



Taking Leadership to the Next Level: UN Peace Operations 2020

Challenges Forum Workshop

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Stock-take of United Nations current policy, guidance, reviews, capacity-building, pre-
deployment preparations and evaluation tools, for mission leadership
– The How

Check Against Delivery

Peace operations are fundamentally an expression of political will and ultimately a political instrument which relies on building support, empowering local actors and building partnerships to succeed. The problems UN peace operations address are political, thus, they require political solutions. UN will never sustain peace through the application of hard power alone. The effective and judicious use of force to protect civilians and stabilize a fragile situation is a necessary but not sufficient capability for UN peace operations.

Communications, external and internal, is a key aspect of effective ‘soft’ power. Leadership is ultimately responsible for determining how a mission will implement its mandate and/or assigned tasks. A Strategic Communications approach for UN Peace Operations Leadership is thus a requirement and not optional for missions and senior personnel deploying to the field.

An advocacy and campaign driven approach, which promotes dialogue and uses a mix of traditional and modern techniques and tactics, is critical to promoting situational awareness, assisting in force protection, promoting support from key advocates, deterring spoilers and protecting the mission’s overall reputation. Internal communications, to mission personnel and the entire UN family as appropriate are also the responsibility of mission leadership and should likewise be subject to all relevant accountability frameworks.

In support of this approach, a holistic, flexible and data-driven strategic communications plan that targets specifically designated audiences using multiple channels in a comprehensive and measurable manner must become the direct responsibility of mission leadership.

Part of the overall mission communication strategy must be the creation of (1) core narrative of what the mission is there to do, (2) master messages explaining the core narrative, and (3) issue and event specific messages delivered through a variety of pre-identified channels, harmonized against the master messages in support of the core narrative.

Data driven analytics must be applied to determine the success of messaging activities and specific communications campaigns. Communications, both strategic and campaign-driven, must be mainstreamed into policy decision making and planning throughout the mission’s lifecycle. To promote accountability and ensure compliance, Mission Leadership should be judged against this requirement as part of their compact with the Secretary-General and as part of the Mission Directive and the mission Concept of Operations.

Additional resources should be devoted in mission budgets to public information. Current percentage of overall budget is typically quite small unless there is an FM radio station. The associated personnel and information technology required to get an operation’s message out and build effective internal communications links with UN staff (mission and broader UN family) deployed in the field beyond mission headquarters.

To ensure performance standards are met in this regard, (1) the training regime offered to Mission Leadership should both be expanded and formalized into existing leadership courses and processes, (2) subsequent refresher programmes and issue specific training should be designed and made available in the field at the request of senior leadership, (3) additional resource materials should be prepared using new and existing channel, and (4) mission budgets should be adjusted to ensure sustainable resource levels for this approach.

There are a number of practical steps that can be characterized as the “six M:s” that would help to create an environment that would empower UN leadership to successfully fulfil these critical requirements in today’s complex communications environment.

They are:

- **Mainstream:** Strategic Communications considerations starting with desired outcomes and effects, then identification of target audiences, then master messages and sub messaging, then identification of channels for distribution, and then measurement of effect and evaluation of impact should be a feature of all aspects of policy decision making starting with planning and formulation.
- **Moderinize:** Today's communications landscape has changed fundamentally from analogue to digital, from one-way/top-down to circular/dialogue driven. The UN must pivot to accept these new realities and adjust resources to match required output. This will require a bottom up review of existing communications capabilities and assets to ensure that the UN is fully leveraging all possible capacities in an impactful, deliberate, efficient, effective and quantifiable manner.
- **Minimize:** There is undoubtedly duplication in the existing communications architecture at the UN Headquarters. The top to bottom review should identify areas where capacities can be combined and efficiencies realized using existing resources and where outdated assets could be repurposed to fulfil prioritized communications tasks.
- **Manage:** Integrated and coordinated backstopping of field presences will require a clear definition of roles and responsibilities and a willingness to use non-traditional means such as outsourcing and centralization/sharing of technical assets such as FM radio production. This should throughout involve deliberate and contemplative oversight with clear lines of accountability.
- **Measure:** A data-driven, measures of effect-oriented, quantifiable approach will allow a strategic communications approach that demonstrates effective use of scarce resources, demonstrates value for money and overall "impactfulness". Monitoring, through software and other more traditional tools, can be a huge asset in this regard.
- **Message:** Leadership driven, corporate messaging beginning with a core narrative and then flowing into thematic and issue specific sub groupings, will allow the Organization to communicate as one. It will also leverage the diverse resources of the whole UN system to provide a compelling narrative on the intrinsic value of the UN and the multilateral approach it embodies. Specific departments and agencies, funds and programmes will harmonize against these broad themes rather than repeat them, but the diverse voices when properly coordinated and integrated can ensure that the system, and the UN leadership that embodies it, can manage its reputation and communicate effectively and persuasively to a diverse set of target audiences.