# Understanding the Effects of Leadership within the 2030 UN Agenda

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## Abstract

*The 2030 UN Agenda aims so solve much of the world`s problems, and thus, it has a defining importance over the way member states decide to organize their public policies. The present article aims to reveal the ways leadership is understood in international organizations, particularly within the United Nations. Also, the article takes a look at how leadership has been affected by the latest contextual factors, both internal and external, the ones affecting the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda objectives.*

## 1. Introduction

The UN has set an agenda that by 2030 has concrete goals to achieve such as: eradicating poverty, hunger, ensuring a better life, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, promoting gender equality, ensuring access to accessible energy, reliable, sustainable and modern measures, urgent action to combat climate change and its impact and last but not least, the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and the protection, restoration and promotion of sustainable terrestrial ecosystems.

Leadership at the UN level is supported on several pillars such as: the normative basis, principles, inclusive character, responsibility, multidimensional character, transformative, participatory, self-applied, which helps to formulate any possible strategy, as it outlines its guidelines.

## 2. Literature review

The pandemic context that has irreparably affected the UN's ability to operate, mainly due to the fact that, by applying measures to prevent the spread of the disease, Member States have severely affected the global economy, which essentially reduces their ability to act. towards compliance with the SDG of the UN 2030 Agenda. Thus, it is a extremely complicated subject which the specialized literature still has difficulties understanding it. But many authors have tried to answer some of these challenges in a short period of time such as: Turner S., Reinalda B., Trent J., Schnurr L. and Hochschild F.

Carrying out activities taking into account primarily the impact of these objectives, without taking into account its place and culture, when they are carried out, opening local public actors to support the implementation of actions taken and measures taken, are threats to the current system which the current article also aims to underline.

## 3. Research methodology

Before we begin with the main features of UN leadership, some key questions need to be asked:
a) What does it mean to be a leader in the UN?
b) What are the key elements of the UN leadership?
c) What distinguishes UN leadership from other leadership models and approaches?
d) How has the leadership model changed as the UN system has evolved?

The current questions will serve as starting point for both the theoretical analysis that will be made, but also for the practical analysis. In order to answer these questions, the findings of the current article will focus on a comprehensive cause-effect analysis regarding the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The qualities of a leader in the context of international organizations

Regarding the degree of concern of leaders for staff, we have the following indicators and indices that characterize a leader with a high degree of concern for subordinates (Charbonneau, 2020):
• The leader involves subordinates in the decision-making process: the leader frequently encourages the creativity of subordinates; the leader frequently encourages subordinates to participate in important decision-making; the leader takes into account the opinions and ideas of subordinates when making a decision;
• The leader is interested in the well-being of subordinates and their professional development: the leader frequently provides advice to subordinates on how to behave and how to improve personal performance; manifesting the leader's willingness to teach subordinates new ways to accomplish a task;
• The leader attaches great importance to the development of the relationship between him and his subordinates: the leader frequently shows pleasure (and patience) in explaining all the implications of a complex task; the leader respects the limits imposed by subordinates; the leader is concerned with developing new methods for improving relations with subordinates; the importance that the leader attaches to the formation of a team at work;
• The leader has a strong relationship with subordinates (this cannot be easily damaged), which is why he can intervene to solve problems without worrying that the relationship could be damaged;
• The leader has as a priority the fulfillment of the objectives of the institution in which he works. Clues: The leader's most common concern is to achieve goals and accomplish tasks; the leader ensures that the tasks will be completed on time; the leader frequently analyzes the organization's problems in order to find a solution;
• The leader attaches great importance to planning. Hints: The leader has a habit of dividing complex goals into achievable tasks; the leader is concerned with the efficient use of time and conducts frequent monitoring to ensure that goals are met on time;
• The leader likes challenges and reacts positively to crisis situations. Clues: often the high degree of difficulty of a goal or task is a motivating factor for the leader; the leader has no problem performing several complex tasks at the same time;
• The leader wants to improve in his field of activity.
 Other aspects that could influence managerial behavior are related to: the degree of maturity of subordinates, the degree of responsibility of the leader and the leader's philosophy about people.

So far no one was able to send in the perfect solution, which is not strange. Although behavioral theories have tried to show that the democratic style is more efficient than the authoritarian one, criticizing the latter; Empirical studies have shown that authoritarian style can, in some situations (in crisis situations), be more powerful than democratic. (Hochschild, 2010)

### 4.2. UN Leadership

To answer these questions, the Charter of the United Nations must first be studied; UN rules and standards, as set out in its treaties and declarations; its central mandate to promote peace and security, protect human rights, address humanitarian needs and advance economic and social progress and development; the imperatives of the sustainable development agenda; and the UN political framework in general (as all were previously promoted). Once studied, they offer eight defining characteristics of leadership at the UN level (Alkiviadou, 2019):
1) Leadership is based on rules;
2) Leadership is based on principles

3) Leadership is inclusive
4) Leadership must be responsible
5) Leadership is multidimensional
6) Leadership is transformative
7) Leadership is participatory
8) Leadership is self-applied

Earlier we talked about the global challenges for leadership. However, in order to be able to correlate the contextual factors with the directions of action of the UN and the challenges they face.

Context is therefore important, especially when it comes to implementing a strategy such as the United Nations Agenda 2030. What can be seen from the previous figure is that at both level 1 and level 2 of the contextual factors, what is repeated is the leadership style and structural capabilities. (Jesenský, 2019)

The external environment of the organization (Level 3) highlights several contextual factors, and behind them lies primarily the willingness to contribute to the implementation of organizational objectives by: public authorities and the community (society) in general. As is well known, culture can influence market characteristics and the level of coordination / involvement in society. (Reinalda, 2020)

The environment close to the organization (Level 2) highlights several contextual factors, and these are much closer to the organizational practice than those from the external environment, more precisely they refer to the direct way to affect the organizational activity without being part of it.

Organizational practice (Level 1) highlights several contextual factors that are closely correlated with organizational practice. Whether we are referring to the mix of employees, the demographics of their attitudes or the training process, organizational practice is directly related to how the organization's activity is directly affected by the interactions between its members.

Regarding the identification of the link between the theory of leadership applicable to the organization and the achievement of sustainable development goals, there must be a correlation of contextual factors with national reports on progress towards sustainable goals from the UN 2030 Agenda.

For this reason, a key point of the research must be the correlation of contextual factors (regardless of their level) with the reports made by the states regarding the achievement of the UN objectives on the 2030 Agenda.

*Figure 1. Failure of leadership at a UN level*
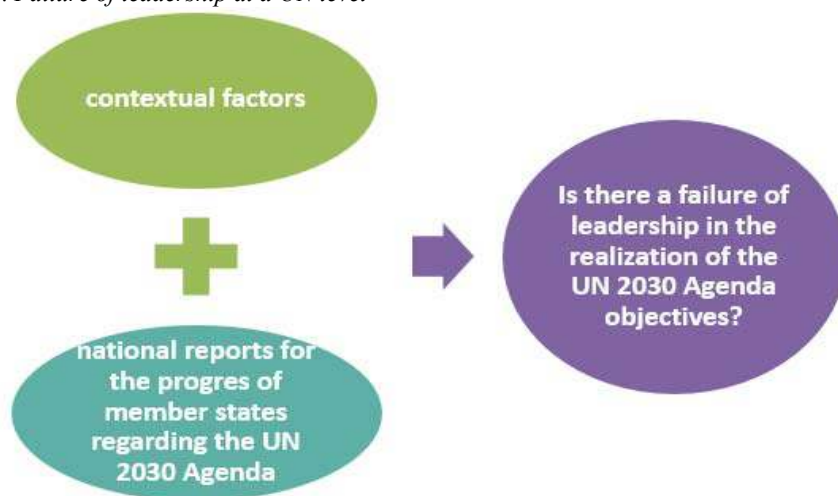


*Source:* self-processing

Another key point of the contextual factors is the emphasis on the interest of public actors and society in general to correlate national interests with those of the international organization. Specifically, a central idea that has emerged throughout the research of this topic is that public

authorities often either do not want or cannot correlate their work with the policies of the United Nations. Member States must accept that beyond the consensus almost always unanimously given to projects The UN must understand that the achievement of the objectives is to their advantage and apply the measures for the implementation of the UN plans. (Turner, 2021)

## 5. Cause-Effect analysis regarding the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda. Findings

*Table no.1 Cause-Effect analysis*

| CAUSE | EFFECT |
|---|---|
| Transformational change, and the inability to always fulfill the 4 roles of international organizations (financial support, dispute resolution, application of sanctions and / or peacekeeping); | Creating a global climate where the organization's trust and influence are not complete, where geopolitical and geostrategic instability still exists and due to it, the number of migrants and / or people who have left their homes increases; where living standards are still framed in what the UN itself calls the "extreme poverty line". |
| A leadership model oriented more towards management, based on answers to the "how and when" questions, to the detriment of a leadership model based on the "what" and "why" questions at the UN level. | Confidence in the leadership of the international organization is assimilated to those in public organizations, and by definition it is much more deficient compared to one of private organizations. |
| The current context confirms Ronald Reagan's statement: "*In this current crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the issue* "from the perspective of availability to the unity of action of the UN member states; | Member States follow their own public policy agenda, independent of the UN's sustainable development goals, and/or taking into account only the interests of their leaders or the political culture of which they are a part. |
| Confronting the effects of global climate change has failed to provide a global consensus. | Countries such as Indonesia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, India, Mexico, Thailand and Australia have difficulty convincing the population that global warming exists and that national leaders must act to combat it. |
| Managing the migration phenomenon and discrimination. Reports on Goal 5 on the SDGs show that no country in the world is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Target 7 on the SDGs also shows that more than 3 billion people do not live in conditions. minimum hygiene. | With each passing day, there are growing views of migrants and the positive effects that migration can have. Also, the increase in the number of people in refugee camps and the worsening of the conditions in which they live can give rise to other health crises or can lead directly to huge loss of life. |
| Education reform. UN data show that with regard to Objective 4 on the SDG list, more than half of children and adolescents do not meet minimum education standards, and reports on Objective 8 show that young people are 3 times more likely to become unemployed as opposed to grown ups. | The level of education decreases every year, although the technological capacity increases. International organizations fail to directly and sufficiently support research and development that can only be done as a result of increasing the level of education of the population. |
| The pandemic context that has irreparably affected the UN's ability to operate, mainly due to the fact that, by applying measures to prevent the spread of the disease, Member States have severely affected the global economy, which essentially reduces their ability to act. towards compliance with the SDG of the UN 2030 Agenda; | Without the right tools to adapt to new organizational capacities in the current context, the 2030 Agenda is largely in danger of not being realized. |

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|---|---|
| The systemic thinking of the 2030 Agenda, as the SDGs had to be analyzed in concrete terms, depending on the capacity of each Member State to submit to such a process and to achieve its objectives; | This means that there are currently large discrepancies between the achievement of the objectives by the Member States, but also in terms of the progress itself. In essence, in the same progress report of a state there may be areas where the state has exceeded expectations, the state has not made any progress or even regressed, or areas where there is no data to provide an answer as to the stage at which the state is achieving that goal. That is why there are already at least 3 objectives on the SDG agenda that will not be achieved by 2030 |
| One of the pillars of UN action is: "Developing an active and enjoyable work environment with a sense of purpose and inclusion" | The lack of studies to show that some resolutions (or directions of action) are passed and accepted as the result of cohesion or are the result of the concession, endangers the long-term desired inclusion at UN level. |
| The deficient direct relationship between citizens and the UN, they appear more only in the surveys of the organization | National leaders succeed in better convincing citizens of the importance of the national policies they pursue, gaining the vote of confidence (in any form) on action at the level of state leadership. Civil society plays an extremely small role in linking international and national policies, with citizens often being completely surprised by the goals on the UN agenda. |
| The focus of the organization was on setting achievable goals and did not focus on motivating Member States to achieve them. | From the perspective of the distinction between leaders and managers, it should be emphasized that more has been organized at the UN level and no means have been developed to differentiate the capacity of states to achieve their objectives. |
| The effects of the Covid-19 virus pandemic | The UN estimates that the number of people living in poverty will increase by more than 905 million by the end of 2030 (by more than 44 million compared to those currently existing), thus announcing another failure on the list of the 17 SDGs. |

*Source:* self-processing after data collected from " UN Sustainable development report 2020", [online]
Available at:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2020/2020_sustainable_development_report.pdf

## 6. Conclusions

The performance of any country in pursuing the UN's sustainable development goals will largely depend on its leadership. An effective one will translate into the prudent formulation and implementation of useful public policies, which correlate the interests of citizens with those of the UN. Achieving the goals of sustainable development will also require the concentrated efforts of citizens, governments and the business community. (Trent & Schnurr, 2018)

In conclusion, the inability of UN leadership to correlate its efforts with national ones and given the context and environment in which it operates will result in altering some defining elements of the international organization: such as autonomy, the limits and relevance of autonomy, its ability to effectively abolish poverty, to have the capacity to rebuild obsolete infrastructure in the current conditions and to create a general framework of instability.

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