute them with gratefulness.

What is unique about UN leadership, and distinct from leadership more generally, or in other 'industries' and organisations?

UN leadership reflects the values of international legal instruments signed and ratified by Member States. As such, it builds wider partnerships with private institutions, academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and the people we serve.

At the same time, it benefits from the UN system's unique advantages and is called to address particular challenges.

The greatest advantage of the UN is that it is present in every country in the world, and even though each one of its agencies specialises in a specific area, they all function under one system and with the new UN reform under one goal. As a result, different resources, experiences and points of view can be pulled together to deal with a great variety of issues, from climate change to large population movements. It is thanks to our capacity to mobilise the UN system that, when we are called in to save lives, we can go big fast, and always in line with humanitarian principles.

Furthermore, the UN does not only focus on addressing humanitarian and development issues, but it also has a role in building bridges and in helping maintain and restore peace, when required. However, ensuring that the organisation is perceived as neutral by all sides can be a challenge. Indeed, I see neutrality as an art: we carefully cultivate balanced relations with different actors, while remaining true to our values.

Can you give us examples of extraordinary UN leadership that you have witnessed - leadership that went beyond good management?

This is certainly for me the million-dollar question, as I have worked with many charismatic leaders during my tenure with UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies. I have had the privilege to collaborate with exceptional managers who acknowledged my contributions and taught me a lot about leadership. Even today, their example fills me with energy and helps me remain motivated.

For instance, about twenty years ago I went to work with refugees in a very remote area. From the moment I arrived there, my supervisor, who was the head of office, became my mentor, encouraging me to take on more responsibilities and to step out of my comfort zone. It was an eye-opening experience, not only because I realised how quickly I learned, but also because I was exposed to a different type of leadership.

That supervisor was one of the many people, including my previous Representatives, Directors of Bureaus and

senior management teams, who appreciated my work and gave me space to progress. For that reason, when I mentor staff, often women, I make sure to challenge and encourage them, so they can reach their goals. I find this aspect of my job so fulfilling that I mentor young people in my free time as well. I strongly believe that young professionals' voices offer a different perspective that helps diversify and renew organisations, such as the UN.

There are also many prominent UN leaders whom I admire. The late Secretary-General Kofi Annan was a remarkable man who could connect with people of all backgrounds and seniority levels. His leadership skills inspired many inside and outside the organisation, particularly those of us from Africa.

The late Ogata Sadako was the first and, so far, only female High Commissioner for Refugees and held the position for 10 years. She oversaw many large-scale emergency responses with courage and decisiveness that enabled her to take unprecedented decisions, such as providing a clear and predictable pathway for UNHCR's engagement in situations of internally displaced people. At the end of her term she correctly predicted that for UNHCR to remain relevant, it had to be quick, smart, effective and adaptable to a fast-changing environment.

António Guterres, the current Secretary-General of the United Nations and our former High Commissioner, stands out for his result-oriented mindset and clear vision. Notably, during his tenure, UNHCR took the lead in the protection of IDPs.

The current High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has used his extensive knowledge from years of service with the agency to find solutions to the challenges that refugees and UNHCR staff face. As a result, he and his executive team have made integrity, diversity and inclusion high priorities within the scope of our work.

What concrete measures could be taken to strengthen the practice of leadership at the UN and/or to promote leadership at the UN?

There are certain measures that we, at the UN, should take system-wide to strengthen our leadership.

First, we need to adhere to integrity, accountability and management of all risks, including reputational. Performance at high standards is important to our work and credibility. In order to address issues and gaps, it is crucial that we provide guidance to colleagues and praise their achievements, while also discussing areas of improvement and mistakes that have potentially been made. Even though such conversations can be difficult at times, clear communication can turn them into conflict-free and

positive experiences that help individuals and the whole team move forward. Given how fast-paced our environment is, it is of course difficult to spend a lot of time mentoring colleagues. People need to be quick on their feet and learn on the job. If they are ambitious, they will need to show commitment. However, if they know that their team is supportive and willing to offer second chances, and if they are given opportunities to improve and progress in their career, they will be more motivated to do their best.

Also, UNHCR and the UN as a whole are undergoing major changes, dictated by a need to find new ways to address the world's most pressing issues. In a bid to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN agencies are working closer together than ever before. At the same time, they are called to work at an unprecedented level of intensity, without losing their efficiency. At UNHCR, the best way to foster our partnership with others is by finding common issues that they can contribute to managing refugees. Implementing the Global Compact on Refugees is in our respective interests. Our goal is to be a centre of excellence in our field and to contribute meaningfully to the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. These efforts should be implemented from the top and bottom.

Furthermore, it has also become clear to me that we are in dire need of more role models and coaches for young UN staff so that we can give them the best career start possible. As an organisation, we strive to attract young talent with top-notch education and new ideas. If we want them to make the best use of their skills and invest in the organisation, we need to provide them with space to learn and try out ideas, be more open to innovation,

and foster a more positive culture and working environment. For them to become the leaders of tomorrow, they must participate more in decision-making, consultations and transparency efforts. Only if young staff members have a seat at the table will we realise the vision of a transformative and innovative UN.

There are other issues that should concern us as well. Abuses of power can have a significant impact on the staff's performance and mental health. Therefore, we should always take such incidents seriously. Diversity at senior management level is a challenge that can only be addressed by identifying the issues that people face at every step of the ladder. It is also important for those who have leadership roles to share good practices among them. Finally, networking is an excellent tool for seasoned and aspiring leaders, and it should be encouraged formally and informally.

On a personal note, as a woman who has been heading large country operations for a number of years with the support of wonderful colleagues, I try to lead by example and strive for work-life balance. It is particularly important to me to understand my colleagues' needs, so we can foster together an environment that will motivate us all to do our best. For instance, when I was in Afghanistan, I worked with UNHCR's Headquarters to initiate a set of measures that would promote duty of care for staff in order to help them cope with the realities of a conflict zone and respond efficiently to the needs of the people we serve.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my family for their unconditional love, support to fulfil my dreams and for understanding the noble objective of my work.

Compassionate leadership

By Rima Salah

I was born a refugee, and I often asked my parents what is a refugee? Why are we refugees? As a child, it was difficult to comprehend that we were different and what we could do to be a part of normal life again. Despite being refugees, my parents sacrificed a lot to ensure that I received the best possible education.

I believe that growing up in this context nurtured my passion to help people in need. At first, I wanted to become an international lawyer in order to defend the vulnerable and serve as their voice, but I ended up graduating with a degree in social sciences and conducting research for my doctoral thesis in Palestinian refugee camps. Life in the camps was extremely harsh. In those early days, I witnessed the terrible effects that war has on people's lives, in particularly on women and children. I also learnt that despite all of the indicators that we have in social sciences, there are no indicators to capture the full extent of people's pain, loss and sadness. It is also difficult to measure human dignity, moral courage and wisdom.

The people I met and lived with had tremendous strength, and in the face of all the tragedies they had undergone, they were hopeful, and the essence of their hope lay in the assistance that they received from the United Nations. Given my early wish to be a part of a process to promote justice and improve people's lives, I felt that working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was the fulfilment of a dream. The United Nations Charter, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), provided an ideal and concrete platform for the pursuit of peace, justice, social progress and human rights.

My work with UNICEF and later the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)¹ took me to many parts of the world, including Africa and Asia, that were marked by poverty, war and violent conflict. There I witnessed how the mission of the United Nations and

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its values were a beacon of hope and peace for millions of people. But I also met people who were disillusioned with the United Nations and its capacity to respond to their needs and improve their lives.

Credibility through compassion

To keep people's hope alive and to restore their trust in the United Nations, the organisation must stay credible and fit for purpose. As the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operation (HIPPO) said in the report, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*,

The organization will remain credible to the extent it is served by leaders and staff who demonstrate courage, integrity, compassion and humility, and who act upon the norms, principles, and values upon which the Organization was founded.²

Dag Hammarskjöld did just that. He elevated and transformed the role of the International Civil Servant through his reflections, writings, lectures and most importantly through his visionary leadership of the United Nations. He demonstrated that an International Civil Servant must reinforce her/his responsibility and leadership in upholding the principles and values of the United Nations, translating them into action for the benefit of the people at all levels.

One of the underpinning value of this type of leadership is compassion, which involves elements of kindness, mindfulness and common humanity.³ Compassion is necessary to drive the action of the International Civil Servants as she/he works in many regions of the world, becoming part of many cultures and people's lives. Compassionate Leadership includes traits such as:

Learning

For the International Civil Servant, induction and training are important. Learning about the culture, the values, the beliefs and history of the country and the people she/he are going to serve is key for their success as this will inform strategies and decisions on how to respond to the needs of the people and gain their trust.

Empathy

The International Civil Servant meets and works with people who have been trapped in situations of poverty, violent conflict and displacement. These situations disrupt the fabric of their societies and compromise the very foundation of their institution, causing the breakdown of their protective systems. Empathising with the people, with their sufferings, with their fears, with their loss of hope in humanity will help the International Civil Servant to lead with her/his heart and mind and be more effective. This is, for example, by designing better protective strategies that respond to their expectations and help them be more secure.

Participation

Strengthening partnerships should be at the heart of the work of the International Civil Servant. Engaging with governments with regional organisations, with civil society, and most importantly with communities including women and youth ensuring their full participation. This will promote the effectiveness in reaching common and shared goals. Partnerships with UN agencies are as important to shape the pace and direction of the progress to advance sustainable development and peace.

Humility

Dag Hammarskjöld's leadership at the United Nations exemplified humility and courage. In his journal *Markings* he wrote,

*Humility is just as much the opposite of self-abasement as it is of self-exaltation. To be humble is not to make comparisons. Secure in its reality, the self is neither better nor worse, bigger nor smaller, than anything else in the universe. It is – is nothing, yet at the same time one with everything. It is in this sense that humility is absolute self-effacement.*⁴

In his last speech to the United Nations staff on the occasion of Staff Day on 8 September 1961, he stated,

*It is false pride to register and to boast to the world about the importance of one's work, but it is false humility, and finally just as destructive, not to recognise – and recognise with gratitude – that one's work has a sense. Let us avoid the second fallacy as carefully as the first, and let us work in the conviction that our work has a meaning beyond the narrow individual one and has meant something for man.*⁵

In conclusion, the International Civil Servant plays an important role in building bridges and restoring trust among peoples, providing pathways for the fulfilment of the goals of the Charter. The recent reforms introduced by Secretary-General António Guterres in 2018 further strengthen the role and responsibility of the International Civil Servant, guiding global action towards sustainable development, prevention of conflict, and peace.⁶

Endnotes

¹ Department of Peace Operations (DPO) is the name of the office since 2019.

² United Nations, 'Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People – Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations', (report, UN, 2015), p13.

³ Elizabeth Pommier, *Development of a Scale to Measure Compassion*, (dissertation, University of Austin, 2010).

⁴ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York:Vintage Spiritual Classics, 2006), p174.

⁵ Dag Hammarskjöld, 'Address at the United Nation Staff Day', (speech, 8 September 1961).

⁶ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 31 May 2018, Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system', (General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/72/279, UNGA, 1 June 2018).

Leadership and identity

By Marc Jacquand

Tony Judt, historian, professor and distributor of inconvenient wisdom, once remarked that *'identity is a dangerous word'*.¹ The danger has not receded. It is now all too available for those ready to bandy it around to erect barriers, invoke treason, sow fear, stoke exclusion, win elections and wage war.

As such, evoking the concept of identity and UN leadership may seem odd, and somewhat of a slippery slope. Preconceptions that the UN is already too closed, self-referential and inward-looking may be exacerbated by a discussion on identity.

Nonetheless, if one believes in the concept of *'one UN'*, a central tenet of reform these days and a required mindset for UN leaders, an exploration of what it means in terms of identity is inevitable. Staff throughout the organisation are being told, and are quick to repeat, that one must think and act as one UN rather than through the lens and mandate of their respective entity. Few meetings now start without the chair imploring participants to affect a bold identity-altering move by dropping their *agency hats*. For the UN, leadership and identity seem ever more linked.

From the Charter to the Tukul: The markers of a UN identity?

As Sarah Von Billerbeck wrote in a recent study, *'the UN is a hugely complex and multifaceted organisation, one with a kind of split personality, which makes it particularly difficult to maintain a coherent sense of internal legitimacy. In these situations, the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO now DPO) staff deeply question their own legitimacy, and as a result engage in a variety of practices intended to reassert a more coherent identity and reaffirm their overall legitimacy – not for others but for themselves'*.²

In fact, the observation about the Department for Peace Operations (DPO) can be extended to most if not all

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other entities of the UN. Throughout, UN staff resort to practices that contribute to a strong bond with the organisation, a sense of belonging that is lived and felt, if not expressed, as literally exceptional.

This sense of exceptionalism is grounded in the UN Charter, in its ideals and its lofty language. The power of its objectives and the elegance of its prose make it a potent maker of identity. But day-to-day work is equally formative. It is true that considering the nature of the work, many UN staff do go through quite unique and intense experiences in the course of their careers. These moments inevitably create shared memories, which bind people together long after they are back from the field, in the more anonymous and unexceptional HQ environments. The recollections of long days spent travelling in convoys or working in communities or the reminiscences of long evenings consumed unwinding at a tukul³ – or compound bar – all form part of a UN identity that staff sustain through a common lingo and shared

references and through cliques formed in field postings (Afghanistan, Somalia, etc).

This sense of identity is also shaped by a combination of external pressures, especially when everyone believes the UN to be *under siege* (physically, financially, metaphorically), as well as by a range of symbols and events, such as the UN *laissez passer*, the UN car or UN day.

These different markers all play an essential part in making work at the UN feel distinct, if not unique. It requires cohesiveness and resilience in the face of indifference, scepticism or hostility.

Identity

The way UN staff exhibit their identity can also have several limitations. The first one comes in the form of a paradox: there is often a very strong *centripetal* UN identity vis-a-vis the outside world, one that is affirmed with pride, and not always without a touch of defensiveness. Nonetheless, it is one that helps the UN cope with external criticism, and weather the turbulences of UN life, notably in the field. It is one that fuels solidarity in forlorn places and empathy through hard times. At the same time, this identity is subject to strong *centrifugal* pressures within. Hard and harsh lines are often drawn between departments, between departments and agencies, and between agencies. Animosity, grounded in a very narrow, entity-based identity are frequent. Those transferring from one entity to another are rare, perceived with suspicion, leading such transfers to quickly replace their old identity with the one provided by their new entity, often at the expense and in opposition to the old one. This double approach to UN identity is pervasive, including at senior leadership levels, and undermines efforts to truly live a one UN mindset.

In addition, and perhaps as a result of this paradox, in normal times expressions of UN identity are often reduced to the material signs of UN life and the privileges and immunities that come with them, be it a blue passport that sets one apart (and speeds up the waiting at airports), the UN vehicles that help evade traffic control or the UN compounds that exacerbate insular reflexes, while often drawing in curious visitors from government and non-government organisations (NGOs) alike.

Furthermore, if a strong UN identity is helpful in times of adversity, any stilted version can also exacerbate defensiveness, bordering at times on self-righteousness. Through an impervious sense of identity, UN staff can forget that the UN belongs to all and no one at the same time. This can translate into an aversion to new ideas, especially those coming from the outside, which are interpreted as an assault on one's experience and knowledge of how to do one's job.

Managing these tensions is difficult. The nature of UN work often does not make it easier. Most UN work resides in a space where personal and professional values often overlap and therefore where respective identities are often blurred. Keeping these identities connected but with enough distance is essential. The distance attenuates competition; it lowers anxieties. Without it, a UN identity can become unhealthy, because very quickly, everything is at stake; criticism from anywhere is now an affront, and one's self-worth becomes tied to grade, one's own and everyone else's. The challenge is often to define a clear, strong and expansive identity while maintaining the recognition that there is more to a healthy UN life than the UN.

The identity traits of UN leadership

What then does this mean for the links between leadership and identity at the UN? These links are difficult, and perhaps even more so in an organisation like the UN. But I would suggest the following elements.

UN leaders must have the ability to add identities and blend them, rather than replace them. Throughout the course of their careers, a leader will likely experience very different roles, and even change entities. Each change is an opportunity to enrich one's UN identity, building on and adding to those previously developed.

This requires two essential leadership traits: openness, or curiosity, and reciprocity. David Bromwich, in his book on *Moral Imagination*, argues that active identity making is not about renouncing one's roots, as provided by culture and education; rather it is about using one's roots to expand one's sense of self and have the confidence to incorporate other perspectives around a core. A UN leader seeks new experiences, and is open to regularly rethinking and refining her own identity based on those experiences.

This approach in turn reminds me of Dag Hammarskjöld's elegant exposition of a key civil servant quality as '*being able to see through the eyes of the other without losing (one's) own perspective*'. Through this philosophy of exchange, the Secretary-General challenged us to confront and manage a difficult paradox: to undergo a degree of self-effacement and expose oneself to differences, in order to develop an identity that is both more fluid and more grounded, one that at the same time is more vulnerable and more confident in itself.

I would then add one last paradox. What the above suggests requires a process of self-examination, humility and honesty, that is difficult. It is deeply personal. Yet, for a UN identity to enable true leadership, one has to have the ability to navigate the links and tensions between the personal and the professional identity, without making

one wholly dependent on the other. The line between the two is not impervious, far from it. Yet, the UN is best served, and led, when a sense of distance exists between the two. Work at the UN is personal, and personal ethics matter. Those are preserved and enhanced when the leader demonstrates that their identities extends beyond their UN lives, and that such UN lives are enriched by what lies beyond.

Implications

For this path to a UN identity to take root and pervade the organisation, four changes at least are required.

In terms of *recruitment*, it therefore matters to bring in people who are not just defined and valued for their UN related experience, but also for their openness and curiosity. This may mean doing away with competency-based assessments as currently practiced. These have an inherent UN or UN-related bias and they seldom provide the space to explore a candidate's sense of perspective, and to probe their understanding of the world beyond their own biography.

When it comes to *professional development*, promoting a UN identity that finds strength and meaning in self-effacement and learning from others requires a greater focus on exposure (often in situ) and self-reflection. It also means less emphasis on rote management approaches that in fact reinforce a closed circuit sense of self. It may also require providing staff with greater opportunities and easier means to take some fresh air outside of the UN, see the world and people from a different lens; this would allow them to safely get out of their comfort zone, to disconnect from the UN-made identity, and reconnect with other aspects of their identity. From a *management* perspective, this also means, paradoxically, moving away from the individual leader model to a collective management – and leadership – approach, so that identities can grow as they interact on a more equal footing.

Finally, the main implication resides in the UN's own *discourse on leadership*. Perhaps because it is indeed a dangerous concept, identity is not mentioned in the UN's leadership frameworks. Nowhere and never are UN 'leaders' really being challenged to think about, and to enrich their identity while they are and because they are at the UN. The path of convenience is one that focuses again almost exclusively on the management dimensions of leadership. UN leadership extends beyond metrics of effectiveness and innovation, to qualities that speak to, and challenge core identities: curiosity, empathy, humility, imagination. These traits are of course hard to find, hard to teach, but they can be nurtured. I once asked a retired Under Secretary-General what it takes to be a good UN leader. Almost without hesitation, he answered: *'he or she must spend time reading non-UN material'*, most likely as

one of the means to develop these traits, which must be recognised, encouraged and valued.

Leadership at the edge

How leadership is construed, enacted and rewarded will either perpetuate unhealthy and confused UN identities or pacify the current identity crisis, making the UN more effective and confident. In turn, a more serene understanding and experience of UN identity will enable greater leadership.

These choices may in the end lead us back to Tony Judt, who advocated for and wrote of the people at the edge. He defined the edge as *'the place where countries, communities, allegiances, affinities and roots bump uncomfortably up against one another – where cosmopolitanism is not so much an identity as the normal condition of life'*. For these people, full identity is never completed, but always evolving, and the interest is rather in the search than in the find. And where humble confidence is achieved through an ethic of tolerance and learning rather than through conclusions, and displayed by relentless questions rather than big answers.

For the UN, a place on the edge if there ever was one, the leader builds on rather than replaces and excludes identities. Such a leader is confident in navigating complexity, in the search for elusive truths, and in her various *modes of existence* as proposed by Walter Benjamin, with little need for artificial boundaries or for the false comfort of exclusionary affirmations of the self. The leader finds strength and inspiration at the edge.

Endnotes

¹ Tony Judt, 'Edge People', (article, New York Review of Books, 23 February 2010), <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2010/02/23/edge-people/>

² Sarah von Billerbeck, 'United Nations peacekeeping and internal legitimacy', (report, University of Reading, 2017). <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/peacekeeping-legitimacy/>

³ A tukul is a round hut, a common type of rural housing found in Ethiopia, Sudan and other parts of Eastern Africa.

The role of lawyers: Leadership for a UN civil servant

By Larry D. Johnson

Article 100 of the UN Charter provides, in part, that the Secretary-General and the staff '*shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization*'. They are described as being '*international officials responsible only to the Organization*'. When hiring persons for the international civil service, Article 101 provides that '*the paramount consideration... shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity*'.

The role of lawyers is somewhat different in an international organisation than other professionals. That role is to provide clear, objective and honest legal advice to a policymaker or a policy organ. It means speaking *truth to power*, to give one's honest professional advice even though it may be unpopular with the policymaker or the policy organ.

The Charter Article provides that the staff shall be international and independent civil servants, serving no government or external authority. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the staff should be hired on the basis of the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. However, from my experience, the leadership of a lawyer in the UN needs to go beyond this; it requires more. It requires independence and courage.

Obligations of a lawyer in the UN

The legal advice provided by a lawyer in the UN is based upon their professional education and standing, including being *licensed* by a state to function as a lawyer and counsellor at law domestically. As such, lawyers often take an oath of office before a state authority and are subject to codes of ethics adopted by those state courts or authorities. They may be investigated for unethical behaviour or other violations of such codes or regulations and are subject to disciplinary proceedings if accused of misconduct.

These obligations of ethical behaviour continue even if the lawyer is serving in an international organisation.

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Lawyers certainly in *private practice* may decline to undertake certain actions if they believe it would violate their professional standards and ethical codes. Those serving in national governments may resign rather than follow instructions to perform what they would consider to be contrary to their professional standards and ethical codes. Lawyers within an international organisation have a greater incentive to show independence and courage as well as efficiency, competence and integrity.

To behave otherwise would constitute a breach of their professional standards and ethical codes to which they are bound by the state which admitted or licensed them to practice law in the first place. Lawyers should not feel as if they are no longer bound by those standards or codes just because they have joined an international civil service. A lawyer in the UN is still obligated to tell his client or superior what that person needs to know, not what that person wants to hear. To behave otherwise, does a disservice to the client or superior who is relying on the professionalism of the lawyer for competent

legal advice. In fact, given the moral underpinnings of international organisations of the UN system, lawyers should be the first to show independence and courage and should provide the model of a truly international civil servant. What follows are a few examples of when lawyers in the UN have done just that.

The case of the denial of Yassar Arafat's visa

In 1988, the US refused to issue a visa to the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) leader Yassar Arafat to enter the US in order to address the UN's General Assembly on the Palestinian question. In the UN's Committee on Host Country Relations, the denial of the visa was discussed and the host country was challenged to justify its decision in the light of the 1947 US/UN Headquarters Agreement, which stipulates that the US is obligated to issue visas (even if severely restricted in terms of access to any place other than the headquarters district) for those invited to participate in UN meetings, such as PLO representatives.

The US representative alleged that under US law and the Headquarters Agreement, the US had the authority to deny visas and access to the UN to anyone which the US considered to be a threat to the security of the host country. The UN had rejected that position as early as 1953 and a *modus vivendi* had been worked out between the US and Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld on how to deal with situations of '*national security threats*' should they arise in the future. That arrangement had been followed in practice since 1953 and obtains to this day in fact. But ignoring that agreement, the US representative alleged in the debate that the UN had acquiesced to the US legal position and that the 'national security reservation' in US law had been accepted by the UN.

The Legal Counsel had a choice: to take on the US representative frontally and clearly; or moderate any response to a diplomatic and '*cooperative*' reply without '*rocking the boat*'. The then Legal Counsel was incensed at the misrepresentation made by the US of the facts and the law. He chose – over the lunch break – to frame a response which frontally confronted the US government position and upheld the long-held UN position and stipulated why the US position was incorrect in law and in fact. It concluded that the US had failed to comply with the 1953 *modus* procedure for dealing with such issues and was in breach of the 1947 Headquarters Agreement. That Legal Counsel upheld the law and the UN's position of principle, regardless of the consequences in relations with the host country and any political backlash.

The legal opinion was published as a document by decision of the Committee and endorsed in a resolution

of the General Assembly by a vote of 151–2 (US and Israel), with the UK abstaining but indicating it agreed with the legal opinion. The General Assembly also called on the host country to abide by its obligations under the Headquarters Agreement and allow Arafat access. It did not. The Assembly moved its debate on the Palestinian question to the Geneva office of the UN at great expense, 25% of which was paid by the US taxpayer.

The Legal Counsel performed his duties with independence, courage and integrity, regardless of the consequences and regardless of challenging the host country. His leadership was recognised and applauded by the vast majority of the members of the General Assembly and even more importantly, by members of the Legal Office and Secretariat at large.

The case of proposals for UN Charter amendments

In the early 1970s, the Legal Office was responsible for putting together a document for a General Assembly subsidiary organ on the UN Charter, setting out comments and suggestions submitted by members of the organisation. Many newly admitted members, who had just been liberated from colonialism, harboured a strong sentiment to amend the Charter to eliminate the veto or moderate its abuse. The legal office's draft was based on an article by article collection of comments, so that under the Article on the veto, all the various proposals for amending or altering the Charter's veto provision were spelled out in one place for easy reference and comparison.

The four active permanent members of the UN Security Council at the time (China was relatively quiet on the issue) had learned of the Secretariat's plan and were absolutely opposed to it as it made it '*easier*' to consider amending the provisions of the Charter on the veto. They viewed that as dangerous and each had their representatives call on the then Legal Counsel to press their case that the draft had to be changed to make it less dangerous to their privileges as veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council. While a Senior Legal Officer overseeing the matter fought energetically to maintain the draft and its logical, legal and professional approach, the then Legal Counsel bent to the pressure of the four permanent members and ordered that the document be re-done, not organised on an article-by-article analysis but rather on a country-by-country basis. This made it very difficult to pull together the various suggestions for specific Charter amendments, particularly regarding the veto, burying specific proposals under country headings.

The staff were inspired by the independence, courage and integrity of the Senior Legal Officer, but also saw

first-hand what happens when a supposed leader (in this case the then Legal Counsel) abandoned his professionalism and independence in the face of political pressure, despite the Charter-mandated obligations regarding independence and competence.

The case of the United Nations Protection Force flight

During the time of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in 1994, the President of Turkey was to arrive for a visit to the Turkish troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and to visit Sarajevo for consultations with the President of BiH. To do that, UNPROFOR had to inform the leader of the so-called Republika Srpska (RS), Karadzic, that the UN would be sending in a plane to Sarajevo with that official visitor, as planes to Sarajevo flew over and through RS 'airspace' as it were. This was required under the arrangement by which the RS transferred Sarajevo airport to the UN for its use for humanitarian purposes. The UN had informed the RS when its planes were flying to Sarajevo including when also carrying official visitors to the Sarajevo government. Usually, RS simply took note when informed of such flights rather than incur the anger of whatever official was visiting Sarajevo. For the BiH government and its western supporters, such visits were important political events to attract financial and logistical support to assist in defending itself against RS's military offenses. But for RS, it was no doubt a provocation that UN humanitarian flights had turned into pro-BiH diplomatic initiatives.

On this occasion, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) informed a morning staff meeting that upon informing Karadzic as usual, he was told that Karadzic could not guarantee that his forces would not shoot down the plane as the Turks were the eternal enemy of the Serbian people. The persons around the table all laughed, assuming it was a joke. I was present as chief of staff to the SRSG but at a lower level than most people in the room. I hesitated but interrupted the laughter to ask the SRSG whether he was sure that Karadzic was joking. He paused and others clearly wondered why someone at my less than senior position would insert myself into the discussion. Nonetheless, the SRSG said that perhaps he would call back to make sure it was a joke.

At the next morning's meeting, the SRSG reported that in the follow-up call, Karadzic confirmed it was not a joke at all, that he could not guarantee the safety of the UN flight which would include the Turkish President and staff, together with UN political staff and UN-contracted flight personnel. It was also, according to Karadzic, a violation of the agreement by which the RS had transferred the airport to the UN. With that new

information, UNPROFOR decided to cancel the visit of the Turkish President. The cancellation was condemned by the Turkish, Bosnian and US governments in formal UN documents, accusing the UN of 'folding' to Bosnian Serb intimidation and blackmail; weakness yet again.

While the advice provided was not legal advice per se, it stemmed from training in legal analysis that cries out for proof and further investigation before proceeding on a course of action/inaction which might jeopardise human life and safety, regardless of political consequences. It is an instance where even though the staff member may not be at a senior level, it is extremely important as a lawyer to follow your principles, training and professional judgment, despite risks of bureaucratic backlash or negative reaction.

Preserving the integrity of the international civil service

Independence and courage have an impact and are needed in order to preserve the integrity of the international civil service – at whatever level. Dag Hammarskjöld's 1961 lecture at Oxford should be required reading and re-reading for all international civil servants. It should be circulated by the Secretary-General annually to every staff member on 24 October, UN Day.

In the several examples of independence and courage I have observed, some behaviour came from lawyers who were career international civil servants and some from lawyers who had come directly from national civil service systems. I do not believe it can be said with any scientific certainty that those coming from national civil service systems are any less likely to behave as true international civil servants with independence and courage once they begin working with the UN. I have seen career staff behave without these qualities, all too eager to please a superior or a government representative without concern for what would serve the best interests of the organisation and what is necessary in order to fulfil the oath each staff member takes upon joining UN service, let alone what is necessary in compliance with a lawyer's own professional standards and ethical codes.

Thus, it depends on the character of the individual and a lawyer's own commitment to his professional standards and codes of ethics. Shame is brought on the international civil service, the legal profession and of course onto the individual him or herself, if a UN lawyer fails to live up to their profession's standards and codes. This, in turn, means that a lawyer has failed to live up to the high standards of an international civil servant.

A UN culture of integrity

Interview with Karin Landgren

Karin Landgren served with the United Nations for over 35 years and is the first woman to have headed three UN peace operations mandated by the Security Council. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation sat down with Karin Landgren and discussed her views on UN Leadership.

When you think about UN leadership, what immediately comes to your mind?

Standing up for human rights and for the principles of the UN Charter.

What is unique about UN leadership, and distinct from leadership more generally, or in other 'industries' and organisations?

The UN's uniqueness stems from where its accountability lies. Its personnel – its civil servants – are accountable to the Secretary-General and to the Organisation's principles, which give high priority to integrity (even if it is weakly defined), and according to which staff members are not to take instruction from Member States. For that to work in practice, it has to be modelled by the organisation's leadership.

What does it mean to be a UN leader to you; what specific traits do you think a UN leader needs today?

A few years ago, during the selection campaign for the current Secretary-General, I wrote about this, highlighting five traits for a UN leader¹:

1. Being diplomatic, dexterous and charismatic;
2. Asserting global intellectual leadership while maintaining a credible moral voice;
3. Orienting the entire UN System towards greater candour, collegiality and coherence;
4. Communicating and presenting the UN's vision, and
5. Connecting the organisation with a world of constituencies.

Karin Landgren joined Security Council Report in May 2018 as its Executive Director. She was until 2015 a UN Under Secretary-General and head of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a peace-keeping operation, and led UNMIL's response to Ebola through the height of the epidemic. Prior to this, she led two political missions, the UN Office in Burundi (BNUB) and the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). She was UNICEF's first chief of child protection from 1998 to 2008. While with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from 1980 to 1998, Karin Landgren served in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eritrea, Singapore, the Philippines, India and at its headquarters in Geneva. She is a founding member of the Nordic Women Mediators' Network and has taught at Columbia University and Central European University.

We also need humility in leadership. Dag Hammarskjöld once said: *'Your position never gives you the right to command. It only imposes on you the duty of so living your life that others can receive your orders without being humiliated'*.

In the field, it is vital to interact with national staff, who are as much a part of the UN community as the internationals. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Liberia, I decided to have small meetings with UNMIL's national staff, not just the massive town hall meetings where the same people always take the floor. I sat down with groups of 15-20 national staff, and talked about UNMIL's aims and the role of the UN and also opened the floor for these colleagues to talk about anything they wanted – from their health insurance to the future of their country. Several national staff told me that this was their first ever face-to-face meeting with UNMIL's SRSG. These meetings helped us tremendously later, when Ebola broke out in Liberia, and we had more of a relationship on which to base the directives that would keep us all safe through the epidemic.

Can you give us examples of extraordinary UN leadership that you have witnessed - leadership that went beyond good management?

When Ian Martin was Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the East Timor Popular Consultation, in 1999, he remained in the besieged UN compound in Dili with some of his staff, thousands of civilians and some journalists, at a time of chaos and violence and fear. This was a bold choice. Compassion, humility, empathy, solidarity with the staff, and bravery when necessary – this is what I want to see in a leader.

What concrete measures could be taken to strengthen the practice of leadership at the UN and/or to promote leadership at the UN?

There is a gendered aspect to leadership that must be recognised. In my experience, women generally give themselves less time to reflect on their own leadership experiences and qualities. I have noticed, sitting on selection panels, that men more often tell fluent stories about what they led, directed or accomplished. Women more often speak in the ‘we’ form about achievements. I find myself saying ‘I was part of an initiative’ even when I was leading that initiative! Men also react to and register women’s leadership less, or less well, than they do the leadership of other men. I recently read a friend’s memoir in which he speaks glowingly of dozens of male colleagues, who are variously brilliant, energetic or collegial. Women are all but absent from this book, and

when they appear, it is largely without the fulsome adjectives. Unconscious biases are powerful, and we all have them. The UN needs more in-depth internal reflection on leadership among senior women, and also among men.

Years back UNICEF used to send its senior women leaders to a leadership seminar in Sweden. Among other things, we discussed a leadership culture that moves away from a ‘power’ model and more towards considering the qualities that might make others want to follow one. I realised that I, too, had needed ‘permission’ to reflect on the factors that shaped me, on initiatives I had taken and led, on strengths and weaknesses.

I was once told that the UN hires staff according to their resumé, but fires them over personal misdeeds. More scrutiny in the selection process, adequate mentoring and less tolerance of toxic and abusive behaviours are called for. The UN Secretary-General should give clear messages about what kind of leadership he is looking for in the UN’s senior cadre. He needs to set the strategic direction and model new behaviours and signal expectations explicitly to senior staff – even to those who previously served as ministers in their own country. He needs to stake out and claim a UN culture of integrity. UN staff are an international civil service that should be known for positive qualities, not for scandal.

Endnote

¹ Karin Landgren, ‘Global leadership needs a shot in the arm, starting with the next SG’, (article, Medium, 19 July 2016), <https://medium.com/unsg-2016/global-leadership-needs-a-shot-in-the-arm-starting-with-the-next-sg-cf0271217bf9>



The portrait: Rendering the individual

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A transformational leader

By Andrew Russell

I will never forget when Lars walked into our conference room in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Guatemala Country Office on his first day on the job, back in the summer of 1995. We knew he was different. He was very tall, somewhat overweight, with a big white beard and white hair and had a huge smile plastered on his face. He was also not alone. His wife was standing right beside him, smiling too.

At that very moment, I decided that Lars was probably the best thing that had ever happened to me in my professional life. I still feel that way. All my career I had been searching for role models and mentors who could combine strong leadership with kind-heartedness and compassion for others. I wanted to believe that you could be both a great leader and a good person but, until that point in my life, I had not come across too many examples of this specific combination.

In that first meeting he taught us that one's profession was not something separate from the rest of one's life. His wife's presence was his way of saying this to us: to live a life of integrity, you cannot be one person in the office and another one at home. And he wanted us to know him, to truly know him, and as such we also needed to know his family.

It was during that first meeting that he talked to us about the importance of service. This was the first of many times he would remind us that his primary role as our leader was to serve us, to help us achieve our potential and make the most of our individual gifts and talents. And, in turn, our job was also to serve others.

He also made his first reference to the need for *ánimo*. In one Spanish word (with many meanings) he summed up his philosophy of work and life: *'Cheer up! Have courage! Be thoughtful! Be connected! And, while you are at it, why not be happy too?'*

Andrew Russell was most recently a Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary-General, Human Resources Management, supporting the development and management tracks of UN reform. From 2013 to 2018, he was the UN Development Coordinator in Kosovo.

Andrew Russell has worked for the UN in several Latin American countries as well as in Cyprus. He holds a Master's of International Affairs from Columbia University and has taught development and peacebuilding studies at Haverford College, Columbia University and Queen's University (Canada).

Here are the basic facts:

- Lars was UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Guatemala from 1995-2001.
- He served in the same role for a few brief months in Colombia, before dying at the all-too-young age of 55, the result of a tragic accident.
- His death in 2001 cut short a lifetime dedicated to peacebuilding, beginning in the 1970s with his work with the Swedish non-governmental organisation (NGO) Diakonia in Central America and elsewhere, followed by an eight-year stint at the Swedish Foreign Ministry overseeing Swedish cooperation in that region.¹

Every day I spent with him I learned something new about leadership. I was moved by his profound humanity, genuine humility and passion for bringing people together for a higher purpose. He was not always smiling though. He had no patience whatsoever for hierarchy, mediocrity or mindless bureaucracy. As his former adviser, Maria Noel Vaeza explains, *'his leadership always served the cause of peace and reconciliation because, in every*

situation, he expected us to seek consensus, common understanding and joint commitment to find solutions. Lars only got angry when he faced injustice. In those moments he would react with Swedish passion, disguised as calm, but with just enough outrage to generate change.’²

He took risks and encouraged us to take them as well. He created safe environments for his staff to speak their minds and where human rights advocates could sit down and plan the future with those who had tortured them. He saw how simple conversations could transform even the most divided societies, like Guatemala.

Here are a few more Lars stories to illustrate what I mean: That same month he informed all staff of his intention to close the UNDP Office between Christmas and New Year’s Day. He wanted to make sure everyone went home and stayed home. His reasoning? We were about to launch into the first phase of implementation of the Peace Accords and he felt that the best way to prepare for this particularly intense time at the office would be to spend time relaxing with family and friends.³ Soon after we came back, we found that Lars had reorganised the functional structure of the office to fully align with the three thematic areas covered by the peace agreements, a simple but powerful change that allowed us to shift into high gear more efficiently.

One of the junior colleagues in the Guatemala Office, Pilar Marin, remembers that ‘my wrists and hands were very sore from writing so much on the computer, the famous carpal tunnel syndrome. One day, out of nowhere, he came to greet me in the morning, as he did with everyone. He had brought me a pair of special ergonomic gloves for my hands and an ergonomic keyboard so I could work more easily. He cared for everyone; he took care of us. That was him. The one who sought the welfare of everyone and who is always remembered with love and admiration. It is worth saying that I still have his gifts. And they continue to serve me to this day.’

In April 1998, the Catholic Church released its report on the victims of the Guatemalan conflict, *Nunca Más!* Two days later, Bishop Juan José Gerardi, who oversaw the preparation of the report, was attacked in his garage and beaten to death. The next day I watched as Guatemalans from various walks of life came to the office to share their grief with Lars. After they left, Lars joined a group of us for lunch. He was smiling. We asked him how in the world he could smile, given what had just happened. Very gently, he told us that it is during such moments of greatest despair that human beings can see beyond their petty, daily problems and begin to grasp the longer, larger, transformative processes at work. He said that Gerardi’s death was in fact the beginning of a new phase, that his killers would be brought to justice, and that this was the beginning of the end of impunity in Guatemala.

His many friends had come today not just to grieve but to plan for a better future. Then he turned to us and said: ‘And you too are a part of this future – entonces, ánimo, mis amigos!’

Reyna de Contreras, who at the time led UNDP’s support to the social aspects of the Peace Accords, remembers that, ‘Lars simply could not accept ideological confrontation and sought consensus and practical solutions from all parties to the conflict. He firmly believed that, during this new time of peace, a more conciliatory way of acting was not only possible, it was indispensable.’⁴

Even in the weeks just prior to his death in 2001, Lars was still teaching me. He had just begun the job of UN Resident Coordinator in Colombia and was returning from a field visit when his car was stopped by FARC guerrillas. They were intent on kidnapping his travelling companion, a former governor of the region. Lars immediately placed himself physically between the ex-governor and the armed group, engaging with them for almost an hour to convince them that this was not a good idea, retreating only when it appeared that weapons would be fired.

This was his final message to me and to all of us who followed him and loved him: Don’t ever be afraid to fight for peace.

Over the years since his death, I have tried my best, as I have assumed positions of greater responsibility within the United Nations, to emulate his passionately non-hierarchical, consensus-based and service-oriented approach to leadership. Many other colleagues who were fortunate enough to know him have tried to do the same. I have struggled, however, to find terminologies and concepts in the standard leadership literature to help explain Lars’ leadership style to others who were not so fortunate. Certainly, he was a *servant leader*, Robert Greenleaf’s term for a leader who ‘shares power, puts the needs of the employees first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.’⁵

Nevertheless, in last few years I have found an increasing number of new and emerging leadership philosophies that capture, to some extent, Lars’ unique approach. Here are a few examples:

- Lars was a *mindful* leader, someone who ‘embodies leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity and compassion in the service of others.’⁶
- Lars exemplified *humble leadership*, a model of leadership that is ‘more personal and cooperative’, creating trusting relationships within teams and organisations and between organisations and their stakeholders.⁷

- I find, though, that the concept that best matches Lars' style is that of the *transforming* leader.⁸ Again and again, he demonstrated the capacity to think and lead in transformational ways, using his deep emotional intelligence and generosity of spirit to harness the full capacities of those around him. At a time of enormous challenge and rapid change, the United Nations would greatly benefit from more leaders with the necessary self-awareness, humility and courage to transcend long-entrenched transactional leadership approaches and bring about transformational change.

Not a day goes by that I do not think of Lars and what I learned from him. In 2013, when I was pleasantly surprised – and a bit nervous – to find that I had been selected by the UN Secretary-General to serve as his UN Development Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Kosovo, it was Lars' voice that whispered in my ear 'OK Andrew, it's your turn now – ¡ánimo!'

Six years later, most of it spent actively pursuing collaborative, consensus-based solutions to development and peacebuilding challenges in Kosovo, and having now closed the book on 29 years of service to the United Nations, I remain committed, in my own small way, to honour Lars as I continue the fight for peace.

Endnote

¹ My primary source of background information for this leadership story is Francesca S. Jessup, *Lars Franklin: The Culmination of a Lifetime in Peace Building*, (New York NY: United Nations Development Programme, 2005).

² Source: Interview with Maria Noel Vaeza, Director of Programme Development, UN Women.

³ Lars' political adviser Ricardo Stein called it 'not just an epoch of change, but rather a change of epochs' for Guatemala.

⁴ Source: Interview with Reyna de Contreras, former programme specialist, UN Women, former National Director, World Vision Guatemala.

⁵ Sen, Sendjaya and James C Sarros, 'Servant Leadership: Its Origin, Development, and Application in Organizations', *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9 (2) (01/09/2002): 57–64.

⁶ Janice Marturano, *Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership*, (New York, NY and London: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

⁷ Edgar H Schein and Peter A. Schein, *Humble Leadership: The Power of Relationships, Openness and Trust*, (Oakland CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2018).

⁸ Carol S. Pearson, ed., *The Transforming Leader: New Approaches to Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, (San Francisco CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012). Lars indeed was ahead of his time.

In praise of 'influencing' from offstage

By Richard Bailey

Richard Bailey is currently working for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the Innovative Finance team. His previous post was in UN Development Cooperation Office (DCO), where he worked to establish the Joint Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Fund. He has served the UN in Malawi, as head of the Resident Coordinator Office and with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Burkina Faso.

This article is written in Richard Bailey's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

As a UN staff member somewhere in the middle to lower end of our hierarchy I have limited power and rarely a platform. On the other hand, I can and believe I have 'influenced' real change, both in the UN and, more importantly, in the world. I can shape, shift and even set an agenda, sometimes in surprising ways. At our best, as UN staff members, we can be an incredible influence for good. Perhaps, out of necessity, the best stories of UN facilitated change are untold. Our influence often rests on our willingness not to take the stage, nor to take credit. The risk is that, since these stories are untold, in our era of Results Based Management (RBM) and payment for results, this strength can go unnoticed. And who wants to fund results that they can't see?

Nevertheless, I honestly think that the best work of the UN never find its way into our annual results reports (perhaps that is why such reports are almost uniformly dull!). Working offstage, without getting any credit can also get tiring after a while, so I wanted to write, to try to encourage our offstage influencers. Of course, the fact that you know you are making a difference, even without anyone else really knowing, is the reward, nevertheless, perhaps it is important to know that you are not alone!

I am convinced that there is enormous space and opportunity to make a difference, for anyone and everyone who is given the great privilege and responsibility of working as an international civil servant. However, I believe that there are a few necessary attributes that individuals will need to possess or develop, to be successful in the medium term. These include tenacity, a thick skin, a capacity for teamwork and perhaps, most important of all, a willingness to do the work for its own sake, in the full knowledge that it might never be noticed or rewarded.

I would like to offer a few examples that I have observed, where such offstage influencing has had a lasting impact, including one of my own. I hope that these examples will encourage you to maintain and even accelerate your offstage efforts.

My first example comes from Malawi. It is a great story of the impact of the work of the UN, but, as far as I know, it is relatively unknown. The success, as always, is down to a team effort, but in this case, it was also, due to the hard work and determination of a particular individual. The first ever UN Women Representative arrived in Malawi on her own, I know, because I picked her up from the airport! In three or four years of hard work, this Representative managed to build a passionate and committed team. Even more significantly (and thanks to her unrelenting hard work and advocacy, and that of the Team) the age of marriage in Malawi was challenged and changed, finally through a constitutional amendment, from 16 to 18. Of course, this was a political decision taken by the president, cabinet and parliament, and it is right that no individual (especially not one working for the UN) should be credited with such an important change. Nevertheless, as an observer, I am almost certain that without the unstinting determination and effort of our UN Women Representative, and her willingness to influence from offstage, this change would not have happened as quickly as it did.

A second story comes from New York, and from a colleague who managed to improve the entire UN development system without a mandate or an invitation. This colleague is interested in data and was concerned by the weakness of the system-wide financial data that the UN development system provides to Member States and to its own senior leadership. In order to more effectively leverage the finance we are entrusted with, and for transparency reasons, it is vital that the UN development system reports consistently on system-wide funding; however, until this colleague engaged it was not happening. Depending on the data source, our numbers varied significantly. The first step on this journey of improvement was to agree on definitions of basic terms for development, humanitarian, country names etc across all agencies, so that all would report against the same thing. In order to achieve this, interested colleagues across agencies and UN networks were invited to join an 'extra-curricular' team. A kind of coalition of the willing.

During a year of meetings and preparatory work, definitions were proposed and a roadmap for improving system-wide financial data agreed. These definitions and roadmap were then approved through different inter-agency fora and ultimately by all United Nations Development Group (UNDG) principals. The definitions are now finalised and agreed, and a roadmap is in place. The result of this effort is that the UN development system data will, over time, be significantly improved. A critical aspect of success on this initiative was the willingness of the team to embrace the initiative, work diligently but without demanding attention and

ensuring that at the end the people in their hierarchies were duly briefed, so that they could sign off on the results. In my view, a great example of 'influencing' from offstage.

My ten years of working with the United Nations is full of such stories and tales of UN staff members with a willingness to work outside the spotlight. My most recent personal example is the establishment of the Joint Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Fund. A colleague was part of the small team that initiated the Fund and then handed the baton to me. We managed to build a US\$ 130 million fund, supported by 13 donors, endorsed by the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General and part of the UN Reform General Assembly Resolution. Through the Fund we will soon be supporting 30 countries to improve their social protection systems. The Fund is now overseen by senior UN officials and both my colleague and I are quietly exiting, moving on to other things. Hopefully the Fund will go from strength to strength and we have helped to build something that is both impactful and sustainable.

My aim, in sharing these individual stories is definitely not to claim or demand credit. To be successful, this type of work probably needs to remain offstage, however, I would like to encourage colleagues to keep going! There is a lot more scope than you might imagine to set an agenda and drive change. If you see something that you think needs to be done or needs to change, regardless of your level, I would encourage you to get started! I would also love to hear your stories.

Power, leadership and responsibility for the Other

By Marc Jacquand

In his words and his decisions, Nelson Mandela provides a rather unique illustration of a man who achieved a balance between humility and strength, and of a man whose *bonhomie* and gentle ways concealed an unflinching mental discipline and a dogged determination to endure.

To break the cycle of violence in Apartheid South Africa, Mandela had to accept and translate into a political platform Dostoyevsky's admonition of personal responsibility for everything and to all, and engage with his oppressors as men and women of inalienable dignity, whose essence and humanity neither Mandela nor anyone else could ever claim to fully judge, let alone direct and bend.

In his refusal to use his experience of oppression as a tool for retribution and electoral gain, Mandela's life highlights the tension, and the difference, between power and leadership. His example should loom large at the United Nations, at a time when the organisation's continued legitimacy may ultimately depend on how its staff understand and live the difference between power and leadership.

Alas, all too frequently, leadership initiatives and discourse in the UN bureaucracy are in fact about power. Leadership frameworks are in essence not much more than managerial checklists. References to *distributed leadership* barely conceal vested interests about control. Rather than blurring the lines, and if UN leaders are to break with recent history, a return to the essential differences, grounded in a very personal engagement with both concepts, may be warranted.

Power and leadership: Ethical differences

These two concepts are indeed often confused, because they share many traits. They both require self-confidence, inner strength and a certain imperviousness to setbacks. In the face of challenges, they both entail audacity and resilience. To the mediocrity and blandness of day-to-day struggles, they offer vision, ideas and solutions.

Marc Jacquand was a Senior Advisor to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation for this leadership project. He is an advisor to the UN and other entities on crisis response, strategic planning, and UN reform. He also serves as an adjunct Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University where he teaches risk management in conflict contexts. Marc Jacquand worked two years with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General António Guterres on strategic planning and UN reform. Starting his career in investment banking, he worked in the field of microfinance for FINCA International before joining the Microfinance Unit of the United Nations Capital Development Fund. He went on to work on conflict and post-crisis responses both at Headquarters, for the Development Cooperation Office and for the UN presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. He graduated from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and the HEC School of Management in France.

And they are often both displayed through eloquence and charisma.

On the surface, they seem cut from the same cloth. But they differ in fundamental ways. Rarely does a day go by without the reminder that power surpasses leadership in the art of prestidigitation, allowing many of the qualities cited above to be exhibited to the extreme, for manipulative purposes, combining depth of self interest with shallowness of meaningful connections.

Leadership requires specific qualities, beginning with self-scrutiny and a sense of perspective. A leader's outward path is charted by an inward journey, where silent and genuine self-examination is sought as a necessary counter-balance to the din of external engagements and actions. The leadership experience is one of self-discipline and the search of moderation, even if the practice of moderation may at times tactically involve, according to circumstances, variance to certain extremes in form, but never in content. The leader may not always

appear, or sound moderate, but her or his actions and thoughts steadily avoid sustained dependence on such extremes, they are anchored in an equilibrium of tone and substance.

Power and leadership also serve different aims. The many expressions of power all derive from one true and only purpose, the positioning of the self as both the reference and end of all action, to which all thought and all relations must be subjugated. As result, manifestations of power are unmistakable, and they are seldom subtle, but always fickle.

That is because power can be achieved but achievement begets new urges; each manifestation generates a need for another demonstration, each display feeds an urge for additional gratification. Like violence, power revolves around mimetic self-perpetuation. As soon as the purpose is achieved in one form, the search for power continues in another form, in an endless cycle of constant vindication.

Leadership turns this relationship around. Its true purpose is the provision of space for the Other to realise her or his self. It may never be fully achieved but it never wavers. The ethics of power and the ethics of leadership fundamentally differ in their relation to the Other.

Power and leadership: I and Thou

In his essay *I and Thou*¹, the Jewish theologian Martin Buber articulated the need for the self to recognise, accept and respect the other as ‘*Thou*’, in all his/her mystery, rather than as an object, ‘*It*’, designed only to serve the self. He further added that this need is not merely a moral imperative. Rather, the self can only realise its potential, become ‘*I*’ (and therefore a genuine leader), through that recognition, acceptance and respect, far and distinct from a focus on power.

Power means ‘*Thou for I*’. Leadership requires ‘*I because of Thou*’. The self takes action only because such action serves the Other. The spotlight is accepted only in so far as its momentary beam on ‘*I*’ is also accepted by the Other, and its star eventually turns into an innocuous white dwarf among many, rather than collapsing into a black hole, from which no light escapes.

These opposing ethics, with one focused on the Self and the other worried about the Other, have two additional implications. They inherently involve different epistemological approaches and they reflect divergent views on responsibility.

For power to maintain its balance, one must inhabit a world of absolutes. Certainty in one’s belief, in one’s cause, and in one’s right drives discourse and practice.

The knowledge of the powerful is infallible. A leader has convictions, but those do not exclude doubt, and may even be expressed in a language of frailty, preserving a space not just for those who may disagree, but for the possibility that one may be wrong. In essence, true leadership combines courage of conviction with courage of fallibility.

Power requires that Others are responsible to the powerful Self. Since power is infallible, it would be illogical otherwise. Others are in his or her debt. Leadership reverses this proposition. The leader, all too aware of her or his fallibility, is responsible to the Other. For power and leadership, the terms of the relationship between the Self and the Other may *a priori* both resemble a *quid pro quo* but power accepts this balance only superficially, in discourse only, for political convenience. The imbalance of a power relationship is revealed when the powerful falls, a reversal of fortune that often involves recrimination and the casting of blame on anyone but oneself. It is not uncommon for the fallen ones to invoke the language of treachery and betrayal to explain their loss of power, exposing in the process the true nature of the relationship that they expected from the Other and the primacy of the Self as the reference, and endpoint of all relationships.

When relationships with others are defined in absolute terms, it is difficult to imagine a space for compromise, unless concessions are made as a matter of tactics, to eventually win completely. Because power is justified by the outcome, albeit unstable, cooperation is a means to that end, or yet another objectification of the Other to pursue one’s objective.

But what of leadership? Can it include compromises and is it, in essence, a collaborative concept, involving trading and bartering one’s ideas, values, and ideals in pursuit of the greater good? After all, ‘*if you are a man of principles, compromise is a bit of a dirty word*’, remarked Dick Cheney once, a man all too well versed in the tension between power and leadership.²

Yet, his remark poses a genuine conundrum for leadership, one that UN officials grapple with on almost a daily basis. If leadership is primarily shaped and recognised for its ethical dimension, can it afford to indulge in the vulgarity of outcome-driven transactions? Serious men of integrity, such as French writers Raymond Aron and Albert Camus, struggled with this tension, recognising that adherence to one’s principles can just as well veer into rigid, and ultimately, self-defeating dogmatism or slip into a Faustian bargain where both soul and results are lost. Aron insisted on the incompatibility of legitimate values, stretching Isaiah Berlin’s

hedgehog and fox comparison to remind us that choices are often, if not always, between two suboptimal solutions, rather than a stark contrast between evil and perfection.

Camus retained an idealist streak and never fully gave up hope in devising an ethical epistemology that would provide greater clarity and finality than Aron's unsatisfying (to Camus), middle of the road moderation. *'I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice'*³ – one can perceive such intuition beneath the slightly manipulative (and oft misconstrued) bravado of his press conference remark in Oslo.

There are times when compromise is indeed a bad word, where moral choices are clear, where leadership should not tolerate concessions, especially when the long-term repercussions of settling are either damaging or unknown, which is just as dangerous and damning for many moralists. But Aron and Camus share a common ethical foundation, often expressed as an obsession. Choices may be difficult, but decisions should not be inconsistent, or whimsical, subject to political convenience or intellectual flimsiness.

A certain integrity must shape such choices. There must be a degree of coherence to decisions made, or opinions expressed, a mark of reliability in ethical references. For the UN, finding the right balance, and achieving this coherence in the midst of so many centrifugal pressures, this is almost an existential matter. For guidance, the organisation and its staff can turn to Dag Hammarskjöld who grappled with the conflict between compromise and principles throughout his tenure as UN Secretary-General. For him, integrity was precisely what genuinely connects principles and compromise, in a combination that embodies genuine leadership. Integrity defines the parameters, including the times and circumstances, of a compromise that does not violate the principles.

But how does one know? For Hammarskjöld, a compromise that turns one from objective to neutral on the ethical underpinning of the issue at stake fails to meet that test. A compromise that retains objectivity grounded in the Charter is one that a leader can, and should, make. As an avid mountaineer, the former UN Secretary-General may have acquiesced to the idea that compromise is to leadership what a course deviation is to a hike: an acceptable measure as long as the integrity of both the point of arrival and the point of departure is protected.

A rule for UN staff

Any genuine reflection on leadership at the UN must include this dimension, and ask of each UN staff: what is

being discussed or exercised, leadership or power? It is a difficult question, one that takes each one of us beyond our comfort zone, and certainly beyond stale leadership checklists and frameworks. It speaks to very personal behaviours and requires genuine introspection.

In this effort, it is helpful to go back to the example provided by those who have shown the way and highlight an inspiring historical connection.

For most men and women who focus on power, their relationship to the Other is clear: people gravitate around them, for them. The Other's existence is defined on their own terms, as a function of the Other's usefulness to them and to their quest for power. President Mandela, who chose not to serve a second term, reversed this relationship, cementing his place as a leader.

This approach, developed by Buber and lived by Mandela, whose statue now greets visitors at the UN headquarters, should have a particular resonance for the organisation.

After all, on the night he died, on that last flight, Dag Hammarskjöld was carrying with him a copy of *I and Thou*, which he was translating from German to Swedish. The organisation's second Secretary-General's worldview had many sources of inspiration. But one can detect the spirit of *I and Thou* in those words, found in *Markings*, and which could stand as a rule for UN staff across the organisation: *'what one loses in power can be made up in leadership'*.

Endnotes

¹ Martin Buber, (translation Walter Kaufmann), *I and Thou*, 1923, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970)

² Dick Cheney, 2013 – see Mark Danner, 'How Dick Cheney Became the Most Powerful Vice President in History', (news article, The Nation, 11 February 2014) <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-dick-cheney-became-most-powerful-vice-president-history/>

³ Quote by Albert Camus, see citation in Dominique Birman, 'Albert Camus a exposé aux étudiants suédois son attitude devant le problème algérien', (article, Le Monde, 14 décembre 1957) https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1957/12/14/albert-camus-a-expose-aux-etudiants-suedois-son-attitude-devant-le-probleme-algerien_2337114_1819218.html

The heart of a leader

Lessons from a mother hen

By Ahmed Abdillahi Hashi

Ahmed Abdillahi Hashi is currently a Master's student at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, with a particular interest in the nexus between leadership, politics and current affairs. Prior to his studies, he worked with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UN RCO) in Somalia.

When I was growing up, I liked to observe the behaviour of free-range chickens as they led their chicks around our backyard, unearthing worms and strewn bits of food with their claws, and directing their chicks to eat. One time, I was flying a kite overhead. As the kite glided, its moving shadow was cast on the ground. Mother Hen must have mistaken the approaching shadow for that of a hawk for, suddenly, she made a low croak-like sound and stood in vigilance. Her six chicks flapped their little wings and dashed for cover under a raised granary.

I was astounded. How could the chicks have known what the warning sound meant or how to react? Clearly, this behaviour was not inborn. I knew this because, about a week before, Mother Hen had sounded a similar alert and the chicks had paid no heed. Before their eyes, the predator bird overhead had descended and made away with a chick. All efforts by Mother Hen to fly and save her little one were in vain. With that terrifying experience, the chicks learned to pay attention to their leader.

What I learned from Mother Hen's second successful rescue was leadership, a term that is not so easy to define. In their 1984 book, *Functionalism: Basis for an Alternate Approach to the Study of Leadership*, Rauch and Behling define leadership as the 'process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement.'¹

I have worked for the UN since 2010 in different capacities. During this time, I have had the opportunity to serve under numerous leaders, each employing a different leadership style. What is common to effective leadership is that it produces results.

I have also learned that leadership does not have to be loud or flamboyant to produce results. I like the words of American management consultant Peter Drucker, who said, *Leadership is not magnetic personality – that can just as well be a glib tongue. It is not "making friends and influencing*

people" – that is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person's vision to high sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations'.²

To understand good leadership, it is important to contrast it with bad leadership. Here is how a friend describes the leadership style of a former boss: *'he lacked leadership; he inspired fear. Members of staff were kept on edge. Fear ruled the roost.'* This friend explains that ordinarily, their office was a vibrant place; staff freely exchanged ideas, but when the leader was around, the office was eerily silent, new ideas were quashed and ambitions were kept in check. He adds: *'we achieved a lot under this leader in the short term. He was demanding and results-oriented. Over time, though, morale slackened, and the leader's gains were lost'*.

An inspiring leadership style

Great leaders treat people with care and empathy. They trust them to do the right thing. Showing leadership means offering guidance, encouragement, and consultative solutions. Great leaders accord staff the leeway to be creative. They provide incentives, while explicitly stating the value of what they aim to achieve. A good leader should selflessly give their time to the team, provide a sense of belonging and purpose, and be willing to sacrifice so that the team gains. Great leaders put people – not gadgets, processes, and personal ambition – first.

I was fortunate to work under one such a leader. His philosophy of leadership was people-centred. He was empathetic and considerate. He believed that just like we take care of our work-tools by, for example, protecting

our gadgets from the elements, so too should we take care of people. He created a conducive working environment for the team. He built relationships among members outside the office by organising drinks after work.

During such informal get-togethers, we would talk about everything but work. We shared stories about family, sports, dreams and love. Through these soirées, emotional barriers were broken down. Power dynamics were transcended. This leader purposed to find out what made each team member tick. Individualised interaction was important because each worker – although serving as part of the larger team – was personally responsible for core deliverables.

I recall an incident where I was the target of hostility by a colleague. My leader stood up for me. That event remains etched on my mind. Thanks to his support, I felt deeply indebted to him. Under this leader, we delivered a stellar performance. We got rave reviews from our clients and a commendation from our top bosses. Staff were happy and motivated. As is wont to happen, our leader left, but his impact was durable. To this day, team members nostalgically reminisce about his inspiring leadership style.

Three general leadership styles

Although I have sometimes differed with a leader, my disagreeing does not necessarily mean I was right. It could well be that this leader raised the bar and that I was anxious about meeting his or her high expectations. Equally true, it could be that I was right in my assessment. Whatever the case, from my many years at the UN, I can delineate three general approaches to leading people:

Participatory leadership: This style of leading people considers the leader and the workers as a unified team. Everyone sails in the same boat; they belong on the same side; the failure of one (the team or the leader) translates to the failure of the other. Since all reside in the same organisational household, if their house burns down, all perish. Similarly, the success of one is shared by all.

Laissez-faire leadership: In French, the term *laissez-faire* means 'let people do as they deem fit'. Essentially, *laissez-faire* leadership entails giving free rein to workers; they are free to do as they please. Thus the worker who chooses to walk out in the middle of a meeting is free to do just that. And the worker who chooses to toil until 3am is also free to do so. In other words, anything goes!

Autocratic leadership: This means just that – dictatorship. In this leadership style, the leader resides in their own psychosocial domain while the workers subsist in their

separate, lower domain. Since the leader remains veiled in a separate, mystical dimension, the workers find it hard to gain access to the leader's realm. And when the leader must interact with the workers, it is to issue decrees or to institute disciplinary measures.

The true mark of a leader

It has been my experience that leaders tend to blend parts of all three styles. Some leaders are more autocratic, others are more democratic or participative, while others give workers boundless freedom. Given the nature of our work as the UN, the values we espouse and the higher principles we advocate, it is my firm belief that a leadership inclined towards more engagement with staff will serve us well. As with Mother Hen, a true leader must balance between nurturing and sounding a warning when the situation calls for it. They must be flexible, willing to listen and correct course. The reason is simple: Ordinary staff have rich experiences that the organisation can tap – and any leader must adapt in ways that make it possible to tap this potential.

For workers to be productive, they must feel engaged; they must be made to feel that they belong. American motivational speaker Hilary Hinton Ziglar, popularly known as Zig Ziglar, put it well: '*Research indicates that staff have three prime needs: Interesting work, recognition for doing a good job and being let in on things that are going on in the organization*'. The leader who provides a working atmosphere that is conducive for workers to take part in both hands-on work and idea generation will be of value to the host organisation.

Endnotes

¹ Charles F. Rauch and Orlando Behling, 'Functionalism: Basis for an alternate approach to the study of leadership' in James G. Hunt (Ed.), *Leaders and managers: International perspectives on managerial behavior and leadership*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), p. 45–62.

² Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

Demonstrating UN leadership: Positioning the UN in the midst of a revolt

By Charles Petrie

Yangon, 2007 - It all started at exactly noon on 22 September. I was stopped at a traffic light near one of the main monasteries of Yangon. Torrential monsoon rains poured down onto the streets of the city, when all of a sudden out of the monastery to my right emerged in single file a long line of monks. Unlike the classic processions, the eldest monk took the lead, with others in order of age following. The lead monk carried an upside-down alms bowl, indicating that the order would no longer accept donations from the authorities. The sight was extraordinary.

Over the next few days, the scene was repeated throughout Yangon. Each day the heavens seemed to open at precisely noon unleashing a phenomenal downpour, just as the monks emerged from their monasteries. The first day traffic stopped, and the people in the streets knelt in prayer. The following days the population formed human chains on both sides of the procession to protect the monks from the wrath that they were sure the military would unleash.

The Saffron Revolution, as it came to be called, had been triggered on 15 August by the military regime's unilateral lifting of fuel price subsidies, which provoked dramatic price increases of as much as five hundred per cent for compressed natural gas. This last price hike resulted in an overnight doubling of bus fares. The people of Myanmar, worn down by the poor management of the economy – the effects of which were compounded by decades of international sanctions – were unable to absorb this economic shock. The doubling in the price of public transportation forced many people to walk to work. The monks knew more than anyone else how difficult life was for the majority of the population. They depended on alms for their sustenance and were receiving almost daily a growing number of orphans in their monastic schools. After a number of incidents with the military in various parts of the country, the monks took to the streets to ask the military to rescind these price increases, and 'to stop insulting the people'.

Charles Petrie was the UN Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Myanmar from June 2003 to December 2007. During his career he has served more than 20 years with the UN, carrying out policy, operational and developmental activities in various postings, including in Sudan, Rwanda, Gaza, Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Afghanistan. His most recent appointments in the UN were as the Secretary-General's Executive Representative for Burundi in 2010 and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia (UNPOS) in 2008. Charles Petrie holds a Bachelor's in International Relations from the American College in Paris and a Master of Business Administration from INSEAD, the international graduate business school.

When, after a week or so, the political opposition joined the procession, the military was provided with the justification it needed. The military ruled that the act of defiance was actually a political demonstration and had to be confronted. But even that did not go as planned. When commanded to act, the Yangon military commander refused to instruct his troops to attack the monks. More time passed as another military unit had to be brought into Yangon to do the job, and they did it with great efficiency.

I tried to meet as many of the regime's leadership as I could. At every opportunity I would explain to my interlocutors the need to understand the monks' message. The people were desperately poor. I explained to the generals that the message of the monks was nothing more than the message the UN had been trying to get the military government to understand for the last five years. They listened, at least the younger officers did.

Well into the second month of the Saffron Revolution, I started to understand that the violence would not be over by United Nations Day, 24 October. The UN

would be *'celebrating'* its anniversary in the middle of the crackdown. So, I made a request to UN Headquarters in New York for a specific reference to the situation in Myanmar to be included in the Secretary-General's speech that I would have to read on UN Day. I was told that this was not possible as to do so would mean setting a precedence to accommodate similar requests from other countries in turmoil. Having received the UN's refusal to include a specific reference to the violence against the monks in Burma in the Secretary-General's speech, I decided that I would read a second speech, immediately after having transmitted the Secretary-General's UN Day message. I worked on a draft with a few colleagues.

And late one evening I presented it to the other representatives of the UN system in Yangon. The heads of the different UN agencies were gathered around the conference room table. A storm was raging outside and rain battered the windows. An occasional flash from a bolt of lightning filled the room and the detonation of the thunder that followed gave the meeting an even more conspiratorial air. I handed out copies of the statement I planned to read and instructed my colleagues to go back to their offices, turn all lights out except for one, and to read it.

Once they had done so, they needed to decide whether they could stand behind this statement. If anyone of them felt uncomfortable, I would fully understand, and would read it as the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. On the other hand, if all were in agreement, then I would do so on behalf of the UN system. I also explained that I assumed full responsibility to inform UN headquarters, and that there was no need for any of them to approach their respective headquarters to clear it. The next day when we all met, to my great surprise all agreed to stand by the text.

So, on UN Day, once the Secretary-General's speech had been dispensed with, I launched into the other one. The second speech basically said that the UN stood with the monks. It had three parts to it, including the UN's understanding of the levels of poverty in Myanmar, but ultimately it was a statement of solidarity with the poor.

I write this as if it was a natural act to perform. But it was not so easy, quite the contrary. It wasn't that I was nervous. I was scared. It is not a given to openly confront an authority. Whether one wants to or not, being part of bureaucracy naturally leads one to respect the hierarchy. I tried to rationalise my fear. After all I had had to share even tougher messages in the past – explaining to a Congolese warlord that the last time I had heard of someone doing what he had, the individual had ended up in an international court – but that did not do much to ease my anxiety and fear.

The initial reaction at the end of the speech was total silence. And then a few days later the Secretary-General was officially informed that the authorities in Myanmar would no longer have anything to do with me. I no longer existed in their eyes and was declared *persona non grata*. I had to leave.

Of course, I had not informed the UN in New York of my intention to read the speech, as I knew that they would not have sanctioned it. So that fateful evening, I sent the speech to the Secretary-General's office in New York with a copy to all UN staff throughout the world. I imagined that I would be severely reprimanded for my insubordination, and thought that I should leave in style rather than anonymity. To my great surprise it triggered an immediate response from Kathleen Cravero, an Assistant Secretary-General at UNDP. In her message also copied to all staff, she explained that this was probably one of the proudest moments of her UN career. She was proud to belong to an organisation that had the courage to stand firm on its principles and in defence of the oppressed. Her message basically set the tone of the UN's response.

But when I returned to New York I found not all expressed positive views, some saw my speech as an act of insubordination. I responded that had UN Day not fallen in the midst of the crackdown, I would not have positioned the UN in such a proactive and visible manner. After all there was no need to, as I was getting regular access to the regime's leadership, and used it to make the same points as those contained in the speech. But the fact is that it had left me with no other option. To have remained silent would have been to deprive those who looked to the UN for support of any hope that they were understood. And not positioning the UN on such a matter of basic rights and dignity would also have undermined the efforts of those within the regime trying to push for change.

When I left Myanmar, I received a handwritten note from one of the Generals. It said, *'we understand you did what you had to do; understand that we have done what had to be done'*. A few years later, when I had returned to Myanmar to work on the ceasefires (I had left the UN), I overheard another former General, now minister in the civilian government, explain to a foreign dignitary *'we kicked him out for what he said, we invited him back because of what he had said'*.

Leadership with empathy

By Raja Karthikeya Gundu

Raja Karthikeya Gundu is a Political Affairs Officer in the United Nations Secretariat.

This article is written in Raja Karthikeya Gundu's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

'You know that I don't have the answers', said the UN official, 'but you do'. I expected the Afghan political leader to respond with anger or disappointment. Instead, the warlord-turned-politician broke into a smile and extended his hand.

In an era where leadership is often conflated with firmness, Vadim believed in kindness. Where the importance of communicating about one's deeds is stressed, his approach was one of self-effacing humility. In a highly hierarchical organisation like the UN, Vadim recognised the importance of empathy. As one colleague described him, he was a 'big picture thinker for whom all the little courtesies fit into the big picture'.

Leadership is often equated with tact and with the ability to rally people behind oneself. But Vadim embodied the idea that a leader could identify with those he led, to the extent they saw him as one of them. His was the soft touch, the warm and ever-smiling face, the quick nod and often, a two-hand handshake which turned strangers into allies and subordinates into friends.

As Chief of the Political Affairs division in a Special Political Mission in an active conflict zone, he had overwhelming responsibilities. And yet, he would start each workday by walking to each team member in the office to wish good morning. At the end of the day, when he left office, usually as one of the last ones to leave, he would stop in to check on any colleague working late. Whenever a rocket attack or a bombing – all too frequent and always terrifying – drove the team into a bunker on the office compound, he would approach each staff member with a warm smile to set their hearts at ease.

Having served over two decades in his national foreign service in the Persephone world, he was fluent in Farsi. But he forever saw himself as a student of the language and asked local staff about nuances of the language,

which brought them delight in explaining to him. I often suspected that this was a way of not only satiating his curiosity but a means to build bridges with them by levelling the power distance.

Vadim was skilled at subtle gestures that empowered his subordinates. When a local or international staff member subordinate to him organised a meeting with an external interlocutor, Vadim made it a point to refer to the subordinate in the meeting with an honorific suffix *saab/khanum*, cognisant that this gesture of respect would elevate his subordinate's status in his/her regular interactions with the interlocutor. Seeing my interest in mastering Farsi, he would opt to conduct meetings in the language and have me take notes in English. Despite the effort it entailed for him, he reviewed and painstakingly gave comments on the notes to help me learn the language in a live professional context.

Vadim's patience was legendary, and he gave an attentive ear to anyone who went to him with a grievance. No one left his office feeling he did not care about their problem, because irrespective of his work burden, he worked on a solution to their problem almost immediately. Being a patient listener endowed him with *empathy* – the secret attribute of every great leader, from Lincoln to Mandela.

He was not one to pass the buck down the ladder. While mindful of the deadlines from headquarters, he negotiated with his superiors so as to give his subordinates enough time to accomplish their tasks and produce results – whether it was drafting a report, organising a national gathering of tribal elders or supporting the

organisation of an election. And when the task was done, he was generous with praise in a way I have rarely seen in the system. It motivated the entire office, for it came from someone who was not only kind and warm, but also set benchmarks with his own diligence at work. He made sure that he found out about grievances before they reached him. When the mission's administration decided to cut the salary of the aged janitor of the office as part of an austerity measure, he promised to pay her the reduced amount out of pocket. The news prompted administration to eventually find a solution.

For many professionals, camaraderie with colleagues stops at the doors of the office. Not for Vadim. Every Ramadan, irrespective of administrative obstacles, he would take all the local staff to a lavish *iftar* dinner at personal expense. One Ramadan, on finding that I was fasting in solidarity with local colleagues, he insisted that I join for the dinner. For someone who grew up in a Communist society, Vadim admired the inner spirit of believers that enabled them to work tirelessly despite the rigors of fasting in sweltering heat.

He believed in a tenet that underlies all religions – that we all have a duty towards each other and that, irrespective of religions and nationalities, each of us is our brother's keeper. This worldview is rarely discussed in the context of leadership. Yet, I believe this was the reason why Vadim endeared himself to everyone he met in the course of his service in the UN, from gardeners to pres-

idential candidates. Unsurprisingly, he inspired a loyalty that no amount of patronage could ever buy. When I went to him with news of receiving a posting which would help me rise faster in the UN system, he said, '*The team needs you. But I won't ask you to stay since it's good for you*'. His words were enough for me to decide. I turned down the posting.

On 17 January 2014, with two weeks to go to his 60th birthday and a potential retirement, Vadim was killed in a terrorist attack while dining in a restaurant in Kabul. Twenty civilians perished in the attack. Vadim was shot while trying to shield a young former colleague from a hail of bullets. Later that night, I stood with my director at a military base waiting to receive Vadim's mortal remains from the scene of the attack. It was hard to comprehend the magnitude of the loss to our team, and to the UN.

I would later learn that when his family had implored him to leave the UN after eight years of continuous service in an increasingly dangerous conflict zone, Vadim had refused saying, '*...the UN is more than a job. This is a mission... The country I serve in has the kindest people that I've ever met, and I need to do what I can to bring peace back for them*'. This would be his creed to the last.

As a civilian peacekeeper, Vadim left behind no medals, only memories. But for all of us that served with him, he left behind a legacy – of leadership with empathy.

A story of inspirational UN leadership

By Karen Daduryan

My career with the UN spans 24 years and counting. In 1995, I joined the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in my country as a project assistant and grew through the ranks to my current position of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Representative in a country facing one of the most complex protracted emergencies.

During my journey with the UN, I have seen inspirational leaders who have led transformational changes – be it for a country office, an entire agency or even the entire UN system. They have been true champions of UN reform at various stages and levels and, despite all the frustrations and setbacks, have made a lasting impact on what the UN has collectively achieved over the years in implementing its incredibly complex reform agenda.

My story is about the inspirational leadership of a UN Resident Coordinator (RC) from the first cohort of RCs, ‘triple-hatting’ then as UNDP and UNFPA Representative. I will use her initials KC. She inspired me and my colleagues to become true UN-ers: a person who led by example and never compromised on the core UN values and principles. Someone who brought together and transformed not only her agency but the entire UN family, which had suffered from a bit of a ‘Wild West’ type of culture, before UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan launched his broad UN reform agenda.

Changing the office environment and culture

KC inherited an office riddled with mistrust and divisions among staff and UN agencies alike. This situation was a result of a protracted conflict between the previous Resident Coordinator (RC)/Resident Representative (RR) and Agency Regional Director, as well as due to unhealthy competition among the agencies, including for the overall UN leadership in the country. The national staff were pressed to take sides in the conflict and upon agreed separation of the previous RC/RR, the regional office sent KC to ‘clean house’ and remove those who aligned themselves with the previous leadership.

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This article is written in Karen Daduryan’s personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

Yet, upon meeting the team and doing bilaterals, KC announced that she had no intention to dismiss anyone, despite the pressure from the regional director, and would rather work with the entire team to rebuild the team spirit, trust and cohesion.

Simultaneously, she began to position herself as a leader of the entire UN system in country. And here are few lessons I learned then: a true leader is the one who can sustain and negotiate various external and internal pressures; the one who makes decisions based on a fair assessment of the situation, in the best interest of the organisation and the team. KC realised that the team she inherited was very capable but was unwillingly drawn into the conflict. She then initiated change management in the office that saw the introduction of clearer labour division and lines of accountability; an inclusive work environment; and the setting up of collaborative platforms to bridge silos within and among various units. A lot of attention was given to individual coaching and regular feedback to senior national staff, gradually changing the office environment and culture.

Among the top priorities of change management was strategic repositioning of the agencies she represented and the broader UN system in the country. Under her leadership, our team engaged in developing ambitious multi-sectoral integrated programmes at the national and community levels. The programmes were designed as a broad flexible platform to address the needs of particular regions and communities; capable of adapting and scaling-up over time; as well as adding new components, such as multi-agency joint programmes. Due to its design, the key programme ran continuously for about 15 years and generated a tangible impact on the development of participating communities. From this experience, I learned that leadership is about having a long-term vision and strategically positioning the UN in complex and diverse country and local contexts.

Investing in the leadership abilities of staff

Another important feature of KC's leadership was her determination to invest in the capacity and leadership skills of the UN staff. Long before the emergence of UN and agency specific corporate leadership programmes, KC commissioned development of a 6-month leadership and management programme, initially for her agencies' staff and later for the staff of other agencies that opted to join. I owe most of what I learned about leadership and management in the early years of my career to this programme. It has had a profound impact on my subsequent career advancement.

The programme was a combination of theoretical courses and practical assignments, combined with coaching sessions. It provided the conceptual framework for leadership and management in the office, as well as follow up on actual application of the concepts in our work. Uniquely, the master trainer was part of our team and had an opportunity to observe and provide feedback to the course participants on how the skills learned were applied in daily practice. The course was a major contributor to the office change management initiative.

Furthermore, staff encouragement and recognition was inherent to KC's leadership style. For example, despite my young age and position as a programme assistant at that time she tasked me with a key role in designing the integrated programme I described above. I spent the next six months visiting regions and communities of my country, discussing with beneficiaries, authorities and stakeholders what the future programme would be. During those 6 months I probably learned more about the actual development challenges that my country was facing, as well as development programming, than at any given time in my life. This exposure was instrumental for my career development. Hence, I learned that a true leader is the one who not only inspires people but is able to move them out of their comfort zone by challenging

them to dare and not to fear mistakes and failures. Empowering people to be bold and go beyond the perceived glass ceiling is what an inspirational leader does.

An honest broker

I want to also mention how KC transformed the broader UN leadership in the country. Engagement with all agencies and a deep understanding of their priorities, needs and challenges earned KC a reputation of being an 'honest broker' who was useful in positing the agencies as part of the broader UN agenda. KC kept the UN perspective in mind when engaging with government counterparts and other partners. She saw her role as identifying agency specific opportunities in her engagement with the government and other stakeholders and kept the agencies apprised of those opportunities. For the UN system her style was more of 'leading from behind' without imposing her leadership and rather enabling agencies to do their job. Systematic sharing of relevant information was a key feature of KC's leadership as Resident Coordinator. At the same time, she was firm enough and was able to project her authority when it was needed. This leadership style helped KC to address numerous challenges of inter-agency dynamics and bring the UN much closer together than before. Undoubtedly, the challenges were still numerous, but the transformation of the overall UN coordination and its positioning significantly improved.

For KC this assignment was the last before retirement, and she brought to the service of the UN and country all the wealth of her experience and her charisma of inspirational leadership. She inherited a broken office and team but when she retired after 5 years, the same office and the team were known as one of the best performing regionally and beyond. It took six months for the next Resident Coordinator to arrive, yet during that period the office worked like a Swiss watch to the extent that we did not feel the gap in the leadership. It was such an amazing transformation that stayed with me through the rest of my professional and personal life. KC's leadership enabled all of us to advance in our work, career and lives. And one of the most important lessons that I learned from her is to never give up, remain calm and focused – no matter the challenge or tough situation one may face. In my own leadership experience, past and present, when I need to deal with such situations, I always recall KC's smile and voice speaking with a Latin American accent: *"Mira", I have a thick skin and I sleep at night very well!*

This story is a tribute to an inspirational leader and an amazing person who has changed the lives of so many people, including mine.

'Blue Grit': Determination, courage and principled behaviour in the UN

By Ulf T. Kristoffersson

Ulf T. Kristoffersson is an international civil servant who has held high-level positions in four United Nations agencies and responded to humanitarian emergencies from Southeast Asia to Central Africa. He is currently a visiting professor at the University of Lund in Sweden and the Chair of the Maitri Foundation in India. In 2015, Ulf T. Kristoffersson published a book on his four-decade career with the United Nations: *Blue Grit: A Life on the Humanitarian Front Lines of the United Nations*.

I spent my entire professional life with the United Nations. My career spanned four decades, five continents, three UN agencies and six Secretaries-General. Perhaps more importantly, it spanned a range of experiences that is as hard to describe as it was to digest, from humanitarian crises to fighting a global pandemic. So, choosing the most essential qualities of leadership, identifying what made it possible to rise to challenges that I could never imagine before I joined the UN ranks, is not easy. But I have thought about this before and have landed on the one overriding characteristic of successful UN leadership: *grit*.

According to the dictionary, grit has two meanings. The first, and perhaps more common one, refers to small particles of stone or sand. The second, more relevant here, means '*courage or resolve...strength of character*'. I know there are more elegant terms for this – many of which are used in this volume – but for me grit best describes the combination of determination, courage and principled behaviour that epitomises the successful UN staffer.

A mentor to a generation of UN staff

I first saw this quality exemplified in a man who served as guide and mentor to a generation of UN civil servants: Sir Robert Jackson. Sir Robert entered the international arena after a distinguished career in the Royal Australian Navy, during which he is largely credited for having saved Malta from almost-certain ruin in one of the darkest periods of World War II. His first assignment as a UN official was to help strengthen the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), leading its operations in Europe (which constituted 80% of its total expenditure). Sir Robert understood that the failure of the United Nations' first operational body would shake international confidence

in the UN concept itself. By the time he left UNRRA in October 1947, it had saved countless lives, his efforts earning widespread praise.

After this, he served in various capacities for the Australian and British Governments, as well as the UN. Later UN assignments included a key role in creating the United Nations Development Programme, leading UN relief operations in Bangladesh (1972–1974), coordinating UN assistance to Zambia, Indochina and Cape Verde (1973–1977) and overseeing the humanitarian mission for refugees along the Thai-Cambodian border (1979–1984).

Through the course of these efforts, Sir Robert's leadership qualities, operational skills and political finesse became legendary. It was in his last UN assignment – the Thai-Cambodian border – that I had the privilege of seeing him in action. Despite his broad gamut of responsibilities, as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Kampuchean Relief, he visited the border almost every month. While a '*big picture*' thinker, he was interested in every operational detail and in every member of the team. His advice covered everything from the positioning of the operations at UN headquarters to approaches to local officials to managing relief supply chains. We were astounded at what he asked, what he knew and what he remembered about our work. Sir Robert continued to inspire me throughout my career

in the UN, and three particular examples of where grit was the key ingredient of my own work have stayed with me.

Thailand

The first brings me back to Aranyaprathet, Thailand, in April 1979. I stood on the border between Thailand and Cambodia with a local Thai commander, looking into the jungle beyond. We could not know then that we were on the brink of a humanitarian emergency of historic proportions; we could not anticipate what that jungle was about to unleash. Over the next several days, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children staggered out from beneath the trees and into our protection. They were in urgent need of medical attention, food and water. I was a mid-level programme officer with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), virtually alone at this far outpost of the Bangkok office. We had almost nothing to offer during the first few hours but somehow, through calls for help and re-purposing the little we had, we got a make-shift refugee camp up and running by the end of the first day.

Over the next week, several more took shape. At their peak these camps were home to more than half a million of the most vulnerable souls on earth – and the UN their principal 'guardian'. We felt unprepared, overwhelmed and under-resourced. When I wonder what gave us the strength to get up each day and feed the living, bury the dead and fight for the food and shelter we needed for what seemed an endless stream of refugees, I think *grit*: a determination to rise to this challenge, keep people alive for a better day and make the world care. The United Nations needed money, material and political support to keep the operation going. We needed grit to keep it all on track.

Cyprus

The second example unfolded in Cyprus in the spring of 1967. I was part of a Swedish contingent of soldiers assigned to the UN Peacekeeping operation on that island, the mission of which was to defuse tension between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Three months in, the platoon I commanded was called to respond to an incident on Artemis Road, a well-known flash point in the on-going struggle. What began as a routine call became one of the deadliest battles of the conflict. My men and I were trapped for a week in trenches beside our vehicles, simultaneously trying to end the gunfire and stay alive. We had no authorisation to respond in kind or even to defend ourselves. Communication with our commanders – those who needed to understand how the situation had evolved and with the authority to send us help – was sporadic. I was 22-years-old, responsible for representing UN peacekeepers in that explosive situation and for keeping my platoon intact.

It took three days for the first reinforcements to arrive. By that time, we were hungry, exhausted and somewhat disillusioned. We were no longer sure whether the locals were shooting at us or in spite of us – but it was crystal clear to us that our efforts to stop the fighting had failed miserably. When I ponder what got us through that week, helped keep us calm and persist in calling a command base that could not hear us, I think *grit*: an ability to reach past the fear and apply the military tactics we learned as soldiers, a commitment to each other and a loyalty to what UN peacekeeping represented in that troubled country.

Security Council Resolution 1308

The last example is more recent and concerns the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1308, adopted in July 2000. I had arrived at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) a few months earlier, tasked with addressing an emerging and uncomfortable problem: growing evidence that HIV/AIDS was surging through the uniformed services, both national armies and UN Peacekeepers. Resolution 1308 charged UNAIDS with assisting governments to develop training courses and other measures to tackle this problem head-on. For the first time, a global epidemic had been categorised as a security issue; the reputation of UNAIDS rested on full implementation of 1308. The public health experts running UNAIDS lacked the experience to interact with the military and, even if they had, very few senior military commanders – in any country – were ready to acknowledge that their uniformed services needed urgent help. Yet there were some key military leaders – for example in Thailand, India and Brazil – who were beginning to realise the full impact of the epidemic. As one famously said: '*more of my soldiers are dying of AIDS than from any other cause*'.

It fell to a small team to bridge the gap. On more than one occasion we found ourselves surrounded by armed soldiers, delivering unwelcome news. Yet, over the next five years, in the face of strong and persistent resistance, we forged ahead, developing a worldwide prevention and awareness campaign that, at its peak, covered all countries contributing UN peacekeeping forces. This included, among other measures, the placement of HIV/AIDS advisors in every major peacekeeping operation. When I reflect on what made us believe that this was possible – that we could transform the attitudes and behaviours of the uniformed services across the globe – I think *grit*: an ability to envision such transformation, the capacity to empower a small but dynamic team to achieve it and the courage to '*speak truth to power*' no matter how unpopular the message.

Empowering teams and collective leadership

A common thread through all these United Nations' assignments was the building and empowering of teams. These teams included the full gamut of experience, cultures and expectations. We were often caught up in highly charged situations, with little contact with our families and limited support and reinforcements. While making operational decisions was hard, the responsibility to keep these teams motivated – to deal with the host of mental and physical problems that arise among staff in fast-moving humanitarian situations – was harder still. This is where the example of Sir Robert Jackson looms large. During his frequent visits to the small, exhausted team at the Thai-Cambodian border, Sir Robert was both realistic and encouraging. He never promised that our jobs would get easier or that the suffering around us

would dissipate, but he was a real-life (and much-needed) demonstration that the highest levels of UN leadership were aware – and appreciative – of our operations. In other words, he recognised and admired what he saw – a UN team that personified *grit*.

Thus, it is fitting that on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, the memory of Sir Robert Jackson should be highlighted. He and Dag Hammarskjöld are among the greatest international civil servants in history. By their words and actions, they both proved, in the words of Hammarskjöld, that *'intellectually and morally, international service therefore requires courage.... courage to defend what is your conviction even when you are facing the threats of powerful opponents'*. In other words, *grit*.

Who would you want to work for?

By Stephanie Koury

Stephanie Koury has more than 23 years of experience in international relations and political work, with the last eleven years with the United Nations serving in countries in conflict or post-conflict and political transition situations (Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria). She currently serves in Lebanon as Principal Political Affairs Officer/ Chief of Staff with the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL). Prior to joining the UN, Stephanie Koury worked with non-governmental organisations in conflict prevention, human rights advocacy and as a research fellow.

This article is written in Stephanie Koury's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

In writing this article, I reflected on the characteristics I would want in a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) or Special Envoy. In doing so, I reviewed a few of the most important leadership qualities I have observed in the contexts I have served in to date, namely UN Special Political Missions in the Middle East, supporting countries going through political transition or seeking to end conflict. In such situations, the UN leader (head of the mission) needs to have built up sufficient trust and respect with interlocutors to be able to advise the parties and help forge compromise among them as needed. The UN leader also has to convey to the people at large that the UN is doing its best to serve on the basis of UN principles, particularly impartiality, inclusivity and respect for human rights.

Accordingly, the leadership qualities I have chosen to highlight are consistency, commitment, integrity and humility. These qualities are crucial for a UN leader in contexts characterised by a high level of mistrust among political and security actors and civilians. In these situations government actors are often grappling with elements of a previous regime, while negotiating power-sharing arrangements and addressing pressing problems, such as ensuring basic services. State institutions are often historically weak, corruption-riddled and marked by human rights abuses, leaving little room for political dissent. Thus, to build this trust, a UN leader has to show commitment, integrity and humility, and it has to be consistent and not only in reaction to a particular incident.

Leadership is consistent commitment and integrity

In Libya, I observed how an SRSG consistently displayed his commitment and integrity to the Libyans – and to the UN team – throughout his interactions and engagements in a variety of ways. In meetings with Libyans, he

listened effectively and consistently conveyed that the UN was there to support Libya's transition and serve the Libyan people. He did this even when he was having to deliver difficult messages to interlocutors or raise sensitive issues, such as alleged human rights abuses.

He remained in country throughout most of his tenure and travelled throughout, meeting a range of interlocutors to understand their concerns. Throughout these engagements and irrespective of the interlocutor, he would respond in a politically sound, transparent manner with interlocutors and which consistently affirmed UN values in support of Libya's transition. He also ensured the UN delivered with appropriate political initiatives and technical and humanitarian expertise as needed. Internally, he held early morning, daily meetings to review political and security developments and UN initiatives, and plans to ensure that staff were on top of the critical work needed to be done. Every evening, he would spend hours reading and preparing for the next day.

In the end, the mission largely delivered during his tenure on the transition and he enjoyed the respect of the Libyans and his team. Although what is described above may sound routine or even boring, the importance of such an approach, learning the file and instilling trust

with interlocutors and the team, cannot be underestimated. Through consistent commitment and integrity, he earned the trust of Libyans, and was able to effectively facilitate an agreement on elections legislation and other steps critical to the political transition process at the time.

Another example of commitment and integrity in leadership is one I observed of a non-UN counterpart. This individual served initially in the national dialogue process and then on a committee that was tasked with drafting a new constitution (based on outcomes of the national dialogue process), which among other things would transform the state from a centralised, unitary state to a federal system. The allocations of authority among the newly forming regions and states were still to be negotiated as were many of the outcomes. He was one of four who were neither lawyers nor judges on the 17-member committee and had no prior experience of issues of constitutions or federalism. Imbued with the full conviction of the responsibility at hand, his commitment to learning the subject matter and his genuine motivation to serve the country, he acquired the trust and respect of his peers, including those from opposing political parties and the senior lawyers and judges. Consequently, he was often asked by members in the committee to explain the concepts of federalism to others and he regularly helped to facilitate compromises among the committee members.

Although this person is not a UN leader, he exemplified traits important for all UN staff; an incredibly strong sense of integrity combined with humility, and commitment to serving the country in which you are working; a full cognisance and appreciation of the responsibility of the task even when the outcome is not guaranteed or known; sincere dedication to learning the issues inside and out, and engaging with all interlocutors in a transparent manner which helps shifts perceptions and build trust, facilitating compromises among parties for the good of the country and its people.

Leadership entails broad engagement

Another important aspect of leadership, which I learned from working with SRSGs and Envoys in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, is the importance of meeting with a broad range of interlocutors, be they lower-level political or diplomatic representatives, ordinary citizens, civil society, armed fighters, opposition figures or traditional tribal leaders. Although it is time-consuming and one must balance political sensitivities, I observed how such broad engagement deepened the SRSG/Envoy's knowledge and insights of the conflict, empathy in response to the stories of suffering or aspirations for the future, points that were often not conveyed by political leaders.

In Yemen, specifically, the envoy would sit for long periods with various interlocutors listening, and often about the same grievances or same political positions he had previously heard. However, it was a critical element in enabling him to build trust and ultimately wield such a degree of influence that he could facilitate agreement in subsequent UN mediated political talks; something which I have yet to see repeated elsewhere.

Through his commitment to learning the file (including his ability to pinpoint the core political issue under contention combined with his broad-based outreach with local and national interlocutors), the SRSG in Iraq was able to effectively facilitate agreement on elections and later, advance progress on confidence-building measures related to the disputed internal boundaries.

Of equal importance is for a UN leader to insist on meeting with unpopular but influential stakeholders, be they actors rejected by other conflicting parties or with representatives of Member States under sanctions imposed by other Member States. The UN leader is subjected to criticism and is pressured to refrain from such contacts. Nonetheless, if those individuals are critical in helping to prevent conflict or advance a political process, the UN leader is showing integrity, particularly impartiality and commitment by engaging with them to build trust and effective working relations to help the parties find solutions or prevent conflict.

Insights gained both by the UN leader and the team from such broad engagements helped inform ideas for confidence-building measures to put before the conflicting parties, such as addressing deep-rooted feelings of marginalisation in the eastern and southern part of Libya related to discrimination in employment opportunities, or local grievances related to power-sharing in Kirkuk among the communities. Broad outreach – even if unpopular – combined with the UN delivering on its commitments, is perhaps the most effective way the UN conveys that it is generally working towards the wellbeing of the population and their future. Such engagement by UN leadership also publicly reaffirms the importance of inclusivity, a principle which is often under threat during political transitions and immediate post-conflict situations.

Finally, perhaps the most important trait which a UN leader needs to have is humility. Those that possess humility are best placed to listen, to really hear and understand the interlocutors' political and security challenges and needs. They are also better at listening to advice or ideas from within the UN team, all of which helps the Envoy or SRSG to better advise, problem-solve and deliver on the mandate. Humility also helps to ensure that the UN leader will not overstep her/his mandate or

exceed their role in such a way that offends the interlocutors or infringes on their sovereignty or that unnecessarily complicates relations with headquarters.

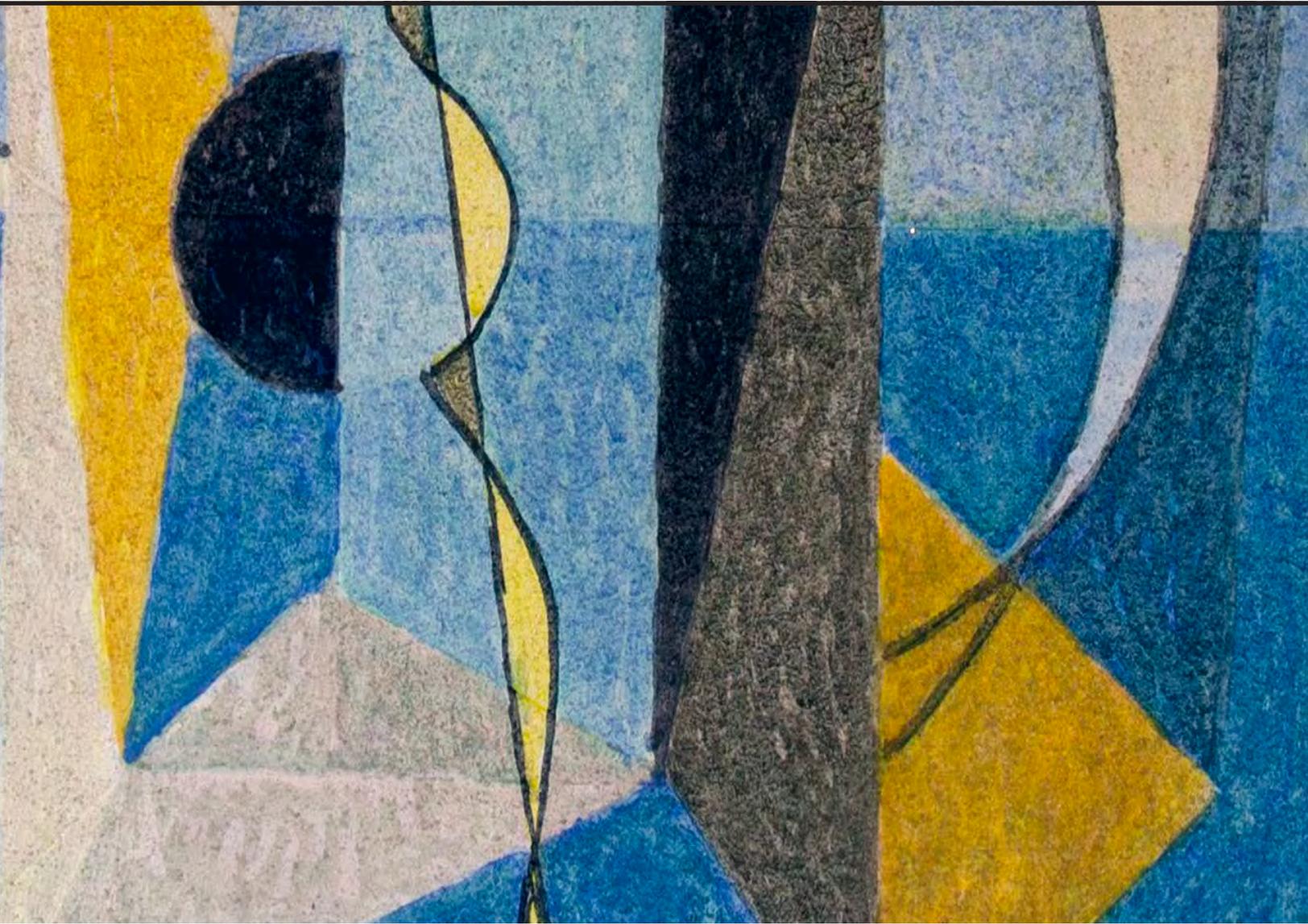
I have observed instances where the opposite of humility has harmed a UN leader's relationship with UN headquarters and been a detriment to the mission, limiting the mission's ability to deliver on its mandate and quashing creativity and motivation among staff.

To the contrary, humility in leadership, combined with many of the other traits described above, simply inspires staff – whether they are advisers, close protection, or mission support – to do their best, be it in logistics, in research and outreach, or in generating creativity in problem-solving and advising. It exemplifies caring. Finally, humility also reminds us all that we are humans and we all make mistakes. There is nothing more reaffirming of the UN's commitment to helping inter-

locutors and to the UN team itself when a UN leader acknowledges their own mistakes, while simultaneously expressing their commitment to go forward.

Conclusion

In contexts of conflict or countries in political transition, there are so many dynamics and factors operating outside of the control of the UN and its representative on the ground, who is seeking to fulfil the mandate to prevent conflict and support a political transition. The traits as described above – consistency in commitment, and integrity, including broad-based engagement – and particularly humility, although not the only traits important for effective UN leadership, they are critical ones in helping to ensure the success of the UN in these complex situations. With much of the region continuing in such turmoil, focusing on such traits in selecting UN leaders will be doubly important going forward.



The abstract: Innovating and breaking the mould

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The United Nations - A unique ecosystem for leadership and innovation

By Alain Sibenaler

'Leadership is the ability to change and to accomplish things that couldn't have been done without you.'

Why write about leadership and innovation? For one, leadership, as a distinct trait that makes one stand out and rise above the crowd, has fascinated me in my day-to-day work with large and diverse teams in complex work environments. In different settings and through reflective observations, I have gotten a sense of how to recognise the true leadership potential of colleagues and the tipping points of talent. Second, through my research, studies and practice in leadership coaching, I have gained an understanding of when and how an organisational leadership development strategy fails to address the contextual complexities that an individual leader may face.

An impressive number of scholars – especially in the business, management and leadership fields – have devoted thinking and literature to how you measure innovation and what benchmarks can be used to label a team, a product or a company as being *innovative*. I like the way Jay Fraser details the etymology of the term, stating that innovation refers to *'the renewal of what already exists'* and that it distinguishes itself from *invention* by its evolutionary nature.¹ In the UN, *innovation* has successfully sustained itself as an organisational metric and is being used to gauge the organisation's fitness and an individual's or team's performance and competitiveness.

Indeed, my departing premise for this piece is that internationally diverse work environments are unique assets for organisational effectiveness and for innovation. Simply put: if you bring the hearts and minds of citizens from over 190 countries together to work on common goals, leaders would have a tremendous advantage; by leveraging cultures and individual differences, they can advance their work to the benefit of innovation and creativity. With a workforce composed of nationals across all Member States of the United Nations, leadership takes on additional dimensions compared to those in the

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corporate, non-profit or public sectors. One of these dimensions is a high degree of contextual complexities and the need for different and tailored, yet flexible leadership approaches.

Ingredients for global leadership

In the literature about global leadership, there has been an effort to conceptualise certain models of leadership and how these models resonate within the concrete experiences of the global work environment. All the studies converge towards putting emphasis on diversity, inter-cultural skills and flexibility to inspire and motivate across cultures in organisations.

I believe that leadership in global organisations should go beyond raising awareness about cultural differences. Several factors (mindset, behaviours, decision-making styles, influencing and politics) will strengthen a new corporate global culture, at the service of multiple stakeholders. Leading across cultures will foster additional richness on the basis that cultural diversity contributes to additional perspectives. Recognising and working with individual and cultural differences will become a strength.

Global leaders are able to lead global teams, characterised by distance and diversity, and are also able to address organisational culture gaps and to promote a new organisational culture. Seeking the inter-connections and addressing complexity are two of the required skills and competencies of global leaders. *'Inter-connectivity is at the heart of complexity!'*²

In sum, it is critical for the leader to be aware of the context, to think systems, to be culturally alert and to display increased levels of the multiple intelligences. I believe that integrating the elements of systems thinking, complexity and cultural intelligence/awareness will lead to increased acceptance, acting and thinking in terms of leveraging differences to the leader's advantage. Creativity, innovation and flexibility to explore new behaviours, ideas, structures are all ingredients of multi-layered interventions and approaches to global leadership. Differential leadership, ie the ability to spark change and to influence decisions, however, lies in constantly seizing new opportunities and in challenging the status quo with fresh, innovative ideas.

It is upon the leader to instil a culture of innovation

I am a huge fan of an *everyone culture*. In my day-to-day gathering of information and making decisions, I firmly believe that the staff and positions in the *lower boxes* of the organisational structure are as, if not more, important than those *closest to the top*. Staff working at the periphery, at the front line are those who happen to contribute greatly with intelligence gathering, insights and exposure and hence they are the true, prime advisors to senior leaders. The same applies to the most junior staff – both the youngest and external recruits, who bring fresh and new perspectives to discussions and to issues.

The leader hence has the amazing opportunity to facilitate or to enable real safe spaces or ecosystems for empowerment, participation and... innovation. The leader can make use of his/her opportunity by establishing (physical) spaces whereby he or she is advised and inspired by external actors such as youth, entrepreneurs, academics. In other words, I believe that fostering innovation in organisations like the UN and in individuals has above all to do with changing mindsets and leading successfully on change.

Innovation

– a matter of organisational culture and mindsets

In the line of value-based work of the UN, innovation is mainly – in my view mistakenly – equated to the work of young people and deals, in most cases, with IT-based solutions or applications to an aspect of work. I believe that innovation should be infused as much as possible *throughout* the organisation as a culture of doing things differently. Innovation(s) should not be confined to that

one unit or that one talented individual. Instead, it is up to the leader or manager to ensure that fostering innovation is part and parcel of the day-to-day *operandi* and an incentive for successful change leadership.

Organisations go through numerous cycles of re-inventing themselves such as business transformations, strategic re-engineering and structural reviews among other things, and they encumber the leader of change from installing a culture of innovation that is nurtured and organically driven by the entire staff. The elaboration of new strategic visions, business plans or investment cases should be seen as opportunities for real, system-wide transformation through innovation.

Putting the Innovation Ecosystem into place

I very much like the term *ecosystem* since it encompasses the organic, interdependent nature and systemic linkages notions of a workplace and/or culture. Let's try and create ecosystems for innovation driven by entrepreneurship, creativity and imagination of all staff! When leaders pretend that they unleash potential (among youth or marginalised or the oppressed) they should have a small mental checklist to see if they create the comfort and trust zones where staff – and especially the most junior and those in the organisational peripheries – actually have the freedom and flexibility to present their innovative ideas to the senior management and decision-making levels. This is certainly not easy in organisations that are influenced by a personality-driven culture, mental barriers or constructs (age, gender, ethnicity), hierarchy-based power and silos.

Even if an office does not venture into the specific establishment of a dedicated new innovation initiative like social change entrepreneurs, youth leads, talent competition etc, creating a larger innovation ecosystem requires that the leader/manager is looking out for specific skillsets in his/her staff when recruiting and rewarding. Some of the innovation *attributes* in staff should include:

1. systems-thinking and ability to explore multiple linkages between the conceptual design of the innovation and its replicability, its feasibility for up-scaling etc;
2. adaptability and flexibility; and
3. technical and personal confidence.

The leader/manager has to ensure that this enabling, innovation ecosystem is underpinned by psychological safety and equal treatment of the entire workforce. In my current office in Uganda, we have *innovations* as a standing item on the agenda of our weekly all-staff planning and coordination meetings so that each and every colleague can either present their own innovations or share inspiring ideas that may contribute to the way we work.

Taking risks

Creating a culture of and for innovations entails a significant part of risk-taking. From the manager's and his/her unit's perspective the risk lies in adding to the workforce a different generation of staffers who are taking risks when developing their innovation products or approaches. This often leads to clashes or frictions between the new recruits and the staff that have been working for some time in *business as usual* mode.

As in many human resource related ventures, this calls for additional time investment by the leader in:

- building trust throughout the entire personnel structure;
- ensuring fair and equal treatment of both new and more senior staff alike;
- setting clear boundaries and spelling out expectations that the *innovations* are to be owned by the organisation and not by individuals.

Risk management in fostering cultures and ecosystems of innovations should be recognised with organisational coherence and rewarded. Again, it is important to recognise even those units and individuals who are not rewarded with dedicated Innovation Challenge/Competition Awards.

From concept to product

I feel strongly that in the line of global development and rights-based work, innovations should gear towards achieving equitable, social change. Beyond setting new trends, innovations should aim at changing mindsets and be used as incentivising, positively-competing entry points for the further unleashing of ideas and against the larger objective of maximising programme/project excellence.

So rather than focusing only on what could be a new product or approach, why not use any of the current or traditional work streams to innovate and set the tone for outwardly driven change and trend setting.

One of my proudest achievements is the conceptual innovation around the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) annual reports and other publications, which have projected UNFPA as an inspiring game changer. Like with most innovations, the concept stemmed from a basic idea: if we want to change the lives of young people, adolescents and women, why not communicate *with* them and in a way that they appreciate. Once this was established, we then went further and wondered how we can move away from reports being a narrative or a descriptive publication to becoming a platform that stimulates ideas and provokes debate around issues. In Cameroon, the annual report was coined 'IMPACT' and the model was later adopted by our global Evaluations Division. Sri Lanka, a

fast-growing middle-income country, opted for *Potential* and used the four Ps (population, potential, possibilities, policy) to reflect the country's vast opportunities for socio-economic transformation.

Social Change Entrepreneurs: Using UNFPA's work on young people as the entry point to promote youth leadership

Our office in Sri Lanka started with the premise that the missing link in youth empowerment was the absence of a space where young people could give us, as development and policy partners, their opinions on matters and issues that concern them. The UNFPA Country Office recruited eight young social change entrepreneurs who demonstrated a new model of youth leadership. All that we did was to provide an enabling space and a thinking environment for the young individuals.

With each entrepreneur working with a supervisory mentor, the assignments were designed to be a theme-based learning journey, forming a collegial and mutually benefitting tandem. From the outset, we set clear expectations and allowed the young entrepreneurs to venture into uncharted territory with foresight and curiosity, enabling them to take risks and to experiment new approaches promoting social and inclusive change.

This not-always-easy-to-manage ecosystem quickly became a true breeding ground of fresh and inspiring innovations. The social change entrepreneurs not only challenged us but – with the necessary trust and support – broke new ground in designing innovative initiatives to address issues that none of us long-serving staffers had thought about. My job as head of office was to strike the delicate balance between the insecurities, and at times frank animosities, of the more senior staff and to bring the innovators back to the objective of making differences in the lives of communities through social change.

'How can different generations talk to one another?' one entrepreneur asked me in one of our coaching sessions. She elaborated on a concept of combining the energy of young Sri Lankans with the wisdom of the older population, which turned into the 'Generation to Generation – #G2GLK' project. To begin, UNFPA used national data and citizen-generated evidence of one major national policy issue and distilled it into a brief. This then informed a panel comprised of representatives from three generations of Sri Lankans (male/female and from all sectors) who debated the specific policy during a live broadcast and with full participation of the audience. The results from each topic were published as *G2G Voices* and disseminated widely in Tamil, Sinhalese and English. Such *innovations* led to UNFPA Sri Lanka being recognised regionally and globally for having reinvented its relevance with renewed programme excellence. And for its ability to attract and to leverage resources with

minimal financial investment. It is hence important to continuously remind ourselves that innovations are not stand alone initiatives or isolated projects. In Sri Lanka, they became our signature products. They became our brand in a fast-changing country that is witnessing significant inequalities and unique demographic phenomena.

Endnotes

¹ Jay Fraser, 'Etymology of Innovation', *Innovationexcellence.com*, 29 April 2014.
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² Phillippe Rosinski, *Global Coaching: An Integrated Approach for Long-Lasting Results*, (Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2010), p 197.

Building coalitions for change: UN Leadership on the ground

By Alexandre Marc

During much of my career I have worked on the strategic agenda around issues of Fragility, Conflict and Violence for a large-scale development bank and in this respect had the opportunity to work closely for many years with UN colleagues on the ground. Both for professional but also for personal reasons, I have been very keen to bridge the understanding between a rather technocratic and mandate-bound institution, such as a development bank, and a much more political and value-based organisation, such as the UN. Leadership of UN staff on the ground should be seen as extremely valuable for most development banks that are currently trying to implement a more holistic, comprehensive and politically sensitive approach, which they claim is essential to address the big challenges of this century. In practice, a collaboration in the field between international and local actors fully incorporating UN leadership is happening at times with success but not enough and often great opportunities are missed. Of course, the blame is on both sides, but because this compendium is on leadership at the UN and especially leadership of staff on the ground I will focus on the topic of UN leadership.

Being a true believer in the need for an increasingly strong international system of governance, I have the unpleasant feeling, as many of us working on international issues feel today, of swimming against a powerful tide. This feeling brings the belief that what you need more than anything else – more than good management, more than perfect technical solutions, more than nice language and well-articulated speeches – is practical, down to earth leadership that enables change on the ground. The views developed in this short paper are personal, they are not based on a representative sample of situations and they are inevitably influenced by views from my colleagues from development banks with whom I interact daily.

Alexandre Marc was until very recently the Chief Specialist for Fragility, Conflict and Violence at the World Bank. He is the lead author of the UN World Bank Flagship Report: *'Pathways for peace, inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflicts'*. He has extensive experience in the areas of conflict and fragility having worked on related themes across four continents over the last 32 years. He joined the World Bank in 1988 in the Africa Region. In addition to his Bank experience, he was Director of the Roma Education Fund from 2006 to 2007 and a visiting fellow, in 2005, at the Centre d'Etudes et de recherches internationales (CERI) in Paris, responsible for research on cultural diversity and public policy. Alexandre Marc holds a Doctorate in Political Science from the Paris Institute of Political Science (Science Po). Before joining the World Bank in 1988, he undertook research and consulting on Africa at Oxford University (St Antony's college) and for the Société D'Étude Économique et Sociale (Paris).

The nature of leadership in a very structured organisation, such as the UN, is described in detail in other parts of this report. However, it is very important to stress that while individual capabilities play a very important role, leadership also depends on how colleagues support you and how much the system in which one operates values leadership qualities on the ground, versus purely obedience, good management or fundraising. So while individual qualities are essential, the environment in which this leadership is expressed is essential to understand why it happens. I will therefore inevitably discuss issues with this environment.

Finally, leadership of the UN plays out differently in places where it has an extremely clear mandate, as is the case in most humanitarian efforts, especially during or after violent conflict, peacekeeping operations and political missions mandated by the Security Council. This obviously makes a huge difference as in these

situations institutional leadership of the UN is mandated and one cannot ignore the UN in any way. UN leadership is much more difficult to exercise in other situations. However, if we want to do more on prevention and on addressing preparedness in situations where the UN has, as of yet, no special mandates, this leadership is extremely important. In practice it is clear that in these situations it is considerably more challenging to exercise leadership, but I strongly believe that the international community is not doing enough to find a new mechanism to provide the UN with stronger legitimacy to act in these spaces.

What type of UN leadership on the ground mobilises development banks?

What everyone expects from the UN leadership, even development banks, believe it or not, is to uphold universal normative standards, especially human rights, but also to hold governments to their word on issues such as climate change, environmental protection, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and many others for which governments have signed important treaties or conventions. Increasingly, development banks are under pressure to provide many of the financing needs behind these agendas, including on economic and social rights. The UN is probably, in this area, the only organisation that has a truly global mandate.

Based on my experience, when leadership was effective, it was less about preaching and helping the government produce reports on a topic or supporting a series of workshop for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but more a process of outreach and patient efforts to convince actors in and outside government of the value of the agenda that the UN was trying to promote. This engagement was often with groups that were not the usual interlocutors of international organisations, such as trade unions, security actors, various religious denominations, national private sector representatives and local politicians. Real leadership on the ground translated into practical alliances around some important topics that were sustainable and could influence government. UN leadership gained strength when it was creating entry points for others in the international community with less legitimacy than the UN to come in and provide a positive contribution. When these entry points were established then development actors with large financing, such as the development banks or more technical UN actors, could start a more specific and technical dialogue and engage in those breaches created by UN leadership.

To effectively support these efforts, the UN must achieve an understanding of the internal politics, of what major international and internal organisations can do and cannot do, and of what is politically possible or not for many of the influential actors. This is, in my view, one

of the UN's biggest challenges but also the essential ingredient of UN leadership. For the development banks this type of leadership is invaluable because their own 'DNA' creates risk aversion and reluctance to engage in any processes perceived as political. They tend to have few staff in the field and governments expect from them a rather technical and focused dialogue. Typically, most contacts are with ministers of finance and planning and few technical ministers. UN leadership can contribute to a much broader coalition and identify entry points that development bank staff are not well equipped to do.

UN leadership in the field also requires an understanding of how political, economic and social policies, peace-building and security issues all connect. Here the challenge is that the UN itself tends to be siloed. This type of understanding, that brings down the traditional barriers between these areas, is what is most needed. Unfortunately, development banks are still often not ready to seize these opportunities, but they are trying to change under international pressure. UN leadership, when it is effective, is very much anchored in this intimate and holistic knowledge of the country realities and a solid understanding of various actors' playground; something that is, in my experience, mostly a result of the personal abilities of staff more than something guided by the institution. This ability, when it is there, creates a sense of trust with other institutions and a confidence that advice provided by UN is solidly grounded.

In today's complex world nothing can be achieved on the ground without a strong coalition among a large variety of actors. The UN leadership is very much about supporting and sustaining these coalitions and gaining trust among the various actors that compose these coalitions. However, leadership is reinforced by focusing these large coalitions on some concrete actions that will show some impact in the field and be able to attract actors to deliver on them. This is reinforced by building trust among various actors, showing integrity and knowing clearly what the purpose of these coalitions are for. The UN needs to bring in these coalitions of actors that can do something about the issues it discusses. When this happens on very concrete topics, such as public financial management in Somalia or reaching out to remote regions with development actions in the Central African Republic, then the combination of bringing all the actors around the table, having a vision of where this coalition can go and being politically courageous on getting the right messages to government and local authorities, UN leadership roots itself to the ground.

What are the challenges for UN staff leadership on the ground?

A major shortcoming of UN leadership in the field is

the tendency of the UN system to look inward. The thinking in UN missions is that the UN system can do it all, which is not only a problem at the UN! When UN missions in the field focus only on ensuring that the various UN agencies and departments are well-coordinated and believe that moving the machinery of the UN system is leadership, then usually other actors turn away. The idea today that any institution can do it on its own is in most cases wrong. Today there are extremely few issues and situations on the ground that can be addressed by the UN system alone. Of course coordination is important for any agency, but the amount of time and energy it seems to take within the UN system often undermines the ability for UN staff to play a true leadership role. The problem of the fragmentation of the UN system is seen by many outsiders as a self-inflicted problem, and when it seems to take precedent over broader outreach efforts it greatly reduces trust of other partners, which in turn undermines dramatically effective leadership.

The second issue is linked to financing and because so many of the activities of the UN are under-funded or funded by non-core funding, this often requires much of the staff's focus and keeps them from looking outside at the big issues to be addressed in country. Under-funding also has an impact on the professionalisation of staff on the ground and the tendency to want to create a project for every problem so that staff can be financed and the UN's presence can be ensured. This is, I understand, one of the main reasons for the reform of the UN and it is still too soon to say if it is working, but hopefully it will address this problem, at least in part. Fundraising is important for any organisation but should come after all the other efforts mentioned above have been undertaken. The focus on financing of the system does not support a sense of leadership outside of the UN system; quite the opposite, it can undermine trust of partners and of government that can see the UN system as a competitor for resources. As a friend working in the UN once told me talking about my own organisation: *'it makes a huge difference when you are independently wealthy!'*.

Finally, one of the most complex issues today for UN leadership on the ground is the unravelling of the international order and its effect on the credibility of the UN with governments it is engaging. Obviously, the leverage of the UN on the ground suffers tremendously from this unravelling and the credibility with governments often suffers. The fact that countries have signed agreements or endorsed decisions carries less and less weight because many large powers or regional powers increasingly take great latitude with the international order. Waiving large agreements on climate change or on the SDGs carries less and less weight. This is where UN leadership on the ground is challenged, but at the same time is so import-

ant to bring together the right collation, find the type of entry points that might be the most effective, align the various international actors behind a few big agendas and patiently advocate for change.

What makes UN leadership work on the ground?

So what seems to make leadership in the field stick? The short answer is strategic vision combined with extremely practical tactical skills. It is the ability to bring various meaningful actors, international and national, around a table to discuss critical issues for the country, beyond the UN system. It is the ability to bring important world values and principles, especially human rights, to bear on discussions with government, always keeping in mind that at some point, not too far away, whatever is done will require concrete outcomes on the ground so that communities can start to believe in it, and these are rarely pilot projects.

It is also the ability to engage state and non-state actors with political courage on the most important issues, including the ones operating in the shadow of power, to influence important decisions. This can only work if UN staff have a deep knowledge of the political and social dynamic at play and a vision of where these efforts should lead. Resisting being absorbed by the black hole of UN coordination and of responding to each UN headquarters-led initiative, but instead identifying where opportunities could be seized and building coalitions for this to happen is what leadership seems to be about. It is bringing the moral weight of the UN to the table while recognising the importance of very practical engagement that means progress for communities on the ground. Not easy! But I have seen this work through personal attributes and skills of individuals. These are political courage and integrity, an ability to create trust with a wide variety of actors by understanding the reality on the ground and what other organisations and people can bring or not bring to the table and providing a global vision of where the country should be heading on specific issues, as well as speaking truth to government.

When UN staff can expose these qualities, then naturally other actors will look to the UN to help move their agenda. This has happened lately with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Bank on the forced displacement agenda, but it has also been pivotal in countries like Yemen, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Mali, as well as in very difficult situations for development organisation such as Myanmar.

Feminist leadership – An inspiration for all

Interview with Bela Kapur

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation spoke with Bela Kapur, an independent expert on women, peace and security who has had plenty of exposure to leadership in crisis contexts. She has seen and lived it through field assignments with the UN, notably in Libya and Syria, and she has thought and written about it, notably as part of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) process.

Bela Kapur explained how for her the concept and practice of feminist leadership has been shaped by the many women she has worked with in places as different as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Syria, Ukraine or South Sudan, who are at the forefront of the struggle to advance women's rights and build peace. She further reflected that listening to these women leaders in war-torn places has brought greater clarity as to the true essence and practice of feminist leadership.

What are the attributes of feminist leadership?

There is probably not one all-encompassing definition of feminist leadership. Yet, there are a number of attributes that women leaders working in conflict contexts displayed and talked about.

Many women used the word 'courage', which is manifested in different ways, notably through the ability, despite the fear, to articulate one's ideas in front of the party that resists change, be it the police forces or political leaders. 'You feel fear, but stand up and do your duty'. This courage also drives the ability and willingness to come up with radical ideas, to break taboos.

Women also spoke of the need, in addition to courage, of listening to the other, including the other who has or is committing the harm. For these women, listening to others is part of a larger imperative of empathy, which some define simply as acting as a human being,

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and making connections, reaching out to other human beings across the line.

To do that, one must be driven by a sense of fairness and curiosity. The women emphasised the need to recognise and respect people according to their capacities and aspirations, and not their background, their status or their qualifications. To recognise and respect, one must want to learn, to reflect and to adapt. All three actions are marks of curiosity, which is at once externally and internally oriented.

Finally, these women leaders expressed confidence in themselves, in others, in their vision and in their faith.

For me, this confidence is the core element of these women's persistent patience: persistent patience to understand and to struggle for common ground. It underpins their resilience, to keep pushing up the hill, despite the resistance and the setbacks in their fight for women's right and to build peace.

What makes these leadership traits 'feminist'; is it because they are embodied and practiced by women leaders, or because many of these leaders work to advance women's rights?

Not at all. I believe that what makes this leadership feminist are people's – in this case women's – consciousness in going through life by looking out for discrimination and seeking inclusion. The women's rights movement is grounded in speaking up and acting against a long history of exclusionary spaces and marginalising practices. So the concept may have come about from the women's rights agenda, but its scope is certainly not restricted to women's rights.

Many women may have directly experienced discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion and this may have provided their own awakening to take action against discrimination and for inclusion. But the practice of feminist leadership is not the prerogative of women leaders only. The term *feminist leadership* is also used to distinguish and contrast those practices of the women leaders with whom I have worked with current practices of leadership in peace and security spaces. Those practices arise largely from and are dominated by the subconscious adoption and practice of masculinist leadership traits – where man is seen as '*the default human*' – which generally do not seek to progress inclusion.

For many of the women I have spoken to, the values with which they sought to abide were necessary to cope with life now, and to bring about a post-conflict vision of a *feminist peace*, defined as a space of political, economic and socio-economic equality, where all have the freedom to exercise their rights. They further spoke of *feminist leadership* as residing in the link between this vision, the values and practices. This link defines their work for women's rights and building peace, and this link speaks to the integrity required, in being, in their words, the same person in the personal and the professional.

Being the same person in the personal and the professional therefore means that the exercise of leadership must be done through co-leading, co-creation, co-owning and compromising. These professional practices are eminently reflective of personal values. If they were any different, their effectiveness would be reduced.

These 'professional practices' listed here, such as co-leading and co-creating, are strikingly similar to what one can read in the UN's latest leadership documents; is the UN therefore already practicing feminist leadership? If not, what is needed?

Having left the UN a few years ago now, it is difficult for me to comment on whether spaces within the UN today embody the practices of feminist leadership as discussed here. But I think that what matters is not just that these practices, including of co-leading and co-creating, be listed in leadership documents, or even included in leadership reviews, training etc. To be meaningful, effective, and transformative – for that is the ultimate goal – and for the UN to be a transformational leader in the world and to lead transformation in the world – these practices must be linked to personal values. That's what makes them constitutive of leadership, beyond management. But that is also why it is difficult to capture them in standard UN management instruments.

And therefore the question of what the UN can do to foster and nurture feminist leadership is challenging.

For one, I think that feminist leadership needs to be modelled by UN staff, including senior staff. Leaders must design and implement practices of genuine inclusiveness, on a daily basis. Very few tasks should escape this imperative, as well as very few moments with colleagues. The disempowering phenomenon of the 'back benchers' must be tackled head on. Remembering what one woman leader once told me, it is important to reflect on how one can be hierarchical in tasks, but not in relationships.

Beyond modelling it, the UN needs to speak to it, to discuss what it means and what it looks like so that its practice in the unique space that is the UN can be understood. Across the organisation, the UN's voice must refer to the value and practice of courage, curiosity, fairness and so forth.

And the UN needs to recognise and value it, if not reward it. I am aware of the risks involved: bureaucratic incentives (through awards and rewards) can fuel superficial practices to get ahead. Their pursuit can sully the underlying values. Maybe the results of feminist leadership approaches, and the inspiration they provide, are sufficient. But surely its values can better suffuse many aspects of human resource management, from recruitment to promotions, as well as daily collegial relationships.

And here, there are other challenges as well. Feminist leadership is about bringing about long-term metamorphosis, one that also reflects major societal transforma-

tions currently underway. For the UN, it is therefore also a matter of relevance. But will the organisation exercise the kind of persistent patience that these women do? And how many UN staff, including senior leaders, will demonstrate the courage, self-confidence and vision to let go of some of their formal authority and power to exercise feminist leadership so that they and the organisation can bring about real transformation?

Leadership on the frontlines of conflict: The UNHCR team approach in Afghanistan

By Maya Ameratunga

'The UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell,' former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's famous words rang in my ears. In the skies above Central Asia, I was deep in thought, as I rushed back to re-join my team in Afghanistan, interrupting a family New Year holiday to cope with yet another emergency. I was pondering what makes humanitarian workers serve the world's most vulnerable populations in the toughest of conditions – in a way, aspiring to *'save them from hell'* – and how we each in our own ways, individually and collectively, show leadership in the deep field at crucial moments for our teams.

The previous night, on 4 January 2016, nine United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) colleagues, huddled in the bunker *'safe room'* of our international staff guest house in Kabul, had reached out to me as UNHCR's Country Representative, their voices brave but shaking through the crackly telephone line, as the guest house – our communal home – was attacked by suicide bombers in a massive truck bombing. UNHCR was not the target (the Taliban later took responsibility for aiming the attack at the next door international military contractors' camp), but we were badly impacted. If not for the New Year holiday period, the numbers at the guest house would have been much higher – more than 20 UNHCR staff.

Alex, whom I had entrusted as the officer-in-charge when I had gone on leave in the expectation that it would be a comparatively quiet New Year by Afghanistan standards, showed heroic leadership on the night of the attack, ensuring the safety of the team and their transport to a safe guest house to receive medical treatment, counselling and care. Indeed, all the colleagues showed great courage and fortitude under fire. When Martin initially could not be accounted for but finally staggered into the bunker dripping with blood, it turned out that he had been saving lives. After he had been the first to be extricated from the collapsed gym, he had stayed on to help the responders identify where the

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This article is a tribute to the UNHCR Afghanistan team of 2015–2016. The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of many team members in compiling and reviewing this story.

This article is written in Maya Ameratunga's personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

others were and to calm those still trapped while rescuers worked to dig them out. The moral and physical courage and humanity of such colleagues were all the more remarkable, because everyone was anticipating that at any moment there could be an imminent complex attack from fighters following the suicide bombers paving the way into the compound, as was the usual pattern.

Collective leadership in the face of tragedy

The following day, amidst the ruins of our compound, my team and I were reunited in emotional embraces. As we surveyed the destruction all around us, it seemed miraculous that they had escaped with minor injuries given the scale of the attack. Tragically, a local guard had died and a number of the guest house residents were seriously wounded. UNHCR's bomb blast expert, who had recommended security reinforcements months earlier, had helped to save our lives.

I was deeply moved as I saw our local drivers sifting through the rubble of our rooms, dusting off the glass and debris to pick out salvageable possessions and help us pack and move to another guest house. National colleagues had immediately volunteered for international staff to come stay in their homes. UN security regulations did not permit us to accept these generous offers, but such gestures of kindness and glimpses of humanity humbled us. Through this bombing and the loss of our 'home', we international staff experienced a temporary taste of the daily risks faced by our national colleagues, but for them there is no respite.

Internally, leadership – in combination with management – in the days that followed meant focus on a combination of priorities: caring for colleagues (not only those who had been injured and traumatised, but the whole team) and being as accessible as possible; having to stand by difficult and unpopular executive decisions, such as not permitting international staff, who had been on leave outside the country, to return until the situation stabilised; grappling together with headquarters about what level of staffing and operations the Afghanistan team should stay at; identifying options for a new guest house, which would enable us eventually to reunite the team; and in spite of staff being dispersed abroad, keeping operations going seamlessly for the millions of people – the internally displaced, returnees, refugees and host communities – we were there to help. Externally, leadership concentrated on mobilising support for the future of UNHCR operations in Afghanistan and ensuring we would stay and deliver.

While colleagues who had been at the guest house at the time of the attack were asked to leave Afghanistan to recover, I remained with the national staff, who were worried that the team might break up and that the operation may be downsized. I spent my evenings having Skype calls with each international colleague outside the country, trying to maintain a sense of togetherness despite the distance. The colleagues overseas in turn kept up close links with each other and with national colleagues throughout Afghanistan. I saw a number of colleagues working extra hard from afar at a much higher level than their grade – they told me it was the only thing they could do to feel they were there in spirit with the team inside Afghanistan. Gradually a handful of international colleagues were allowed to rotate in and out of the country from a hub we set up in Istanbul, while we constructed a guest house in Kabul. Through an emphasis on camaraderie and caring for each other – from cheerful social events and encouraging colleagues to maintain informal 'buddy systems' during moments of anxiety, to developing constructive rituals (such as lining up at the nearby NGO hospital to donate our blood when horrendous attacks around us brought shock and

grief) – we managed to keep team morale high during danger-ridden, tumultuous times.

The intensity of our collective experiences – the bombing and its aftermath, as well as the exceptional operational challenges we were navigating together – had emotionally bonded the team. There was a sense that it was somehow fitting that as we worked as a cohesive and inclusive team, so we should leave as a team when our work was done, rather than accept the organisation's offer to facilitate early departure from Afghanistan for any international staff who wished to do so.

A collective leadership built on the strength of national colleagues

While the bombing focused the organisation's attention on the security and well-being of international staff who had been impacted, for those of us in the field it drove home the daily reality of life in Afghanistan for our national colleagues. We in the management team used every opportunity to highlight that this was a period when national colleagues were seriously at risk and needed more support, which we did our best to provide. As UNHCR nationalised some of its field offices (for local capacity building reasons as well as due to security and budgetary constraints), there have been outstanding examples of leadership and courage by national colleagues.

The visibility of certain national colleagues due to their leadership roles within UNHCR and the humanitarian community, particularly in areas of shifting frontlines, left them vulnerable to intimidation and threats from local anti-government elements. However, their fidelity to basic humanitarian principles and persuasive appeals to common decency and humanity often served as protective armour. For example, when approached by a Taliban commander for money and weapons, a national head of office negotiated instead a contribution of notebooks and school supplies for a primary school in an area under their control (he had funded hundreds of dollars' worth of such assistance out of his own pocket, without requesting assistance from UNHCR – his personal contributions came to my attention only later).

For many national colleagues, their leadership in the cause of humanitarian service meant self-sacrifice as they came under security risk, in part due to their prominence and exposure. Many were forced to repeatedly relocate their families to the relative safety of Kabul or other cities, thus enduring family separation in their service on behalf of UNHCR. While the sacrifice of international colleagues who endure prolonged absences from loved ones is often lauded, there is little we can do for our national colleagues faced with the competing dilemmas of continued service to those in need and the

imperative to safeguard the welfare of their families in conflict zones.

Female national colleagues – especially those in prominent positions – were especially exposed. In one particularly conservative community, where the still unusual phenomenon of working women attracted negative attention, three sisters (one of them a UNHCR staff member) on their way to work in their car came under fire from unknown gunmen on a motorcycle. Our colleague's sister – also a UN staff member with a human rights profile – was killed. Without our brave female national staff, UNHCR and our partners would not have access to the female half of the populations we serve, as well as little direct understanding of their daily hardships and the inequities and continuing injustices in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Our female national colleagues were well-equipped to stand as equals in the struggle for a better Afghanistan. They had had to fight for an education and the right to employment, in the process defying harmful traditional practices, such as early/forced marriages of girls. Young female colleagues had continued their education during Taliban times by attending underground schools, while older colleagues had taught in these schools, risking serious punishment if caught. Those who had fled to Pakistan and Iran as refugees had managed to benefit from education and work experience in asylum countries, supported by UNHCR, and had returned to rebuild their still war-torn country. Now they were on a journey to leadership in UNHCR. They told me they found inspiration in having their first female Representative. So it was important to mentor these colleagues and to broaden their horizons, even beyond Afghanistan.

When European offices of UNHCR requested Afghan staff to come on mission to help with the influxes of Afghan and other asylum seekers to Europe, initially the lists of volunteers were men. I made it clear that I would only consider gender-inclusive lists, as I was aware that some female colleagues were facing pressures – from their families, communities and even within the office – not to put themselves forward. The Afghan women and men who went to serve in European operations came back with their eyes opened to the experience of workplace gender equality and respect for diversity and inclusion in the world outside their country – my hope was that they would become the living embodiment of these principles in their communities, with the potential to change longer term thinking and perceptions. For the women especially, it was a bold and courageous step to emerge from the confines of their more traditional culture and to put the humanitarian cause first; and to defy convention in travelling alone for the first time in their lives, to provide support so far

away to their fellow countrymen seeking refuge from the ravages of conflict.

A team approach to leadership

The unbelievably difficult path we navigated as a team was recognised by our headquarters with an Excellence in Field Service Award for achievements in field operations. While the original award sits proudly in the UNHCR Kabul country office, I arranged for every section and every field office to be presented with a replica by our High Commissioner when he visited Afghanistan in 2016. The team approach to leadership had been instrumental in enabling us to give the best of ourselves as we strove to make a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable populations, for whom we were their hope in their time of greatest need – the ultimate test of the success of our humanitarian leadership.

Now as UNHCR's Ombudsman, I look back at my team of 2015-2016 for important lessons to be learned on leadership in the most dire field conditions in Afghanistan, a country that inspires passion in many who serve there.

The Afghanistan team learned from our experiences of that period that the best and most inclusive leadership is not necessarily at the level of one individual, or dependent on seniority, rank, power or status, but can be through the team. Leadership does not need to be hierarchical; democratic and participative styles can be more empowering and sustainable. Effective leaders do not try to do it alone, but are also prepared to *lead from behind* where appropriate and to make space and cultivate settings to coach others to step up and lead, so that leadership can also be exercised from below.

Promoting diversity of thought and opinions is as important as other aspects of diversity. Confident leaders seek out team members who will represent diversity of opinions. Leaders should empower these colleagues to challenge them and the system when required, rather than simply filling the team with those who will safely mirror their own views. Leaders need to create an organisational culture of seeking out opinions where staff feel safe and supported to express different viewpoints and take initiatives and calculated risks in pursuit of UNHCR's mandate. Leadership in Afghanistan was about managing these risks and helping define how far we would go in our strategies, advocacy and interventions in the most challenging of times.

Even in pressured emergency circumstances such as in Afghanistan, where there are many competing demands on one's time, a leader needs to invest at least as much time and effort internally in the team as on the inevitable pressures of external demands. Leadership is about

caring for, nurturing, empowering, inspiring and, on occasion, defending the team. Leaders do their best to get to know their staff at all levels and in different locations (despite the challenges in operations such as Afghanistan, with hundreds of staff and several field offices around the country), as well as to understand these colleagues' hopes and fears. Good leaders do not judge people by the 'colour of their badge' (ie seniority or grade), but by their character, values, dedication and performance.

Especially in an operational context as grim as Afghanistan, it is important for leaders to have optimism and hope for the future, proactively communicating a positive can-do attitude, celebrating team achievements and learning constructive lessons from the failures. Leaders need to model organisational values and 'walk the talk'; be self-aware and self-critical; have personal humility, emotional intelligence, empathy and respect and be able to build trust and resilience.

An inclusive team approach means consulting downwards in incorporating ideas of others for setting the vision, and taking care to carry the whole team forward with this common vision, as we adapt operations to evolving needs and contexts. Amidst moral ambiguities, messy field realities and hostile security environments, leaders need to have a moral compass and intuition for what is the right thing to do, especially in complex and uncertain circumstances such as those prevailing in Afghanistan. When we face challenges in upholding UN standards and norms, integrity and courageous loyalty to our values are essential in skilfully advancing the principles we stand for, most importantly when it may be controversial to do so. At such moments, we need to be less concerned about how we may be criticised in the present and more about how history will judge us.

The strongest humanitarian leaders are needed in the toughest field operations and hopefully are attracted to challenges such as in Afghanistan. Leaders need to be sought for *soft* team and people management skills, strategic thinking and the ability to communicate a clear vision, build trust and inspire their colleagues. Our various technical expertise, for which we may have been promoted in the past, becomes less and less relevant as we rise to leadership positions ('*what got you here won't get you there*', as the saying goes). Delivery and technical expertise now come from those we manage, not micro-manage. Organisations need to value and promote stronger skills in leading people, knowing that the most well respected leaders tend to attract the best

staff. Self-assured leaders recruit and harness the talent of those who will be complementary and, within the constraints of human resources policies, try to build the right team. Ensuring the right person is in the right place at the right time can go some way towards making up for the invariable lack of resources in humanitarian operations. Empowering leaders regard as their primary goal to bring out the best in everyone, recognising that happy people work better. For the psychologically safe workplaces that are needed for this to become a reality, we need to create conducive conditions of civility for colleagues to function with positive morale in a happy, inclusive and cohesive team environment, with a coherent vision and common purpose. Our duty of care to ensure these factors in our workplaces is as important as duty of care in addressing risks to our staff in the external environment. Dynamic leaders need to be enablers of change and should embrace new norms, including those needed for productive and harmonious workplaces. Compassionate leaders are tough on maintaining standards, while being kind-hearted and nurturing to people. Especially in non-family duty stations such as Afghanistan, it helps if a team can become like an extended '*second family*' in taking care of each other.

In Afghanistan, national colleagues have often been refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and host community members – the very people we serve – and need to be valued, mentored and accorded the respect and prospects they deserve equally with their international counterparts. They are the backbone of our operations and their local knowledge and advice should be actively sought, while doing the best we can to protect them from the daily risks in conflict zones. National colleagues are leaders and influencers in their communities and capacitating them is an essential part of the legacy the UN leaves behind when our work is done.

My assignment as the Representative in Afghanistan taught me that leadership can be a collective endeavour even in momentous times, with motivated and committed team members being nurtured to embody traits of leadership each in their own way. For many, our experiences inspired in us the ideals of the United Nations and the spirit of what had made us want to join UNHCR – dedication, courage, compassion, service and, in a sense, the aspiration to '*save humanity from hell*' on the frontlines of conflict.

Democratising innovation and leadership at the UN

By Ruth Blackshaw and Klas Moldéus

'When I grow up I want to become a bureaucrat', is a sentence that has probably never been said out loud. Still, for many of us in the public sector, it can seem like we have little choice. We joined the UN system for its inspiring mission and the opportunity to do meaningful work. And we're not alone.¹ Once joining however, we can find ourselves serving the bureaucracy rather than the mission, churning out reports but losing sight of the real impact of our work.

In a survey on innovation conducted by the 'Young UN: Agents for Change' (Young UN) network (a network of more than 1600 UN system employees in 100+ countries working towards a UN that lives by its values), a UN employee shared: *'they say the UN is a place "where great ideas come to die". There is no lack of innovation in the UN. It is implementing the innovative ideas employees have that presents the greatest hurdles'*. When asked what keeps him up at night, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, himself said: *'simple: bureaucracy. Fragmented structures. Byzantine procedures. Endless red tape.'*²

Such challenges are not unique to the UN. Large organisations everywhere are struggling to transform from within to keep up with the rapid pace of change shaping the future of work – to overcome bureaucracy and embrace new ways of working, become more flexible, agile and open to constant learning and change. In response, changemakers inside organisations called anything from *social intrapreneurs* to *corporate rebels* and *insider activists* are working to reinvent organisations from the inside out.

The question is: is it possible to work at the UN (or any other large bureaucracy for that matter) without becoming a bureaucrat in the process? Is it possible for employees instead to contribute to UN's mission with full potential and motivation?

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Klas Moldéus is working with United Nations Water based in Geneva, Switzerland. Having grown up in Sweden, he has since led sustainable development and startup initiatives in countries including Myanmar, Kenya and Ethiopia. Klas Moldéus is a passionate advocate for sustainable development and innovation, and as part of the Young UN network he has contributed to several initiatives promoting environmental sustainability, bottom-up approaches and driving innovation at the UN.

This article is written in Ruth Blackshaw's and Klas Moldéus' personal capacities and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

We believe that the answer is yes. In this article, we unpack two of the most commonly used buzzwords out there, *leadership* and *innovation*. We share our ideas on how senior leaders, supervisors and employees can apply the levers available to them to create a UN where all employees can bring their full potential to achieve the UN's mission, by democratising innovation and leadership.

To us, democratising innovation and leadership means enabling innovation to emerge from all corners of the organisation, and reimagining leadership to enable distributed responsibility and driving change through collective action. We are of the view that factors which



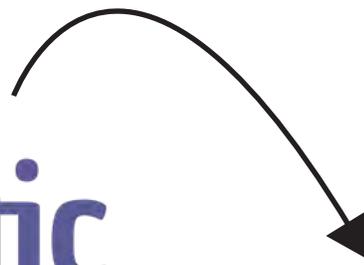
enable innovation also enable leadership, and that by investing in an enabling environment for innovation and continuous learning, a new type of leadership and intrapreneurship can emerge from within. Drawing on our experience as members of the Young UN network, we offer some thoughts on what can be done at different levels of the organisation to make such shifts happen.

Taking the pulse on the UN – where are we now?

When asked to describe in five words the UN as they experience it and the UN as they would like it to be, the words most frequently mentioned by UN employees (shown in the word clouds above) tell a clear tale.

The need to enable a shift from the left image to the right, and mainstream innovation in the UN is recognised and prioritised at the highest levels of the UN system, by the UN Secretary-General personally and through the UN system Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). For example, one of the four core principles of the UN System Leadership Framework³ for UN employees is co-creation and it applies to ‘all personnel of the UN system’, urging ‘we are all called to lead’.

Yet, despite this strong and welcome commitment from the top, current structures and practices continue to prevent innovation and leadership from being open to all. When asked whether their organisation has a culture of innovation and risk taking, only 14% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed in a recent Young UN study⁴ on the future of work which captured the views of 859 employees from across more than 30 UN organisations in more than 90 countries. Only 21% agreed they have a voice and opportunities to shape decisions in their organisations, while poor management practices was the



second most cited reason for leaving the UN. This is a testimony that changing culture and integrating innovative approaches into the DNA of the organisation take time – perhaps especially in the public sector – and that our journey towards an innovative UN still has a long way to go.

Digging deeper, the study asked about the limiting and enabling factors for innovation. The top factors limiting employees from experimenting with new and better ways of doing things were: lack of support from senior management or direct supervisor; lack of dedicated time within working hours; lack of financial resources; lack of access to tools and lack of people to collaborate with. On the contrary, the top enabling factors were found to be support from supervisor, motivation, knowledge and skills and people to collaborate with. See Figures 1 and 2 on the following page.

It is to the UN’s advantage that employees have a strong willingness and interest in collaborating across boundaries. More than 80% of respondents in the study were interested in either supporting the work of other teams in their organisation on an ad-hoc basis, working in cross-functional teams in their organisation, working in cross-UN teams and through short-term assignments to other teams and/or duty stations in their organisation or short-term assignments or secondment opportunities to other UN organisations.

Lack of support from senior management was the top factor hindering testing and experimentation with new approaches.

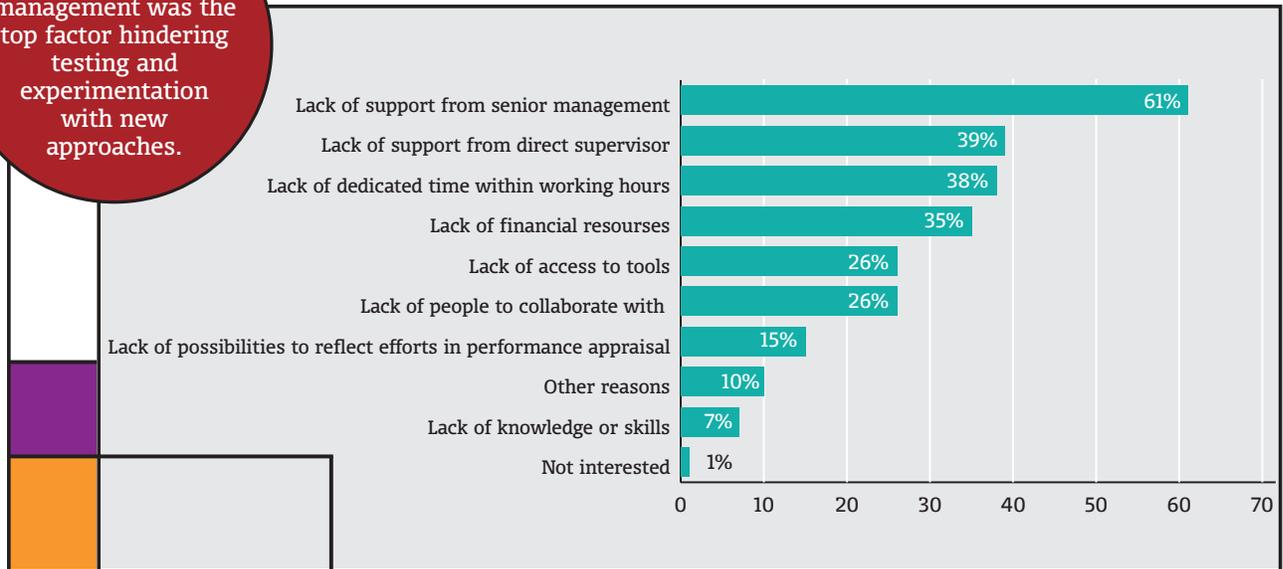


Figure 1: Factors cited by respondents that limit them from coming up and experimenting with new and better ways of doing things.

The top enabling factors are support from supervisors and having motivation, knowledge and skills, as well as people to collaborate with.

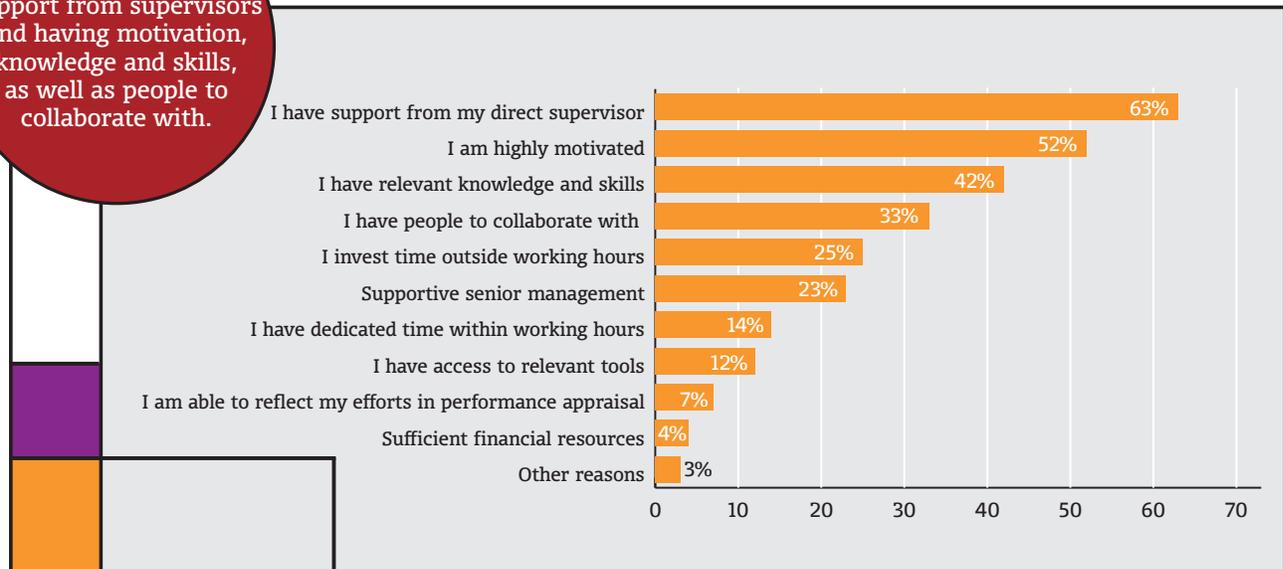


Figure 2: Factors cited by respondents that enable them to come up and experiment with new and better ways of doing things

Young UN:

A non-bureaucratic space in the UN system

Started in 2016 by young UN employees to catalyse systems change, Young UN is a cross-UN, global network working towards a shared vision of a UN that fully embodies the principles it stands for. In three years, the network has grown to now more than 1,600 members across more than 100 UN duty stations. Young UN drives change through crowdsourcing ideas from across the UN system, by piloting new ideas and by building a movement of new mindsets and ways of working.

In a wider context where risk aversion can quell creativity, for us, the Young UN network has provided a non-bureaucratic space embedded within the UN system where we can experiment with new ideas and approaches. It is where we find a community of like-minded ‘bureau-hackers’ ready to both conform and rebel, challenge and comply and proactively shape the UN system into what we think it needs to be. Young UN is co-owned and continuously co-created by all its members. The network operates on a model of distributed leadership, where projects and geographical hubs can be initiated by any member of the network and rely on the commitment of members to drive them forward. Young UN works on the basis of constant questioning, creating, experimenting, testing and improving. Members take a solution- and action-oriented approach, forming fluid teams that gather and disperse according to the initiative underway. The fundamental assumptions underpinning Young UN’s work include trust, transparency, collective intelligence, shared responsibility and distributed leadership.

This way of working takes down hurdles for people to contribute and get engaged, and enables Young UN members to develop their own ideas and initiatives, find colleagues across the system to collaborate with and drive local and global change projects within the UN. Some examples of recent initiatives include: crowdsourcing feedback on and ideas for the on-going UN reform and other high-level processes at the request of UN senior management; piloting ‘innovation time’ where 30 participants in 10 organisations dedicate up to 20% of their working hours to develop an innovative project or idea; the development of a UN system-wide skills sharing and collaboration platform, *conecta*; and initiatives to advance climate action in the UN system including an open letter to the UN Secretary-General⁵ and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Anonymous initiative, which supports UN employees to adopt more sustainable practices in their workplaces and daily lives.

The role of leadership and innovation

Both *leadership* and *innovation* can mean almost anything to anyone. Different people will bring different assumptions about *what* they mean (is innovation about

gadgets or culture?) and *who* can or should do each (can everyone be a leader, and if so what does this mean for the concept of leadership?). Offering some guidance, Portable⁶ writes, ‘*innovation is as simple as improving a current process, adapting an old method for a new context or creating something entirely new*’. Meanwhile, Laloux⁷ explains that ‘*innovation doesn’t happen centrally, according to plan, but at the edges, all the time, when some organism senses a change in the environment and experiments to find an appropriate response*’.

In a similar vein, innovation within Young UN is not about the latest technology or gadgets, but instead a culture and approach that enables the individual, as well as the organisation, to constantly learn, test, collaborate and improve.

This approach to innovation is tightly linked to a view of leadership that is fundamentally different from traditional approaches in hierarchical organisations. Instead of power being held by a few and inaccessible to the majority (‘old power’ as described by Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms⁸), power and the possibility to exercise leadership are distributed and unlimited across organisations, functions and duty stations (‘new power’). In such a setting, factors that enable a culture of innovation also enable distributed leadership. In effect, by taking down hurdles for innovation, we create organisations where anyone can drive change – in short, we create more space for leadership by reducing limitations and control of traditional management practices. In the National Health Service England, their New Horizons team consciously seeks to leverage ‘new power’ networks to make change happen and build change agency in a bureaucratic and traditionally hierarchical organisation – an inspiration for our thinking.

	old power	new power	
	Currency	Current	
	Held by a few	Made by many	
	Pushed down	Pulled in	
	Commanded	Shared	
	Closed	Open	
	Transaction	Relationship	
Source: This graphic has been reproduced from The NHS School for Change Agents 2019 - session 1, slide 19, available here: https://www.slideshare.net/HorizonsCIC/school-for-change-agents-2019-session-1			

So, what can be done to democratise innovation and leadership in the UN?

Building on our experience as Young UN members and insight from the future of work study, some building blocks for creating an innovative organisation where everyone has the opportunity to exercise leadership are offered below.

For senior leaders:

- **Invest in cross-UN platforms and networks to foster collaboration over competition.** Invest in crowdsourcing and idea-generation systems which enable the best ideas to get implemented, regardless of who suggests them. With such systems in place, employees can develop new ideas, share them with colleagues and form teams across traditional organisational silos to drive projects forward. This will enable the UN system to have one talent pool, aligned to its overarching purpose, rather than competition between entities and can eventually enable an organisational structure underpinned by a network of self-managing teams rather than a traditional top-down management structure.
- **Adopt a broad definition of innovation.** Communicate that innovation is everyone's job and not the sole responsibility of a dedicated department.
- **Provide time, space, support and (if necessary) funding** for employees to reflect, think critically and test new approaches. Dedicated *innovation time* is one such a measure.
- **Incentivise a culture of openness, collaboration, creativity and learning from failure.** A culture shift is the most sustainable approach to mainstream innovation. This may be attained by including and incentivising innovation in performance appraisals so that supervisors are encouraged to provide employees space for innovation and be open to new approaches.
- **Communicate openly that failure is part of learning,** allow for original mistakes and focus on learning from failure and iteration in a constructive way.

For supervisors:

- **Be a coach and an enabler, rather than a traditional manager.** When asked to describe their ideal supervisor, the top words mentioned by respondents in Young UN's future of work study were supportive, empowering and open-minded. The role of current managers is then reimaged to focus on enabling functions, including coaching, mentoring and guiding team members, encouraging their learning and growth. Continuous feedback is crucial and will enable employees to develop and acquire new skills.

- **Be open to and supportive of new ideas and approaches.** Provide team members with the time and space to pursue bold ideas and projects that inspire them. Give team members the space to grow and bring their full potential rather than putting them in boxes that can lead to self-censoring good ideas.
- **Embrace collaboration over competition.** Despite high interest in collaboration, supervisors blocking team members from taking up such opportunities was frequently cited as a barrier by respondents. Supervisors have a vital role to play in encouraging and facilitating team members to participate in opportunities for collaboration by seeing the benefit to the UN system as a whole rather than their team exclusively.
- **Enable teams without fixed hierarchies through self-management practices.** Small practices can shift the dial – for example managers inviting other team members to chair meetings/proposing a rotating chairperson, openly sharing information and/or involving all team members in strategic decision-making.

For employees:

- **Set aside time to reflect, connect the dots and pursue ideas,** no matter how crazy or simple they may seem. Setting aside time on a regular basis is an important starting point.
- **Have the courage to take the first step.** Whether it is writing down your idea, doing some initial research to know what has already been done on the topic or experimenting with a new approach, make a start. As a quote often attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe goes: *'Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it; boldness has genius, power and magic in it'*.
- **Share and develop your ideas with like-minded others.** Maybe you are the first person to have your idea or maybe it has been tried and failed somewhere else inside or outside the UN system. Plug into networks such as Young UN, the UN Innovation Network and countless others to find like-minded people and co-create together.
- **Build change agency,** by adopting a growth mindset of constant learning, and by being kind to yourself, realising that failed attempts are learning opportunities, and that driving change takes time. The New Horizons team at NHS England shares 10 top tips⁹, from starting small to reframing your thinking to replace uncertainty with curiosity and keep persisting.

Zooming out – lessons for future bureaucrats/bureau-hackers

So much can happen if people feel agency and are connected through distributed platforms and networks. This is true for the UN system, but also other organisations. Bureaucratic organisations neither cater for the needs of their people nor unlock their full potential. It is as argued in Young UN's future of work study time to rethink the current cog-in-a-machine mentality and create a modern and transparent system that puts people at the centre.

We hope these thoughts will contribute to shaping future organisations and a UN system where anyone interested can take the space to innovate and to lead, where employees can develop purposefully and contribute to the mission with full potential and motivation.

Endnotes

¹ In a survey bringing the perspectives of 643 employees across the UN system conducted by the *Young UN: Agents for Change* (Young UN) network in 2017, the top three reasons for joining the UN were: potential to make a difference, reputation and mandate of the organisation.

² Remarks of the UN Secretary-General at a UN Reform event on 18 September 2017, full transcript available here: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-09-18/secretary-generals-reform-remarks>

³ The United Nations System Leadership Framework (2017), available here: https://www.unssc.org/sites/unssc.org/files/un_system_leadership_framework.pdf

⁴ 'Navigating to the Next UN: A journey full of potential', (study, Young UN, 2019).

⁵ Emma Farge, 'UN urged by own staff to look at its climate footprint', Reuters, published 20 September 2019. <https://in.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-un-document/u-n-urged-by-own-staff-to-look-at-its-climate-footprint-idINKBN1W50YH>

⁶ 'Hacking the Bureaucracy: Exploring the key drivers of innovation within Government', (report, Portable, 2019). <https://www.portable.com.au/reports/hacking-the-bureaucracy>

⁷ Frederick Laloux, *Reinventing Organisations*, (Massachusetts, Nelson Parker, 2014). <https://www.reinventingorganizations.com/>

⁸ Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms, 'Understanding "New Power"', Harvard Business Review, December 2014 issue. <https://hbr.org/2014/12/understanding-new-power>

⁹ 'School for Change Agents 2019 – Session 1, Slide 31', Slideshare, published 16 May 2019, <https://www.slideshare.net/HorizonsCIC/school-for-change-agents-2019-session-1>

The need for a fundamental shift in who we see as leaders

By Irem Tumer

At the time I joined the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2016 as one of eight youth innovation fellows, we were easily noticeable, not only because of our young age, but also because of our unusual profiles. Unlike most of the early career professionals in the system with a more professional outlook, as fellowship candidates we were chosen not based on experience and education, but based on our commitment and advocacy around UNFPA's issues.

A few years later, and I have joined the ranks of young professionals in the UN system. According to data, the average of the P-2 level in the UN system is 37.4 for women and 38.9 for men (see page 106). Compared to this benchmark, as a newly recruited P-2 at age 28, I am dragging the average age down in almost any setting at work. I was fortunate enough to enter and remain in the organisation because of certain practices and developments that supported me in my path. In this article, I will outline some of these practices and explore what is required to strengthen leadership for young UN staff.

Successful entry level opportunities: The Youth Innovation Fellowship

The fellowship facilitated a transition from the external to the internal that is quite rare. Many of us had been beneficiaries of UNFPA programmes, focusing on youth leadership or Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and remained active in youth networks. For example, I presided over the 81st International Session of the European Youth Parliament a few months before moving to New York. This direct tie to our focus areas allowed us to implement many novel practices during our fellowship time, largely informed by our first-hand experiences of being on the other side of the equation.

The fellowship illustrated that creating opportunities that welcome unusual profiles and early career professionals can have a positive impact on the work delivered by

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The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNFPA or the United Nations.

the UN system. As important as such opportunities are, sprinkling a handful of young people in a vast bureaucracy cannot be the solution alone.

A remarkable aspect of the fellowship was its success in creating a strong support system for us to stand up against some of the inevitable challenges. The strongest support elements were transformative leadership training, mentors from the private sector and continuous psychosocial support. What is more, being introduced to our respective teams as *disruptors* as part of a key organisational initiative for innovation, created more space for us to implement our ideas. In many cases, fellows were able to take more initiative and work more independently than peers in the organisation, who were mostly doing internships.

Overall, this experience taught me that with proper support and the commitment of the organisation, it is possible to create pockets for young people to contribute to the UN. The challenge remains to mainstream this wisdom into the system as a whole. As many of us found out the hard way at the end of our fellowship, finding entry level positions at the UN is a very stressful and

often impossible task, let alone having access to such leadership support if hired.

Participation of young professionals: UNFPA Tangerine Network

During my three years with UNFPA, an important part of my experience was my involvement in the creation and expansion of *Tangerine*, an informal global network of young professionals working at UNFPA. Originating from a happy hour conversation and growing to 121 members across all regions within a year, *Tangerine* provides a space for young professionals to get to know each other, collaborate professionally and implement ideas that will contribute towards achieving the mandate of UNFPA.

Independent, horizontal and decentralised, teamwork-based, radically transparent, agile, fail forward, responsible and accountable: these are the principles of *Tangerine*, and they encapsulate the appetite for a new way of working among young professionals. Through actualising these principles, the network served as a much-needed space for divergence and creativity, making our experience as young professionals a bit less dependent on the specific team we are working in. For many of us, it was a lifeline when things got overwhelmingly bureaucratic or frustrating. Overall, it showed that the stellar work undertaken by system-wide initiatives such as the Young UN needs to be complemented by internal spaces that allow for stronger involvement in the day-to-day of different units and agencies.

The next frontier: What is required to strengthen leadership for young UN staff?

Hiring more young people and making the voices of young professionals heard is a great start, however, this needs to be supported by HR policies, leadership reform and overall culture change. How can the UN system attract talent from diverse backgrounds, like myself and other fellows? Is there any room for us to have more mobility between positions and agencies, without the threat of losing employment benefits? How can there be more space to take initiative without having to *'wait our turn'*? Can this especially be the case in portfolios that go beyond youth participation and innovation? More simply put, how do I keep on growing and broadening my horizons whilst also making the most of the unique position I am afforded?

As exemplified by Youth 2030, the UN's strategy on youth, and many other youth related initiatives from different agencies¹, the UN system has taken notice of young people, as well as acknowledged what sets this generation apart: technology adaptation, open-mindedness, value-driven leadership. Yet, what is so easy to voice externally is often challenging to execute internally.

Young professionals today have a more fluid understanding of career progression and tend to have diverse and deep interest across numerous domains, yet this is rarely reflected in the UN system. According to data, voluntary resignations are increasing, especially at the P-2 and P-3 levels, and mobility initiatives such as inter agency transfer and secondments are in a sharp decline (See Page 109).

Recruiting and retaining young professionals is not enough to strengthen the leadership of young UN staff. We also need a fundamental shift in who we see as leaders and how young professionals are supported to cultivate and express leadership traits. It is no coincidence that many of the leadership traits that have been repeatedly brought forward by young professionals (as exemplified by the Young UN Report² and *Tangerine* principles) point to characteristics that are also in the new UN System Leadership Framework: multi-dimensional, transformational, collaborative, self-applied. The *'new way of leading'* that is a frequent topic of debate requires that professionals from all levels are seen as leaders in their own rights, and that these traits are encouraged and strengthened, rather than repressed. In this regard, existing leaders' perception of youth is very important; we need good leaders that pave the way for a future leading cadre. This can only happen through an understanding that leadership by young professionals is an essential part of the leadership debate, and not just an afterthought for inclusion.

Endnotes

¹ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) – Generation Unlimited; the International Labor Organization (ILO) – Decent Jobs for Youth; UNFPA – My Body, My Life, My World; UNWomen – Generation Equality, to name a few.

² 'Navigating to the Next UN: A journey full of potential', (report, Young UN: Agents for Change, September 2019).

Testing limits, pushing boundaries and giving space to young people – Interview with Catherine Sozi

by Vendela Romedahl Stjernkvist and Savvy Brar

Vendela Romedahl Stjernkvist and Savvy Brar are working for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa, based in Johannesburg, South Africa. They are also members of Young UN – a network that includes more than 1,400 young professionals across the UN system working towards a shared vision of a UN that fully embodies the principles it stands for.

This article is written in Vendela Romedahl Stjernkvist's and Savvy Brar's personal capacities and does not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

We had the opportunity to sit down with our Regional Director, Dr. Catherine Sozi*, to ask her about her inspiring leadership through which she supports and empowers her staff, not least young people such as ourselves.

Catherine Sozi has been a strong role model for both of us since we joined UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa over one year ago. Through her professional yet personal approach she has entrusted us with responsibilities and given us space to learn and grow.

She has allowed us to take the initiative and lead on specific projects – such as the *Situation Room* or the *Uproot Youth Accountability Scorecard*. Moreover, she has even made sure that these activities have adequate budget allocations in the work-planning process. It is her encouraging and positive attitude that allows us to run with our ideas, without the fear of failure.

A key component has been her way of providing a supportive and enabling environment with an *open door policy*, allowing us to discuss and solve problems under her guidance. She is an empathetic and humble leader who understands that challenges arise and that to err is human. In providing constructive feedback, she enables us to tap into our full potential.

A huge sign of Catherine Sozi's humility and inspiring leadership is her ability to promote and acknowledge talent. She never shies away from shining the spotlight on others and celebrating their successes.

Sozi has also played a leading role in applying a gender lens to the HIV response, as well as pushing for young voices, noting the youth bulge. She is a strong advocate for addressing the structural drivers of HIV, such as gender-based violence that puts women and young girls

at risk. She also encourages the use of participatory approaches that bring together various stakeholders and beneficiaries, including government, parliamentarians, communities, development partners and sister UN agencies, to best understand prevention aspects and how to reduce inequalities. Furthermore, she urges everyone to work for and with youth, both being crucial components if we are to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

What advice would you give to your 15-year-old self?

Make sure to surround yourself with mentors and individuals who build your self-esteem. Take advantage of ALL opportunities that make themselves available to you – if you get to move across continents, do so! Keep up with the rest of the world and different opportunities as they open up your eyes, possibilities and what you can achieve. The world is truly your oyster – but just remember to always be happy and always be kind. You can do anything and everything!

What do you envision as being the role of youth and young people in the process of reform and revitalisation within the UN system?

Youth must keep the momentum up and support the UN in getting back to its roots! Youth must hold the UN accountable and demand an audience that listens to them.

We should all listen to and transform with youth – change with the times! Youth must continue to think outside the box and fight a system that makes them feel like they're not being listened to – keep trying and trying! Never give up – in testing the status quo, look for positive allies and work with the system.

What is good leadership for you?

Testing limits, pushing boundaries and giving space to young people. Being supportive and encouraging others. Rather than being afraid of change, good leadership means welcoming change and being open to transformation. Good leadership means being a positive ally and voice for others and using your position to test and change the status quo.

What advice would you give to a young person wanting to become a UN civil servant?

Have the passion – and never lose that passion for advocacy and human rights! Read about how the UN started, what it stands for and WHY that is important. The UN came about as a form of ensuring peace and security, and you must understand the role of the UN and how it supports Member States to make a difference in people's lives.

Being an international civil servant means dedicating yourself to work of service – having a passion for development and understanding where people come from and how to empower them (especially if you come from a place of privilege).

**at the time of writing, Dr. Catherine Sozi served as the Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa at the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). On the 19th of December 2019, Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Dr. Catherine Sozi as the new UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia.*



The still life: Depicting current arrangements

Chapter Four

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The UN System Leadership Framework – Where are we now?

By the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in memory of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Foundation aims to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development, multilateralism and peace.

The following section presents the genesis and content of the UN System Leadership Framework followed by a *sample overview* of how it is being implemented and operationalised in four UN agencies, funds and programmes (all part of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)), as well as within different parts of the UN Secretariat. It is based on document review and interviews.

A few caveats are in order: How the UN System Leadership Framework is to be operationalised across the UN remains at the discretion of the UN entities themselves. However, the overview is not meant to be exhaustive; it summarises on-going efforts to strengthen leadership policy and practice in just a few UN departments and agencies, as a small sample of the organisation. It is hoped that many other entities could be featured in subsequent editions. Neither is this section designed as an assessment of the efforts undertaken. It merely consolidates and summarises information provided through interviews by the UN entities approached for this exercise. They are *their* updates, and the intent was not to evaluate or critique the information.

In the conclusion we do provide a short examination of common elements and trends, in light of the leadership reform's goals and what is at stake. Thus, it is not merely descriptive: it is an analytical rendition, but it does not render judgment. Our intention is to provide an interesting backdrop for the personal leadership stories and reflections by our guest contributors.

Genesis and content

In 2017, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres proposed a reform agenda to transform the UN into a nimble, transparent and pragmatic organisation.

To achieve this, the Secretary-General put forward several proposals in 2017¹ and 2018 that addressed the culture and leadership of the organisation, placing the United Nations System Leadership Framework at the core of management reform (see Box 1 on the next page for more details on the key proposals).

The framework, which António Guterres inherited from his predecessor Ban Ki-Moon, originates from the work done by the CEB.² In 2016, a high-level committee was set up within the CEB to develop a shared concept of leadership characteristics necessary in the era of Agenda 2030, across different functions, levels and locations. On this basis, a joint task team *Action on Leadership* was formed, facilitated by the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC).

In 2017, the joint task team produced the unified and comprehensive framework, known as the UN System Leadership Framework³, which is described in more detail on page 94 (see Figure 1).

The Secretary-General's reason for introducing this framework into the UN internal management structure was clear: complex global demands require UN personnel to endorse a new 'leadership culture' that enables them to respond in a more efficient and agile way. This framework was '*a call to action and a call for change*'⁴ for all UN personnel regardless of their level, duties and location. It was the first time such a framework was introduced across all UN entities.

Box 1: Secretary-General's management reform: Addressing shortcomings in management culture and leadership

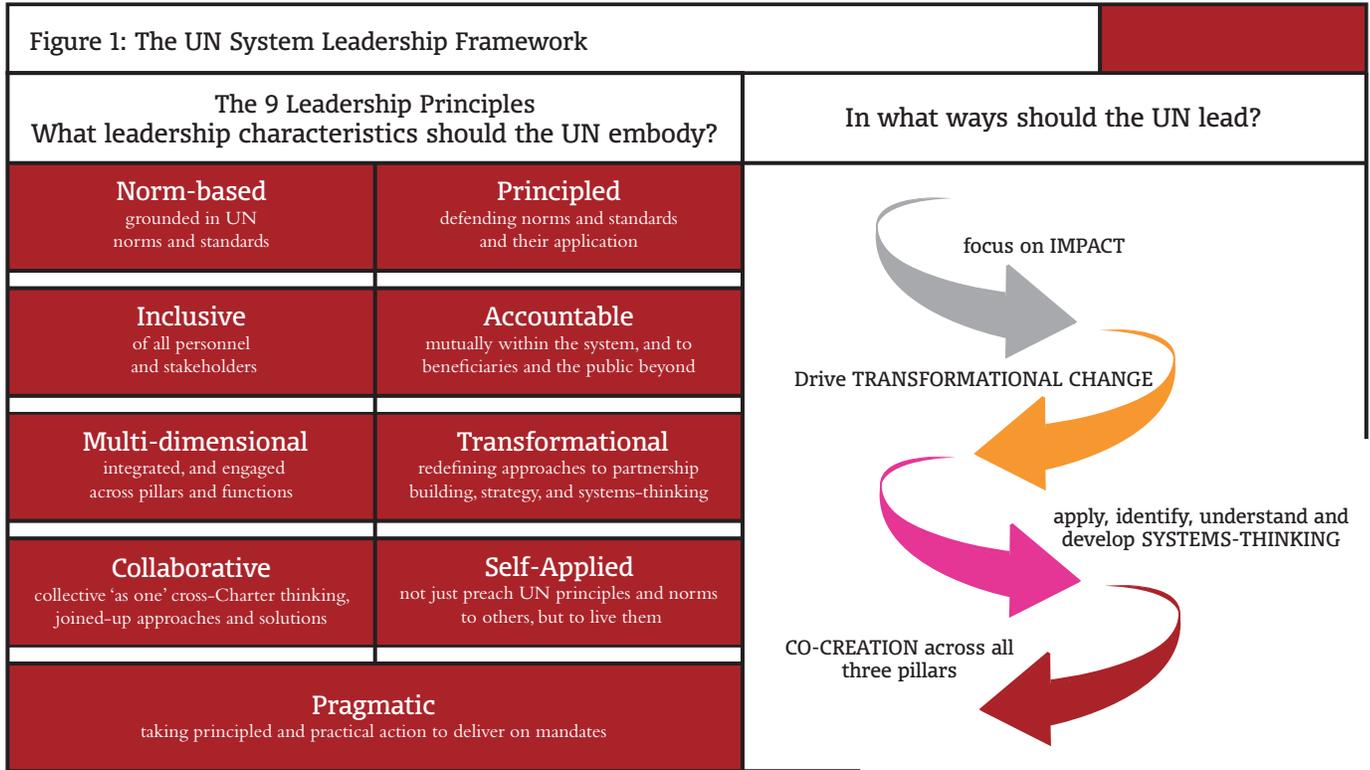
In the 2018 Report of the Secretary-General *Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: implementing a new management architecture for improved effectiveness and strengthened accountability*, the Secretary-General proposes a change in the management model to address existing shortcomings in management culture and leadership.⁵

What was proposed?

The report makes clear that the United Nations must move to a culture that is focused on results rather than processes, better manages administrative and mandate delivery risks and values innovation. Among a number of key proposals, relevant to this report are the following:

1. Endorse the UN System Leadership Framework and its nine principles: Leadership should be norm-based, principled, inclusive, accountable, multidimensional, transformational, collaborative, self-applied, pragmatic and action-oriented.
2. Changing management culture and leadership at the United Nations requires action at every stage of talent management cycle such as creation of a revised set of organisational expectations with a focus on observable behaviours, assessment of desired competencies at senior level recruitment.
3. Encourage mobility within and outside the United Nations, allowing staff to leave and grow in key managerial and leadership behaviours with a possibility to return to the United Nations for the benefit of the organisation.
4. Developing talent through learning and performance management such as 360-degree evaluations.
5. Integrate knowledge management into learning activities, break down silos and develop common values across the system.
6. A transformed Department of Management that undertakes a readiness assessment of performance management, shifting from the current focus on compliance and enabling a more agile approach, fostering a culture of ongoing dialogue and promoting greater accountability.
7. Use of performance data in line with new competencies starting with senior leaders compacts.
8. Human resource policies are to be simplified and aligned to new leadership and management competencies.
9. Greater use of staff engagement surveys which are to be made public.
10. More analysis of what kind of rewards drive staff to perform well and deliver high impact results.

Figure 1: The UN System Leadership Framework



Elements of the UN System Leadership Framework

The UN System Leadership Framework is a *leadership vision* that identifies nine characteristics of UN Leadership that every UN staff should embody: norm-based, principled, inclusive, accountable, multi-dimensional, transformational, collaborative, self-applied and pragmatic-oriented (Figure 1).

These characteristics should be exemplified through four distinct ways of working (competencies):

- 1) Focusing on impact;
- 2) Driving transformational change both inside and outside their organisation to impact the behaviour of the system;
- 3) Systems thinking that collectively defines and addresses the challenges that the UN confronts;
- 4) Co-creation while working across the UN's three founding pillars: peace and security, human rights, and development.

Craig Mokhiber's contribution (page 16) gives a more detailed historical overview of the UN System Leadership Framework and its nine characteristics. This new leadership vision aims to provide the UN system with a common reference to a value based leadership approach. It should uphold the universal leadership characteristics, behaviours, principles, and mind-sets, creating a leadership culture that stands ready to *prevent* instead of *react* and deliver on all of the UN's mandates.

Operationalising the UN System Leadership Framework – Perspectives from the UN system

Departments within the UN Secretariat

Using the UN System Leadership Framework as the reference, the **Department of Management, Strategic, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC)**, which provides, *inter alia*, the Human Resources support to the UN Secretariat worldwide, has developed a new '*UN Leadership and Management Cycle*' together with the UNSSC. It offers management and leadership training according to functions and roles, deviating from the usual practice of extending training according to grade level.

DMSPC is also working on regrouping the four competencies, namely focusing, driving, systems-thinking and co-creation of the UN System Leadership Framework by function (see Boxes 2 and 3).

The development of the Framework reflects an evolution in the expected role and function of the **United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)**. According to the CEB, it has transformed from a mere coordination body to a '*think tank*' of strategic decision-making and sharing – an explicit push by the Secretary-General himself to make the board more relevant, innovative and transformative. Certain leadership principles, such as transformational and collaborative leadership, have been particularly emphasised. The CEB

has seen more system-wide thinking and more emphasis on youth leadership, inviting the Youth Envoy and the Young UN Network to join parts of the coordination meetings and play an active role in shaping decisions.

The newly established *senior leadership council*, a result of the management reform, convened by the Deputy Secretary-General oversees the range of system-wide activities related to building capacities for effective support to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It includes non-UN stakeholders (eg universities) and its first output is the **SDG primer**, an introductory guide to the SDGs, released in November 2019⁶, to support Resident Coordinators (RCs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in their efforts to realign planning and programming towards the SDGs.

The Framework has also guided efforts to strengthen the leadership dimension of the new RC system. The newly established *Resident Coordinator Leadership* development branch, within the **Development Cooperation Office (DCO)** in the UN Secretariat is tasked with building up a new RC leadership talent pool. According to DCO, the four competencies of the UN System Leadership Framework will provide the essence of the RC assessment and performance appraisal process. The intent is to move away from assessing *yesterday's leaders*, but foster talent that is the right fit, sent to the right place at the right time and represents UN's diversity. The new talent pool should '*reflect the world*' and consider talents from the private sector, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Ultimately, the new RC leadership pipeline should include individuals who are ready to be deployed as well as those who need to strengthen certain leadership skills. These skills can then be obtained over the years before being selected as a RC. This new system should enable DCO to quickly draw on its talent pool and react to country changes more proactively.

Box 3: The Blue Line

The Blue Line is an initiative by DMSPC, currently being designed as an online platform offering digital resources and experiences to UN staff. The platform will be a knowledge sharing and collaborative tool, aiming to stimulate leadership development across the UN system and helping to shape an organisational culture of trust and accountability. The main focus of the Blue Line is civility, inclusion, diversity and combating abuse and sexual harassment in work environments – all in line with UN values. At the time of writing, the platform was in its pilot stage and should be fully operational by the beginning of 2020.

Box 2: DMSPC leadership development initiatives

The UN Leaders initiative is a modular approach, which includes a five-day experimental senior training programme, online learning resources, coaching sessions, a UN Leaders community group and a session on how to mentor and nourish emerging leaders. The face-to-face five-day training will emphasise in particular change management, ethical decision-making and accountability.

The 360-degree Feedback Evaluation provides senior level staff with confidential but anonymous feedback about their actions and behaviours from their direct and indirect reports, peers and supervisors. It was rolled out to a mix of 5–20 current Under-Secretary-Generals (USG) and Assistant Secretary-Generals (ASG) but with the intention to eventually extend it to all staff.

Situational coaching will give senior leaders an opportunity to access on-demand learning services through professional, external coaching. Furthermore, DMSPC is determined to introduce a new ASG and USG induction programme that reflects the current reform changes, such as the delegation of authority and changes to the rules and regulations of the UN.

The **Senior Leaders' Compacts** will also be revised to reflect the new competencies of the UN System Leadership Framework.

For **mid-level officers**, a UN system executive management programme will be offered to help staff address UN complex realities at Headquarters and field locations. It will entail 16 weeks of online tutored and facilitated training followed by a week of face-to-face case studies. It will also offer coaching. As of 2019, the UN is also offering dedicated leadership training for female staff at P-4 and P-5 level to create a strong network of female leaders.

A training initiative tailored to the needs of the **Young Professional Programme (YPPs)**, the Emerging Leaders Experience, has been created. Starting in 2020, this four-day programme will aim to cultivate the leadership potential and growing management competencies of YPP staff after their second year in the UN system and enable them to receive training at an early stage in their career.

Box 4: SDG Leadership Lab

The DCO has created the *SDG leadership lab*, a facilitated process that provides concrete support to RCs and UNCTs, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). It centres around workshop and brainstorming facilitation, solutions design and coaching and is currently being piloted in two countries, Cambodia and Uganda. The Lab is offered around three objectives: Implementation of UN development system reform, collective leadership and innovative and collaborative SDG solutions. At the time of publishing, 14 RCs have expressed interest in going through the SDG leadership lab process.

Currently, DCO is looking at mapping RCs' required knowledge areas (see Box 4). While the UN System Leadership Framework articulates clearly how RCs should behave, it does not give more insights into what RCs need to know.

Notable changes are also being implemented for the selection of the *Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG)* and *Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG)*⁷ and Military Heads by the Leadership Support Section within the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and Department of Peace Operations (DPO) in the areas of

- a) selection process;
- b) practical support to the SRSG/DSRSG/Military Heads;
- c) alignment to current reform processes.

Specifically, the Leadership Support Section has looked into how to translate the leadership principles of the Framework into the assessment and selection process of the SRSG/DSRSG/Military Heads. For this, a company was chosen to develop a review which can identify relevant leadership traits – such as managerial, communication and emotional intelligence and resilience – crucial to the SRSG/DSRSG/Military Heads functions. This review does not replace the traditional selection process but is an add-on to better evaluate the candidate's capabilities as a *leader* on the ground and assess which position – SRSG or DSRSG – will be better suited for the candidate. The latest call for SRSG/DSRSG roster clearly indicated the four competencies of the UN System Leadership Framework as leadership requirements.

Box 5: UNDP Leadership Framework

UNDP partnered with the Neuro-Leadership Institute (NLI), an expert group in transforming complex topics into *brain/user-friendly* content in order to create positive behaviour change. They created a survey where 450 global UNDP staff were asked to determine what nine leadership actions resemble the UN System Leadership Framework and align with UNDP's leadership culture. The result was a one-page UNDP Leadership Framework. It emphasises three distinct leadership principles:

- 1) Serve People
- 2) Focus on Impact
- 3) Co-create the Future

In terms of practical leadership support, the '**Leadership Partnership Initiative**' provides the selected candidates with mentoring opportunities from former or current SRSG/DSRSG/Military Heads. The content of the mentoring is defined by the candidates and mentors and can last from six months to one year depending on needs. Mentors work pro-bono. The Leadership Support Section also provides coaching on leadership questions.

Perspectives from UN entities

A year after the adoption of the UN System Leadership Framework, the **UN Development Programme (UNDP)** developed its own leadership framework that incorporated the nine leadership characteristics and four competencies (see Box 5).

Under each leadership principle there is a list of the relevant UN leadership characteristics, as well as three separate UNDP leadership actions.

Following the introduction of the framework, UNDP staff were asked to briefly summarise their interpretation of it by sharing video leadership stories, which were distributed internally to inspire staff. UNDP also integrated the framework into talent management activities, including a new 360-degree feedback assessment process, aligned with the new leadership actions. It created learning content, eg micro-learning modules, to help UNDP staff enhance their leadership capabilities and all Country Offices were encouraged to launch and communicate activities on the framework in partnership with Talent Development Managers.

UNDP considers this framework a *living document* that will need to be adjusted to reflect current reform processes.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), on the other hand, has adopted the UN System Leadership Framework as is. It has incorporated the Framework into job descriptions at various levels and launched several initiatives, adding to previous in-house leadership programmes (see Box 6).

Overall, according to UNFPA staff, the general thrust of these initiatives finds its roots in the Secretary-General's direct and very personal engagement in leadership matters and reflects a genuine sense of change in the organisation (and the whole UN system). It is also a representation of the UNFPA Executive Director's emphasis on leadership at all levels with professionalism, curiosity, compassion, purpose and above all a spirit of service.

For the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**, the UN System Leadership Framework serves as an inspiration and strives to better reflect and apply

Box 6: UNFPA in-house leadership programmes

The emerging leaders programme *Leading for the UN*, an initiative aimed at middle management and run in collaboration with UN Women and UNSSC, focuses on soft skills in a five-day face-to-face training, which includes design thinking and co-creation competencies.

The online self-paced and cohort-driven **Managerial Certification** for Directors, Representatives, Deputy Representatives, Assistant Representatives and other senior managers, designed and implemented with the UNSSC, consists of seven online modules over 14 weeks and also focuses on soft skills by unpacking the leadership framework. According to the organisation, the staggered online modules allow for greater time to internalise content, for sharing and exchange of experience with peer managers, and to immediately apply learned skills. Behavioural change is also supported and monitored by asking participants to write and share papers on changes they are implementing as a result of the training.

While everyone is encouraged to take leadership, teams are also encouraged to be more accountable. UNFPA is training internal team coaches in all of its offices and HQ Divisions. Similar to **'scrum masters'** in private agile organisations, three staff (per office) are identified and trained in the three 'Cs': collaboration, conflict management and culture. These staff then play an internal coaching role (in support of management) for the rest of the office.

Box 7: UNICEF leadership initiatives

The senior leadership executive insights programme, aimed at Director-level staff (including Country Directors), combines 360-degree assessment and coaching with an increasing focus on soft skills

The Deputy Representative leadership programme run by Harvard University.

The Leadership transition programme, a coaching programme for staff progressing towards leadership positions.

Management Master Class, run by Corporate Learning Solutions and UNICEF's OneHR team, is targeted at any staff with managerial responsibilities of two or more staff. Beginning with a 360-degree assessment, it focuses on soft skills development through face to face exchanges and includes coaching from peers.

The UNICEF orientation programme, offers a comprehensive online programme for all staff to UNICEF on its role, strategy and mandate. A Senior Leaders Orientation is centrally provided and it includes modules on managing oneself and managing others.

UNICEF also has an **HR performance management team**, dedicated to addressing team/staff management needs and troubleshooting instances of poor staff management, including through eventual departure of poorly performing managers.

UNICEF will launch in 2020 the **'shared reflections'** series, in the form of short videos on inspiring leadership for senior UNICEF leaders.

UNICEF will also establish a **Leadership Master-class**, focusing on topics including leading innovative work and collaborating within the UN and beyond. This is part of an effort to establish a full leadership pipeline, built as a pathway that includes existing leadership development initiatives (eg Personal Leadership programmes, Leadership programme for staff and in the senior leaders pipeline, the executive insights programme), analytical and thinking modules and language requirements.

UNICEF's core values of: Care, Respect, Integrity, Trust and Accountability, and to move from a model of command and control to one of empowerment. In terms of outstanding gaps, the organisation is exploring opportunities for developing a system-wide mentoring model to harmonise standards and approaches across various initiatives. Key questions in this effort are how to mentor others, how to learn from others and how to nurture one's own leadership potential. The organisation is also looking to enhance support for its supervisors and *front-line* staff, notably in the areas of emotional intelligence, and staff living its core values at work (see Box 7).

Through the experience gained with these initiatives, UNICEF is gradually moving away from a focus on sending staff to external training events, opting instead for internally designed and conducted support that is more specific to its needs and conducive to group and team leadership development and internalisation. A common feature of these initiatives is the 360-degree assessment, which is helping staff recognise their leadership blind spots.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also incorporated the UN System Leadership Framework into its leadership competencies. It identified seven core leadership competencies as a basis for the management assessment at the P-4 and P-5 level - Accountability, Change Capability and Adaptability, Empowering and Building Trust, Inclusion, Collaboration, Systems Thinking and Innovation. These competencies are clustered into three domains - Managing Yourself, Managing Relationships with Others and Systemic Influence. The leadership competencies and behavioural indicators describe the expected abilities that are relevant in the role of managers to deliver specific leadership outcomes (see Box 8).

Box 8: UNHCR Leadership Training

These include a one-week strategic leadership programme for staff looking to access P-5 functions, which also features an extra three weeks of coaching as well as for P-5 looking for eligibility to apply for D-1 positions.

The emphasis for P-4, P-5 and Director level is on strategic and soft skill development including conflict resolution and listening. For P-3 and below, the emphasis is on basic concepts of management, including managing self and managing others. Competencies at all levels are based on the UN System Leadership Framework.

UNHCR also offers a number of leadership training opportunities to its staff, including national staff, notably through its in-house *Global Learning and Development Centre* in Budapest.

To create a *collective leadership culture*, UNHCR started a pilot project in South Africa with national staff acting as mentors to other staff. Mid-career level staff and high performing women in particular have been targeted to act as mentors.

As part of the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system reform, UNHCR is supporting its staff in preparing for the assessment center - with a number of them getting trained and coached. With the last recruitment round, three passed the RC assessment, with UNHCR determined to increase the number with the years to come.

Conclusion

While we were only able to provide a small sample of leadership initiatives and how these were impacted by the Framework, our stocktaking reveals that all UN entities and departments featured are engaged in a flurry of initiatives that embrace the new *culture of leadership*, partially spurred by the adoption of the Framework. They all share and convey the same urgent momentum for strengthening leadership capacities and practices.

Yet, how these UN entities go about these efforts seems to vary, employing different tactics and approaches. The variances can be seen, for example, in the use of the framework, which some entities have adopted as is, while others have chosen to adapt and/or further unpack it for their specific mandates. This is in line with the Framework's operational intentions, where UN agencies have broad flexibility to formulate tailored implementation roadmaps based on their own mandates, value offerings and needs.⁸ The variances can also be seen in the extent to which leadership initiatives make use or not of external expertise and resources. A shift away from outsourcing leadership support and training seems to be taking place, but it is by no means the case for all UN entities.

At the same time, the initiatives also share similar features. In particular, three stand out:

1. The emphasis on collaborative leadership, with co-creation and innovation from and with a wide range of staff featuring as a key element of leadership material being disseminated.
2. The focus on learning from others, through experience sharing and mentoring by colleagues.
3. An approach to leadership that recognises its potential and needs at all levels and grades, and not just the prerogative of senior staff (an interesting illustration being the UNFPA scrum programme).

For many of the UN staff involved in these initiatives, these three features are mutually consistent and re-enforcing. They are also consistent with changes to performance assessment systems, with all stressing the importance of 360-degree exercises, which combine peer learning with the principle of mutual or collective accountability.

With regards to gaps, several shared the sentiment that additional efforts are needed to support leadership potential and capacities of national staff. They also pointed to the importance of investing more in the leadership potential of young staff. In fact, a few colleagues engaged in these efforts suspect that such investments may have actually decreased in recent years. Such under-investment, while not uniform across all entities featured here, may explain to some extent why the organisation as a whole is 'getting old', with an average age of 47 and with young staff and national staff constituting two staff categories that spend the least time with the organisation.

In addition, what is not featured prominently is the link between leadership training and assessment with a broader and unifying concept of the UN civil servant. While such a concept, for many, is embedded and articulated in the Framework, the uniqueness of UN leadership for today and tomorrow's world may require more unequivocal affirmations if it is to provide inspiration for people to join the UN and exercise visionary and principled UN leadership across the system.

Also, the distinction between leadership and management competencies is not explicit. The terms are at times used interchangeably, but many colleagues acknowledge that while formal UN leadership processes (recruitment, training, guidance etc) are relatively effective in identifying and rewarding good 'management' practices, true leadership carries additional dimensions that extend beyond management, that resist bureaucratisation and that are hard to put into frameworks. The framework is envisaged to serve as an organisational tool that goes beyond human resources interventions.⁹ It will therefore be important to follow the evolution of these initiatives, to check notably for any tendencies towards 'bureaucratisation'; it would be a shame indeed if efforts to implement the letter of the Framework ended up diluting its spirit, and the original intent to affect the leadership culture and DNA of the UN, and not just its institutional methods.

But how then does one gain exposure to, and whet one's leadership skills beyond bureaucratic competencies? This is the challenge that the entire system faces, and whether it will be successfully met remains to be seen. But as many colleagues noted in the course of this

stocktake, nothing replaces practice. Hence, the interest conveyed by several entities featured in this review focus on the new RC system. Given the responsibilities that RCs hold under the new dispensation and the expectations placed on them by the 2030 Agenda, they see it as an opportunity for their own people to hone their multi-dimensional skills. RCs are no longer responsible for the management of big budgets and large teams, they are expected to earn their authority through leadership. The distinction between management and leadership is now being brought into sharp focus. It is an arduous task, and operationalising the UN System Leadership Framework will require alignment of the organisational culture of the UN system and of its constituent entities, and the UN entities seem to be taking on the challenge with increased urgency.

Endnotes

¹ United Nations Secretary-General, 'Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/492, United Nations General Assembly, 27 September 2017). <https://undocs.org/A/72/492>

² United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)

³ United Nations system, 'United Nations system leadership framework', (framework, CEB/2017/1, UN, 2017) <https://www.unsceb.org/CEBPublicFiles/Leadership.pdf>

⁴ United Nations system, CEB/2017/1, 2017.

⁵ United Nations Secretary-General, 'Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: implementing a new management architecture for improved effectiveness and strengthened accountability', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/492/Add.2, United Nations General Assembly, 21 March 2018). https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1483805/files/A_72_492_Add-2-EN.pdf

⁶ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 'Foundational Primer On The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', (report, UNSDG, 2019). <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/UN-SDG-SDG-Primer-Report.pdf>

⁷ Since 1 January 2019, the selection of the SRSG, DSRSG and Military Heads is now co-located with DPO and DPPA in the Leadership Support Section, Office of the Director for Coordination and Shared Services. It consists of formally agreed internal process from identification of senior leaders through the Senior Leadership Database (LEAD) or through nomination of candidates by Member State to consideration of organisational objectives to formal interdepartmental interviews to test the candidate's professional competencies for the job opening. The last call for the SRSG, DSRSG and Military Heads roster was in June 2019.

⁸ United Nations system, CEB/2017/1, 2017, p. 6: IV/15.

⁹ United Nations system, CEB/2017/1, 2017, p. 6: IV/14.

Who leads the UN?

What UN demographics can reveal about leadership

By Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström

Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlström is a Programme Manager at the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, covering different aspects of UN reform from the UN development system to UN leadership. She is leading the production of our Financing the UN Development System report. In 2014, she was one of the members who set up the European Institute of Peace in Brussels, where she worked as the Head of Operations and EIP's first Liaison Officer in New York covering the Middle East. She has also done consultancy with the UN Development Programme, the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office and the Development Cooperation's Office on Pooled Funds. Veronika holds a Master's from the University of East Anglia in International Development and Economics.

When leadership is discussed, it rarely invokes data above and beyond perception surveys. In fact, injecting data points into the leadership discourse may seem incongruent, if not at times inappropriate. It is often argued that leadership is about intangibles, which cannot be simply quantified, measured or captured in charts and graphs. Injecting data into the leadership debate can be viewed as sullyng or debasing. That is so if one considers data as the end point of the discussion.

We argue the contrary. Using demographic data, at times in conjunction with perception surveys, can be a starting point for discussions on leadership that can add value to the leadership debate in the UN system. Its value lies in generating questions and shedding light on the realities of leadership and potential links between issues that may not seem connected. Data can also help uncover realities that reflect the state of leadership, beyond or as a complement to claims and stories. It needs interpretation but it can also debunk myths. It is with this mindset we have chosen to explore if and how data-based evidence could further enrich collective thinking on leadership in the UN.

For this (first) attempt, and to avoid the risk of being submerged by data, we focus only on three categories: **gender parity**, **age** and **staff retention**. For all three, we present and interrogate the data, and posit potential links to the state of leadership at the UN, *as questions rather than conclusions*.

On gender, our analysis takes its cue directly from the UN, and the commitment made to achieving parity as a means to strengthen leadership. The decision to explore age-related data resides in the assumption that overall age and age trends matter because UN leadership needs to draw on all talent (and age pools), and an organisation

whose staff composition does not reflect the world of today will struggle to identify, nurture and promote the type of leadership that moves people (staff and beyond) to action. And finally, staff retention is explored as a potential proxy for inspiration and the extent to which staff are empowered to lead in a manner that renders their tenure at the UN meaningful and worth their time.

We hope the findings will help stimulate new or altered ways of thinking about leadership, and whether the realities presented by the data enable the intent and aspirations found in discourses on UN leadership.

The analysis¹ is based on various Secretary-General reports, in particular the Secretary-General's report on the *Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics*², Secretary-General's report on the *Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system*, and the most up-to-date available data from the United Nations System Chief Executives Board Coordination (CEB).³

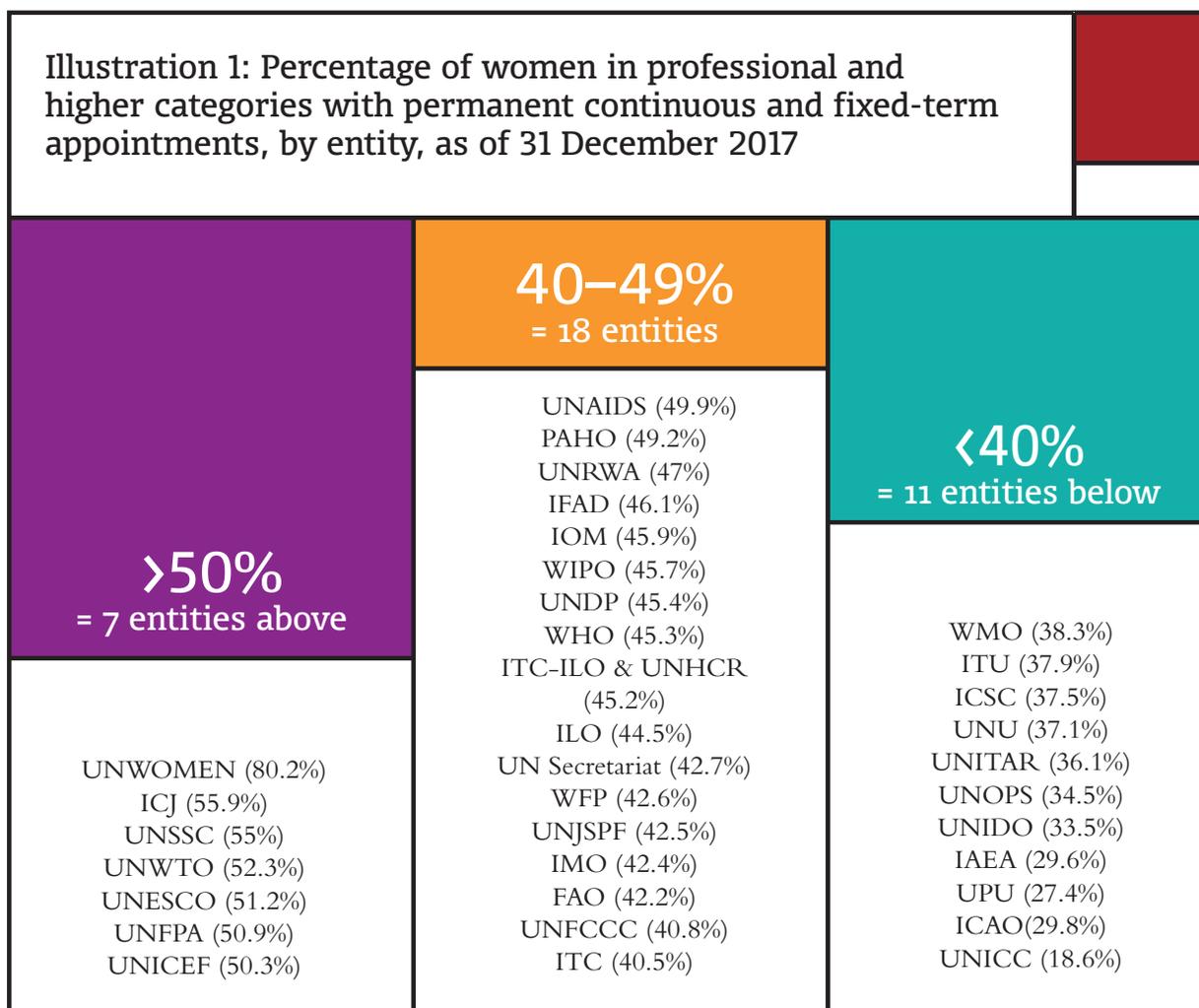
Gender parity: Is the UN moving in the right direction?

The year 2020 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. As one of the goals to achieve gender equality, the UN committed to achieving overall gender parity by 2000, particular at the managerial and decision-making level.⁴ Since then, the UN has continued to implement new internal policies towards overall gender parity, some of which have been reiterated in several resolutions of the General Assembly, such as resolution 25/2715 calling for an increased representation of women at senior level.

Early in his term, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched a consultation on gender parity which led to the first System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity⁵, providing concrete recommendations to achieve

gender parity across the system – at headquarters and the regional and country level. During his election campaign and in his first term as Secretary-General, he reiterated his personal commitment to achieving gender parity among his senior cadre by the end of his first term.

Twenty-five years after the Beijing Declaration, where do we stand on gender parity in the UN system? Looking at 36 entities for which data is publicly available, seven entities have achieved overall gender parity with UNWOMEN accounting for the highest proportion of female staff, with 80.2%. 18 entities are between 40–49% with the UN Secretariat currently at 43%. Eleven entities are below 40% share of women in the organisation, an improvement to last year's numbers where 13 entities were below 40%. Overall, entities with a technical mandate as their core mission seem to attract fewer women and remain below 40% (Illustration 1).



Source: SG report, July 2019. Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system. A/74/220. CEB data until end of the year 2017

The representation of women at a professional grade and higher has increased since 2007

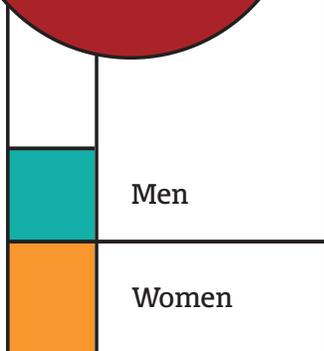


Figure 1: Trend: distribution of staff by gender (professional and higher category) in the UN system, 2007–2017

Source: Secretary-General’s report, July 2019. Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system. A/74/220. CEB data until end of the year 2017

Taking a ten-year perspective, overall the representation of women at a professional grade and higher has increased since 2007 – a clear indication that internal UN human resource policies and strategies for gender parity in the UN system are having an impact. Especially in 2017, fewer men were recruited to the UN, a decline of 2% from the previous year, increasing women representation by 2.1% overall (Figure 1).

Comparing female representation at headquarters and at country level, system-wide

Compared to headquarters, progress has been slower at the country level. While at headquarters the representation of women at the professional and higher category remains high, at around 48.5%, in the field it is almost 10 percentage points lower, currently at 39.8% UN system-wide. Looking at grade level, the share of women at P-1 and P-2 levels make up the majority of the 39.8% in the field (P-1/P-2 more than 50% and P-3 at 40.6%). The number, however, declines at higher grade; women at D-1 and D-2 level are represented only at 34.3% and only 31.7% at Under-Secretary-General (USG) and Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) level at non-headquarters duty stations. The same can be said for peace operations where women have a much lower share than men and, in many cases, only represent 10–30% of the overall staff.⁶

The numbers underscore that fewer senior women are represented at country level, but a positive trend is visi-

ble. In 2018, more women held the position of UN Resident Coordinator than men (62 women), holding 50.4% of the overall positions. In comparison, in 2016 only 43% of Resident Coordinators were women and in 2017 it was 45%. Other UN entities have followed a similar trajectory, committing themselves to achieving gender parity among their Resident Representatives (RR) such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) who continues to maintain gender parity of its cadre in 2019. United Nations Development Coordination Office (UN DCO) has also fulfilled its goal for full gender parity for the new resident coordinator system in 2019, aiming to not only have gender parity among its leaders but also for a majority of Resident Coordinators to come from developing countries. The trend of maintaining gender parity for the UN Resident Coordinator and Resident Representatives will ultimately have an impact on the overall number of female representatives in the field in 2020.

Zooming in: Senior female representation in the UN Secretariat

Numbers at ASG and USG level at the UN Secretariat tell a similar story of a reversing trend: since the current Secretary-General took office, more women have been appointed at the ASG and USG level, showing a trend towards 50/50 gender parity. It is expected that the numbers for 2019, to be published in 2020, will show that the Secretary-General will achieve his goal of gender parity among his senior cadre (Figure 2).

More women have been appointed to the ASG and USG level since 2017

	Male, ASG
	Male, USG
	Female, ASG
	Female, USG

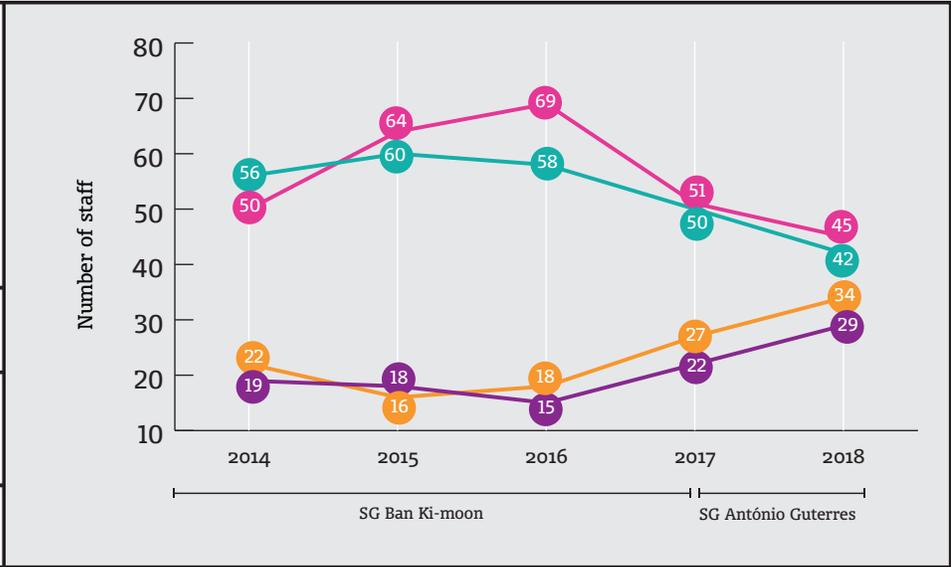


Figure 2: Gender parity at USG and ASG level, UN Secretariat, 2014–2018

Source: Secretary-General's report on the Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics 2014–2018. Presents demographic analysis of the composition of the staff of the Secretariat from 1 Jan. 2014–31 Dec. 2018.

Much more needs to be done to promote women to D-1 and D-2 level

	Male, D-1
	Female, D-1
	Male, D-2
	Female, D-2

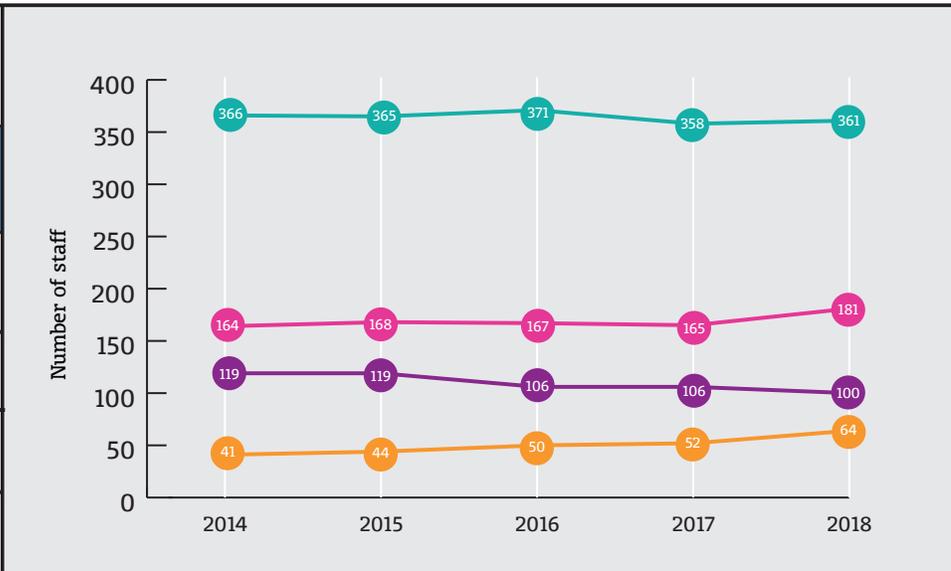


Figure 3: Gender parity at D-1 and D-2 level, UN Secretariat

Source: Secretary-General's report on the Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics 2014–2018. Presents demographic analysis of the composition of the staff of the Secretariat from 1 Jan 2014–31 Dec. 2018

However, much more needs to be done to promote women at D-1 and D-2 level at the UN Secretariat. Female representation at mid-management remains low – far behind the targets of 50/50, especially at the D-1 level. In 2018, only 33% of the positions were held by women in comparison to 39% at D-2 level (see Figure 3 on the previous page).

Increasing female participation: Selection and recruitment matters

Management opportunities for women should not remain a political statement alone. Looking at the recruitment and selection process of the UN system-wide, women only comprise 36.8% of the total applicants for positions in the professional and higher category, an indication that recruitment and outreach to female applicants must be stepped up to achieve gender parity at all levels.

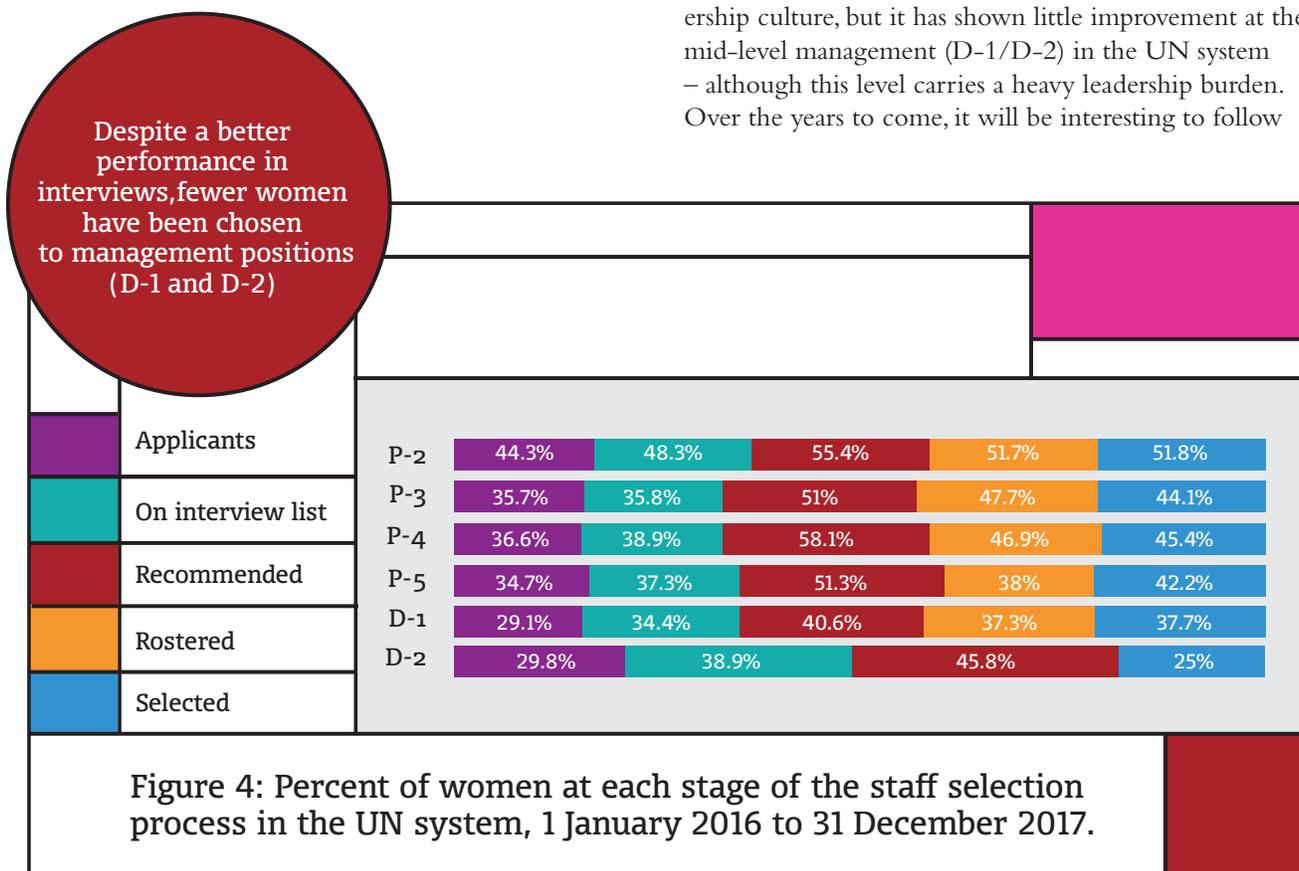
Although, the overall number of female applicants was lower in 2017, women tend to do better during the selection process, from being on an interview list to being recommended. Despite a better performance in the interviews fewer women have been chosen at management level (D-1 and D-2). At D-2 level, for example,

out of 45.8% recommended female applicants only 25% made the selection (Figure 4). This can offer one out of many explanations as to why women are under-represented at D-1 and D-2 level.

Comparing the UN with other international organisations, it does not stand alone in its challenges to close the gender parity gap. However, decisive political and human resource strategies do show impact when applied. The European Commission, for example, has come a long way in reversing a growing trend of male leadership. Under President Jean-Claude Juncker's term⁷, a diversity and inclusion strategy led to an increase of female managers from 30% to 41% in five years alone (Table 1). The number of female middle managers has increased by 11%. The most progress has been achieved at the very top of the organisation where female Directors-General now make up 38% of the total, up from 14%, an increase of 170% since 2014. At Deputy Director-General level, women currently hold 40% of the posts, up from 8% and an increase of 400%.

A commitment to operationalise gender parity strategies, like in cases of the UN and the EU, can clearly show immediate results in the set-up of the organisation.

Gender parity is essential for creating an inclusive leadership culture, but it has shown little improvement at the mid-level management (D-1/D-2) in the UN system – although this level carries a heavy leadership burden. Over the years to come, it will be interesting to follow



Source: Secretary-General's report, July 2019. Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system. A/74/220. CEB data until end of the year 2017.

Table 1: Female representation in the European Commission 2014–2019

Level of management	1 November 2014	1 May 2017	16 October 2019
Directors-General	14%	26%	38%
Deputy Directors-General	8%	32%	40%
Directors	32%	35%	36%
Total Senior Managers	27%	33%	37%
Middle Managers	31%	35%	42%
Total % of women in management at all levels	30%	35%	41%

Source: European Commission - Press release: Women in management: Juncker Commission exceeds its 40% target.

subsequent data on gender parity and explore whether the strategy has had an impact on the overall leadership culture in the UN. For example, will the strategy lead to new ways of working? Will there be different priorities and innovative ideas? Will the increase in, and diversity of, female voices change expectations and perceptions of UN leadership, both from staff within the UN and from beyond?

Is the UN losing its youth?

While youth and innovation are widely accepted to be core UN priorities, a closer look at the internal make-up of the organisation reveals an alarming trend, notably in terms of age. The 2019 report on the Composition of the Secretariat notes that the average age of the UN Secretariat has increased since 2014 from an average of 43.8 to 45.7 (Figure 5).

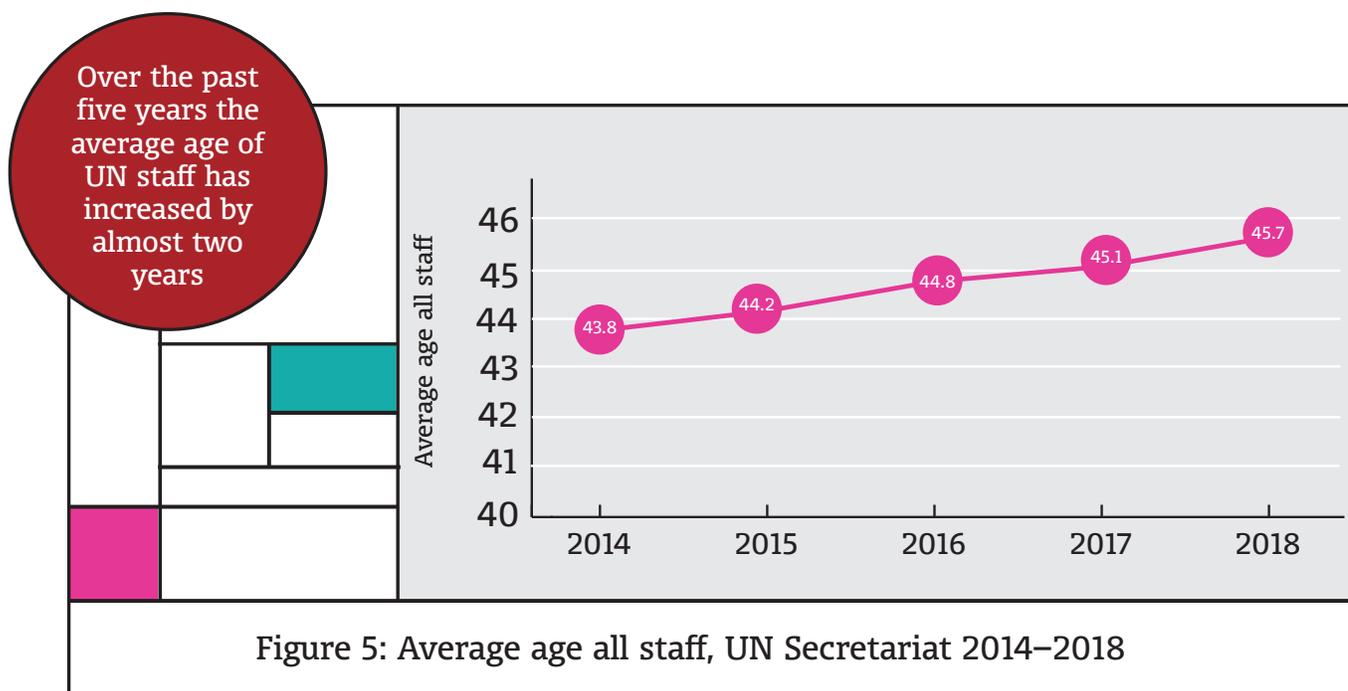


Figure 5: Average age all staff, UN Secretariat 2014–2018

Source: Secretary-General’s report on the Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics. July 2019.

Comparing the UN Secretariat with the whole UN system for 2017, the average age, 48.6, remains high (Table 2). The P-2 level alone has an average age of 37.4 for women and 38.9 for men. At the P-3 level the average age is 43.5. The only professional category that represents the lowest age category is P-1- with an average age of 32.

Looking at grade level, P-1 specifically, it remains the category with the fewest positions offered in the UN System. In 2018 alone, only 246 UN staff were employed at P-1 level representing 0.7% of total UN staff system-wide with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (63), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (35) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNICEF) (20) representing the highest numbers. The UN Secretariat had only 14 P-1 staff in 2018.

The high average age at P-2 and P-3 level suggests that despite the requirement of a minimum of two to five years, most UN staff in this category have had more

years of work experience when recruited, leaving little space for postgraduate students and young professionals with little or few years of experience to enter the UN. Both Figure 5 and Table 2 reveal that challenges persist to rejuvenate the organisation.

Comparing the UN with other international organisations, it is not alone in confronting an aging staff population. Since 2000, the proportion of officials over the age of 45 has been growing and represented 57% of European Commission (EC) staff in 2018. The average age of contract and temporary staff members is considerably younger; on 1 January 2019 it stood at 42 for contract staff and at 40 for temporary staff, compared to an average age of 50 for EC officials. New talent acquisition initiatives, such as the EC Junior Professionals Programme, help to reinforce the influx of younger staff. In 2018, the number of staff younger than 30 years has increased from 720 to 825 compared to the previous year.⁸

Table 2: Average age of UN staff by grade, 2017, UN system-wide

Level	2017		2015	
	Average age (years)		Average age (years)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
UG	60.1	57.9	59.6	58.3
D-2	56.2	55.6	56.0	54.8
D-1	54.1	53.8	54.0	53.6
P-O	54.4	56.4	52.1	50.7
P-5	52.3	50.9	n/a	n/a
P-4	48.7	46.8	48.6	46.6
P-3	45.0	42.6	44.5	42.3
P-2	38.9	37.4	38.8	37.2
P-1	32.7	32.6	33.0	32.1
P-1 to UG average age	48.1	45.2	48.0	44.9

Note: P-O includes undefined professional grades and P-6 and P-7 grades.

Source: SG report, July 2019. Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system.

A/74/220. CEB data until end of the year 2017.

An aging UN may make it more challenging to connect with the world's youth and claim representativeness and inclusiveness while in fact populations are getting younger in many places where the UN operates. Finding ways to rejuvenate the organisation will be challenging, and even perhaps disputed from within. A number of questions will arise: will it require changes to UN recruitment requirements, notably in terms of academic credentials and work experience? Beyond recruiting, and retaining, young people, how can the UN explore other ways to increase its connections with the world's youth? And what will be done to avoid pitting the 'old versus the young' in an organisation wedded to its hierarchies?

Trends in staff retention

A healthy organisation needs both staff that move out of the organisation to allow for new talent to come in, and staff that stay to preserve institutional memory. The latest CEB report on Human Resources of December 2018 reports that 64% of the international professional UN staff in the UN system leave their service within ten years. 41.1% of total staff leave in less than five years.

Table 3 gives concrete examples by UN entity, for those who report on retention. UN WOMEN, for example, about 59.2% of their professional international staff leave within their first five years, 32.1% within five to ten years. In the UN Secretariat, 36.7% of international professional staff choose to leave within five years, 30.7% within five to ten years, which means that over 60% of staff to decide to leave the UN Secretariat within ten years.

But data from some UN entities paints a different picture on staff retention. In cases of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), UNHCR, UNESCO over 50% of employees stay more than ten years. Only 37% of UNHCR and UN Secretariat staff decide to leave the organisation within five years.

For national professional staff, a similar picture comes to light: out of all organisations that report on staff retention, 77% of national staff leave their position within ten years, 45% even in their first five years of employment. Only 22% stay with the organisation long-term.

Table 3: Top 10 UN entities with the shortest length of service for international professional staff, share of total staff in %, 2018

Entity	<5 YEARS	5-10 YEARS	> 10 YEARS
CTBTO	75.3	22.0	2.7
UNRWA	66.1	24.1	9.8
UNU	60.5	30.3	9.2
UN WOMEN	59.2	32.1	8.7
IAEA	56.3	19.8	23.9
UNOPS	55.9	25.3	18.8
WHO	52.7	12.4	34.9
UNSSC	50.0	11.1	38.9
UNICEF	49.6	20.1	30.3
WMO	48.0	24.8	27.2
UN SECRETARIAT	36.7	30.7	32.6

Source: UN System HR Statistics Report – 2018. (CEB/2019/HLCM/HR/17).

Table 4: Top 10 UN entities with the shortest length of service for national staff, share of total staff in %, 2018

Entity	<5 YEARS	5-10 YEARS	> 10 YEARS
ICAO	100.0	0.0	0.0
IFAD	55.3	44.7	0.0
ILO	68.2	15.6	16.2
UN	52.6	30.5	16.9
UN WOMEN	70.1	16.8	13.0
UNAIDS	45.2	40.4	14.4
UNESCO	60.0	22.3	17.7
UNFPA	46.5	30.6	22.9
WHO	47.6	18.3	34.0
WIPO	100.0	0.0	0.0

Source: UN System HR Statistics Report – 2018. (CEB/2019/HLCM/HR/17).

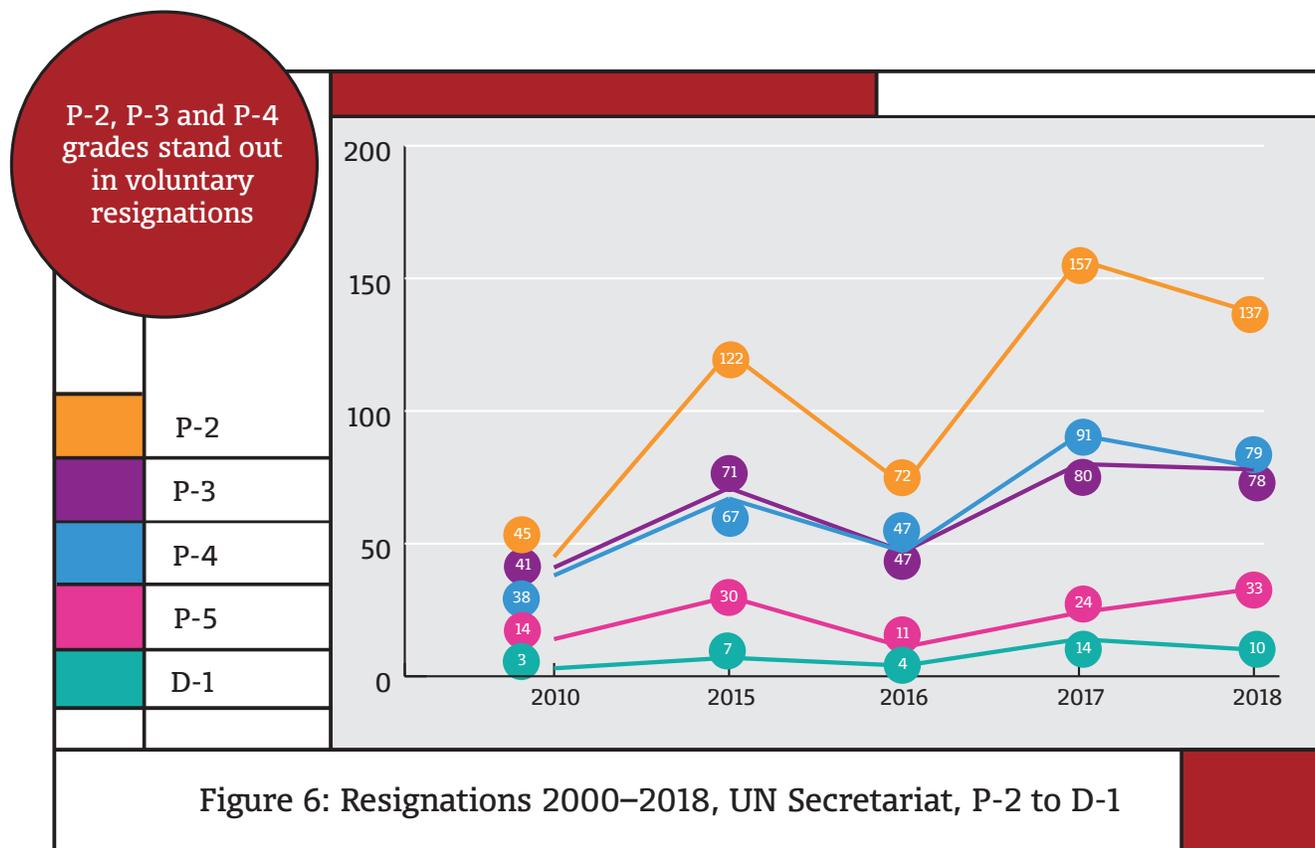


Figure 6: Resignations 2000–2018, UN Secretariat, P-2 to D-1

Source: Secretary-General's report on the Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics from 2010 to 2018.

On average, national staff stay fewer years in the UN service than international staff. 52.6% of national staff leave the UN within five years, only 16.9% stay more than ten years (Table 4). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (42% stay more than five years), UNDP (32.5%), the World Health Organization (WHO) (34%) seem to stand out in providing an environment of long-term stability for national staff.

Figure 6 looks at separations in the UN Secretariat from 2010 to 2018 by grade (P-2 to D-1) more closely. This figure represents voluntary resignations by staff, and not termination due to contract expirations or other types of resignations. While numbers are relatively low in comparison to the overall number of staff employed in each grade, they do show that there is an upward trend of resignations within the UN Secretariat, especially at the P-2 and P-3 level. But they do fluctuate.

A recent Secretary-General report provides a deeper analysis of resignations system-wide by reason and grade. Table 5 (on the next page) reveals that voluntary resignations went down from 2014 to 2017 for each grade in the system. It is important to notice that still only a few entities report on the reasons of separations by type and grade, and no historical overview is available to determine its real implications. More qualitative data on resignations for the whole UN could be helpful for understanding the gaps and challenges the organisations face and provide targeted remedies.

The UN System Leadership Framework, for example, encourages multi-dimensional leadership skills that should be acquired through mobility within and outside the system, but inter-agency transfers and secondments have also seen a decline for each grade as Table 5 indicates. The majority of organisations in the UN system do not have a clear system to track mobility within and outside the UN, although such a system could benefit human resources and management decisions as well as build up the required talent pool.

The Young Professional Programme (YPP), one of the only programmes that targets staff from under-represented countries and offers a long-term opportunity with the UN Secretariat, tracks the recruitment numbers by year in the UN demographic report but does not account for how long the YPPs stay in the system, their career progression or their resignations. A valuable tool that could determine the success rate of the programme and potential alterations.

Staff resignations must be understood as part of a generational trend, beyond the UN, whereby young people, the *millennials* or *Gen Z* in particular, are more inclined to move around, from one organisation to the other.

To better understand whether retention data at the UN really constitutes a warning sign, it will need to be further interrogated. But also, the UN is not the only international organisation working globally offering an interesting work environment with a good remuneration package. It is competing with other non-governmental organisations and the private sector offering similar work environments with less bureaucracy and little hierarchy. So further questions remain to be asked: why do people leave, and where to? Do some of them return to the UN system? And for those who argue that the UN's overall leadership culture would benefit from having staff come in and out of the UN over the course of their career, what can the UN do to incentivise such regular rotation?

Staff perception surveys need to be built into the discussion on leadership

The 2018 UN Secretariat Engagement Survey⁹ highlighted that 88% of UN secretariat staff are proud to work for the UN, a sign that UN staff believe in the UN's core messaging and principles, but only 58% feel that senior leadership makes effective decisions necessary to ensure effective mandate delivery. Staff reported to be critical of senior leadership communication, dissemination of information, support on best practices and their empowerment of staff. Over 50% of respondents believe that staff are not being held accountable for their ethical behaviour and fear that they are not protected from retaliation for reporting misconduct or cooperating with an authorised audit or investigations.

A 2019 study¹⁰ by the Young UN: Agents of Change, a network consisting of young UN staff in the system offers similar insights. It reveals that the majority of young UN staff have a strong link to the UN's core mandate and are proud to work for the organisation, but many feel they do not have any choice but to leave. For more than 90%, short contractual agreements are the real bottlenecks to planning ahead. Two thirds of respondents are actively seeking job opportunities, many within the UN system. But for all, a lack of career development opportunities, weak management practices, the lack of employment predictability are the main reasons prompting them to leave the organisation. While the review shows that the majority of young UN staff are clearly eager to continue to work for the UN despite contractual challenges and fewer career opportunities, a considerable number of staff, more than half, are also interested in pursuing new work opportunities outside of the UN.

Similar issues can be reported for the YPP. In the period from July 2014 to June 2015, only four out of 143 YPO staff at the P-2 level were promoted to P-3.¹¹ In the period from July 2015 to June 2016, no P-2 young professional programme staff out of 184 such staff were

Table 5: Resignations 2014-2017 in the UN system by grade and reason

Reason for separation	P-1		P-2		P-3		P-4	
	2014-2015	2016-2017	2014-2015	2016-2017	2014-2015	2016-2017	2014-2015	2016-2017
Appointment expiration	27	10	457	307	985	649	744	396
Dismissal for misconduct	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	1
Inter-agency secondments	0	0	1	1	12	6	20	16
Inter-agency transfers	1	0	30	16	73	57	90	75
Resignation	9	2	235	137	547	333	431	285
Termination - unsatisfactory service	0	0	1	0	3	2	3	2
Total	38	12	783	517	1916	1225	1780	1062

promoted to P-3. In the 2017 Young UN initiative global ideas survey, more career development support was cited as the most important area for human resources reform. The overemphasis on compliance management instead of promoting talent acquisition, continuous performance feedback and a healthy leadership culture, was cited as the biggest obstacle to career development (see Ruth Blackshaw and Klas Moldéus, page 80).

Conclusion

Demographic data and staff surveys can reveal a lot about the wellbeing of an organisation. Looking at gender parity, age and staff retention at the UN system offers only a few entry points to a wider discussion. Data can be interpreted in different ways, but it shows trends that can be valuable to the debate on how to strengthen human resources policies and practices, in particular create space for renewed leadership potential. Foremost data on demographics and staff surveys needs to have a stronger link to the UN System Leadership Framework, enabling the system to make the right decisions, at the right place and at the right time.

With a vast workforce, spread globally across multiple regions, responsible for programmes encompassing normative, operational and research work, the UN needs to ensure that it has the staff it needs, with the right skills

and the necessary professional leadership profiles. UN staff is after all its most valuable asset, an asset that must be valued and supported to perform the work of the organisation.

P-5		D-1		D-2		UG	
2014-2015	2016-2017	2014-2015	2016-2017	2014-2015	2016-2017	2014-2015	2016-2017
370	193	64	38	45	17	44	12
7	4	0	1	0	0	0	0
22	15	5	12	3	3	2	1
64	54	22	16	16	2	13	7
206	127	56	26	22	11	15	7
0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
1213	708	397	233	180	81	104	43

Source: Data provided by UN entities to UN System Coordination Division, UN Women

Note: 2014 separations data not available for ITU, UNFCCC, UNJSPE, UNRWA, WIPO 2016 and 2017 separations data not available for FAO, ITC ILO, ICSC, IMO, ITU, UNJSPE, UNRWA, UNSSC, UNESCO, UNITAR, WIPO, WMO, UNICC, UNWTO, IOM

Endnotes

¹ As we are making use of different datasets from different entities, data from CEB and SG reports on staff demographics does not always match, given their different modes of collecting data and the time-frames they work in, a problem that is more an issue of data quality than an error of the report.

UN General Assembly (UNGA), 'Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics', (Report of the Secretary-General, A/71/360, UNGA, 31 August 2016)

<https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/71/360>

UN General Assembly, 'Improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system',

(Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/220, UNGA, 27 July 2017) <https://undocs.org/en/A/72/220>

Data from the United Nations System Chief Executives Board Coordination (CEB), <https://www.unsystem.org/content/statistics>

² Data is from the year 2018, but also draws on previous reports

³ Data is from 2017 but also draws on previous reports

⁴ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action', (Declaration, The Fourth World Conference on Women, September 1995), Paragraph 193a.

https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf

⁵ United Nations, 'System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity', (Strategy, UN, 2017).

https://www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org/gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf

⁶ United Nations Secretariat, 'UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard', (website, UN Secretariat).

<https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard>

⁷ European Commission, 'Women in management: Juncker Commission exceeds its 40% target',

(press release, EC, 22 October 2019).

https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-6139_en.htm

⁸ European Commission, 'Human Resources in 2018.

General Report on activities of Human Resources and Security' (report, European Commission, 2018).

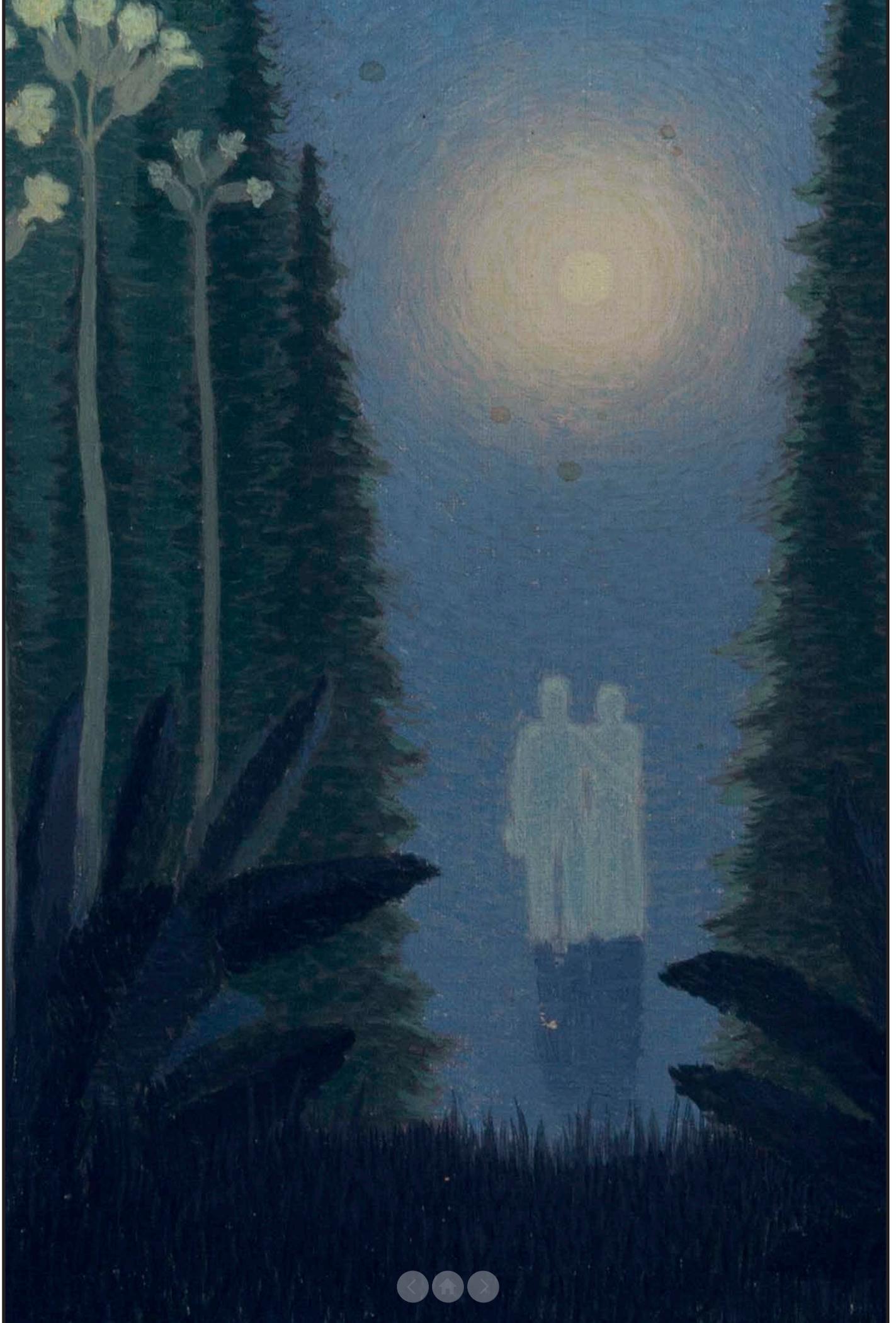
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/about_the_european_commission/departments_and_executive_agencies/documents/general-activity-report-2018-human-resources-and-security_en.pdf

⁹ UN Secretariat, '2018 UN Secretariat Engagement Survey', (survey, UN, February 2018).

<https://pages.devex.com/rs/685-KBL-765/images/UN-Secretariat-Survey-Results-February-2018.pdf>

¹⁰ Young UN, 'Navigating to the Next UN: A journey full of potential', (report, Young UN: Agents for Change, September 2019).

¹¹ Office of Internal Oversight, 'Evaluation of the Office of Human Resources Management', (Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, E/AC.51/2019/3, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 25 February 2019).



Conclusion

The variety of perspectives on the art of UN leadership offered in this report imposes a degree of humility on any attempt to summarise and conclude. As with any other art, one must respect the diversity in meanings that people seek in and the interpretations they draw from leadership, particularly at the UN. Yet, it is possible to highlight a few common movements amongst the various renditions.

Overall, behind the different tones and colours used to speak of leadership, a shared passion lingers. All reflect a yearning for UN leadership: for discussing it, and more importantly, for nurturing it. In several places, one picks up a cry for more and better leadership, and one discerns a request for more courage, more integrity and for more grit. But the report also shows that UN leadership is not a chimera. It exists and it needs to be recognised.

Impressions from the report's four chapters

In the chapter *'The landscape: Painting the big picture'*, the contributors make the point that instances of UN leadership matter not in and of themselves but because of what is at stake. Many contributions link their reflections on UN leadership with reflections on the current state of the world and the existential challenges we face, and why UN leadership matters in such a world.

Two specific imperatives loom large across this landscape where realism meets idealism: the responsibility to uphold universal values and principles, and to hold both governments and peoples to account for such responsibilities as well; and the importance, for UN leaders, of *'authentically'* modelling these values and principles in carrying out their functions. Several authors also recognise the risks and the pressures involved. But such are both the sign of true leadership and the price to bear if UN leadership is to rise to today's challenges.

Contributions under *'The portrait: Rendering the individual'* remind us that beyond policies and frameworks, leadership often comes down to what individual women and men are and do. As the stories illustrate, it is about emotional intelligence – exercising courage, grit, humility, compassion and empathy. How such traits and actions are perceived and the impact it has on other people matters. As such, it has impressionistic power, to be found in the throes of tragedy or at the height of intense pressure, as well as in the everyday of a life at the UN. It appears both in those rare moments when one decision or action can decide the fate of many, and in mundane bureaucratic chores that keep the organisation running and delivering its mandates.

These stories also bring to life the reality that leadership can be exercised in the UN's everyday work, and by all of its staff, which is often less publicly recognised and sometimes forgotten. These contributions call for a reflection on UN leadership at all levels of the organisation.

In *'The abstract: Innovating and breaking the mould'*, contributions project various modernist perspectives on UN leadership, linking it to other concepts such as feminism, innovation, team empowerment and systems theory. Without such connections, these reflections seem to warn us, UN leadership is at risk of being disconnected from where the world is going, and hence of becoming irrelevant.

In this regard, several contributions explore and extend the spatial dimension of UN leadership, by broadening the mental and physical environments needed for it to thrive. These contributions show how hierarchical, seniority based and purely individualistic methods of leadership simply won't do anymore. More open,

collective and imaginative approaches that enhance leadership through teams, diversity, innovation and creativity are needed. To this end, efforts to achieve real gender parity and geographic diversity and to empower youth within the UN take on added urgency.

Finally, in a slightly different room sits *'The still life: Depicting current arrangements'*, which presents a sketch of the UN System Leadership Framework, revealing initiatives that embrace the new 'culture of leadership'. The entities and departments featured all express the same urgency for strengthening leadership practices, but how they go about these efforts seems to differ. An examination of several data points on gender, youth and staff retention shows valuable trends for the debate on strengthening human resources practices and creating space for new leadership potential.

Together, these various works all attest to the belief that UN leadership is a rather unique artistic endeavour, one that is undeniably linked to the UN Charter. The UN Charter is both the source and the purpose of UN leadership. Hence it is leadership at the service of a set of values and goals that extends beyond the organisation. It must ultimately radiate outwardly, even in those actions that are confined to internal purposes.

Therefore, leadership is not just good management. Whether they state it explicitly or implicitly, the contributions speak to UN leadership as uniquely grounded in integrity and personal ethics. The stories and the reflections evoke, all in their own ways, women and men making choices, recognising and accepting that the adequacy between action and principle matters, and that the integrity of such choices requires going beyond one's own biography, to preserve and further the UN Charter.

These discussions bring to light new perspectives and practical implications through which UN leadership can be thought. Hopefully, the reflections presented in this report can offer valuable material for ongoing and future efforts to identify, train, and support UN leaders through established institutional mechanisms or by directly inspiring UN staff to new or different ways to be a leader.

Sculpting future studies

This report does not aim to present recommendations but rather to identify questions that merit further exploration. Some of them could be framed as follows:

- What are the implications of placing ethics and integrity at the core of leadership for UN recruitment and appointment practices? How can potential UN leaders in HQs and the field be better tested and selected for stronger, more ethical and more accountable leadership? In particular, what leadership attributes need to be better tested for with regard to the new generation of UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams (UNCTs)?¹ Consequently, if ethics and integrity are at the core of what UN leadership is or should be, how can these dimensions be further supported and safeguarded in the face of opposition and pressures?
- What do leadership failures (eg discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment and abuse of authority) in the UN as well as in large international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) indicate about accountability for leadership practices? How can misconduct be prevented, and how can accountability be ensured when failures do occur?
- While recognising the value of diversity, what can be done to strengthen a more coherent UN leadership culture overall? How can the implementation of the UN leadership framework support the right kind of knowledge, behaviour, incentives and rewards? How and where can the UN further create spaces for discussions on norm-based, principled UN leadership and what it looks like for individuals and for teams, as well as on failures?

Drawing it into focus

The above questions bring into sharp focus three important issues, which also emerged from the discussions around the contributions.

The first one relates to leadership and failure. For leadership to grow, failure must be recognised and discussed. Many organisations and corporations have routines and fora where failures can be analysed and addressed. Where and how are the discussions on failure linked to leadership taking place within the UN? And how is the call for discussions on failure incentivised by senior management to foster humility and stimulate learning and improvement?

The second one speaks to the significance and future of the UN Leadership Framework. While recognising that Framework is still in relatively early days, it may still be useful to soon take further stock of its implementation across a persistently fragmented UN system and consolidate emerging lessons from the way UN entities are translating it into their recruitment, training and assessment processes, including at the country level, where knowledge of the framework remains limited.

The Framework stands for a renewed commitment of the organisation to develop its leadership qualities, capacities and identity so that it can meet current challenges and opportunities. While these challenges often constitute ‘*problems without passports*’, it reminds UN staff that they do have passports that commit them to a role and tradition of being an International Civil Servant, a unique identity that was introduced in 1919 with the League of Nations and continues to take shape 100 years later.

It would be of particular value to examine the extent to which implementation adheres to the spirit of Framework, and not just its words. As with almost everything else in such an organisation, there is the risk that leadership become *bureaucratised*, with too strong a focus on managerial leadership traits at the expense of more norm-based, principled qualities that must infuse the DNA of UN staff. While avoiding a purely technocratic approach, the organisation will need to devise ways to assess whether the Framework is having an impact.

And finally, if UN leadership is to be impactful beyond headquarters in Turtle Bay or the *Palais des Nations*, reflections on UN leadership must be undertaken and shared outside of the United Nations. For this first publication, the framing used was mostly inward-looking, with most contributions coming from within the UN. Only a few came from outside the organisation. But all offered a clear-eyed view of a complex and at times blurry picture. Good leadership at the UN exists which merits recognition and support. At the same time, resolute measures are also needed to prevent and act upon failing leadership. But all offer insights that would merit exposure to external experiences and perspectives, from which there is much to learn. It is essential to keep listening to people outside of the UN, to their expectations and to what, if anything, UN leadership means to them.

Through this engagement, one would also hope that UN leadership in its current, albeit diffused, forms as well as in its potential can inspire people beyond the UN, and can enrich the practice of leadership elsewhere. Ultimately, UN leadership needs to be projected and recognised by the people it is meant to serve, if the organisation is to play any meaningful role in addressing the challenges that threaten their world.

The exploration of and discussion on UN leadership must continue – onwards and outwards.

Endnote

¹ United Nations, ‘*The Management and Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System*’ (framework, UN Sustainable Development Group, 2019). <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDS-MAF-2019-country-level-component-FINAL-editorial-rev-26APR.pdf>

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASG	Assistant Secretary-General
BNUB	United Nations Office in Burundi
CEB	Chief Executives Board for Coordination
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CTBTO	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
DMSPC	Department of Management, Strategic, Policy and Compliance
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPO	Department of Peace Operations (formerly Department of Peacekeeping Operations)
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
EOSG	Executive Office of the Secretary-General
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HIPPO	High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICSC	International Civil Service Commission
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITC-ILO	International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MINURCAT	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
RBAP	UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
RBM	Results Based Management
RC	Resident Coordinator
RR	Resident Representative
SAPG	Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
UN DOCO	United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICC	United Nations International Computing Centre
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNJSPF	United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMIN	United Nations Mission in Nepal
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNPOS	United Nations Political Office for Somalia
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSCOL	United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
UNSSC	United Nations System Staff College
UNU	United Nations University
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
UPU	Universal Postal Union of the United Nations
USG	Under-Secretary-General
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
YPO	Young Professional Officer
YPP	Young Professional Programme

Featured Art

The art accompanying each chapter comes from Hammarskjöld's private collection, currently curated by the Dag Hammarskjöld Backåkra Foundation. Backåkra is a country farm in southern Sweden that Hammarskjöld purchased in 1957, and it currently operates as a museum and conference facility in honour of his life and legacy.



Cover Art: A portrait of Dag Hammarskjöld, by Bo Beskow (1906–1989), acquired by the United Nations. It was unveiled 5 April 1966 in the Secretariat Lobby, UN headquarters in New York.

'Sea Form' from 1960 by Dame Jocelyn Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975), English artist and sculptor, as well as friend of Dag Hammarskjöld.



Oil painting from 1940 by Kjell Leander Engström (1914–1979), Swedish painter.



Watercolour painting, unknown artist.

Fresco by Bo Beskow (1906-1989), Swedish artist and close friend of Dag Hammarskjöld. The fresco is a study for the piece now on display in the meditation room at the United Nations headquarters in New York.



Carl Kylberg (1878–1952), Swedish painter.

'Nattlig promenad', oil painting by Sven Jonson (1902–1981), Swedish painter.



Leadership, like art, is a fluid and lived experience, making it hard to define. Yet, efforts to understand leadership and to diagnose, even perhaps remedy, what some refer to as the lack, or the end or even the death of leadership in today's world have only intensified over the past few years. The issue seems to be on everyone's mind. No sphere of human activity and no institution escape the interrogation, and perhaps nowhere else more than at the United Nations.

Few would dispute that better leadership is essential for ensuring trust in the UN and in multilateralism, and for delivering more effective responses to today's global challenges. Indeed, despite significant achievements since the organisation's creation, public debate tends to focus on what is not delivered instead of what has been achieved. But both the source of the doubt and the answer lie with the UN – its leadership culture and in leadership manifested by its professionals. Poor leadership explains, to some extent, why the UN at times under-delivers on its promise, and why people lose faith in the organisation.

This publication frames the bigger picture of UN leadership and presents experiences and ideas that speak to both its reality and potential. Written with passion and sincerity, the contributions within it convey a degree of awareness, knowledge and inspiration that we hope will contribute to further strengthening the promise and the practice of UN leadership.



Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in memory of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Foundation aims to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development, multilateralism and peace.

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