

Strengthening the Selection, Preparation, Support and Appraisal of Senior Leadership in Peace Operations

BACKGROUND PAPER

CHALLENGES FORUM WORKSHOP
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The transparency that marked the new Secretary-General's appointment, combined with his commitment to achieving gender parity and regional balance in his appointments, set an example and opened up a window of opportunity for promoting greater authority, accountability and representation in peace operations. Therefore, as António Guterres takes office, this paper asks, how can the UN better select, prepare, support and appraise its senior mission leadership to make it fit for implementing today's multidimensional peace operations mandates, in increasingly complex environments (with shrinking resources)?

Introduction

The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in its Report (2015) noted that throughout its consultations, the quality of leadership was stressed as being absolutely key for the success (or failure) of UN peace operations. Although some of the main challenges to mission leadership outlined in the so-called Brahimi Report (2010) still remain, an important shift has taken place in the approach to the appointment process of senior leaders in the field. The establishment of a dedicated capacity within the Department of Field Support (DFS) on senior leadership appointments in 2007, and the development of senior leadership training by the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and of Political Affairs (DPA), are all part of recent system-wide efforts to develop an integrated long-term norm-based, principled, accountable leadership model, which is multidimensional, transformational and collaborative in nature. This suggests that the UN, and its Member States, are in a good place to be able to implement recommendations on how to improve the appointment process for the leadership teams of tomorrow's peace operations.

The HIPPO Report summarizes one of the main challenges of today's senior mission leadership as being an environment wherein demands and responsibilities are not matched with adequate preparation and capacity-development, nor with the required level of authority over resource management. To this must be added sensitivities around both training and performance assessment, and tensions between the Secretary-General's authority and Member States' desire to select and appoint senior staff. More

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specifically, a number of factors can be identified that currently undermine the leadership agenda including: i) the lack of a consistent application of existing merit-based selection processes; ii) to identify potential candidates with both political and managerial skill sets; iii) weak gender and geographic representation among senior mission leaders; iv) poor induction and continued support for newly appointed senior mission leaders; v) weak performance management and accountability systems; and vi) a failure to grow the capacity of those with leadership potential.

Against this background, this paper outlines the current state of affairs in the UN appointment process of senior mission leadership, including the key challenges and some emerging ideas on how to strengthen: first, selection and appointment; second, preparation and in-mission support; and third, performance management and accountability. It draws on the work of the HIPPO, the Challenges Forum, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), as well as interviews with the Senior Leadership Appointments Section (SLAS) of the Department of Field Support and current and former senior mission leaders.

1. Selection and Appointment

What and who is the UN looking for?

The Secretary General's appointments are guided by Articles 100 and 101 of the UN Charter which state that all staff should be employed to secure the highest standard of efficiency, competence and integrity, with due regard being paid to geographical representation. Member states, for their part, undertake to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff, and not to seek to influence them in any way. To this is added the tenets of achieving gender parity, as well as seeing to the complementarity of forming well-integrated and well-functioning leadership teams.

Terms of reference and post profiles for senior mission leadership have been developed for all 59 current Heads and Deputy Heads of peace operations (predominantly graded Under- or Assistant Secretary-General (U/ASG)). The unique requirements of the specific roles are identified by SLAS in close cooperation with the lead UN Department of the respective mission, as well as relevant Heads of Mission. The aim is to anticipate the requirements of senior positions across missions in order to target and reach out to potential candidates, but also to hold leaders accountable and plan succession. This is part of a Leadership Life-Cycle approach where the different stages of leadership are better linked; from selection to appointment, throughout deployment until performance management and succession planning, and then feeding back into the renewal of contract and/or sourcing and selection of the next leader(s).

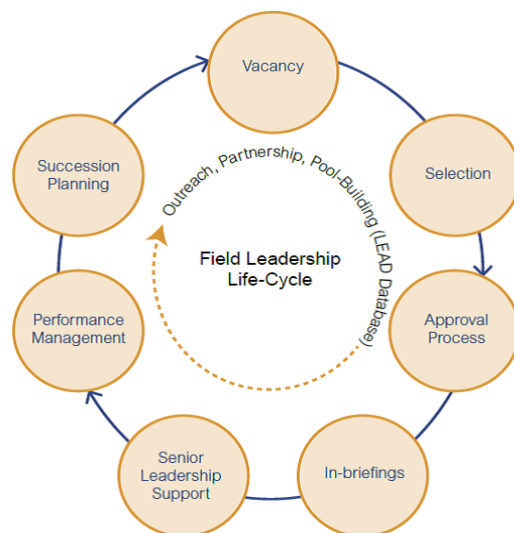


Diagram: Senior Leadership Appointments Section, Department of Field Support, United Nations.

Alongside political considerations, in senior leadership appointments, the UN looks for a complex set of knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as certain types of personality traits and qualities. Candidates are expected to have a mix of political negotiation and mediation expertise, regional knowledge and linguistic capabilities, an in-depth understanding of the UN's political space, operating environments and internal system knowledge, as well as developed strategic planning and management skills. In sum, the competencies that the UN is looking for in senior mission leadership teams can be considered in terms of three main functions or roles.

1. As implied by the name, mission leadership must have leaders in the sense of someone who provides the mission with vision and strategic direction for fulfilling the Security Council mandate. All mission staff have to understand the mandate and how they can contribute to its implementation. Mission leadership has to establish a strong culture of performance and accountability, ensuring a proactive stance on the protection of civilians and promoting zero tolerance of sexual violence. This requires resilience, a full understanding of the mission's components, people and diversity, as well as of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the Human Rights Initiative.
2. Mission leadership must have managers who can ensure that the mission works as a tight unit across the military, police and civilian components, and in line with the UN's processes and operating models, including sound financial and resource administration. This requires strong organisational and management skills, and resources and project management experience, preferably cultivated through an effective relationship with the Chief/Director of Mission support, and the Mission Chief of Staff, who manage the instrumental links with UN headquarters.
3. Mission leadership must have influential political actors to facilitate the consolidation of peace against the backbone of the UN Secretary-General's good offices. They must work effectively with a range of stakeholders and manage the relationship with the host government; but also be able to act directly as mediators when necessary. This requires political acumen and emotional intelligence, strong judgement, and decision-making and communication skills.

How these functions are translated into profiles for senior mission appointments is further influenced by the specificities of the mission mandates, the current situation on the ground and the configuration of the leadership team, including factors such as gender parity and geography. The recent Global Call to Member States for Heads and Deputy Heads of Mission, includes the following requirements:

- A minimum of 20 years of proven high level governmental, non-governmental, international and/or regional experience, including in conflict, post-conflict, peacebuilding and/or development;
- Strong leadership and managerial skills;
- A high degree of emotional intelligence and political acumen;
- Excellent communication skills;
- The ability to build consensus amongst stakeholders and coordinate the work of complex multicultural and multidisciplinary field missions;

- Impeccable personal integrity and respect for human rights;
- Demonstrated cultural and gender sensitivity;
- Fluency in English. Given the areas of deployment of UN field missions, nominations of French and Arabic speaking candidates are encouraged.

How are those candidates sourced/identified?

Senior mission leadership roles have traditionally not been advertised, lest the current in-mission incumbent's role of good offices and mediation, on behalf of the UN Secretary-General, is undermined. Instead, potential candidates are stored in a database maintained by SLAS. This is one of the main tools that facilitates early identification and selection of potential senior leaders, as well as one that tracks appointments across missions and increasingly identifies outreach priorities. The database is open and often informally sourced with candidates proactively identified by SLAS, and nominated by internal and external partners including a range of relevant UN actors, Member States, and international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, as well as self-nominations by interested persons. Similar databases exist in other parts of the UN, but without any systematised coordination or interface to facilitate information sharing.

Through the February 2017 Global Call, DFS requested all Member States to nominate a maximum of four candidates, two of whom should be women, for the generic positions of Head and Deputy Head in UN peace operations. Self-nominations of internal or external potential candidates as well as referrals were also encouraged. Nominations must include a CV *plus* a personal vision statement. Nomination does not guarantee inclusion in the database, just as inclusion in the database does not guarantee an appointment.

Given the specificity of the job, and the demanding tasks at hand, one of the key challenges is to ensure that all stakeholders involved generate and identify men *and* women with relevant expertise, experience and qualities. Calls are made for a greater systematization of efforts to source and maintain records of potential candidates. Whilst advertising senior mission leadership roles could help diversify (and strengthen transparency), the influx of candidates that this implies requires clear assessment and vetting tools, and a removal of any guarantee of appointment for candidates and Member States within the principle of the best candidate for the job.

Despite a 21 per cent increase of women appointed to senior mission leadership positions from 2006 to 2016, achieving gender representation remains a standing challenge. Efforts to address the reasons for the low appointment of women have to be strengthened and systematised to ensure continued progress throughout the appointment process. Mobility policies have to be enhanced with opportunities for mid-career level staff to apply for senior position roles as well as appropriate support for both men *and* women to maintain a work-life balance. Such efforts should be coupled with timelines and benchmarks for monitoring to ensure results.

How are they selected?

The selection process of senior leadership in UN peace operations is typically delegated from the Secretary-General to the respective lead Department (DPA, DPKO and DFS). SLAS, intentionally established outside of the Executive Office of the Secretary General's (EOSG) office, facilitates and supports the selection process across all Departments. Depending on the position, the relevant Department proposes recommended candidates to the Secretary-General for final decision and appointment.

As part of recent efforts to strengthen a standardised competitive selection procedure, the first assessment of candidates' CVs is combined with ad hoc informal reference checks, coupled with human rights screenings. If previously employed by the UN, internal Conduct and Discipline Unit case records and databases, and self-attestations to a candidate's human rights records are considered. Candidates are also required to complete a pre-appointment declaration of interests to identify and manage possible conflicts of interests that may arise should the person be appointed. Today, all shortlists of interview candidates include at least one woman.

Once candidates have been short-listed, the main assessment tool is a 40 minute interview. The interview panels are put together by the Lead department. Typically, three members are selected, including at least one woman, from among senior UN officials from different Departments, at the same level or higher than the position under recruitment. The interview is organized around a generic mix of competency-based and strategic questions.

Finally, a short list of between one to three candidates is suggested to the Secretary-General for appointment. At least one of these has to be woman and if this is not so, a written explanation has to be provided highlighting the circumstances as to why not. The Secretary-General's independence in this decision is key and requires the Member States' full support. Traditionally, senior mission leaders are non-career posts whereby they should not remain in position for longer than five years and moreover, should not expect reappointment to other posts. However, this non-reversion policy is not immutable when there is a need to free up more talent for consideration.

2. Preparation and In-Mission Support

Pre-appointment

Senior mission leader training should ideally start prior to appointment. The number of ready-to-deploy leaders can be increased by preparing external candidates for the task prior to appointment, as well as nurturing potential leadership talent within the system. This being said, training should of course continue throughout the assignment to support in-mission leadership as per the Field Leadership Life-Cycle approach.

A non-mandatory Senior Mission Leaders (SML) course is available to potential candidates nominated by Member States or DPKO/DFS. Since 2005 this two week course has been organized up to twice a year by the UN's Integrated Training Services (ITS). Although attending the SML does not guarantee selection for a senior appointment, it does expose the candidates to the complexities of peace operations and the UN selection system. While the course is hosted and part funded by Member States, participants are selected by a joint DPKO/DFS panel with input from DPA. Of late, more targeted messaging to Member States by ITS has encouraged more strategic nominations. Suggestions are currently on the table for at least one SML per year to be funded by the UN to safeguard the Organization's independence in ensuring continuity.

Additional non-mandatory courses that focus specifically on military leadership and resources management are available including Senior Mission Administration and Resource Training (SMART); UN Leaders' Programme and Management Development Programme; Leadership, Women and the UN; and mediation training (run by the DPA). Whilst there is a training course on UN Emerging Leaders, there is room for an SML type course, specifically targeting

potential leaders at mid-level management. To this end, in order to strengthen the professional preparataion of field mission management assignments such as for example Chief/Director of Mission Support, Chief of Staff, or heads of components who have significant programme management responsibilities, the Integrated Training Service (ITS, DPET, DPKO and DFS) has developed the Mission Advanced Staff Training (MAST). The MAST programme is intended to build on knowledge acquired during the Senior Mission Administration and Resource Training (SMART), or other programmes such as the Management Development Programme by providing leadership and strategic management skills.

Leadership support

Once appointed, it is mandatory for all mission leaders (D-2 level) to complete the Senior Leadership Programme (SLP) within their first six months. The course provides an overview of peace operations and guidance on how to navigate the UN system. Since 2012, newly appointed Heads of Military Component also participate in a mandatory week-long Intensive Orientation Course that provides an overview of peacekeeping operations including relevant doctrines, guidelines, international humanitarian and human rights law, and gender issues. The UN Office of Human Resources Management provides an on-demand modular induction programme available to all senior mission leaders and there are a number of strongly recommended training programmes available, ranging from mandatory security training to an optional online ethics and integrity course. In addition, there are role-specific tailored in-mission briefings carried out by the lead Department's regional divisions.

Despite the available training opportunities, a 2015 UN study conducted by OIOS showed that only 61 per cent of senior leaders had completed the SLP and 21 per cent of leaders had been deployed without having completed any of the above mentioned courses or having received any in-mission briefing on their roles. The study also showed that just under a fifth of SML course participants actually went on to take-up mission leader roles since the majority of the nominated candidates lacked relevant experience to compete for these positions. It was concluded that there is room for improvement in the strategic use of the SML course. This highlights the challenge of finding a balance between the need for tailored pre-deployment training on the one hand, and demands for rapid deployment on the other.

In addition to training potential leaders, remote in-mission or regional training and table-top exercises might be one way to address this issue by bringing training closer to leadership teams. This would help shift the emphasis from the more general training approach, to a more comprehensive induction and in-briefing combined with tailored scenario-based training and dedicated through-mission support. This would make it easier, and perhaps also less problematic, to link training to an enhanced performance management process and to succession planning. However, there remains an underlying challenge to overcome senior leaders' reluctance to train, especially once in-mission. Member States could support the UN in this regard by encouraging, and increasingly requiring, their nationals to do so. Ultimately, a desire to constantly learn, evolve and self-improve should be part of the tool-kit for any senior leader.

In addition to training and induction programmes, leadership support is essential to both attract and retain the best and brightest people. To this end, DFS launched a pilot Leadership Partnering Initiative (LPI) mentoring programme in 2014 for newly appointed senior mission leaders. Senior Assistant- and Under-Secretary-Generals who have conveyed their interest in participating are paired with previous or current Deputy/Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. The programme has been well received and it is suggested that it be expanded in terms of becoming

standard practice for all mission leaders.

3. Performance Management and Accountability

Once deployed, senior mission leaders have a high degree of autonomy with limited evaluation of their performance. Since 2010, additional direction has been provided by the introduction of so-called ‘compacts’ (annual agreements) between the Secretary-General and Heads of Missions, coupled, in DPKO, with letters of guidance from the Head of the Department to the Heads of Mission. These set out strategic priorities and standard managerial objectives against which performance can be evaluated and progress monitored. The aim is to streamline monitoring mechanisms in order to strengthen strategic oversight and better support as well as guide mission leadership.

Clarity is needed on the purpose and intent of these compacts and guidance letters. Otherwise the risk is that they are loaded with tasks that result in expectations for sophisticated oversight functions which are not met. They are strategic direction documents, not performance management tools. They assess agreed objectives; they do not evaluate senior mission leaders’ competencies and skills.

Efforts to strengthen senior mission leadership need to consider additional performance and assessment mechanisms that can directly inform and influence the renewal of appointments. There is an appraisal process in place for UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators, Designated Official and UN County Teams, but there is no standardized approach applied across the Departments. In practice, this implies a significant weakness in the overall accountability of mission leadership. At a minimum, the use of 360 degree feedback or mission-wide surveys might be considered to underpin a set of predefined competencies and skills. It is key however, that the assessments are not seen solely as self-improvement tools; but that they feed into the Field Leadership Life-Cycle, and are clearly ascribed to a particular actor responsible for their consistent application.

To achieve this, however, some cultural challenges need to be addressed. Success has to be defined as both delivering the mandate *and* achieving high performance across a set of predefined competencies and skills. Members of mission leadership teams have to perform with regards to their political, leader and managerial functions (as previously outlined). In practice, the leader *and* managerial functions are often overshadowed by the political functions of mission leadership, in particular when it comes to assessing performance. Some change is necessary here. Political sensitivities must be addressed with regards to evaluating senior leadership. Once again, success will be dependent on Member State backing.

Conclusion: Way Forward

2016 marked a notable shift in the appointment process of senior mission leadership in terms of teams and a life-cycle approach as described in this paper. The task in 2017, is to continue to build on the system-wide and systematic efforts to enhance a transparent process that promotes greater authority, diversity and accountability.

To ensure more consistent application of the merit-based appointment process that has been developed during the last years, candidates have to be selected in a more refined, sustained and strategic manner; according to clearly defined and transparent criteria; and along geographical and gender lines; while withstanding lobbying from Member States. But also, once sourced, selected and appointed, the UN and its Member States have to become better at supporting their appointed leaders—new and old, men and women, from all regions of the world; and also better at holding them to account through robust performance management systems.

To this end, there are a few key areas in which efforts could be focused, namely, ensuring (and enhancing):

- A life-cycle approach to leadership appointments that links the different stages of leadership through an accountability mechanism with Terms of Reference serving not only as a selection tool but also as an element of an appraisal, the outcome of which would have a direct influence over any process of renewal of appointment.
- A leadership team approach to profile UN mission leaders.
- Transparency of appointments through a standardised merit-based process.
- A diverse candidate pool and institutional memory with regards to senior mission leadership appointments.
- Continued (and sustained) progress in gender representation of senior mission leaders.