



DRAFT:
**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN 21ST CENTURY
HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS**

A SCOPING EXERCISE

**HUMANITARIAN FUTURES PROGRAMME
KING'S COLLEGE LONDON**

Executive Summary

1. This is a scoping exercise (funded by the Norwegian and Swedish Governments) designed to define the parameters and potential importance of strategic leadership, in order to determine how best to proceed with the study, itself, and its practical implications. In so doing, the exercise is intended to open up discussions on four critical issues: (i) the extent to which strategic leadership has a role in the humanitarian sector; (ii) possible impact and consequences of such leadership for the sector as a whole as well as for individual organisations; (iii) institutional adjustments that would be needed to provide an *enabling environment* for strategic leadership; and (iv) types of research methodologies necessary to explore the first three issues. In anticipation of discussions to take place at HFP's Stakeholders Forum in November 2009, a preliminary review of the Scoping Exercise took place on 29 October 2009 by a group of organisations from the humanitarian, private sector and military sectors. The results of that review are reflected in this paper.

2. The purpose of strategic leadership is to foster and promote a purpose – based on abiding goals and values – that will transcend the pressures of immediate operational objectives and organisational requirements, while at the same time providing a guiding framework for them. The challenge for this sort of leadership is that the paths towards achieving such goals appear increasingly unclear – marked by a growing sense of uncertainty and complexity.

3. Strategic leadership is faced with the conundrum that cause and effect are not readily identifiable. Small influences and events can be magnified by feedback loops, and have extraordinarily disproportionate consequences; and highly improbable events such as that iconic Black Swan can emerge to disrupt a well ordered world model. Hence, uncertainty and complexity are increasingly recognised as pervasive features of existence, and the perceived certitudes of yore less so. The challenge for the strategic leader is how – in an attempt to achieve value-driven goals – can one plan in an environment increasing marked by complexity and uncertainty.

4. In light of uncertainty and complexity, the first question to pose is, “What can one know about the future?”. An alternative to traditional knowledge is an increased understanding about the nature of the future, a sensitivity to plausible alternatives and the commitment to explore a wide range of possible futures. In so doing, one takes the first step

towards effective strategic leadership, namely, developing more acute anticipatory capacities for assessing *what might be*. This sort of perspective at least establishes a level of sensitivity to alternatives which in turn should improve an organisation's ability to adapt to change and be ready to seize opportunities when they arise. However, the ability to consider *what might be* in an uncertain future must be balanced against areas where increasing certainty is emerging, such as improved early warning and prediction capacities.

5. This sort of speculative or futures-thinking approach, however, goes against the grain of leaders in most organisations and organisational dynamics in general. Leaders live by a hard-won personal world model, and tend to seek evidence that supports that model. Organisations, designed to screen out information perceived as “irrelevant”, rely in one way or another upon standard operating procedures that are geared towards fulfilling functions in preconfigured ways. These general individual and organisational characteristics also apply to those in the humanitarian sector. There is a tendency to rely on leadership approaches that are low risk and that promote predictability for fear of getting something wrong or appearing incompetent.

6. In the humanitarian sector, the issue of leadership has been largely absent from recent debates about performance and professionalism. An initial foray into what it is that people are talking about when they lament a lack of leadership is a vacuum of strategic leadership, both at global and local levels. This vacuum is all too evident among multinational and bilateral organisations as well as amongst NGOs.

7. There is a range of reasons for this conclusion, and include (i) the response-oriented humanitarian ethos, (ii) the fact that the humanitarian sector operates as a closed system, (iii) the propensity within the sector to focus on the technical rather than the strategic, (iv) the lack of incentives to think in a futures-oriented way and the related emphasis on risk aversion; (v) the control rather than leadership criteria evident in many organisations throughout the sector; (vi) the understandable though often goal-limiting emphasis on institutional survival; and (vii) the sheer dimensions of complexity and uncertainty.

8. In light of such constraints, strategic leadership in the 21st century needs in the first instance to change present approaches to planning and focus upon three broad issues: (i) new style planning process reflecting range of key uncertainties likely to be faced in obtaining core value-driven goals; (ii) diffuse and “flatter” forms of leadership where strategic leadership does not collide with “managerialism”, and is sustained by different leaders at various levels; and (iii) blending of traditional leadership strengths with new dimensions of leadership, attributes of the latter noted below.

9. Strategic leaders of the future need to position themselves at the node where different networks connect or where there is maximum overlap between the elements of a collaborative ven diagram. They will need skills to build multi-sectoral collaborative networks based on a recognition of the changing realities of the humanitarian field and emerging actors, and also to enable others to learn from them. The strategic leader will have the ability to identify and seize opportunities for innovation, and through “stakeholders net assessments” will be better able to understand the value he or she brings to stakeholders and the value which they in turn bring. Future strategic leaders will have to move beyond their traditional comfort zones and embrace the ambiguity which reflects reality, and consequently will have to develop appropriate anticipatory and adaptive skills.

10. Strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector will require at least five competencies for enhancing the overall value and purpose of the humanitarian sector in general and humanitarian organisations in particular: (i) *envisioning*, or, the ability to identify and articulate value-driven goals that have overarching importance for the leader’s own organisation and a wider community; (ii) *posing the critical question*, or the ability to challenge certitudes and seek alternative explanations; (iii) *externalisation*, in other words, networking on a multi-sectoral and inter-active basis; (iv) *communication*, or disseminating value-driven goals in ways that become deeply embedded in the objectives of the organisation as a whole; and (v) *listening*, or, the confidence to “never pass up the opportunity to remain silent.”

11. The strategic leader will only be able to plan for achieving value-driven goals if the enabling environment is right. Towards that end, three broad steps are needed to provide that enabling environment. The first is *planning as a priority*, and this in turn will require (i) expanded planning time-frames, (ii) organisational understanding that speculation is a main-line activity, (iii) harvesting ideas and expertise from a wide array of sources (iv) promoting inter-

disciplinary methodologies and (v) promoting strategic thinking at all levels of the organisation. In this context, the art of systematic speculation is the second critical step, and needs to be fostered throughout the sector and individual organisations.

12. None of the above can have overall value unless the consequences of such adjustments feed into an organisation’s decision-making process. Ways towards that end include (i) reducing the impact of unanticipated strategic options; (ii) communicating the centrality of speculation; and (iii) eliminating functions that create unnecessary closure.

Introduction to the strategic leadership scoping exercise

“We’re doers, not thinkers,” was the reaction of a UK government head of department to the idea of long-term strategic analysis. It was a reaction that would have resonated in many humanitarian organisations, focused -- as so many are -- on the ethos of practicality, immediacy and response. This is not to say that the humanitarian sector is not becoming increasingly aware of the changing environment in which it operates, and that a growing number of humanitarian organisations see the need for deeper understanding about the dimensions and dynamics of future crisis drivers and ways to address them. Rather it is to say that there is a growing unease, a deepening uncertainty throughout much of the sector about how to relate long-term organisational purpose with immediate operational needs and organisational survival.

It is in this context that strategic leadership will play an ever more important role for the humanitarian sector. The purpose of strategic leadership is to foster and promote a purpose – based on abiding goals and values – that will transcend the pressures of immediate operational objectives and organisational requirements while at the same time providing a guiding framework for them. The difficulty of this sort of leadership is compounded by the uncertainties and complexities that are hallmarks of the 21st century. In this sense, the wish of the 19th century Prussian commander von Moltke that his strategic objectives would survive even the most chaotic moments of the “fog of war” is more than apposite.ⁱ

This scoping exercise is presented with that “fog of war” analogy in mind. Its purpose is intended to be as practical as Moltke’s own view of strategy, though successful military results is not its objective. Based upon a review of the literature and a preliminary series of interviews with leaders in the corporate and military as well as humanitarian sectors, the exercise has four essential objectives. *Section I: Strategic leadership in context* describes strategic leadership and the individual and organisational constraints that affect it. These themes are explored in the context of the humanitarian sector in *Section II*. *Section III: 21st century leadership* takes the themes discussed in the first two sections, and considers what 21st century leadership not only might look like, but also what will be required in terms of organisational enabling environments.

As a scoping exercise, the intention is to suggest how this initiative might be further developed. *Section IV: The way forward* is designed to do just that. It also proposes ways that the concept might be explored to deal with related concerns such as incorporating strategic leadership into human resource frameworks, cultural determinants of strategic leadership and ways to create enabling environments.

Section I: Strategic leadership in context

Strategic leadership is about achieving a set of objectives that reflects a clear purpose over time, based upon abiding goals and values. Ways to attain this clear purpose is in no small part a key element of the strategic leader's function, but that function is confounded by the deep uncertainties and complexities that pervade the environment – internal as well as external – in which strategic leadership should take place.

The emphasis placed on complexity and uncertainty reflects in various ways fundamental transformations in the assumptions that have underpinned so much of Western development at least over the past five centuries. Scientific and religious certainties

embedded in our European ancestors a belief that the world operates like a machine, with clockwork precision through a code of rules and consequences. It created a world of sameness – predictable, controlled, known – where acts of nature, plagues, social upheaval and other forms of disorder were seen as aberrations in a world order.ⁱⁱ

Such certitudes are now replaced by the dynamics of complexity and dimensions of uncertainty.

The dynamics of complexity

Complexity theory suggests that in a complex system such as our world, cause and effect are not always readily identifiable. Small influences (the butterfly flapping its wings) can be magnified by feedback loops to have massive effects such as storms over India. Highly improbable events such as that iconic Black Swan can emerge to disrupt a well-ordered world model,ⁱⁱⁱ These inevitably impact upon the environment in which the strategic leader has to operate.^{iv}

The future, like the present, is a complex and uncertain space. What will happen in the future is all too often impossible to predict. As quantum mechanics has made evident, uncertainty is ingrained in nature at sub-atomic levels, and the same can be said for findings in the social sciences. Uncertainty and complexity are pervasive features of existence. Hence, if that is the case, what can one “know” about the future?

An alternative to knowing is an increased understanding about the nature of the future, a sensitivity to plausible alternatives and the commitment to explore a wide range of

possible futures. In so doing, one takes the first steps towards effective strategic leadership, namely, developing more acute anticipatory capacities for assessing *what might be*. This sort of perspective at least establishes a level of sensitivity to alternatives which in turn should improve an organisation's ability to adapt to change and to be ready to seize opportunities when they arise.

The development of a new leadership perspective based on complexity concepts will help organisations survive and thrive in today's uncertain and fast-changing times. This perspective will depend upon a strategic leader's understanding that to achieve its purpose the organisation has to be seen as a complex adaptive system containing independent agents in dynamic interaction with each other and the environment. Self-organisation enables it to adapt and survive and become fitter over time. Such systems operating at the edge of chaos are highly flexible, innovative and adaptable to change. Key features are diversity, double-loop learning, cultivation of positive conflict, recognition of the inherent nature of paradox and a sensitivity to small changes.^v

Dimensions of uncertainty

So uncertainty is an inevitable part of reality. Future outcomes cannot be predicted with any certainty and, while a sensitive leader, may be able to influence events, he or she cannot fully control them. What we can do is to use the whole range of analytical techniques at our disposal to increase understanding of the possibilities. There are different and complementary approaches available to help with this. Simple (or not so simple!) logical analysis is a start, but this can only go so far; science offers a great deal of help through analysis of empirical evidence. But this too has its limitations. *Futures* thinking helps us look further into the unknown and begin to see light where there was none. As Howard C. Kureuther and Erwann O. Michel-Kerjan et al report:

More companies now realise that a single event can seriously jeopardize their activities, if not their existence. As a result, a growing number of boards of directors and government cabinets are incorporating the importance of management of extreme events into their strategic planning process. It is often the case that events destabilizing one's organization are those that occur outside of normal routines. Training top decision makers to deal with these “it cannot happen” scenarios has become a critical element of success in managing large-scale risks in a new era of catastrophes. But one thing is

clear: proactive leaders will be the ones to glean the benefits from initiatives that reduce the potential impacts of future catastrophic events on their own activities and those of other stakeholders.^{vi}

Deepening constraints affecting strategic leadership

From the individual perspective. Here the themes are not necessarily new, but their impacts and consequences appear to be becoming more deeply rooted and increasingly pervasive. One wonders if this emerging reality does not stem from the ways that organisations and those who “manage” them presently cope with phenomena that they do not readily understand or at least feel comfortable with, i.e. uncertainty and complexity

Futures thinking brings other benefits besides explicit recognition of high levels of uncertainty. It is able to draw on evidence with a lower than usual degree of credibility – the wild cards at the margins of current thought – it is not so long ago that climate change fell in this category yet now it is a key issue for global Governments. In a sense, futures thinking represents simply a due diligence process for the organisations future. It helps reduce the risk of stakeholder outrage when the organisation is faced with unexpected events.

Better understanding is not just about getting the evidence. It is about reducing the personal and institutional screening devices that prevent new information, ideas and concepts from challenging conventional assumptions and standard procedures and processes. In that regard, there is much to learn from the cognitive sciences.^{vii} Human-beings generally have inbuilt cognitive defences against information overload; and most live by hard-won personal world models and seek evidence which supports that model – conveniently tending to ignore evidence which contradicts it. Organisational analysis and decision-making suffer from group think and blind spots, and there is a natural bias in favour of short term rewards and against longer term benefits.

Calls for evidence-based analysis, while justifiable in many instances, has the unintended consequence of focusing only upon analysis that can be “proven”, and statistically measured. Yet the paradox is rarely recognised that policy about the future is all too often explored by using conventional evidence about the past^{viii}. In that sense, horizon scanning is a good way to explore the future. It helps avoid the blind spots and provides access to wider sources of probabilities and opportunities. It helps avoid that fundamental barrier to understanding that encapsulated in the expression, “*We do not see the world as it is, but as we are*”.^{ix}

From the organisational perspective. It is not only individuals who suffer from internal constraints. Organisations, too, operate in ways that tend to drive out ambiguity and uncertainty in the quest for “most likely” outcomes and quantitative certainty and solutions. Yet the richness of ambiguity offers much to learn from and can help leaders to shape their understanding of different ways in which the future might evolve, bearing in mind that linear analysis of cause and effect and extrapolation of known trends is no longer a valid strategy under conditions of high uncertainty.

A strategic leader needs to position the organisation to face inevitable uncertainty – to track and respond adaptively to emerging scenarios – to provide the framework which allows others in their team to react effectively when opportunities and challenges arise. Bob Hopkins explains in his Transition Handbook how this approach can empower communities to rise to the challenge of peak oil by building local resilience^x. They need to provide a more enabling organisational culture which supports rather more reflective skills, those perhaps of an explorer or chess player rather than a traditional Army commander or day-to-day implementer of humanitarian relief operations.

In a non-linear organisation, top down control is impossible. How far such a culture can coexist alongside a traditional “command” model is a moot point.^{xi} In the past the separation has been achieved by having research departments with a more open culture but examples of integrating both aspects in mainstream operating divisions are less easy to find. This may be one of the key leadership challenges of the day.

The all too frequent lack of integration between policy and operations also reflects on some of the more evident weaknesses that arise from current strategy planning models. In this context, two fundamental weaknesses are particularly evident:^{xii}

- (1) strategic planning is treated as a mechanical process which is at odds with the need to encourage creativity and innovation. Strategic planning should stem from a much more dynamic process than can be encapsulated in a rigid plan;
- (2) strategies generally focus on delivering a single vision of the future (the “preferred” scenario perhaps) and so are unrealistic in not reflecting the high levels of uncertainty and the possibility (or even likelihood) of other futures emerging.

Section II: Strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector

Since at least the mid 1990s, the international humanitarian system has been heavily committed to improving its performance and to becoming more professional. There are numerous initiatives associated with this – codes, standards, discussions about accreditation of aid workers – to name just a few. This drive seems also to have been accompanied by another more concerning trend – a sense that the system is suffering from lack of leadership. This issue has so far been largely absent from the debate about performance and professionalism.

An initial foray into what it is that people are talking about when they lament a lack of leadership indicates that it is a vacuum of strategic leadership, both at global level and localised levels. At the global level, humanitarians are looking for visionaries who can lift their gaze from the day-do-day ‘doing’ challenges that occupy the time of most aid workers, to the horizon beyond, in other words who are able to look outside the system to ask questions about the wider context and ultimately develop an inspiring vision of what is needed and how we may work in the future. At the more localised level, in challenging contexts like Sudan and Afghanistan, aid workers are looking for strategic leadership to advocate for and to open humanitarian space, often in highly contested conditions. This usually means the ability to engage and negotiate with those who may challenge and disagree with the work of humanitarian organisations, and to provide direction to the numerous organisations and individuals that make up the humanitarian system. In terms of the latter, this means providing leadership in contextualising the “standard” international humanitarian response to the specific conditions and uncertainties of the crisis in question.

An example of strategic leadership at the global level is Henri Dunant, who returned from the horrors of the Battle of Solferino to found the international Red Cross movement. The late James Grant, as Executive Director of UNICEF in the late 1980s, pioneered “corridors of tranquillity” in civil war stricken Sudan – clearly an example of innovation and strategic leadership at the local level. Bernard Kouchner possibly provides an example of both when in 1971 he founded Medecins Sans Frontieres and put ‘temoignage’ at the heart of MSF’s work, thus challenging the conventional way that humanitarian agencies operated.^{xiii}

Despite such examples, however, it would seem that throughout the sector little emphasis is placed on fostering strategic leadership or the institutional support that effective

strategic leadership requires. A number of commentators have expressed their unease about the focus of much “strategic level” work that is currently going on within the sector, and this is acting as a disincentive for fostering strategic leadership. One analyst recently noted that:

Much of the impetus for improvement in the formal humanitarian system tends towards consolidation at the moment. UN humanitarian reform and the several other improvement initiatives are all focused on bringing organisations and approaches into line so that they work more logically and effectively together... But the system also needs innovation if it is to cope with and adapt to the inevitable shortcomings of its political and practical setting.^{xiv}

The United Nations, for example, would seem the natural place to look for this kind of leadership, and specifically to the role of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) in-country; but the findings of a study on the UN six years ago still seem painfully true today:

The UN continues to take a fragmented and sporadic approach to advocacy, does not promote a strategic vision, and has no global approach to vulnerability reduction. One cannot help but draw the conclusion that leadership often plays second fiddle to management.^{xv}

Five years later in a related study, the United Nations still had done little to recognise strategic leadership as an important function for Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators, and perhaps even more significantly had done little to promote an enabling environment that recognised the value of strategic leadership.^{xvi}

Similar perspectives emerge in analyses of non-governmental organisations, perhaps as one observer has noted leadership issues might be seen as “antithetical to the participatory culture espoused by many NGOs.”^{xvii}

Fortunately this now seems to be changing as a number of NGOs invest in leadership development programmes. In the last year a group of NGOs and the Red Cross Movement in the UK have come together to establish a Leadership Development Forum to engage with these issues.

Causes and consequences of strategic leadership gaps

There is a range of reasons that explain the minimal attention given to strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector, and ultimately these reasons provide some insights into the dearth of anticipatory, adaptive and innovative capacities which could eventually marginalise the present humanitarian sector. Such reasons include

the humanitarian ethos. Inherent in the work of humanitarian organisations is the sense of immediacy, the urgency of response in challenging contexts, and a focus on the practical. While a number of organisations in the sector are increasingly beginning to consider human vulnerability in the longer-term [in no small part spurred on by global climate change and related consequences], the abiding concern remains with the ethos of response. Hence, even in those organisations that have recognised the importance of futures-oriented analysis, such perspectives are rarely incorporated into operational planning, even in the context of prevention and preparedness;^{xviii}

closed systems. Only recently have humanitarian organisations begun to engage with any sense of long-term commitment with the corporate sector and the military. Interaction between those outside the sector has traditionally been for reasons of the immediate and *force majeure*. It is evident, however, that many in the humanitarian sector do not recognise the long-term importance of systematic engagement with those outside the conventional boundaries of humanitarianism. New approaches and innovation which could result from more systematic engagement with the world of the sciences and social sciences are not promoted. Nor is there even adequate efforts to cross the bounds between humanitarian organisations between the developing and developed worlds. Closed systems is an unintended hallmark of the humanitarian sector;

emphasis on the technical. In a lesson-learning review of the humanitarian response to the Darfur crisis two years into the conflict, it was concluded that a technical approach had predominated and the overall context had been too narrowly understood.^{xix} This is symptomatic of the consequences of inadequate strategic leadership at the country level. A focus on humanitarian aid delivery – the ‘doing’ part that agencies are most likely to excel in – will at best only partially succeed (and at worst will fail) if it is not accompanied by sufficient analysis and reflection about the wider context – the ‘thinking’ part that is key to strategic leadership. It is also a comment on a phenomenon that is all too apparent in many

organisations, including those in the humanitarian sector, people are generally more inclined to opt for the sheer clarity of technical tasks than the ambiguity inherent in strategic thinking – even at senior levels;

institutional survival. Humanitarian organisations resist ambiguity and focus on perceived certainties in no small part because the latter is closely tied to short-term institutional survival. Humanitarian organisations stick to what they know in no small part because that is what they get paid for. In a discussion with the World Food Programme’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM), it was evident that there was no humanitarian crisis that did not require a food assistance component. The reason for that was explained in a surprisingly unambiguous way, “Well, of course, we are the World Food Programme!” In other words, alternative means of assistance and different perspectives on causation and consequences are frequently second to what the organisation knows, its mandate, what it has the technical competence to accomplish and what therefore can assure continuity of resources for organisational survival;

lack of incentives and risk aversion. There are few in the humanitarian sector who have invested in capacities that promote and sustain long-term futures analysis. In a recent exploration into humanitarian innovation, it was noted that “‘generative learning’ is ... inhibited by a growing culture of compliance and the rigid contractual nature of aid relationships, both of which push agencies to deliver according to pre-defined goals, methods and targets”.^{xx} A growing number have expressed concern about the predominance of linear ways of thinking and planning – typified in the widely used logframe – and have drawn on complexity science to underpin their arguments. There appears nevertheless to be a contradiction at the heart of how the humanitarian system currently organises itself. Despite working in complex, unpredictable and risky environments, current approaches to planning, funding and reporting inadvertently seem to encourage conservatism and risk aversion, neither of which is conducive to strategic leadership.

authority versus leadership. There is a clear paradox that leaders of the future will have to face in any organisation, namely, that between authority and envisioning. Authority is about control, or, about ensuring that those mechanisms that are in place to fulfil organisational objectives are functioning properly. It is about ensuring that possible deviations that might affect the anticipated functioning of the organisation are screened out or eliminated. Conversely envisioning is about seeing “what’s going on in the outside world,”^{xxi} and – based upon abiding values – to make appropriate

adjustments and innovations. In other words, the former is about homeostasis; the latter about change. The former ensures that the characteristics noted above, including *closed systems*, *institutional survival*, *technical competencies*, the *humanitarian ethos* and *risk aversion*, are “protected”. The latter ostensibly does little to control the uncertainty and disentangle the complexity for which organisations are designed to address.

dimensions of complexity and uncertainty. Capacities are limited in the humanitarian sector as presently conceived to understand and appreciate the implications of complexity and uncertainty. In part this has to do with the nature of closed systems. Collaboration is weak in the humanitarian sector, and concepts of substantive networking are poorly developed. In other words, consortia such as ICVA, SCHR, VOICE and InterAction are like the UN’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee essentially closed systems that appear to lack the inclination or mechanisms to deal with uncertainty and complexity. This may in no small part be due to the fact that both dimensions appear too vast and intangible to be built into organisational processes. And yet without capacities to deal with the dimensions of uncertainty and complexity, the true dynamics of humanitarian threats and ways to address them will be missed.

Section III: 21st Century leadership

Three abiding issues for the 21st century leader

Given the sorts of constraints on fostering strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector, it is important to develop a clearer sense of what strategic leadership might mean in the 21st century context. It is this perspective that the humanitarian sector will have to draw upon for its own approach to strategic leadership for the future. In this context, there are three broad issues that will circumscribe strategic leadership for the future:

Values in times of uncertainty and complexity

What determines “certainty” in a world marked by uncertainty and complexity? Is it paradoxical to suggest that there can be certainty when the entire thesis for new forms of strategic leadership rests upon fundamental uncertainty? In the final analysis the only compass that a leader might have in times of great complexity and uncertainty is his or her own set of values that in one way or another relate to the values of others. In so saying, to what extent do values define objectives which in turn determine strategies?

A new approach to strategy therefore needs to build on the commitment that exists within organisations for the current process while redirecting it into avenues which will help to overcome these weaknesses. If a strategy is to support a new leadership style it will need to focus much more on desired outcomes and core values to be sustained in achieving them.

A new-style strategy will need to capture the key uncertainties likely to be faced in delivering these outcomes in the future and the challenges these represent. It will not be a delivery plan but will instead chart areas for exploration and learning which are needed to enable the organisation to flourish in the longer-term. Some short-term steps to help with this are likely to be identified. As with the new leadership style, however, ambiguity and lack of understanding need to be made transparent, and not buried in obfuscation. Values, however, will shine through.

Leadership as a diffuse function

Strategic leadership, however, needs to be sustained by other forms of leadership, without colliding into the world of “managerialism”. In other words, strategic leadership will inevitably depend upon other forms of leadership. The leadership function itself is likely to be much more dispersed and diffuse than leadership has traditionally been perceived –

both within the organisation at different levels and also outside it, among stakeholders and partners for example.

While the strategic leader will be at the centre of developing value-driven goals, he or she will depend upon others not only to implement policy but also to think strategically about ways to achieve their own functions. In this context, Admiral Hyman Rickover, the father of the US’s nuclear navy, was not a nuclear physicist, and recognised that once the vision was accepted, the fate of the vision was in the hands of other leaders – those who were nuclear physicists. In other words, the complexities and uncertainties inherent in seeking “the vision” require a diffuse number of leaders, at various levels and with various expertise. They will not be as much a part of a hierarchical structure and more a collaborative network whose mission is being constantly re-enforced by the strategic leader.

Blending continuity and change

There are characteristics of strategic leaders in the past that are of relevance now and in the future. – for example, the visionary and inspiring leader. At the same time there are new dimensions of leadership which are less applicable to the strategic leader of yesteryear. There will continue to be areas of management and operations where established leadership skills and approaches will endure and provide the best way of meeting organisational goals. However, in a world perceived as increasingly complex and uncertain, there will be a “gap” between what traditional skills can achieve and what is needed to cope with the impact of an ever-changing strategic and operational environment. This is where new skills and approaches based on the latest strategic futures thinking will come into their own, both in terms of personal characteristics and an organisation’s enabling environment.

Individual characteristics of the strategic leader

While there is a host of characteristics that one could identify for the strategic leader of the future, for the purposes of this scoping exercise, three seem of overarching importance.

(1) **Collaboration: nodes of networks and stakeholders assessments.** The resilient structure of the 21st century will be a learning organisation. Though by no means a new term or aspiration for many, the learning organisation reflects the strategic leader’s commitment to developing systematic and multi-sectoral networks that not only transcend conventional organisational hierarchies, but also go beyond the boundaries of the organisation, *per se*. Hence, the strategic leader will reach horizontally and vertically into his or her own organisation. In other words, the strategic

leader will inculcate the value-driven goals of the organisation and the importance of speculative thinking throughout the organisation, including sections that deal with administration, finance and human resources. He or she will aspire to position themselves at the node where different networks connect or where there is maximum overlap between the elements of a collaborative ven diagram and to develop skills which enable them both to build such relationships and to enable others to learn from them.

Strategic leaders also need to understand the values they bring to their actual and potential stakeholders, including networks and *ad hoc* groupings, and the value that they in turn bring to them. A stakeholder net assessment can help leaders to understand the dynamics of these important relationships better and to begin to develop wider goals for mutual benefit while minimising negative aspects.

(2) **The strategic leader as innovator.** An effective approach to uncertain conditions requires an ability to identify and seize opportunities for innovation when they arise. This in turn needs a culture in place which allows experimentation and rather than imposing a “blame culture” accepts that failures will occur on the path to success. A learning culture supported by effective collaboration and freedom to experiment are vital pre-requisites. The leader can help by providing a “strategic nudge” where appropriate and by acting in the role of “head coach” to enable and facilitate emerging ideas.

The strategic leader at the same time will recognise that organisationally it might well take more than a strategic nudge to engage the organisation and a wider community of collaborators to think and act more experimentally. Henry Ford’s old adage that had he asked what people might have wanted to travel more quickly, the answer most likely would have been a *faster horse*. The strategic leader needs to foster the networks and sensitivities that will guide him or her beyond solutions that are merely extrapolations of the past. The strategic leader has to be let it know that risk-taking is important and can even be rewarded as long as it adheres to value-driven goals.

(3) **Envisioning and trust.** Envisioning and trust should be regarded as inter-related characteristics for the strategic leader. In a very fundamental sense it returns one to the issue of the “fog of war”, and the strategic leader’s aspiration that the objectives of the organisation or the effort are sufficiently inculcated into the mind-set of all those “in the battle” that – whatever unexpected events may befall –

the objective, itself, will ultimately be the abiding factor in the response.

With more decentralised structures that will be the hallmarks of successful 21st century organisations, leaders will need to provide a clear high-level vision of where the organisation is heading and what its core values and desired outcomes are. An effective leader will ensure that these are well-defined and communicated, for example using a modern strategy document reflecting the approaches of Strategic Futures thinking. With that in hand the strategic leader then needs to demonstrate the confidence that those organisational leaders at different levels, in different geographical situations and in different functions have the authority and capacity to fulfil the objectives in whatever ways they can, recognising that risk is an inherent feature of an agile and adaptive organisation.

(4) **Embracing ambiguity and fostering agility.** If the uncertainties which lie ahead are to be properly taken into account, then leaders will need to move beyond their traditional comfort zones and embrace the ambiguity which reflects reality. Participants, for example, who look solely to organisational interests to define national security interests seldom feel the need to engage in a full-scale analysis of a particular issue. Rather their reactions reflect “grooved thinking” – responding to a particular stimulus in a set way. This leads to typical patterns of stands by organisations.^{xxii} Hence, the strategic leader does not automatically ask, “What is the most likely outcome?”, but instead – particularly with higher-cost options – avoids becoming locked into one position through neglect. “Options should be vigorously re-evaluated whenever important uncertainties are clarified – at least every six months.”^{xxiii}

It is for such reasons that it will be important for leaders to develop the anticipatory and adaptive skills and agility both personally and as an organisational characteristic in order to track and respond as different possible futures begin to develop so that opportunities can be seized.

The strategic leader’s effectiveness is likely to be seen in his or her ability to produce effective solutions that are greater than the sum of their contributions and to continue to adapt these dynamically rather than reactively as the future unfolds. Communicating the nature of the problems, potential solutions, and the resources required will be vital to stakeholders, existing and potential: a sense of realism that problems and crises evolve, and that broad-ranging solutions invariably involve compromises should help to keep expectations reasonable. And providing the guidance, culture and organisational frameworks to enable others to

contribute effectively to the wider leadership function will be the real key to strategic success.

Strategic leadership and humanitarian futures

The constraints affecting strategic leadership in humanitarian organisations can only be overcome if it is recognised that the objectives which underpinned 20th century organisations – the search for clarity, control and certainty – will no longer be the hallmarks of effective 21st century organisations. 21st century organisations will work in an environment of uncertainty, complexity and periods of paradigmatic transformations.^{xxiv} They will have to have a deeply held belief in their ultimate objectives, but without consistent and certain paths about how these are to be achieved. Strategic leadership in that sense is about identifying and fostering a vision in an environment in which there are no consistent certainties about how one will arrive at the destination. In many ways humanitarian actors are no strangers to uncertainty and complexity, but these features of the landscape are likely to intensify in the 21st century. If humanitarian leadership is already struggling with uncertainty and complexity, the urgency to find new models and new approaches is even greater if the humanitarian enterprise is to survive and be ‘fit for purpose’ in the coming decades.

The strategic leader

Strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector will require at least five competencies for enhancing the overall value and purpose of the humanitarian sector in general and humanitarian organisations in particular:

1. **Envisioning.** There is a significant difference between the visionary leader and a leader with vision. The former often combines charismatic qualities with a perspective about the future that transcends recognisable values and objectives. The latter for the purposes of this exercise may or may not have all the qualities of the former, but whose main characteristic is an ability to identify and articulate a purpose – goals and values -- that have overarching importance for the leader’s own organisation and a wider community;
2. **Posing the critical question.** Leadership has all too often been seen as authority focused on process and control. The strategic leader will recognise that solutions to achieve goals and values will begin with limited number of assumptions – principally focused upon purpose -- and a far greater inclination to ask the right question, to challenge certitudes and seek alternative explanations. In that context,

one might well ask why so many humanitarian organisations continued to focus upon rural programmes when a major demographic shift was resulting in increased urban vulnerabilities.

3. **Externalisation.** For senior officials in most humanitarian organisations, principal focus and attention are devoted to the organisation and about the organisation. If, however, strategic leadership concerns envisioning and challenging conventional assumptions, he or she will have to relate to a far wider and more diverse community than is normally the case today. Through new forms of collaboration and engagement, the strategic leader will be exposed to environments in which goals and values and ways to achieve them will be tested. This will take the strategic leader well outside standard comfort zones into worlds in which new forms of humanitarian crises and solutions will be encountered, a world which is suggested in Annex I of this exploratory note.

4. **Communication.** The purpose – goals and values -- of humanitarian organisations are tested in various ways at headquarters and at operational levels. Unanticipated crises, new funding opportunities, pressures to present deliverables all in one way or another may affect the ways humanitarian organisations operate and even the ways that they see their overall goals and objectives. To that extent the strategic leader has to be able to communicate the purpose of the organisation in such a way that even in “the fog of war” – in the midst of ensuing diversions and chaos – those within the organisation and its partners have a clear idea of the abiding values and goals being pursued. The strategic leader in that sense is a communicator.

5. **A listener.** “Never pass up the opportunity to remain silent” is a standard business school adage. Its relevance to the strategic leader in the humanitarian sector is central. The analogue is perhaps with a good head coach, inclined to listen to what adjustments might be required rather than to impose a view. In the 21st century, listening is further complicated and made more important by the need to grasp the cultural determinants, technological options, perceptual assumptions that must influence the environment in which ways to achieve objectives will be determined. The ability to absorb such elements that often go beyond one’s normal perceptual circle is extremely difficult, and perhaps one of the greatest challenges that strategic leaders have to address.

The enabling environment

In developing an organisational capacity responsive to rapid change and complexity, organisational structure, *per se*, is less an issue than are the dynamics of organisations. From that perspective, an effective humanitarian organisation will have to create an enabling environment to promote and sustain strategic leadership. Towards that end humanitarian organisations will have to reflect at least three essential characteristics.

1. Planning as a priority in the face of uncertainty.

All too often in modern organisations, the planning function is regarded as secondary to what are perceived as more implementation-oriented functions. Planning, too, is frequently and wrongly deemed a luxury, and long-term planning particularly so. In that context it is interesting to note that entities designed to think creatively and innovate within organisations are all too often the first for the axe when economic times become hard. This reality makes little sense, but it does suggest the ultimate marginality of the planning function.^{xxv}

(i) **Expanded planning time-frame.** Three to five years is long-range planning for most organisations, including those with humanitarian roles and responsibilities, although so-called "blue-skies thinking" can look at issues for much longer periods. The problem for many planners is that they assume that a plan must reflect relatively firm and fixed steps for a defined period of time. Hence, when one busy executive argued that anyone nowadays with a five or ten year plan is "probably crazy,"^{xxvi} he implied that to plan one had to be relatively certain about the environment in which one was operating. However, the key for planners in a time of intense uncertainty is to understand that the only way to prepare for the short-term is to have some sense of probable future alternatives that set boundaries for possible change. This of course requires that the planning process be one that is continuous and leads to regularly revised and updated plans.

(ii) Speculation as a main-line activity.

Phrases such as "that's a bit academic" or "let's get practical" are all too familiar in the humanitarian sector. The implication is frequently that there is little use in pursuing a matter about which one cannot be certain. It is clear that such insistence on certainty reflects a form of mind-closure. Speculation, like planning itself, will have to gain greater respectability if an organisation is to be truly

adaptive.^{xxvii} Such speculation will naturally be followed by vigorous critical analysis, dialogue and reflection in anticipation of appropriate action.

(iii) Cross-systems organisations.

"Exploration competencies", or, the ability to harvest ideas and expertise from a wide array of sources, is vital for staying on top of innovations and their implications.^{xxviii} Yet, innovation is all too often "internalised" and the essential external cross-fertilisation necessary to maintain focus and development of ideas is sacrificed to insular institutional interests.^{xxix} Adaptive organisations will need to develop open information and communication linkages with new types of partners, institutionally [eg, commercial, non-governmental organisations] as well as geographically.^{xxx}

(iv) Promoting inter-disciplinary methodologies.

It is most likely that every humanitarian organisation that provides some form of technical assistance has experienced the gulf between its technical experts and its policy makers and decision-makers. It might be amusing when management – at headquarters or at field level – is teased for not understanding the implications of the "techies' language." Those small groups of experts that only understand each other are important, but at the same time the conceptual and linguistic distance between them and others in the organisation can prove a serious constraint on broad-based organisational understanding – about the present and about the future.

2. **The art of systematic speculation.** A second component of an enabling environment for humanitarian organisations involves far greater attention to "scenario-building". Planners and policy-makers are inhibited in their efforts to plan for the longer-term because of their assumption that the future cannot be predicted. This attitude reflects in part the linear thinking that requires a precise understanding of cause and effect sequencing. It also reflects an inherent organisational resistance to ambiguity. And yet as a recent study of future consequences of climate change suggests, the only way to develop means to deal with the possible consequences of such change is to identify "a sequence of steps, each with associated uncertainties."^{xxxi}

The point is to challenge our preconceptions about how things will develop – not to predict the future, but to give an array of future worlds that seem to flow from these assumptions".^{xxxii}

3. **Essential institutional adjustments.** None of the above can have overall value unless the consequence of such adjustments feeds into an organisation's decision-making processes.

(i) **reduce the impact of unanticipated strategic options.** Those responsible for strategic planning and policy formulation need to communicate regularly with decision-makers to ensure that "the future" fits into a pattern of events that will not come as a surprise.^{xxxiii} The inclination of decision-makers working under extreme pressure is to discard issues and options with which they are not familiar. Conversely, a way around this barrier would be to introduce means by which senior decision-makers were regularly briefed on trends, potential discontinuities and their implications – in order to enhance familiarity and reduce the potential dissonance created by unanticipated analyses, options and proposals.^{xxxiv}

(ii) **communicating the centrality of speculation.** While in most organisations only a relatively few will be interested in becoming involved in "blue-skies thinking," an effective organisation in the future will be sure of two things. In the first place, it will be sure that all in the organisation know that long-range strategic analysis and planning are valued by the organisation, and that it is part of the organisation's ethos. Secondly, it will find ways to foster that ethos, promoting for example knowledge networks and communities of practice. The centrality of speculation, broad-based networks and close liaison with decision-makers all underpin efforts to make planning a priority.

(iii) **eliminate functions that create unnecessary closure.** The purpose of more broadly-based thinking is of course not to paralyse decision-making but to ensure that better, more open decisions are taken which create resilience to different outcomes and maximise potentially available opportunities. A starting point is to assess the various types and levels of pressures that determine why and when decisions are taken. Unnecessary closure is due to various factors. Inflexible budgeting procedures, disconnects between programme objectives and project targets and "bottom-line" driven determinants all restrict

the organisation's access to information or its willingness to deal with new or discrepant information. The obvious tension is between the need to make decisions and the need to understand the basis and context for those decisions.

And yet, there are probably few instances when greater consultation and collaboration both within the organisation and between organisations would probably have not resulted in better long-term responses. In the world of humanitarian response, this would clearly seem to be the case. More careful analyses of local distribution systems and indigenous coping mechanisms as well as greater attention to communicating with vulnerable communities would most likely lead to more effective and appropriate assistance.

Feedback from representatives in the humanitarian, corporate and military sectors

In a review meeting on 29 October 2009, the draft paper was discussed by a group of leaders from the humanitarian, corporate and military sectors. They were asked to consider the key questions posed on page 16 of the paper, and concluded that strategic leadership was an important issue that should be explored as a priority within the humanitarian sector, to enable organisations to prepare for a changing future. Key points that emerged during the review meeting included:

- **Reliance on certainty:** Humanitarian organisations, accountable to a range of stakeholders and donors, struggle to sell an approach to leadership and planning that is based on complexity and ambiguity. There is a tendency to rely on leadership approaches that are low risk and that promote predictability for fear of getting something wrong or appearing incompetent.
- **Leadership as a discrete event:** Leadership has traditionally tended to be viewed as a discrete event which occurs in response to specific events which require people to demonstrate leadership characteristics. In consequence, if the uncertain event fails to materialise, then investment in leadership development is often seen as wasted resources.
- **Organisational dynamics:** Leadership cannot be separated from a consideration of wider organisational dynamics. For instance, there is often a disconnect between those who are involved in intelligence gathering and forecasting and those responsible for decision making, with the result that warnings can be ignored. Organisations can be unwilling to entertain the possibility of a dramatic and damaging, but uncertain, event occurring and instead “drive out” ambiguity in favour of clear and predictable models.
- **Balancing agility and certainty:** It will be necessary to find leadership models that balance agility and rigidity, and to have a clear understanding of degrees of uncertainty. Although the future is likely to become increasingly complex and uncertain in some senses (one participant described recent simultaneous crises in South-East Asia and East Africa as the “unthinkable future” that organisations gamed out in scenarios ten years ago), in other areas such as improved early warning and prediction systems are allowing increased certainty in planning. Similarly, while organisational agility and flexibility will be beneficial in some areas, leaders must be able to distinguish between the areas which require rigidity and structure to maintain efficiency and accountability, such as financial monitoring, and logistics procedures.
- **Different levels of leadership:** Leadership, particularly in the humanitarian sector, does not only come from the top of the organisation, but is exercised by people at all levels (even if it is not explicitly recognised as leadership). Empowering staff and creating an environment that encourages leadership and independent decision making are important aspects of promoting strategic thinking and are core values for the military and many corporate sector organisations. The importance of recognising and defining specific areas of responsibility for leaders at different levels to enable “collective strategic leadership” to function was discussed, along with the importance of “followership” as an integral component of leadership.
- **Recognition of changing realities:** The “genie is out of the bottle” in terms of increasing humanitarian roles for emerging actors, including the corporate and military sectors. An important aspect of strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector will be an honest recognition of the changing realities and the development of a humanitarian rhetoric that reflects them. This will require leaders to engage in collaborative relationships with new partners without the “arrogance and stereotyping” that frequently characterises these interactions.
- **Strategic leadership and spheres of influence:** Strategic leadership becomes increasingly challenging when external forces and other players have significant influence over the organisation’s decisions. The impact of the Cluster System on NGOs was given as an example, who found themselves operating at a “nexus of intersection” where the decisions of governments and multilaterals directly influence their own operations, despite little NGO consultation when the system was introduced.

Section IV: The way forward

This exploratory analysis is designed to pose four key questions:

1. Is the assumption that there is a void of strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector correct? To what extent is strategic leadership important in the humanitarian sector? In other words, does the concept in and of itself suggest how those with humanitarian roles and responsibilities could benefit from this form of leadership?
2. How realistic is it to strengthen strategic leadership in the humanitarian sector? Where should this be located, and what might the consequences of such leadership be for individual organisations and for the sector as a whole?
3. If strategic leadership that is adapted and appropriate to the 21st century be a valued and accepted innovation in the sector, what would be required in terms of an enabling environment to support that initiative from organisational and sector wide perspectives?
4. Based upon the points immediately above, what recommendations should one consider for moving this exploratory, scoping exercise into a more developed study and plan of action?

In addition to these four questions, there is a further dimension of strategic leadership that needs to be considered, namely, spill-over issues that one might consider within the broader framework of strategic leadership. Such issues might include:

- Leadership in different socio-political contexts – An attribute of the strategic leader, as noted earlier, is to be able to understand different contexts in which he or she is involved. That, attribute would at the same time require the strategic leader to be sensitive to the ways that other cultures and societies perceive strategic leadership;
- A human resource framework – Should strategic leadership prove to be compelling for the humanitarian sector, one would need to revisit and review human resource frameworks to ensure that they are fostering this kind of leadership from recruitment through to staff and organisational development;;

- Creating an enabling environment for strategic leadership – The strategic leader needs an enabling environment, but what is detail might that look like, and in what ways can present organisational competencies be transformed partially or totally into the requisite environment?
- Developing strategic leadership – The debate continues about whether or not one can develop leadership and, in this instance, strategic leadership. The general consensus of opinion is that perhaps charismatic leadership is not within the purview of “taught courses,” but strategic leadership can for 21st century organisations can be developed.

Next steps

Participants at the Review Meeting felt strongly that work should continue to research and promote strategic leadership for the humanitarian sector. Next steps suggested included:

- Promoting strategic leadership as an entry level issue in humanitarian organisations
- Convening a range of stakeholders, drawing on both policy and field level experience from NGOs, corporate, academics, UN, governments and the media. Suggestions for this group included open ended discussions, identifying champions to promote the issue, producing a joint paper and holding a series of dialogue fora on different aspects of strategic leadership.
- Developing a compelling case for strategic leadership in a changing environment, appropriate for different levels and types of organisations. The use of champions was also discussed, for example CEOs of humanitarian charities who could promote the issue to their peers.
- Including the perspective of organisations from Southern countries, both those who receive humanitarian response, and those that exercise leadership in the humanitarian field such as BRAC.
- Researching the existing mechanisms for promoting leadership in the humanitarian sector.
- Integrating strategic leadership with other forms of leadership credibility in the humanitarian sector, such as field experience.
- Exploring the degree to which people in the humanitarian sector are engaged in leadership activities.
- Exploring how diffuse leadership changes in “peacetime” and “emergency” situations and the ways that humanitarian organisations should be investing in both types of leadership.
- Exploring how strategic leadership can support innovation and collaboration, in particular a greater use of corporate sector skills and expertise which is currently under-exploited.

ANNEX I: SEVEN ISSUES FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS ABOUT THE FUTURE

A SPECULATIVE PIECE PREPARED BY THE HUMANITARIAN FUTURES PROGRAMME

Aspects of the future that humanitarian workers will have increasingly to take into account.

[1] **changing nature of humanitarian crises.** Uncertainty, rapid change and complexity will increasingly be the hallmarks of humanitarian crises in the foreseeable future. One has become all too used to a certain set of crises that have been “ring-fenced” by labels such as “natural disasters” and “complex emergencies”. The foreseeable future will reflect new sets of sudden and slow-onset crisis agents, including technological systems failures, large-scale industrial and chemical collapse, nuclear seepage, water scarcity and pandemics. In addition, the profound transformation in state systems over the next two decades will mean that more and more people will live in so-called “no-man’s lands” where governments have little capacity or interest in providing security and social safety nets over large portions of state territory. Such people will survive on the margins, and their lives and livelihoods will fall prey to the most minimal changes in living conditions;

[2] **changing dynamics of humanitarian crises.** More and more future crisis will be interactive, global and synchronous. The persistent division between natural and man-made, eg, “complex emergencies”, agents will increasingly reflect its conceptual inadequacy as the inter-relationship between the two become more and more evident. The inter-relationship between the two will become more overt as natural events trigger political turmoil which in turn will lead to violent conflict and more natural, technological and systems failures. At the same time, humanitarian crises will become increasingly global. Pandemics are but one manifestation of the globalisation of humanitarian crises. Pollutants from eroding nuclear storage facilities is but another. A further change in the dynamics of humanitarian crises will include what can be called “synchronous failures,” or the simultaneous collapse of infrastructures and economic systems that will rapidly

threaten means of survival for large numbers of people, particularly in urban conurbations;

[3] **changing nature of the affected.** The nature of affected populations will significantly change over the next decade in at least three ways. In the first place, the affected will no longer represent the “hapless South” in the face of the relatively “vibrant North”. Vulnerability will be increasingly globalised, and as Hurricane Katrina clearly demonstrated, humanitarian threats – in the face of complexity and eroding safety nets -- will visit poverty anywhere in the world. A second aspect of the emerging disaster affected is that they will be more and more urban. 54% of the world’s population will soon live in megalopolises, approximately 60% of whom will live in overcrowded, unsanitary and impoverished conditions. Provision of assistance to these emerging vulnerable will be far more complex than assisting rural populations. Thirdly, large-scale affected populations will suffer from long-term, agonising afflictions arising out of such disaster agents as chemical and nuclear exposure. Like HIV/AIDS victims now, their ability to survive will be limited, but their need for relief from suffering will be relatively long term;

[4] **changing types of humanitarian actors.** The private sector will play a growing role in the “humanitarian cycle.” This private sector’s involvement will be underpinned by the fact that it will be forced to protect its operating environment in situations where conventional state structures [see: #1, above] no longer can provide minimum safety-nets or security. The private sector, too, will become more and more engaged for reasons that have to do with more refined approaches to corporate social responsibility and also to the profits that some companies will find in a growing number of relief activities. At the same time, while the “civ-mil” debate rages in some quarters about the involvement of the military in relief operations, the sheer dimensions of future crises will require more campaign-like approaches to relief assistance that will see the military not only provide

support to the civilian sector, but on occasion take the lead in “martial law” type operations;

[5] **changing instruments in the humanitarian toolkit.** Prevention and preparedness as well as response will increasingly depend upon economic instruments rather than conventional food, shelter, water and clothing inputs. The humanitarian toolkit of the future will include remittances from what today are called the Diaspora, and will increasingly be dependent upon insurance-based schemes, covering food security as well as health. In most relief operations, one area that has been sadly lacking is assistance to deal with trauma. Psycho-social issues in the world of modern relief will have to play a much larger role, though its “delivery” is far more complex and requires different types of skills than those needed for the standard relief provisions. The capacity to anticipate and monitor crises through communications technology and satellite imagery will be just two types of scientific contributions to the future humanitarian toolkit, while at the same time the humanitarian toolkit will be also contain far more sensitive social anthropological and social-psychological methodologies than have been used in the past;

[6] **changing types of humanitarian workers.** There will be a significant decline in so-called “international” relief workers as ethnic and cultural sensitivities and lack of security make greater reliance upon local relief workers essential. This shift will be compounded by two intersecting trends in the relief world. The first is that those who are “internationals” may well be required to deal with humanitarian crises nearer to home, and secondly the humanitarian instincts and funds of today’s major donors may decline as operational environments become too hazardous and traditional donor advantages, eg, food surpluses, currency stability, no longer can be relied upon. At the same time, a great deal of the technical expertise which internationals had offered the authorities as well as the affected in the past will be readily available to local institutions and their staff. Ironically the relief worker of the future – similar to the diplomats of yore – will have to act as bridges across cultures and donor institutions, more able to translate needs and ensure accountability than directly administering assistance;

[7] **new standards of accountability.** The interest of the conventional governmental donor community in providing humanitarian assistance as

one understands it today will decline when compared to the level of interest and expenditure over the past twenty years. There are many reasons for this, including the economic pressures that donors will face in a decade’s time, the alternative commercial opportunities that assets such as food surpluses will provide, the aforementioned difficulties with operating environments, the related decline of perceived neutrality, impartiality and independence as valued principles and the fundamental changes in the types of assistance that will be required. In addition to such possible explanations for a decline in donor interests and commitment will be an increase in accountability and litigation. In other words, the days of the well-intentioned but haphazard response to human suffering will become subjects of litigation by governments, authorities and even the affected who may suffer more than benefit from international intervention. In that sense, litigation is an aspect of globalisation which may strengthen accountability but not necessarily the commitment of humanitarian workers.

On balance these seven issues for humanitarian workers in the future suggest a gloomy picture for the well intentioned community of all those who try to respond to the plight of the afflicted. This, however, need not be the case. There are, for example, many innovations – scientific, technological – that can mitigate the impact of disaster threats, and these, too must be taken into account. More importantly, the humanitarian community remains a vibrant one. Though all too often ensnared in the ways of “previous wars,” inherently reactive and absorbed by the mantra of “practicality”, there is enormous energy that exists and can be used to prepare for the challenges of the future.

Endnotes

ⁱ Moltke's main thesis was that military strategy had to be understood as a system of options since only the beginning of a military operation was plannable. As a result, he considered the main task of military leaders to consist in the extensive preparation of all possible outcomes. His thesis can be summed up by two statements, one famous and one less so, translated into English as *No plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main strength* (no plan survives contact with the enemy) and *Strategy is a system of expedients*.

ⁱⁱ T. Irene Sanders, *Strategic thinking and the new science: planning in the midst of chaos, complexity and change*, Free Press., New York, 1998, p.50

ⁱⁱⁱ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 2008, Penguin

^{iv} See, for example, James Gleick, *Chaos*, 1987, William Heinemann Ltd., and Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership in the New Science*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2006

^v Nanette M Blandin, *Leading at the Edge of Chaos*, 2007, Chapter 8 in *Transforming Public Leadership for the 21st Century*, Ed. Morse, Buss and Kinghorn, M.E.Sharpe.

^{vi} Howard C. Kureuther and Erwann O. Michel-Kerjan et al, *At War with the weather: Managing large-scale risks in a new era of catastrophes*, 2009, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p.358.

^{vii} Philip Quinlan and Ben Dyson, 2008, *Cognitive Psychology*, Prentice Hall.

^{viii} Quote attributed to Alex King, Foresight Horizon Scanning Centre

^{ix} Humberto Maturana, *Metadesign*, 1997, Instituto de Terapia Cognitiva
<http://www.inteco.cl/articulos/metadesign.htm>

^x Robert Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*, 2008, Green Books

^{xi} R Stacey, E Mittleton-Kelly, G Eoyang and E Olson cited in B Christian, 2008, *Don't Ask*

What Complexity Can Do For You, OD Network

^{xii} Brian Brader, *New Approaches to Strategy for the 21st*

Century.
<http://knol.google.com/k/brian-brader/new-approaches-to-strategy-for-the-21st/1zbxlf5ryvs7w/3#>

^{xiii} 'Temoignage' describes MSF's commitment to testimony, open advocacy and denunciation when working with endangered populations throughout the world

^{xiv} Slim (2006) 'Global welfare: A realistic expectation for the international humanitarian system?' *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action*, London: ODI

^{xv} Dalton, M., von Hippel, K., Kent, R., and Maurer, R. (2003) 'Study Four: Changes in Humanitarian Financing: Implications for the United Nations

^{xvi} Randolph Kent, *Mapping the Models: The roles and rationale of the humanitarian coordinator*, 2008

^{xvii} Hailey, J. and James, R. (2004) *Trees Die from the Top: International Perspectives on NGO Leadership Development*. Paper presented to ISTR Conference. Toronto. July 2004

^{xviii} This comment is based upon findings from HFP's partnership development programme.

^{xix} Larry Minear (2005) 'Lessons Learned: the Darfur Experience' in *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2004*, London: ODI

^{xx} See, for example, Ramalingam, B., Jones, H., Reba, T., and Young J., (2007) 'Exploring the Science of Complexity: Ideas and Implications for Development and Humanitarian Efforts', *ODI Working Paper No. 285*

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/odi-publications/working-papers/285-science-complexity.pdf>

^{xxi} Harris Collingwood and Julia Kirby, "All in a day's work," *Harvard Business Review on Breakthrough Leadership*, Harvard Business School Press, 2001, p.54

^{xxii} Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1974, p.58

^{xxiii} Hugh Courtney, Jane Kirkland and Patrick Viguier, *Strategy under uncertainty*, Harvard Business Review on Managing Uncertainty, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, p.29

^{xxiv} [[RCK to explain]]

^{xxv} Jones, T., *Innovating at the edge: how organisations evolve and embed innovation capability*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2002, pp.14ff

^{xxvi} Hugh Courtney, *20/20 Foresight: Crafting strategy in an uncertain world*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2001, p160

^{xxvii} The US Under-Secretary for Science and Technology at the Department of Homeland Security, Charles McQueary, noted soon after his appointment that “it’s easy to look back and say we could have done this or that, but the fact is we weren’t thinking that way.” Those who were not thinking that way were policy planners and decision-makers, for the probability of this sort of attack was evident to many.

^{xxviii} R. Leifer, *et al*, *Radical Innovation: How mature companies can outsmart upstarts*, Harvard Business School Press, Cambridge, 2000

^{xxix} J.D Wolpert,, “Breaking out of the Innovation Box,” *Harvard Business Review*, Special Innovation Edition, Vol. 80, #8, August 2002, p.78

^{xxx}

^{xxxi} The first emissions of greenhouse gases and aerosols need to be specified, but so, too, will their dependence on *unknown* socio-economic behaviour. These unknowns can be tackled by using scenarios designed to produce indicative rather than definitive analysis The Royal Society, *Climate Change: what we know and what we need to know*, Policy Document 22/02, August 2002, p.7

^{xxxii} Else, L., “Opinion Interview: Seizing tomorrow”, *New Scientist*, 1 December 2001, pp 43-44

^{xxxiii} In a recent review of approaches to strategic planning in post-conflict environments, representatives of the British government’s Ministry of Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development agreed that one of the difficulties facing decision-makers is that issues and options are “dropped on them” with little familiarity and without any frame of reference. In that sense lack of familiarity relates to what earlier had been described as perceived utility and relevance.

^{xxxiv} Personal communication