

# **Addendum 4: Behavioral insights for successful UN integration**

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## Introduction

The viability, relevance, and success of the United Nations hinges on its capacity to maximize collective impact in response to global demands. But people comprise organizations—and it is their capacity to make the required decisions and actions that then determine organizational capacity. In UN settings, changing ways of working to facilitate successful integration<sup>1</sup>, therefore, requires attention to all of the human factors—not just policies, protocols and explicit incentives—that drive individual behavior.

The discipline of applied behavioral science—the study of how humans make decisions and take actions in real-world environments—presents a lens through which to view the challenge of promoting behaviors that are critical to successful integration. Behavior itself is often assumed to be a function of either an individual’s unique personality traits, their level of training or the explicit incentives (rewards and punishments/sanctions) that they face. Thus, historical approaches to improving collaboration between siloed branches of large organizations, including at the UN, have largely prioritized a combination of improving criteria for selecting and hiring, providing information and trainings, and optimizing the policy frameworks and performance management schemes that determine workplace incentives.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, a growing body of “behavioral” scientific literature at the intersection of psychology and economics has demonstrated over the past several decades that human behavior may just as often be influenced by the situation (or context) that individuals find themselves in, opening the door to a new and lower-cost class of solutions to complement those described above. Marrying insights from cognitive psychology with the analytical methods of economics, the behavioral paradigm highlights the influence of less-considered environmental factors—the perceived behavior of members of peer groups, for example, or the presence of habits formed during previous experience—as separate from structural factors such as incentives (pecuniary or reputational) or information

deficits. *Importantly, applied behavioral science is distinguished from related fields, such as human-centered design, by a unique dual focus on using scientific findings to analyze behavior and rigorously testing designed solutions to inform iterative improvement.*

Applying a behavioral lens requires first identifying the behaviors critical to successful integration that may also need reinforcement and the actors responsible for behaving in these ways. Then, it is possible to assess the presence of one or more contextual influences—guided by scientific findings from the academic literature—that might bias each identified behavior, before finally designing context-appropriate recommendations for mitigating these specific biases. The following section describes the procedure that the UN integration review team has used to identify behaviors critical to successful integration, diagnose contextual barriers to these behaviors, and design solutions for mitigating the barriers and improving adherence to behaviors critical to successful integration.

<sup>1</sup> As detailed in other sections of the report, the purpose of integration is to ultimately improve peace consolidation outcomes in a country, and as a result, is only desirable, i.e., successful, when it leads to improvements in those outcomes. We do not surmise that all integration is beneficial on its own, but that integration is successful when it is used as an instrument to consolidate peace more effectively.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, these approaches have often relied on identifying and hiring people with attitudes and mindsets conducive for successful integration or targeting change of attitudes and mindsets of existing UN staff. Attitudes and mindsets should be the focal point when changed attitudes in and of themselves are the desired end state; however, if the actual objective is a shift in behavior at work, then focusing on the change of the specific behavior itself is most critical.

## Methodology

Applied behavioral science is, first and foremost, problem-driven. Therefore, the integration review team identified a specific set of behavioral problems—meaning the systematic, observable behaviors that we are looking to change, stripped of any assumptions about how they are produced. Having a defined set of behavioral “problems” then allows us to diagnose why these are occurring—or why people are not behaving in the ways desired—and address them through behavioral design solutions. But to identify behavioral problems related to UN integration and diagnose and design solutions, we must first answer the question: *what behaviors are critical to successful integration?*

### IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING BEHAVIORS

During the course of the research, we identified key sets of behaviors that are critical for successful integration to be achieved. To do so, we conducted a literature review, key stakeholder interviews (50), focus groups (9), and an online survey (260 responses) to

map the full process to successful integration—that is, the duties, responsibilities, and actions amongst all UN staff that lead to success integration. The mapping process began with the literature—including mandates, policies, and prior reviews of integration—to identify the formal duties and responsibilities of staff involved in integration. We then supplemented the formal with the informal; through the course of interviews and focus groups, we collected qualitative data on what additional actions are necessary for successful integration. This process led us to identify over 150+ actions across all UN actors involved in the various aspects of integration.

We then set out to consolidate and prioritize these 150+ actions into a succinct set of behaviors that are crucial to successful integration. As we dissected the set of actions into their component parts—asking, what are the practical application behaviors involved in each action—we were able to identify similarities across the actions. For example, while a set of UN staff may be required to “draft and finalize interagency documents” and “contribute to resolution of policy



**Integration involves many actors...**

Who is involved in integration?



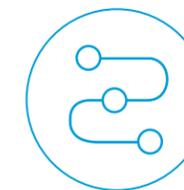
**with many duties & responsibilities...**

What are the duties & responsibilities involved in successful integration?



**requiring certain actions...**

What actions must occur to complete these duties & responsibilities?



**necessitating multiple behaviors.**

What explicit behaviors are involved in each action?

differences between UN entities”—two actions in the course of integration—both require the staff to behave in similar ways. In both actions, they must identify and solicit buy-in for collaboration points across pillars, incorporate data and viewpoints from other entities, support amicable dispute resolution, and document the final decision.

And as we drew a set of practical behaviors for each of the more than 150 actions, we found that the majority of the very distinct actions involved a smaller overlapping set of 45-50 behaviors. This set of behaviors ranged from those derived from formal mandates and responsibilities (such as attend cross-pillar meetings) to informal behaviors that might be considered “above and beyond” what is typical or formal (such as proactively build relationships with cross-pillar counterparts). By conducting this exercise, we were able to establish a set of behaviors that occur in the course of successful integration. From this, we then sought out to understand, which of these 45-50 behaviors are most critical to successful integration? And which behaviors are UN actors not regularly adhering to in the course of their work that is negative affecting integration efforts?

To answer, we established a set of criteria based on 1) adherence and 2) positive effect towards successful integration. We referred back to the literature, interviews, focus groups, and survey to understand each behavior on the basis of the criteria. We quickly identified that some of the behaviors were well adhered to and less effective; for example, most staff identified that they and others regularly attended cross-pillar meetings that were required of them but noted that these meetings and forums were often not flexible, inclusive, or productive enough to facilitate successful integration in many settings. It became clear that the more effective and less adhered to behavior was establishing and improving upon appropriate forums and mechanisms to foster integration, rather than simple attendance. By analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data, we were able to derive a list of nine behaviors critical to successful integration not uniformly adhered to in UN settings.

## IDENTIFYING ACTOR GROUPS

In the course of the research, we also focused our efforts on identifying a key set of actors that contribute to successful integration through the behaviors outlined. As mentioned previously, we mapped all sets of actors involved in integration in UN settings; we then used qualitative and quantitative research to identify those staff which have most influence on integration. The staff spanned across UN entities, country contexts, appointments and positions, and were responsible for a unique set of actions and behaviors that contribute to successful integration.

We then grouped the actors according to similarity of behaviors necessary for successful integration. Using the research, we noted that some behaviors were most relevant to leadership or non-leadership positions, others were most relevant to HQ or field positions, and some were relevant across the set or sub-sets of actors. This exercise led us to five actor sets each representing a group of staff—across a multitude of positions and contexts in the UN system—that execute a set of behaviors to establish successful integration.

## DIAGNOSING BEHAVIORAL BARRIERS

Defining behaviors and actor groupings so narrowly serves to restrict our focus to a finite set of contextual features—like the routine aspects of daily life for individuals in integrated settings, specific instruments and policies used, timing of integration trainings and staff turnovers, etc. These contextual features can then be matched with findings from the scientific literature on how humans make decisions and take actions to illuminate hidden causes for why staff are not behaving in these ways.

ideas42 uses a proprietary tool called behavioral mapping to diagnose the behavioral factors affecting behavior and identify solutions. Behavioral mapping generates these insights about the psychologies and contextual features contributing to the problem. We use these insights to establish a set of hypotheses about what might be driving the problem from a behavioral perspective. We then confirm or disconfirm the

hypotheses, with a particular focus on the four contexts of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Sudan-Darfur. We do this by categorizing the pre-collected data from formative research and matching them to our hypotheses, as well as conducting additional interviews (approximately 50 in total) of staff in each of the four settings.

To balance breadth and depth, we first conducted a deeper diagnosis of five behaviors and related actor groupings in the form of case studies, and then extrapolated the findings to derive generalizable barriers relevant for the full set of behaviors and actor groupings. The diagnosis is, thus, divided into two sections: diagnosis case studies and behavioral barriers to successful integration.

## DESIGNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Following diagnosis, we designed principles and solutions to mitigate the behavioral barriers identified; to do so, we draw on the diagnosis to propose interventions that address the key barriers. Such interventions grounded in behavioral science can range from small “nudges” or programmatic tweaks to large policy overhauls. We describe both sets of options in the recommendations section.

# DEFINE: Behaviors that characterize successful integration

Successful integration requires many different people to behave in particular ways; specifically, the integration review team identified nine broad behaviors critical to successful integration and five actor groupings that are most influential to their success. In the words of one interviewee, “Integration should be an orchestra, with different instruments involved depending on what is necessary on the ground.” While the identified behaviors are broadly relevant to all UN staff, certain subsets—such as senior leaders or department or agency representatives, among others as described below—are most influential to achieving successful integration when performing a specific set of the behaviors. We posit that when these specific staff behave in these ways, it brings the entire system—or each UN setting—closer to achieving successful integration.

## UN ACTORS MOST INFLUENTIAL TO ACHIEVING SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION

Senior leaders in field settings	Includes SRSGs, DSRSRs, RCs, and HCs.
Senior managers in field settings	Includes members of any strategic leadership forum, cross-pillar or thematic working groups, and leaders of substantive and support components in field settings. They can be key in-country decision-makers such as Heads of Field Offices, Chief of Mission Support and/or Director of Mission Support, Heads of Mission components both substantive and support, and Heads of relevant AFPs.
Planning and staff functions in field settings	Includes members of the bodies responsible for joint analytical and planning capacity, as well as senior leadership staff functions. They are primarily planners and staff functions in SRSG, DSRSR, RC, and HC offices.
Senior leaders at HQ	Includes UN Security Council, Executive Committee and Deputies Committee, agency and department heads who lead on pillars, and Chairs of Integrated Task Forces (ITFs) and other cross-pillar coordination bodies relevant to integration.
Working-level HQ staff involved in cross-pillar collaboration	Includes non-chairing ITF members, non-chairing desk officers from relevant countries, and other staff with cross-pillar coordination responsibilities.

## BEHAVIORS CRITICAL TO SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

### → Publicly define and demonstrate commitment to integration *Most relevant for: senior leaders in field settings, senior leaders at HQ*

This behavior involves using one’s voice and public standing—both within and outside of the UN—to reinforce the importance of an integrated approach. This means identifying a set of consistent messages around integration, including defining strategic outcomes and targets; seeking feedback, buy-in and iterating on messaging to re-align at key points in time, particularly as needs change on the ground; communicating the messaging effectively to heads of agencies, funds, and programs and heads of departments and missions; using interagency and public communication channels to communicate messaging to non-leadership staff.

### → Establish and improve upon appropriate forums and mechanisms that promote collaboration *Most relevant for: senior leaders in field settings, senior leaders at HQ*

This behavior includes establishing and building on appropriate forums and mechanisms for harmonizing policies and practices, ensuring cross-pillar collaboration and integration, and monitoring progress of integration; ensuring inclusive and relevant coordination mechanisms that bring the right set of people to the table through purposeful membership and leadership; developing cross-pillar liaisons and other arrangements that effectively streamline collaboration, as necessary; and overall, creating space for cross-pillar dialogue to occur even if outside the confines of formal procedure. Such forums could for instance be regular technical meetings, planning committees or other cross-pillar groups; multi-entity analytical frameworks; and joint reports across entities and pillars.

### → Provide clear and simple guidance on decisions effectively to all UN staff *Most relevant for: senior leaders in field settings*

This behavior includes detailing a set of parameters for the implementation of decisions in short-term and long-term; setting expectations and providing clear and simple guidance on how the decision should translate into operative points; proactively explaining why and how a decision was made to relevant UN staff; and communicating decisions in a timely manner to mitigate setbacks and negative consequences.

### → Proactively seek out relevant data and viewpoints of entities and individuals *Most relevant for: senior leaders in field settings*

This behavior includes proactively seeking information for decision-making prior to decision and at critical moments in time; seeking information from an inclusive, balanced, and relevant set of staff; asking questions of entities and individuals to elicit additional viewpoints; encouraging information flow and welcoming feedback.

### → Support amicable dispute resolution between entities and individuals *Most relevant for: senior leaders in field settings, senior managers in field settings, senior leaders at HQ*

This behavior includes raising conflicts at the right time, in the correct forum, and at the appropriate level; not avoiding conflict but proactively seeking solution to concerns, particularly as it relates to comparative advantage and overlapping mandates; advocating for conflict mitigation among counterparts and supporting resolution; and reflecting on and making suggestions for improving dispute resolution mechanisms. For senior leaders, this also includes supporting substantive discussions on dispute resolution in existing forums and through seeking bilateral discussions; ensuring dispute resolution occurs across and within each entity.

→ **Identify and solicit buy-in for collaboration points across pillars**

**Most relevant for: senior managers in field settings, planning and staffing functions in field settings**

This behavior includes proactively identifying points of commonality across workstreams; recognizing where goals can be consolidated or harmonized; identifying space for other pillars to work and/or collaborate, including on planning, analysis, and reporting. For senior managers, this also includes negotiating different relationships to pull mandates together despite distinct accountabilities; reflecting and iterating on existing collaboration points, including analytical frameworks and other tools; and going above and beyond for goal alignment when it can lead to better outcomes.

→ **Incorporate data and viewpoints from other entities and individuals into decision-making**

**Most relevant for: working-level HQ staff involved in cross-pillar collaboration**

This behavior includes incorporating data and viewpoints from field and cross-pillar counterparts; including such information into reports, forum discussions, and other tools that contribute to policy and practices; ensuring relevant field and cross-pillar counterparts are invited into conversations and consultations; and providing ample opportunities for field and cross-pillar counterparts to share data and viewpoints.

→ **Proactively build relationships with cross-pillar counterparts and other staff critical to integration**

**Most relevant for: senior managers in field settings, planning and staffing functions in field settings, working-level HQ staff involved in cross-pillar collaboration**

This behavior includes members actively and organically seeking out counterparts across pillars to improve collaboration; forming regular, iterative, and positive communication channels with these counterparts; asking questions of counterparts to initiate and sustain dialogue; creating space for listening, learning, and iterating on existing practices; ensuring consultation occurs regularly and at critical points in time, such as during reform processes or country transitions.

→ **Proactively exchange information with cross-pillar counterparts and other staff critical to integration**

**Most relevant for: planners and staffing functions in field settings, working-level HQ staff involved in cross-pillar collaboration**

This behavior includes members proactively providing information and establishing effective forums for regular information exchange; learning the information needs of other pillars and offering support; triangulating and bouncing information off each other; and sharing said information in a timely manner and at relevant and critical points, including during planning, reporting, analysis, policy and reform discussions.

## DIAGNOSE: Behavioral barriers to successful integration

Behavioral barriers are features of the context that limit UN personnel from behaving in ways critical to successful integration. The interplay between human psychology and context can have a powerful effect on behavior. When we better understand how UN staff interact with their environment, we can adjust the context to help them to make optimal decisions and take the resulting actions—particularly in ways that support successful integration. Many features of UN staff working environments are created by the UN itself—from the physical workspaces to the guidance and handbooks or the informal working norms set by leadership. This section serves as a framework to understand how UN staff are affected by these features of their working environment. While the following barriers are broadly relevant to the behaviors and sets of key individuals identified previously, not all are relevant for all staff at all moments, and not all staff experience each barrier. Rather, the barriers illuminate often overlooked challenges to achieving successful integration commonly identified during the course of the research.

### **BARRIER #1: FACILITATING SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION REQUIRES FOCUS AND ATTENTION THAT UN STAFF DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO DEDICATE TO THE TASK.**

People's ability to pay attention to several things at once is much more limited than most would think; in reality, attention is extremely limited and fleeting. When attentional capacity is stretched—for instance, when UN staff are navigating a multitude of important tasks such as making determinations on a number of inquiries, preparing multiple reports, attending back-to-back meetings, and planning future workstreams all at once—people are effectively blind to information they would easily notice under less fraught circumstances. The challenge in many UN settings is that most staff are almost always navigating a multitude of important tasks at once—their attention is regularly stretched—which affects their ability to behave in ways critical to successful integration.

For example, for senior leaders, **publicly defining and demonstrating commitment to integration** may appear simple at a glance, but *successfully* doing so requires much more than delivering a set of talking points on the topic—it is a multi-step process to identify practical and evidence-based guidance on how integration can be positively achieved in a variety of cir-

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“We need space, time, energy to do it all... We don't have it.”

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cumstances with a network of UN individuals and entities of differing opinions, experiences, and constraints. What specific messaging will draw various disparate and independent mission and AFPs to the same table to discuss coordinated programming or other work? What examples of success can be drawn from to build a case for integration among these agencies? What are

the implications for each mission or AFP if they were to agree to an integrated approach, and what can be said to mitigate any negative implications for each entity? These decisions and actions require a large amount of attention, but senior leaders—and people in general—only have a finite amount at their disposal. When the majority of that attention is devoted to navigating day-to-day decision-making, it can be difficult for senior leaders to give the attention that is needed to determine how to promote integration successfully, and then acting on those determinations.

In the case of working-level **staff incorporating data and viewpoints from other entities and individuals**, a similar behavioral barrier exists. The decisions and actions that are required to seek inputs, review and incorporate inputs, and follow up with a diverse set of counterparts require an extensive amount of time and attention. The task often requires multiple back-and-forth communications, deliberation, and coordinating with a variety of people with competing interests all at once. Many interviewees noted the difficulty of pursuing all of the steps needed to incorporate inputs; and it is often the case that staff don't complete the full process of incorporating data and viewpoints successfully. They may solicit feedback for a document, but not sift through the 10-60 edits from each individual agency and department, identify solutions for all competing edits or concerns, or follow-up with for clarification that may be needed before inclusion. While not including inputs or following-up with counterparts may appear a conscious and deliberate choice, often it's the case that staff simply did not have the attentional capacity at the time to do so.

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“There are always other urgent matters to attend to.”

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In addition, senior leaders and working-level staff alike are tasked with a multitude of issues and challenges, many of which require immediate action. When faced with a multitude of tasks and experiencing a scarcity of time or other resources, people tend to tunnel. That is, they focus on the most pressing decisions and actions, crowding out other vital but less time-sensitive tasks—such as many of the behaviors critical to successful integration. Overall, even if deemed important, many of the important decisions and actions to ensure successful integration can easily be subconsciously sidelined if other competing and more urgent tasks arise—and in integrated settings, they always do.<sup>4</sup>

This is often the situation when senior leaders must **provide clear and simple guidance on decisions to staff**. While the actual decisions are made, senior leaders do not effectively convey the decisions and relevant guidance to staff. Many interviewees expressed concern regarding the lack of clarity surrounding various decisions of top leadership that affect their work; for example, perhaps a security decision was made but an AFP was provided little to no information on the decision, or a new high-level policy is disseminated without guidance on how to apply it at the working-level. In these cases, senior leaders often focus their mental energy on the task at hand—the decision itself—and move onto other pressing decisions and actions thereafter. In reality, they tunnel on the remaining decisions at hand and fail to focus on providing

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<sup>4</sup> Scarcity: a context in which people experience a relative lack of resources (ie. time), which tends to deplete mental resources (such as attention, working memory, cognitive control) and lead to poorer-quality decision-making, including heightened focus on the present at the expense of the future. Tunneling: the brain's tendency to focus on the most urgent or pressing needs in situations of limited available cognitive bandwidth.

follow-on guidance, which is often of secondary priority to senior leaders. It may appear that senior leaders are opaque, indifferent, or aloof, when in reality they simply focused on other pressing decisions at the expense of an important action—ensuring clarity for senior managers and working-level staff.

Moreover, in situations of funding scarcity, many interviewees noted how a “single-agency focus” becomes dominant as senior and working-level AFP staff tunnel on delivering programs and ensuring continuity of

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“Certain people can be enemies of integration—it's natural, they're working with reduced footprints and under impossible conditions.”

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operations. While this is often not the context for missions given their stable funding streams and longer-term staff positions, the future of AFP programs and staff positions are often predicated on delivering programs and demonstrating individual value. As a result, AFP staff experiencing funding scarcity or precarity are unlikely to focus on **identifying and soliciting buy-in for collaboration points** with mission or other entities—not due to an aversion to collaboration but rather tunneling on their own urgent programmatic and funding priorities to ensure their very survival.

## BARRIER #2: THE RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN “INTEGRATION”-ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES APPEAR MORE FORBIDDING THAN THEY ARE

People generally avoid ambiguity or risk, preferring to stick to decisions and actions with relatively safe—or at the least, known—outcomes.<sup>5</sup> The challenge in UN settings is that often, behaving in ways that are critical to successful integration may require staff to go “above and beyond”—choosing uncharted paths with no assured line to success. Most people find relative safety and success in the silos of their own department, mission, or AFP; within each, there are clearly-aligned goals supported by leadership that connect to each person's workstream and assessed performance. Choosing to individually step outside of the bounds of existing silos—particularly when joint goals are not readily aligned, leadership support is limited, and performance indicators on collaboration are non-existent—can easily be perceived as stepping into the unknown.

This is most commonly the situation when senior leaders must **proactively seek out relevant data and viewpoints from other individuals and entities**. When senior leaders make the decision to seek out informa-

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“As a leader, it's hard to step out and engage in new conversations when you feel you are starting on your back foot, just trying to catch your footing on the topic.”

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tion from additional sets of staff, they are not able to anticipate what information they receive and how it will affect their decision-making. They could potentially pursue viewpoints from departments or AFPs that may be contrary to their existing narrative—necessitating a rethinking of their position on a topic—or even negative feedback of their current approach. Senior leaders have a difficult task; overall, it can be incredibly

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<sup>5</sup> Ambiguity aversion: a preference for known over unknown risks.

challenging to weave each divergent viewpoint from UN entities into a sound judgement that is inclusive, balanced, and relevant for the context. The challenge is made more difficult by many senior leaders' prior professional experiences primarily occurring in one line of work (as is the case for many SRSGs originating from diplomatic careers, as well as DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs working in one pillar). In light of this challenge, it is often most common that senior leaders stick within the silos of information that they are most comfortable with, whereby they can discuss matters familiar to them, anticipate outcomes and make decisions accordingly. Without knowing what they will receive once they seek out additional insights, it can be difficult to take the leap.

People are also greatly affected by the visible behavior of their peers—known as descriptive social norms. In UN settings, stepping outside of “the norm” is perceived as a costly endeavor in many circumstances. For example, senior managers regularly experience or witness low-level conflict at a variety of coordination meetings, hear of disputes regularly between other entities or pillars even if they are not directly involved, and have experienced similar ongoing disputes in previous roles in other integrated settings. If deferring or maintaining conflict is the norm, then **supporting amicable dispute resolution between entities and individuals**—which falls outside the norm—becomes a difficult behavior to engage in no matter how beneficial. Instead, senior managers often mirror the ways others respond to conflict, such as confronting or deflecting, because it is perceived as the norm.

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“We don't play well together. That's the steady-state norm of integrated settings.”

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Moreover, in many instances, staff often perceive risks to behaving in ways that are critical to successful integration as more consequential than they are in reality. That is because people's perceptions of risk are often not an objective calculation of the situation; most people overemphasize details that are most salient—or prominent—in their environment at the expense of less obvious facts that may sway their decisions and actions.<sup>6</sup> For example, staff may perceive that personally behaving in ways critical to successful integration—such as **identifying and soliciting buy-in for collaboration points or incorporating data and viewpoints from other entities**—is risky if they are going against peer and supervisor norms in their entities. However, the risks are more salient for staff who work in siloed environments or are not co-located; they are surrounded by and interact mostly with their entity peers and supervisors. The risks are less salient for co-located staff or staff that have regular exchanges with interagency counterparts as they have a wider viewpoint in their day-to-day and perceive norms differently (particularly perceiving the norm to be that people do in fact collaborate across pillars).

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<sup>6</sup> **Saliency:** the prominence of something compared to other elements in the surrounding environment.

### **BARRIER #3: THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN THE BEHAVIORS APPEAR SMALLER THAN THEY ARE.**

The degree to which people perceive that their decisions or actions will lead to positive outcomes affects how likely they are to make the decision or take action. Unfortunately, UN staff often perceive individual actions—particularly actions to enhance collaboration and increase successful integration—as not enough to affect real change in the UN system. This can be true; structural barriers embedded in UN policy and protocol can impede UN staff from successfully affecting change at the individual level in some circumstances. However, as noted in the previous section, perceptions do not always match reality. In many other instances, UN staff underestimate the scope of their practical influence—or their locus of control—on UN integration.<sup>7</sup> In reality, individual action can and does tip the balance and move the UN system closer to successful integration.

People's perceptions of themselves as having limited control over events and outcomes can affect even the highest rungs of leadership in organizations. For example, given the disparate departments and agencies across the UN—all with thousands of staff and multiple areas of work—many senior leaders at HQ perceive their own individual influence on integration to be subsumed by the relative totality of other senior leaders' influence both at HQ and in the field. As a result, senior leaders deciding to **publicly define and demonstrate commitment to integration** often perceive the task will not tip the scales towards successful integration enough to be worth taking action given that other senior leaders may not be pushing integration in their own departments and agencies. In particular, engaging in integration-related activities are not perceived to be as beneficial as the alternative of using their time, mental energy, and other resources towards furthering the particular mission of the entity in which they lead.

In field settings, the sheer enormity of the enterprise that senior leaders manage can also lead them to underestimate the benefits of action, particularly in **supporting amicable dispute resolution between entities and individuals**. Senior leaders are primarily engaged in coordination roles, and their direct control of mission departments and AFPs is limited given that

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“We lack real authority. RCs and their offices are merely coordination, we don't control funding.”

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funding and reporting lines go directly to these entities and not through senior leaders' command. As a result, senior leaders often noted hesitation to weigh in on or arbitrate disputes—they perceived that given that they have no direct control over the entities, they could not affect change. In reality, senior leaders underestimate their practical influence as a high-ranking official in UN settings and at times, fail to capitalize on opportunities where they could push entities to arbitrate and resolve disputes.

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<sup>7</sup> **Locus of control:** the degree to which people believe that they, as opposed to external forces, have control over the outcome of events.

#### **BARRIER #4: THE EXISTENCE OF TOO MANY AVAILABLE OPTIONS, COMBINED WITH TOO FEW GUARDRAILS, INHIBITS DECISION-MAKING.**

UN staff are often working in dynamic environments where the context can change rapidly and often. To be successful, senior leadership and working-level staff alike cannot simply rely on the existing ways of working together at every moment, but must change when necessary to fit the context at hand. To do so requires that people be able to navigate the multiple emerging choices in their day-to-day work—from choosing which workstream to prioritize, whom to develop and maintain professional relationships with, what meetings to attend and information to exchange, among other choices. But too many choices can be overwhelming; and for most people, when faced with a huge range of options, they often fail to choose the best option—or fail to choose altogether.<sup>8</sup>

In practice, people mostly choose what is comfortable and familiar, and having more options often leads to less realized choices. Instead, we often “choose” pre-set options even when many other options are available. Even arbitrary options that set the status quo—for example, default settings—play important roles in decision-making, and can influence what people choose and what eventually happens. People will be less likely to switch to an alternative even if they would have chosen it in the absence of the status quo.

When senior leaders attempt to **improve upon forums and mechanisms**, they are stuck between two extremes: existing defaults and endless possibilities. The existing defaults—for example, in the IAP handbook—are a one-size model that often do not fit

the context nor do they go into detail about the smaller sets of forums and mechanisms needed for complex settings. In the absence of these defaults, senior leaders face endless possibilities, making it incredibly difficult (and time-consuming) to make decisions on what forums and mechanisms can lead to successful integration. As a result, many senior leaders stick with what is most comfortable—that is, sticking to the existing set of forums and mechanisms that were operational upon arrival.

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“I’m always asking the awkward question—why are we still doing this? There is a tendency to set meetings by what is already there, not by what is needed.”

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Moreover, when working-level HQ staff attempt to **incorporate data and viewpoints from entities and individuals**, they too face an endless amount of possibilities, each with its own benefits and risks. Compounded by mental bandwidth and time constraints, it is natural that these staff choose pre-set options. In particular, they solicit and incorporate data from the “usual suspects”—those they have established relationships with, have learned to reach out to through handover and guidance documents, and are familiar with the data they will receive and can easily incorporate. Even if there are other productive viewpoints to include, the choice to open up the possibilities to other new sets of people is often mentally challenging, time-intensive, and ultimately paralyzing—particularly in expansive settings such as at HQ.

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<sup>8</sup> **Choice overload:** an increase in the number of options leads to adverse consequences, such as a decrease in the motivation to choose.

#### **BARRIER #5: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES, PRIOR EXPERIENCES, AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE TASK AT HAND LEAD STAFF TO AN OVERRELIANCE ON FORMAL PROTOCOL.**

Productive collaboration occurs when individuals are able to expand their sense of their role, think independently and take marginal risks in order to close gaps that exist between formal mandates. And yet, subconscious narratives, impressions, and perceptions based on experiences—known as mental models—may stand in the way of taking initiative.<sup>9</sup> For example, when UN staff establish perceptions of integration-related tasks as outside of their formal responsibilities—as a majority of people surveyed appeared to—it makes them less likely to prioritize those tasks. When UN staff develop a narrative of their primary identity as “UN agency head” rather than “UN leader”, they are less likely to engage in collaborative behaviors with other UN entities. Overall, UN staff perceptions of themselves, their environment, and the roles they play in it often deter them from behaving in ways critical to successful integration.

Most notably, UN staff that maintain their careers in one entity often form impressions of themselves—or their identity—as representative of that entity; as a result, staff make decisions and take actions within the bounds of what is best for the entity as opposed to the greater ecosystem of UN and other entities. For example, senior leaders at HQ and in field settings with careers primarily within one pillar may be more prone to **seeking out data and viewpoints from entities**

**and individuals** working in the pillar as opposed to a well-rounded set of individuals. Senior managers with singular entity or pillar identities may similarly be prone to **soliciting buy-in for collaboration points among individuals and entities** working across the same pillar and may be less likely to **support amicable dispute resolution** across pillars.

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“Integration is a buzzword. The UN puts out great language, but it doesn’t set a relevant agenda for individual entities, and people don’t see themselves in the work.”

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Moreover, UN staff that perceive themselves as agency or department representatives and have witnessed failed attempts at integration in their day-to-day work more regularly form impressions of integration as a bureaucratic imposition secondary to agency or department priorities. As a result, these staff are less likely to prioritize integration-related tasks or step outside of entity imperatives to behave in ways critical to integration—such as **demonstrating commitment to integration, soliciting buy-in for collaboration, or building forums and mechanisms to foster cross-pillar collaboration**.

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<sup>8</sup> **Choice overload:** an increase in the number of options leads to adverse consequences, such as a decrease in the motivation to choose.

## **BARRIER #6: STAFF ERRONEOUSLY ASSUME BAD FAITH RATHER THAN RECOGNIZE THE SITUATION'S INFLUENCE ON ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL'S BEHAVIOR.**

People in general have a tendency to believe that the ways in which people behave primarily reflect who they are as people, although it's often the case that situational factors, instead, highly influence behavior.<sup>10</sup> When UN staff perceive counterparts behaving poorly—missing a deadline for providing feedback, disagreeing with others during cross-pillar meetings, and generally not collaborating—they brand them as difficult personalities. Sometimes, people do in fact have difficult personalities; but just as often or more other times, they do not. And when “irreconcilable personalities” are perceived to drive behavior as opposed to situational factors, valuable opportunities are missed to resolve situational challenges and collaborate effectively.

For example, many interviewees frequently mentioned internal agency or department pressures as the cause for not being able to **amicably resolve disputes** among peers during discussions on strategy and implementation—they often were facing extensive pressure to deliver on their own urgent priorities. Yet when asked about peers in these same settings, interviewees often perceived their peers' personalities as the cause for the disputes. As a result, they were less willing to work towards a mutual solution since they did not perceive their peers' to be experiencing similar situational constraints.

In addition, minor situational factors such as external deadlines or time constraints strongly influenced working-level staff's ability to **incorporate data and viewpoints from other entities and individuals**. However, counterparts often perceived failure to incorporate data and viewpoints as a result of personal indiffer-

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“ We had difficult characters in the room...but we realized it was easy to fix with clarification of boundaries and timelines. ”

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ence to the alternative views. As a result, rather than reach out to staff to understand the situational challenge and negotiate different deadlines, counterparts would either escalate the situation into a high-level dispute or simply not collaborate with the person in the future—neither of which resolved the challenge nor led to outcomes that promoted successful integration.

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<sup>10</sup> **Fundamental attribution error:** the tendency to attribute other people's behavior to their character instead of their circumstances, but recognize the influence of circumstance on one's own behavior

## **BARRIER #7: OPERATIONAL HURDLES AT EACH MOMENT MAKE THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF COLLABORATING PROHIBITIVE.**

Many times, people do not act in accordance with their intentions because hassle factors, or minor inconveniences or obstacles, stand in the way of achieving their intentions<sup>11</sup>. In numerous interviews, UN staff express intentions to behave in ways critical to successful integration—such as **soliciting and identifying buy-in for collaboration points, exchanging information, or proactively building relationships**—but hassles often impede follow-through. Overall, UN settings are often not set up for integration, requiring staff to navigate numerous hassles and hurdles along the way to collaboration.

For example, the physical distance between staff of different agencies and departments creates numerous hassles to **proactively building relationships** among working-level staff in the field. To establish productive relationships, staff must identify relevant counterparts, establish contact, and continuously engage with each other to build the relationship. When staff attempt to identify counterparts, they are not in their vicinity nor are they often in the same email systems—requiring staff to go through the extra hassles of reaching out to other colleagues to connect them through different degrees of separation. Staff might intend to reach out via email for weeks, but the build-up in their inbox can be enough to convince them that tomorrow is a better day to sort their inbox and send the email. And when maintaining the relationship requires continuous travel to other offices, often across towns and with each compound having their own security protocols, the obstacles are often too great.

Even when physical distance between staff of different agencies and departments is reduced, other hassles can stand in the way of building productive relationships. For working-level staff at HQ and in the field, the hassles of seeking clearances and approvals from higher-level staff for many operational and programmatic decisions can be enough to discourage people from engaging in relationship-building. For example, UN staff at HQ noted that they avoided establishing relationships with counterparts in other entities who did not have a large amount of decision-making authority; the hassles of working through the counterpart to reach the true decision-maker was too great. UN staff in co-located field settings also expressed similar concerns; they could build relationships, but they and their counterparts would have to receive approvals for collaboration at the national level, which would create more hassles to their work in the form of additional clearances they would have to seek.

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“ There are fixes, but at some points, you get discouraged and give up. People relocate, your counterpart changes, the mission changes, different people need to approve. ”

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<sup>11</sup> **Hassle factors:** inconveniences and/or obstacles that impede follow-through of intentions/actions

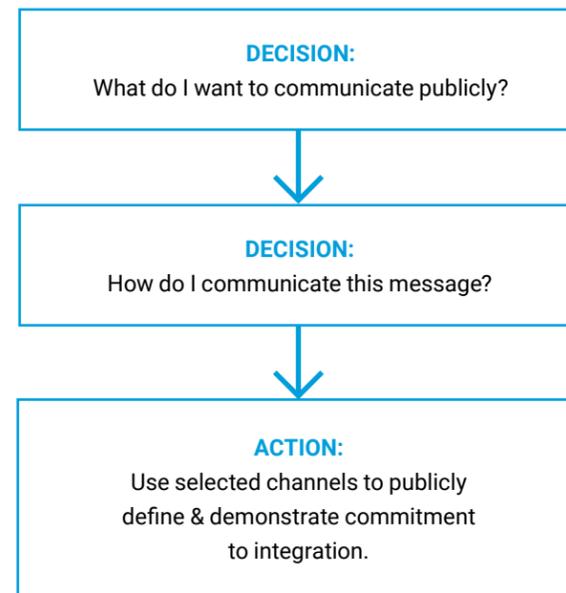
# DEEP DIVE CASE STUDIES: How are five critical behaviors biased by the context?

In each case study, we look more deeply at an actor set and a relevant behavior—identifying the main decisions and actions that staff must take for each to occur—and then identify the situational factors that prevent staff from making these decisions or taking action. The situational factors, or the specific elements of the context in which decisions and actions occur, can then be matched with well-known findings from behavioral science to explain why people may not be behaving optimally. We highlight these findings below by describing 1) five behaviors and their relevant decisions and actions, 2) the contextual sources of bias that prevent the decisions and actions from occurring, and 3) the psychological underpinnings that explain why people behave in sub-optimal ways when operating in such contexts.

## HIGHLIGHT BEHAVIOR #1: SENIOR LEADERS IN FIELD SETTINGS MUST PUBLICLY DEFINE AND DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT TO INTEGRATION.

Senior leaders in field settings—specifically SRSGs, DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs—may vary both in their degree of personal commitment to integration and their propensity to discuss the subject in public. Yet even the most committed such leader does not simply decide on a whim to, for instance, issue an announcement praising and calling for more integration efforts of UN staff in-country. Doing so requires careful planning and attentive perseverance to a) decide what to communicate publicly, b) match the message with its appropriate medium, and c) execute these decisions effectively.

### Micro-steps



### Potential sources of contextual bias

*Publicly defining and demonstrating commitment to integration requires focus and attention that senior leaders in field settings don't always have to dedicate to the task.*

**Applies to: (a) deciding what to communicate, (b) deciding how to communicate, and (c) acting/communicating**

There is no common definition or understanding of integration across the UN nor a blueprint for communicating about integration. As a result, senior leaders have to “start from scratch” to deliberate, identify, and deliver the right message and in the right way that resonates with UN staff. In addition, promoting and demonstrating commitment to integration requires not

just convening a conversation “about” integration with UN staff, but determining a common vision and understanding across UN and other entities at the country level. Many interviewees also noted the importance of not only sharing positive messages about integration but demonstrating how to integrate while proving the value add of doing so.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, the task of promoting and demonstrating commitment to integration is a multi-step process to identify practical and evidence-based guidance on how integration can be positively achieved in a variety of circumstances with a network of UN individuals and entities of differing opinions, experiences, and constraints. *What specific messaging will draw various disparate and independent mission and AFPs to the same table to discuss coordinated programming or other work? What examples of success can be drawn from to build a case for integration among these agencies? What are the implications for each mission or AFP if they were to agree to integrate, and what can be said to mitigate any negative implications for each agency?*

**Limited attention:** at any given time, we have a finite amount of attention at our disposal. When our cognitive capacity is stretched, we are unable to process information that we would easily be able to process when attention isn't otherwise captured.

These decisions and actions require a lot of **attention**, but senior leaders—and people in general—only have a finite amount at their disposal. When attention is stretched, it can be extremely difficult to focus on any multi-step process, such as promoting integration, no matter how important it may be.

Even the most seasoned of senior leaders can find it daunting to decide what to communicate publicly about integration, decide how to do so, and then act.<sup>13</sup> To be successful, the action requires defining integration for the setting, demonstrating its importance, showing how it can be achieved through which processes, and how mission and AFP staff will be supported to do so,

among others. And when the circumstances on the ground change, as they tend to in integrated settings, it becomes time-consuming to redefine integration, its importance, and its practical applications. Moreover, while this might be relatively easier for DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs given their extensive experience from UN careers,<sup>14</sup> the authority for promoting and demonstrating commitment to integration often ultimately lies with the SRSG in many settings.<sup>15</sup> Yet many SRSGs have limited experience within the UN system, which restricts their intimate knowledge of the workings of the different missions and AFPs and what messaging is needed, making the decision on what to communicate a difficult one. Coupled with the lack of common services and easily accessible communication channels across the UN, the decision on how to communicate can be even more challenging.

In addition, senior leaders are tasked with a multitude of issues and challenges, many of which require immediate action.<sup>16</sup> Behavioral science tells us that when faced with a multitude of tasks and experiencing a **scarcity** of time or other resources, people tend to **tunnel**. That is, they focus on the most pressing decisions and actions, crowding out other vital but

**Tunneling:** the brain's tendency to focus on the most urgent or pressing needs in situations of limited available cognitive bandwidth

less time-sensitive tasks—such as publicly promoting integration. Overall, even if deemed important, messaging integration is a task that can easily be forgotten if other competing and more urgent tasks arise—and in integrated settings, they always do.

<sup>12</sup> “Integration messaging must not merely be aspirational but practical,” one interviewee states.

<sup>13</sup> “We need space, time, resources,” one interviewee stated.

<sup>14</sup> “DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs come from decades long careers in the UN. They know the ins and outs of the system, the players and their hang-ups,” states one interviewee.

<sup>15</sup> “It all starts from the top,” as many interviewees note.

<sup>16</sup> “There are always other urgent matters to attend to,” as one interviewee responds when asked about messaging integration.

*The risks of publicly defining and demonstrating commitment to integration appear more forbidding than they are.*

**Applies to:** (a) deciding what to communicate

What does it “cost” a senior leader to signal public support for integration? While many may believe the answer is nothing, this is not often perceived to be the case by senior leaders in field settings. Given the various politics of the UN system, deciding to message integration is not often perceived as a neutral or safe choice by many senior leaders. As missions and AFPs have different understandings and perceptions of integration, including some negative connotations of each other, senior leaders do not have guarantees or assurances that demonstrating commitment to integration is the right decision to make.

**Ambiguity aversion:** preferring known risks over unknown risks

Moreover, integration itself is not tied to any performance outcomes for SRSGs, DSRSGs, RCs, or HCs, nor do lines of accountability make it clearly beneficial to any individual’s career. SRSGs in particular often rely on mission mandates due to their lack of experience in the UN system, and messaging integration is not explicitly built into those mandates; given this, it can be difficult to know what option outside of the norm will lead to success. As a result, the ambiguity of potential (negative) outcomes to messaging integration can easily sway a senior leader to decide against defining the boundaries of integration or publicly speaking out in favor of it. In general, people prefer to choose known risks—such the consequences (or lack thereof) remaining silent on integration—over unknown risks, such as the consequences of promoting a more integrated approach (potentially at the expense of some mission or AFP operational independence) and its effect on senior leaders’ reputation, career, or other. For most senior leaders, the ambiguity of potential outcomes when deciding is enough to choose to avoid publicly demonstrating commitment to integration.

For some other senior leaders, they may attempt to reduce ambiguity surrounding the benefits and risks of publicly messaging integration to better inform their

**Salience:** the prominence of something compared to other elements in the surrounding environment.

decision. In doing so, these leaders are faced with a few clear and **salient** facts. For one, there is no current business case for integration, and as a result, no set of benefits that are widely known and accepted. Multiple interviewees noted the importance of showing the benefits of integration; this is particularly important for AFPs as the majority of their funding (including for staff salaries) is predicated on the success of individual programs and strategy, while mission funding is more stable. As a result, many AFPs are unwilling to accept integration if the benefits are not salient and certain. Without a business case for integration, promoting and demonstrating commitment to it puts senior leaders at risk of being ignored or sidelined, and as a result, perceived as ineffective.

Secondly, the lack of monitoring and evaluation and other feedback loops has similarly resulted in limited or no evidence to claim that integration is a necessary and valuable exercise (even if it is necessary and valuable). Without clear and salient evidence to the case, senior leaders risk receiving negative feedback if they decide to promote integration—essentially meaning publicly supporting a practice and policy that cannot be supported by evidence. While there may be benefits to promoting integration, it is often the case for senior leaders that the risks are more salient, resulting in a misestimation of risk that skews senior leaders towards deciding against demonstrating commitment to integration.

*The benefits of publicly defining and demonstrating commitment to integration appear smaller than they are.*

**Applies to:** (a) deciding what to communicate

The UN presence as a whole in any given country is “an enormous ship to steer,” as one interviewee notes. This presence often comprises a multi-million-dollar mission and more than 20 AFPs. The sheer enormity of the enterprise senior leaders supervise leads them to underestimate the scope of their practical influence on events in the field—or their **locus of control**. Moreover, the majority of formal funding streams and accountability lines bypass senior leaders. “Money talks,” as one interviewee notes, and senior leaders often do not control funding as their positions are primarily for coordination. Deciding to publicly message integration by itself, therefore, can often be perceived as “a drop in the bucket” or a futile endeavor by senior leaders in these settings. This can be particularly the case for DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs who are often responsible for

**Locus of control:** the degree to which people believe that they, as opposed to external forces, have control over the outcome of events

communicating to a multitude of entities on integration but don’t feel they have the agency to do so given the SRSG’s overarching authority or AFPs’ separate funding streams. The less control senior leaders perceive themselves having over integration, the less likely they are to decide to publicly associate themselves with it.

In addition, the UN to date has a strong history of internally struggling to engage in behaviors critical to successful integration. While some senior leaders in the past and present have messaged integration well, there are limited success stories of these attempts, as many interviewees note. In fact, the majority of senior leaders interviewed were not aware of many “champions” of integration nor successes of promoting integration. Of the positive examples, many were related to one-time successes or moments of triumph

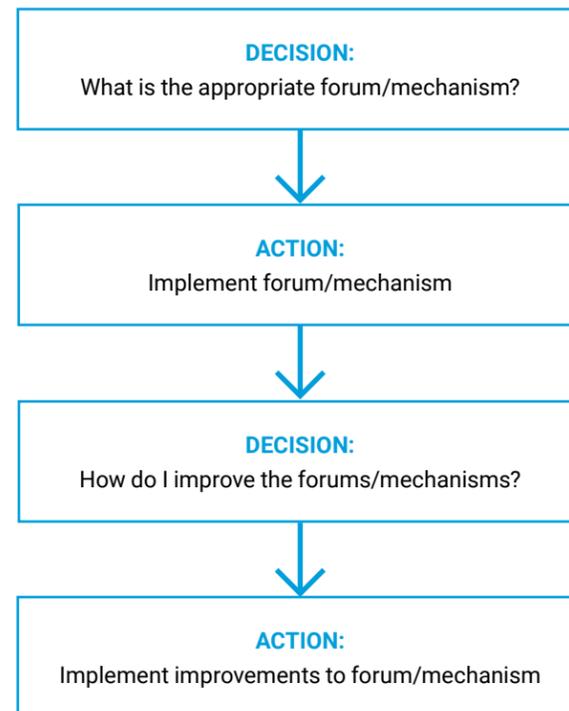
**Availability bias:** people to rely on how easily examples of come to mind when judging the probability of something happening.

in difficult settings, rather than normalized success. Most people tend to rely on how easily examples come to mind when making judgements on the likelihood of success—a phenomenon known as the availability bias. As there are limited examples of improving behavior towards successful integration by way of public messaging, it is difficult for a senior leader to believe in the effectiveness of such messaging. Once deemed ineffective or inconsequential, senior leaders are unlikely to make the decision to communicate publicly to demonstrate commitment to integration.

## HIGHLIGHT BEHAVIOR #2: SENIOR LEADERS IN FIELD SETTINGS MUST ESTABLISH AND IMPROVE UPON APPROPRIATE FORUMS AND MECHANISMS TO PROMOTE COLLABORATION.

Most professionals—in the UN as in any large organization—appreciate that in order to work together successfully, there must be forums and mechanisms that bring people together to coordinate and collaborate effectively. Forums and mechanisms can include meetings and gatherings for relationship-building; additional channels for regular communication between entities and individuals; systems for joint data collection and analysis; or other. Particularly in integrated settings; the most seasoned leaders who desire successful integration can find it difficult to navigate establishing and improving upon appropriate forums and mechanisms among thousands of staff, numerous departments and agencies, and multiple pillars in each country. To achieve this, senior leaders must first a) deliberate and decide on the appropriate forum/mechanism and then b) implement their decision. But the work does not stop there; country contexts are always changing and forums/mechanisms must be recalibrated to meet the demands of ever-changing contexts. Therefore, leaders must also repeatedly c) decide how to improve existing forums/mechanisms and d) implement their decisions.

### Micro-steps



### Potential sources of contextual bias

*Too many choices, and too few guardrails for what to pick inhibit decision-making about appropriate forums/mechanisms.*

**Applies to:** (a) *deciding the appropriate forum/mechanism and (c) deciding how to improve forums/mechanisms*

While there is a set of forums and mechanisms enshrined in policy and found uniformly across UN settings (such as the UNCT, security working group, or humanitarian response plan), senior leaders must ensure a dynamic and functional set of arrangements exist that reflect the needs of the particular context. Many interviewees noted that leaders cannot simply stick to the mandated basic arrangements for successful integration, but must build on to them to achieve functionality in each setting.<sup>17</sup> Senior leaders must approach each setting with a willingness to observe the set of forums/mechanisms in existence and determine which is functional and effective, and which can

be improved or supplemented for improved collaboration across entities—going “above and beyond” usual policy and practice.

A senior leader’s task of deciding these additions can be a complicated endeavor, particularly given the endless possibilities. For example, for meetings, there is always a multitude of configurations and options to choose from: *Large, medium, or small group of participants? Which departments and agencies to invite? Digital or in-person format? How often should it occur? What is the agenda?* These are just a few difficult questions that senior leaders must encounter before determining the appropriate meeting. When faced with a large number of options, many people fail to choose the best option or fail to choose altogether—they experience **choice overload**. In particular, having more options often leads to fewer realized choices, as in the case of senior leaders deciding which improvements to make out of the numerous options available. Given the multitude of choices, the decision often becomes paralyzing to the extent that leaders fail to choose new or improved forums/mechanisms at all.

**Choice overload:** an increase in the number of options leads to adverse consequences, such as a decrease in the motivation to choose

Navigating the choices requires a significant amount of time and mental effort from senior leaders, which they often do not have. Especially when arriving in country, senior leaders are more likely to rely on the default options that exist—specifically, the meetings, strategic or working groups, data collection and analysis tools, or other forums/mechanisms in existence in the integrated setting. This is because we often “choose” pre-set options even when many other options are available because the decision requires

**Default options:** pre-set courses of action that take effect if nothing is specified by the decision-maker

limited to no effort. This was evident in multiple interviews: when probing senior leaders on their decisions about improving forums/mechanisms, most stated simply that they “worked with what they were given” and did not choose other options. While the strategy of relying on defaults works to free up time and mental resources for other tasks (“I have to pick my battles,” one interviewee stated in response), the choice can result in missed opportunities.

In particular, the default may not be the appropriate fit for the setting or different forums/mechanisms may be needed for unique issues to the context. For example, smaller, intimate forums focused on dispute resolution amongst entities may be needed in contexts with expansive UN presence; wider information-sharing mechanisms on population needs may be needed in transitioning contexts; regular town halls with senior leaders focused addressing staff concerns may be needed in small but hierarchical UN settings. Options such as these, however, require effort to determine and enact, which senior leaders often do not choose to devote to the task given the defaults available.

With the multitude of other information to process, decisions to make, and actions to take—it is understandable that forums/mechanisms are not regularly

**Decision fatigue:** the deteriorating quality of decisions made by an individual after a long session of decision-making

improved upon. The decision is often one that takes second priority to other pressing and urgent decisions in integrated settings that arise each day. Although the decision is of major importance, it is often made when senior leaders are fatigued after resolving all other priority decisions for the day or week. **Decision fatigue** can cause leaders in any organizational setting—including senior leaders in field settings—to make poor decisions on issues of secondary priority, like

<sup>17</sup> “Many times, the usual meetings are not functional. I’m always the one asking the awkward question of why are we still doing this?” “The system is very prescriptive; we are told to have a UNCT, PMT, gender WG, etc. But we can create bits on the side to make the system as a whole more effective.”

improving upon forums/mechanisms. The end-result decision is often choosing to make no improvements at all (either as an active choice or simply not devoting mental energy to the decision at all), the easy option, even if improvements could lead to more successful collaboration and integration as a whole.

*Prior experiences lead senior leaders to stick with default settings upon arrival in new assignments.*

**Applies to: (c) deciding how to improve forums/mechanisms and (d) implementing the improvements**

How senior leaders perceive the task at hand can greatly influence their decisions and actions. In complex working environments such as integrated settings, any decision or action that is not perceived as

**Mental model:** the concepts, stereotypes, causal narratives, and worldviews that shape our ideas about the world and our place within it

crucial to operations can be easy to dismiss. Determining and then implementing the appropriate forums/mechanisms (beyond defaults) are two such examples. Senior leaders arrive in-country with pre-existing forums/mechanisms created by their predecessors, or defaults. These leaders have also operated in other integrated settings in which forums/mechanisms are never improved upon, or the forums/mechanisms in existence simply mirror policy and typical practice, as many interviewees note. Moreover, the

task is not listed in any terms of reference or mandated policy that guide senior leaders' work. As a result, senior leaders develop a subconscious narrative or impression based on these experiences—known as a **mental model**—that improving forums/mechanisms is an optional task. Overall, when improving forums/mechanisms is perceived as an optional choice, senior leaders—already busy in their day-to-day work—will choose not to act.

The fact that the decision or action is perceived as optional can be compounded by the fact that there are no clear moments where senior leaders must make the decision.<sup>18</sup> *Should I improve forums/mechanisms upon arrival? Should I when the situation changes? If so, what change must occur before I need to improve these?* These are questions that rarely arise in a senior leaders' day-to-day work, nor are senior leaders prompted by any external force—such as supervising senior leadership at HQ—to consider these decisions and take action. Salience determines which information to focus on and what to ignore; when there is no moment to consider improving forums/mechanisms, it is not **salient** (top-of-mind at a moment when action can be readily taken) and the task is easily ignored until the moment of opportunity has passed.

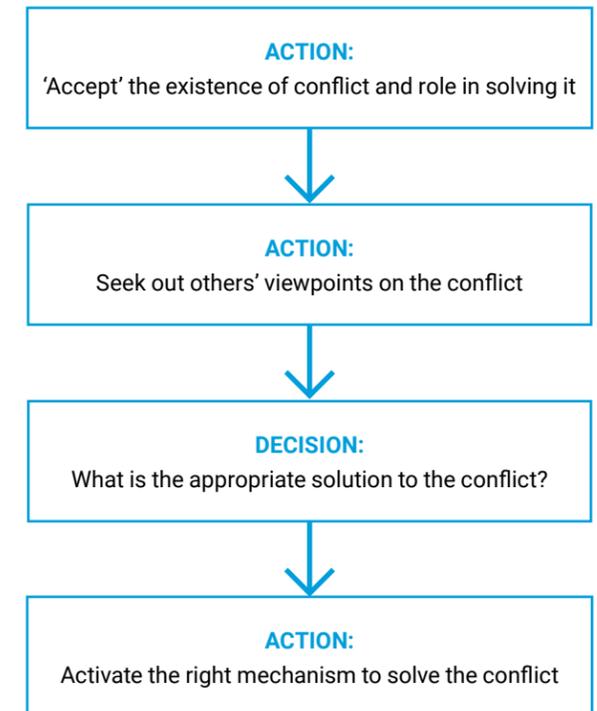
<sup>18</sup> "It is never top of mind," one interviewee notes when referring to improving forums/mechanisms.

### HIGHLIGHT BEHAVIOR #3: SENIOR MANAGERS OF DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES IN FIELD SETTINGS MUST SUPPORT AMICABLE DISPUTE RESOLUTION BETWEEN ENTITIES AND INDIVIDUALS.

In most complex organizational settings, conflict is inevitable. The majority of UN staff, with competing mandates and priorities, experience a multitude of disputes at various times in the lifecycle of an integrated setting. However, the ways in which these disputes are managed and resolved can make the difference towards successful integration. Without amicable dispute resolution, particularly among senior managers of departments and agencies, integration cannot be fully achieved. But the process to amicable dispute resolution itself can be a difficult endeavor even for the most committed, humble, and diligent senior manager.

Foremost, senior managers must a) accept the existence of conflict and their role in solving it. This includes accepting even the smallest of conflicts knowing that their continued persistence could derail future collaboration efforts. It is also vital for senior managers to reflect on their roles, knowing that even conflicts only tangentially-related to them may still require their engagement. Senior managers must then b) seek out others' viewpoints on the conflict, not only outside of their own but also beyond their innermost circles. Only then can senior managers c) make decisions on the most appropriate solution to the conflict. And once a decision is made, senior managers then must still d) activate the right mechanisms to solve the conflict.

#### Micro-steps



#### Potential sources of contextual bias

*Professional identities deter people from proactively supporting dispute resolution.*

**Applies to: (a) accept conflict and role in solving it, (b) seek out others' viewpoints, and (c) identify the solution**

Senior managers in integrated settings are professionals who have developed certain "identities" over the lifetime of their careers, which affects their acceptance of conflict and role in solving it. These managers in particular are decades-long UN staffers who have spent the majority of their careers in one UN entity or within one pillar. They have primarily worked around individuals of the same entity or pillar, with limited to no deep engagement with other entities and pillars. Their training and handbooks throughout their careers are largely focused on their entity and pillar, and their accountability and incentive structures are all tied to the outcomes of their entity.

As a result, these senior leaders perceive themselves, or their **identity**, as one belonging to a certain UN entity or pillar—and not the UN system as a whole. One interviewee noted that most UN staff when introducing themselves rarely say they work for the “United Nations” but instead a particular mission or AFP. Rarely

**Identity:** a person’s perception of themselves and their role in a context

is there a common identity among individuals as “One UN”; as such, if an individual perceives themselves as belonging to a particular mission or AFP, they are also likely to not identify (or perceive themselves) as an integrator, and therefore not proactively accept and resolve conflict that cuts across departments or agencies. Instead, this task is often perceived as outside of their identity and role given that the ultimate goal is not to uplift the UN system, but those related to their own agency or department. The ways in which people perceive themselves, or their identity, can have a strong effect on their decisions and actions, such as in the case of accepting and resolving conflict.

Overall, evidence from interviews shows that staff across the UN are extremely mission-driven. But “mission-driven” is helpful only if the right mission is defined—and often times, it is not. In fact, senior managers often perceive the “mission” as one specific to their agency or department.<sup>19</sup> As a result, senior managers’ **mental models** of the “mission” can impede overall progress towards integration, including specifically during supporting amicable dispute resolution. If the mental model is “do the best work that seeks to help x pillar,” staff will accept conflict, seek others’ viewpoints, and resolve conflict only so far as they support that pillar, and often at the expense of other pillars.

**Observers (and participants) to a conflict erroneously assume bad faith on the part of others involved.**

**Applies to: (a) accept conflict and role in solving it, (b) seek out others’ viewpoints, and (c) identify the solution**

“Personalities” and “culture” are regularly cited in interviews and focus groups as challenges to successful integration. UN staff do have different personalities and each entity or pillar often maintains distinct cultures, which are upheld by career silos, separate physical offices, and other structural impediments. Given this, it can be easy for senior managers to dismiss attempts at dispute resolution. *Why accept conflict as a problem to solve if you perceive others’ culture is the problem itself? Why seek out others’ viewpoints if you perceive “it is just their difficult personality” that is driving conflict?* If senior managers perceive personalities and culture—two attributes that are very difficult to change—as the primary drivers of conflict, they then also perceive dispute resolution itself as a difficult process to endure, and ultimately a futile exercise to engage in.

Often, the primary drivers of conflict are in reality situational factors, but people fall prey to **fundamental attribution error**, particularly in the midst of conflict. That is, people tend to overemphasize personal characteristics and ignore situational factors in judging oth-

**Fundamental attribution error:** the tendency to attribute other people’s behavior to their character instead of their circumstances, but recognize the influence of circumstance on one’s own behavior

ers’ behavior. For example, one interviewee noted when there was a breakdown in communication with his counterpart, “My counterpart was not a collaborative person. He never responded to my emails.” But when the interviewee was asked of his own communication

<sup>19</sup> “The mission is not always ‘consolidate peace in the country’ but ‘improve [humanitarian, development, political, etc.] outcomes for populations in the country,” as one interviewee noted.

efforts, he responded, “It was difficult for me because our offices were across town from each other and I had poor internet service.” As in the example, people tend to believe that others behave poorly because of their attributes and personality, rather than situational factors that might have played a role. When senior managers are not open to seeing situational factors of others as the cause of conflict, they are unlikely to accept their role in resolving it, seek out others’ viewpoints, or identify the appropriate solution. Rather than a situation to resolve, senior managers ultimately perceive many conflicts as a personality or culture that can’t be changed.

Competition for resources and disparate funding streams between departments and agencies also affects senior managers’ perceptions of their role in dispute resolution. Senior managers often perceive dispute resolution as a battle to win rather than a collaborative challenge to solve, and are unwilling to compromise which fuels conflict further. This is evident in the way interviewees discuss past disputes regarding mandate overlap between entities; the reason for the dispute is most often always the “other” department

**Ingroup/outgroup bias:** A pattern of favoring members of one’s ingroup (a social group to which a person identifies as being a member) over out-group members

or agency engaging in “mandate creep” and not the actions of the interviewee’s ingroup. People have a pattern of favoring members of one’s **ingroup** vs. **outgroup**. Ingroups and outgroups are developed by the nature of the context; the lack of co-location, limited relationship-building opportunities across entities and pillars, separate funding streams, and competing mandates in integrated settings are a few features that contribute to their development. Senior managers often unconsciously favor their ingroup and neglect to consider outgroup views as equally valid; given this, rarely do senior managers (or others in general) seek out or accept “outgroup” viewpoints—a critical step to resolving disputes.

**Perceptions of dispute resolution and senior managers’ role in it lead to inaction.**

**Applies to: (a) accept conflict and role in solving it, (b) seek out others’ viewpoints, (c) identify the solution, and (d) activate the right mechanism to resolve the dispute**

Disputes in integrated settings mostly always involve multiple bodies, departments, agencies, or pillars. As the overarching leadership and coordination roles, senior leaders—SRSGs, DSRSs, RCs, or HCs—are meant to serve as integrators. Given this and coupled with many senior managers’ learned experience that it is difficult to affect what happens at other entities, senior managers often perceive dispute resolution between entities as outside of their responsibility and more relevant to senior leaders. As many interviewees demonstrated, rather than seek to personally resolve a dispute, it is more likely that senior managers defer or escalate the dispute to senior leaders—which does not usually lead to a long-term productive solution (particularly since escalation can be perceived negatively by other parties involved). If senior managers’ **mental models**, or default assumptions or perceptions, of dispute resolution are that it is “out of their hands” or not within their responsibility, they are unlikely to engage in the behavior.

Furthermore, disputes are familiar and pervasive in integrated settings. Senior managers regularly experience or witness low-level conflict at a variety of coordination meetings, hear of disputes regularly between other entities or pillars even if they are not directly

**Descriptive social norms:** perceptions of which behaviors are typically performed by a group

involved, and have experienced similar ongoing disputes in previous roles in other integrated settings.<sup>20</sup> People often are heavily influenced by what they perceive others are doing in their environment—known as

<sup>20</sup> “We don’t play well together. That’s the steady state of integrated settings,” as one interviewee notes.

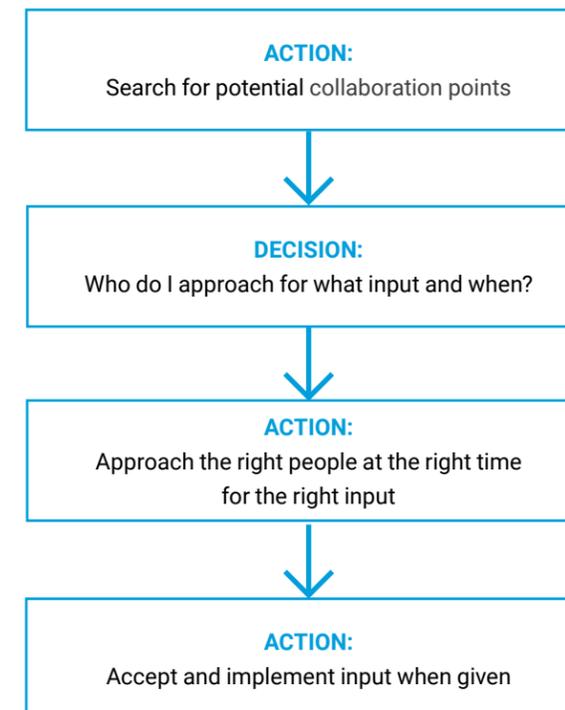
**descriptive social norms.** If deferring or maintaining conflict is the norm, then dispute resolution (which falls outside the norm) becomes a difficult behavior to perform. Senior managers may mirror the ways others respond to conflict, such as confronting or deflecting, because it is perceived as the norm.

Moreover, dispute resolution does not typically occur in public forums, if it does occur at all. “UNCT meetings are mainly just people talking at each other but not to each other,” one interviewee states. Interviewees made similar comments for a variety of other cross-entity or cross-pillar forums, stating that the meetings are mainly reserved for information dissemination but not meaningful discussion or dispute resolution. People often misperceive social norms when some choices are highly visible—such as publicly disputing in UNCT meetings—and others are not, like the much larger number of people in UN offices each day choosing to resolve disputes with their colleagues. When senior managers do not see their peers amicably resolving disputes, particularly in these public forums, they perceive the task as outside of the norm. Therefore, accepting their role in dispute resolution, seeking others’ viewpoints, or even determining the appropriate solution becomes a difficult task.

## HIGHLIGHT BEHAVIOR #4: JOINT PLANNING AND SENIOR STAFF FUNCTIONS IN FIELD SETTINGS MUST IDENTIFY AND SOLICIT BUY-IN FOR COLLABORATION POINTS ACROSS PILLARS.

Joint planning and senior staff functions are meant to streamline coordination across a multitude of entities and pillars of the UN. Yet even those closely tied to coordination can falter in their work, including identifying and soliciting buy-in for collaboration points across pillars, for successful integration. To successfully behave in this way, these staff must first make the decision to a) search for potential collaboration points across entities, pillars, and other lines of division in the UN. They must then b) identify who to approach for what input and when, followed by c) approaching the right people at the right time for the right input. And lastly, once they have done so, they must also d) accept and implement input when it is given.

### Micro-steps



### Potential sources of contextual bias

*Operational hurdles at each moment can make the nuts and bolts of collaborating prohibitive.*

*Applies to: (a) search for collaboration points, (b) decide who to approach for what input and when, (c) approach the right people at the right time for the right input, and (d) accept and implement inputs*

Planning and senior staff functions face extensive logistical hurdles when attempting to conduct joint programs, analyses, or other work between different entities and pillars. Funding streams, mandates and policies, accountability mechanisms, and other disparate structures across UN entities complicate efforts to do so. Given the logistical hurdles, these staff often have to “think outside the box” and “interpret, not just read the mandates and policies,” as many interviewees

**Hassle factors:** inconveniences and/or obstacles that impede follow-through of intentions/actions

note. It can be intensive and time-consuming to not only read and learn all of the documentation, but then identify how to go “above and beyond” to get the work done. The extensive **hassles** of the process get in the way of searching for collaboration points, deciding who to approach and doing so, and accepting inputs of those approached. We can be greatly affected by hassles even if we intend to behave a certain way; no matter the desire or benefit of integration, even minor hassles in the process can prevent staff from doing so.

In particular, planning staff note that the guidance and toolkits for integrating are not always practical; they don’t get “in the weeds” to help staff know how to best navigate hurdles, as one interviewee notes. Some planning staff mention that the IAP handbook is “practical in theory but not actually on the ground,” and it does not provide easy support on how to make implementation happen in reality. For example, nowhere does the handbook provide guidance on how to link budgets to plans, one interviewee notes. “But many people don’t realize you don’t have to have a joint budget, there can be a workaround.” But workarounds

require navigating hassles—meaning reading the documentation, interpreting it into practical application, reading more documentation on others’ mandates and policies, and getting the numerous sign-offs on the practicalities that deviate from the documents. Given the complexity of interpreting and “bringing policy to life”, many of these hassles are all that are needed to derail efforts towards searching for collaboration points.

In addition, deciding who to approach for what inputs and when, and approaching those people, requires knowing the right staff in other UN entities. But lack of co-location places heavy barriers to staff relationships; in addition, email systems and most other UN technology do not “speak to each other” as many interviewees mention. As a result, the hassles when deciding who to approach—such as researching relevant staff from each entity of interest, seeking out advice from counterparts on who to approach, reading up on unique mandates and program cycles—can be quite extensive. And when identified, even small hassles can get in the way of approaching the right people—such as needing to send an introductory email, reach out to schedule meetings, travel to meet, and follow up on joint tasks to begin the work.

Moreover, accepting feedback and implementing inputs to expand joint programs, analyses, and other collaboration points require iterative communication and continuous relationship-building. This can be difficult when staff in integrated settings rotate out of their positions every 2-4 years, often in different times of the year. The hassles associated with maintaining productive relationships (particularly with counterparts in other entities operating in different physical spaces) to continue building collaboration points are often too great in these settings to overcome. And when you are short-staffed, deep in documentation, and trying to get your most basic work done—as many planners and senior staff functions are—going “above and beyond” often requires navigating too many hurdles to do so.

***Professional identities and perceptions of the task at hand lead to people staying within the boundaries of formal protocol.***

***Applies to: (a) search for collaboration points, (b) decide who to approach for what input and when, (c) approach the right people at the right time for the right input, and (d) accept and implement inputs***

Planning staff have to not only know the ins and outs of the policies and mandates, but interpret and “bring them to life” amidst serious structural constraints. There is no documentation that dictates at which point in the overall process of working or planning that new collaboration points should be sought out; there are no deadlines or suggested workflows where this is an item. “They can’t just copy and paste—they have to do the work,” notes one interviewee.<sup>21</sup> But doing the work, or going above and beyond to interpret policies into real-time practice can be difficult to achieve if staff in these positions don’t perceive interpretation and related activities as within the scope of their role. In fact, the typical profile of a planning staff is often focused on operations, data, analytics—all topics with hard and set protocols. “Thinking outside the box” is often not a typical planner’s **mental model** or assumption of their role; as a result, it can be a barrier for a planner to even begin to search for collaboration points if they are outside of the protocol in which they operate.

Secondly, joint planning and analytical capacity and RCO offices are often perceived by many in the UN to have weak authority given the lack of funding oversight within the office.<sup>22</sup>

Many mission departments and AFPs have separate internal funding streams with reporting lines to external donors for their programs and operations, yet planners and senior staff functions are charged with soliciting and identifying buy-in for collaboration points. Since funding often drives perceptions of authority in many integrated settings, planning and senior staff functions often perceives their roles as

limited in authority to drive collaboration with other departments and AFPs. As a result, staff defer from searching for collaboration points given their limited **locus of control**. If staff perceive they have no control over other potential collaborators, then they also are likely to perceive the efforts to engage in “above and beyond” collaboration as futile.

Hierarchy of staff is also an important feature of the coordination environment. The level and grade—or professional ranking—of staff is perceived as highly important in the UN. While there are dedicated planners and staff functions for missions, there are no similar structures within AFPs. As a result, planners may decide to only approach people of similar professional ranking, limiting their ability to make the best decision on who to approach. In addition, approaching the “right person” can be perceived as insubordination or stepping out of line in some circumstances if the right person is not of similar professional ranking. The decision is not always about whether and when to approach someone as it is about crossing boundaries of agency and hierarchy. If the right person is of the wrong professional ranking, planning staff may either face additional hurdles of going through the chain of command to address the individual, or choose to defer the action entirely.

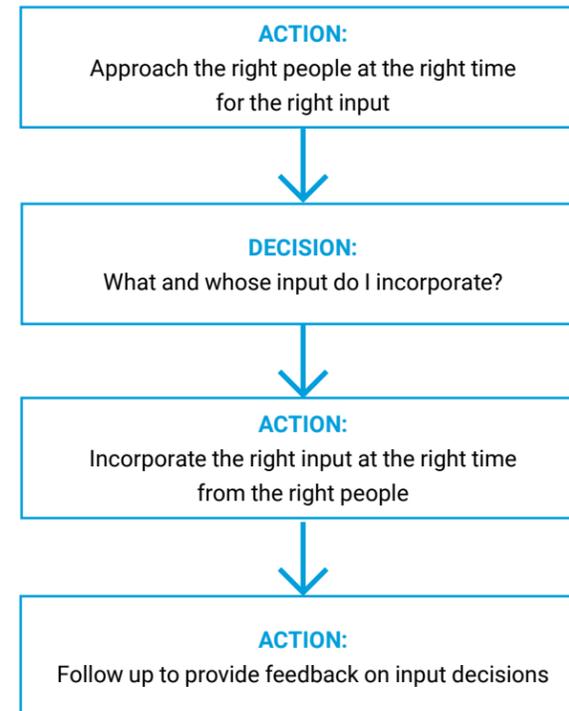
<sup>21</sup> F6

<sup>22</sup>

## HIGHLIGHT BEHAVIOR #5: WORKING-LEVEL HQ STAFF INVOLVED IN CROSS-PILLAR COLLABORATION MUST INCORPORATE DATA AND VIEWPOINTS FROM OTHER ENTITIES AND INDIVIDUALS INTO DECISION-MAKING.

Working-level HQ staff are involved in an extensive amount of integrated-related issues, particularly as each integrated setting often has staff from each entity involved present at HQ. As such, coordination and collaboration with HQ staff, including senior-level and working-level, are critical to successful integration. At the working-level, staff from a variety of different entities—with unique mandates, policies, and practices—must navigate their own work and the work of others to incorporate data and viewpoints into decision-making. But to do so, these staff must first (a) approach the right people at the right time for the right input, and once input is received (b) determine what and whose input to incorporate. Once the determination is made, staff then have to turn the decision into action by (c) incorporating the right input at the right time from the right people. And even when the incorporation is complete, it is critical that staff also (d) follow up with counterparts to provide feedback on input decisions.

### Micro-steps



### Potential sources of contextual bias

*The expansiveness of UN HQ makes it seemingly impossible to navigate outside of the norm.*

**Applies to:** (a) approach the right people at the right time for the right input, (b) decide who to approach for what input and when, (c) incorporate the right input from the right people at the right time, and (d) follow up to provide feedback

Across the UN, there are formal mandates, policies, and practices for collaboration across entities and pillars; however, informal policies and practices also exist in these settings that at times supersede formalities. Each department and agency within the UN maintain certain habits and **defaults**—which comprise the **status quo**—that are difficult to change, as is typical in most large organizational settings. Individuals at a particular agency or department often maintain defaults: they approach a certain set of people, at a certain time, for specific inputs, and then repeat the

process. Even for newly hired staff, they enter into a context in which these defaults already exist. As a result, choosing other options—perhaps a different set of people for at a different time for different inputs—does not usually happen.

One illustrative example is in the difficulty of mainstreaming gender into decision-making across the UN. The status quo has always been to approach people for inputs on gender in very specific moments, and not for all decisions. The action of soliciting inputs from a new set of people and at higher frequency is, therefore, outside of the status quo—even after years of attempts to do so. This is because people prefer to stick with the status quo even when there are benefits to changing (such as advancing gender parity).

In other moments, staff may not take action to incorporate the inputs they do receive. Often, this omission is not a result of intentionality—many staff interviewed across the UN indicated their intentions to incorporate inputs in a variety of decision-making moments. Rather, the more common barrier is that people rarely leave sufficient time to meet deadlines. This phenomenon is called the **planning fallacy**, and can make it difficult for staff to complete seemingly simple tasks like incorporating inputs or providing feedback. “People receive inputs but don’t review them or even respond many times because the deadline is approaching. The priority is finalizing the report,” one interviewee noted. Even with years of experience, people tend to be consistently overly optimistic about their ability to finish tasks on time. And in settings like UN HQ, where there is a multitude of entities submitting information for inclusion at different moments, most staff rarely leave enough time to review, incorporate, and provide feedback on inputs.

**Planning fallacy:** underestimate the time required to complete a project even when they have considerable experience of past failures to live up to planned schedules

Moreover, deciding to incorporate data and viewpoints across entities requires staff to know a variety of other counterparts. Many interviewees referenced that they would not know who to contact when seeking input from other entities or pillars; they regularly coordinate with their counterparts whom they were introduced to when they commenced their role, and are not aware of many others.<sup>23</sup> Given the lack of co-location and direct interaction with other entities at UN HQ, there is no easy way to learn about or access new people, and there is no specific moment in which to do so. In reality, deciding to seek alternative viewpoints outside of traditional networks is not **salient**, or top of mind, to most working-level staff.

Overall, working-level HQ staff are busy individuals with **limited attention**. The decisions and actions that are required to seek inputs, review and incorporate inputs, and follow up with counterparts require an extensive amount of time and attention. The task often requires multiple back-and-forth communications, deliberation, and coordinating with a variety of people with competing interests all at once. And when attention is stretched, it can be extremely difficult to focus on any lengthy or arduous tasks no matter how important they may be.

*Emotional risks seem to dwarf the benefits of soliciting collaboration.*

**Applies to:** (a) approach the right people at the right time for the right input, (b) decide who to approach for what input and when, (c) incorporate the right input from the right people at the right time, and (d) follow up to provide feedback

At UN HQ, new staff who join a team or department are indoctrinated into the ways of that department or agency. They are trained to follow the informal policies and practices in place, and they emulate existing practices. While most staff prefer to stick with these defaults, others who consider alternatives practices (such as approaching a different set of people for inputs than usual) may ultimately decide against it so

<sup>23</sup> “My TOR said I was to coordinate with a person at another agency but I never met the person,” one interviewee states.

as not to stand out among staff. That is because people have a tendency to believe they are being noticed more than they really are—known as the **spotlight effect**. In a highly hierarchical work environment where there are defaults and strong social norms (“culture” as most interviewees mention), staff struggle to accurately evaluate how much others notice them, and resultantly overestimate the attention paid to them by

**Spotlight effect:** inaccurately evaluating how much others notice you and resultantly overestimating the attention paid to you by others

others. As staff consider approaching new people for inputs, it can be difficult to not be derailed by the feeling of being noticed. In reality, as working-level staff, the opportunity to seek out inputs of another individual is likely not to be noticed by the larger group, but the perceptions are enough to disengage from the action.

Moreover, it can be an emotionally taxing endeavor to approach new people, receive inputs, and relay feedback to counterparts, particularly if that feedback is that the inputs were not incorporated. Receiving new inputs and compiling them in a coherent and inclusive way can be particularly challenging given the proliferation of clearances, and even vetoes, that occur as a result of new inputs. Many interviewees have noted dismay as many of their inputs were not included in final documents or products. “We work tirelessly to provide inputs, but many times it is deleted in the final output. No one ever even tells us why.” Rather than any nefarious reason, staff may not provide “bad news” feedback because they anticipate receiving recipro-

**Ostrich effect:** avoiding information (actively or passively) that you anticipate will be negative or aversive

cal negative feedback, which most people attempt to avoid. Overall, people avoid information, actively or passively, that they anticipate will be negative or

averse—known as the **ostrich effect**. Staff do not provide feedback to counterparts often times as a product of pre-empting negative reactions.

The likely vetoes in the future when attempting to incorporate inputs can make the task particularly difficult to undertake as well; if staff are aware that some of the inputs may be discarded in the process, they may seek to avoid the “headaches” that come with relaying the disappointment back to their counterparts and decide to not act at all. This is known as **affective forecasting**, whereby people predict their emotional responses to an event in the future and make decisions accordingly. Staff will likely avoid soliciting inputs if they predict that they will experience negative reactions in the future if the inputs are not incorporated.

**Affective forecasting:** predicting your own emotional response to an event in the future

*The value of seeking others’ input is perceived as lower than it truly is.*

**Applies to: (c) incorporate the right input from the right people at the right time**

Interviewees frequently state that “integration starts at the top.” As a result, when senior leaders do not message or signal the desire for integration, there can easily be a breakdown at the working level. Senior leadership’s messaging of integration is often limited, particularly in HQ settings where work environments are increasingly siloed. In addition, interviewees often noted that people seek out inputs, but do not incorporate the inputs if not explicitly requested by management and senior leadership. Due to this context, staff develop a **mental model** of collaboration as a “formality not a reality”, as one interviewee described. As a result of the pervasiveness of this mental model at UN HQ, staff tend to engage in seemingly performative acts—such as announcing a call for inputs in a large meeting—rather than those that contribute to successful integration, such as then incorporating inputs and providing feedback.

In addition, given the hierarchical nature of the UN structure, level and grade of staff is important in

determining if incorporating inputs and providing feedback occurs or not. “Careers are made by aligning with the mission and following the bosses,” one interviewee states. As a result, staff often prioritize inputs within their own agencies or departments, as

**Social comparison:** people judge their own social and individual worth based on how they stack up against other people.

well as those that come from people of higher professional rank. Even if not consciously recognized, working-level staff tend to incorporate these inputs, while at times discarding inputs from others of lower professional ranking so as not to diminish their own value. In general, people often engage in **social comparison**, whereby they judge their own worth based on how they compare to others, which affects how they perceive themselves and resultantly act. When engaging in social comparison, staff may opt to diminish or disregard the inputs of others in an attempt to increase their own social and professional value. In addition, in organizations with high levels of hierarchy, social status and adherence to social hierarchies can have a powerful effect on decisions and actions. For working-level staff, this often affects their incorporation of others’ inputs into their own work. In situations where many inputs are received, it is often easiest to prioritize those belonging to more important social groupings, and deprioritize meaningful inputs from other agencies or departments of perceived lower social value that could lead to more successful integration.

Lastly, the majority of staff tend to work in the same agencies, departments, or pillars for their careers, and as a result, develop intimate knowledge about a set of information and processes about the UN system and international affairs. Staff self-perceptions of their expertise can sway their decisions when deciding who and when to reach out for additional inputs and which feedback to incorporate. In these situations, it is often the case that staff perceive they already know who to contact and which feedback to incorporate; their perceptions of the “other” coupled with their own subjective confidence clouds their judgement on who should participate in the input process. “There are many assumptions in other areas that their work is essential, but people don’t perceive our work as essential,” notes one interviewee. The **overconfidence effect** refers to the tendency for a person’s subjective

**Overconfidence effect:** the tendency for a person’s subjective confidence in their judgements to be reliably greater than the objective accuracy of those judgements

confidence in their judgements to be reliably greater than the objective accuracy of those judgements. At UN HQ, staff are routinely overconfident in their reliance on their own intuitions for whose inputs should be incorporated, leading to a diminished sense of value of reaching out to others (or seeking out alternative viewpoints).

# RECOMMENDATIONS: Solutions for mitigating behavioral barriers to successful integration

As described in previous sections, contextual features in UN staff working environment can have outsized effect on the way they form intentions, make decisions, and act. As such, it is crucial that the UN approach organizational settings through a behavioral lens—that is, recognizing how the subtleties in individuals’ environment influence behavior, and consequently, creating environments conducive for optimal decision-making and action-taking. In the following section, we detail recommendations for doing just that in light of the previously described behavioral barriers. We have grouped our recommendations into three overall “strategies” for facilitating successful integration.



## STRATEGY 1

Make better use of the limited focus and attention that staff can allocate to making integration work

<p><b>BARRIER 1:</b> Facilitating successful integration requires focus and attention that UN staff don't always have to dedicate to the task.</p> <p><b>BARRIER 4:</b> Too many choices and too few guardrails for what to pick inhibit decision-making.</p> <p><b>BARRIER 7:</b> Operational hurdles at each moment make the nuts and bolts of collaborating prohibitive.</p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 1:</b> Minimize unnecessary demands on attention for all staff.</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 2:</b> Provide staff with tools for more easily engaging in behaviours critical to successful integration.</p>
<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audit and modify or eliminate forums, frameworks, mechanisms, and tools that are deemed either duplicative or not useful</li> <li>Remove administrative and logistical hurdles to collaboration, consultation and constructive conflict</li> <li>Reduce tasks to the minimum required to accomplish integration-related and other activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create shortcuts in guidance</li> <li>Curate options and provide guardrails to facilitate quick decision-making</li> <li>Embed prompts for collaboration, consultation, and constructive conflict where staff are already used to dedicating their attention</li> </ul>



## STRATEGY 2

Reset false expectations about the benefits and risks of integration

<p><b>BARRIER 2:</b> The risks of participating in integration-associated activities appear more forbidding than they are.</p> <p><b>BARRIER 3:</b> The benefits of engaging in the behaviours appear smaller than they are</p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 3:</b> Reduce the perceived risks associated with integration</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 4:</b> Identify the successes of integration, large and small.</p>
<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State the facts to dispel harmful perceptions about integration-related behavior</li> <li>Provide tools for senior leadership to use two-way communication when promoting integration</li> <li>Establish opt-in, publicly announced, joint pacts for senior leadership to commit to certain behaviors and/or actions related to successful integration</li> </ul>	<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicly recognize and reward staff who model good practices and champion integration</li> <li>Showcase operational and programmatic success in action through communication spotlights</li> <li>Show value added of each sub-activity that advances successful integration</li> </ul>



## STRATEGY 3

Emphasize the role of the individual and promote personal initiative

<p><b>BARRIER 5:</b> Professional identities, prior experiences and perceptions of the task at hand lead staff to an overreliance on formal protocol.</p> <p><b>BARRIER 6:</b> Staff erroneously assume bad faith rather than recognize the situation's influence on another individual's behaviour</p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 5:</b> Deconstruct siloed identities.</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 6:</b> Facilitate the formation of interpersonal relationships.</p>
<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create regular opportunities for staff to reflect on common objectives together, interrogate others' point of view, and learn others' "language"</li> <li>Give senior leaders time and space to reconstruct their identity and build muscle memory of behaving in ways critical to successful integration</li> <li>Prime people of their communal identities at key moments</li> </ul>	<p><b>SOLUTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build new formal channels for exchanges between individuals at lower levels, explicitly encouraged by senior leadership</li> <li>Create "stop and think" protocols for constructive conflict management, emphasizing deliberative reflection and empathy</li> </ul>

## STRATEGY 1: MAKE BETTER USE OF THE LIMITED FOCUS AND ATTENTION THAT STAFF CAN ALLOCATE TO MAKING INTEGRATION WORK

Integration can only succeed when staff can access the necessary cognitive bandwidth to undertake each constituent action. A number of distinct solutions can work to maximize the use of time and attention without adding staff, reducing aggregate workloads or making other structural changes that might have high associated opportunity costs.

### RECOMMENDATION #1: MINIMIZE UNNECESSARY DEMANDS ON STAFF ATTENTION

*Most relevant for behavioral barriers 1, 4, and 7*

Duplicative burdens and administrative and logistical hurdles are common across the UN—many meetings on similar topics, a multitude of reporting frameworks for the same data, and too many “box-checking” exercises. Each unnecessary meeting, report, or task takes away valuable attention that could be put towards achieving successful integration. UN entities can work to minimize unnecessary demands on staff attention in a variety of ways:

#### *Audit and modify or eliminate forums, frameworks, mechanisms, and tools that are deemed either duplicative or not useful*

Auditing can provide a regular feedback loop to make decisions on the utility of each meeting, reporting framework, guidance or other coordination mechanism; the feedback can then be used to eliminate or modify mechanisms to better meet the needs of staff. For example, in many interviews, senior managers discussed the abundance of coordination meetings in field settings, which were often too large to agree on topics in the time allotted and ended up serving as mere information sharing channels. These meetings took away their time and attention to devote to meaningful dialogue in more intimate settings where **identifying and soliciting buy-in for collaboration points** was more possible. In response, setting up and

normalizing one-question rapid surveys at the end of each meeting could provide senior leaders organizing each meeting with data needed to provide staff with the best set of meetings for facilitating collaboration.

In additional interviews, planners and staffing function personnel noted that many reporting frameworks were required to be filled out and sent to HQ, but often, no one was using the data; these frameworks were simply relics of past decisions on information needs. The reporting frameworks were time-consuming and attention draining as staff often had to clean data from numerous entities to fit the framework, limiting their attention for **identifying and soliciting buy-in for collaboration points, proactively exchanging information, and building relationships** with counterparts. Conducting annual, short surveys that rate the usefulness of each reporting framework could further give leadership the data needed to eliminate unnecessary frameworks.

#### *Remove administrative and logistical hurdles to collaboration, consultation and constructive conflict*

Most notably, use the same systems! Human resources, finance, staffing, location—the more integrated the administration and operations, the easier for staff to accomplish integration-related tasks. When systems cannot be uniform, set staff up for success by helping them navigate the hurdles of each one. If administrative and finance systems are disparate, train a set of relevant staff across entities together on the

various systems of each coordinating entity to build a base level of knowledge to streamline **identification of collaboration points**. If co-location is not possible, set up simple communication platforms—such as through Slack, Microsoft Teams, or even WhatsApp—as defaults to make staff easily accessible to each other to **proactively build relationships**. Include taglines with usernames on business cards and in email signatures (ie. “Don’t let distance hinder collaboration! Reach me on Slack @UNUser”) to encourage use of more rapid forms of communication.

#### *Reduce tasks to the minimum required to accomplish an activity*

Many activities across the UN often take more steps than are likely required, particularly as a result of age-old systems that were never updated as situations changed. For example, in some settings, UN entities go through the painstaking process of establishing co-location in deep field locations, but each field staff still has to take all direction from their individual entity’s national office. This complicates co-located staff’s ability to **proactively build relationships with their counterparts**, since they are required to pass the majority of decisions through the national office before supporting their counterparts on particular tasks. In response, minimizing clearances and decentralizing decision-making of certain outputs to field settings would reduce the steps to collaborate and open up opportunities to build relationships with counterparts.

## RECOMMENDATION #2: GIVE STAFF A “STARTER KIT” FOR MORE EASILY ENGAGING IN BEHAVIORS CRITICAL TO SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION

*Most relevant for behavioral barriers 1, 4, and 7*

Integration-related tasks in particular are often attention-draining and hassle-ridden, and they require concerted effort of staff to move beyond existing silos and protocols into action. This challenge is made more difficult by the lack of accessible, relevant, and behaviorally informed guidance to do so; for some integration-related behaviors and tasks, no guidance exists at all. UN entities can give staff a set of tools or “starter kit” for more easily engaging in behaviors critical to successful integration, such as:

### *Create shortcuts in guidance*

Handbooks and other guidance can be useful but are often too tedious and intensive to use in a pinch; shorter versions or quick “how-to” guides for different integration-related activities—such as auditing and **improving forums and mechanisms** or **defining integration**—are better for busy individuals. For staff who rely on intensive handbooks and guidance, each document must be practical, easily navigable, and speak to the challenges of those that need to use it the most. For example, the majority of staff interviewed and surveyed other than planning staff note that they do not or have not used the IAP handbook in their day-to-day work; the handbook is perceived as either

unrelatable to their work or too arduous. Breaking down the handbook into modules for different types of staff—such as mission, AFP, those with specific integration roles, those without—and including one-page guidance notes, step-by-step guides, or checklists on topics that can be pulled out for staff to use individually can help them to navigate the handbook—and ultimately **seek out and identify collaboration points**.

In addition, sometimes the best shortcut to guidance is through peers, but staff of similar professional positions are working across countries and regions. Establishing informal messaging channels and check-in meetings—such as through WhatsApp or a monthly video call—for cohorts of staff to seek quick guidance on an integration-related task can shorten the time needed to research how to accomplish it. For example, some interviewees noted that they used cohort communications—including an RCOs regional WhatsApp group and an RCs chat group on Microsoft Teams—to helpfully bounce ideas off of each other and seek guidance on **defining and demonstrating commitment to integration** and **supporting amicable dispute resolution**.

### *Curate options and provide guardrails to facilitate quick decision-making*

Existing handbooks and guidance on integration currently provide many one-size-fits-all models that often do not fit complicated UN contexts. If UN staff do not choose these default models, they instead face myriad possibilities, making it difficult to productively

take decisions and actions towards successful integration. In response, providing staff with a curated set of options or a method for curating the options themselves can help decision-making when the default guidance is not adequate. For example, a menu of options could help senior leaders **improve upon forums and mechanisms** more easily. The menu could include a decision guide for how to use auditing feedback to navigate choices. For example, are staff not sharing knowledge efficiently when the country is in a period of rapid transition? *Choose larger forums whose agenda items include knowledge transfer. Are staff not able to resolve conflict and make coordination decisions effectively? Choose smaller, intimate meetings with agendas mainly comprising action items.* Senior leaders can then easily reference the guide to make efficient and effective decisions on forums and mechanisms.

### *Embed prompts for collaboration, consultation, and constructive conflict where staff are already used to dedicating their attention*

At present, UN staff are meant to behave in ways that are critical to integration at every moment. While there is a strong push for successful integration at the highest levels of the UN, staff often have no moment where they are specifically prompted to think about integration and how to achieve it. As a result, many staff simply never think about integration in their day-to-day work—their attention is used up on other tasks. Rather than broadly encourage staff to think

about integration at every moment, prompt them at specific moments. For example, when senior leaders must **publicly define and demonstrate commitment to integration**, embed checkpoints during their multi-year appointment to work on the task—such as by month three, establish country-level definition; on month four, draft press releases demonstrating commitment; on month six, hold town hall regarding integration.

In addition, be intentional about using training moments—when staff attention is captured—to prompt behaviors critical to successful integration. For example, during trainings, help staff practice and build a plan for how they will react and respond to disputes in their day-to-day work **to support amicable dispute resolution**. In addition, at the end of trainings, provide staff with “homework” for the weeks following to push for a concerted effort towards integration. Homework can include brief prompts to encourage staff to **proactively build a new relationship** or **seek out a different dataset or viewpoint**. This can help build positive behaviors into the routine of staff while it is salient.

## STRATEGY 2: RESET FALSE EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF INTEGRATION.

Integration requires bold action, yet an exaggerated sense of the potential pitfalls combined with a jaded view of potential benefits may restrain individuals from participating in critical activities. A number of creative approaches are available to help remove some of the opacity that currently exists around both costs and benefits, presenting advantages over the alternatives of re-training or altering incentives

### RECOMMENDATION #3: REDUCE THE PERCEIVED RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH INTEGRATION

#### *Most relevant for behavioral barriers 2 and 3*

UN staff face numerous potential risks when deciding to support and pursue integration. Stepping outside of visible peer norms—such as in settings where most UN staff are seen sticking to their siloed approaches—*could* bring about unwelcome social consequences. Engaging in integration activities without explicit approval or signaling from leadership *could* bring about negative career consequences. And choosing integration when donor funding itself is siloed *could* lead to negative programmatic implications. UN entities can help by clarifying and mitigating the perceived risks associated with engaging in integration, for example:

#### *State the facts to dispel harmful perceptions about integration-related behavior*

When staff perceive behaviors critical to successful integration as outside of their formal responsibilities, and thereby risky, flip these narratives by promoting opposite viewpoints through public campaigns. For examples, use decals, posters or even training slides to reverse perceptions that those who go outside the confines of their role to **seek out additional data from other entities** or **incorporate new viewpoints into decision-making** are putting themselves at professional risk. Use these formats to communicate the facts people should know—specifically, that each of these

behaviors is critical to achieving mission success and relevant for all UN staff. Visual and other communications can also help to dispel identity-based preconceptions about conflict; for example, consider promoting taglines to encourage **amicable dispute resolution**, such as “Productive conflict is critical to effective collaboration. Dispute it, discuss it, resolve it.”

#### *Provide tools for senior leadership to use two-way communication when promoting integration*

Many senior leaders avoid the topic of integration altogether, but those who do promote integration often do so using one-way communications—such as speeches, statements, or even demands in coordination meetings. UN staff often perceive these communications as hollow, as it is ultimately the staff who assume the risks of going against peers and supervisors within their entities when engaging in integration-related tasks. To successfully promote integration, senior leaders must demonstrate willingness to dive into the practical ramifications of integration with staff—which can be done using two-way communications.

For example, rather than a press release or directive addressed to a wide audience, set up town halls where leadership can **demonstrate commitment to integration** by encouraging individual agency and ownership of integration and allowing staff to reply with questions or concerns regarding integration. In addition, provide senior leaders with materials—such as a “question bank” for use during regular staff meetings—to help them prompt frequent discussion

on integration challenges as a way of signaling interest in and receptivity. These solutions help staff see integration messaging not as mere lip service—and as a result a risk to staff if senior leaders are not perceived to be truly supportive—but a responsibility for all UN staff.

#### *Establish opt-in, publicly announced, joint pacts for senior leadership to commit to certain behaviors and/or actions related to successful integration*

Voluntary opportunities for senior leaders to opt-in to publicly committing to activities that foster cross-pillar collaboration and/or successful integration can also go a long way in helping staff perceive less risk to engaging in integration. It’s important, however, that such commitments are related to specific activities that are “misperceived” as risky but are seen to be beneficial more broadly. Public commitments to integration itself, a broad topic not always considered beneficial, is likely to perpetuate the narrative that integration is a bureaucratic imposition since the commitment is not linked to positive and direct activities.

Instead, consider drafting a statement of intent to **seek out viewpoints of different entities and individuals** or **build the best set of forums and mechanisms to foster collaboration** and provide SRSGs, DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs the opportunity to publicly commit and sign the document during induction trainings prior to deployment or during the first month of deployment once they have assessed the setting. Similar to the previous solution, joint pacts not only demonstrate

public commitment and act as a commitment device for leadership but reduce the perceived risk of publicly supporting integration at the lower levels if staff can refer to clear documentation of support by leadership.

#### **RECOMMENDATION #4: IDENTIFY AND HIGHLIGHT THE SUCCESSES OF INTEGRATION, LARGE AND SMALL**

##### ***Most relevant for behavioral barriers 2 and 3***

UN staff perceptions of integration in many settings has come to be defined by the amount of work required to achieve it as opposed to the communal benefits that can be achieved by it, particularly since the benefits of successful integration are not always easily visible in UN settings. UN staff rarely witness their peers, supervisors, or leadership engaging in behaviors critical to successful integration nor do they see those who attempt to do so achieving success and benefiting from such actions. And when staff must manage expansive day-to-day operations and ensure success of efforts in their own workstreams, it can be difficult to look beyond what is sitting on your desk to engage in activities with only far-off benefits. But real successes in integration do occur, and when they do, it moves the entire UN system closer to achieving its goals. When success is not easily visible, UN entities can highlight these successes on an individual and organizational level, such as:

##### ***Publicly recognize and reward staff who model good practices and champion integration***

Encourage individuals and entities to see championing integration as a positive endeavor by publicly recognizing individuals and teams who are strong collaborators. Reward people for actions that further the UN's

integration objectives, recognize their achievements, and celebrate staff who go above and beyond. For example, top UN leadership can establish quarterly or biannual rewards that highlight innovative and meaningful effort towards achieving integration on an individual or team level. Senior leaders in field settings can also award staff and hold town halls recognizing their achievements; award categories can be specific to individual integration-related behaviors, such as awards for staff who **demonstrate commitment to integration, champion relationship-building across pillars**, or proactively seek out **improvements to forums and mechanisms for better collaboration**. To build consensus and foster positive interactions, nominees can be identified through individuals, teams, and agencies or departments nominating their counterparts.

##### ***Showcase operational and programmatic success in action through communication spotlights***

Using communication spotlights, ceremonies, and talking circuits to specifically highlight operational and programmatic successes across settings can increase awareness of successful integration, and publicly recognize the individuals who make it happen. For example, create video spotlights or hold "after-action" ceremonies, brownbags, or fireside chats that showcase where individuals and teams have had operational and programmatic success towards integration. Use these channels to demonstrate how small actions towards integration—such as **identifying a new collaboration point** or finding new ways to **incorporate data**

**and viewpoints**—have had real-world effect. During brownbags and fireside chats, encourage dialogue on how individuals and teams navigated particular challenges to achieve successful integration.

##### ***Show value added of each sub-activity that advances successful integration***

Successful integration often requires an extended period of time to see positive indicators of success, while UN staff frequently rotate into new settings before achievements can be fully realized. In response, senior leaders and other staff fostering collaboration in UN settings should break down steps to successful integration and demonstrate the value add of individual activities and outputs. For example, senior leaders can demonstrate the value add of each meeting by allowing others in the meeting to drive the agenda on a rotating basis or allow a rotating set of participants to chair the meetings. The practice allows participating staff to gain automatic and immediate benefits from attendance, and lead to more active participation, **incorporation of different viewpoints, and better relationships among staff**.

## STRATEGY 3: EMPHASIZE THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND PROMOTE PERSONAL INITIATIVE

Individual identities matter to the extent to which staff are prepared to go beyond their duties to promote integration, particularly when it comes to informal actions like building relationships with peers or stepping up to resolve a conflict. Any approach that emphasizes individual initiative may help to combat the perception that the system is simply too big for any one person to create meaningful change.

### RECOMMENDATION #5: DECONSTRUCT SILOED IDENTITIES

#### *Most relevant for behavioral barrier 5*

All UN staff have multiple identities—for instance, they can be a UN member, an agency or department representative, and a sector expert all at once—and each identity carries different goals and values. People's choices are often made in accordance with the identity (and its associated goals and values) that is most salient in the moment of choice. The challenge in UN settings is that for most staff, their siloed identity is always the most salient. Deconstructing these siloed identities and increasing the salience of communal identities can encourage more socially beneficial actions and behaving in ways critical to successful integration. For example:

*Create regular opportunities for staff across the UN to reflect on common objectives together, interrogate others' point of view and learn others' "language"*

UN staff do not have many opportunities for reflection with staff across entities and pillars, which limits their ability to understand different approaches to work and recognize the relative strengths of others. Guided group activities that bring together cross-sections of UN staff to build relationships and reflect together can help to build more well-rounded identities. For example, conducting simulation exercises with staff from different entities that require them to complete an integration-related challenge together can help

build awareness of each other's' relative strengths and practice integration-related behaviors, such as **seeking out data and viewpoints** and **supporting amicable dispute resolution**. In addition, multi-entity brownbags that showcase achievements in situation analysis, reporting, programs and operations, or other cross-cutting areas of work can help staff to **build new relationships**, gain familiarity with language across pillars, and see innovation in action across the UN.

*Give senior leaders time and space to reconstruct their identity and build muscle memory of behaving in ways critical to successful integration*

Senior leaders in UN settings often spend the majority of their careers in one pillar or entity; when they move on to become SRSGs, DSRSGs, RCs, and HCs, it is a rapid ascent that does not provide much time or opportunity to build their identities as coordination leaders. However, senior leaders need to be able to transcend the siloes they are raised in and build new cross-cutting identities, and they need activities to do so. Induction trainings that span longer periods of time to absorb information, create new skillsets, and practice engaging in integration-related behaviors—such as **supporting amicable dispute resolution** or **providing clear and simple guidance effectively to all staff**—can help build muscle memory for when leaders are deployed to difficult field settings. Moreover, building training in modules to complete over the course of a future senior leaders' career can help instill communal identities early on; such modules can further lead to

professional certifications in different pillars or areas of work, which are used as starting requirements for senior leaders.

*Prime people of their communal identities at key moments*

The existence of multiple social identities means that the extent to which a message or option primes a specific identity—meaning subtly nudges an individual into thinking about a particular aspect of their identity—can have important effects on the decisions that UN staff make. As a result, priming people of their identity as a “UN staff” or “community UN member” can increase collectively beneficial outcomes. To encourage **support for amicable dispute resolution**, priming can be as simple as an exercise at the beginning of a group meeting encouraging people to reflect on a time that they successfully addressed conflict across pillars (priming staff's identities as conflict resolution specialists). Priming is best utilized when parochial identities are likely to be strongest yet there are large benefits to be reaped from collaboration, such as in the coordination meetings right after a large crisis, during a fundraising cycle, or in the lead-up to a high-level mission.

**RECOMMENDATION #6:  
FACILITATE THE FORMATION OF  
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

*Most relevant for behavioral barrier 6*

UN staff work in settings where situational factors often complicate their ability to coordinate and collaborate. But UN staff (and people in general) often focus on personal characteristics—rather than consider situational factors—when judging others’ poor behavior. As a result, staff may miss opportunities to resolve differences and expand collaboration, ultimately believing it to be impossible to change behavior. However, UN entities can counter this practice by breaking down siloes (as described above) and helping staff build stronger relationships and situational understanding that move beyond seeing each other as character-flawed acquaintances. Consider the following:

*Build new formal channels for exchanges between individuals at lower levels, explicitly encouraged by senior leadership*

It is important to broaden UN staff horizons and create more opportunities to encounter to different situations that other UN staff, such as their counterparts, may find themselves in. The more situations that UN staff are able to encounter, the easily they can empathize and productively respond to the situational factors that stand in the way of collaboration. To do so, create opportunities for temporary secondment, role-switching or perspective-sharing for mission staff in other entities, roles, or hierarchies. For example, during simulation

exercises, conduct at least one exercise that allow staff to assume the roles of their counterparts as opposed to their own role, then debrief together on the challenges encountered. Such opportunities can help staff **build new and better relationships** and **support amicable disputes resolution**.

*Create “stop and think” protocols for constructive conflict management, emphasizing deliberative reflection and empathy*

Conflict among UN staff is often exacerbated by the high-stakes nature of decision-making; in meetings and other exchanges, UN staff are often highly focused on their own entity’s goals, which are often most salient and time-sensitive. As a result, staff often quickly judge individual disagreements during consensus-building as a result of character flaws rather than the potential difficult situation the staff member is in to deliver on entity goals. In these circumstances, protocols that create a moment for staff to stop and reflect on the challenges their counterparts are experiencing can help lead to quicker consensus-building and **support amicable dispute resolution**. For example, for UNCT or PMT meetings, pre-existing and socialized “stop and think” protocols that are built into agenda items that require cross-entity consensus can give staff a moment for deliberate reflection and empathy for the situation others find themselves in. The protocols can include exercises that ask staff to identify and share a challenge another staff member may experience when deliberating on the particular agenda item before they share their own challenge during discussion.