Exercising leadership

This is a coordination toolkit not a leadership guide. Teambuilding, however, is essential to successful coordination. This sub-section is included to link leadership and teambuilding.

Introduction

Leadership is a process through which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.¹ The role of a leader:

1. To help others achieve results (initiating and motivating);
2. To ensure the team or group works smoothly (facilitating and “catalysing”); and,
3. To guide (instructing, advising, briefing, training, coaching and clarifying the task objectives).

International refugee coordination is grounded on a “lead-agency” model. Coordinators need to balance between inclusive facilitation and confident leadership, and between a genuine institutional humility and the decisiveness to embrace fully leadership responsibilities.

Leading groups towards a common strategy requires, among other things:

1. Knowing the issues
   a. Context
   b. Partners/stakeholder mapping – getting to know them, their objectives, capacities, representatives, strengths, weaknesses, and interests. And keep it up to date because it will evolve
   c. Technical or thematic areas
   d. Priorities and options and
2. Analysis
3. Leading the identification of priority needs, options, priority actions and strategies
4. Developing these into strategies and plans

Leadership Qualities and Styles

Coordinators balance potentially competing roles. They are facilitators, brokers, mediator and leaders. They also need to show personal and institutional while remaining decisive.

Key coordination leadership qualities are:

1. Vision, clarity and strategic thinking to identify questions, options and directions
2. In-depth knowledge of the context, stakeholders, challenges and possible solutions
3. Confidence, conviction and courage to guide and decide
4. Emotional intelligence, charisma and communication skills to rally, include and convince
5. Dedication and commitment to lead by example and inspire loyalty
6. Organisation and discipline to promote predictability and meet accountabilities
7. A generous instinct to share space with others

¹ Northouse, 2004, as quoted in the UNHCR Senior Emergency Leadership Programme (SELP) module on Management and Leadership, 2012
8. A supportive demeanour to help and advocate for partners and provide ‘a last resort’
9. Confidence and courage to take hard decisions and ‘to lead from the front’
10. Vigilance, to identify weaknesses or a need to adapt

Experts have identified six leadership styles:

1. Visionary: Motivates people to achieve a common aim
2. Coaching: Supports others to work more effectively
3. Affiliative: Brings people together to work collectively on problems or tasks
4. Democratic: Respects others’ opinions, needs and contributions
5. Pacesetting: Encourages, even pushes people to reach high goals
6. Commanding: Instructs people and shows direction in the face of challenges and may reassure them in moments stress or crisis

Skills, tips and good practices
Leadership and Management skills may be subdivided into the following broad categories:

1. **Communication skills** (public speaking, effective writing, leading meetings, facilitation, negotiation, conflict-resolution and cross-cultural communication)
2. **Organizing skills** (planning, monitoring, problem-solving, evaluation, coordination, programme management, decision making, time management)
3. **Supervising skills** (leadership, delegation, motivation, staff performance evaluation)

The following tips for coordinators come from real cases. They complement other guidance in this toolkit.

1. Do the work necessary to identify and propose issues, options, priorities and paths for action.
2. Maintain and demonstrate independence and impartiality. Avoid and discourage undue “closeness” to some members of the group versus others. Avoid and dissuade members from creating “cliques” (small, informal groups that exclude others).
3. Encourage, maintain and show discipline. For

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2 By leadership expert, Goleman
instance, start and finish scheduled meetings, visits, activities and networking interviews on time.

4. Display fairness and even-handedness.

5. Share information in an agreed, structured, and regular manner.

6. Discretion and discipline go hand in hand. Coordinators can jeopardize the confidential nature of consultations, reports or quality assessments through, for instance, sloppily handled, mislaid or inadequately distributed, collected and transmitted documentation.

7. Be respectful and be seen to be respectful. Dress appropriately, especially where culturally necessary.

8. Avoid conducting yourself in a way that could damage the good name and reputation of the coordinating body and the member agencies.

9. Be careful when making jokes. You could be misunderstood. Jokes are generally culturally biased or sensitive.

10. Give group members (and yourself) a break.

Note: Teams and Leadership: key points

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