



WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

Going beyond analysis of individual skills and abilities to consider important questions about the role of the organisation and of the group in ensuring effective leadership.

A discussion starter from

DISCUSSION STARTER

Why look at leadership?

This discussion starter is based on the ALNAP Working Paper 'Who's in Charge here?', which goes beyond analysis of individual leadership and abilities and considers in more detail some important questions about the role of the organisation and of the group in ensuring effective leadership.

We define leadership as:

1. *Defining a clear vision and objectives*
2. *Building a consensus around plan*
3. *Ensuring realisation of the vision*

The research explores:

Collective leadership as an alternative approach

The under-representation of women and people from the global south in operational leadership positions.

The role of organisational structure.

We reviewed what actually works in...

Fire service
Civil defence
Emergency medicine
Humanitarian evaluations
Military service
Film industry

In 2010, aid workers interviewed for ALNAP's pilot edition of the State of the Humanitarian System report identified poor leadership and coordination as the single most important constraint to effective operations (ALNAP, 2010).

Three years later, the authors of the State of the System 2012 see little improvement, and conclude that 'interviews and evaluations focused on the last three years have consistently continued to point to gaps and failures in leadership' (ALNAP, 2012a). Meanwhile, several aid donors have identified the need for improvements in humanitarian leadership as a strategic priority (AusAID, 2011; DFID, 2011).



3 APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

Exceptional Individual

Benefits

- Fast decisions
- Flexibility and initiative

Challenges

- Risk of overwhelm
- Finding exceptional people
- Culturally specific
- Requires single line of command

Structured

Benefits

- Addresses key failures noted in evaluations
- Saves time

Challenges

- Lack of flexibility
- Not well adapted to multi-agency contexts

Collaborative

Benefits

- Better decisions in complex situations
- Improved continuity
- More effective collaboration
- Required in inter-agency settings?

Challenges

- Slow decision making
- 'Lowest common denominator'



Successful leadership is about more than the leader.

What works best in the humanitarian context?

Which is characterised by...

1. Rapid decision-making
2. Collaboration requirement
3. Unclear priorities
4. Limited information
5. Many decisions
6. Politicisation
7. Inter-agency: no clear line of authority

Single agency

- It's not about the perfect answer, just the best one
- Move away from an overreliance on the exceptional individual
- Clarify the rules around roles
- Clear mechanisms for collecting, analysing and transmitting info
- Focus on principles, not procedures.

What can we learn?

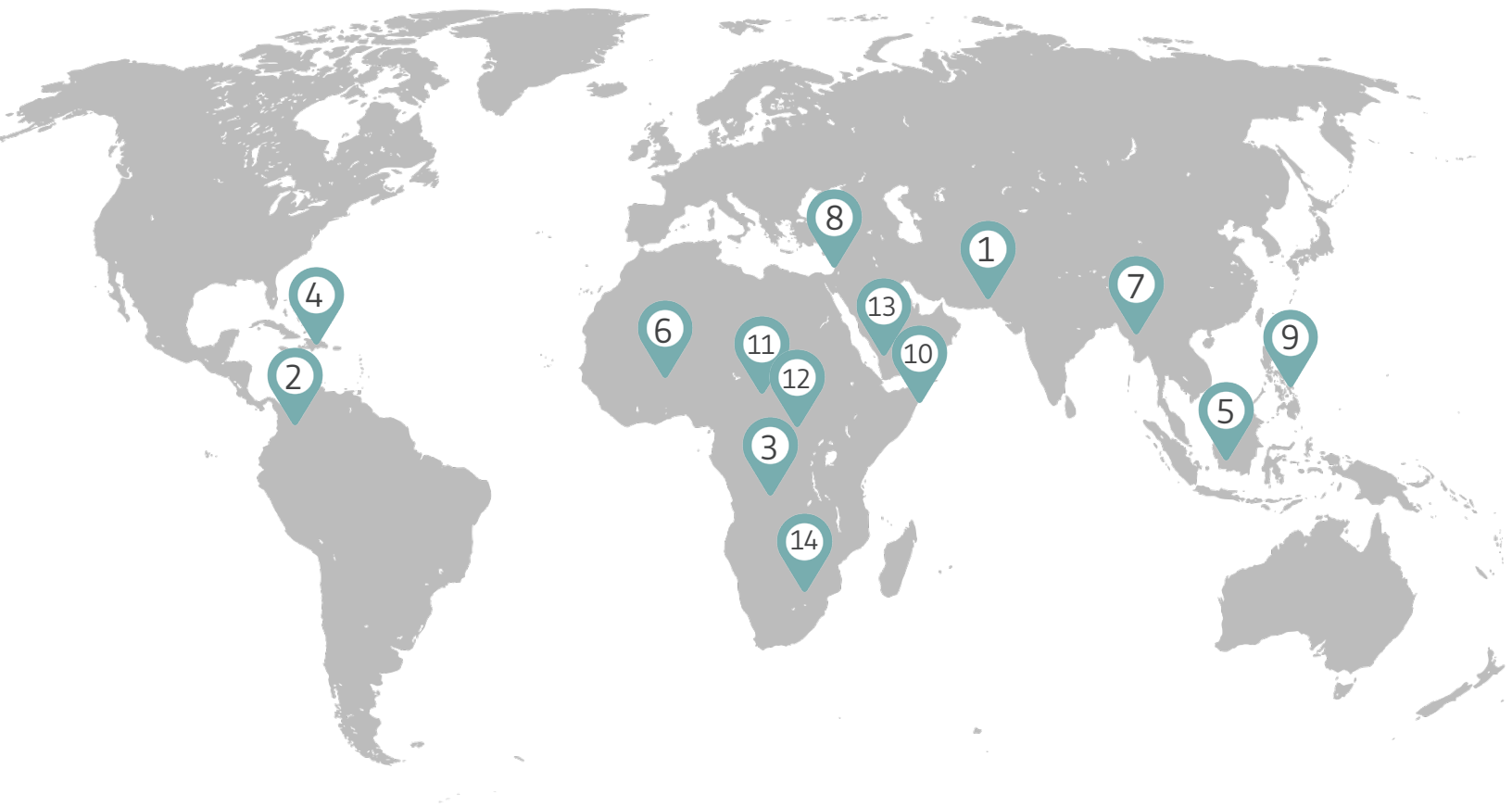
Inter-agency

- Clear membership criteria
- Group decision-making processes and techniques
- Train together
- See leader as facilitator

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ACTIVE LEARNING
NETWORK FOR
ACCOUNTABILITY AND
PERFORMANCE IN
HUMANITARIAN
ACTION



ALNAP will be using this review to inform a research study due out later this year.

It will be conducted by ALNAP and our partners in these countries:

1. Afghanistan
2. Columbia
3. DR Congo
4. Haiti
5. Indonesia
6. Mali
7. Myanmar
8. OPT
9. Philippines
10. Somalia
11. Sudan
12. South Sudan
13. Yemen
14. Zimbabwe

The full study that this paper is based on is available at:

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