



Leadership for Peace

Koenraad Van Brabant, October 2012



Leadership in Multilateral Organizations

This is the second working paper on 'leadership for peace'. While there is a vast literature on 'leadership' and a growing literature on conflict transformation and peacebuilding, with few exceptions 'leadership' has not figured prominently as an important factor in building sustainable peace.ⁱ Even if the topic does get our interest, its importance cannot be researched unless we clarify our understanding of 'peacebuilding', and of 'leadership'.

A first working paper reviewed key concepts and perspectives on 'leadership', as developed by a largely 'western' leadership field (Van Brabant 2012). This second working paper highlights key observations and insights from a number of recent studies and other resources concerning leadership in multilateral organizations in general or in the context of humanitarian action and peace support missions. Most of these studies look at the United Nations (UN). It being a working paper, comments and observations are warmly welcomed.

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SUMMARY

There is modest but gradually increasing attention to the question of 'leadership' in international organizations and in multi-agency humanitarian and peace support operations. Many of the reflections and resources in this regard turn around leadership in the United Nations and in UN missions, but presumably the analysis and lessons from UN experiences resonate with those of other multilateral organizations. The 'senior leadership' considered is that of a 'Head of Agency' and/or of a 'senior mission leader'. The latter can be for example a Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), a Force Commander or a Humanitarian Coordinator. In addition there is some documentation of the reflections and actions of mediators in high level political peace negotiations. For those focusing on it, the quality of 'leadership' is often turned into a critical variable for overall 'effectiveness' and 'success'.

A review of several recent key reports and resources highlights a number of central themes. These are: the allegedly especially difficult nature of the contexts in which humanitarian and peace support actions take place; the need for strategic leadership; what effective leaders do, how they do it and what core qualities of such people are; 'leadership teams'; problems with appointments of people in the most senior posts, with their task specific preparations and their accountability; and the challenge of institutionalizing leadership development.

Contexts: People demonstrate leadership – or not – through their actions in particular contexts. It is possible to differentiate different 'contexts' that are interwoven but not identical:

- The '**strategic context**': This is the medium term bigger picture, and raises the question of how to prepare ourselves and our organizations for the challenges of a future that seems to be growing more complex and unpredictable?
- The '**operational context**': These can be very problematic in situations where there has been a major natural disaster or large scale violence.
- The '**organizational context**': With its internal cohesion and efficiencies or lack thereof, and a culture that can encourage initiative and risk-taking or be very averse to it.
- The '**multiple interveners**' context: With the potential competition and rivalries among the external assistance actors, and differences in perspective, priorities and ways of work also with and between internal actors.

The combination of all of this, much of which is beyond the control of even very senior post holders, adds up to a massive challenge. The UN and many other multilateral organizations tend to have additional challenges resulting from the influence that member states may seek to exercise, mission mandates that are ambiguous and often under resourced, and a workforce of diverse nationalities which can be a source of creativity but also of confusion.

Strategic and Operational Leadership: A distinction is sometimes made between ‘strategic’ and ‘operational leadership’, with the first one looking at the total picture, and the second one concentrating on the action in a particular sector or geographical area. Closer examination reveals different aspects of ‘strategic leadership’ that are closely related but are not the same: anticipating future developments and challenges; positioning and developing one’s organization to remain relevant and effective in a changing world and; bringing about internal organizational coherence. Not every person at the top is equally skilled and equally effective at all three. It is argued that the challenges of the 21st century will require better but also much more adaptive strategic leadership, and much greater distributed and collaborative leadership. What remains un- or underexplored however is whether the operational leadership of major peace support missions should not also be ‘strategic’, as building sustainable peace and legitimate institutions is typically a long-term endeavour. Secondly, presumably national political leaders need to be both ‘strategic’ and ‘operational’, so how do they combine this? Thirdly, what happens under different configurations of national and external leaders: strong internal and strong external leadership; strong internal and weak external leadership; weak internal and strong external leadership; and weak internal and weak external leadership?

Effective Leadership: The literature on leaders and leadership in multilateral organizations confirms the general observations about what effective leaders do and how they do it:

- **What they do:** exercise strategic leadership rather than stick to standard operating habits; visioning although cautionary notes are needed here about situations in which this has to be handled with great caution; managing relationships in a circle of 360 degrees – even people in top positions are often still answerable to others and hence have to ‘manage upwards’; building alliances and coalitions; dynamically keeping oneself and one’s organization positioned so as to continue to be perceived as ‘impartial’ (though also value-based); and making decisions. An important difference in approaches is highlighted however between a more technical and a more people-oriented approach to problems. In the more technical approach one considers the ‘what’, then decides on ‘the how’ and then pays attention to the ‘who’. In a more people-oriented approach, consideration of the ‘what’ is followed by consideration of all the key actors and stakeholders, the ‘who’, whose ability to exercise agency as well should influence the choice of the ‘how’.
- **How they do it:** Attention is drawn to the need to develop an in-depth understanding of the (operational) terrain, and how you are likely to be perceived in it; the promotion of the values the organization stands for, although we need to learn more about how to deal with profound moral dilemmas where there is no ‘best choice’; knowing when to act but also being able to resist the temptation to ‘do something’ when the time is not ripe and we are unlikely to exercise any meaningful influence; pushing the boundaries while appreciating what is definitely impossible in the current situation; they know they have to take risks but are not reckless. They treat everyone with respect even when in disagreement yet will not hide anger

or strong emotion when their trust is betrayed. Effective leaders also need to know when to remain discreet and when and how going public can be to their advantage. They value their staff and colleagues and show it. They build a diverse team around them that will have the creativity and the courage to disagree and come up with other options. And they have strong political intuition and skills, which they may use to foster a political agreement, but also to depoliticize important issues, so that fundamental moral values and legal commitments remain paramount.

Core qualities of recognized effective leaders are: integrity and service to the organization though when a conflict arises between the two, integrity will prevail; courage; and great determination and persistence. They are not easily thrown and discouraged by setbacks. Being a good listener is as important as being a good communicator. They are very effective learners. Finally, people in senior positions who take their responsibilities serious also need to be caring well for themselves, in order to deal with the uncertainties, the workloads, the stresses and criticisms that come their way all the time as well. They also recognize how strength can turn into a weakness: continue to support a staff member who obviously doesn't have the ability, or driving colleagues into the ground with one's own appetite for work, will ultimately backfire.

While many examples exist of admirable and admired leaders of multilateral organizations, it is also relevant to acknowledge that none of them was good at everything all the time and effective in all aspects. But **all inspired others** to get beyond their comfort zone and strive for better.

Senior Leadership Teams: Reference is often made to the team of selected individuals that senior post holders assemble around them. Such **individualized leadership teams** can be highly effective, but they tend to disappear when the key person moves on. They also need to be alert not to get disconnected from the rest of the organization. There is however a different type of 'leadership team', that is made up of **individuals from different organizations**. That can be the case with a UN Country Team, a Mission Leadership Team or a Humanitarian Country Team. Very different dynamics occur in these, and though there may be a designated central 'coordinator' s/he typically has no formal authority over senior post holders from different agencies. This de facto becomes a form of 'collective leadership', the performance of which is rarely assessed adequately.

Appointments, Preparedness and Accountabilities: Notwithstanding some improvements in recent years, strong criticism remains over how people in top positions in the UN and possibly other multilateral organizations are appointed. **Political considerations and/or interpersonal networks** are often at work, rather than transparent and rigorous procedures that compare a candidate's experience and skills with the requirements of the job. This is also discouraging for mid-level staff in those organizations whose chances for promotion are thereby undercut. Some changes have been taking place to make the assessment of e.g. potential Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators more rigorous, although further improvement is still demanded. The introduction of 'competency

frameworks' has value, but many core competencies – such as those listed above – are either not mentioned or very hard to 'measure'.

There are now some efforts and resources to help senior post holders prepare for challenges they will face, in the form of short courses, manuals and peer retreats. But there may be **insufficient experiential learning and learning from reflected case studies**.

While there are stronger calls for senior post holders to be held more accountable, the **practice continues to fall short**, for a variety of valid and less valid reasons. Among the less valid ones are the political and interpersonal considerations that got the person into the post in the first place, and that indicate a commonality of interests that will not be put in jeopardy by tough performance appraisals. Where performance appraisals take place in large multilateral bureaucracies, the emphasis tends to be on financial propriety and rule-compliance. Whether the post holder demonstrates the values of the organization and how s/he treats people is largely ignored. Proper accountability however must take into account the complexities and uncertainties of 'delivering results' in unstable environments with a multitude of influential actors and/or in situations of collective leadership like in the multi-agency leadership teams referred to. In extremely problematic situations with very little scope for influencing, the most effective leadership might consist of little more than 'damage control'. This might be a real achievement, although it is rarely recognized.

Institutionalization of Leadership Development: While there is growing recognition of the importance of 'leadership' in multilateral organizations and their missions, we remain far away from seeing the emergence of **a real 'leadership culture', that encourages and enables staff at all levels to demonstrate such quality**. And this notwithstanding the fact that the internal and external challenges are such that no one or few persons at the top can handle them on their own. Major reasons for this resistance to change are:

- An outmoded understanding of 'leadership' as referring to people at the top, rather than a quality required at all levels of the organization;
- An inability of people at the organizational top to understand that human resource planning is strategically vital for the future relevance and success of the organization, and sometimes an unwillingness to acknowledge that their responsibilities centrally relate to 'people';
- A human resource function that also remains stuck in transactional management of hiring, assessing, rewarding, training and retiring people, and fails to demonstrate it is as strategically important as operations/programs and policy.

While we find some interesting insights in the available analysis and guidance, perhaps more striking is the prevailing paradigm and the lack of detailed attention to issues that are critical for leadership practice.

Notwithstanding brief references to the need to enable leadership at all levels, the prevailing paradigm is that of 'senior people at the top' (mostly men). The attention also goes largely to the 'organizational context' that demands 'leadership' rather than to the challenges in the external environment that demand collaborative leadership, not only across external assistance agencies but also between external and internal and among internal actors. We don't learn much about finding the appropriate balance between exercising 'leadership' outside and inside the organization. There are hints about an 'optimal lifespan' for people to stay in a particular senior position, but what that would be and whether it is a generic period irrespective of the specific circumstances, is not clear.

More critical and nuanced reflection is required about the various aspects of 'strategic leadership', about who should be 'visioning', about leadership in the face of significant risks and when confronted with painful moral dilemmas. That also raises the question about fairness in accountability, taking into account the 'change space' that someone encountered and had to work with. A fresh look may be needed at the existing 'competencies frameworks' and the possible misuse of 'demonstrated competencies'.

Most critically needed are real world case studies that can illustrate 'leadership-in-action'.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is modest but gradually increasing attention to the question of 'leadership' in international organizations and in multi-agency humanitarian and peace support operations. Many of the reflections and resources in this regard turn around leadership in the United Nations and in UN missions, but presumably the analysis and lessons from UN experiences resonate with those of other multilateral organizations such as the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of American States, ECOWAS, SADC, ASEAN etc. The 'senior leadership' considered is that of a 'Head of Agency' and/or of a 'senior mission leader'. The latter can be for example a Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), a Force Commander or a Humanitarian Coordinator. In addition there is some documentation of the reflections and actions of mediators in high level political peace negotiations. Mediators presumably exercise 'leadership', though one could posit that they cannot be successful unless the parties to the conflict exercise real 'leadership'. Unlike agency or mission leaders, 'mediators' typically do not also have a large organization to manage.

Even if the authors of these reports tend *not* to be 'leadership experts', many of them put a premium on 'leadership', either by lamenting its absence (e.g. Humanitarian Futures 2009:2) or by making it the center piece for success:

"Highly effective leadership by the Mission Leadership Team is arguably the single most important factor for the success of all peacekeeping operations. Under such leadership, UN missions can optimize the use of scarce resources, motivate mission personnel, set proper examples for the host nation in state- and peacebuilding, and strengthen the credibility and reputation of the Organization." (International Forum 2010:15).

"Effective, dynamic leadership can make the difference between a cohesive mission with high morale and effectiveness despite adverse circumstances and one that struggles to maintain any of those attributes. That is, the tenor of an entire mission can be heavily influenced by the character and ability of those who lead it." (Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations 2000: 16)

II. CONTEXTS

From a practical point of view, it matters little whether one is 'born' a leader or has acquired leadership skills largely through learning. In the end, 'leadership' is demonstrated in action, and actions take place in particular contexts. There is a tendency to describe the contexts in which multi-agency humanitarian and peace support work takes place as particularly challenging and with very high stakes.

One can question whether the leadership requirements in disaster and conflict situations are indeed so fundamentally different from those faced by a Minister of Finance in a country ridden with public debt and on the point of defaulting on its interest payments, the board and executive of a large company with thousands of employees and suppliers who is losing market share, or of a national minority struggling to protect or obtain equal rights? The stakes in the latter situations may not be so directly of 'life or death', but they do profoundly affect the lives of large numbers of people.

More directly useful perhaps is the observation that there are interwoven but somewhat different contexts in which leadership has to be exercised:

1. **The 'strategic context'**: This refers to the wider- and medium-term picture, whose realities we can try to anticipate but not predict with confidence. What will a global, regional or societal situation look like five to 10 years from now, taking into account economic, political, technological and social trends and developments? How do we prepare ourselves, our organization(s) for the challenges of the future? It has been argued that key characteristics of our future world are complexity and unpredictability (Humanitarian Futures 2009:2; Ramo 2009). This increases the need for but also the challenge of 'strategic leadership'.

2. **The 'operational context'**: Frequent features in contexts in which relief, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts take place are, among others, the prevalence of violence; arms proliferation; physical insecurity; human rights abuses; forced displacement; widespread poverty; time pressure because of acute needs; high stakes (life and death); corruption; a politically charged atmosphere; duplicitous actors; authorities unable or unwilling to help; rapid changes in the environment; high visibility; intense scrutiny etc. All of this calls for strong 'operational' leadership.

3. **The 'organizational context'**: Factors mentioned in this regard are, among others, insufficient resources and/or inadequate quality; failing logistics and things not delivered timely; bureaucratic rules and regulations that appear outdated and counterproductive; some colleagues with dubious motives and motivations, others unwilling to accept leadership; ambiguous and unrealistic mandates; a misalignment of responsibility, authority, accountability and resources; an organizational culture that is conservative, and averse to candour and risk, privileging caution over courage etc. (see e.g. Hochschild 2010:41)

4. **The 'multiple interveners' context'**: References are made to the turf battles among the many 'assistance' actors such as rivalry and competition for profile and money within the UN; the inability or unwillingness of UN and non-UN actors to coordinate their work; the influence that donors and politically powerful states will seek to exercise, the appropriate and less appropriate assertions of 'independence' of non-state actors etc.

The often also divergent views and interests of the host government, local authorities and others on

whose behalf the international efforts take place, are occasionally also acknowledged by the authors and analysts, but do not really appear to be part of the scope of the research and studies.

The difficulties in each of these contexts, when combined, add up to a massive challenge. The 'change space' seems very limited (Van Brabant 2012:26). "Much conspires towards failure." (Hochschild 2010:37)

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

The experience of senior leaders in the UN draws attention to some additional challenges specific to the organization, although probably also applicable to various other multilateral entities:

- **Independence in practice:** Regardless of the principles and values of the Charter "few if any member states wish to see the UN act or think independently where their own interests are concerned." Hence senior leaders in the UN need to try and reconcile the narrow, national interest of government driven political pressures with the UN's broader moral purpose. Political compromises are often required that do not match the moral purpose that the UN is expected to exhibit. (Hochschild 2010: 38-39/41)
- **A multitude of interests and voices:** Confronted with a multitude of often incompatible interests, the UN is inevitably going to prioritize some over others. Partially this will be based on its moral assessment and the dynamics in a particular situation, but one needs to recognize that the UN will be inclined to listen more closely to the powerful member states and its financial donors. As the UN is primarily accountable to member states, state actors will have more influence than non-state actors. This does not automatically mean that the UN is neglecting the interests of the weaker – one needs to work with the strong to defend the rights and interests of the weaker. (idem p. 39-40) At the same time, the ability of member states to exercise political and/or financial leverage over the UN has made the organization very risk and candor averse. Caution is privileged over (moral) courage (idem p. 85).
- **Mandates:** Security Council mandates for major UN operations are often the result of political compromise, and therefore worded in ways that leave ambiguity. They can also be unrealistic, certainly in terms of the resources and authority provided to implement them. A senior mission leader can be disturbed by this, or take this as an opportunity to give the mandate meaning, and to carve out a vision and space for action (idem p. 43-45). As one UN general put it: "you can take mandates as a floor or a ceiling" (quoted by Hochschild 2010:93).
- **Governance structures:** The governing bodies of UN agencies are made up of member states. They have the dual role of organizational oversight and the establishment and promotion of international norms, agreements and standards. National interests tend to become quite noticeable for the latter role, which leads governance bodies to seek compromises based on ambiguity. It also leads to guidance that is not necessarily always in the best interest of the organization or its intended beneficiaries. There is also a difference between states in the governing bodies that are donors to a UN agency and others that are recipients of its services. The result is a certain blurring between governance and management (idem p. 45-47).
- **Diversity:** Diversity in the UN is portrayed as a source of strength, which it very well can be. But in practice this is a diversity of passports more than of thought, perspectives and ideas. Such diversity can also be a source of misunderstandings and of friction (idem 52).

III. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The military often make a distinction between the ‘strategic’ and the ‘operational’ level (and then below it the ‘tactical’ one) and we see that it has found its way also in these reflections on leadership in multilateral organizations. As a result, a distinction then is sometimes made between ‘strategic’ and ‘operational’ leadership.

There is however no clear or common understanding about what is meant with ‘strategic leadership’? There seem to be at least three different readings, which are not totally unrelated but which do put the emphasis differently. These are:

1. Anticipating future developments and challenges: The members of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change demonstrated this type or aspect of ‘strategic leadership’ (Secretary General 2004.) But this will become ever more difficult as our world becomes more complex. After all, only a few analysts saw the dangers of low quality mortgage-backed securities and subprime mortgages and their proportional importance in the global financial system before the crash of 2008, and nobody anticipated the nature and scale of the ‘Arab Spring’.

2. Positioning and developing one’s organization to remain relevant and effective in a changing world: This will require ‘vision’ from the senior leadership.

“Strategic leadership is the process used by a leader to affect the achievement of a desired and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive, and building consensus within a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous global environment which is marked by opportunities and threats.”
(Senior Mission Leaders course 2007)

3. Bringing about internal organizational coherence: The different parts of the organization come to understand their role as part of a larger system and operate in a manner that makes the organizational system as a whole more efficient and effective.

“Strategic leadership involves the coordination and maintenance of the organization or department as a whole, the establishment of structures and the definition of organizational purpose. Team and operational leadership are more narrowly focused roles. Strategic leadership brings with it greater breadth of responsibility, increased visibility and greater complexity.” (Hochschild 2010:16)

Hochschild, in his seminal study on leadership in the United Nations, refers to James Grant at UNICEF, Sadako Ogata at UNHCR and Louise Arbour in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as examples of individuals who demonstrated ‘strategic leadership’ (2010: 89-91). The strength of James Grant’s strategic leadership may have been greatest in the third aspect: greater

organizational coherence behind an emphasis on immunization and oral rehydration therapy available to all children. Ogata's strategic leadership more explicitly covered the first and second aspects: a new global environment had emerged after the end of the Cold War, and UNHCR's mission was more clearly operationalized in terms of prevention, solutions and emergency response. Louise Arbour recognized challenges in the external environment (the discrepancy between policy and practice regarding human rights, and the disconnect of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights from realities on the ground). She is said to have been partially effective in repositioning the organization but not very much in achieving strong internal coherence.

Reflecting on the requirements for strategic leadership for humanitarian action in the 21st century, the Humanitarian Futures Programme identifies some that seem to transcend the largely organizational focus we have seen so far. It argues that we should now focus on:

- New style planning processes reflecting the reality of high uncertainty and complexity, in order to achieve value-driven goals; this requires strong anticipatory and adaptive skills and expanded planning time frames;
- More diffuse or distributed forms of leadership will be inevitable, where strategic leadership remains different from 'managerialism', and is sustained by different leaders at various levels; and
- Blending of traditional leadership strengths with strong skills to build multi-sectoral collaborative networks. Strategic leaders of the future will need to position themselves "at the node where different networks connect or where there is maximum overlap between the elements of a collaborative Venn diagram." (Humanitarian Futures 2009:3)

Insightful as this may be, the issue of 'strategic leadership' remains under-explored. Some of the questions left unanswered are:

- How, in the same organization, does 'operational leadership' relate to 'strategic leadership' in practice? What happens in there is strong 'operational leadership' very much attuned to the specific challenges of its operating environment(s), but oriented differently and with other priorities than those of the 'strategic leader(s)' of the organization?
- If 'strategic leadership' relates to the larger picture and the medium-term future, how does one sustain it in a situation of turnover among top post holders? Seen from the perspective of talented individuals, our attention is can be drawn to their display of strategic leadership. But seen from an organizational or wider collective point of view, the reality may be more one of alternating top executives, some bringing strategic leadership and others not, or different

talented individuals succeeding each other but strategically positioning the organization differently.

- Is there such a clear distinction between ‘operational’ and ‘strategic leadership’? It is not uncommon for UN peace support operations to be present in a troubled country for a decade or more. Surely a decade amounts to ‘medium-term’. Seeing that it is consistently recommended to undertake short-term actions with an eye on longer term developments, so as not to jeopardize for short-term gains the opportunity for longer-term benefits, then surely ‘operational leaders’ should also be thinking ‘strategically’? (Even if the financing of humanitarian and peace support work is ‘tactical’ and at best ‘operational’ but is rarely if ever ‘strategic’.) The annual Senior Mission Leaders course certainly includes considerations of ‘strategic leadership’.
- Admittedly, troubled societies need strategic leadership but from their own local and national leaders, more than from outsiders. What happens in the different configurations possible between strong or weak internal and external (strategic and/or operational) leadership: strong internal and strong external leadership; strong internal and weak external leadership; weak internal and strong external leadership; and weak internal and weak external leadership?
- Who exercises strategic leadership for other entities than a relatively defined ‘organization’, such as a political constituency, a sub-region in a country, a nation or society at large, a consortium or network of agencies. Is ‘strategic leadership’ here different from that of individual organizations and if so, in what ways?

IV. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

1. What Effective Leaders Do

a. *Exercise strategic leadership:* We have seen that this requires constantly scanning the wider environment, looking for trends and shifts, assessing the potential risks and opportunities and proactively positioning and repositioning oneself to remain in a position of relevance and strength. Strategic (and operational) leadership also imply an engagement on the basis of a proper understanding of the dynamics of the contexts and the actors that shape it, rather than coming up with standard formula.

b. *Visioning:* Much is made in the general leadership literature about a leader’s ability to project and articulate a compelling vision, without getting bogged down by the contradictions and complexities of the situation. It is argued that a vision brings clarity and a sense of higher purpose around which

people can rally and come to work together. To be inspirational, the vision needs to resonate with the aspirations of many and be underpinned by personal enthusiasm and commitment of the leader. A clear vision also makes it easier to define one's position on a series of critical issues. A vision furthermore becomes an organizing principle i.e. it helps to identify a limited number of priorities and ambitious goals around which the organizational resources can be aligned.

However, the value of a 'vision' for leadership in the context of political conflict and peace may require some closer analysis. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Su Kyi and others are often hailed as social and political leaders with an unwavering – and inclusive – vision. But there are many other pragmatically 'effective' political and military leaders who at least stayed in power for decades without such compelling and/or inclusive vision (examples might be Mobutu in the former Zaire, ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen). There will also be situations where different social and political forces in a country have visions that differ quite significantly on important matters e.g. the role of religion in society. Maintaining stability and political agreement may require leaders that do not push hard for one controversial vision over another, but that can sustain a climate of cooperation across divides. Alvaro de Soto, an experienced mediator, also warns against a mediator pushing the issue of a 'vision', his own or that of the conflicting parties, onto a negotiation agenda. Conflicting parties are bound to have opposing visions, and a 'common vision' can at best emerge out of the negotiation process –inasmuch as it is ripe for resolution. If not, then the best one can hope for is 'managing' the conflict and trying to mitigate its impacts (de Soto 2007:17-19).

c. *Managing relationships.* Great leaders tend to be compulsive networkers. Senior post holders in international relief and peace support missions, particularly UN or other multilateral ones, need to establish and maintain good working relationships with a diverse set of actors all 'around' the senior mission leader(s). Among them are:

- The staff at headquarters, who are to support the mission but also keep a number of stakeholders 'upstream' informed;
- The Security Council, to keep it informed and actively engaged, and to ensure that the mission's mandate and resources remain appropriate to the evolving situation on the ground;
- Interested member states, which implies developing good relationships with their ambassadors on the ground, their ambassadors to the UN, and with relevant ministries in their capitals, to mobilize political support and leverage if needed, and to find the necessary resources for the mission;
- UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes, to reduce the inherent institutional rivalries and to create an atmosphere in which the UN will work 'as one';
- Regional and sub-regional organizations and regional leaders, to foster a coordinated

approach (see e.g. Waihenya 2006: 100/114);

- The conflicting parties, and those who surround and influence their decision-making;
- Local and regional civil society, especially those who support the peace process, and the local population to mobilize and maintain broad support to keep the process on track;
- A diverse national and international staff coming from many different national and professional (civilian, military, police etc.) cultures, some of them in rotating contingents, to harmonize them into a well-functioning team and to maintain morale (Peck 2004:327-328).

There is therefore a lot of 'upstream' and 'side ways' building and managing of relationships all around to bring the many influential actors into some unity of purpose.ⁱⁱ This requires great interpersonal but also political skills, to sometimes find the necessary leverage to overcome the obstacles that constantly will present themselves. The acknowledgment of influential players 'behind' a major peace support mission, underscores that even those in very senior positions often remain answerable to others, and hence can be simultaneously 'leaders' and 'subordinates' (see Van Brabant 2012:23-24).

d. *Building alliances*: Leadership is also about exercising influence. Influence can be exercised through coercion or the threat thereof, but this comes with higher transaction costs and uncertain sustainability. Influence gained through persuasion and negotiation is generally, though not always, more cost-effective (see Nye 2008 or Van Brabant 2012:14-16). This requires building good working relationships which in turn depend on a modicum of respect and trust. Within this wide and encompassing set of relationships, senior leaders therefore actively seek to build alliances and coalitions. This is lateral or collaborative leadership par excellence (see Van Brabant 2012:19-20).

An extensive network of good relationships, particularly in one's own organization, can also make it easier for a senior leader to bend or bypass some of the organizational procedures, where these actually create inefficiencies and reduce or even could jeopardize effectiveness.

e. *Dynamic positioning*: In conflict situations, the need is often underscored for the external actor to be and to remain 'impartial' (e.g. Lubenik 2009). Over the years 'impartiality' has come to replace the earlier more commonly used notion of 'neutrality'. 'Neutrality', when operationalized, in a number of instances led to a silence and passivity that became criticized as a form of 'complicity'. 'Impartiality' acknowledges more clearly that one is not neutral about what is happening. An 'impartial' external actor does come with values, principles, standards and possibly even interests, but will listen with equal attention to all parties to the conflict, and deal with them even-handedly (see also MediatEUr 2012:17). Remaining 'impartial' in a changing environment will also require active positioning and possibly repositioning, precisely to maintain that middle-ground. That requires leadership.

f. *Decision-making*. 'Decisiveness' tends to be seen as a hallmark of 'leadership' (and of masculinity). Yet at the same time we also know that we can assess someone's decisions, and 'excessive decisiveness', as 'foolhardy', 'reckless', 'thoughtless', 'impetuous' etc. We can assess decision-making challenges and decision-making styles along various criteria:

- The process of decision-making (more or less consultative and/or consensus-oriented);
- The informational basis for a decision (more or less well-informed);
- The appropriateness of the decision (to address the problem but also taking into account the interests and sensitivities of different stakeholders); and
- The learning ability of the decider(s) (the alertness, courage and flexibility to adapt or change a decision if it turns out not have been such a good one). The art of leadership is the ability to know when to consult (and whom to consult!) but also when to end the consultations.

Sometimes a situation will also demand an instant decision. Decisiveness here is not intrinsically contradictory with a generally consultative approach. One may have to take the decision and build support for it later.

The current trend of valuing lateral and collaborative leadership, which inevitably requires significant effort and skill in multiple relationships management, tends to favour a persuasive style ('soft power' in Nye's terms) and a consensus-oriented approach. Effective leaders need to understand and practice 'consensus' building in realistic terms. A maximalist interpretation is that everyone agrees and continues to do so. That is rarely achievable or sustainable. A more realistic approach to 'consensus' may be one that seeks a 'no objection' agreement from all concerned stakeholders.

"Sensing when to end a consultative process in order to make a clear decision, especially if there is dissent is a matter of judgment, which is in turn informed by experience."

(Buchanan-Smith and Scrivner 2011:30)

"Consensus among Member States does not have to be based on everyone having an expressed opinion on all issues, but confidence that one's interest will not be jeopardized by a given policy decision. Consensus-building, in the view of one international mediator (Marc Otte) need to be based on understanding differences, working on those issues which can be agreed on, and working individually with those who show reluctance, to avoid the risk of isolation or even offence in decision-making." (MediatEUr 2012:24)

We also need to remain conscious of the limitations and constraints on the decision-making ability of even senior office holders:

- They themselves may remain answerable to others, who will also want to influence the

direction taken and key decisions;

- Not all situations allow for every possible decision: some choices will not be feasible in a given situation (at a given moment in time), because the situation imposes other priorities or certain influential players reject certain options;
- Often decisions have to be made, even if the available information is incomplete, unreliable and even contradictory;
- Sometimes there will be no clear-cut 'good choice': all available options come with important negative consequences, and so one is compelled to choose the 'least bad' of a range of 'bad options'.

g. *Problem- or people-centered approaches*: An issue largely overlooked in the literature reviewed here is the process or the 'sequencing' of the above. There is a significant difference between

- Assessing the wider environment (strategic assessment), developing a vision, deciding to pursue it, and then working the relationships to get wider support for it, or
- Assessing the wider environment, developing and working the relationships, and then articulating a vision (or not/not yet) and taking some decisions.

The critical difference is the centrality given to others who are actors/stakeholders in a given situation. The first approach may be considered problem-oriented in the 'technical' sense: first comes the 'what', then the 'how', and then the 'who'. The second approach is 'people' oriented: indeed, large scale violence is the result of actions and decisions of a variety of individuals and groups. This sort of problem is not an 'impersonal' one. It is initiated and sustained by human agency. Therefore ending and resolving it inevitably also requires decisions and actions of a variety of other actors, initiated and sustained by their agency. The 'what' is followed immediately by the 'who', and from that flows the 'how'. Both de Soto and Kofi Annan express the second type of approach when they make it clear that they may enter a challenging situation with a certain idea of how to approach it, but will then first meet with and listen to all concerned parties, to reassess their initial thinking and possibly reshape their approach (de Soto 2007: 18; Center for Humanitarian Dialogue 2009:4).

2. How Effective Leaders Do It ⁱⁱⁱ

a. *In-depth understanding of the terrain*: This implies a solid analysis of the (operational) situation, but also of the relevant different perspectives and narratives that are part of the conflict. It also means being aware of the interests, sensitivities, tensions and power games, not all of which will be overt and visible. Furthermore, it is necessary to be very alert to how others perceive you, your position and your organization. All of this leads to a realistic appreciation of what one can control, what one can hope to influence and what is definitely beyond one's control.

b. *Promoting the values the organization stands for.* Values, principles and norms are the source of an organization's moral authority. Often if you want to be influential, you need to operate at the highest political level which means acknowledging the centrality of politics. But moral purpose and political realities do not always coincide easily, so it is crucial to be “politically aware and politically sensitive without letting political criteria predominate against principle” (Hochschild 2010:75). The skill is to carefully balance ends and means.

Even then, it is possible that leaders will be confronted with difficult moral dilemmas – where all the realistically available options carry negative consequences for significant numbers of people. This is an issue that merits more attention and case learning.

c. *Knowing when to act and when to be patient.* There are times when whatever you do will not make any difference. Then it may be better to wait and resist the urge to ‘do something’. Patience is not abandonment when combined with determination. As Kofi Annan put it:

“In this sense, one of the most dangerous situations you can get yourself in is of ‘wanting to do something’. You see, most people feel that when you are in a difficult situation you have to ‘do something’. It doesn’t occur to them that sometimes the best thing to do is just to sit. (...) ... there are times you need to ‘let’ things happen, because whatever you do won’t make any difference, but you must know when you need to ‘make’ things happen – when to move. And so that fine sense of timing is very important.” (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2009:11).

d. *Principled realism.* Realism means knowing when a conflict is not ripe for resolution and can only be managed and its impact mitigated (de Soto 2007:17). Realism also means knowing that where progress is possible, there are many actors and factors that you simply cannot control. The art is to not to waste one’s energies and ideals on what is beyond your control but to find your sphere of influence and to focus on what you can change. Test and push the limits of the possible and be prepared to take some risks to do so. But also be ‘realistic’ enough to assess possible actions not only on the basis of principle but also against what is likely to be their real-world outcome.

e. *Dealing with risks:* The nature of risks in violent or politically unstable environments and the issue of how leaders deal with risk merit significantly more attention. Extremes on either side have to be avoided: we do not want leaders that are reckless, but we also need to reverse the trend of ever greater (financial) risk-aversion that is permeating international assistance (see INCAF 2011). In environments with high degrees of complexity and uncertainty, which are increasingly prevalent, there will always be a degree of ‘risk’. Risk aversion can lead people to fall back on old formula whose limitations are well known. It may stifle creativity and innovation. So there needs to be space and even pro-active acceptance for ‘calculated’ or ‘honourable risk’ (Buchanan-Smith & Scriven 2011:31). How do leaders for peace manage ‘risk’?

f. *Showing respect – and disapproval*: As a matter of principle, one is to treat everyone with equal respect and personalized attention, even when delivering a message your interlocutors are unlikely to appreciate. Saying ‘no’ can also increase one’s standing even among those who get it for an answer, if it is expressed with respect and explained as based on convincing reasons. Differentiating between the person and the position may make it easier for your interlocutor to change position without losing

“The loss of temper, as some people in the negotiating team were to admit later, was seen as a pointer to his emotional transparency, his outspokenness, his fairness and his commanding authority.”

(Waihenya 2006:127 about Gen. L. Sumbeiywo, chief mediator of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement)

face. Yet at the same time, it would be mistake to present and accept everything with equal equanimity. When basic principles and values are violated, or your trust has been betrayed, it can be morally but also tactically appropriate to demonstrate moral disapproval, and even outrage and anger (see e.g. Waihenya 2006:126-127). A controlled show of passion can demonstrate the strength of your convictions and integrity. Beware however of the gender biases in this regard: When a male leader shows anger, this tends to enhance his public image. When a woman leader shows anger, this tends to diminish it (see e.g. Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008).

g. *Being discreet and going/being public*: Being discreet and keeping things out of the public spotlight, is often recommended to maintain good relationships. Yet an effective leader also knows when to go public to exercise some pressure or instill a sense of urgency, and how to do this without antagonizing those s/he seeks to influence (e.g. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2009:14). On the other hand, anyone in a very senior position also needs to be aware that they will be constantly watched, by those around them, by their staff, and by the media. There can be no unguarded moments, even in the ‘private’ sphere. Maintaining constructive relationships with the media can be important to mission success. Therefore one needs to be seen as accessible and informative to them. A good ‘public spokesperson’ on the leader’s inner team can be a major asset in this regard.

“There are no rules for knowing when to remain silent, when to speak out, when to approach governments discreetly and when to do so publicly.” (Hochschild 2010:77)

h. *Valuing people*: If a senior post holder treats her or his staff with distrust and contempt, they will lose credibility and their staff’s loyalty. The recommendations are consistent: Be accessible to your staff, consult ‘downward’. Stay in touch with staff at all levels and locations and signal that you care about them. Manage more through creating positive expectations than through threat and censure. Mentor others around you. Attribute ideas to those who had them rather than presenting them as your own. Give credit and take the blame.

“Strong staff value leadership which values them.”

(Hochschild 2010:101)

Create the space for others to lead.

i. *Build a diverse team*: Effective senior leaders try and get the best people in the most appropriate positions. They seek to put together a team of advisors that complement each other and themselves, and that will have the independence of thought and courage to disagree with them, to challenge their reasoning and likely decision and to tell them what they may prefer not to hear. Effective leaders are also good mentors to their colleagues.

Yet while such close and strong team undoubtedly brings great benefits, it is also important to remain aware of the potentially insulating effect it may unwittingly bring about:

“Small, highly empowered teams close to the principal, while highly effective, are easy targets for accusations of favoritism and non-consultation. Where they act with independence and speed they can quickly become detached from the rest of the institution and grow out of touch and less able to exercise influence internally. Having team members who are good at outreach and know the institution well and constantly cultivate contacts within the organization is essential to keeping the institution at large connected.” (Hochschild 2010:103)

j. *Being ‘political’*: How ‘political’ should a senior leader in relief and peace support operations be? Certain positions, such as that of a ‘Special Representative’ or ‘Special Envoy’ or that of ‘mediator’ are designed to engage with the political process. Significant ‘political skills’ therefore will be required – although there can be no suspicion that the post holder has taken this role or is using it to further his or her personal political ambitions. When it comes to other senior roles however, such as that of a ‘humanitarian coordinator’, the picture is different. This role is not designed to engage with a political process, but rather to ‘depoliticize’ the access to affected populations and the right to provide them with assistance and protection. Here we rather need “a humanitarian professional with political acumen” (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven 2011:38), who uses this acumen to analyze the political economy of conflict, to promote respect for humanitarian principles and to increase humanitarian space and access.

3. Core Qualities

What are some of the core personal qualities that effective leaders need to develop?

a. *Integrity and service*: ‘Integrity’ means being true to fundamental values and principles, in one’s professional and personal life, while one’s energies and talents are put in the ‘service’ of an organization or of a cause. The latter distinction is important. One can serve an organization and be loyal to it, because, but also as long as, one feels that this organization truly serves a worthy cause, and does so with attempted efficiency, effectiveness and integrity. But when doubts arise over the organization that one is part of, one’s personal integrity may compel a person to leave the

organization and even to criticize it for failing to live up to its own proclaimed values and standards.

b. *Courage*: Maintaining one's integrity can require courage. Dag Hammarskjöld, a former Secretary General of the United Nations, distinguished different aspects of courage that are essential for international service (referred to by Hochschild 2010:73):

- Courage to ourselves: the courage to be true to our own principles and convictions;
- Courage to freely admit mistakes and show humility; and
- Courage to defend what is our conviction even when we are facing threats from powerful opponents.

c. *Determination and resilience*: Reducing violence and eventually transforming conflict is neither a quick nor a linear progress. There will often be periods of great uncertainty and of reversal. That requires a sense of persistent optimism, if only to keep up morale among those around you. It therefore requires very strong determination to keep working on the 'problem' (see e.g. Waihenya 2006:144-145). But leadership in these types of situations also requires a high degree of personal resilience. Indeed, an appropriate mixture of modesty and self-confidence will be required to deal with repeatedly expressed doubts and criticism from within and from outside your own circle – some of which will be intentional and tactical to test your strength and resolve. Indeed, effective leadership does not always equal being very popular.

d. *A good listener and a good communicator*: Effective leaders have the openness and the ability to actively listen to others. They also have a willingness and ability to share information and to be transparent. They have the skill to present and to represent. They have the ability and the courage to have difficult conversations and to speak out if need be. They can communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds and in different sectors.

e. *Effective learners*: Effective leaders have a sustained level of intellectual and emotional alertness, and are both eager and able to learn. A typical flaw of ineffective leaders is their inability to learn from mistakes (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven 2011:32).

f. *Effective self-care*: In many instances, senior responsibilities in challenging situations imply prolonged periods of pressure, long working hours, stress, fatigue and loneliness. High profile leadership can come at a high personal cost – unless one develops the ability to manage this well. That will require monitoring one's own physical and mental wellbeing, taking time out (also to reflect and think), staying in touch with a few good friends, and being attentive to the needs – and gifts – of one's family.

4. Inevitable Limitations

Even the most talented and dedicated individuals cannot provide effective leadership all the time. No one is perfect, or can be equally strong in all aspects of a job and all dimensions of leadership. “All successful UN leaders were lacking in some respects and all made mistakes, some of them major.” (Hochschild 2010:110) But in the best ones the flaws did not dominate.

In others, apparent strengths eventually turned into a weakness. Driving others too hard, and/or driving oneself too hard and into burn out, would be one, fairly common, example.

“...it was striking how often an individual’s leadership strengths could become a weakness when overplayed. For example, supporting, developing and mentoring staff could become over-protective when the employee concerned lacked either the necessary competence or the ability to make the required changes in their performance. The most commonly cited weakness was the leader’s tendency to push colleagues too hard, expecting others to match their own boundless energy and appetite for work, and to keep up with their own frenetic pace.” (Buchanan-Smith & Scriven 2011:37)

Some leaders became less effective after a period of time, their freshness, creativity and energy eventually diminished. Yet others did not stay long enough to effect a more durable change in the organization they were heading (Hochschild 2010:110). This raises the question whether there is an ‘optimal lifespan’ for effective leadership?

And then there is always the ‘change space’, the degree to which a given environment enables a leader to transform it for the better, or not.

“However exceptional the leader, the nature and contradictions of the UN and the uncertainties inherent in the larger context will often prevent sustained success.” But *“The best UN leaders inspire others long after they have gone to keep trying to make the difference.”* (Hochschild 2010:110/111).

V. SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

A more explicit distinction can be made between two types of ‘leadership’ teams than is usually the case. One we can call the ‘individualized leadership team’, the other is more an ‘interagency leadership team’. The first one is highly dependent on the central individual, which in technical language is sometimes referred to as the ‘principal’. The members of the second type of senior leadership team are far less dependent on a ‘principal’.

1. The individualized leadership team

In the previous section we have seen a reference to the importance of a diverse but complementary team of individuals around a leader, typically handpicked by the latter. What tends to be overlooked is that such 'personal teams' tend to disappear with the individual leader. Buchanan-Smith and Scriven observe in their study that "these 'leadership teams' rarely seemed to survive the leader's departure." (2011:55) When Marc Otte was appointed as EU Special Representative for the Middle East peace process, for example, he only kept one key staff person from his predecessor (MediatEUr 2012:11). Leadership changes may be desirable to bring in fresh energy, and new creativity. But given the need for persistence and the critical importance of the good working relationships, one would have expected researchers and analysts to pay greater attention to the impacts of a whole leadership team disappearing – and presumably being replaced by another?

2. The interagency leadership team

There is another, fundamentally different, type of 'senior team', that is made up of senior people of different agencies. This can be the 'Mission Leadership Team' (MLT) that will include e.g. the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her or his deputy/ies, the Force Commander, the Police Commissioner, the Director/Chief of Mission Support and the Mission's Chief of Staff (International Forum 2010:16). Depending on the design of the mission, the UN Country Team (UNCT) is integrated into this or not. Such integration can be (formally) achieved for example by making the Resident Coordinator (who may already also be the Humanitarian Coordinator) a Deputy SRSG. If the UNCT is not formally integrated, then the Mission Leadership Team will have to closely coordinate with it.

In contexts where the predominant external action is the provision of relief, or where relief operations continue to be an important aspect of the international engagement, the Humanitarian Coordinator works with and relies on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). Such HCT is again a multi-agency platform that brings together the major UN and other relief/humanitarian actors. Such platform is supposed to be the center piece of the relief/humanitarian coordination architecture (Featherstone 2010:16). In principle, the national authorities as a primary duty bearer should be participating and even co-chairing an HCT. That works when the relationship of the external actors with the national authorities is fairly healthy. The presence in the HCT of donors to the relief/humanitarian effort can be positive, or can turn out to be problematic if they use their financial leverage to impose their own agenda and priorities.

It becomes in a way the collective responsibility of such Mission Leadership Team to successfully implement the mandate they have been given. To that effect they need to create an enabling environment around them, but also ensure effective communications and cooperation among the different components of the mission, often coming from very different professional and national cultures. Joint mechanisms can be set up to facilitate greater internal cooperation and coherence,

such as a Joint Mission Analysis Centre, a Joint Operations Centre and a Joint Logistics Operations Centre (International Forum 2010: 19).

A 'Humanitarian Country Team' (HCT) is made up of different agencies, but not necessarily as components of an integrated mission. It is expected that an HCT mechanism will facilitate agreement on the strategic issues and common policies related to relief & humanitarian action in-country, and will promote adherence by all relief providers to humanitarian principles, Principles of Partnership, Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines and policies and strategies adopted by the HCT (Featherstone 2010:16). As no individual has formal authority over the heads of other agencies, this in fact becomes a form of 'collective leadership'.^{iv} Research shows that HCTs to work well need clear Terms of Reference, a work plan and a mechanism for performance review.

Unfortunately, there are various instances where the HCT does not live up to expectations: it may limit itself to 'information sharing' rather than more substantive concertation, or it gets stuck in micro-management of practical problems while ignoring its responsibility to promote humanitarian principles. But the reasons for ineffectiveness can be more serious: Rather than participating actively and constructively, agencies send junior staff to HCT meetings, prioritize individual agency positions over the wider needs of the collective, or form voting blocs (e.g. NGOs and UN) which leads to division. Other agencies may obstruct the HCT from operating effectively by omission: they don't participate and/or don't follow through. The issue is that a Humanitarian Coordinator, who is expected to provide senior leadership, has no effective authority. S/he can only cajole and persuade (Featherstone 2010:17).

VI. APPOINTMENTS, PREPAREDNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITIES

1. Appointments

The UN is not alone in professing that appointments to senior positions are based on explicit criteria relating to competency and integrity. In practice however, the dominant selection criteria are political and geographic, not proven managerial or leadership skills. Internal talent is also often passed over, as the favored pool for recruitment to the top jobs are retiring politicians, ambassadors to the UN, senior diplomats etc.

"Decisive criteria for the most senior posts include nationality, political connections, diplomatic ability and acceptability of the individual to the host or other member states. Knowledge of the relevant subject area, proven leadership and management skills, field experience, or experience in managing a diverse workforce or familiarity with the UN Secretariat are not usually given sufficient, or in some cases, any consideration. (...) the ability to work with those

in authority and to be seen to be responsive to critical member state interests can carry more weight than a proven commitment to and solidarity with those in need.” (Hochschild 2010:62)

Powerful countries, particularly among the Permanent 5, have also shown a tendency to seek to reserve certain top positions for ‘their’ nationals. Individuals may be approached by senior officials in the multilateral organization (see MediatEUR 2012:9) or put forward by their home government, or a list of some names may be drawn up e.g. by the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) or of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). It certainly was not and probably still is not common practice to analyze what particular experience, knowledge and skills might be required for certain jobs or assignments. Not surprisingly, until recently the overwhelming majority of people thus appointed were men.

Recruiting from outside the organization can be beneficial as it brings in fresh perspectives and individuals not encumbered by the organization’s legacy and weaknesses. But it can also cast doubts about the claim of the organization to be merit-based and be demotivating for staff with a significant track record of performance. The over-personalized practice also works heavily against individuals that are not on the radar screens of those in capital cities and headquarters.

When it comes to Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators, the practice in recent years has changed towards establishing a pool of pre-screened candidates (see e.g. IASC 2009). Potential RCs now need to undergo first an independent formal assessment process (there is a Resident Coordinator Assessment Centre and a 12 month process), while there is also a pool of potential HCs. While an improvement on overly subjective practices, debate continues:

- The selection of HC’s is still seen as working against experienced individuals with predominantly NGO rather than UN experience (Featherstone 2010-11);
- The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator has still a powerful influence in making the choice, including for individuals that are not in the pool (idem:12);
- There is disagreement about whether humanitarian experience and competencies are given sufficient weight in the assessment of potential RCs (Lindores 2012:47); and
- The choice of a UN Resident Coordinator remains very much an internal UN matter, while the practice of making the RC also the HC effectively deprives other stakeholders from a say in who will take up the latter responsibility (Featherstone 2010:13).

Competency frameworks have been introduced to systematize the assessment of the potential of candidates and bring some more rigour to the process. Yet there has also been strong criticism of over-reliance on competency frameworks:

- ‘Demonstrated competencies’ require past experience of a fairly similar type of challenge.

While reasonable as a consideration, treating the absence of a comparable experience in one's earlier professional life as a decisive negative, in practice can become a counter-productive criterion. It denies the relevance of a person's learning abilities, may favour non-creative individuals who continue in largely similar positions, as well as an older generation which may not be best placed to deal with new challenges. General Lazaro Sumbeiywo was a military man and not an experienced mediator. And yet he skilfully and with great persistence pursued the Sudanese peace process until the warring parties reached formal agreement. To do so he drew inspiration from his recollections of how his father and other elders mediated in the community (see Waihenya 2006:39).

- Competency frameworks also miss some of the critical but hardly measurable aspects of effective leadership: authenticity; intuition; passion; dedication etc. (see Buchanan-Smith & Scriven 2011:22-24).

2. Preparation

Preparation for top positions with significant responsibilities historically has also been minimal. That too is gradually changing although probably still largely insufficient. There are now, for example, basic induction programs for Resident Coordinators, periodic retreats for past and current SRSGs, an annual gathering in Oslo of political mediators, a Senior Mission Leaders course, and various handbooks and manuals (e.g. International Forum 2010; IPI 2012). Some of the offered guidance and learning seems however to be lacking in realism, and/or remains too oriented towards knowledge rather than skill. While individuals are presented as role models, there certainly seems to be a lack of reflected real case studies.

3. Accountabilities

Given the emphasis on 'results' and 'results-based' management, and the presence sometimes of 'compacts' and of 'performance appraisal' mechanisms, one would expect that international organizations engaging in and on conflict can and do hold their senior people accountable. Critical reports indicate that the practice may not match the expectation, for a variety of valid and less valid reasons.

- Among the less valid reasons is the 'political' and/or 'subjective' (being part of an interpersonal network) nature of appointments. Maintaining good relationships with the right people then can easily become more important than intervening when an individual is not performing (see Hochschild 2010:66).
- Inasmuch as there is supervision and accountability within large international organizations,

the attention seems to be largely directed towards financial and procedural matters. While by no means irrelevant or unimportant, reportedly little weight is given to for example the values and moral commitment of senior post holders, how they behave to their staff, how they pursue the values the organization stands for etc. (idem:65).

- Among the more valid reasons must be mentioned the fact that the necessity of collaborative leadership inevitably also makes it more difficult to hold one individual accountable for the collective performance. One person may be chairing a UN Country Team, a Mission Leadership Team or a Humanitarian Country Team – but in the absence of robust authority s/he can hardly be held solely responsible for the collective performance? Not surprisingly, a number of RCs have objected to the fact that other members of e.g. a UNCT can input into their appraisal but they are not invited to contribute to the appraisal of other agency's country representatives (Lindores 2012:48).
- Another valid reason is that no one realistically can guarantee 'results' when it comes to conflict or crisis management, peacemaking or peacebuilding. So many actors and factors are at play that escape any agency's control, let alone that of their senior personnel. That is not to say that it is never possible to identify any responsibility for blocking progress, causing serious reversals, missing major opportunities or sheer ineptness and obvious mistakes. But while the best performing leaders in such circumstances may be expected not to make obvious mistakes, they can rarely be expected to take responsibility for guaranteed results within the time frame of their tenure.

Here we see another problem that is not well recognized and merits deeper exploration: that of individual performance expectations and performance accountability in situations where they may be very limited 'change space' (see Van Brabant 2012:26) and where effective leadership must be inherently 'collaborative', whether in a formalized structure or not.

VII. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ^v

At least at the discourse level in and on multilateral organizations there is a gradually growing acknowledgment of the relevance and importance of 'leadership'.

Kofi Annan as Secretary General in his report 'Investing in the UN' (2006) called for a major new leadership development plan. This would involve a more thorough assessment process; greater staff mobility, but also career planning and staff development; and a sanctions and rewards system linked to performance. So far this hasn't happened, at least not UN-wide. Individual agencies may now have

management and leadership courses for their staff, and the UN Staff College in Turin since 2009 runs a leadership course for UN staff at the Director's level. But there are major obstacles to change. Among them:

- The association of 'leadership' with leading on policy, or in negotiations or in influencing governments, rather than 'leading people'. And the reluctance of many people in senior positions to acknowledge their responsibility for the management of resources and people (Hochschild 2010:55-56).
- The appointment of people in top positions on the basis of the technical expertise rather than their management and leadership abilities, and performance assessment systems that do not distinguish between managerial and technical achievements.

"No, we don't hire professional managers. I could say that they are few and far between in our business. The main reason is that working with a huge range of governments on extremely sensitive issues our people need to be able to talk in depth about our mandate and our technical expertise. That, after all is the key focus." (quoted in Johnson 2010:23).

- The profound unwillingness to really assess the performance of those at the top. In practice there is no real "360 degree" evaluation and strong reluctance to face up to bad people-management decisions (Johnson 2010:17).
- The top of the organization generally fails to see that in a rapidly changing world, the role they can and must play in say 5-10 years from now may have evolved quite a bit. Consequently they should but more often than not fail, to plan ahead to get the right people with the right skills in the right place to enable it to do so. Neither do the top people of many international organizations pay much attention to 'succession' planning when several senior individuals with significant experience and institutional memory leave the organization or retire (Johnson 2010:20/27).
- Focused on operations/programs and policy, the top of the organization tends to underestimate the strategic value of the human resources function. This then gets confirmed by the fact that many HR functions have remained stuck in 'transactional management', limiting itself to the old-style personnel administration and personnel management of hiring, assessing, and rewarding, training and retiring people.
- The understanding of 'leadership' in international organizations is generally behind the times: stuck in the notion of 'the leader' as 'the person(s) at the top', rather than embracing the inevitability of 'distributed leadership' and a 'leadership culture' that is enabling at all levels.

“The world may be a great deal more connected, a lot more global, but these developments have brought with it a whole host of new complexities. Technocrats and political apparatchiks can only go so far in dealing with massive emerging issues. If their staff are to do the job, they need to be sure that leadership is not one person at the top, but a way to involve and evolve everyone.” (Johnson 2010:18)

“It is not simply the number or quality of individual leaders that determines organizational success, but the ability of formal and informal leaders at all organizational levels to pull together in the support of common goals that ultimately makes the difference.” (Johnson 2010:28)

In short, while there are excellent examples of talented individuals taking initiative and demonstrating leadership, and whereas fragmented units of large organizations can pull together when faced with a major challenge or crisis, the comprehensive survey carried out by the Centre for Creative Leadership (Johnson 2010) paints a bleak picture when it comes to the institutional development of a real ‘leadership culture’. Partially this is attributed to the absence of recognition of its strategic importance for the future effectiveness of the organization, partially to reluctance and even resistance of people that are currently at the top of these organizations. The review report contains one optimistic observation i.e. the move towards more coaching and mentoring by experienced colleagues, an approach to skill development that is generally received with greater enthusiasm than class-room based approaches. It can only be hoped then that those in coaching and mentoring roles will indeed be acting as enablers and change agents from within.

VIII. OBSERVATIONS

The available research on ‘leaders’ or ‘leadership’ in multilateral organizations and the guidance being produced for senior post holders contains certain insights, although few of them are really new to anyone familiar with the general reflections on ‘leadership’. More striking perhaps are the prevailing paradigm and the gaps.

- The focus remains almost exclusively on ‘people at the top’ i.e. people that are in formally senior positions. This is a classical positional, rather than situational or functional perspective on leadership (see Van Brabant 2012:20-21), a focus on (would be or should be) ‘leaders’ rather than on ‘leadership’. Mention is made of the fact that in the absence of effective leadership at the top people in more junior positions may be exercising it. A call is also made for the development of an organizational leadership culture that is enabling for people at all levels, not in the least because the challenges today are simply too much for one or a few individuals to be able to deal with by themselves. But the old paradigm definitely prevails.

- The review of leadership development and talent management across various multilateral organizations sadly underscores that it may be said that ‘people are our greatest asset’, in practice human resources are not looked upon strategically and remain dealt with through a narrow paradigm of transactional management.
- A gender perspective is largely missing, and most examples provided of individuals that are recognized as having been effective leaders are men.
- Humanitarian and violence/peace related contexts are described as extremely challenging, but predominantly the reflections turn around the exercise of leadership in and for the organizations where individuals hold a very senior position. There is a remarkable paucity of references to and detailing of the challenges in these difficult operating environments, where multiple players may be very powerful and influential and perhaps exercising leadership.
- More attention tends to be paid to the individualized leadership team of ‘advisors’ around a principal, than to multi-agency leadership teams of peers where no one has real formal authority over all others. While it is recognized that effective leaders are good at creating alliances and building coalitions, there are hardly any examples to illustrate. Collaborative leadership is strongly encouraged (e.g. the ‘leader as host’ quoted in Buchanan & Scrivner 2011:22) and the leader as the node or connector of networks (Humanitarian Futures 2009:10). But examples of collaborative leadership tend to look at this among the external assistance actors, as if this is the priority for effectiveness, rather than between external and internal actors. There is a brief reference even to forms of ‘collective leadership’ (e.g. Buchanan-Smith and Scrivner 2011:55.56), but this is not really analyzed.
- Ultimately ‘leadership’ exhibits itself as ‘leadership in action’. There is a surprising absence of real world shorter and longer case studies that actually illustrate concretely the importance of ‘leadership’ and particularly its exercise with great ‘contextual intelligence’ (see Van Brabant 2012:15).
- It is unclear who has assessed the leadership qualities of the individuals who are held up as role models. Are it their close advisors, the staff of their organization as a whole, their peers, their ‘bosses’, or external actors who had to deal with the organization/mission the individual was heading? Surely when it comes to humanitarian action and even more to peace support, the (probably diverse) perspectives of the internal actors is quite relevant?
- The rapid review has also pointed at a variety of issues that are un- or underexplored, among them:
 - The different aspects of ‘strategic leadership’ and how to effectively exercise it in a

world whose interconnectedness makes it increasingly unpredictable?

- Should leadership of significant peace support missions not also be 'strategic' if consolidating peace (and building legitimate state institutions) are clearly long-term endeavors?
- How do you ensure operational and strategic leadership continuity, in the face of turnover of senior post holders and with them their individualized leadership team?
- Is 'visioning' always required from individual leaders, particularly in contexts where someone tries to catalyze and support collaborative leadership, or where convergence of important protagonists around critical issues is very unlikely at this time? Should we not adopt a more critical and nuanced perspective on the 'vision thing' in 'leadership'?
- What about 'leadership' in the face of profound moral dilemmas where all options carry significant human costs?
- What about 'leadership' and managing 'risks'?
- What is the appropriate balance for people in senior positions between exercising leadership outside their organization and within their organization?
- Is there an 'optimal lifespan' for senior people: not too short so to be able to have some real influence, but not too long so as to enable fresh energies and perspectives? Is an 'optimal lifespan' fairly generic, or does it vary depending on the types of situations and challenges?
- People in senior positions must be held more accountable, but how do we do that fairly, taking into account an assessment of the 'change space' that the post holder encountered?
- 'Demonstrated competencies' requiring people to already have done something before are irrational and dysfunctional in the absence of an active staff development practice, supported by coaching and mentoring, where people get a chance to learn new things. Beyond that, do the established 'competency frameworks' really assess the 'leadership potential' of individuals?

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ E.g. Reychler and Stellamans 2005; Wolpe and McDonald 2006 & 2012

ⁱⁱ The importance of managing the many relationships ‘upstream’ is also underscored in the interview with Kofi Annan on his experience as mediator in the Kenyan 2008 post-election crisis (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2009:3/8/11) and the debriefing of EU Special Representative Marc Otte (MediatEUr 2012:21-22).

ⁱⁱⁱ This section draws quite extensively on Hochschild 2010: 68-107 and on Buchanan-Smith & Scriven 2011 : 25-34

^{iv} Buchanan-Smith and Scriven (2011) make some references to ‘collective leadership’. But they do not always sufficiently differentiate between: a senior management team within one organization; distributed leadership at different levels within an organization, both of which combine with a structure of formal authority, or an inter-agency ‘team’ where there is no formal structure of authority. For the sake of clarity, we prefer to use the term ‘collective leadership’ for the inter-agency set up.

^v This section draws very much on a review (Johnson 2010) carried out by the Centre for Creative Leadership on behalf of the Association for Human Resources Management in International Organisations. Members of the AHRMIO include a variety of UN agencies, but also e.g. INTERPOL, NATO, the OECD, the OSCE, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, the European Patent Office, the Council of Europe, regional development banks etc.
