THE UNITED NATIONS LEADERSHIP MODEL
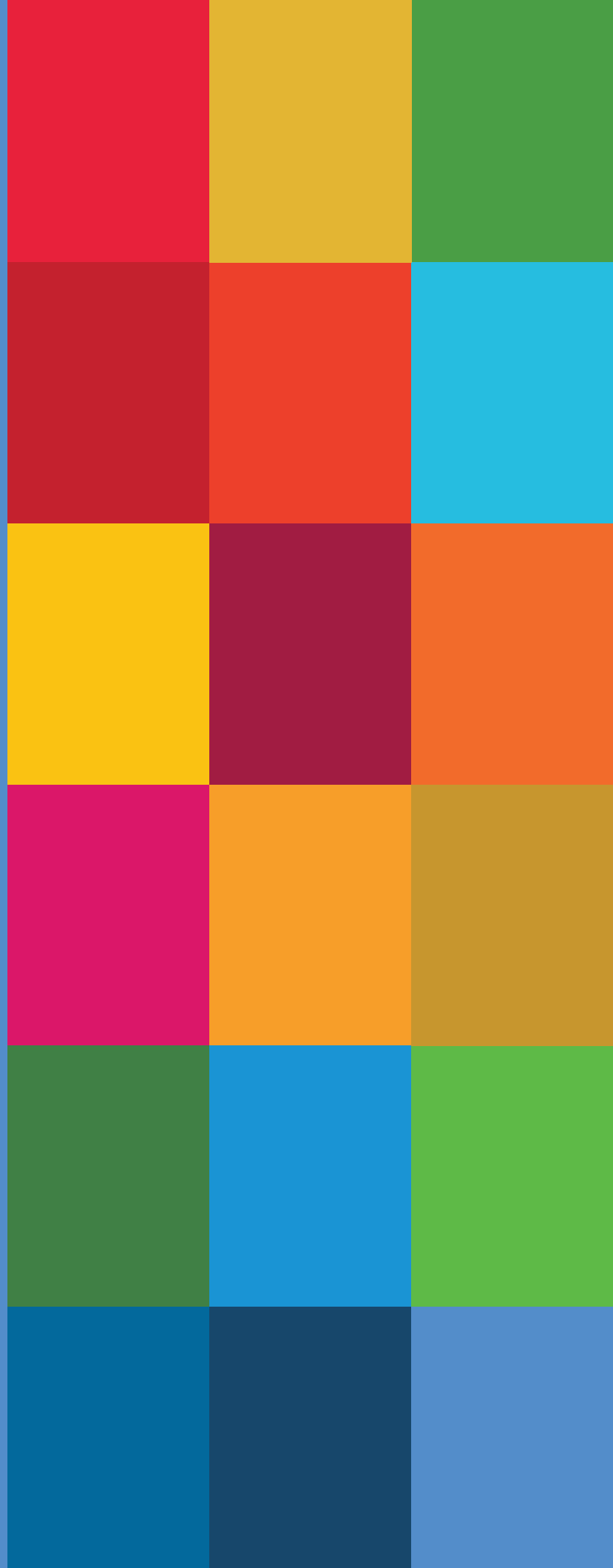
The UN Leadership Model[1]

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

–Dag Hammarskjold

Leadership means many things to many people. And a diverse range of leadership models is promoted by institutions and academics around the world.

But what does it mean to be a *UN* leader ? What are the essential elements of the UN leadership model ? What distinguishes it from other models and approaches ? Where does one find the foundations of the UN leadership model ? And how has that model changed as the Organization itself has evolved ?

The UN Working Group on Leadership (WGL), an interagency mechanism set up under the auspices of the UNDG but with membership from beyond the UNDG itself, launched an initiative in 2014 to answer these questions.

To this end, the WGL convened a series of workshops in New York and Geneva, a discussion in the UNDG AG Retreat in 2015, and consultations with RCs, UNCTs and UN system colleagues from across the globe in 2015 and 2016.

At the same time, the WGL reviewed key reforms underway across the system, and the transformational policy documents that were changing the Organization's approach to leadership, particularly at the country level.   These included the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Human Rights Upfront policy, the revised RC Job Description and UNCT Code of Conduct, and multiple RC/UNCT policy guidance notes, among others.

This paper summarizes the results of that process, setting out a model of UN leadership that is grounded in the United Nations Charter, the norms and standards of the Organization as contained in its treaties and declarations, its core mandate to

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[1] Endorsed by UNDG on 11th October 2016.

promote peace and security, protect human rights, address humanitarian needs, and advance economic and social progress and development, in the current and future imperatives of the sustainable development agenda, and in the UN policy framework[2] constructed to advance those imperatives and to deliver results.

On that basis, the WGL has determined that the UN Leadership Model is characterized by the following essential elements:

- It is **Norm-based**, in that it is grounded in UN norms and standards, beginning with the Charter itself. In other words, UN leaders *stand for something--* something quite specific. The UN is a norm-based organization, bound to promote and protect human rights, peace and security, humanitarian principles, economic and social progress and development, gender equality, environmental stewardship, and countless other areas *in accordance with* the norms and standards contained in the international treaties, resolutions and declarations adopted under the auspices of the Organization.   UN leaders are duty-bound to defend these in every case, and must therefore be ready, able and equipped to do so.

- It is **Principled**, defending its norms and standards and their application without discrimination, fear, or favour even—especially-- in the face of pressure and push-back from powerful actors. It seeks out, and promotes evidence over prejudice and popular assumptions for the basis of its work. Sometimes, this means telling government interlocutors, corporate actors, senior officials in our own organizations, and others—including the public-- not just what they want to hear, but what they need to know. It means a principled approach to alleviating human suffering and protecting the lives, livelihoods and dignity of populations in need, without discrimination. UN leaders can never turn a blind eye to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, war crimes, crimes against humanity, corruption, discrimination, environmental degradation, or other abuses, regardless of (inevitable) pressures to remain silent. This means our leaders must be equipped with the skills and tools to maintain principled, constructive engagement with all stakeholders on the most sensitive of issues. And it means that they must know that, at highest levels of the Organization, they will be supported in making, implementing and defending tough decisions. In sum, UN leaders must form part of an unbroken "blue line" of principle, across the organization, and at all levels.

- It is **Inclusive** of all personnel and stakeholders irrespective of age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, grade, contractual status, and other personal characteristics. This means rejecting discrimination in all its forms, embracing diversity as a strength, and practicing cultural and gender sensitivity. It requires actively reaching out to those less likely to engage in group settings, facilitating multi-stakeholder access and engagement, and demonstrating empathy in interpersonal relationships. It means as well recognizing the authority of host communities, and

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[2] Including the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, Human Rights Upfront, the RC Job Description & UNCT Guidance notes, and others.

treating all human beings with respect, whether peers, supervisees, supervisors, or external partners and stakeholders. And it means working to maximize geographic diversity and to achieve gender parity within the UN system, while maintaining the highest standards of competence and integrity.*[3]

- It is **Accountable**, mutually within the system, and to beneficiaries and the public beyond. This means that, even as leaders ensure accountability from others, they equally accept their own accountability, striving for 360 degrees of mutual accountability. UN leaders embrace accountability as a gauge of progress, as a check against waste, fraud or abuse, and as an opportunity for transparency, communication, and learning. They are skilled in results-based management, in constructive performance appraisal, in transparent leadership approaches, and in approaches that support a culture of individual growth and development, where good performance is incentivized and underperformers are held to account. UN leaders are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of their staff, especially those who serve in volatile crisis contexts. And, most of all, they recognize that our ultimate accountability is to the people that we serve—especially the most vulnerable, excluded, or marginalized—for the causes that we serve—peace, human rights, development, humanitarian relief, and so on.

- It is **Multi-Dimensional**, integrated, and engaged across pillars[4] and functions[5]. It is now seen as axiomatic that the three pillars of the UN Charter (peace and security, human rights, and development) are interdependent, and that all UN functions, whether humanitarian, political, security, or others, impact on one another. That's why today's UN leader is required to learn, access, and shape new ways to connect cross-pillar knowledge and experience, and to ensure coherence while safeguarding a principled approach. S/he must be prepared to help unpack complex challenges and to build a shared understanding of problems, enabling collective support for effective solutions beyond the scope of individual organisations. The RC job description, for example, frames the RC as a multi-dimensional leader, responsible for leading on development, human rights, humanitarian[6], political and security matters. And the SDGs themselves are a fully-integrated framework, incorporating economic and social development, environment, human rights, peace, and other elements into a single whole.   Leadership, for the UN, does not reside in silos.

- It is **Transformational,** of ourselves and those we serve. The mission of the UN is to achieve positive *change*-- to bring greater peace and security, human rights, economic and social progress and development, and a healthier environment.   The SDGs themselves constitute a major change project – and a significant change effort is

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[3] Note: The leadership element « Inclusive » was incorporated into the Model as part of further consultations within the UNDG, HLCM and HLCP. All three CEB pillars have endorsed the UN Leadership Model elements.

[4] Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Development.

[5] Development, human rights, humanitarian, political, environmental, safety & security, etc.

[6] If humanitarian assistance is required, and where a separate HC position has not been established.

therefore needed to better support their implementation while 'leaving no one behind.' The UN system needs to invest in strong transformational leadership at the individual, team and organizational levels. It needs to strengthen its own agility, and adaptability to change. Transformational leadership requires a focus on redefining approaches to partnership building, strategy, and systems thinking. It is heavily reinforced by attitudinal and behavioral adjustments, by development of leadership capabilities, and by strong vision and leadership for change. UN leaders facilitate change through role model behavior, recognizing and rewarding the contributions of others, fostering a work culture of reflection, and through creating empowering conditions based on commitment and principled collaboration rather than compliance.

- It is **Collaborative**, within and beyond the UN system. Today's UN leaders comprehend the interdependent imperatives of the UN Charter, as well as the comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda and the multiplicity of stakeholders beyond the Organisation and its Member States. They seek collective 'as one' cross-Charter thinking, joined-up approaches and solutions. And they use the UN's convening power to actively create safe and meaningful opportunities to hear the voices of the people themselves, civil society, local communities, the marginalized and excluded within them, and those most at risk of being left behind. The UN leader recognizes that better connecting universal goals to people-centered initiatives requires investment in collective UN efforts to achieve them. This requires new behaviors that strengthen collaboration within and beyond traditional organizational boundaries. UN leaders should be able to scope constituencies, opportunities, and tipping points for progress that harness the latest technological advances of the scientific and technical community, collaborative system thinking, and enterprising partnerships with both traditional and non-traditional partners. This requires creating collaborative spaces for innovative thinking and experimentation at the country and global levels, and the exploration of tailored problem-driven solutions across constituencies and in dynamic environments and varying country contexts.

- It is **Self-applied,** that is**,** modeled in our own behavior. A UN leader is expected not just to preach UN principles and norms to others, but to live them. S/he seeks to inspire, not to command. This means that in interactions within offices, teams, agencies, and across the system the UN leader is fully respectful of all colleagues at all levels, is gender-sensitive, promotes and celebrates diversity as a strength, fosters teamwork, empowers staff, recognizes and rewards merit, and operates with integrity, transparency and fairness. And it also means that every UN leader exhibits these principles in all interactions with the people, communities and constituencies they serve, with partners in government and civil society, and, not least, with the vulnerable, marginalized, and those most likely to be left behind.

The development of this UN leadership model is now well advanced, grounded as it is in UN norms, standards, policy documents, accountability frameworks, and learning initiatives. It increasingly defines the core of the RC assessment and selection process, the RC induction, and the appraisal of RC and UNCT Heads of Agency performance. It is reflected in the codes of conduct, guidance and training for all UNCT members. It is integrated into dissemination and training efforts under the *Human Rights Up Front* initiative and the policy on *Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*. And it guides the work of the Working Group on Leadership. Now, as the UN System begins its dedicated efforts to help realize the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, as it confronts chronic poverty, expanding armed conflict, climate change, unprecedented humanitarian crises, massive inequalities, and gross violations of human rights, more intensified efforts will be required to reinforce and extend this model of leadership across the UN at the global, regional and country levels.

What will it take?

Knowledgeable leadership is empowered leadership. UN leaders must be well versed in this approach, in the substance of the Organization's three pillars, of mandates from across the system and the demands of the broader 'eco-system' of actors, and in the needs and aspirations of the people and communities we serve. Further, 21st Century leadership must have a firm basis in evidence, which is also central to the SDGs, and is key to combating prejudice, unpacking false assumptions, and moving beyond failed approaches. A commitment to continuous learning and professional/leadership development is therefore a key attribute of the UN leader. Going forward, we must work to consolidate the application of this model at the country level, and to extend its principles and approaches to the global and regional.

The challenges that confront us in the 21st Century will not be met by mere deference to power, reliance on a shaky status quo, or operation in old silos. Rather, they demand a model of leadership that is norm-based, principled, accountable, multi-dimensional, transformational, collaborative, and self-applied. That is, a *UN* leadership model.

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ANNEX

Indicative elements for follow-up
For discussion by the Working Group on Leadership

In planning next steps, the Working Group on Leadership will consider the following actions among others, in the immediate term, including in the design of an implementation plan for the UN Leadership Model.

- The sharing of the model with the UNDG, HLCP and the HLCM, to ensure a coordinated, whole-of-system approach to the model's development, dissemination, and implementation;
- A mapping of existing UN leadership development efforts, with a mind to advancing coherence between them, obviating duplication, and filling gaps;
- Regular training and learning events for UN leadership, incorporating the core elements of this model, its expectations and practical application;
- The application of the elements of the leadership model to all UN leadership selection processes and hires at global, regional and country levels;
- Review and updating of relevant assessment, performance review and guidance materials and tools to ensure alignment with the model;
- Public and partner engagement on the leadership model and its implications;
- Establishment of a dedicated leadership development mechanism, working closely with relevant UN and external partners, to inform, incentivize, and inspire system-wide leadership development as well as engagement around specific strategic issues and challenges faced by UN leaders, and that helps to translate the elements of the UN leadership model into everyday practice.