



Scenario-Based Learning for Senior Leadership Teams in UN Field Missions: A Framing Paper

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The report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) described leadership as “one of the most crucial factors in the success or failure of UN peace operations.” It also called on the UN secretary-general to reinforce the selection and appointment of senior leadership and to “establish an obligatory professional induction programme for new mission leaders, complemented by a follow-on mentoring programme.”¹ In addition, in 2015 the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services found that, “despite the many positive aspects of the training offered [for leaders of peace operations], current leadership feels underprepared in the field.”²

In line with this, IPI, with support from the Government of Canada, has conceptualized a project to develop specific modules that will be used for scenario-based learning for UN leadership teams in field missions, as well as for tabletop exercises in UN headquarters and capitals. The modules will factor in real-world challenges from “new environments” as well as persisting challenges that confront senior UN leadership teams in most missions. The modules will also address the main leadership skills required for managing complex multidimensional missions.

This paper is one of four background papers IPI will draft looking at key leadership challenges. This paper provides guidance and framing for developing the modules, key considerations, and an outline of the project.

This paper was drafted by Arthur Boutellis, Director of IPI’s Center for Peace Operations, and Lesley Connolly, Policy Analyst at IPI.

Introduction

While there is no substitute for merit-based selection of leaders with strong political and managerial skills, scenario-based learning for senior leadership teams in UN field missions can greatly improve strategic thinking, decision making, and crisis management in increasingly uncertain operational environments. As senior staff members of a UN field operation are rarely recruited at the same time as a “leadership team,” such trainings can also serve as team-building exercises and foster collaboration within missions.³

With this in mind, the International Peace Institute (IPI), with support from the Government of Canada, is undertaking a project to develop eight scenario-based-learning modules by mid-2018. These “real-world” modules will be developed and piloted both with leadership teams in field missions and as tabletop exercises in UN headquarters with member states and representatives of the UN Secretariat.

The ultimate objective of this project is to better equip senior leadership within UN missions to manage contemporary crises, lead teams, make decisions while being confronted with competing objectives and priorities, and effectively deliver the mandate of the United Nations. This will improve senior leadership training and foster team building within missions.

This note is based on the outcomes of an expert-level meeting held in partnership with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the Challenges Forum, and the United Nations, with support from the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nation, on June 29, 2017. This workshop analyzed existing scenario-based modules and exercises currently used by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), as well as non-UN actors, in trainings for senior mission leadership, courses on demobilization, disarmament, and

¹ UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace—Politics, Partnership and People: Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/95-S/2015/446, June 17, 2015.

² UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, *Evaluation of the Senior Leadership Training of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS)*, report no. IED-15-010, December 29, 2015.

³ We define “senior staff members” as including special representatives of the secretary-general, who head field operations, deputy special representatives, force commanders, police commissioners, heads of support components, chiefs of staff, and chiefs of sections. They compose what can be called “leadership teams” in the missions.

reintegration (DDR), and trainings on the protection of civilians (POC). It also outlined key challenges leaders face in the field.

This note aims to frame the scenario-based learning project, including its objectives, key considerations, and potential scenarios to be developed.

Objectives of the Project

The scenario-based learning project aims to help mission leaders in all peace operations by making them more aware of both the external/environmental and the internal/management challenges they face. The intention is to help mission leaders develop the knowledge, skills, and attributes they need, as well as to assist them in preparing for crisis situations currently seen in missions.

1. External

The modules will aim to:

- a. Address real-world challenges stemming from the “new environments” peace operations are increasingly being deployed to, such as how to address asymmetric attacks and violent extremism, deal with the re-hatting of African Union (AU) missions, operate alongside parallel counterterrorism forces, use new technologies and social media, and operate within an “ecosystem” of actors.
- b. Address persisting challenges, such as how to manage relations with host countries, armed groups, local populations, UN country teams, troop-contributing countries, UN headquarters, and contractors; ensure the protection of civilians (POC); abide by rules of engagement and decide when to use force; address sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers; and overcome financial constraints.

2. Internal

The modules will aim to:

- a. Develop the main leadership skills required for managing complex multidimensional missions, such as crisis management, emotional intelligence, communication, context analysis, managerial leadership, mediation, and partnership development.
- b. Encourage innovation and creativity, as well as moral courage (including upholding UN norms and values and managing the lack of support from headquarters), in responding to multidimensional scenarios drawing on a number of the external challenges mentioned above, including in the absence or lack of institutional support.
- c. Encourage collaborative decision making and problem solving, thereby fostering team building, in line with the initial workshop’s emphasis that leadership in UN field missions is also about empowering others and that training “leadership teams” is crucial.

Key Considerations for Scenario Development

These modules must be simple and implementable as well as relevant to all aspects of a mission. The main target is senior leadership (at both the political and the operational levels), including special representatives of the secretary-general, deputy special representatives, force commanders, police commissioners, and key D2-P4-level staff such as chiefs of staff, chiefs of joint operations centres, heads

of sections, heads of regional offices, head of sector-level offices, sector commanders, and directors/chiefs of mission support. It is essential that all actors involved in decision-making processes are involved in their development to ensure they are relevant and applicable.

Real vs. Fictional Scenarios

This project will begin with one fictional scenario based on the “Swarlena” scenario developed by IPI in 2016. Swarlena is a fictional case study based on Carana⁴ and developed for the “Senior DDR Planning” course run by the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre (SWEDINT). From this base scenario, IPI will develop eight modules that will address key issues in crisis and leadership, as mentioned above. These modules will be approximately three hours in length and will contain a case study and exercises.

Teams running in-mission or tabletop trainings will pick three or four modules to build a relevant training for the specific context. For example, for the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) the training scenario would be set in Swarlena and could include modules on command and control, safety and security, and challenges with headquarters. For a training in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) the relevant modules could be on the protection of civilians, sexual exploitation and abuse, and parallel forces. The aim is to mix and match modules (all based in Swarlena) to make a relevant training program for the mission at hand.

Using a fictional case is known to have advantages and disadvantages. Fictional scenarios such as Viking, Carlena, Carana, and Swarlena, among others, can be adapted with ease, and participants are unable to bring in external facts related to real cases. However, scenarios need to be extremely thorough, requiring extensive development and the creation of unique materials. While scenarios based on real events require less new material as they can utilize real facts, footage, and actors, they are more likely to create biases and to lead participants to include information or facts not provided in the scenario as part of the analysis.

In this project, IPI has decided to use fictional cases. The advantage of using the Swarlena case as a base is that a series of actors, facts about the country, and footage has already been developed. The ideal training would use the existing scenario to develop eight modules that can be built to meet the needs of different missions.⁵ This permits the scenario and modules to be applicable to all missions and thus to have a longer shelf life. Because this exercise is about not operational response to crisis but leadership qualities, a fictional case will allow trainings to focus on these skills instead of facts surrounding cases.

Length and Format

Trainings will vary in length from a minimum of three hours to a maximum of three days, depending on the location, audience, and time available.

If time permits, trainings should have three aspects: an introduction to the scenario; facilitation of the modules; and final wrap-up and debrief on lessons learned and key takeaways. Consideration should be given to having a non-optional follow-up one-month after the training to understand how the skills have been used, if at all. This could be done through an online evaluation and online platform. This follow-up could also be used to mentor and support senior leaders by pairing them together for future engagement in times of crisis and lesson sharing.

⁴ Carana is a fictitious country, located on a fictitious island, Kisiwa, off the eastern coast of Africa. The story of Carana and its people was originally developed in 2002-2003 by experts at the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO). It was meant to serve as the foundation for scenario-based training exercises by African peacekeeping forces. For more information see http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/csdp/documents/pdf/carana_scenario_en.pdf

⁵ This would be similar to the Carana approach.

Technology

The modules should use technology such as social media and other online tools to replicate modern situations. This could include using BBC or CNN breaking news footage to introduce new facts each day. In addition, Twitter accounts and online newspapers are excellent tools for emulating modern news sources. Injects will be developed to accompany all modules, and suggestions on the format will be provided in the facilitator's guide.

Content

Each module should consider team dynamics and ensure the exercise includes the entire team. Modules should have clear learning objectives; they should be understood as learning tools focusing on how to react to situations, make difficult choices and decisions, and work as a team, rather than tests or evaluations of knowledge or processes.

Strategic thinking and analysis are vital for senior leaders. This includes the ability to look beyond the immediate environment, however pressing or stressful the circumstances may be, to take a broader strategic view. It also requires leaders to understand the changing nature of leadership, adapting their style to social, economic, and geopolitical/regional shifts and trends and analyzing the resulting impact on risks and opportunities for the organization or field mission. Leaders also need to understand the people in missions, given their multicultural and multilingual environment, as well as gender dynamics. The key is to have participants look toward the intended outcome and then work on how to get there. The modules should also capture the frequent reality of having to decide between two bad options in the field.

Modules should reflect that senior leaders are setting an example and are often followed in action by others. One of the important roles of senior leadership teams is to nurture and be accountable for converting followers into leaders by recognizing and unleashing their leadership potential, fostering their talents, and empowering them. This requires them to focus on middle managers, particularly female managers.

Facilitators, Participants, and Mentors

In facilitating the training program, three to five senior facilitators/mentors would be ideal. A facilitators guide will be provided to ensure that the modules can be used in numerous organizations and settings. The use of animated videos to introduce the overall scenario and the modules will help limit the need for an initial training of facilitators and mentors. Facilitators must remember that they are not teaching or providing answers on how to act in a specific crisis, but rather teaching skills that mission leadership can use thereafter.

For participants who attend the trainings, self-awareness or self-knowledge of their emotions (emotional intelligence) is vital. While this quality is less visible than the ability to inspire others or manage crises, it is crucial for mindful team leadership, as it shows whether leaders understand both how to relate to others and how their decisions affect others. Consideration could be given to a self-assessment by participants ahead of time to set a baseline of their skills and the challenges they need to address as well as to unpack the challenges they faced and what types of support they would have found useful. A basic diagnostic tool could also be considered to assess baseline knowledge and ensure all participants have basic common understanding of things like context analysis, mandates, standard operating procedures, concepts of operations/mission concepts, and rules of engagement.

Process of Scenario Development

Initial Workshop (June 2017)

On June 29, 2017, IPI held an expert-level meeting in partnership with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the Challenges Forum, and the United Nations and with support from the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations. This workshop analyzed existing scenario-based modules and exercises currently used by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), as well as non-UN actors, in trainings for senior mission leadership, courses on DDR, and trainings on POC. The first part of the meeting looked at the gaps in scenario-based trainings on leadership. The second half was devoted to identifying key areas for improvement in these trainings and agreeing on new scenarios and methodologies targeted at UN mission leadership. Out of this workshop, a series of topics for potential modules was identified.

Setting up an Advisory Group of Experts (February 2018)

IPI will form an Advisory Group of Experts who will work with IPI on the formulation of the modules, methodology and review material. In addition, these experts will be used for facilitation during the piloting stages.

Development of Scenarios (January–July 2018)

IPI will develop eight desktop modules, each three hours in length, to tackle individual leadership challenges. These modules will be informed by desk research, the initial workshop, fieldwork, including interviews with current mission leaders in the field and former mission leaders, mission staff, and partners, and input from the Advisory Group of Experts. In cases where existing scenarios are available or similar processes are being undertaken, IPI is open to partnerships to facilitate sharing of materials so as to avoid replication of work.

Piloting of Scenarios (August–October 2018)

The scenario and modules, in their draft form, will be piloted in four locations, including both peacekeeping and special political missions. These pilots will be led by a group of senior facilitators, together with staff from IPI and the UN Integrated Training Service to make sure feedback is factored into the final revised scenarios. The pilots should serve not only to refine and enrich the scenarios but also to generate interest and support from mission leaders who may want to participate in scenario-based learning exercises in the future. Pilots could tentatively include:

- Workshops in two high-intensity peacekeeping missions (e.g., Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan);
- A workshop in one low-intensity peacekeeping mission (e.g., Haiti, Lebanon); and
- A regional workshop, possibly in Entebbe, Uganda, to bring together leaders from different missions.

The draft modules will also be piloted in tabletop exercises at UN headquarters in New York, involving representatives from the UN Secretariat and member states (both Security Council members and key troop- and police-contributing countries). This would serve to build support from member states for these scenario-based trainings and to bring those based in New York closer to the realities of the field.

IPI is aware that similar processes are being undertaken by training institutes and will endeavor to work closely with those already piloting scenarios to ensure work is not replicated.

The scenario-based modules will be translated into French to ensure maximum reach to francophone missions, where over half of peacekeepers are currently deployed.

Validation Workshop (December 2018)

IPI will organize a validation workshop in New York with key members of the training community, including the Advisory Group of Expert to review and validate the eight modules.

Possible Scenario Themes

The initial workshop in June 2017 helped identify a series of possible module themes that could be explored and developed (as well as real-life situations these modules could be based upon while taking out any references to real events). This is a draft list open to amendment.

1. **Sexual exploitation and abuse:** Dealing with a crisis of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and preventing its recurrence, including by addressing command-and-control issues, rotating out a contingent from a troop-contributing country, and managing communication with various audiences, including the media.
2. **Host-state relations:** Dealing with a difficult host state that does not respect the status of forces agreement or allow freedom of movement, including of air assets, creating life-threatening challenges for medical evacuation.
3. **Protection of civilians:** Dealing with a POC crisis (e.g., government forces threatening civilians, intercommunity violence), including by coordinating between mission headquarters and sub-offices, determining the division of labor between civilian, military, and police components, and prioritizing POC threats.
4. **Relations with UN headquarters:** Dealing with staff at headquarters in the context of impending budget cuts that will be imposed by the Security Council or the Fifth Committee in New York, including by advocating to keep the mission mandate and resources in line with evolving realities on the ground and dealing with micromanagement from headquarters.
5. **Parallel forces:** Managing relations with parallel forces with different mandates (e.g., offensive, counterterrorism) and forces engaged in different types of military tasks, including by deciding how much to coordinate, deciding how to reconcile POC mandates with offensive operations in the same theater, determining what to do if asked to support these operations, putting in place risk-management strategies, and identifying the relevant legal issues.
6. **Safety and security:** Dealing with a safety and security crisis whereby a complex attack against a sub-office is taking place, with casualties reported, including by coordinating with the head office, chief medical officer, and other staff, ensuring coordination between military and civilians leaders, addressing command-and-control issues, prioritizing tasks, and addressing budget-related challenges.
7. **Election support:** Supporting the conduct of an election where there are issues of human rights violations, including by considering the risk of violence and how to mitigate it, identifying where violence is most likely, gathering information from local partners, and putting in place an early-warning system.

8. **Use of force:** Dealing with dilemmas related to integration of contingents, including by addressing command-and-control issues especially in regards to the Force Commanders control of troops, managing risk, and engaging in scenario planning,

Implementation and Ownership

This project is funded and led by IPI, and thus the modules will be owned by IPI. IPI has allocated funds for developing and piloting the modules and will lead this process.

Upon validation and finalization, the modules will be made available to various partners with training capabilities (including the UN Integrated Training Service), member states such as Canada, and training institutions such as the Norwegian Defence International Centre (NODEFIC), SWEDINT, the Folke Bernadotte Academy, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the US Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), the US Institute of Peace, the UN System Staff College in Turin, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, and the École de maintien de la paix in Bamako.

There are opportunities for partnerships in piloting the modules.