



## Leadership & Talent Development in International Humanitarian and Development Organizations

A Center for Creative Leadership / People In Aid Review of Current and Future Practice and Expectations

**PEOPLE****IN****AID**<sup>®</sup>



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CCL offers leadership solutions to a worldwide audience from campuses and Network Associate locations across the Americas; Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA); Russia and across the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); and Asia-Pacific (APAC). The Center annually serves more than 20,000 individuals and 2,000 organizations in over 120 countries, including more than 80 of the Fortune 100 companies across the public, private, non-profit and education sectors. Last year alone, we funded 255 scholarships at a value of more than \$1 million for leaders of non-profit organizations to attend CCL educational programs. In addition, our knowledge was disseminated to nearly two million people through CCL publications. The Center employs almost 600 faculty and staff on five campuses in North America, Europe and Asia and maintains relationships with approximately 500 adjunct faculty members worldwide. Since 1970, nearly 470,000 leaders have graduated from a Center program.

**People In Aid** is a non-profit, global network of more than 180 member organizations dedicated to improving organizational effectiveness within the humanitarian and development sector worldwide by advocating, supporting and recognizing good practice in leadership and people management.

Established in 1995 by non-government organizations (NGOs) in the humanitarian and development sector, People In Aid now works with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve its mission. Its main office is in London, UK, with regional hubs in Kenya and Australia and partnerships throughout the world.

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*“A real issue for us? How do we get people to have more ‘courageous’ conversations with their staff... get to the root of issues... tackle poor performance?”*

## About the Study

The face-to-face and telephone interviews for this study took place in April, May and June 2010 in Europe, Africa and the United States. To encourage the most open discussion, all interviews were “off the record.” The Center for Creative Leadership and People In Aid would like to thank all the individuals who gave their time to this project and helped to make it such a success.

### The Organizations and the People Involved

A total of 37 International Aid and Development organizations took part in the interview and research process and 56 individuals gave their viewpoint around leadership and talent management challenges. Those interviewed ranged from chief executives and members of managing boards to human resource and organizational development directors and their direct reports. The majority of interviewees were senior human resource professionals. Throughout the report, no individuals or organizations are directly identified. Organizations who gave their time and energies to the project were:

Action Aid	Medair
Action Contre la Faim	Medicines Sans Frontieres
Amnesty	Mercy Malaysia
British Red Cross	Merlin
CABI Europe	Norwegian Refugee Council
CAFOD	OHCHR
Catholic Relief Services	Oxfam
Centre for Safety and Development	Oxford HR
Christian Aid	Plan International
Concern	Retrak
Cordaid	Save the Children
CORED	Sightsavers
Everychild	Tearfund
Futures Group	UN Aids
HIV/Aids Alliance	UNHCR
IFRC	UNOG
International Rescue Committee	VSO
Islamic Relief Worldwide	Wateraid
Marie Stopes	World Vision

## An Introduction by the Center for Creative Leadership

A member of the managing board of one of the world's most influential aid organizations provided this Leadership and Talent Management project with just the right amount of momentum to get started. They commented, "If 99.9 percent of the assets of most aid organizations are people, why aren't we better at managing and leading them?" Good question. What follows is our attempt to discover some of the answers and suggest some ways forward as we enter the second decade of this century.

There's a great deal talked about leadership. Indeed we at the Center for Creative Leadership spend our lives doing just that. But what we try to concentrate on is putting leadership to practical use – making it part of the everyday process of managing an organization. More than that, **we want to see leadership spreading around organizations, helping to blur those departmental silos, reaching downwards to include everyone.**

We are very conscious that much of the work in the aid sector is very different from that of the for-profit organizations: tough conditions, inhospitable and dangerous places are part of the remit of many of the agencies we talked with. So, on that basis, we set out to discover what leadership and talent management mean to this hugely important part of our working world. To do this we have talked with dozens of people in the aid sector, getting their views of the real, on-the-ground issues and their ideas on how to fix them.

This is not a work based on theory or academic rigour. It is a **snapshot of how international humanitarian and aid organizations view leadership today and would like to see it evolve tomorrow.** Furthermore, it is an opportunity to record what the sector thinks about talent management and the role it has to play in creating the organizations of the future.

Most importantly, this is a report written in the words of the people who make it work, who see the problems, face up to the issues and try to make their organizations a little better every day. We hope you will find our report useful and timely and of practical use in considering the twin issues of leadership and talent management in your organization. We have also taken the opportunity to include in this review of leadership what we regard as two important additional chapters:

- The view of the Center for Creative Leadership on why and how leadership development at the grassroots can make a difference
- The view behind People In Aid's support of this project

On that support, I would like to extend our appreciation to the staff at People In Aid for making it possible to meet and interview such a broad range of people and organizations within the sector. Without their enthusiastic assistance this report could not have been created.

*Rudi Plettinx  
Vice President and Managing Director, Europe, Middle East, Africa  
Center for Creative Leadership  
Brussels*

## An Introduction by People In Aid

Leadership and talent development are without doubt two of the most critical issues for international humanitarian and development organizations today. Many commentators within the humanitarian and development sector view this moment in time as critical – there is a closing window of opportunity for bold decisions to be made by organizations and their leaders in response to the uncertain economic outlook, a challenging operating environment, new competition and ever increasing calls for accountability and transparency.

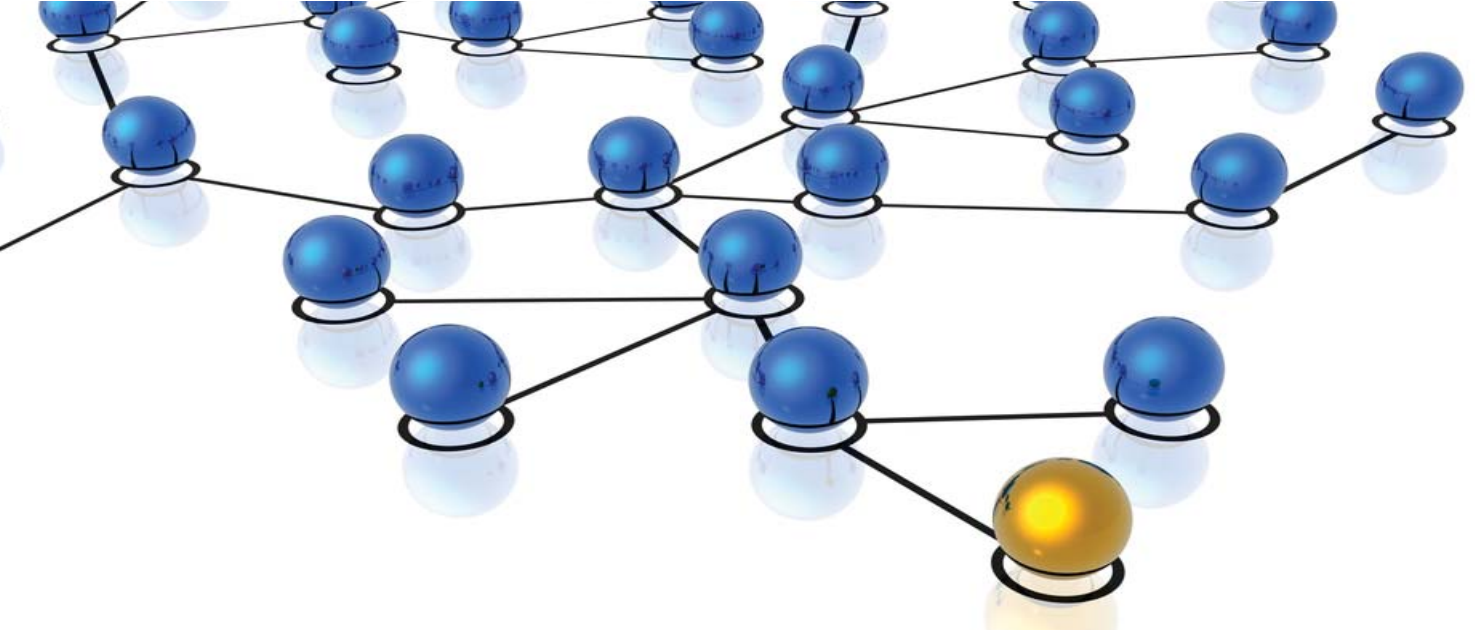
However, it is not just leaders at the ‘top’ of the organization that we are concerned with – People In Aid’s recent work on leadership has underlined the **importance of encouraging leadership behaviours at all levels in the organization, as well as at the most senior levels.** Translating this into practice requires sensitivity and rigor, and for this reason People In Aid is delighted to be partnering with the Center for Creative Leadership, whose leadership philosophy meshes well with our own.

This particular research, undertaken in partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership, has **stimulated frank dialogue about gaps and shortcomings in leadership and leadership capacity. It has also opened up a space for creativity and innovation in terms of identifying ways of addressing those gaps and shortcomings.** It is People In Aid’s hope that this paper will catalyze leadership conversations, and lead to wider collaboration as we seek to strengthen leadership capacity within the sector, and ultimately transform the lives of the vulnerable and disaster-affected people with whom we work.

*Ben Emmens  
Director of HR Services  
London*

*“We need to identify the 100 top talents in our organisation. I mean THE top talent, not the 100 people who think they are in that group.”*

.....  
*“Our big problem is the culture of TIME... emergency people have an emergency culture... everything’s a rush!”*



## Summary/Key Findings

So what are the leadership, talent and organizational “hot buttons” facing the international aid sector? The answers to that are many and varied. But out of the hours of conversations and discussions came some common points of view: some issues that seem to transcend the whole sector for better or worse. Not only that, **many of these issues – and how they are ultimately solved – will be a key part of how people in the aid sector work, manage and lead in the years to come.**

Here are the issues that were raised time and time again. They are in no particular order of importance.

- Most senior leaders have embraced the need for change, using this unsettled period to restructure and refocus and be ready for economic upturn. A few “holdouts” are still praying for a return to business as usual.
- It’s the heads of the big agencies that “get it” and are ready for the next challenges. Many smaller agencies still struggle to cope, lacking an infrastructure that can easily deal with change.
- Forced redundancies (many poorly handled by inexperienced staff) have created challenges for leaders to rebuild trust and motivation.
- There’s a view amongst enlightened leaders that the forced changes will be regarded long-term as a good thing, ushering in what is now seen as much needed opportunity to be more efficient and targeted in delivery.
- Some leaders don’t fit the new regimes and need to move on or out. Strong feeling that out-of-touch leaders, as well as other non-performers, need to be dealt with to ensure ongoing staff morale.
- Many leaders have concerns about how similar to the for-profit sector they can ever afford to be. Where do you draw the line between being a humanitarian agency (with the culture and type of staff that entails) and being super efficient and profit-driven like big-business?

- The biggest concern? Lack of communication, up, down, sideways. This was the number one failure of leadership at every level.
- Part of that was a consistent failure to have “courageous conversations” and redirect or deal with poor performers. Too many bad hires still don’t get moved on.
- Going further, too many agencies still “celebrate mediocrity.” Not facing up to performance issues and not hiring the right people in the first place.
- The best organizations never give up on people development, finding ways to do this in even the hardest times. Coaching and mentoring (especially by in-house staff) was seen as a cost-effective option to keeping employees engaged.
- Major agencies in particular were pushing their top management through tough leadership challenges and developing them in new ways. Most of this driven by fully empowered HR staff.
- Changing reward structures. “How” you reward is increasingly just as important as “what” you give.
- Many aid organizations are still failing to tackle “job-for-life” culture (especially in field operations). But, while tackling talent “bottlenecks”, they need a formula to make sure that effective leaders are not turned off or lost to the agency.
- Smart organizations are focusing on new talent categories that can bring strategic thinking to the business: IT, Marketing, Finance and Logistics staff (not to mention effective HR professionals) who can make a real difference. Again it is the major agencies that can afford to employ and deploy them effectively.
- Focus on smarter hiring of leadership potential means a face-to-face confrontation with the private sector. Agencies report it can be done. You just have to hire smart and create a climate where these people want to work. That climate includes, allowing considerable autonomy and freedom to let these new expert hires do the job their way.
- Relocation of HQ’s from the North to South hemisphere to be closer to the sources of aid delivery. The jury is out on whether this works or not.
- Don’t forget the “stayers.” Some report too much focus on the smart people and not enough on those who just want to do a good job day after day (the real core personnel for many players in the sector).
- Similarly don’t create a new model that alienates the volunteer sector of an agency. Smart new ideas need communicating.
- Suggestion from many interviewees. Go out and find the “real top 100” people in the agency. NOT those who think they should be in it (because of their status or seniority), but the REAL top 100 performers.
- Finally, cut out the “management speak.” “Use plain English please!”, was the plea from local staff. Make sure both the communications and the messages are relevant and understood by the people on the ground. All too often they are not!

## Things to Think About

Here's some thoughts, concerns, ideas and opinions we picked up during our interviews:

- Many aid professionals would advocate a lot more sharing of information and ideas across agencies, suggesting that this would be a very cost-effective way to keep-up-to-date, learn of new developments and generally plug into best practice. Trouble is, for every booster for sharing there's another person saying it won't work. "People steal ideas from you," commented several interviewees. "It's tough out there in this climate," said another, "I don't think it's conducive to supporting a sharing culture."
- Such are the demands of restricted funding that donor reporting is becoming a much-in-demand and admired skill. "Expect this to become a real new talent area," suggested an aid charity chief executive." As demands for report-back and accountability increase in frequency and complexity, talented donor reporters will come into their own. "The ones who do it well can save hundreds of man hours," said one interviewee, "and we see these donor-led demands for data getting more and more in the coming years."
- Can there ever be true gender-diversity in the aid industry? A few experiments are currently underway, but admit to finding it hard going. "Development agencies may be able to get close to a 50-50 balance between men and women," says one observer, but when it comes to humanitarian aid and emergency relief there are just some places it doesn't make sense." Others are more opinionated in their views, "There are some places and some circumstances when it would be just foolish to send women... and ineffective and dangerous too." So the debate continues, but the long-time professionals seem to have made up their minds and are not likely to change – for some things it's still a man's world.
- Here's a small item, but with a BIG influence – "management-speak." Lots of pleas from country managers and project leaders to ask headquarter staff (and those smart consultants they employ) to use real words in communication. As one supervisor complained, "We spend precious time translating some gobbledegook business report, when it could have been said in English." Of particular concern is a tendency to use big words and phrases that have no meaning in "field" situations. "We need to use phrases that local people not just understand but relate to and can put into context – otherwise it's a waste of time and resources," says one observer.
- Lots of people have suggested that the next group joining their staff (the much discussed Generation Y) are going to place all sorts of new work demands on their employers. Studies have claimed that these new arrivals in the workplace (the first true techno generation) will have shorter attention spans, expect different working conditions, won't put up with second best or any excessive demands from employers. However, a study of 10,000 Generation Y's across Europe showed that the number one concern was getting a job – any job. This is a major shift from four years ago, when just getting a job was concern number five.

- The cooling winds of the economic downturn haven't lessened the heat in another area – senior management appointments. In many agencies, senior managers have been horrified we are informed by two developments (1) senior staff openings being advertised externally, instead of simply being automatically filled from within and (2) worse still, senior staff in line for an internal move or promotion having to face being interviewed for the job. The idea that this may lead to better results all round doesn't seem to have penetrated some parts of our industry.
- Several aid agencies we talked with explained to us that they had major issues with first line recruitment (reporting that often as many as 50 percent of new recruits quit after the first or second mission). They were puzzling what to do about this. Do you seek new ways to engage and retain these people and get the levels down to an acceptable turnover? Alternatively, do you – as they do in places like Silicon Valley, where huge numbers of recruits arrive and depart in a year – treat this as the reality of your business model and make rapid, cost-effective recruitment a core competence and staff for that?
- Finally, an idea that will be good news to some. During our interviews many people suggested that there was a very strong need to create a resource list of consultants (both companies and individuals) prepared to work at NGO rates on organizational development assignments. This was seen as a particular need in Africa.

## Part One: A Sector in Transition – People Issues that will Shape the Next Five Years

The ice cold winds that have embraced large parts of the global economy didn't spare the aid industry. A few notable – and laudable – exceptions apart, the international humanitarian aid and development sector was hit hard by economic recession. As many of the people we talked to for this report all too kindly pointed out, it seemed a strange time to be talking about renewal, leadership culture, talent management and the case for organizational change. Moreover, as the majority of the aid agencies we interviewed began to recover from two years of tumultuous events, a project designed to put the spotlight on human resource issues and to celebrate the people side of the aid business might have, perhaps, been better timed. Nothing, as it turned out, was further from the truth. **This was an industry sector in transition, embracing change and learning from the past.**

Indeed, our timing could not have been better. As we began our interview process, organizations were slowly getting back into recovery mode. And there were three distinct categories of business out there:

- The well prepared, or just lucky, who had survived with few problems, in some cases increasing both their funding and their outreach

- The majority, who were seeing a return to business as usual after a period of major uncertainty and organizational turmoil
- A minority still struggling, still unsure what the next months would bring

Three distinct “this is where we are” scenarios, but just two quite different situations:

- A majority who had taken this dramatic business downturn and used it as the catalyst of change, reshaping their organizations to meet future challenges and take advantage of opportunities
- A minority who seemed to be praying for the status quo of yesterday. Who will arrive in a new, quite different world with their organizational philosophies, structures and methods largely unchanged.

So where are these aid agencies going and what have they learned in the past few years that will help them organize themselves in better ways than before? Terms like, “more professional”, “manage as a business”, “making the business better” and even “becoming a more grown up organization” were commonly used. What was clear however, was that the **aid agencies who had moved forward during recession had done so by taking the time to critically examine their structures and not just rebuild, but reshape in a style that would meet the new reality of business 2010.**

It seems that the smart organizations were quick to recognize that despite the problems brought about by recession this was perhaps a once-in-a-generation opportunity to push through major change and, quite honestly, use this unstable environment as the platform for building a new-style organization. For **when sudden change happens and you’re dealing with day-to-day crisis, it’s a lot easier to push radical reform.**

Remarkably, several of those interviewed used the term, “becoming a more grown up organization.” Asked to explain, they said that their agency had sort of grown organically, never with a central, long-term master plan or strategy. Now, faced with economic meltdown, they had little choice but to become what others termed, “more professional.”

And that being “more professional” covered a wide range of issues that many had not had to face before.

*“It’s one thing to be able to say we have 45 people in Country X, but are they the right people? Would it be better to have 30 people doing the right job than 45 doing an OK job?”*

*“It’s people that are THE logistic nightmare!”*



## The Long, Hard Look

That “growing up” and “becoming more professional” began with an appreciation that this was a time for change – a belief that **if you weren't going to do something now you never would**. “We’ve really turned our business upside down and examined and questioned everything we do and how we do it,” enthused one HR director. They added, “it hasn’t been easy, but we feel it was both necessary and right to move to a next stage in our activity.”

Others concurred with that view. Emphasising that the economic downturn had, in fact, provided a platform to build from. To create a new organizational structure rather than just putting the old one back together again.

## Refocusing Leadership

A real push to take senior managers away from their “favourite issues” and make them less transactional and more strategic. To do this, top management teams have been challenged to think in new ways and spend their time moving the business forward. From our interviews it would seem that aid agencies with strong HR teams have been best at doing this. As one explained, **“You need more than just a great relationship with the top team, it takes having the respect of your management peers**. Then you can push this sort of thing through.” They add, “you also have to make sure that everyone (all the way down the organization) sees it is being done and what the end results are.”

## Facing Up to Redundancies

Although there are some exceptions, redundancies throughout the aid sector have been quite severe (up to a numbing 30 percent in a couple of cases). Again, smart organizations have approached this with the idea of permanent change in mind. “Rather than a simple knee jerk, this number of people have to go,” said one organizational development manager, “we looked long and hard at the people needed for the next stage of our development.”

“It was seen as a **unique chance to remove the dead wood, to tackle some of the issues and the people that we had, quite frankly been avoiding facing up to** – now we didn’t have much of a choice,” explained another.

But it was a huge and at times white water ride. Recalled one HR director, faced with the need for massive downsizing, “we had been on a growth curve for ten years – more donors, more people, more projects. Then very suddenly the bottom fell out of the business. Quickly I realised that I was the only person in our senior team who had any experience at all of how to fire people – everyone else only knew about the good times.” He went on, “Consequently, we made a lot of mistakes along the way, but we learned a great deal too. And there’s no doubt it has **helped all our managers become a lot better at the people-side of the business and also understand the business in totally new ways.**”

Unfortunately, as was reported to us from several sources, the legacy of redundancy is often hard to deal with. Taking an axe to organizations that have had no history of staff downsizing creates all sorts of traumas. Mistrust, in-fighting for scarce resources and eventual departures of hard-to-get talent that see opportunity elsewhere are all part of the picture. Dealing with these downsides isn’t easy, especially if you have little experience to draw on.

## Stronger Organizations

Although this has been an extremely hard time for many aid agencies, there’s also a deep-seated view that in a few years this period will be looked upon as something that was ultimately good for the sector. “It has not only made us stop and think, but **given us the need to run our businesses in a different, more focused, more efficient way,**” explained one interviewee. “For a decade it was simply like shooting fish in a barrel. You held out the begging bowl and it filled up and you spent it. I suspect we were a little divorced from reality. Then suddenly you had to start from the beginning all over again,” recalled a U.S. based HR professional. They concluded, “Of course it hasn’t been a pleasant experience but I think we’ll look back and realise it was necessary and we’ve made the best of it we could.”

## Where’s the Line?

However, there’s one big issue that no one we talked with seems to have a solution to: just how similar to the private sector do you want to be as an aid agency? Talk of “being more professional” and “managing as a business” is all very well, but should agencies run themselves as pure profit and loss operations? And, if they do that should they, in turn, pay private sector salaries and bonuses too?

Our discussions failed to produce any clear answer to this dilemma. All we can report is that the altruistic element within the aid sector probably needs to be there as part of the long-term make-up of how you do business. Creating a full-on, private sector hire-and-fire, market-led business may sound really grown up, but it won’t attract and retain a lot of the talented, committed people that make the aid sector unique.

Today, there seems little doubt that **many of the successful aid agencies have shifted their operational model closer to the private sector than ever before** (they are even competing for talent – see below), but it would seem that there is a line that should not be crossed. The trick, of course, is knowing where that line is today and how far you can move it in the future, without as one interviewee dramatically

exclaimed, “losing your soul.” While it may not be quite as bad as that, the aid sector will always have to struggle to balance this equation. With many agencies and societies relying heavily on volunteers as fund raisers and in the field, the reward structures for key staff will always be some type of an issue.

One interviewee expressed the future as a need to, “swap passion and dedication for sustainability and long-term results.” However, there is a distinct case for asking, “Is this a step too far already?” Passion and dedication are what have defined many of these aid organizations for decades. Don’t we change this at our peril? Then again, if there is a radical new business model for the future being contemplated, no one shared the plans with us. However, **there is a clear acceptance that running your operation “more like a for-profit business” is now the norm.** Well, it is for those who have decided that’s the way forward. Others, we know, are reluctant to abandon old business models.

## Other Issues that Impact Leadership and Talent Management

The economic climate – as well as natural and man-made events – has a huge impact on how the aid sector deals with leadership and talent management issues. Here are just some of the key areas that organizations are having to deal with:

- **Battling the private sector:** there’s a growing trend (see *Paying the Price*, page 16) for aid agencies to go head-to-head with the private sector to secure specialized talent (think I.T., finance, logistics). This is creating a need for new thinking on reward packages – not just monetary but professional opportunity and exceptional autonomy.
- **Techies versus managers:** great professional expertise doesn’t guarantee great people management, or leadership skills. Still a huge amount of work to do in this area. And with T&D cut to a minimum not an issue with an easy-to-fix solution. More assessment of skills at hiring; twin-track careers (that split techies and would-be leaders) and recruitment of professional managers are all in the mix to change this.
- **A trend to pay more:** Battles with the private sector and the need to recruit a more professional leadership cadre is driving up the salary bill. Even in tough times, this isn’t going away.
- **Pressure on under-performers:** Redundancies, short-term working, pay cuts – all have been implemented to keep aid agencies solvent and operational. But the result has been less tolerance for the lazy and underperforming employees. Managers are being openly challenged by overworked staff, to make sure everyone shares the burden equally or are removed.

*“If performance management doesn’t take place at board level (a reluctance to deal with a poor performer on the board), then this sends a strong – and wrong – message to the rest of the organisation.”*

- **Pay attention to T&D:** For most, training and development has been severely curtailed during the downturn. But now the smart advice is find ways – whatever they are – to turn the tap back on. It doesn't need to be expensive, it can be in-house and using your own people (what better way to get your leaders connected). But do something. Why? Staff are demanding it and if they don't get it will add that to the reasons they'll change jobs come the upturn.
- **Are the big agencies winning?:** In terms of the battle for hot talent, no question they are. And as complexity, compliance and costs all start to spiral those with the big, well managed infrastructure look a lot more in control. When it comes to the effective deployment of people, small agencies look set to struggle.
- **The north-south equation – relocation:** Relocating headquarters to “where the action is” is a work in progress for several agencies and is being closely watched by many others. Could this be a key trend? So far, no one is taking a bet. Also key areas like fundraising, treasury operations and media/communications tend to remain in the north.
- **The north-south equation – recruitment:** Hard to find skills in the field mean that many positions (fundraising, marketing, finance, communications, IT) are still sourced from the developed world. Will this change in the short term? Unlikely say HR experts.
- **The rise of private contractors:** Seen by many as a huge, long-term threat. Already many aid agencies are in turf-battles at the delivery-of-aid level. More worrying, as a consequence of a still recessionary climate, major logistic, consulting and legal firms can for the first time make this a profitable way of doing business. The real concern, medium and long term, is that these “privateers” (with more laissez-faire contract terms) will make it harder for the aid agencies to recruit and retain the right sort of talent for themselves.
- **Tinkering with the brand and its values:** Even some of the old guard agencies have been playing around with their brand image (ostensibly to appeal to a new generation of donors and volunteers). So, that brand has a people-value as well. It's worthwhile finding out what that “value” really is, to potential employees, current staff, suppliers and the rest.
- **Do politics play a part?:** You bet they do! All the reports point to the fact that there's lots of infighting aimed at securing scarce budget resources. In our interviews it was stressed that – according to most HR professionals at least – there's a lot more politics in the aid industry than in the private sector. Is this going to change? Not really.
- **Finally, a need to think differently perhaps?:** A discussion with two senior colleagues in a relief agency sparked off this statement. **“We've come to the conclusion that people, not relief supplies are the real logistical nightmare and the one we still fail to address fully.”** They added, “Events like Haiti prove to us that the key to an operation's success is the ability to get the right people to the right place at the right time. Moving people efficiently has to be the core skill of our kind of business – and we don't do it nearly as well as we should.”

## Paying the Price

Historically and traditionally, pay across the humanitarian aid and development organizations has lagged behind other sectors. Private corporations resort to a bonus culture to reward and retain their people, the big international institutions rely heavily on super perks like education, health care, housing and cost-of-living allowances and generous (and often early) retirement packages. Indeed, from the aid sector's viewpoint the UN and its many agencies are regarded with a mixture of envy and outright hatred. "They are the enemy," suggested several HR professionals; always, it would seem, having the ability to up the ante when seeking hard-to-find talent. "They (the UN) always seem to offer a bigger and better package, a longer contract and a tax free break," explained another.

All the same, there are some trends – even in the present tough economic climate – that point to changes taking place over the medium to long term in how talent in the aid business gets recognized and rewarded.

- An open market for the very best talent. Strong evidence that aid agencies (especially the major players) are increasingly going head-to-head with the private sector to secure hard-to-find talent that can make a significant impact on their overall results. Prime examples are strategic IT professionals, whose expertise can dramatically and rapidly change how an agency both operates in the field and raises funds. Other hard-to-get talent in marketing, finance, logistics is also becoming the subject of turf battles between the sectors. As one HR director noted, "we may not be able to stretch to the very top end of the private sector, but frequently we can offer real talent much more in professional satisfaction and the chance to do the job their way. This is fast becoming a new way to create an edge on the big for-profit corporations."
- A new understanding – especially for the truly global agencies – that "the pay and reward dynamic has shifted," according to one recruiter. "Today, HOW you do it is as important as WHAT. For the future, everyone will need to up their game on the packages they offer."
- A need to realise that what looks like a mediocre reward package in a Western H.Q. context is a whole lot different in other parts of the globe. "You may be struggling to recruit the best talent in London, Paris and New York," suggests a senior operations manager, "and only able to reach two-thirds of the private sector salary level. But you need to remember that in many countries the aid sector is a major player, a key employer. One that much of the local talent aspires to work in, as it pays highly competitive salaries and often offers that other key element – job security." This takes on an interesting dynamic. The dichotomy of country operations being viewed as employers of choice, while headquarters a world away fights to hire the kind of people it needs at a price it can afford. This means that recruitment processes need to be very flexible to meet different on-the-ground situations.

Just as the private sector has had to continue to innovate in how it organizes its reward systems and packages (including changing the profile of the people who are responsible for this and hiring heavy-weight professionals), so will the aid industry need to constantly revisit how to make its employment packages attractive to the specialist talent they want. The advice to leadership here is: stay up-to-date, consult with compensation professionals. Do it twice a year at least, things are changing fast.



## Part Two: Today's Leadership Responsibilities – What to do, What to Leave Alone

Leading an international agency, or any part of one, in the last few years has most probably been a difficult responsibility. For our project, we asked a wide variety of senior management professionals to give their verdict on the leadership of aid agencies today and, perhaps more important, where they think the emphasis of leadership should be in the future.

Leadership can be a confusing, hard to define word. Many of us, faced with the word leadership, think of the person at the top: the president, chief executive or possibly director general. But in today's ever more complex world leadership would seem to be about much more than that single, often remote man or woman at the very apex of the organizational pyramid – it's about the whole organization. While the phrase "leadership culture" might seem just another piece of trendy management-speak, there is an **increasingly strong case that creating a leadership-driven culture in any organization (for profit or not-for-profit) can make a great deal of difference, not only to the success of that organization but to the overall wellbeing of the people inside it.**

As aid and development organizations and satellite NGOs the world over become more democratic, transparent and accountable for their presence and their actions, so leadership is seen not as something that is concentrated on one person at the top, but as a culture that cascades down through an organization. This type of leadership culture is the antithesis of the autocratic "I'm the boss" role that often still rules in many places. **A true leadership culture is predicated on creating strong ties, sharing openly and a dedication to making people at all levels across a business better at what they and their colleagues do.** Interestingly, this type of leadership culture seems to catch the *zeitgeist* of today: its inclusivity, its openness, its acceptance to constant change and new ideas, all fit with what current and next generations seek in a place where they work – a place where they really and truly want to do the best job that they can.

This review of leadership and talent management is developed to look at the good and the bad aspects of how international humanitarian aid and development organizations function in today's world, when it comes to their people. More than that, its mission was to go further, by examining where today's practitioners can do better, as well as offering up some practical ideas to take the concept of a leadership-driven culture to the very heart of how these international agencies, NGOs and others can adopt this approach as simply doing "business as usual."

## More than One Leader?

Our interviews prove that overall there is very real progress being made in creating a leadership culture across aid-related NGOs. More and more it would seem the cult of the figurehead leader is being consigned to history. Much of that has been brought about by the sheer scale of many international aid and development organizations today. **No longer can one person, or even a small top management team stay aware of the complexities of their total operations. Leaders are needed everywhere.** The issue is, what sort of impact are they making and could they do a better job?

The answer to that – not surprisingly is YES, they could.

So, where does every leader from senior managers to first line supervisors lag behind; what could they do better that would have real impact on the people they are leading? This is what our interviewees told us:

- Improve communication – take the time
- Learn to "connect" with everyone in the business
- Say "no" to secret meetings
- Improve local leaders – drastically
- Increase people exchange processes
- Upgrade leadership training
- Redefine leadership responsibilities and roles
- Stop celebrating mediocrity, from top to bottom
- Accept that some leaders just don't "fit" anymore
- Learn to nurture the next generation of leaders

*"Save us from yet more 'management-speak.' A big issue is translating stuff so that it makes sense in a local context."*

## Improve Communication – Take the Time

A huge amount of the criticism aimed at leaders (we should point out at all levels across most organizations) comes down to communication – or rather the fact that they just aren't any good at it. Time and again in our interviews we were told that the consistently **poor quality of communication was the one thing that most needed work.**

To be fair and objective about the criticism, it wasn't always for the want of trying that the communication process failed. All too often it was put down to chief executives, divisional heads, project leaders and team supervisors under pressure and taking the time that could be used for a meeting to do something that seemed more important at the time. "There's always a reason to cancel a meeting," noted one HR manager. They added, "Just as you are ready to be brought up-to-date another, short-term crisis happens and all thoughts of spending even ten minutes getting people up to speed or helping them to make sense of the big picture vanishes."

But, there lies the whole problem. Many so-called leaders, placed in a role where they act as head of a team, are simply highly qualified technical specialists. Indeed, **a majority in many NGOs and aid agencies have no people-skill training at all.** "So when it comes to the choice of re-organizing the warehouse, auditing the motor pool, or checking on supplies against calling a staff meeting, you can guess what happens," explains a project manager. Says another, "A warehouse full of supplies doesn't ask questions or want to know 'why'. It's so much easier for most people to never have a staff meeting. The standard excuse is, "I haven't got time to worry about people – I've a job to do!"

This is far and above the biggest single criticism of leaders at all levels. And it goes right to the very top. "Our chief executive is a wonderful man, absolutely brilliant," says one senior aid worker, "but he's good on theory and long-term strategy but not with people. Consequently we never know what he is thinking." This statement is all too common. Another senior HR professional said of the chief executive, "he's a very good man. I didn't say a good leader, just a good man! But his entire focus is external. He has no interest in what goes on inside the business. Result? Chaos!"

Those may be reports of extreme cases, but the truth is that in many, many situations the very nature of the aid business means that there is always something else to do rather than take the time to communicate. Does it need to be that way? No.

The solution lies in changing the overall mindset and taking on board that communicating is a key part of the management and leadership process. And the only way to get this adopted fully into any business is to **create a formal process where communicating effectively becomes part of the appraisal process.** If managers are assessed on their ability and actual record of communicating it does help to focus on the issue.

## Learn to "Connect" with Everyone in the Business

An inability to communicate may be one thing that needs fixing fast, the other concern is that people communicate at certain levels and not on others. Consequently, there are disconnects between senior management and those at the bottom as vital information doesn't flow through the organization in any formal way. This



appears to be a lot worse where local operations and headquarters are concerned. “We are not sharing consistent messages across the business,” is the complaint of one manager interviewed. She added, “this leads to all sorts of problems and misunderstandings. There’s no real reason for it except our top management don’t seem to be too concerned that everyone is on the same page.”

Again the solution lies in creating some type of formal communication plan that everyone signs up to.

### Say “No” to Secret Meetings

A possibly worse leadership situation is where a group of managers hold “secret” meetings, make decisions and don’t explain anything. “Everyone knows that decisions have been made, but no one finds out. This just leads to considerable speculation and rumour,” says one HR officer, “and it happens a lot more than we think.”

### Improve Local Leaders – Drastically

Numerous staff surveys, carried out by the organisations we interviewed highlighted local country management failures as one of the key reasons for losing operational staff. “There’s a real need to upgrade the communication and leadership skills of local, on-the-ground staff,” advised one HR director. They continued, “we know that frustration about poor management, confused objectives and unclear communication is a key reason that people leave.” Several interviewees commented that there had been plans to address issues like this in greater depth, but that subsequent events and economic considerations had made it very difficult to make a great deal of progress.

Other interviewees also raised the issue of continued inconsistency amongst country heads. Explains one HR director, “Often leadership style is created by local country heads, so it then becomes even more inconsistent across the organisation.” They add, “the reason for this is that senior management have not tackled the issue from headquarters. What I would term “grown-up leadership” gives staff a lot more direction and makes them fit into an overall plan. Problem is that a lot of people seem to work in this sector because – to date – it has given them freedom to do things their way – this is particularly true at the country level. There are going to be some big battles to come to change this.”

As another commented, “There’s a lot of passionate people out there who just want to be left alone!”

## Increase People Exchange Processes

One way to improve those local, or country leaders seems to be getting them to either regularly visit or be part of an exchange scheme. “Getting the field staff involved in the decision-making processes at headquarters really helps to get them on side,” enthused one HR manager. They added, “It really gets them involved and they feel very much a part of the whole organization.” Added another, **“It’s vital to get the heads of mission back to the headquarters on a regular basis so they are up-to-date on policy and planning.”** Similarly, having HQ staff make regular visits to field operations to not just “audit” what’s happening, but to ask for input from staff on the ground, also sends a strong message that the organization has an interest in their views.

Several agencies we spoke with, however, pointed out that they would probably do more staff exchanges if it weren’t for the ongoing problems of getting work permits and visas for many of the people.

## Upgrade Leadership Training

During the interview process, it was encouraging to hear that there has been an increasing focus on leadership training, particularly a senior levels. More discouraging perhaps was that **in many cases this was the first time that top management had submitted themselves to a formal process.** In all the cases we came across, this had been pushed through by Human Resources who felt that there was a very real need to re-skill top managers. One of the HR directors involved in the senior leadership project said that as a part of the program it was important to let the rest of the organization know how things were developing. “There was a genuine interest,” she commented, “from our staff in knowing what the outcomes of the training were. They were certainly looking for some changes in behaviour!”

Elsewhere, the picture appears to be patchy at best. One disappointed HR director explained to us that they had no problems getting their views aired at top management level, just that no one took much notice of them. Another suggested that **HR professionals need to be prepared to do, “a lot more work with the top team to try and get them away from the day-to-day stuff and look at longer-term issues.”**

And, frankly, there was still a view in many aid agencies that leadership development and training somehow belonged only to those at the top. Advocates for creating a strong, viable top down leadership culture were still having a hard time selling the idea in many places. Having said that, where leadership development was taking place across the organization, interviewees reported an excellent response and a very real sense that this type of approach to helped build a more sharing and transparent culture. One that fitted well with the overall mandate of aid industry organizations.

*“The problem for us is senior managers who respond to any request with, “I haven’t got time to worry about people... I’ve got a job to do!”*

## Keep Up the Training!

In tight economic times there's always the urge to cut training and development (T&D) programs – it's an easy thing to do. From our interviews it's obvious that some agencies had little choice but to pull back on the amount they were spending on T&D. But it was also clear that the majority have tried hard to maintain at the very least some activity that helps develop staff.

As one human resource director warned, “we cancel all training at our peril. Sure, it's easy to do but it sends the wrong message to staff.”

Said another, “we need to keep our people up-to-date, otherwise we won't have the right sort of people in place come the upturn.”

Several key T&D trends emerged from our interviews:

- A move away from mass classroom learning programs to more individual development that catered to specific needs
- An increase in coaching and mentoring activity (especially using in-house staff). Allowing people development to continue without spending large amounts on outside experts. Several organizations reported that this had the added knock-on effect of really motivating those chosen as coaches and mentors, by giving them a new sense of pride and engagement in their staff roles.
- More measurement of coaching activity. A need to know the effect of the coaching process; what has been learnt; what development changes have taken place; what needs to happen next?
- The use of coaches and mentors from other aid organizations to provide fresh insights and share experiences – particularly in field operations.
- An increase in cross-organizational learning and experience exchanges.
- A need for many aid agencies to make it clear to donors that the T&D of staff is a key part of the work process (making people better at doing their jobs). Too often, T&D spending is viewed as a “nice to have” rather than a “must have”, with donors wanting every cent funnelled to the end recipients.
- While this determination to maintain at least a minimum level of training activity despite economic hardships was encouraging, there was also strong evidence that staff cuts, hiring freezes and consequent staff shortages posed problems. “Where do we find the time for quality learning?” asked one interviewee. “We are so pressed for time we just can't spare two or three hours for this sort of thing.” For many, this would seem to be the reality of day-to-day organizational existence.

## Redefine Leadership Responsibilities and Roles

There is a definite need to take a long, hard look at what leaders are supposed to do – especially in terms of their contribution from the top of the business. As we have already reported, there are still **a lot of people in senior leadership roles who are deeply involved in the day-to-day operational activities of their organizations.** But in an ever more complex and regulated world, should senior managers be doing this, or should they have a much more strategic role?

One HR director, involved in this issue, told us, “I think it is important that our senior leaders ultimately have a strong view of what THEY (as individuals) have to do for the organization as opposed to what WE have to do collectively.”

Another made a plea for a lot more focus from top level leaders. “There’s an awful lot of top managers who still keep what I call the ‘retained hobby’ from a previous role,” she said. “They seem unable to move on and consequently waste time on issues and operations that should not really concern them anymore.”

Then again, as several people interviewed from the UN system and its subsidiaries pointed out, what is often referred to as leadership isn’t that at all. “In truth, there’s a lot of negotiation skills in the UN, but not much leadership,” voiced one HR specialist.

## Stop Celebrating Mediocrity from Top to Bottom

“There’s a very real danger that we are actually good at rewarding, you could say celebrating mediocrity,” worried one HR recruiter. “Many people seem to be so aware that we have people working long hours for poor rewards that they feel they should thank them – even when they are not doing a very good job.” Said another interviewee, **“There’s a lot of very well-meaning people in the aid industry – but are they holding us back?** Should we be a lot more strict in how we hire and who we hire. More than that should we toughen up our appraisal processes?”

By way of illustration, one aid agency HR director recounted the story of Jane, a long serving member of staff. When the charity could no longer put off making some staff redundant, they had a detailed audit of people’s contribution and how vital it was to survival. “When we came to Jane,” she recounted, “we had a problem. Everyone knew who she was – she had been with us 27 years – but no one knew what she actually did! Everyone assumed that everyone else knew!” She concluded, “That might be extreme, but I think we could all do with taking a long, hard look at our organizations and what people really do all day.”

Back to the issue of rewarding average performance. “There’s far too much of it,” said one interviewee. A real tendency to feel that people make a sacrifice. **I think we need to spend a lot more time getting the right people on board and then making sure they do the right job.**”

Another posed the question, “It’s one thing to be able to say proudly that we have 45 people in Country X, but are they the RIGHT people? Wouldn’t it be better to have 30 people doing the right job than 45 doing an OK job? Unfortunately not many of us stop to think this through.”



And while most HR professionals at least recognize that there has to be some kind of line drawn before the aid sector adopts totally the cut and thrust, free market, anything goes approach of the for-profit sector, there was a strong feeling that – even after the hard knocks that economic recession has brought – many organizations had not learned all the lessons on offer. Because of that, **many felt that it was up to the leaders in an organization to lay down tougher guidelines on performance and productivity.** “We are too easy on a lot of people,” commented one, “lot’s of people go largely unsupervised. Sure they may think they are overworked, but did we really want them to spend all their energy on that project; could they have made a better contribution by doing something else?” They finish, “danger is, of course, if you criticize you are seen as being unfair and uncaring – not the impression you want in an aid agency culture.”

Clearly this is an issue that takes a lot to resolve in any meaningful way.

### Accept that Some Leaders Just Don’t Fit Anymore

Two senior aid agency leaders that we interviewed admitted that they were possibly out of touch – a real danger of not be able to cope in the fast-paced world of the 21st Century. “I admit that I am somewhat a dinosaur when it comes to a lot of organizational needs,” said one, “and I suppose that this needs to change.” The other felt that she wasn’t making the best of her role on the basis that change was rapidly taking over, making many of her long-celebrated skills increasingly redundant.

At least they admitted this. **For many, it is a total inability either to see their failing, or agree to reskill that is the most dangerous.** People working very long hours at the wrong thing (as we saw above) who are then surprised when a new hire is promoted ahead of them. This ‘importing’ someone from the outside is management’s “safe” option: get someone new to do the job while not having “that” conversation with the long-time employee who can’t change, won’t change or doesn’t realize they should.

And, as we were reminded on several occasions, these sort of issues don’t just apply to employees in the lower levels of a business. One chief executive of a leading emergency aid agency explained to us that it was imperative that “weeding out the poor performers had to start at the top.” And by that he meant not just the managing board, but the external board too. “We’ve had several people, who by their actions, have clearly demonstrated that they don’t meet the criteria we have set for external board members. There really is not much

*(continued on page 29)*

## Leaders Need to Have Courageous Conversations

It's been termed by some the "ostrich mentality", meaning that it's easier to stick your head in the sand, or look away, than it is to confront staff on difficult issues, poor performance or bad behaviour. Time and time again, interviewees voiced serious concern that senior management were turning their backs on dealing with poor hiring decisions and below standard performance.

The reason for this was a very real reluctance to engage in what one HR director termed "courageous conversations."

"Managers and supervisors need to tackle poor or unacceptable performance honestly – to confront, not ignore, issues," said one organizational development professional. They added, "too often we see people who don't perform being kept on when they should have been either counselled or removed."

One part of the problem in getting to grips with underachievers within the aid sector is the very nature of the jobs they do. Explains one HR manager, "It's very difficult when people are in a long hours, low pay job and you then tell them they are underperforming." Added another, "If you try and tackle people who aren't making a real contribution they turn round and say, 'how can you say this to me – I'm a good person! You don't pay me much and the hours are terrible and now you want me to work harder!'"

A dilemma perhaps, but one that needs a solution. And now, as many aid workers have been asked to take pay cuts to meet current economic conditions, there's more of a reason to deal with underperformers than ever.

"Senior staff can't ignore these sort of non-performance issues any longer," says a recruitment professional. They continue, "First they need to be a lot more careful in the people they hire; second they need to have honest, in-depth conversations about people's careers and career goals. Finally, if they can't get the person to do things in the right way they should start by saying, 'here's how we can make you better at what you do, not you're crap at this!' What's required is to give our leaders the confidence to tackle these issues in the right way. Perhaps then they won't spend their time avoiding confrontation."

Interestingly, a recent study of leadership issues in international organizations (the UN family, World Bank, OECD, EU etc) also pointed to agency leaders being reluctant to face up to poor performers.

As this extract explains: *"Unfortunately, for those that aren't quite good enough we are not at all good at dealing with exit policies. So, if you make it through the first three years you are almost guaranteed to stay forever, even to the point of 'parking' people in an out-of-the-way function where they won't cause too much trouble." Others agree with this assessment. "We need to face up to bad fits – right now we don't. The upshot is that people get promoted (to get them out of one department) and they get passed around the organization getting more and more important, when they should have been weeded out early on."*



From our conversations, there seems little doubt that international aid agencies are facing the same sort of people problems. And while some seem to be beginning to confront these issues in a positive fashion, for others it is still very much an unwillingness to face up to reality.

What is certain is that four actions can make a difference in tackling poor performance:

- Making it a part of performance reviews that managers and supervisors do tackle these issues as a matter of day-to-day management
- Give them the right tools to approach underperformance in a “we’re here to help” fashion as a start point
- In the recruitment process (especially with technical positions) do an assessment that takes social skills into account
- Consider twin-track career systems (technical track and a management track), so that those with the right skills get into the right places.

As one HR manager interviewed pointed out, “Often we have to remember why we recruited the person in the first place. If we wanted a great technician, we can’t blame them if we then ask them to become a manager or change their role without any help and support. Sadly, that’s something – in the heat of a crisis – that we often do.”

Adds another, “It all comes down to those conversations. Taking a few moments to keep people informed, to encourage and praise and tactfully correct. That’s what good leaders do. Bad leaders walk the other way and we can’t afford that anymore.”

choice. You are usually dealing with highly successful people, with very fixed views. To move on, you need to have the discussion with them and get them to depart.”

Our interviewee pointed out that the upside of taking action like this sent a “strong message to the whole organization, that we are not going to carry passengers, or ineffective or disruptive people anywhere at all.” He added, “This really is a good thing and it also energises the organization as they feel you are doing you very best to make the business really work.”

## Learn to Nurture the Next Generation of Leaders

Lastly, effective leaders have a duty of care. They need to **spend time ensuring that the next generation are being given every opportunity to grow and develop the required skills.** This means that the onus is on senior managers to counsel and mentor future leaders and do all they can to ensure they are ready to assume a more senior role when it occurs. From our conversations it would seem this aspect of the leaders’ responsibilities is getting better. Still, there are some of those dinosaurs who could do a whole lot better.

## Part Three: Talent Management and the Aid Sector – New Challenges Require a New Pragmatism

There’s a huge amount of talent employed in the aid sector – technical, specialist, organizational – and it’s under pressure as never before. The scenario is all too clear. A world in permanent crisis, where those charged with relieving suffering and offering millions a new beginning are finding it tougher to deliver, harder to raise funds and facing ever more determined competition for their number one asset – people. Everyone knows it isn’t going to get any easier. Indeed even the most optimistic predict ever harder times ahead. So **in a climate like that, how do you recruit, reward and retain the talent you need?** Our interviewees have some very fixed ideas about what we should do, and what we shouldn’t waste our precious time and people assets on.

There’s a great deal of all too predictable ‘management-speak’ about the phrase talent management. It’s cool, it’s trendy to talk about it. Organizations the world over are full of eager corporate types with freshly printed business cards proclaiming titles of vice-presidents, directors, or managers of talent; heads of people solutions, even knowledge officers get a look in. And, yes, we admit, there are even a few we’ve come across in the aid sector too. But the truth is that the art of spotting, recruiting, developing and holding on to talented people isn’t new. All sorts of organizations of every shape and size have made it their goal to have and hold on to the very best talent. Whether it’s a Nobel prize-winning chemist, a premier league footballer, a great entertainer or your colleague in the cubicle next to you. We all want to be associated with and work with people at the very top of their game.

But what are the key issues and options around talent within the humanitarian and development aid sector; what are the things we need to take on board to make us all better at the recruiting, onboarding, rewarding, developing and retaining talent? Here’s what our interviews produced.

## Above All, Take a Chance

The worse thing you can do with talented people is not give them a chance to show what they can do. Today, so many agencies demand that projects are staffed with experienced people that there's never any room to get new-comers involved. All this does is store up long-term problems. If experienced people dominate then there comes a time when the pipeline is empty. **A duty of human resources is to convince heads of operations that they need to diversify and get new talent onto assignments early on in their careers.** The message is, "take a chance on these people or you'll lose them."

## Learn to Protect Your Talent

It has always been difficult to find senior staff to do complex, often highly specialized work, especially in some of the most remote and dangerous parts of the world. This is unlikely to change. However, **interviewees predict that there are going to have to be some changes in reward packages and contractual terms in the future.** Key reason for this is the arrival of private sector corporations, able to offer additional benefits and conditions. Our sources predict battles for hard-to-get talent increasing.

Similarly, heads of mission are being stolen from rival aid agencies and the private sector. Again, fresh thinking is required to secure their future employment.

## Should He Go or Should He Stay?

For some agencies, long-serving country managers are seen as a real block to progress. As one said, "We have to make it clear to them, that this is not a job for life." But there are others who see them as providing continuity and stability, especially in organizations with high turnover in field operations. Solutions range from moving them to new assignments, to putting them onto fixed term contracts. Problems abound. "Sure, putting these people onto short-term contracts does get rid of bottlenecks at the top and allow us to promote new people with new ideas," explained one interviewee, "but we also can find ourselves losing valuable staff with a lot of local knowledge." **Smart organizations are hedging their bets, going for more in-depth assessment of people's abilities to make sure they get the right kind of future career and the agency has the right person in the right place.**

*"We've got a bunch of ageing country directors who all think they've a job for life. So far no one has had the courage to go and tell them this isn't actually true."*

*"Should NGOs get together and share ideas and information? My question, will they share stuff or steal stuff?"*

## Expats Rock OK!

Lots of aid agencies have spent huge amounts of time, money and resources getting local nationals to assume key field positions right up to country director level. But there's a problem in lots of places. **Government leaders and other local country dignitaries are more likely to invite and do business with expatriates than with their own countrymen** – they just open doors more easily. Moreover, local nationals working at country director level are much more likely to have their extended family or the government put pressure on them.

One other point regarding expatriate talent. In many, many places it is still a MUST requirement as there is no local personnel solution.

## You Choose

Talent turnover remains an issue for many agencies – especially for volunteers in their field. **Several agencies told us that one way to improve turnover is to create a system where staff can choose their next assignments.** This, it appears, makes a major difference. Of course, not everyone can go to the so-called “good” places to work.

## New Talent Categories

For most of the aid organizations we spoke with the top new category in terms of securing talent was IT. But not any IT person. **“We were able to hire an IT specialist who really was able to make a huge difference to our business in all sorts of ways,”** reported one aid charity. This was a strategic role, really looking at all aspects of how IT can impact on and improve everything from fundraising, tracking volunteers, marketing, logistics control, organizing assignments – even how an agency relates to the emergent social media. “This one person was able to make such an impact that they completely changed the way we run our business. It’s hard to believe the contribution they made – far more than we could have imagined.” As others confirmed, taking a major step like this is a real investment, not only in money but trust too. And taking this route means that you are fishing in the same waters as the big international agencies, the UN and the private sector. Comments a recruiter, “before you begin you’ve got to have the package absolutely clear, know why you are doing it and what you want to achieve from it. This isn’t about hiring an IT guy, this is about rethinking your strategic approach.”

In addition to IT specialists, financial, legal and logistic talent is also in demand (again with that need to go up against rival recruiters from the private sector). Also we had reports of several agencies hiring heads of learning, with the intention of getting people much more focused on the jobs they do and being properly developed for those roles. Finally several aid groups have been deliberately recruiting from the private sector retail market. This is specifically focused on aid agencies with high street shopping outlets.

## Recruitment From the Private Sector

But how well do these newcomers from the private sector settle down in a very different care-related, not-for-profit world? The honest answer is, some do and some don’t. There are two problems:

- Refusal to change, from both sides
- Poor onboarding methods

## Social Networking and Leadership

An interesting development that has already threatened old-style leadership methods is the increasing use of social networking. Use of Facebook, Twitter, U-Tube and other “instant access” tools has meant that headquarters or senior-level in-country staff no longer have the monopoly on what’s happening in the field. In today’s world, voicing – and showing – dissent and disagreement are just a few key strokes away.

As one aid agency chief executive explained, “20 years ago it was the telex and the fax machine that kept people in touch, but that was a limited and highly controlled service. Today, everyone has a mobile phone and probably a laptop too.” They added, “To put it simply the cat is now out of the bag. No amount of instruction or demand from the top can stop field workers sharing text and images with their friends, relations and others. This means that leaders can’t assume anything anymore, because they are not in control of the message.”

A clear issue from this major change in how news can get out to the wider world in practically real time, is that organizations must be totally transparent. “If they are not,” warns a country operation manager, “they will find that the real news gets out anyway.” They add that, “In some organizations there is an all out war going on as headquarters staff try to censor staff in the field. However, there is a much wider issue. The wrong messages going out for the wrong reasons can lead to all sorts of security issues that we are only just getting to grips with. It’s a tough call but leaders do need to address this issue as a matter of some urgency.”

*“To get through this recession we reduced everyone’s salary, so we all share the pain. Then comes the question, ‘why do we keep the underperformers?’”*

.....  
*“Basically, we’ve got to stop celebrating mediocrity.”*



According to HR professionals with experience of this there seems to be a limit as to how many people from outside the aid sector can easily be deployed. Too many and the culture – someone termed it the “ethos” of the organization can be under threat. Also, talent from the private sector is usually brought in to create – even force – change. Unless this is done in a certain way, agency employees can usually cause the newcomer to fail, basically through outright refusal to follow the new ideas.

Equally, incomers from other industry sectors – and especially for-profit corporations – are all too often left to their own devices. “Advised one HR director, “You need a complete onboarding strategy that really makes certain the new hire is accepted. More than that, you need some sort of mentoring process to get the person comfortable with how our industry operates.”

Another successful way of doing this is make sure that any hire from another industry sector has had prior exposure to NGOs or the aid sector. At least this way they will have some understanding of the way the industry works. “Usually, new recruits from outside the sector are horrified at the slowness of decision-making processes,” observed one interviewee, “but, if they have been around the organization for a while as an advisor or volunteer they will know that a lot of that apparent slowness is caused by the high levels of complexity we all too often have to deal with.

### Size Matters!

When it comes to attracting top talent, size of the organization remains a factor. Small organizations are quite simply unable to provide the career development and progression for ambitious, get-ahead people. Consequently they leave. As we commented earlier in the report, there seems little that smaller organizations can do to combat this. **The only thing that seems to work in terms of attracting hard-to-get talent is to offer them terms and conditions they can't get elsewhere.** This usually results in specialists being recruited with a promise to be able to pursue their own agenda or be given huge amounts of autonomy. Neither of these reasons seems a particularly good idea for hiring people given limited resources.

### Look to Your Own Talent

Another issue raised by several aid agencies was the problem of placing people in difficult or dangerous postings. Advice offered was that you should always solve these difficult positions with your own staff. Said one HR

director, “You must staff hard to fill positions with your own, home grown people. If you can’t do that you will never successfully fill these jobs using external hires. It just won’t work.”

## Change the Hiring Mentality

Often under pressure to get the best people for the least outlay, the aid industry starts the recruitment process from the wrong point of view. “The ‘how little do I need to pay?’ approach isn’t at all smart,” argued a recruiter we spoke with. Better to ask a totally different question, “How can this person best help me? Of course it is sensible to have a salary level in mind, but if you really want to hire talent, the equation must be built around cost/benefit, not some fixed number in your head.”

## Attributes of the Top Team

Look at any job description for a senior manager in the aid sector in a recruitment advertisement and you’ll see that the demands are not getting any easier. Farm from it, there’s an expectation that the attributes Superman, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela have been successfully glued together! Seriously, it’s a tough call. **We’re asking a great deal of those who will lead our agencies and we are not usually able to pay the real market price.** So what are the key attributes today? Our interviewees suggested three:

- An exceptional manager/leader
- A consummate politician
- An incredible fund raiser

There may be more qualities. We think most organizations will take these three as a very good start!

## Pick the Real Top 100

We don’t care how big your business is. What you need to know is who are the top 100 people that make your organization work. And we mean the real top 100 people. We DON’T mean the 100 people who THINK they should be in the top 100 list. Chances are they are not all in the top team or even the second team, But they are the people who’s varied talents keep the organization going through good times and bad. **Know who they are, and have a plan for each of them. Talk to them, develop them, reward them when you can. Above all don’t lose them!**

## ... and Those Others ...

Finally. Don’t forget what one interviewee termed “the stayers.” Those people who don’t want a promotion, don’t want a new posting, don’t want much apart from doing a good job, day in and day out. They are the “other” people that keep things going – especially when the going gets tough. Have a plan for them – a kind word is a good start!

## The View of the Center for Creative Leadership

### Unleashing Leadership Talent in INGO's: CCL's Philosophy Stresses Collaboration with Others

The Center for Creative Leadership have committed themselves to helping the more disadvantaged of our society by using their knowledge and expertise to develop leadership program that have a real and lasting impact on individuals and societies that have not had access to these sorts of tools before. Here David Altman, Executive Vice President, Research, Innovation and Product Development; Lyndon Rego, Director, Innovation Incubator and Steadman Harrison III, Regional Director Africa, outline CCL's philosophy in using leadership tools and strategies in the developing world.

As they explain, CCL is committed to developing affordable and scalable innovative leadership development approaches for the international humanitarian and development aid sector. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with others on this agenda.

There are few people in the world who are challenged to do as much with as little as those who work in the INGO sector. Working with few resources relative to the extraordinary needs that exist in the world and often too little formal authority to change the structural forces that lie

*"Where you come from, this leadership training may result in better management and better business practices. But here, here in Uganda, this teaching has the potential to save lives."*

*– former Ugandan guerrilla soldier*

at the root of problems faced by society, INGOs nonetheless routinely take on an array of complex challenges such as hunger, health and sanitation, education, poverty and economic development, disaster relief, discrimination and violence. Their ability to be effective in addressing these challenges impacts the lives and livelihoods of billions of the world's people. But if they were better able to unleash their talent, could they be more effective? The short answer is a resounding "yes".

As guardians of the common good, INGOs are mission-centric and focused on outcomes that improve the human condition both in the short-term and long-term. Yet, **the success of INGOs rests on the abilities of their people to create new solutions, forge coalitions, mobilize cross-sector initiatives, be resilient in the face of adversity, and innovate in the face of challenge and change.** Fuelled by mission and passion, INGO staff often work long hours for little pay and an uncertain future. Burnout is common. Turnover can be high. And development of staff is mostly a function of their experiences on the job with few resources dedicated to formal leadership development or to providing staff with time to reflect and synthesize their experiences.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) has begun to dedicate more time and attention to addressing the leadership development needs in the INGO sector. Over the course of its four decades of involvement in

leadership development, CCL has conducted ground-breaking research, pioneered approaches to intervention that are standard practice in the field, and helped to develop hundreds of thousands of leaders. However, we recognized that we were not doing enough for most of the people in the world:

- Those who lived at the middle and bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid
- That we had just a small footprint in developing countries
- That we were more involved in the private sector than the social sector
- That we only did leadership development for young people through intermediaries such as school administrators.

Therefore, over the past few years, we have set about to remedy this situation by filling key gaps in the field.

Teaming up with two of the leading innovation consulting firms in the world, Continuum and IDEO, we conducted three in-depth investigations in Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and India. Using ethnographic methods, we sought to learn the context of need and to begin the process of rapid prototyping on ways to meet these needs. These and other projects, followed by small experiments, **provided a rich understanding of existing constraints and potential solutions. Some of our work provoked interesting reactions.**

For example, at one of our early programs in East Africa, a former member of an outlaw guerrilla organization proclaimed:

*“This training is very important. And you need to understand why we say to you, You need to come back. You hear us saying, come back soon. And it’s for a reason. Where you come from, this leadership training may result in better management and better business practices. But here, here in Uganda, this teaching has the potential to save lives. This region, these governments have been at war for many years. If they heard today what you were teaching us, I believe we could end many of these conflicts. We could see an end to these wars.”*

In conversations we had with many INGO and grassroots leaders throughout India, we heard that some 2.2 million INGOs cover the country and have the capability for doing massive capacity building; what was needed (but missing) was an effective and simple curriculum and tools. **There was significant interest in quality leadership development approaches but affordability was essential.** In the social sector, the ability to pay for a leadership program may be only a dollar.

Out of these experiences, we learned that in order to address these needs and constraints we would have to think very differently from the traditional view of executive education. We adopted a series of practices from the spheres of open-source, bottom of the pyramid innovation, and social innovation. We brought these approaches into an integrated leadership development models for social sector organizations:

- Simplified curriculum (but not simple!) that could be delivered by facilitators without extensive skill-building and credentialing.



- Tools, toolkits, and practices that can be used at marginal cost, without licensing or royalty fees or complex MOU's or contracts.
- Train-the-trainer programs to transfer these curriculum, tools, and capabilities to local grassroots trainers so that they could adapt and deliver these at the local level, in local language, and at realistic local costs.

The models that we developed have since been used to develop over 100 grassroots trainers and some 10,000 leaders across the world. Some of the indigenous trainers we worked with have launched new institutions for leadership development in Ethiopia, Kenya, India and the Caribbean.

Since then, we have expanded on this model, and are developing an extended series of solutions for the social sector that will facilitate these models being scaled further. These include:

- An “early leadership” trainer toolkit that can be used to develop essential leadership and life skills in young people. As one example of its use, the toolkit has been used in Kenya to help heal the wounds of the 2008 ethnic violence and build an appreciation for diversity. We continue to expand the toolkit and are working to disseminate it to schools around the world so that every child can enhance their awareness of themselves, appreciate others, manage conflict effectively, and approach life’s hardships with resilience and determination. These are skills that are rarely formally included in standard school-based education but are among the most fundamental drivers of success in life.
- A social innovation curriculum that can equip would-be change-makers with the leadership and innovation skills that they need to create and enact new solutions to entrenched social challenges. In the world today, we see a rising interest among young people to address the great challenges of our time – from the environment to hunger to poverty. So too, those nearing retirement are looking to connect anew with the social change movements that characterized their youth.
- A women’s empowerment toolkit that is focused on the billion-plus women around the world who are among the most marginalized with regard to education and opportunity. As microfinance has demonstrated, opportunity extended to these women can, almost more than anything else, change the lives of the poor. When money is in the hands of women, it enhances the well-being of entire families who benefit from better education, nutrition, and health.

- A “creative leadership conversations” toolkit that seeks to enhance the art of collaboration and co-creation using the practice of coaching. **The boundary-spanning problems in the world require interdependent leadership approaches.** The old paradigm of influence is less effective here than gaining true engagement and commitment through weaving solutions out of common understanding and shared interest. Coaching seeks to co-create and gain commitment through deep dialogue that uses the tools of listening, inquiry, and feedback.

Other initiatives include leadership development for the microfinance sector, which has emerged as one of the key solutions to poverty. The sector, which is experiencing growth of as much as 100 percent annually in India, is suffering from growing pains with regard to talent. The pain is sharpest in the middle manager ranks. This layer bears responsibility for operations in the field where microfinance reaches out to millions of women spread across tens of thousands of villages. **Middle managers must balance financial returns with social impact in an operation that is high touch and highly-process driven.** Our focus is on developing alternate methods for nurturing the leadership skills needed to help microfinance managers scale out operations to hundreds of millions of poor who have yet to be served by financial services.

The next frontier for our work is developing local innovation capacity. Our world is increasingly recognizing the need for greater interdependence and boundary-spanning collaboration. The social sector has been modelling these behaviours for a long time. So too, the social sector has shaped new pathways for innovation, pioneering practices such as “base of the pyramid” approaches and microfinance that are now being emulated by mainstream corporations. The intense needs and constraints that social sector organizations address form a crucible for innovation. Partnering with local institutions, we hope to create a Web of innovation incubators that bring together local researchers and developers with international researchers, designers and developers to co-create new leadership development solutions. This will help ensure that the needs in local contexts are being addressed and that the solutions that are created conform to local culture and constraints.

As we work to build leadership capacity in the social sector, we recognize that we are riding a rising wave. Funders are increasingly interested in building local capacity in developing countries, creating self-sustaining solutions, and building cross-industry collaborations that include INGOs, government, and business. The need for the work that the social sector does is as great as ever. **The need for leadership skills that enable those working in the sector to rise to these challenges cannot be understated.** At CCL, we are committed to developing affordable and scalable innovative leadership development approaches for the social sector. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with others on this agenda. The challenges we face in the world require fresh thinking and greater collaboration. Indeed, they require creative leadership.

*“I don’t care what people would like to think. In a lot of cases and a lot of places gender diversity just doesn’t work – period!”*

## The Viewpoint of People In Aid

### 'Leading people'

The leadership of people is fundamental to People In Aid's work and thinking and has been since its origins in the mid-1990s. The People In Aid Code itself states as its guiding principle that 'people are central to the achievement of the organizational mission' (People In Aid Code of Good Practice 2003), and indeed, as countless evaluations within the humanitarian and development sector testify – the extent to which an organization's mission is delivered effectively is inextricably linked to the way in which it leads and manages its people.

People In Aid believes that **the increasing complexity of the International non-governmental organizations' (INGOs') operating environment requires stronger and bolder leadership, but the gap between what exists and what is required appears to be widening.**

To close the gap, we must continue to answer pressing questions:

- How does 'humanitarian leadership' differ from leadership in other contexts?
- To what extent can leadership behaviours be nurtured or developed throughout an organization, as opposed to solely among a senior elite?
- Where are tomorrow's leaders today?
- How can organizations identify and develop new leaders from within?
- How can organizations better engage current and future leaders, and strengthen commitment, alignment and a sense of belonging or shared purpose?
- What are the career development opportunities for emerging leaders?
- How do we evaluate successful leadership?
- How can organizations recognize (and reward) their leaders appropriately?

And we must develop affordable leadership development approaches for the INGO community.

Over the last five years, People In Aid has deepened its research into leadership within INGOs. Our journey of discovery has led us to an understanding of what makes a great leader, and what sets them apart from followers. Together with our INGO members, we have also identified and elaborated core leadership behaviours, and helped organizations equip their leaders to lead individuals and teams more effectively. We have also become absolutely convinced that **certain leadership behaviours must be encouraged and nurtured at all levels of the organization, regardless of role, function or seniority.** Or, in the compelling words of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), "leadership must be democratized".

But to answer our questions, and to develop innovative solutions, and to have anything approaching the 'impact at scale' that we desire, we recognize the urgent need for new, global partnerships, and to collaborate with renewed 'intentionality'. Which is where relationships such as the one between People In Aid and the CCL promise to deliver.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

Developing this report, interviewing so many people and organizations has been a fascinating journey. It has created an opportunity to view leadership and talent management issues in a completely different way. Therefore, it is important that the ideas and opportunities continue to be addressed and developed.

So what happens now? Several things:

- People In Aid will – as part of their overall mandate – continue to monitor and report on both leadership and talent management issues as they impact the aid sector
- The Center for Creative Leadership, will continue to work with People In Aid to develop appropriate program and tools that meet the specific needs of international aid agencies at both headquarters and in the field.
- The Center for Creative Leadership will develop publications and e-zines focused specifically on the international organization sector.
- People In Aid and the Center for Creative Leadership will regularly seek out opportunities for exchanges of ideas and information and provide input to seminars and conferences.
- There will be ongoing conversations, interviews and exchanges of ideas on leadership and talent management between the Center for Creative Leadership and international organizations, leading to future publications and events.

Although many of the leadership and talent management issues are common to most sectors, **aid organizations have distinct and highly specific expectations and needs**. It is to ensure that these emerging needs are not just recognised but met in a practical, pragmatic fashion, that the Center for Creative Leadership and People In Aid will continue to work together.

*“Where do we consistently fail? Easy! Our inability to fill senior management and technical positions in what can only be described as the world's hell spots!”*

## People In Aid Members

Acción Contra El Hambre (Spain)  
Act4africa (UK)  
Action Against Hunger UK  
ActionAid Australia  
ActionAid Greece  
ActionAid International (South Africa)  
ActionAid Ireland  
ActionAid Italy  
ActionAid Sweden  
ActionAid UK  
ActionAid USA  
ADRA - USA  
Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (Kenya)  
All India Disaster Mitigation Institute  
American Refugee Committee (USA)  
Amnesty International (UK)  
Article 19 (UK)  
Australian Red Cross  
Australian Volunteers International  
British Red Cross (UK)  
Build Africa (UK)  
Canadian Red Cross (Canada)  
CARE Australia  
CARE Austria  
CARE Canada  
CARE Denmark  
CARE France  
CARE Germany  
CARE International Secretariat (Switzerland)  
CARE Japan  
CARE Netherlands (Netherlands)  
CARE Norway  
CARE Thailand – Raks Thai  
CARE UK  
CARE USA  
Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (UK)  
Catholic Relief Services - USA  
CBM Australia  
CESVI (Italy)  
CHF International (USA)  
ChildFund International (USA)  
Christian Aid (UK)  
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CONCERN Worldwide (HQ Ireland)  
Consumers International (CI) (UK)  
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Cordaid (Netherlands)  
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Emergency Nutrition Network (UK)  
EveryChild (UK)  
Fred Hollows Foundation (Australia)  
Grameen Foundation Australia  
Hands Around The World (UK)  
HAP International (Switzerland)  
Health Unlimited (UK)  
HealthNet International TPO (Netherlands)  
HelpAge International (UK)  
Human Relief Foundation (UK)  
ICCO (Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation) (Netherlands)  
Identity, Merge and Action (Pakistan)  
Intermón Oxfam (Spain)  
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International HIV/AIDS Alliance (UK)  
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International Medical Corps USA  
International Nepal Fellowship  
International Rescue Committee - USA  
Irish Red Cross (Ireland)  
Islamic Relief Deutschland (Germany)  
Islamic Relief Worldwide (UK)  
Leprosy Mission International (UK)  
Malteser International (Germany)  
Marie Stopes International (UK)  
Medair (Switzerland)  
Médecins sans Frontières – Belgium  
Medecins sans Frontieres – Sweden  
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Medica Mondiale (Germany)  
Mercy Corps (USA)  
Mercy Corps Scotland (UK)  
MERCY Malaysia  
Merlin (UK)  
Mines Advisory Group (UK)  
Mission Aviation Fellowship – Europe (UK)  
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MOPAWI (Honduras)  
MS ActionAid Denmark  
Muslim Aid (UK)  
Niza I.S.M. ActionAid (Netherlands)  
Norwegian Church Aid (Norway)  
Norwegian Refugee Council (Norway)  
Oxfam America (USA)  
Oxfam – Australia  
Oxfam Canada  
Oxfam Deutschland (Germany)  
Oxfam GB (UK)  
Oxfam Hong Kong  
Oxfam New Zealand  
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 Peacebuilding UK  
 Penal Reform International (UK)  
 People In Aid (UK)  
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 Plan Ireland  
 Polish Humanitarian Action (Poland)  
 Pump Aid (UK)  
 Rainforest Alliance (USA)  
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 TEAR Australia  
 Tearfund (UK)  
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### Associate Members

Antares Foundation (Netherlands)  
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 (Netherlands)  
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 Cinfo (Switzerland)  
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 Akuapem Community Development  
 Programme (Ghana)  
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 (BACH) (Ghana)  
 Fundación Acceso (Costa Rica)  
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 Liberia Red Cross Society  
 New Energy (Ghana)  
 Oboomma Rural Action Programme (Ghana)  
 Professional Network Association (Ghana)  
 ProNet North (Ghana)  
 Rural Aid – Ghana  
 Sierra Leone Red Cross Society  
 The Brooke India  
 The Brooke Pakistan  
 Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (Nepal)  
 Uganda Red Cross Society  
 VSO Jitolee (Kenya)

### Network Members

Nigeria Network of NGOs

## Focusing on the Practical: A Final Word from the Center for Creative Leadership

Whether working with multinational corporations at the most senior levels, or a true grassroots “teach-in” at an African village, one thing defines all the Center for Creative Leadership’s work – a focus on the practical. We use research-based tools to deliver a consistent leadership model based on assessment, challenge and support. Moreover, **the basic structures and platforms of the CCL approach to leadership work at all levels across all types of organizations in every location you can think of.**

The outline on the next page illustrates CCL’s view of the challenges and competencies of effective leadership at every level, from leading yourself right up to leading the whole organization. Take a look, we know it works because we’ve seen the results literally thousands of times. If you want to know more there are two things you can do:

- Contact Philip Healy, Sales Director Open Enrolment EMEA and International Organizations for more information at +32 (0) 2 679 31 or [healyp@ccl.org](mailto:healyp@ccl.org).
- Visit the website and that will tell you a great deal more, <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/programs/LDRFlash.aspx>

*“What don’t we do? – Communicate! Our leaders are too busy to tell staff what’s going on and where priorities are.”*

## LEADING SELF

### Challenges

- Prepare for management or leadership role
- Build common leadership language in organization
- Increase personal effectiveness and performance

## LEADING OTHERS

### Challenges

- Transition from individual performer to leading a team
- Build relationships to get work done
- Deal effectively with conflict
- Solve problems successfully

## LEADING MANAGERS

### Challenges

- Integrate cross-functional perspectives in decisions
- Handle complexity
- Manage politics
- Sell ideas to senior leaders
- Select & lead managers for high performance

## LEADING THE FUNCTION

### Challenges

- Set vision and build toward the future
- Balance trade-offs between the short and long-term
- Align organization for strategy implementation

## LEADING THE ORGANIZATION

### Challenges

- Set organizational direction
- Foster alignments across the organization
- Gain commitment for performance
- Refine and build strong executive persona

## Fundamental Four Leader Competencies: Self awareness, learning agility, influence, communication

### Competencies

- Establishing credibility
- Leading with purpose
- Delivering results
- Doing whatever it takes
- Interpersonal savvy
- Embracing flexibility
- Tolerating ambiguity
- Understanding one's own values and culture

### Competencies

- Coaching & developing others
- Leading team achievement
- Building & maintaining relationships
- Resolving conflict
- Learning to delegate
- Confronting problem employees
- Innovative problem solving
- Embracing change
- Adapting to Cultural Differences

### Competencies

- Thinking & acting systemically
- Managing organizational complexity
- Negotiating adeptly
- Selecting & developing others
- Taking risks
- Implementing change
- Managing globally dispersed teams

### Competencies

- Being visionary
- Driving results
- Strategic thinking & acting
- Creating engagement
- Identifying innovation opportunities for new businesses
- Working across boundaries
- Leading globally

### Competencies

- Creating & articulating vision
- Creating strategic alignment
- Developing a leadership and talent strategy aligned with business strategy
- Leading the culture
- Executive image
- Creating a culture of innovation
- Catalyzing change
- Leading outwardly

## Challenges & Competencies



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The Center for Creative Leadership is committed to a policy of equality of opportunity for the admission of all students regardless of race, color, creed, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability, and does not discriminate on any such basis with respect to its activities, programs or policies.

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Price €85