WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

A literature review on approaches to leadership in humanitarian operations

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Acronyms

ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ACFSo	Afghan Civil Society Forum
ADRRN	Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ANCB	Afghanistan NGO Coordinating Bureau
ANDMA	Afghan National Disaster Management Authority
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
BDCP	Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre
BDRC-LC	Building Disaster Resilient Communities Learning Circle
BNNRC	Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio Communication
CDAC-N	Communication with Disaster Affected Communities
CDRN	Citizens Disaster Response Network
CEPREDENAC	Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central
CNDR	Corporate Network for Disaster Response
CoAR	Coordination of Afghan Relief Network
COAST	Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust
DMB	Disaster Management Bureau
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building
EquityBD	Equity and Justice Working Group
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HCTT	Humanitarian Coordination Task Team
HPN	Humanitarian Policy Network
HRC	Humanitarian Resource Consortium
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INDMCC	Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee

INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IVCA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
LCG	Local Consultative Group
LLC-DER	Local Consultative Group Working Group on Disaster and Emergency Response
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
MERN	Mindanao Emergency Response Network
NARRI	National Alliance for Risk Reduction and Response Initiative
NC4	The NGO Coordination Council for Climate Change
NDMAC	National Disaster Management Advisory Committee
NDMC	National Disaster Management Commission
NDMC	National Disaster Management Council
NFA	Network Functions Approach
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIRAPAD	Network for Information Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
POPI	People's Oriented Program Implementation
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
RRD	Relief, Recovery andDevelopment
SADK	South Asian Disaster Knowledge Network
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
SHOUHARDO	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
SOD	Standing Orders on Disasters
SWABAC	Southern and Western Afghanistan and Balochistan Association for Coordination
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

Why consider humanitarian leadership, and why now?

The last five years have seen a growth in interest in humanitarian leadership, amid growing concern that operations are often compromised by poor leadership. The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Reform process, building on the findings of the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review, identified 'effective leadership and coordination in humanitarian emergencies'[1] (IASC, 2007) as one of four priorities for action. In 2011, recognising that 'challenges still remain in deploying adequate leadership' (IASC, 2012a), the IASC decided to retain the focus on leadership and 'strengthen leadership capacities at all levels of... response' (IASC, 2012b) as part of the 'transformative agenda'. The IASC's concerns are echoed elsewhere.

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).

The problem appears to be widespread. While much attention has focused on inter-organisational leadership, and particularly on poor leadership at the level of the Humanitarian Coordinators and the Cluster Coordinators (see for example: De Silva et al., 2006; Featherstone, 2012; Grunewald et al., 2010; Polastro et al., 2011; Steets et al., 2010; Ashdown and Mountain, 2011), evaluations

[1] Specifically, leadership by Humanitarian Coordinators.

also suggest that leadership challenges exist within individual organisations (Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 2011; Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Thammannagoda and Thileepan, 2009). In the words of one senior aid worker: 'we have issues around leadership everywhere' (Webster and Walker, 2009: 28)

Many humanitarian organisations are responding to these challenges (see, for example, Featherstone, 2012; IASC, 2012c). However, to date there has been only limited research to support the humanitarian system's efforts to comprehensively improve standards of operational leadership. That research which has been conducted has tended to focus primarily on one aspect of leadership: the skills and abilities required of the humanitarian leader (see for example: Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011; CBHA, 2011; Hochschild, 2010; IASC, 2009).

This paper builds on one of these pieces of work: the ALNAP study Leadership in Action: Leading Effectively in Humanitarian Operations (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011). It aims to go beyond analysis of individual skills and abilities and consider in more detail some important questions raised in the earlier report around the role of the organisation and of the group in ensuring effective leadership. In particular, it expands on findings that 'many of [the cases studied] point to a strong element of collective leadership', that organisational structure and individual skills both play a role in effective leadership, and that women and people from the global south appear to be under-represented in operational leadership positions.

This paper is the result of an extensive literature review, which considered documentation from international humanitarian organisations and from other fields, such as civil defence, the military, and emergency medicine (see Annex A for methodology). It considers some of the assumptions that we commonly make around operational leadership, and investigates the potential relevance

of alternative approaches to leadership, and how they might be implemented in the international humanitarian system. In so doing, the paper creates some broad hypotheses, which we intend to test 'in the field', and in collaboration with members of the ALNAP network. As such, this paper is part of a process that aims to ensure that investments in improving the effectiveness of humanitarian leadership achieve the greatest possible impact.

Defining operational leadership

There are a wide variety of definitions for the term 'leadership' (Bennis, 1959; Grint, 2005a). The definition of operational humanitarian leadership that we use here is: providing a clear vision and objectives for the humanitarian response; building a consensus that brings aid workers together around that vision and objectives; and finding ways of collectively realising the vision for the benefit of the affected population, often in challenging and hostile environments. This definition emphasises some of the most commonly encountered definitional elements of leadership: the identification of a desired end state that is very different from the current state; the creation of a plan to reach this end state; the creation of support for this plan; and the (arguably more 'managerial') responsibility for implementing the plan.

Discussions of leadership in the humanitarian literature – and particularly discussions related to the leadership of inter-agency bodies, such as the Humanitarian Coordination Teams (HCTs) and the Clusters – regularly refer to 'leadership and coordination' in the same breath. As we shall see, this is not surprising: both leadership and coordination aim to ensure that diverse individuals and groups work effectively together, and in humanitarian contexts, it is often difficult to see where coordination ends and leadership begins. However, it is also useful to differentiate between the two concepts, and so in this review we have tended to see 'leadership' as relating to efforts that guide a single set of common

actions forming a single plan, and coordination as relating to efforts to ensure complementarity and prevent overlap between diverse actions and diverse plans. Leadership relates to working together, whereas coordination relates to working in parallel.

2. The humanitarian context

Any attempt to identify an effective approach to leadership needs to be situated in the context in which leadership takes place. What, then, are the specific factors of humanitarian operations – the humanitarian context – that might affect the success of different leadership approaches?

It is generally accepted in leadership theory that there is no 'one right way' to lead and that effective leadership depends on the context (Bechky, 2006; Carson et al., 2007; Klein et al., 2006; Leonard and Snider, 2010). Military approaches to leadership may not be effective in a hospital; what works for a Fortune 500 corporation may not transfer well to a police force.

Every emergency is, of course, different, as is every humanitarian organisation. There is no single, undifferentiated 'humanitarian context'. However, on the basis of the literature review (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008; Hochschild, 2010; Magone et al., 2011; Slim, 2006; Stephenson Jr, 2005), we would propose that most emergencies are marked by a series of conditions which, in combination, differentiate them from most other environments and which influence the effectiveness of any given leadership approach.

Complex, uncertain situations

Humanitarian emergencies involve, by definition, life-threatening situations. There is generally a requirement to act rapidly, often in situations of poor security and with limited access to the operational site. This puts pressure on decision-makers, which is often compounded by intense external scrutiny. There may be a large

amount of information to support decision-making, but it is generally incomplete: a lot of important information is missing. In some, not infrequent, cases the situation is sufficiently new or different for there to be no reliable existing best practice. The overall objectives and priorities for action are often unclear: there may be tension between short- and longer-term objectives or between the various imperatives of response, political relationships and human rights. And, in most cases, resources are inadequate to fully achieve objectives.

Under these conditions, 'the exercise of leadership is trying and perilous... much conspires towards failure' (Hochschild, 2010: 37). We should expect that the most successful approaches to leadership will be those which are best adapted to making good decisions quickly while under pressure, on the basis of limited information, and – in at least some circumstances – without recourse to 'tried and tested' solutions. In addition, these decisions will typically need to reconcile or prioritise between a variety of ethical, practical and political imperatives.[2]

Competition and collaboration

If humanitarian leadership needs to be effective in the specific context of humanitarian emergencies themselves, it also needs to be adapted to the realities of the international humanitarian 'system'. This system is highly atomised. It is composed of: governments; the United Nations; international non-governmental organisations (NGOs); the Red Cross/Crescent movement; and national civil society actors. It articulates with numerous additional actors, including diaspora organisations, the military and the private sector. As a result, a very large number of organisations will typically be involved in any response. These organisations will have varying mandates, priorities and philosophies, and will often be in competition for funds and media attention. So it is not surprising that intense competition and disagreement are common elements of humanitarian responses. This situation has been described as a 'Battle of the Samaritans' (T'Hart, 2010).

[2] For example, who should receive assistance? The people who are easiest to reach, or to reach safely? Particular groups with specific needs? Isolated groups with high levels of need, who are difficult or expensive to access? Should we provide assistance to a particular population, irrespective of need, if this will allow us to have access to a larger population with high levels of need?

However, despite these differences, international humanitarian organisations will in most cases need to work collaboratively with a wide variety of actors: national authorities (who may provide strategic leadership of the response, delegating tactical or purely operational roles to international organisations); third-party governments (in the guise of donors, or, particularly for the UN, as important elements of the agencies' governance structures) and with one another. This requirement to collaborate, in a highly politicised environment, with a large number of diverse entities is one of the central leadership challenges presented by the humanitarian context (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011; Hochschild, 2010)

Inter-agency structures – a different kind of leadership

The tensions between individual agency and collective action are most evident in the large number of inter-agency structures that are increasingly part of the humanitarian landscape. Over the last decade, there have been a series of attempts to address the challenge of collective action in humanitarian operations. Many of these initiatives have led to the creation of inter-agency structures. The most obvious examples of these structures are the Humanitarian Country Teams and the Cluster system, but there are many others operating at country or operational level: this review considered, among others, reviews and evaluations of the Malawi NGO consortium (Goyder and James, 2002), the South Sudan NGO Forum (Currion, 2010), an NGO cash consortium in Southern Somalia (Majid, Hussein, and Shuria, 2007) and a District Steering Group in Kenya (Levine et al., 2011), as well as mechanisms for coordinating different members of the same organisational 'family' (Donnell and Kakande, 2007; Humanitarian Futures, 2012; Simpson et al., 2011). These various inter-agency structures are generally, and loosely, described as having a coordination function. However, on closer inspection, they are often expected to provide a vision and objectives, build consensus and

find ways to collectively realise the vision. In these cases, they are not merely fora for the exchange of information to facilitate parallel actions – they are expected to lead.

Hence, the role of the Humanitarian Country Team includes 'setting common objectives and priorities, developing strategic plans... (and) providing guidance to cluster lead agencies' (IASC, 2009a) Similarly, while 'it is hard to pin down how the cluster approach... is intended to work', and 'the... approach continues to evolve' (Steets et al., 2010: 24), several observers have noted that the role of the clusters appears to 'go beyond mere coordination' to encompass 'the organization of a common response' (Steets et al., 2010: 24), 'forming a common vision... and translating this into concrete activities' (Bourgeois et al., 2007: 11) and 'jointly moving towards common... objectives' (Cosgrave et al., 2007: 3). Many other inter-agency 'coordination' bodies also perform the humanitarian leadership functions of visioning, planning and managing, to a greater or lesser degree.

For the leader of an individual agency (the Oxfam Country Director, say, or the UNHCR Representative), these inter-agency bodies are the places where the tensions outlined above, between individual agency interest and the interests of other organisations, can be most acute.[3] In this respect, these structures provide concrete expression of the collaborative/competitive challenge of humanitarian response discussed above.

[3] Although, obviously not all the time. These fora also provide individual agencies with the opportunity to greatly increase the effectiveness and impact of their work as part of a more coherent response.

However, for the leader of the inter-agency group itself (the Humanitarian Coordinator, for example) these structures create a specific challenge: how to 'lead' a group over which one has very limited formal authority, where the people who are 'led' represent organisations accountable to different stakeholders. These people may have different priorities, procedures and cultures, and may well perceive themselves to be in competition with one another.

In short, there are two slightly different contexts for humanitarian leaders: single-agency and inter-agency. The two contexts share many features – the requirement to make important decisions under time pressure with limited information, for example – but they also differ in the degree of control that the 'leader' has over the actions of the 'led'. This paper considers both contexts, and differentiates between them where necessary.

3. Three approaches to humanitarian leadership

How do the exceptional individual, structured and collaborative approaches to leadership play out in the humanitarian context? Is one more appropriate than the others, or could a combination of all three be effective?

In reviewing the literature, there appear, broadly speaking, to be three possible approaches that humanitarian organisations can take to leadership. The first option is to use an 'exceptional-individual' approach, relying primarily on the personal qualities and attributes of individuals in leadership positions to ensure that leadership functions are conducted successfully. The (often tacit) assumption behind this approach is that these individuals use their skills and knowledge to form effective strategies and plans, and then exercise their powers of influence and negotiation to inspire others to collaborate in implementing these strategies. As we shall see in the next section, this appears to be the dominant model in the international humanitarian response system.

The second option is to take a 'structured' approach, creating clear hierarchies and formalised procedures, so that the leader bases strategies very largely on standardised, tried and tested ways of addressing problems, and the group implement these plans because they have been schooled in the same procedures, and are part of and accept the hierarchy that gives the leader the final say. This approach still requires skilled leaders, but it spreads the burden of leadership in two important ways. First, it relies on high levels of delegation: many tasks which might otherwise accrue to the leader are delegated to other people in the

structure. Second, it ensures that many of the leadership functions that would require time and energy in the 'exceptional-leader' model are replaced, or made automatic, by systems and procedures created by the organisation.

This structured approach is perhaps most common in national fire and civil defence services (the Incident Command System, or ICS, used in the USA, Australia, Ethiopia and elsewhere, is a good example of the approach). However, in the literature review, elements of the approach were also found in other high-pressure, time-critical environments, notably hospital emergency departments (Klein et al., 2006) and film sets (Bechky, 2006). Currently, some international humanitarian organisations are considering variants of the ICS (Robinson and Joyce, 2012) for implementation within their own systems; others are incorporating elements of a more structured approach to operational leadership, particularly around role clarification (IASC, 2009; Lake, 2011). Many groups 'in the field' appear to have spontaneously adopted parts of a structured leadership approach. However, a review of humanitarian evaluations and other literature suggests that a more structured approach is still regarded with suspicion by many in the sector.

The third leadership option is to open the strategic and planning function up to a group, and use a 'shared-leadership' approach to establishing vision and strategy, and ensuring that the group act collaboratively. The argument for shared leadership is based on the ideas that a group can handle the workload better than an individual, and that multiple perspectives create a more rounded vision, and better strategies and plans, than an individual working alone. In terms of ensuring group action, expanded ownership increases the commitment to put plans into effect.

There are several ways in which leadership can be shared, some of which are detailed below. Generally, shared leadership does not mean dispensing with the individual leader, and it requires a high level of skill on the part of that leader – although the skill-set is rather different from that required in the skilled individual model, being more facilitative and less directional. This review paid particular attention to the Unified Command System – an approach which aims to bring a more structured; 'Incident-Command'-type approach to groups composed of multiple organisations with multiple accountabilities, and also considered examples of shared leadership within individual private- and public-sector organisations.

Each of these three approaches has implications for which activities the system should prioritise to strengthen operational leadership. In the exceptional-individual approach, the priority is to identify skilled leaders, and to build individual leadership skills among the organisation's staff. A structured approach tends to focus more on establishing structures and systems, and then training staff in their use. A shared-leadership approach would lead to increased interest in group dynamics: team structures, processes and behaviour. The following sections explore the potential and demonstrated strengths and weaknesses of all three models in a humanitarian context.

An overview of the three approaches to leadership

	Exceptional individual	Structured	Shared
Authority and accountability	With individual leader.	With a number of leaders, each with clearly delegated authority, and areas of accountability.	With team as a whole.
Successful leadership	Skills and abilities of individual leader.	Organisational structure that delegates authority effectively. Clear operating procedures.	Ability of team to pool knowledge and work effectively together.
Leadership development	Selecting and training individuals – often in 'leadership competencies'.	Developing structures and procedures. Training all members of organisation in procedures	Team development: often around role clarity and decision-making processes.
Potential Strengths	Decisions can be made quickly. Flexibility to deal with unexpected situations.	Clarity around who does what. Effective information flow. Effective use of resources.	Decisions benefit from broader knowledge – can be better quality (particularly in complex situations). Higher levels of 'buy in' lead to more successful implementation.
Potential weaknesses	Leader can become overwhelmed. Leads to unrealistic requirement for large numbers of exceptional leaders.	Can be overly rigid and fail to adapt to complex environments. Requires acceptance of hierarchy not always found in humanitarian organisations.	Can be slow to make decisions. Can lead to 'lowest common denominator' decisions.
Example in practice	Many humanitarian organisations.	Incident Command Systems (particularly fire service).	Unified command systems; dynamic delegation systems (some accident and emergency hospital wards).

4. The 'exceptional individual' approach

The importance that humanitarians – and humanitarian leaders in particular – place on the skills and abilities of the individual leader emerges clearly from previous, interview-based studies: 'Our interviews made it clear that... in the end, a good response comes down to the people' (Webster and Walker, 2009: 25); 'leadership is embodied in the individual or individuals concerned; it is not... a status that can be conferred on someone by virtue of their appointment' (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011: 19).

Several humanitarian evaluations echo this theme: in the opinion of the evaluators, at least, the key to effective leadership lies in: 'the personal attributes and dynamism of individual leaders' (De Silva et al., 2006: 12) (see also Grunewald et al., 2010; Young, et al., 2007).

This focus on the individual is reflected in the approaches that the system has taken to strengthening leadership. Most of the research on operational leadership in humanitarian contexts has attempted to identify the individual skills required by leaders (CBHA, 2011; IASC, 2009) and many, perhaps most, improvement activities have centred around building these skills.[4] The disproportionate attention devoted to leaders, rather than to leadership, has been noted before. The Humanitarian Response review noted in 2005 that, in the absence of alternative approaches to strengthening leadership, 'the performance of the UN humanitarian coordination depends too much on the personal qualities... of the RC/HC' (Adinolfi

[4] For example, the majority of training events recorded in a recent review of activities in support of Humanitarian Coordination appear to relate to individual skill-building (Andy Featherstone, 2012).

et al., 2005: 11). Four years later, the authors of Strengthening the HC System: The Unfinished Agenda note that 'up to now discussions and efforts [to strengthen the HC system] have focused mostly on individual-level variables' (OCHA, 2009) while a more recent review notes that 'it's puzzling that greater investment hasn't been made to support HCTs as a team rather than focusing efforts on individual members' (Featherstone, 2012: 9).

As noted above, the humanitarian context – with its complexity, lack of information, high expectations, limited resources, time pressure and atomised structure – presents considerable challenges to any leader. The previous ALNAP study found that those individuals who had been successful in a humanitarian leadership role 'generally exhibit an unusually broad range of leadership qualities' (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011: 36). They are, in short, exceptionally talented people. It would appear from the interviews and evaluations that, despite disquiet in some quarters, much of the current thinking around humanitarian leadership starts from the assumption that effective leadership can best be achieved by ensuring that these exceptional individuals are identified, or that individuals are trained to become exceptional, and then put into operational leadership positions. The literature suggests that this approach, while not unchallenged, still dominates the practice and development of humanitarian operational leadership.

Benefits of the exceptional-individual approach

There are good reasons why an approach that relies on individuals, rather than systems or groups, should be seen as being particularly well adapted to the humanitarian context.
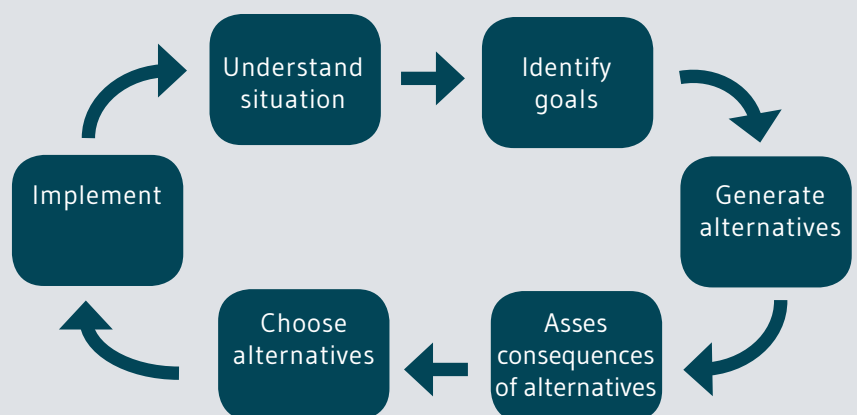
Rapid decision-making

Humanitarian operations often require important, complex and contested decisions to be made quickly. Several authorities from outside the humanitarian

world suggest that 'When time is of the essence... relatively autocratic decision-making is most appropriate' (Klein et al., 2006; see also Grint, 2005a; Hiller et al., 2006). Although evaluations of humanitarian action do present examples of individuals in leadership positions being slow to take decisions (Foster et al., 2010), they give far more examples of slow decisions occurring in situations where an individual does not have the mandate or authority to act individually. Within organisations, this occurs where decisions have to go through 'a consensus-based chain of consultation' (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011: 43). In the context of the individual organisation, decreasing these layers of consensus and empowering the individual leader to make decisions can increase decision speed.

The problem of slow decision-making processes seems currently to be even more acute in inter-agency groups, where the diversity of opinions and interests is greater, and members are cautious about compromising the interests of 'their' constituency for the interests of the larger group (Denis et al., 2001; Lencioni, 2002). This tension surfaces regularly in the inter-agency structures established to strengthen collective action (De Silva et al., 2006; Donnell and Kakande, 2007; Lanzer, 2007; Young et al., 2007). In all these cases, decision-making was slow and time consuming. Here, the leader would need to be not only a skilled decision-maker but also highly skilled in facilitation, negotiation and brokering consensus.

Decision-making processes

A 'classic' decision-making process is outlined opposite. Note that some authorities suggest that, in complex situations, it can be too difficult to assess the likely consequences of alternatives – and in these cases it can be better to act; assess the impact of the action; and then review and potentially choose a different alternative.

Understand situation → Identify goals → Generate alternatives → Asses consequences of alternatives → Choose alternatives → Implement → (back to Understand situation)

Flexibility and initiative

The second potential strength of this approach – particularly when compared to a more structured approach to leadership – is that it allows the flexibility and initiative[5] required to respond to complex situations. More structured approaches to emergency response (such as the ICS) are often criticised for their inflexibility (Lalonde, 2011; Leonard and Snider, 2010; Waugh and Streib, 2006). Many UN and NGO leaders would agree that bureaucratic structure is inimical to free thinking and initiative: Hochschild quotes a former head of UNHCR: 'My greatest advantage was that I did not come from a bureaucracy… academic life has taught me to be free in my thinking' (Hochschild, 2010: 47). The literature provides many examples of entrepreneurial, individual leaders using a personalised approach with great success (ALNAP, 2012b; Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011). Again, the benefits of the exceptional-individual approach may be more readily realised in a single-agency than inter-agency context.

Challenges with the exceptional-individual approach

Where this approach works, it appears to work well. However, before endorsing the 'exceptional individual' as the best way to ensure effective humanitarian leadership, there are some considerations that should give us pause.

The literature considered in this review suggests three main arguments against relying too heavily on individual skills to ensure effective humanitarian leadership:

- the difficulty of finding enough exceptional individuals

- the fact that this approach to leadership may work very well in some cultures but can be alien to others – an important consideration in a sector which is, by its nature, international

- the degree to which the approach is well adapted to decision-making in high-pressure, complex environments.

[5] Although this benefit can easily be cancelled out by 'risk-averse organisations', who are not prepared to grant operational leaders this level of initiative (Buchanan-Smith & Scriven, 2011).

The difficulty of finding leaders

We have already noted the range of challenges that humanitarian operations place on leaders, and the unusually broad range of skills required of an individual to navigate these challenges successfully. The humanitarian system calls for a very large number of extremely skilled leaders, and ideally leaders who have significant experience in previous operations (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011). The fact that numerous evaluations point to some degree of leadership failure suggests that, all too often, this demand is not being met. It is entirely conceivable that the sector has already long passed the point where demand outstrips supply.

One way in which the supply of suitable leaders might be increased is to train individuals in leadership skills. However, this is no 'quick fix'. Interviews with successful humanitarian leaders tend to suggest that they have learnt their skills over long periods of time. The previous ALNAP study explored how leadership had been learnt, and discovered that 'learning from experience, working in the humanitarian aid sector, was the most commonly cited route…'. Interviewees also talked about the value of coaching and learning from role models – again, over long periods of time. But, 'only one leader emphasised the value of learning leadership through a more formal training programme' (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011: 57). While this finding may reflect the relative lack of formal training programmes available in the humanitarian sector before the 1990s, it echoes findings from other sectors, that: 'much of the skill essential for effective leadership is learned from experience rather than from formal training programmes' (Yukl, 2010: 432, citing Davies and Easterby Smith, 1984; Kelleher et al., 1986; Lindsey et al., 1987; McCall et al., 1988).

It is also important to note that training and related developmental approaches are generally effective only where there is continuity between the skills learned and the skills prioritised and rewarded by immediate superiors and by the

organisation as a whole (Ford et al., 1992). Although there has in some cases been a tendency to see training as an 'easy answer' to organisational challenges in the humanitarian sector (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008) and beyond (Bolden, 2006), it would appear that training will be successful only where humanitarian organisations support an empowering and enabling culture of leadership. Where this culture does not exist, training cannot substitute for it (although, of course, it can be one element in developing a more effective culture). In this respect, Hochschild's findings on the culture of the United Nations (Hochschild, 2010), and the conclusion of Buchanan-Smith and Scriven (2011) that effective leadership more often occurs despite, rather than because of, the culture of humanitarian organisations, make grim reading. This suggests that a lot will have to change if training and leadership development initiatives are to achieve their potential impact. Under these circumstances, we may need to accept that there will always be a significant gap between the number of exceptional leaders that the system requires and the number available.

The culture problem: does the exceptional-individual approach work everywhere?

The second important argument against an over-reliance on a highly individualised approach to humanitarian leadership is that this approach may not sit well with the international nature and values base of humanitarian action. Several authors have persuasively argued that this 'leader-centric' model of leadership – and even, in some cases, the whole concept of 'leadership' itself –reflects and reinforces the values of certain cultures: particularly contemporary 'Anglo-Saxon' cultures (Bolden and Kirk, 2005; Jepson, 2011; Prince, 2005; Tayeb, 2001). These authors point out that most current leadership theory comes from North America and Europe, tends to focus on the individual rather than the group, and so tends to prioritise the effect of individual action over broader contextual factors in

explaining how events occur. Rather than building on universal realities, this approach reflects the individualism of Anglo-Saxon and Northern European culture.[6]

Some researchers point to alternative, non-Western models of leadership which are more collective and collaborative (Prince, 2005; Warner and Grint, 2006), suggesting that, for example, shared-leadership approaches may be more acceptable, appropriate and effective in these contexts than individual leadership. It is important not to oversimplify this discussion: English-speaking societies do not have a monopoly on individualistic approaches to leadership, and some cultures are probably even less disposed to collective leadership than those in the Anglo-Saxon world (Carson, 2005; Dorfman et al., 1997). However, the Globe study: Culture, Leadership and Organizations, which remains the largest and most complete cross-cultural study of leadership to date, did conclude that in collectivistic cultures, the prototype of leadership 'reflects cultural values of interdependence, collaboration and self-effacement' while in individualistic cultures, such as the USA , the prototype of leadership 'reflects cultural values of being independent, strong-willed, and forceful' (House et al., 2004: 462).

If many of our 'traditional' ideas about individual leadership are culturally specific, they are also, arguably, highly gendered. 'Many have noted that the traits associated with traditional, heroic leadership are masculine. Men or women can display them, but the traits themselves – such as individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination – are socially ascribed to men in our culture and generally understood as masculine' (Fletcher, 2003: 7) (Acker, 1990; Calás and Smircich, 1993; Collinson and Hearn, 1996). Shared-leadership approaches, on the other hand, are more generally seen as being 'feminine' (Fletcher, 2003; Ford, 2006).

[6] In this way, the exceptional-individual approach to leadership shares certain interesting parallels with the 'great man' theory of history popularised in the 1840s by Thomas Carlisle, but largely rejected by 20th-century historians.

Do the assumptions that we make, in the humanitarian context, when we hear the word 'leadership' derive from a male, English-speaking view of the world? There are certainly some indications that this might be the case: in the document review, it was noticeable that good leadership, where discussed in humanitarian evaluations, was almost uniformly labelled as 'strong' leadership, while bad or ineffective leadership was almost invariably described as 'weak' ('strong' and 'weak', in British English, often being associated with ideas of masculinity and femininity). Equally telling are observations in ALNAP's Leadership in Action report that 'Western culture de facto dominates many organisations' and that 'it was difficult to find many examples of effective operational humanitarian leadership provided by women when drawing up our list of potential case studies, despite canvassing widely' (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011). Schneider and Kim (2008) note that, in the ICRC, women are 40% of field delegates but only 16% of heads of delegation. Of course, there are many practical reasons why formal leadership positions within the humanitarian system may be held by white men: whatever causes this situation, it is probably not assumptions about leadership alone. However, we should also be alive to the danger that our assumptions about leadership might be an (unwitting) 'new form of colonialism – enforcing and reinforcing ways of thinking and acting that are rooted in north American and European ideologies' (Bolden and Kirk, 2005: 2). If this is the case, then we have structured our hiring, training and promotion processes to perpetuate a culturally specific understanding of leadership, which will tend to reward people from that cultural background with leadership positions.

The individual in complex, high-pressure environments

The third main criticism of the exceptional-individual approach in a humanitarian context springs from the complexity of humanitarian operations. One of the greatest threats to the individual leader is that, in these situations, they are 'buried under the flow of variable problems coming… for resolution' (Leonard and Snider, 2010:

6). Several evaluations point to the danger of humanitarian leaders becoming overwhelmed as they attempt to keep on top of a complex and dynamic situation (De Silva et al., 2006; Grunewald et al., 2010). In addition to the obvious threat of 'burn out' that this poses, it can also prevent leaders from addressing the most important issues through sheer overwork.

A second and related problem that flows from the operational context is that of decision quality. As noted above, individuals may make faster decisions than groups, but they do not necessarily make better decisions. The reason for this is that the process of analysing information and making decisions is 'essentially conservative' (Fielder and Bless, 2001: 138). Individuals tend to notice, remember and use information that they already have, or information which supports existing opinions, and will systematically discount alternative or challenging information (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Macrae et al., 1993). This is especially so when leaders do not have time to make more considered judgements (Bohner et al., 1995). These experimental results on decision-making are borne out by work in the humanitarian sector, which has shown that decision-makers tend to rely heavily on 'implicit values and assumptions' and 'mental models' as much as they do on new information (Darcy, 2009: 11). Obviously, this very human behaviour can become a problem when exhibited by leaders acting as sole decision-makers in pressurised situations, particularly where those situations do not 'fit' well with their existing mental models. Several humanitarian evaluations point out the risks of leaving decisions to an individual leader (De Silva et al., 2006; Grunewald et al., 2010; Thammannagoda and Thileepan, 2009; Young et al., 2007).

One way of correcting the 'systematically biased judgements' (Fielder and Bless, 2001: 135) that tend to result from reliance on an individual decisions-maker is, of course, for leaders to consult with others before taking decisions. And, in fact, experiments suggest that the use of advice, where advice is accepted, generally

increases decision accuracy (Bonaccio and Dalal, 2006). However, advice is often ignored, because decision-makers tend to apply the same 'filters' to expert advice as they do to information from other sources (Bowers and Pipes, 2000; Harvey and Fischer, 1997; Yaniv, 2004), particularly where the advice differs from their own opinion.[7] Again, investigations in the humanitarian sphere seem to bear this out. Humanitarian decision-makers appear to subject 'mainstream' ideas – which will more often correlate with their own – to lower standards of scrutiny than they do 'non-mainstream' ideas (Darcy, 2009). The consultative individual decision-maker may not, in practice, be much of an improvement on the autocratic decision-maker.

[7] Certain conditions appear to increase the likelihood that advice will be used, particularly situations in which: a complex task is to be performed; the decision-maker believes their own task-related knowledge to be poor compared to that of the advisor; and the decision-maker has asked for advice.

Summary: the exceptional-leader approach and humanitarian action

The 'exceptional-individual' approach underlies judgements about leadership in much of the humanitarian literature, and forms the theoretical basis of many of the actions that humanitarian organisations have taken to address perceived failures of leadership. While not, as we shall see, the only model of leadership in the humanitarian system, this appears to be the dominant model. Therefore, we can legitimately ask if many of the leadership problems identified in the humanitarian system are not, in some way, connected to the model. Are we unsuccessful because we have a skewed idea of what good leadership looks like?

The model is well adapted to the humanitarian context inasmuch as it allows for rapid decision-making and for operational flexibility, particularly in single-agency contexts. However, even if enough exceptional leaders could be found (and this is by no means certain), the model can also lead to inertia and poor decisions, and may also reflect – and reinforce – an idea of leadership which prioritises a male, Anglo-Saxon worldview.

It is interesting to note that the other sectors considered in this review (civil defence, the fire service, healthcare and emergency medicine, the military and the film industry) appear to rely much less on individual leadership skills than do humanitarians. This is not to say that they do not see skill as an important determinant of leadership: but, in all cases, individual leadership is reinforced by a fairly high level of structure and by formalised mechanisms to share leadership tasks. Given the experiences of these sectors, it may be time to consider a more structured approach to humanitarian leadership.

5. The structured approach

In essence, the 'structured approach' to leadership transfers certain leadership responsibilities from the individual leader to a set of formal structures, procedures and systems, decreasing the leadership burden (and so the chance of the leader becoming overloaded) and allowing the leader to focus on those areas which cannot be easily codified and standardised.

The idea is usefully explored in Substitutes for Leadership: Meaning and Measurement: 'Effective leadership might... be described as the ability to supply subordinates with needed guidance and good feelings' (Kerr and Jermier, 1978: 400). However, 'the research literature does not suggest that guidance and good feelings must be provided by the hierarchical superior' (Kerr and Jermier, 1978: 399): guidance can come from standard operating procedures or professional training, and good feelings from work satisfaction or from good relationships with colleagues.

Highly structured approaches to leadership occur in many contexts outside the humanitarian system. One of the best known (and most studied) structured approaches is the Incident Command System (ICS), initially developed in the United States as a means of making local fire services inter-operable, and which has subsequently been incorporated into many national emergency-management systems. There are some variations between different ICSs, to incorporate different administrative and political systems, and to reflect differing cultural values (KFRI, 2009). However, the core of the system is 'a set of rules and practices to guide the actions of the various organizations responding to disaster... [and a] division of labour and coordination mechanisms' (Buck et al., 2006). These typically include a clear chain of command, with defined roles, job responsibilities and levels of delegated responsibility at each level. In designing the chain of command,

attention is paid to ensuring that nobody reports to more than one person, that nobody supervises more than a manageable number of people, and – critically – that authority is commensurate with responsibility: everyone in the system has full authority to carry out their role effectively (Buck et al., 2006).

Typically, also, there is a clear distinction between planning, operational and logistical functions: each will have their own chain of command, under an overall Incident Commander (Leonard and Snider, 2010). Other common elements of ICSs include: an emphasis on the use of common terminology; standard operating procedures for frequently encountered events (such as house or factory fires) with a strong emphasis on training people in these procedures; and clear, structured approaches to pooling and allocating resources. Many of these features are also found in other environments where structured leadership is practised, including the hospital emergency rooms studied by Klein and the film sets investigated by Bechky (Bechky, 2006; Klein et al., 2006).

These structured approaches to leadership differ in many ways from what we typically encounter in the international humanitarian sector. However, behind these many specifics there appears to be one fundamental point of difference: structured approaches see leadership as an organisational, rather than a purely individual, challenge. This is nicely illustrated by the fact that in ICS, as well as in emergency rooms and on film sets, leaders at all levels are addressed and referred to by their role title, rather than by name. People are important, but the emphasis is on getting the structures and the procedure of the organisation right.

In the humanitarian system, there appears to be increased interest in the structural element of leadership. As the authors of The State of the Humanitarian System 2012 note: 'Survey responses suggest the somewhat more nuanced finding that… the problem is one of structural leadership, not necessarily personal

leadership. Clearly both aspects are found to be wanting by different actors in the system'(ALNAP, 2012b; see also Kent, 2009). In response, 'leading humanitarian NGOs [and other organisations] have moved to invest in better understanding how their systems and structures affect their ability to respond effectively' (Webster and Walker, 2009: 4). To quote only three examples among many: World Vision has investigated the implementation of a modified ICS system to manage the organisation's emergency response (Robinson and Joyce, 2012); UNICEF has moved to clarify the chain of command in emergencies (Lake, 2011) and define Standard Operating Procedures (UNICEF, 2012); and – at an inter-agency level – IASC activities are focusing not only on developing the competencies of Humanitarian Coordinators, but also on building systems to ensure management and institutional support (Messina, 2012).

Benefits of the structured approach

[8] While ICS is, technically, designed to manage incidents, rather than to lead emergency operations, in reality the 'management' functions of the Incident Commander are essentially those identified in this paper with the operational leader, while many of the 'incidents' – urban flooding or earthquake, for example – are those in which international humanitarian organisations might become involved.

Structured forms of leadership are regularly deployed in situations similar to international humanitarian response,[8] that is: situations where large numbers of life or death decisions have to be made on the basis of insufficient information, under political, media and time pressure, and where there is a requirement for coordination among a large number of different organisations. Under these circumstances, 'the response community has been almost universal in its praise of ICS' (Buck et al., 2006, citing Morris, 1986; Veintimiglia, 1986; Ryland, 1990, Carley et al., 1993; Yeager, 1997; Kane, 2001).

The structured model appears to offer solutions to some of the most frequently reported failures of operational humanitarian leadership. Evaluations of humanitarian responses over the past decade suggest that operations are often compromised by:

- lack of clarity about who is making decisions (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Cosgrave et al., 2007; Thammannagoda and Thileepan, 2009)

- loss of leadership, as a consequence either of the emergency event or of rapid staff turnover (Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 2011; Currion, 2010; O'Hagen et al., 2011)

- lack of information or conflicting information hampering decision-making (Bourgeois et al., 2007; Darcy, 2012; Grunewald et al., 2010)

- delays caused by a lack of existing operational procedures, or by over-complicated procedures not adapted to use in emergencies (Brown et al., 2005; Wiles and Sida, 2006; Young et al., 2007).

In contrast, structured-leadership approaches emphasise the importance of being clear about where decisions are made, and ensuring that responsibility, resources and decision-making are aligned, allowing decisions to be made and implemented swiftly. Identifying who is making which decisions has the additional benefit of improving accountability. Clear delegations of authority prevent the operational leader from becoming overwhelmed, and also provide for fast and effective transitions of leadership should the operational leader become incapacitated or leave the leadership position. By investing leadership in the job, rather than in the personality of the individual, 'step-aside' and similar mechanisms become routine, and are no longer seen as a 'vote of no confidence' in the individual. Leadership transitions are supported by established procedures for induction and by mechanisms for information collection and analysis to ensure that people at all levels of leadership have a common picture of the situation. At the same time, agreed operational procedures prevent leaders from wasting time 're-inventing the wheel'. Finally, by adopting an approach similar to the ICS, the international system could increase its ability to work effectively with state governments, many of whom already use variants of Incident Command.

We are not aware of any single humanitarian agency or inter-agency body that has fully instituted a structured approach on the ground,[9] and so been able to demonstrate whether all of these potential benefits can be achieved.

[9] In the course of this review we found very few documents produced by humanitarian organisations which referred to ICS or...

… or UCS approaches, despite their potential applicability in humanitarian contexts, suggesting that there has not, to date, been much discussion between international humanitarians and national civil defence and similar organisations around the question of 'what works' in humanitarian leadership.

However, there are many examples of elements of a structured approach being implemented successfully – and we consider these below.

Challenges

Despite the potential of more structured approaches to improve humanitarian leadership, and notwithstanding the recent increase in interest in these approaches in a humanitarian context, there appears to be significant scepticism about their utility in emergency operations. As noted above, interviewees consistently told one researcher that: 'no matter the structures and systems, in the end, a good response comes down to the people' (Webster and Walker, 2009). Critiques of structured approaches, from both within and outside the international system, tend to focus on two areas: the hierarchical nature of structured leadership; and the inability of structured processes to work effectively in complex situations.

The problem of hierarchy

All of the more 'structured' systems considered here – Incident Command; emergency surgery; the military and even the film industry – rely heavily on role definitions which are hierarchically ordered. This presents a problem for humanitarians, as hierarchical cultures are by no means the norm in most humanitarian organisations (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008; Sorensen, 1997). This may partly reflect the profile and values of many of the individuals attracted to humanitarian work, but it also reflects the structural reality that, in a fast-moving and confused environment, decisions often need to be taken immediately, without being sent up a formal chain of command. An overly hierarchical, 'top-down' approach can prevent individuals from taking the initiative (Leonard and Snider, 2010; T'Hart, 2010).

While this criticism may be valid in some highly structured leadership environments, it overlooks two important considerations. The first is that the leadership structures that we considered in this review explicitly build in clear levels of delegation, so that those 'on the front line' are empowered to take initiative within defined boundaries: they also tend to include mechanisms for further delegation of authority beyond initial boundaries in situations where this is required by the operating context. The second consideration is that, even in the most highly structured environment, there will always be an element of negotiation over roles and responsibilities, to ensure that the structure fits the context (Bechky, 2006; Moynihan, 2009). However, this negotiation is greatly facilitated by the fact that it begins with a clear pattern of authority from which participants can agree to deviate, rather than with a blank sheet of paper.

The issue of hierarchy does not seem, on reflection, to make structured approaches unsuitable for humanitarian operations. However, it does serve as a reminder to organisations thinking of instituting this form of organisation of the importance of building in clear delegations and accepting the necessity for a certain level of flexibility.

The problem of inflexible bureaucratic processes
Writing about the response to the bushfires in Victoria, Australia in 2009, Leonard and Snider say: 'For routine events we can build organizations that have the expertise, equipment, and procedures necessary to accomplish the task. For routine events, the main task is to execute solutions already designed and trained into the organization…. By contrast… extreme events exceed ordinary capabilities and routines – that is what makes them "extreme" (Leonard and Snider, 2010: 5)

This illustrates the second challenge to a structured approach to leadership: that pre-determined processes work only in the situations for which they have been designed, and that when used in other, new or different situations, they will be at best redundant and at worst actively dangerous. The problem of using inflexible processes has been highlighted as a weakness of some ICS and similar systems (Lalonde, 2011; Leonard and Snider, 2010; Waugh and Streib, 2006). As a result, Buck, in A Critical Evaluation of the Incident Command System and NIMS suggests that Incident Command Systems tend to work best in emergency situations such as fires (for which, of course, they were originally designed), as these situations are 'stable and scientifically understood' (Buck et al., 2006: 4).

The danger of using inflexible and inappropriate processes has also been highlighted in the international humanitarian system. Hochschild (quoting Gardner) notes the inability to function effectively in an emergency if 'all behaviour is heavily regulated by a plethora of standard procedures, rules and regulations' (Hochschild, 2010: 104). Evaluations, such as that of UNICEF in Haiti, SC (US) in Pakistan and Care in Ethiopia, suggest that overly complex procedures can decrease initiative and slow down response (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Kirby et al., 2007; Seller, 2010).

However, as discussed in the next section, the overall experience of international humanitarian agencies as reflected in this review does not support the idea that having and using standard operating procedures decreases the effectiveness of response. Rather, the complaint is that, currently, too few agencies have these procedures, and where procedures exist they are not well-enough known. Evaluations suggest that where procedures exist and are followed, they have generally improved leadership and response. The problem then is not so much about the use of procedures per se (just as there is not necessarily a problem with

the use of all hierarchical structures) but about developing the right procedures with the right level of flexibility.

The structured approach in inter-agency settings

Literature from other sectors suggests that, while highly structured leadership systems often work well for single organisations, or for multiple organisations of the same type (such as fire brigades), they appear to be less effective where multiple organisations, with different cultures, mandates and lines of accountability, are put into a single structure.

Just as the ICS is one of the best, and most researched, examples of a single-organisation structured model for emergency response, so the Unified Command System (UCS) is perhaps the best-known example of a structured system that contains multiple organisations. The UCS model grew out of the ICS, and is an attempt to extend the logic of ICS to a wide variety of government and civil society emergency-response groups. In UCS, 'the basic approach is to form a committee of command-level people from each of the organizations importantly involved in the event. Each discipline continues to work under the authority and direction of its own command structure, but those structures are brought together around a table so that the relevant commanders can jointly consider the best course of action. Once this is agreed, orders and directions flow back down to the field through the separate disciplinary channels of direction and authorization. Commonly, the leader of one of the disciplines represented in the unified command will be the "primus inter pares" (first among equals), and others in the structure will defer to his or her decisions… but this operates more as a voluntary consortium than by any form of legal authority, because of the legal bars to subordination just described' (Leonard and Snider, 2010: 10).

Overall, the literature reviewed for this paper tended to suggest that Unified Command Systems have been rather less successful than Incident Command Systems. Buck concludes that 'unified commands are ill suited to the complexity of the recovery and mitigation tasks as well as to a good deal of disaster response efforts' (Buck et al., 2006: 21), and this view is shared by other researchers (Cole, 2000; Wenger et al., 1990). Difficulties arise from competition between agencies, differing organisational priorities, a reticence to put assets under the control of another agency, and incompatible organisational structures and approaches to leadership. Perhaps the most fundamental challenge to the effective implementation of UCS, however, is that, like ICS, it is built on an assumption of hierarchical command, in a situation where this hierarchical command does not exist: rather 'the legitimacy of command is negotiated... [the leader] enjoy[s] only temporary and partial control over members that retain significant autonomy' (Moynihan, 2009: 898). Even the most active proponents of UCS suggest that leadership, in this context, is a matter of creating a situation where 'ego [is] set aside' and 'all the representatives respect the roles of the others listen, express their concerns and needs, and work jointly to develop an action plan' (Reardon, 2005) – a situation which may be easier to describe than to achieve.

To many in the international humanitarian sector, this situation may sound remarkably familiar. Like UCS, the Humanitarian Country Teams (and, to a lesser degree, many other inter-agency fora) attempt to provide collaborative leadership of multiple agencies under a single individual with limited authority over the other team members. This lack of authority can often be frustrating: Kent notes Humanitarian Coordinators feeling a considerable sense of grievance over 'the lack of authority that affect[s] their ability to perform their functions effectively' (Kent, 2009: 21).

What then are the lessons for structuring inter-agency leadership in the international humanitarian system? First, it is perhaps instructive to learn that we are not alone: other – better resourced – entities also struggle to establish effective structures for inter-agency emergency leadership. Second, UCS can work, and, where it works, it is more effective than multiple agencies working independently (Moynihan, 2009). Third, there are some aspects of the structured approach which tend to lead to better collaboration and better leadership, and which could therefore be usefully adopted by inter-agency groups, even if the full UCS model is not adopted (these are outlined in the section below). And finally, where success occurs, it is not a result of the structures and processes alone but equally a result of high levels of trust between agencies and strong interpersonal and inter-agency relationships (Buck et al., 2006; Heightman, n.d.; Moynihan, 2009; T'Hart, 2010; Waugh and Streib, 2006; Yanay et al., 2011). We will return to this theme in later sections.

The structured leadership approach: lessons for humanitarian action

Structured approaches to leadership are regularly employed in emergency conditions, where they address many of the challenges related to leadership in chaotic, time-poor environments. At the same time, they are not a 'magic bullet', and will not address all of the problems that the humanitarian system experiences with operational leadership. Creating structures and procedures which work in emergency contexts is not easy: a delicate balance needs to be preserved between structure and flexibility. And even where this challenge is overcome, structured approaches seem to be easier to apply, and arguably more effective, in single organisations than they are in inter-agency groups, which struggle to reconcile the independence of multiple organisations with a single line of command.

Nor can improved organisational structures and procedures do away completely with the need for skilled leaders and leadership groups: people matter. However, without these structures and procedures, people, however skilled, are likely to find themselves unequal to events. As Buchanan- Smith and Scriven, considering the role of structure in effective leadership, note: 'It was the skills and qualities of the individuals working together within these well-defined structures that were central to the success of the response' (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011: 45, emphasis added). It would appear that both structures and skills are necessary conditions for effective emergency leadership, and, in most cases, neither are sufficient by themselves to ensure effective response.

Research and evaluations in the international humanitarian sector suggest that the system has (at least until recently) undervalued the importance of structures in enabling – and in some cases substituting for – leadership. As a result, key structures are generally not in place, and then operational effectiveness suffers. On the other hand, where these structures and procedures are in place, leadership functions are exercised more effectively, and operations appear to be more successful. Therefore, while this review would suggest that humanitarians should, at the very least, exercise caution before adopting Incident or Unified Command Systems wholesale, there are three good practices which are embedded within ICS and other structured approaches to leadership which could significantly improve humanitarian leadership, in both single agencies and in inter-agency groups. These are: role clarity, effective information management, and use of standard operating principles.

Getting roles right

The majority of evaluations of humanitarian action reviewed make it clear that roles – and the roles and specific authority of leaders, in particular – are often very poorly defined in humanitarian operations. Role definition is equally a

challenge for single agencies, within 'families' of agencies working together, and in inter-agency groups. These same evaluations call, fairly consistently, for greater definition of roles (Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 2011; Bourgeois et al., 2007; Cosgrave et al., 2007; Currion, 2010; Donnell and Kakande, 2007; Foster et al., 2010; Reid and Stibbe, 2010; Steets et al., 2010; Thammannagoda and Thileepan, 2009; Young et al., 2007).

Within agencies, the emphasis should be on: creating a clear line of command; identifying which roles (or in some cases, groups of roles) in this line have final decision-making authority; and ensuring that those roles with decision-making authority also have control of resources to implement these decisions. Building on the experience of other sectors, agencies should pay particular attention to how they can make leadership roles 'modular'. This means ensuring that smaller or more localised emergencies are addressed by leaders close to the scene, with the delegated authority to act, while, if a situation escalates, the leader automatically cedes overall authority to a leader further up the line.

The evaluations suggest that role definition is as important, if not more important, in inter-agency leadership teams. Here, what is required is not only clarification of the respective roles of the various members of the leadership team, but also of the roles of their organisations in the implementation of any strategy created. The literature on models of shared leadership outside the humanitarian sector consistently points to the importance of role definition in enabling effective group activity and leadership by the group (Bechky, 2006; Flin, 1997; Meyerson et al., 1996; Moynihan, 2009), and there is some indication that this is also true in the field of humanitarian response.

For example, the clear decision-making roles established by the Shelter Cluster in cyclone Nargis allowed timely, actionable decisions to be made (Alexander, 2009) . Where roles are known and clear, groups can devote more time to answering questions of 'what shall we do, and how?', without getting bogged down in repetitive conversations around 'who should do it'. As poor role definition is a common cause of conflict, clarifying roles within the leadership group will generally lead to decreased conflict (Beckhard, 1972; Dyer, 1987; Handy, 1999). It will also in many cases increase trust within the group as, in general, people tend to expect that roles – such as 'the doctor 'or 'the medical organisation' – will behave more predictably than individuals (Meyerson et al., 1996).

At the same time, experience from other sectors suggests that roles should not be defined or interpreted too rigidly: once they have been clearly established, the individuals holding the roles will, and should, negotiate them to fit the specific capacities of the individuals and requirements of the situation (Bechky, 2006). However, this negotiation occurs within a framework of clear mutual expectations, and in a situation where it is possible to 'revert' to the default where situations become contested or unclear. In multi-agency leadership teams, it is perhaps even more important that roles are able to change over the course of the programme (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Lalonde, 2011)and from place to place: while there is value in having 'default' organisational roles, there should also be a place to define roles depending on the capacities of each organisation in any given operation (Alexander, 2009; Stephenson Jr, 2005), and to renegotiate roles – within broadly agreed boundaries – over time.

As with other elements of a structured approach, the creation and strengthening of clear lines of command with explicit role definitions, can, paradoxically, create the flexibility central to emergency response. The structure here provides a basic template that can be applied in most circumstances, freeing up leadership energy

to concentrate on those situations where the basic template does not apply. This seeming paradox has been recognised in other sectors for some time: 'medical wards with the strongest hierarchical component also demonstrate the greatest amount of autonomy' (Stelling and Bucher, 1972: 443).

Assessment and understanding

A central element of Incident Command Systems is a clear and agreed mechanism for collecting, assessing, interpreting and sharing information, to ensure that leaders at all levels of the line of command are operating on the same basic understanding of the situation. Where multiple actors are involved in a response, and particularly where these actors are working together to lead the response, it becomes even more important to have a common picture of what is going on. In both single- and multiple-agency structures, assessments from other sectors suggest that this type of information management leads to better decisions, and also enables actors to cohere around these decisions and execute them more effectively (Bigley and Roberts, 2001; Buck et al., 2006; Flin, 1997; Jensen and Brehmer, 2005; Day et al., 2004). Again, this is an area where evaluations of humanitarian action suggest that more work is required. These evaluations have often pointed out that the lack of common assessment and analytical frameworks leads to delays, gaps in assistance, lack of appropriate assistance, decisions based on prejudice, unnecessarily long 'information-sharing' sessions, and conflict at the leadership level (Bourgeois et al., 2007; Darcy, 2012; Global Education Cluster, 2010; Grunewald et al., 2010; Walden et al., 2006; Young et al., 2007).

In their real-time evaluation of the Haiti emergency, Grunewald et al. identified the lack of a common assessment framework as a very significant problem. They proposed an outline framework focusing on four areas: analysis of the context and how it may evolve; analysis of needs and how they may evolve; existing capacities and support requirements; and constraints to response (Grunewald et al., 2010).

The experiences of both our own and other sectors also provide some pointers to how information frameworks should function. The first and perhaps most important element of a successful framework is that it is collective: information comes in from leaders working across the emergency response, and there is a form of (rapid) collective assessment. A collective approach produces a better picture, and leads to a more coordinated response. Interestingly, it seems to be as important to use a collective approach within individual organisations as it is in multi-agency bodies. Jensen, in experiments conducted with military teams in Sweden, has shown that – once a certain, basic level of accuracy is reached – it is more important that the picture of what is happening is shared than that it is accurate: greater accuracy does not improve results, but greater levels of sharing does (Jensen and Brehmer, 2005).

The key elements required for a collective approach to work appear to be: a common vocabulary and terminology; a common framework for building shared understanding; and role clarity and a positive social climate within the leadership group. In the first two areas, at least, the conditions appear to be in place – or almost in place – in the international humanitarian system. Most humanitarians arguably share a common vocabulary (although without great terminological exactitude – there are multiple, subtly different interpretations of common terms such as 'accountability' and now 'resilience'). There is an increased understanding of the need for, and collaboration around, common approaches, as evidenced by the development of the EMMA tools, and by the NATF and the ACAPS project (ALNAP, 2012b), as well as an increased focus on creating common pictures within agencies (Teklu et al., 2012). At the same time, advances in technology allow some of this information exchange to occur virtually and graphically (with information being plotted onto maps, for example), which simultaneously makes the information more accessible and decreases the amount of time that leadership

groups need to spend on information exchange (Letouze et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2011; Steets et al., 2010).

A second important feature of effective information management systems is their dynamic nature. Mechanisms should be established to ensure that the common picture is continually updated as new information becomes available. This characteristic of the common picture – the fact that it grows over time as members of the team add new information –has led to it being called 'the bubble' in some ICSs (Bigley and Roberts, 2001). The humanitarian system is increasingly recognising the importance of an iterative approach to information management, as demonstrated by the draft Humanitarian Programme Cycle, which emphasises the importance of updating plans 'as more and better assessment information becomes available' (IASC, 2012d).

Finally, effective mechanisms should incorporate clear procedures to ensure that any common picture – any 'bubble' – is passed to new members of the team as they arrive. At present, this does not seem to be universally the case. The very high levels of turnover at the leadership level in humanitarian emergencies do not seem, in many cases, to be accompanied by mechanisms to ensure that incoming leaders receive full induction and briefing: if a bubble is not carefully handed over, it tends to pop, and needs to be rebuilt from scratch.

The importance of flexible operating principles
Armed with a common and evolving understanding of the situation, leaders can identify options and act. In many cases, and particularly when facing situations which are recurrent or which conform to a known 'type', fast and effective action can be supported by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Just as clarity around roles saves time, so pre-determined agreements about how to respond and common standards for response allow for faster decision-making, free time for

dealing with complex and unexpected issues, and prevent unnecessary conflict. Where humanitarian leadership groups have adhered to common standards and procedures, responses appear to have been more effective (Alexander, 2009; Goyder and James, 2002; Young et al., 2007).[10] However, the evaluations suggest that SOPs are often not in place, both within agencies and in inter-agency groups (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Wiles and Sida, 2006; Young et al., 2007), and that where they are, staff are not always aware of them (Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 2011; Brown et al., 2005; Global Education Cluster, 2010). Thammannagoda dryly notes that 'the height of an emergency is not the best time' to be training staff in standard approaches (Thammannagoda and Thileepan, 2009: 5).

Evaluations of humanitarian action, echoing experiences from other sectors, also note the need for flexibility in the use of SOPs and standards (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; De Silva et al., 2006; Kirby et al., 2007; Seller, 2010; Webster and Walker, 2009). We have seen already that, while standard procedures can be an extremely effective way to address 'standard' situations, they can also be counterproductive, and even dangerous, when used in a new context for which they are not appropriate. As with role definition, the issue here is one of balancing clarity and standardisation with flexibility.

How can this be achieved in practice? Again, we can learn from other sectors, as well as from the developing practice in international humanitarian agencies. Perhaps the most important element in ensuring flexibility is to avoid unnecessary detail, and to aim more for operating principles (which can better accommodate a variety of specific contexts) than for tighter operating procedures. The idea of operating procedures based on 'simple rules' as an approach to addressing complex situations has become increasingly common in a variety of sectors over the past decade (Eisenhardt and Sull, 2001; Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1998). A 'simple rules' approach is illustrated by the (perhaps apocryphal) instructions

given to US Marines to 'Take the high ground, keep moving, and stay in touch', the idea being that, where these rules are followed by everyone, they are most likely to lead to a successful outcome in most conflicts. A similar approach has been suggested in the context of civil defence and emergency response in Australia (T'Hart, 2010).

A second important component in building flexibility is to ensure that the process of assessment (outlined above) includes routine consideration of whether the emerging situation has become one where standard procedures do not apply, and – where this is the case – for leaders to make a clear and explicit statement that they are no longer working within SOPs. Bigley and Roberts (2001) describe how fire services achieve this, while still working towards agreed overall goals. In a humanitarian context, Webster and Walker note the importance of empowering operational leaders 'to make decisions and adjust plans as they see fit' (Webster and Walker, 2009: 29). To do this, leaders need to be able to say that they are abandoning the standard playbook – and remain accountable for the results.

6. The shared leadership approach

While history offers many examples of shared leadership, in situations as diverse as republican Rome, the USSR, and the indigenous cultures of north America, the last two decades have seen a notable increase in shared-leadership practice, driven largely by social and technological change (Benson and Blackman, 2011; Gronn, 2002; Pearce and Sims, 2002).

We have suggested above that the humanitarian sector, or at least much of the literature produced by the sector, assumes that that the functions of leadership are best exercised by a highly skilled individual. In making this assumption, researchers and evaluators are subscribing to a well-established tradition which sees 'leadership, by definition, [being] concerned with a formal leader who... influences members of a group or organisation in order to achieve specified goals' (Huxham and Vangen, 2000). There is, however, no *a priori* reason why the basic functions of leadership – providing vision and objectives, creating a plan to achieve these objectives, and collectively realising this plan – should not be shared among a group of people.

In the corporate sector, 'the trend... has been to expand capacity for leadership at the top of business organisations' (O'Toole et al., 2002) with many companies sharing leadership responsibilities between CEO and COO, or more broadly, across a 'top team' (Bennett and Miles, 2006; Wyman, 1998; Yukl, 2010). There is increasing interest in some militaries in the idea of shared leadership (Friedrich et al., 2011). In some sectors, at least in the UK, the idea and terminology of

'distributed' leadership 'has become almost commonplace' – although in many cases use of the term is more rhetorical than descriptive (Gosling et al., 2009: 5). In our own sector, shared leadership may be more common (in practice, if not in theory) then we think: the ALNAP study, Leadership in Action, noted that 'many of [the cases studied]… point to a strong element of collective leadership' (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011: 55). Hochschild, in his study of effective leadership in the United Nations, concludes that 'leadership is always exercised by a close and variable network of people', rather than by an individual acting alone (Hochschild, 2010: 106).

Shared-leadership practices take a variety of different forms and go under a variety of names: in fact, one of the problems in studying shared leadership is the number of different models of leadership that exist under this umbrella (Benson and Blackman, 2011; Day et al., 2004). In the literature reviewed for this paper, the different approaches to leadership appear to be distinguished by a combination of three factors: the degree to which decision-making is shared among a group; the degree to which accountability is shared among a group; and the number of people who are accountable and making decisions at any one time. Using these three factors, the various approaches can be placed on a loose continuum. At one end of this continuum would be autocratic leadership by a single individual. Here, only one person exercises decision-making power (although they may consult others) and the same person is held accountable. At the other extreme of the continuum would be the leadership of the anarchist militias described in George Orwell's Homage to Catalonia (Orwell, 2000), where leadership emerges from discussions among the entire group: all are equally accountable, all are equally involved in decision-making, and all are leading at the same time. Between these extremes are various, more commonly encountered, combinations of accountability, decision-making and consecutive or simultaneous leadership.

For example: moving along the continuum away from the individual, autocratic leader, one would pass the individual consultative leader (who is solely accountable, but listens to the views of a larger group before making decisions) and perhaps make a first 'stop' at the 'Incident Command Model' of leadership which we considered in the previous section. This is still more an individual than a shared model (and in fact is often described in opposition to more collaborative styles of leadership: see for example Waugh and Streib, 2006). However, as previously noted, the model relies on high levels of delegation (Moynihan, 2009), which means that, while the Commander is accountable for performance and establishes performance objectives, actual decision-making around how to achieve these objectives is delegated to a large number of other leaders (Bigley and Roberts, 2001). However, only one person ever has responsibility for making any given decision at any one time.

Moving a little further along the continuum, and perhaps into the arena of 'shared leadership', we encounter situations where, although there is a clear leader, this person acts as a 'first among equals'. Accountability is shared, to a degree, across the group, and decisions are made by the whole group acting together, or by subsets of the whole group: so several people are making each decision. This model has similarities to the Humanitarian Country Team. In the review, it occurred in several variations: as 'collateral leadership' in a study of primary health care partnerships (Alexander et al., 2011) as 'shared leadership' in some private-sector top teams (Bennett and Miles, 2006; O'Toole et al., 2002; Yukl, 2010); and in descriptions of the Unified Command System (Buck et al., 2006; Leonard and Snider, 2010; Moynihan, 2009; Reardon, 2005).

Further still along the continuum are the 'Dynamic Delegation' model, identified in Trauma Resuscitation Units in a US hospital (Klein et al., 2006) where three people are jointly accountable, and further delegate decision-making

responsibility to other members of the surgical team. Here, accountability is shared between several people, as is decision- making. However, because different people take it in turns to make decisions, only one person makes decisions at a time. This 'serial emergence' of leadership can be colourfully referred to as 'whack a mole' leadership (Friedrich et al., 2009) because leaders 'pop up' – or are pushed up – from the group over time. A variation of this model is the situation described by Barry, where a private-sector management team shares accountability and most decision-making, but each member makes specialised decisions within a specific area of competence (Barry, 1991).

Finally, there are models where there is no formal leader, and where accountability and decision-making are shared more or less equally across all members, and decisions are made by members acting together. In the literature review this model is found both within organisations – for example in autonomous work teams (Taggar et al., 1999), road-maintenance teams (Hiller et al., 2006) and the management of healthcare facilities (Denis et al., 2001) – and in inter-organisational collaborations (Huxham and Vangen, 2000).

This overview of shared-leadership forms is not, by any means, exhaustive.[11] However, it serves to demonstrate that there are a variety of potential shared-leadership options available to humanitarians, both for the leadership of individual organisations and for the leadership of inter-agency groups. Shared leadership, far from being an eccentric or unusual idea, is increasingly a commonplace in a wide variety of other professions and sectors.

[11] Nor does it take into account the fact that what actually happens in a team or organisation may be very different from what is meant to happen – in many systems, leadership is in fact shared more broadly then the organogram would suggest.

Benefits of the shared-leadership approach

Increased interest in shared-leadership approaches has led various researchers to consider the degree to which different models of shared leadership lead to positive outcomes.

- Pearce and Sims contrasted the effectiveness of change-management teams using a vertical leadership structure with that of teams who shared leadership (Pearce and Sims, 2002).

- Hiller correlated the degree of collective leadership occurring within road-maintenance teams with various measures of effectiveness (Hiller et al., 2006).

- Carson and colleagues identified the contribution of shared leadership to team performance among consulting teams (Carson et al., 2007).

- Sivasubramaniam and colleagues considered the relationship between shared leadership and eam effectiveness among teams of students (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2002).

All four studies suggest that shared leadership leads to more effective work, and this finding is echoed elsewhere (Carson et al., 2007; Friedrich et al., 2009). In fact, in conducting this literature review, we were able to find reference to only one piece of experimental research that did not show a positive relationship between shared leadership and elements of performance (Neubert, 1999, cited in Hiller et al., 2006).

None of these studies considers the effectiveness of shared leadership in an emergency context. However, the fact that shared-leadership approaches have become more popular as the business environment has become less stable and more complex suggests that there are features of shared leadership which might be relevant to the complex, volatile situations in which humanitarian response occurs. In particular, shared-leadership approaches can potentially lead to better decisions, decrease pressure on a single leader, and improve the likelihood that decisions will be carried out.

Better decisions in complex situations

One of the most important arguments put forward for shared leadership is that it allows multiple perspectives, approaches and skill-sets to be present at the heart of decision-making (Barry, 1991; O'Toole et al., 2002).While this diversity is likely to increase conflict and disagreement, it is also more likely to provide effective

responses to complex problems: 'the problems that no single leader can be expected to solve… challenges confronting a team for which it has no pre-existing… solutions' (Day et al., 2004: 872; see also Bigley and Roberts, 2001; Gosling et al., 2009; Lalonde, 2011).

We have already seen that complex and unprecedented situations present very real problems for individual decision-makers (who will tend to put too much emphasis on previous experience, even where they consult others) and for highly structured leadership approaches (where standard operating procedures are unable to provide effective guidance). In these contexts, a collaborative approach pools perspectives and experiences, and can potentially provide more effective direction. This theoretical advantage seems to be borne out in the real world: the risks of leaving decision-making in such a complex environment to a single leader, and the benefits, in terms of understanding and decision quality, of joint or collaborative approaches to decision-making are underlined in a number of evaluations and reviews of humanitarian work (Grunewald et al., 2010; Khaled et al., 2010; Kirby et al., 2007; Murthy, 2007; Reid and Stibbe, 2010; Thammannagoda and Thileepan, 2009; Majid et al., 2007).

A related argument is that sharing leadership prevents any single leader from becoming overwhelmed. As the business environment in the corporate sector has become more globalised, and technology has increased the amount of information and the speed of information flow, some corporate organisations have moved towards shared management structures in order to share the load (Denis et al., 2001; Gronn, 2002). As we have seen, humanitarian leaders can easily become overwhelmed: a collective approach to leadership might prevent this from happening.

Improved continuity

Even where a single leader is not overwhelmed, there is always the danger that they might leave the organisation or operation. Where the leader 'owns' the plan, or is instrumental in influencing others to accept a plan, their sudden departure can 'decapitate' the organisation and derail operations. Increasingly rapid turnover of senior executives (Economist, 2012) is leading many private-sector organisations to question the wisdom of putting all of their leadership eggs in one basket – another reason for the increased interest in shared leadership in the private sector (O'Toole et al., 2002). In the humanitarian context, there is always the possibility that organisational leaders might be killed or incapacitated (ALNAP, 2012c; Grunewald et al., 2010). Less traumatically, humanitarian agencies typically experience very high levels of staff turnover over the course of an emergency response (Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 2011; Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Brooks and Haselkorn, 2005; Currion, 2010; Darcy, 2012; De Silva et al., 2006; O'Hagen et al., 2011). A structured approach to leadership addresses this phenomenon by ensuring clear delegations of responsibility and structured information sharing. Another, potentially complementary approach to ensuring continuity is to build the leadership capacity of groups and teams in the humanitarian operation.

More effective collaboration

It is a commonplace to point out that people (and organisations) more readily support what they create. This is undoubtedly one of the key strengths of sharing leadership: by increasing ownership of a vision and a plan, shared-leadership approaches also have the potential to increase enthusiasm for implementation. Rather than relying on the individual leader to inspire followers and 'take them along', shared leadership decreases the duality between 'leader' and 'led': a broader set of actors has a personal stake in ensuring the success of a plan. In the corporate sector, this has led to an interest in shared leadership for (potentially disruptive) change programmes (Benson and Blackman, 2011). In the humanitarian sector, the

positive effects of shared decision-making mechanisms in creating engagement for action across several organisations have been noted in several operations (Alexander, 2009; Cosgrave et al., 2007; Khaled et al., 2010; Majid et al., 2007; Murthy, 2007).

Arguments against shared leadership in the humanitarian context

So, can we assume that shared leadership is the best approach to humanitarian contexts? Not conclusively. Although the experimental research from outside the humanitarian sector is positive, the case-study literature suggests that there are plenty of situations where shared leadership does not work particularly well. Shared-leadership mechanisms are often 'fragile' and work under 'constant dynamic tension' (Denis et al., 2001: 24). They are 'likely to be thwarted by difficulties and dilemmas', and the costs might, in many situations, outweigh the benefits (Huxham and Vangen, 2000: 1171).

As with the other two models of leadership discussed here, shared leadership appears to have both strengths and weaknesses in humanitarian situations. The key weaknesses are difficulties in coming to decisions (and particularly to coming to decisions rapidly) and the danger of poor-quality, compromise decisions.

Slow decision-making

Just as many of the benefits of shared leadership derive from the diversity present within the leadership group, so do most of the costs. Where an individual takes a leadership role, this person can mediate between different points of view to make a final decision. Where there is no individual leader, the group has to make this final decision – and so the greater the diversity of the group, the greater the potential both for good decisions, on the one hand, or for poor, compromise decisions and conflict, on the other (Barry, 1991). The problem is often one of divided loyalties – most members of the leadership group will be there because they represent

either a division or office within an organisation (if the leadership group is operating within a single organisation) or an organisation which is part of the group of organisations (in a cluster or HCT). The tension is often heightened by two important factors. First, the diversity of objectives among the organisations included leads to situations where a common strategy is almost impossible to achieve (Hashim, 2007; Steets et al., 2010; Stobbaerts et al., 2007). Second, these structures are often used to make funding allocations between members, further intensifying the competition for funding that exists between many humanitarian agencies (Binder et al., 2010; Bonard et al., 2010; Steets et al., 2010; Young et al., 2007).

Perhaps the most evident negative consequence of this tension around decision-making is the time required for a group to make decisions – particularly if there is an expectation that the group will make decisions by consensus. While there are alternative group decision-making models to consensus (see below), they do not seem to be used frequently in the humanitarian system. Several observers see the problem not in the use of consensus decision-making per se, but in the fact that group members and coordinators are inadequately trained in how to get to consensus (Bourgeois et al., 2007; Brooks and Haselkorn, 2005).

Groupthink and compromise

A second criticism of shared leadership centres on decision quality. While, as we have seen above, groups have the potential to make better decisions than individuals, they can also, under certain conditions, make substantially worse decisions. Perhaps the most often-cited example of poor group decision making is the 'groupthink' phenomenon, first identified by Irving Janis in the 1970s (Janis, 1973). Groupthink is a condition where groups with a very strong sense of esprit de corps create a mode of thinking in which loyalty to the group prevents anyone raising controversial issues or questioning weak arguments. As a result,

these groups will often take excessively risky decisions. However, while the idea of groupthink has attracted a lot of attention, studies of the phenomenon have been inconclusive, with a majority of studies designed to test the groupthink hypothesis producing negative results (Aldag and Fuller, 1993; Park, 1990).

Certainly, the evaluations considered for this review did not provide any examples of overly cohesive humanitarian groups taking risky decisions in order to preserve harmony within the group: but this might be less a criticism of the groupthink model, and more a reflection of the fact that the evaluations did not identify many cohesive groups. Alternatively, it might be a reflection of the high levels of risk aversion noted in humanitarian agencies and the humanitarian sector as a whole (Brown et al., 2005; Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011; Hochschild, 2010; Humanitarian Futures, 2012; Wiles and Sida, 2006). In fact, the problems with humanitarian group decision-making seem to be that, divided as the groups often are, they tend to the safest, or 'lowest common denominator' decisions (Foster et al., 2010) – or, as in the recent Horn of Africa crisis, fail to take decisions at all (Hillier and Dempsey, 2012; Levine et al., 2011; Hillier and Dempsey, 2012) . When groups do take decisions, they often fail to specify who is tasked to implement the decision, or leave implementation to the whole group, with the consequence that nothing happens (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; O'Hagen et al., 2011).

The shared-leadership approach in inter-agency settings

In many cases, as Huxham and Vangen suggest, the potential benefits to an organisation of shared leadership will be outweighed by these constraints, and by the confusion that inevitably occurs when moving from an individual to a shared model – which implies significant organisational and attitudinal change. Any individual organisation considering implementation of shared-leadership forms should think carefully about this choice (Huxham and Vangen, 2000).

In inter-agency structures, however, the situation is slightly different. These structures contain individual agencies with different and multiple accountabilities: each agency is accountable to its own board or governance mechanism, as well as – in most cases – to several donors for specific activities or elements of funding. Even if the agency representatives wanted to (and this is a big 'if'), they would generally not be able to pass final responsibility for developing and implementing strategy, and with it, accountability for the success of operations, to the leader of the inter-agency group. As a result, inter-agency mechanisms, while often convened by a single 'leader' (more often styled a 'coordinator') are in reality composed of a number of individual leaders, each with responsibility for their own area of activities, who need to find ways to pool or share leadership to ensure more effective collaborative action.

The literature suggests that this distribution of authority is often not fully explored or understood. Instead we see actors attempting to work in inter-agency mechanisms as if they follow the clear logic of a line of command. So leaders feel a 'sense of grievance' over their 'lack of authority' (Kent, 2009: 21), while group members either refuse to accept the leader's nominal authority with the result that there are '11 captains of the same team on a football pitch' (Polastro, et al., 2011: 48) or abdicate their own responsibilities, expecting the 'coordinator' or 'facilitator' to lead (Cosgrave et al., 2007; Currion, 2010; Featherstone, 2010; Levine et al., 2011; Young et al., 2007).

One way to address this situation would be to make the reality closer to the 'leader–led' model with which we are intuitively comfortable, by merging the various independent organisations, at least to the degree where their interests and accountabilities are more closely aligned. This course of action appears unlikely, at least for the time being.

Instead, the humanitarian system needs to find ways to create unitary leadership within a diverse group. One possibility is to rely on the personal (as opposed to positional) authority of the leader: on their ability to come to decisions acceptable to all parties, and their exceptional talents as a negotiator and ability to influence their peers. We have already considered the difficulties with this approach; it is likely to be even more challenging in a situation where different members of the group have different organisational priorities and interests. And, given the multiple accountabilities within the group, it would not be possible for this person to make a unilateral decision binding on all the members of the group.

A third way is to bring the various organisations, and their representatives, more closely together through common mechanisms and procedures. This structured approach may certainly make inter-agency bodies work more smoothly and effectively, but it will not prevent all disagreement, and, when this disagreement occurs, the leader 'has only tenuous authority' (Alexander et al., 2011: 343), and certainly does not have the authority to make a final decision. We have already noted this as a weakness of Unified Command Systems, which in many ways humanitarian inter-agency groups resemble.

All this brings us to what is, perhaps, the 'least worst' option: accepting that HCTs, Clusters and other groups are already based on a form of distributed authority and accountability, and to try to create shared-leadership mechanisms that mirror this fact by sharing accountability and authority. The humanitarian system has made tentative moves in this direction. Guidance issued to HCTs in 2009 made the Humanitarian Country Team as a whole responsible for 'agreeing on common strategic issues' (IASC, 2009a): although more recent guidance appears to transfer much of this authority from the group back to the individual HC: the HCT now provides 'input to strategy', but is not responsible for agreeing strategy, although the Concept Paper notes that it is 'still preferable the decisions are made by consensus within the HCT' (IASC, 2012e).

At the same time, a number of inter-agency bodies have spontaneously and successfully experimented with elements of shared-leadership approaches (see for example Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011; Majid et al., 2007; McPeak, 2001). However, the system does not appear to have provided the sort of concerted attention to shared leadership that would be required to support such a significant attitudinal shift. As Featherstone concludes: 'it's puzzling that greater investment hasn't been made to support HCTs as a team rather than focusing efforts on individual members' (Featherstone, 2012). If these inter-agency structures are to work as shared-leadership structures – and this appears to be required by their composition – humanitarians will need to think more clearly about what shared leadership actually means, and how it can be supported.

The shared-leadership approach: lessons for humanitarian action

The idea of sharing leadership functions within a group, which may appear unconventional to many humanitarians, is becoming increasingly mainstream in other sectors. Shared-leadership approaches have been demonstrated to lead to better outcomes than individual leadership in a variety of contexts, and are often considered to be particularly effective in situations of complexity. In humanitarian operations, shared leadership has been successful, particularly in inter-agency contexts (Alexander, 2009; Goyder and James, 2002; Majid et al., 2007; McPeak, 2001; Murthy, 2007; Reid and Stibbe, 2010; Teklu et al., 2012). However, shared-leadership systems are not 'magic bullets': they can be difficult to introduce, and do not necessarily work well in situations where decisions need to be made quickly.

At the level of the individual agency, there may, in many cases, be good arguments for 'opening up' operational leadership to a team (and, anecdotally, this often happens in country offices), particularly if leaders will be expected to participate in shared-leadership groups at an inter-agency level (Waugh and Streib, 2006). However, agencies should be aware of the challenges involved, and the fact that

that building effective shared leadership into a system 'requires substantial, sustained effort' (Barry, 1991: 12; and see also Benson and Blackman, 2011; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; O'Toole et al., 2002). On the other hand, within inter-agency groups which have strategy-setting and implementation functions, there may not be any viable alternative to making this sustained effort, as shared leadership is more a matter of necessity than of choice.

Case studies and reviews from other sectors, as well as evaluations of humanitarian action, paint a fairly consistent picture of 'what works' in terms of establishing effective mechanisms for shared leadership in complex, time-poor environments. Some of the key factors for success are the same as those for structured approaches: ensuring clarity of roles within the leadership group; establishing mechanisms for building a common picture of the evolving situation; and agreeing minimum shared operating principles. In addition, there are also elements specific to shared leadership: making the fact of shared leadership explicit; being clear about the membership of the leadership group and the decision-making process used by the leadership group; mitigating tensions that exist around 'dual membership'; and creating opportunities to build relationships over time.

A clear and explicit statement of what (collective) 'leadership' means
The first and fundamental step towards establishing effective shared leadership is to commit clearly and unequivocally to the idea that accountability is held jointly and that decisions are made jointly. 'Leadership' is not an absolute reality, but a mental model, and different people will very often have different assumptions about what leadership is, and how it is best exercised. Where these assumptions are not clarified, there is a danger that each person around the table will act on their own expectations, and that this will rapidly lead to chaos or conflict. The internal agency documents reviewed in the course of preparing this paper suggest

that agencies could do more to clarify what they mean by 'leadership', and what is expected of whom. In many cases, agencies are framing their expectations of leadership – both within the single agency and in inter-agency fora – as an uneasy compromise between leadership by a 'team' and leadership by an individual, without being explicit about where the 'buck stops'. If agencies want to introduce shared leadership, they need to be very clear that the buck stops with the team. This would probably require, among other changes, revising performance-management systems to include the achievement of team, as well as individual, objectives.

However, any agency committing to shared leadership should also be clear that the approach is not a panacea, and will not magically improve all aspects of leadership. The leadership of humanitarian operations is an inherently difficult task, whether conducted by an individual or a group. Shared leadership brings significant benefits, but there are also costs: this should be spelt out clearly from the beginning.

Clarity about how collective leadership works in practice

Being explicit about what leadership means is an important first step, but it is by no means sufficient. To put shared leadership into practice, the leadership team will need clarity and agreement about membership, decision-making processes, and the role of the individual with formal 'leadership' or coordination responsibility. We look at this last point in more detail below: suffice to say here that the structural logic of most organisations and inter-agency groups is not well adapted to purely egalitarian leadership teams. Most teams will require someone to hold a 'leadership' position, as 'first among equals', even when the organisation has committed to sharing leadership. At the same time, the nature of this position will fundamentally change if the organisation moves to a shared-leadership model.

Clarity around membership

In terms of membership, it is a fairly common observation that, over a certain number, the functionality of any team declines rapidly (Pearce and Sims, 2002). This phenomenon has been observed in domestic emergencies (Lalonde, 2011; Moynihan, 2009) and in the humanitarian sector, where several evaluations – particularly of the Haiti response – have made the connection between large group size and an inability to create and manage the implementation of common strategy (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Currion, 2010; Global Education Cluster, 2010; Grunewald et al., 2010). Big groups tend to become 'talking shops'. At the same time, smaller teams have been shown to be effective in fulfilling leadership functions. How, then, to determine who should be on the leadership team? There is no hard and fast rule to follow here, but there seem to be two clear criteria.

First, membership of the leadership team should go to those who control important resources, and who are willing, in principle, to put these resources towards the achievement of a common objective. Important resources are not necessarily financial – they may include relationships, authority, knowledge or materials – but, as the Malawi NGO consortium showed, it is important that those on the team are able to determine how the resources are used without reference to a higher decision-making authority (Goyder and James, 2002; see also Reardon, 2005 for discussion of this point in an incident command context). As resource levels for any given agency differ from one country to another, this approach would also suggest that which agency or department is a member of any leadership team should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The second criterion is that members of the leadership team need to be working towards the same primary goals. It is probably more realistic to expect coordination, rather than leadership, in situations where different actors have

separate activities aiming at different goals (Hashim, 2007; Stobbaerts et al., 2007; but note an opposing view from Murthy, 2007).

Agreed procedures for making decisions

The inability to make rapid, actionable decisions is often cited as the most important weakness of shared leadership. However, experience from humanitarian operations appears to show that leadership teams can make good decisions quickly, where they have clarity around three elements: which decisions are made where, the process the group uses to get to a decision point, and the method by which decisions are made.

We have already considered the importance of clarifying structures, and so will concentrate here on the second and third of these points: decision-making processes and methods. The distinction between process and method is important. The process leads up to, and follows from, the moment at which the decision is made. The method determines how the decision is made. Ideal decision-making processes in complex emergencies should incorporate discrete, explicit phases for: goal clarification, option generation, option assessment, decision, implementation and review. The mental models used for decision-making and the impacts of recent decisions should be continuously reviewed, and the group should expect to revise decisions if the outcomes differ significantly from those expected (Einhorn and Hogarth, 1987; Flin, 1997).

At the decision phase, the choice of method becomes important. Anecdotally, humanitarian organisations often expect to make decisions by unanimous consent: 'The logically perfect but least attainable kind of decision... where everyone truly agrees on the course of action' (Schein, 1988: 74). This is often confused with consensus, although consensus is better understood as a situation where everyone feels that they had a fair chance to influence the decision, and nobody

opposes the decision strongly enough to block it (Schein, 2006). However, neither unanimous consent nor consensus is an ideal method for making decisions in a hurry. Groups can agree in advance to majority or multiple voting, or, if attempting to achieve consensus, can use a 'set quorum' approach (Reddy, 1994; Schein, 2006). Although there was little discussion of decision-making techniques in the evaluations reviewed for this paper, it would appear that, in many cases, groups are not aware of general facilitation processes – presumably including processes to facilitate decision-making – or require training in their use (Bourgeois et al., 2007; De Silva et al., 2006; Polastro et al., 2011; Steets et al., 2010). On the other hand, the evaluations do show situations, both in single organisations and in inter-agency groups – the Save US team in Pakistan, the Shelter Cluster in Myanmar, and the Care Field Office Leadership Team in Ethiopia – where groups appeared to be making effective decisions (Alexander, 2009; Khaled et al., 2010; Kirby et al., 2007).

Relationships and trust – building a true leadership team

Incident and Unified Command models of leadership have tended to emphasise the importance of shared procedures and mechanisms in acting as 'glue' to hold the team together. The theory of Incident Command suggests that these elements replace the need for personal relationships and inter-personal trust, and so allow groups of people who have not worked together before, and who do not have any pre-existing relationship, to respond rapidly and successfully to a disaster. However, the experience of Incident Command suggests that systems do not in fact replace trust: the effective use of procedures relies, at least to a degree, on relationships formed through the experience of training together, or of working together in previous disasters (Bigley and Roberts, 2001; Buck et al., 2006; Moynihan, 2009; T'Hart, 2010; Waugh and Streib, 2006; Yanay et al., 2011). Meyerson, in her analysis of 'Dallas organisations', where groups of professionals come together for a single piece of work, suggests that it is possible to create 'Swift Trust' among strangers

who have not worked together before, but only in conditions where the team members are likely to work together again (Meyerson et al., 1996; see also Bechky, 2006). Even in those situations where emphasis is placed on clarifying roles and procedures as a way of decreasing the importance of trust and relationships, these relationships, either actual or anticipated, continue to play a part in keeping groups coherent and effective.

This, obviously, presents a problem for humanitarians. While the literature reviewed here seems to suggest that humanitarian leadership groups are more effective where they have worked together for some time (Brooks and Haselkorn, 2005; Cosgrave et al., 2007; Goyder and James, 2002; Murtaza and Leader, 2011), in many situations the 'surge' and rapid turnover of staff – including leadership staff – means that any shared-leadership team is likely to consist of people who have not worked together before, and do not necessarily expect to work with one another again. This is, of course, particularly true for multi-agency groups, but it is also the case within agencies, and especially within multi-mandate agencies, where emergency specialists take leadership positions alongside staff already in place.

The experience of humanitarian agencies suggests that, in these circumstances, agencies can take certain steps to improve relationships within the group. One simple but effective approach is to co-locate members of the leadership group in the same office (Foley, 2007; Kirby et al., 2007; Simpson et al., 2011). Where this is not possible, it is important to ensure that all members of the group have equal access to leadership meetings. Such access is more than just physical: the use of English, or of another dominant language, may deny access to discussions, as may the habit of holding 'informal' discussions related to leadership topics in the bar or over dinner. A second approach is to separate financial allocation from other strategic decisions, particularly where groups are newly formed and relationships are not well

established. As the humanitarian system is defined by groups which simultaneously compete and collaborate (Donnell and Kakande, 2007; Featherstone, 2010; Lanzer, 2007), removing the budget-allocation function and locating it at a higher level of leadership may improve the effectiveness of the leadership group (Binder et al., 2010; Goyder and James, 2002).

While such measures might increase trust, and so improve the effectiveness of leadership groups, they are not a substitute for time spent working together. If, as the literature suggests, groups who work together for some time are significantly more effective, the humanitarian system should consider some fairly fundamental changes to staffing practices. These changes could include identifying and training leadership teams in advance of any emergency, and taking steps to avoid the rapid rotation of staff in operational leadership positions and the 'parachuting in' of HQ staff who do not have relationships with teams on the ground.

Rethinking the role of the leader

Finally, and importantly, effective shared leadership in the humanitarian system would involve a fundamental shift in what people – particularly 'leaders' – think of as 'leadership'. Most shared-leadership mechanisms do not completely do away with formal leadership roles: 'vertical leaders continue to play a significant role in developing and maintaining shared leadership' (Pearce and Sims, 2002); in fact, they can 'make or break a team' (Day et al., 2004; see also Carson et al., 2007; Friedrich et al., 2009; Gosling et al., 2009; Huxham and Vangen, 2000). However, the nature of, and qualifications for, this role will be different from those of a leader operating in a more individual model (Alexander et al., 2011; Carson, 2005; Gronn, 2002). Typically, effective leaders operating in a context of shared leadership work primarily as facilitators – whether in private-sector task teams (Taggar et al., 1999), the military (Jensen and Brehmer, 2005), or crisis management (Lalonde, 2011). In practice, this means that the formal leader maintains the focus of the group

on processes (Day et al., 2004; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Taggar et al., 1999), ensuring, for example, that the group decision-making and sense-making processes outlined above are followed. The leader also maintains an overview of the situation, in order to ask the questions that lead the group to a better level of understanding in complex situations (Grint, 2005b). In some cases, the formal leader may also maintain certain specific roles: holding the casting vote, making financial allocations independent of (but informed by) decisions on strategy and implementation, and fulfilling a representative function in liaising with other groups. Of course, in a well-functioning leadership group, there is no reason why any of these facilitative or representational functions cannot be held by any member of the group: but in newly formed leadership teams, in particular, the formal leader may need to model particular behaviours until they 'take root'.

Comparing these skills with those more habitually attributed to individual humanitarian leaders (Buchanan-Smith and Scriven, 2011; IASC, 2009) shows a difference in emphasis, rather than a complete difference in skill-set required. Specifically, a shared-leadership model, where the leader is a facilitator, puts a high emphasis on the 'managing relationships' domain (and particularly on 'fostering humanitarian teamwork') in the humanitarian coordinator competencies, and on the relational, communication and (team) management skills identified by Buchanan-Smith and Scriven (2011) in the study Leadership in Action. Other humanitarian leadership skills remain important for humanitarian leadership in the shared-leadership model, but they are no longer the preserve of the 'leader'; instead, they are required (ideally) of all team members, or of at least some members within the team who are able to contribute those skills to the broader group.

This change of emphasis has important implications. In the first place, it means that individual leaders have to become comfortable with process and questions, rather than with content and answers. Judging from experience in other sectors, it would not be surprising if many found this shift challenging. Many leaders, while embracing the concept of shared leadership at the intellectual level, can be emotionally ambivalent about putting the concept into practice (Alexander et al., 2011; Ford, 2006). At the same time, and just as importantly, shared leadership requires that other members of the group 'step up' and accept responsibility for the group's process and accountability for the group's results. Evaluations of humanitarian action suggest that, currently, even where more collaborative approaches are tried, this does not always happen (OCHA, 2009; Cosgrave et al., 2007; Levine et al., 2011).

7. Summary of conclusions

Based on this review, we offer a series of conclusions. We propose that these conclusions be seen as hypotheses, which could be usefully tested by observation and research on the ground.

This review has considered: literature related to leadership theory (particularly theories of leadership in emergency contexts and shared leadership); case studies and assessments of a variety of approaches to shared leadership outside the humanitarian sector; and case studies, evaluations and reports related to intra-organisational and inter-organisational operational leadership in humanitarian operations.

In looking at leadership in humanitarian contexts, we should be careful not to aim for the 'perfect' or 'ideal' leadership type, as this does not exist: emergencies are 'by their nature, not pretty, and no response structure… yet invented will make them so' (Leonard and Snider, 2010: 11). However well operations are led, we should expect a level of 'chaos and improvised response' (T'Hart, 2010: 14).

At the same time, most authorities agree that in any situation there will be some approaches to leadership that are more effective than others, and that the most effective approach will vary with each context. The most effective approach to leadership in humanitarian operations will be that best suited to the humanitarian context. This context can be characterised as being time-sensitive, dynamic, politicised and information-poor. Within this context, there are two distinct types of operational leadership: leadership of a single organisation, and leadership of inter-agency groups. Inter-agency leaders, in addition to these contextual challenges, need to work in a situation where there may be significant

differences of opinion between the people they 'lead' and where they do not have the formal authority to impose decisions.

The review identifies three approaches to leadership, and considers their suitability to both single-organisation and inter-agency leadership in the humanitarian context. While none of the approaches is perfectly adapted to operational humanitarian leadership, all have elements that could be usefully incorporated into a distinctive humanitarian model of leadership.

The literature suggests that the humanitarian system currently relies on an approach to leadership (here called the 'exceptional-individual' model) which emphasises the personal qualities and abilities of the individual 'leader' as the key determinants in the successful execution of leadership activities. By extension, this model suggests that efforts to improve leadership should concentrate on building the skills of individuals. This model is closely associated with specific ideas related to power, masculinity and agency in Anglo-Saxon (and some other) cultures, and as a result it is more acceptable to some people than to others.

While this approach offers the possibility of rapid decision-making and a certain level of flexibility, it is not particularly well adapted for use in humanitarian operations. Exceptional individuals are hard to find, and even the best leader can rapidly be overwhelmed by an emergency context. While the individual matters, evidence from other sectors, and from humanitarian evaluations, suggests that we should give more emphasis to the role of the organisation and the team in our consideration of leadership.

The second approach (here called the 'structured approach') is widely used in emergency response and in other similar contexts outside the international humanitarian sector. It emphasises the importance of standardised procedures

and organisational structures. These appear to be largely lacking in the humanitarian sector – however, where they have been introduced, they have often led to good results. Role clarity, common assessment procedures and clear operating principles appear to be particularly important in ensuring that leadership is effective. The approach has been criticised for being inflexible, and so not being well adapted to dynamic environments. While there is some truth in these criticisms, there appear to be a variety of ways of building flexibility into structured systems. Perhaps more challenging are the difficulties of using structured approaches in inter-agency groups.

The third approach that we have considered here is the shared-leadership model, where, in various forms, decisions are made jointly, and accountability is held jointly by a group of people. Shared-leadership approaches have been demonstrably successful in humanitarian operations and in other contexts. However, the benefits of shared leadership are hard to achieve. To embed shared leadership successfully, agencies would need to: make their commitment to shared leadership clear and explicit; clarify criteria for membership of the leadership group; establish decision-making procedures that do not rely on unanimous consent; undertake joint training and decrease turnover to increase trust within the team; and place more emphasis on the facilitative role of the leader, and less on the decision-making role. The cost of implementing these changes will not always be justified in single agencies, where leaders have some level of authority over the 'led'. However, leaders in inter-agency bodies cannot rely on this type of hierarchical authority, and in these situations there may be a stronger case for establishing shared-leadership mechanisms.

These conclusions, if found to be correct, would have significant implications for our understanding of what humanitarian leadership should be like, and would suggest changes in the approaches that we take to improving operational leadership and to selecting, training and incentivising leaders. They could lead to better leadership and better operations. The conclusions point to the danger of basing investments of time, energy and resources on untested assumptions about what leadership is, and how best to support it. For this reason, we intend to work with ALNAP members to test these conclusions through a more detailed examination of the realities of leadership practices, and particularly of group leadership practices, as they occur in 'the field'.

Annex A: Research method

This paper was based on a literature review. The initial review related to the research question: 'To what degree are models of collaborative leadership relevant in humanitarian response, and under what circumstances is collaborative leadership successful?' It aimed to develop hypotheses that could be tested in the next phase of research. The initial review used Google scholar and the search terms 'collaborative humanitarian leadership' (19,400 hits) 'collaborative emergency leadership' (67,300 hits) 'shared emergency leadership' (230,000 hits) and 'shared humanitarian leadership' (89,000 hits).

The number of resources precluded a comprehensive review. Instead, for each search, we briefly considered the first 100 results, and identified for review: those which:

- were published in peer-reviewed journals or in books by academic publishers

- appeared to relate to operational (rather than strategic) leadership

- were concerned with international humanitarian action, or with leadership in high-risk and time-pressurised contexts (such as the military, civil defence and hospitals)

- focused particularly on the effectiveness of collaborative and shared-leadership approaches

- (to further refine the search) had been cited more than five times.

The literature thus chosen for review was composed of secondary and primary research. Primary research was both experimental and case-based. Additional literature was identified from the bibliographies of these documents. This first phase of the review allowed the creation of a definition of shared leadership, and identification of circumstances under which shared leadership might be effective,

and organisational and contextual elements that were required to make shared leadership effective.

The review then considered grey literature from the humanitarian sector, particularly evaluations, using a Google search of the web and the ALNAP Evaluative Resource Database (ERD). The ERD search returned 370 documents, of which 240 were evaluations. We considered 70 of these documents, selected at random. The aims of this review of grey literature were to identify:

- situations in which some form of collaborative leadership had occurred

- the degree to which it had, or had not, been successful

- any contexts in which it had been particularly successful or unsuccessful.

The results of the grey literature review were then compared with the results of the first phase of the review, in an attempt to establish circumstances under which shared leadership might be effective, and organisational and contextual elements that were required to make shared leadership effective in the context of international humanitarian response.

The resulting document was then sent for review to eleven individuals with expertise in the topic of leadership in humanitarian organisations. Six of these individuals provided extensive responses. On the basis of these responses, the research question was modified. The revised question was: 'How is leadership currently understood in the international humanitarian sector; to what degree are alternative models of leadership relevant to humanitarian action; and what are the organisational and contextual factors that are required for them to work?' While much of the information required to answer this question had been identified in the first part of the review, we undertook additional searches on Google Scholar using the terms 'incident command system' (333,000 hits) and 'unified command

system' (342,000 hits). A similar process of selection to that used for earlier searches was used, focusing on peer-reviewed papers which had been frequently cited which explored the degree to which these approaches had been effective.

Constraints

The amount of literature on collaborative and shared leadership outside the humanitarian sector made it impossible to conduct an exhaustive review of the literature. On the other hand, the grey literature related to international humanitarian action tended not to consider the mechanics of leadership (who took decisions and how; what the results of these decisions were) in much detail. In many cases, the importance of good ('strong') leadership, or the effects of poor leadership were noted, without any further discussion. In addition, the humanitarian evaluations in particular tended, implicitly, to use a limited definition of leadership, and so did not consider many of the issues that we wanted to address.

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A complete bibliography is also available on the ALNAP website **here**.

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