

SENIOR LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

**Final Report
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**Dr Philipp Lottholz & Dr Sarah von Billerbeck
United Nations and Global Order Programme
University of Reading**

**Co-Principal Investigators
Dr Sarah von Billerbeck
Professor Rosa Freedman**

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DISCLAIMER

The views and analysis in this report are those of the authors alone, and the views of interviewees do not represent the official views of the organizations they represent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This pilot study mapped the performance management mechanisms for senior leaders in four international organizations, three of which are presented here: NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations.

While all organizations have well-defined performance management systems for junior, middle, and senior staff, few have detailed and transparent appraisal mechanisms for their most senior leadership. This is partly due to the fact that the latter are usually politically appointed and therefore there is often little appetite for rigorous evaluation and feedback, both on the part of the organizations and their member states.

Organizations vary in what they seek to measure when evaluating the performance of senior leaders. Most focus on the delivery of targets and the achievement of operational objectives, while only a few examine the managerial competencies and leadership skills of top officials.

How individual performance appraisal exercises fit into an organization's overall performance management framework is often unclear. For lower levels of staff, there are highly specified incentive structures that link (or do not link) performance to progression, reward, reappointment, and professional development; for senior leaders, however, these mechanisms remain largely unspecified.

Some organizations are piloting innovative mechanisms for performance management, such as 360-degree feedback processes. However, these are usually limited to high-level officials short of the top leadership. They offer the potential for using feedback to improve performance, but also face issues of participant anonymity and they divided opinions among senior managers and governing bodies.

The diplomatic and multicultural character of most international organizations renders them predisposed against giving and receiving critical feedback. International organizations face significant challenges in dealing with the resulting culture of avoidance and politeness, and overcoming the latter will necessitate reconsidering the incentive and enforcement frameworks tied to performance management.

Based on these findings and a discussion of cross-cutting issues outlined above, the report concludes that reforms to performance management systems should be introduced slowly and on a pilot basis. Even where staff openly acknowledge inefficiencies and a lack of rigor in performance management, they also often assert that senior leadership should be exempt from such processes or subject to adapted ones, both to shield the organization and its operations from adverse repercussions in case of negative reports and to enable senior leaders to focus on substantive work rather than time-consuming bureaucratic exercises. Furthermore, what works in one organization may not in others, and each individual organizational context, with its distinctive opportunities and constraints, will require unique and tailor-made solutions.

1 INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Report of the United Nations High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) identified senior mission leadership as critical to the effectiveness of UN peace operations. The report noted the lack of Secretariat independence and rigor in the selection process, inconsistent pre-deployment and on-going training and support mechanisms, and weak performance management systems as key obstacles to effective management, and it called for enhanced mechanisms to support and improve leadership (United Nations 2015: 82-85). Similarly, in a 2014 report, the World Economic Forum noted that leadership in international organizations (IOs) is critical for their ability to achieve their stated objectives, but that 'leader[s]' performance is seldom rigorously tested or measured' and that almost no IO has 'an openly published formal procedure for setting performance expectations for the leader[ship]' (WEF 2014: 6, 11).

The issues raised in these reports are widespread within IOs. They relate to a broader problem of how appraisal of senior leadership can or does occur in IOs where the selection of senior personnel by necessity takes into account merit, experience, and training alongside Secretariat needs, member state preferences, nationality, geographical distribution, political orientation, and gender. Within these constraints, where appraisal systems do exist, they may be applied inconsistently and lack standardization and rigor, and therefore may be viewed as ineffective or illegitimate (see WEF 2014).

At the same time, effective performance management in IOs carries a number of benefits: strong and regular performance appraisal can enhance accountability among senior managers with regards to delivery of objectives, strategic organizational change, and staff development; lead to clearer specification of expectations and better linkages between expectations and performance outcomes; and provide a forum where senior leaders can flag challenges, seek advice, and identify their own training or other support needs. In addition, where leaders are accountable and where the entire leadership cycle, from recruitment to appraisal, is transparent, senior managers are likely to be trusted and obeyed, raising staff cohesion and morale, and ultimately boosting organizational efficiency. Over time, this can contribute to improvements in overall organizational performance and the development of a cadre of experienced leaders and emerging managers who can be deployed to a variety of posts and who can contribute to institutional learning. Such considerations are critical at a time when the legitimacy and effectiveness of IOs more generally is being questioned and member states are cutting or threatening to cut funding and withdrawing their membership (see, for example, The Washington Post 2017; The New York Times 2018; Duerr 2018).

1.1 Scope of the study

Against this background, this pilot study was conceived to understand how and whether performance management for senior leaders is currently carried out within IOs, what issues and challenges exist, and whether organizations are adopting any new or innovative approaches. Specifically, we undertook a mapping exercise that assessed the performance management mechanisms of four IOs, of which three are presented here: NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations (see Section 3 for a detailed discussion of case selection and methods). While different IOs have varying performance requirements and operate in vastly different contexts, many face similar challenges regarding senior-level performance management. Accordingly, an overview of the different approaches to, the variety of tools available for, and the issues raised by performance management constitutes a useful resource for a range of organizations that can enable them to ask appropriate questions, engage in productive self-reflection, and eventually select and adapt the most effective methods for enhancing the appraisal of their senior leadership.

In order to provide context for the performance management of senior leaders, we also examine the mechanisms in place for other staff. Though not the main focus of the project, this has enabled us, first, to contrast the expectations and requirements faced by senior leaders with those faced by the majority of organizational staff. Second, it has enabled us to assess how incentives and disincentives for good performance management correspond to the seniority of the official in question.

Through this report, the study delivers the following outputs: 1) a systematic mapping of existing performance management mechanisms across three large IOs; 2) an analysis of best practices and key challenges relating to senior leadership performance management; and 3) an evidence base upon which IOs can draw as they initiate or further develop performance management mechanisms. As a pilot study, this also provides the foundation for future targeted research on this topic and studies of other IOs.

1.2 Key findings

Our report offers the following key findings:

- 1) There is a gap between mid- to high-levels staff and the most senior officials in IOs in terms of performance management. While all organizations have well-defined performance management systems for the former, few have detailed and transparent appraisal mechanisms for their senior leadership. This is partly due to the fact that senior leaders are usually politically appointed and therefore there is often little appetite for rigorous evaluation and feedback, both on part of the organizations and of their member states. Those mechanisms that do exist tend to rely on narrative assessments rather than on quantifiable measures.
- 2) Organizations vary in what they seek to measure when evaluating the performance of senior leaders. Most focus on the delivery of targets and the achievement of operational objectives, while only a few examine the managerial competencies and leadership skills of top officials. This raises the crucial question of the scope of performance management: should it seek to assess the individual performance of an official or that of the department or other unit they are leading?
- 3) How individual performance appraisal exercises fit into an organization's overall performance management framework is often unclear. For lower levels of staff, there are more highly specified incentive structures that link (or do not link) performance to progression, reward, reappointment, and professional development; for senior leaders, however, these mechanisms remain largely unspecified.
- 4) Some organizations are piloting innovative mechanisms for performance management, including in particular 360-degree feedback. However, these are usually limited to high-level officials short of the top leadership. They offer the potential for using feedback to improve performance, but also face issues of participant anonymity and they divided opinions both among senior managers and governing bodies.
- 5) The diplomatic and multicultural character of most IOs renders them predisposed against giving and receiving critical feedback. IOs face significant challenges in dealing with the corresponding culture of avoidance and politeness, and first steps to overcoming the latter point to a need for reconsidering the incentive and enforcement frameworks tied to performance management.
- 6) Reforms to performance management systems should be introduced slowly and on a pilot basis. Even where staff openly acknowledge inefficiencies and a lack of rigor in performance management, they also often assert themselves that senior leadership should be exempt from such processes or subject to adapted ones, both to shield the organization and its operations from adverse repercussions in case of negative reports and to enable senior leaders to focus on substantive work rather than time-consuming bureaucratic exercises.
- 7) What works in one organization may not in others, and each organizational context, with its distinctive opportunities and constraints, will vary. In this sense, our findings should be treated

as preliminary, and further systematic research is necessary to widen applicability of our conclusions.

1.3 Report overview

The report is structured as follows. In Section 2, we present an overview of relevant literature. We survey both scholarly literature from International Relations (IR) and management studies and prior practitioner studies on senior leadership performance management and performance management more generally in IOs.

In Section 3, we outline our methodology, case selection, and recruitment procedures within the organizations, as well as obstacles to the research and steps taken to overcome them. We also define key terms.

Section 4 presents the findings from this study, and we provide detailed descriptive findings for each organization across a variety of dimensions. In Section 5, we identify a variety of key cross-cutting issues and challenges that emerged from the empirical data. In Section 6, we offer some preliminary substantive conclusions that outline an initial set of best practices.

The final section concludes the study by linking the findings back to the arguments and debates on senior leadership performance management and indicates direction for future research, practice, and policy.

2 LITERATURE

In this section we situate our study within both academic and practitioner literature on performance management, drawing on a variety of fields. We begin by surveying the concepts and debates that management and specifically human resource management (HRM) studies offer. We draw on this literature to formulate definitions and identify the purposes and potentials of senior leadership performance management in IOs. Second, we review studies of IOs in the International Relations (IR) literature and point to the relative gap that this body of knowledge exhibits with regards to performance management mechanisms. Third, we survey previous practitioner studies that analyse senior leadership performance management or related topics.

2.1 Management studies

Performance management cuts across a number of fields within management studies, with applications in organizational management, strategy, and governance (see Gheorge and Hack 2007, Klein and Kozlowski 2000, Armstrong 2010: 253 ff.) on the one hand, and the emergence of a vast body of literature in HRM studies on the other (Schleicher et al. 2018, DeNisi and Smith 2014). Moreover, both within management studies more generally and the sub-field of HRM studies, senior leadership performance management is a niche topic. Our discussion is based on key works in this literature that deal with performance management directly (Schleicher et al. 2018, DeNisi and Smith 2014) and with wider aspects of HRM (e.g. Boxall and Purcell 2015, Collings et al. 2014, Brewster and Mayrhofer 2012).

Even a straightforward definition of performance management such as Armstrong's (2010: 253), who defines it as 'taking systematic action to improve organizational, team and individual performance', points to the complexity of the topic: there are multiple levels on which performance can be measured and managed. Accordingly, any study of performance management must establish a clear scope. In this study, we focus on the performance management of senior leaders in IOs, i.e. a specific population within the staff of these entities. Nevertheless, in undertaking this mapping exercise, we show that senior leaders' performance and its management is linked to issues and challenges that go beyond the realm of their individual activities.

It is particularly important here to distinguish between performance management (PM) and performance appraisal (PA) (DeNisi and Smith 2014: 131 ff., Schleicher et al. 2018: 3). Performance appraisal is the assessment and rating of the outputs and activities produced by an individual during a specific time period (DeNisi and Smith 2014: 131, Murphy and Cleveland 1995: 3). Schleicher et al (2018: 3) differentiate this from performance management as follows:

[Performance management] is understood to have arisen when practitioners (and eventually scholars) began talking about transforming PA from an event to a process. ...PM is seen as a broader set of on-going activities aimed at managing employee performance. In other words, PA can be thought of as a subset of PM.

This categorization is shared by other scholars (Denise and Smith 2014, Abraham 2014, Boselie et al. 2012) and forms the basis of our conceptual approach. Specifically, we are interested both in the way performance appraisal is done for senior leaders in IOs, but also how such appraisal is related to other aspects of performance management, and 'the challenge organisations face in defining, measuring, and stimulating employee performance with the ultimate goal of improving organisational performance' (Den Hartog et al. 2004: 556).

The specific practices and tools used for performance management include, according to Abraham (2014: 28), performance improvement, training, career development, and coaching (see also Boselie

et al. 2012: 370 ff., Baron and Armstrong 1998). For their part, Boselie et al. (2012: 379) divide performance management mechanisms into those 'designed to provide feedback, such as twice annual appraisal meetings, two-way feedback, 360 degree appraisals and benchmarking' and those 'designed more as supporting frameworks: defining competency frameworks for specific roles in the organisation, producing scorecards to enable discussion about performance, applying forced ranking/distribution systems, and clear goal setting'.

Much management and HRM literature focuses on performance appraisal, while ignoring broader issues of performance management (Claus and Briscoe 2008) or even confusing the two. In mapping out how senior leaders are subject to these different activities, we agree with Varma et al. (2010: 172) that it is critical to distinguish the two, and accordingly we define where and when in this report our analysis looks at performance appraisal and where it considers wider aspects of performance management.

In analysing performance management for senior leaders in this study, our work also drew upon scholarship comparing HRM practices and approaches across different contexts (see Brewster and Mayerhofer 2012). In this sense, more than merely trying to understand performance management practices and mechanisms in their respective international contexts, we sought to identify the potential for the adoption of specific mechanisms from one IO into another. One limitation of the (comparative) HRM and management studies literature in general is that it is currently still largely focused on the corporate sector while little attention has been devoted to similar dynamic in the non-profit sector. However, recent advances in this direction (e.g. Brewster and Cerdin 2018, Davies and Woodward 2014) point to the general importance of this area of study and suggest strong potential for future policy-relevant research.

Another sub-set of management studies that is relevant is leadership studies. These mostly discuss the wide variety of sources and factors of good leadership, as well as the effects good leadership can have (e.g. Bruch and Vogel 2011). This field has also recently begun looking at leadership in IOs specifically (Schechter 1987, Thorn 2012). However, leadership studies have dedicated less attention to the mechanisms that can cultivate or enable such leadership. Menges et al. (2011) investigate the concept of a 'transformational leadership climate' and how the creation of such a climate affects employees' trust, 'organizational citizenship', and performance, but further research is needed to further differentiate the concept and its relevance for IOs (see also Reinalda and Verbeek 2014, Woods et al. 2016).

2.2 International Relations (IR) and international organizations studies

The academic literature in International Relations (IR) has produced a large body of work on the emergence, operations, and perceptions of IOs. This literature has analysed the challenges and evolution of the conditions under which institutional arrangement and rules for IOs are agreed (see Barnett and Fennimore 2004). Over time, more systematic and empirically based study has emerged, providing significant insights into the constraints and diverging interests within which IOs operate, for instance in case of the International Monetary Fund (Chwieroth 2009, Best 2007) or the World Bank (Weaver 2008, Marquette 2004).

Still, with few exceptions, most work on IOs focuses on their policies, activities, and outputs, rather than IOs as *organizations*. This scholarship thus largely neglects the realities faced by officials in IOs. As a result, a few scholars have started studying the internal workings of IOs, not only with the intention to understand and shed light on them but also to raise questions about the potential for reform of their structures and procedures. Bob Reinalda's *Routledge Handbook of International Organization* (2013), has gone some way to addressing these issues, and Reinalda and Verbeek (2014) have ex-

amined the role of leadership in IOs and how to foster effectiveness and representativeness in order to ensure IOs' contribution to the solving and management of global challenges (Reinalda and Verbeek 2014). Von Billerbeck (unpublished manuscript) has also studied IOs 'from the inside out', taking a sociological and management studies approach to communication and legitimacy within them.

A related and potentially important angle is that of international law literature, which approaches IOs from the vantage point of the treaties and norms that form their legal basis, and assess the evolution and impact of that basis on the actions and practices of IOs. Klabbers' *Introduction to International Organizations Law* (2015) for instance, sheds light on the legal aspects of IOs' structures and bureaucracies. Chesterman et al. (2016) focus specifically on the UN, comparing the legal provisions and actual practices of the organization.

Both IR and international law approaches present important entry points into the study of IOs and their senior leadership. However, these literatures remain largely divorced from the literature in management studies that examines performance management. Bringing these areas of scholarship together represents an important area for future research.

2.3 Studies on particular international organizations

While scholarship on senior leadership performance management in IOs remains diffuse, a number of specially commissioned, policy-focused studies have examined this important topic. The World Economic Forum (WEF) commissioned a report, *Effective Leadership in International Organizations*, published in 2014, that examined the practices of 11 IOs – including the IMF, the World Bank, four development banks, and five UN Specialized Agencies (but not the Secretariat) – in the domain of 'performance management' and related areas.¹ Similar to this pilot study, the project sought to establish a picture of the formal processes in place in the organizations and to access knowledge about the everyday and informal realities of these processes through interviews (WEF 2014: 8). With regards to senior leadership performance management, the authors find that 'very few international organizations have institutionalized annual performance appraisals of their leaders' (11).

Relatedly, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), which consists of 18 OECD member state governments, also seeks to assess performance management mechanisms in IOs.² Using a combination of document analysis, electronic surveys, and interviews, the Network's secretariat regularly assesses multilateral organizations funded by its member states, including UN agencies, international financial institutions, and global funds. Non-classified versions of the assessment reports are available on the Network's homepage and present a wealth of data on IOs' internal mechanisms and processes.³

Although MOPAN's methodology does not explicitly single out senior leadership performance management as an analytical dimension, its assessments give crucial insights into the important role of senior leadership for the wider performance of an IO. In its assessment of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), for instance, the authors conclude that:

Despite having a strong results management architecture and considerable efforts from some parts of the organisation, UNOCHA currently suffers from a weak accountability for results culture. This is based in wider organisational challenges, including limited institutional and management commitment to results reporting. (MOPAN 2017: 22)

¹ Further areas of analysis are: 'setting and evaluating ethical standards', 'developing and retaining talent', 'engaging with a wide range of stakeholders', and 'evaluating independently and effectively' (WEF 2014: 5).

² The five 'performance areas' assessed by MOPAN include: Strategic Management, Operational Management, Relationship Management, Performance Management and Results. See MOPAN n.d. (b).

³ See MOPAN, n.d. (a).

They also assert that:

Currently, UNOCHA lacks a strong performance culture and management systems. Clear linkages are missing between resources to results, and staff performance management is neither systematically implemented nor culturally respected as an institutional process. An ethos of accountability for results needs to be owned and communicated by senior management, so that it permeates the organisation. (Ibid.: 40)

Such critical analyses of the shortcomings and potentials of performance management in IOs and the role of senior leaders in these processes highlight the need for additional research in this area. Importantly, the publication of each IO management's responses to the key findings of reports present a step beyond mere analysis, towards a dialogue about what can or should be done to help an IO deliver its objectives.

In addition to these general or comparative studies, there are a number of organization-specific ones. In this regard, a particularly important source of information on performance management in the EU is the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN). It is 'an informal network of the DGs [Director Generals] responsible for public administration in the Member States of the European Union, the European Commission (EC) and observer countries' with the main goal of 'exchang[ing] and sharing of views, experiences, tools, and best practices on certain topics and areas of interest' (EUPAN 2019). To this end, the network, led by the governments inhabiting the EU Council Presidency on a semi-annual basis, commissions studies on the key areas of interests including human resource management and organizational development.

One particularly important example of these publications is Staronova's comparison of appraisal mechanisms for civil servants, *Performance appraisal in the EU member states and the European Commission* (2017). She shows how performance appraisal for 'top' or 'senior management' varies across state bureaucracies and is overall – but not always – stricter than for rank-and-file staff (Staronova 2017: 20). The study ventures into important structural and procedural aspects of performance appraisal, such as appraisal criteria, components, rating frameworks, and training, as well as its use for promotion, development, and remuneration decisions. However, a limitation of this research is its complete reliance on an electronic survey distributed via email, which presents an appropriate tool for gathering information about formal processes, but is less likely to capture the nuances of the everyday functioning of performance appraisal mechanisms (Staronova 2017: 5-6).

Herma Kuperus and Anita Rode's study on *Top Public Managers in Europe. Management and Employment in Central Public Administrations* (2016) takes on a number of questions pertaining to this population. Their analysis of the 'performance assessment' of these managers differentiates between the assessment of the achievement of objectives (2016: 50) and demonstration of competencies (Ibid.: 51) and adds discussion about financial and non-financial reward and motivation systems as well as links between performance assessment and career development (Ibid.: 54).

Another work focusing on performance management on the aggregate level is Bezzina et al.'s (2017) investigation into the use of key performance indicators in EU member state administrations and the Commission. They argue that:

A holistic performance management approach incorporating Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) could be the answer to streamline and improve the quality of public services while strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness in the way the services are offered to the citizens. (2017: 5)

This argument is less directed at the senior leadership level, but nevertheless sheds light on the important question as to whether and how organizations such as the EU are managed in a systematic and goal-driven manner.

In the case of the United Nations, the most comprehensive recent work is Fabrizio Hochschild's *In and above conflict: A study on Leadership in the United Nations* (2010). Although now slightly dated, it presents an instructive survey of the best practices of leadership within the UN Secretariat embedded in a discussion of the institutional context, including challenges such as multiple and countervailing interests and misalignment of responsibility and authority.

Hochschild's most pertinent conclusions are:

- There is a need for a UN wide strategy for leadership development at all levels ... [which] should be linked to common leadership assessment and selection criteria ... [and] will also require the whole-hearted support of the UN Secretary-General as well as of UN agency and department heads.
- The UN is handicapped by albeit improved but still unsophisticated, politicized selection procedures for the most senior staff, which yield haphazard results. Political and other criteria can count for more than leadership ability in processes. In the absence of consistently strong leadership from above, leadership initiative at a lower level is particularly important in the UN.
- [...] There are numerous political and bureaucratic constraints, which can become a pretext for passivity and a habit of political expediency. Leadership in the UN is in essence about not being resigned to but overcoming the constraints, about creating space for independent action. (2010: 108-109)

In this sense, the study raises important points, which we also address in this study; however, Hochschild's focus is otherwise largely on senior leaders themselves and what attitudes, abilities and 'key practices' (2010: 106-107) they should have or develop in order to provide the right guidance and actions in their environment, rather than on performance management.

Finally, similar analyses about senior leadership performance management or related topics in some organizations are inaccessible. It is likely that these issues are analysed in internal reports or classified studies, but they are not publicly available. Some studies on NATO offer general institutional insights on current challenges (Latrobe et al. 2012) or in comparison with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and European External Action Service (Dijkstra 2016), but do not provide substantial analysis of senior leadership performance management. Accordingly, the use of interviews in our study provides unique insight into issues that are otherwise not available.

3 METHODS AND CASE SELECTION

In this section we outline the methodological approach of the study. After introducing the general methodology (3.1) and definitions of key terms (3.2), we provide more details on case selection (3.3), recruitment of interviewees (3.4.), the use of other material and data (3.5), and ethical questions (3.6).

3.1 Methods

As stated at the outset, this is a pilot study aimed at mapping mechanisms, tools, and practices of senior leadership performance management across select IOs. In this sense, our approach was two-fold: first, we gathered, systematized, and analysed existing information about performance management policies and mechanisms; second, to assess the effectiveness and perceptions of these mechanisms within the IOs, we interviewed key individuals in them.

Interviews were semi-structured and were based on a standard questionnaire of eight questions, which was adapted to the specific roles and background of interviewees. The questionnaire and general information about the study as well as consent conditions (see 3.5) were shared before the interviews. Interviewees were encouraged to point to materials or other questions that they regarded as important for the study. Depending on the choice of interviewees, the conversations were recorded or notes were taken, which were transcribed and shared with the interviewees for final confirmation or corrections and comments as necessary. We interviewed a total of 58 individuals.

Subsequently we carried out content analysis to identify themes and parameters for comparison. These include:

- Key facts, such as the rating scale of performance management frameworks and use and scope of calibration exercises
- Incentivizing frameworks for performance management, such as links to salary progression or promotion
- Competency frameworks used to define the roles, profiles, and characteristics of specific positions
- Central planning and management tools and their integration with performance management systems
- Changes and adaptations to performance management systems
- Selection, appointment, and re-appointment procedure for senior leaders
- Complex political contexts in external missions/offices or specific policy areas
- Cultures of diplomacy and conflict avoidance and a culture of critical feedback
- Feedback and development measures for senior leaders
- Misconduct and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)
- Underperformance response mechanisms
- Talent development

A final component of our methodology entailed the gathering and accommodation of feedback and additional information from study participants during a seminar held in September 2018, during which results from the study were presented and discussed. This, together with comments and feedback on the draft report gathered from study participants, has helped to corroborate and verify the findings and implications drawn from the study.

Nevertheless, as this is a pilot study, our results should be treated as indicative and the variation between our case study organizations should be noted. This in turn highlights the importance of undertaking further research on this topic, both comparative across organizations and in-depth in individual ones, something the organizations themselves supported.

3.2 Definitions

Based on the scholarly literature and discussions with IO officials, we define two key terms for this study – senior leadership and performance management – as follows:

Senior leadership:

We define senior leadership to include individuals at the level of Secretary-General and Deputy, Assistant or Under-Secretary-Generals, as well as Special Representatives of the Secretary General (in the case of UN peace operations and other missions). Secretary-Generals, and heads of organizations in general, present a very specific subset of ‘senior leadership’, who have their own private offices and particular reporting duties but also powers to govern and take a leading position in policymaking in IOs. Given their very specific roles and authority, as well as difficulty in gaining research access at this level, we therefore exclude heads of organizations from our analysis and focus on senior leadership on the level immediately below them. In most, though not all, organizations, these individuals are usually appointed through a process of political bargaining between member states in decision-making organs and informally in behind-the-scenes discussions. In some instances, there is a tacit understanding that a post will be filled by a national of a particular country – for example, the head of the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations is usually French.⁴ We therefore choose to call this population ‘senior political leadership’ for the purpose of better differentiation.

There are two issues with narrowing the study’s definition and scope to this political leadership level that deserve mention. First, access to the policy guidelines for and content of discussions on these individuals’ performance is often limited (with the partial exception of the EU, where Commissioners and the President report to the European Parliament in public sessions).

Second, seniority and the role of top-level leadership in organizations exist on a spectrum. Accordingly, in order to develop a holistic and dynamic understanding of senior leadership performance management, it is important to understand how performance management of staff on the lower levels is conducted. We therefore also examined and provide limited data on performance management for senior bureaucrats – i.e. high-level managers who are not at the most senior levels and are not primarily appointed through political negotiations – which we refer to as ‘senior bureaucratic management’,⁵ and for mid- and junior-level staff within our case study organizations. This provides valuable context for understanding performance management at the highest levels and helps to show whether the systems at these different levels are linked or separate.

Performance management and performance appraisal:

In light of the discussion outlined in sub-section 2.1, we define performance management as the variety of mechanisms, tools, and practices geared towards assessing, steering, and improving the outputs, services, and activities delivered by officials in IOs. As already indicated, the discussion of performance of organizations in their entirety or of divisions or units within organizations often partly or entirely crowds out questions about the individual performance of senior leaders (i.e., performance appraisal). In this study, we acknowledge that senior leaders depend on the other officials working together with them and are subject to the incentive frameworks and general constraints of each IO when they try to bring about certain outcomes and results. Still, we also distinguish between such ramifica-

⁴ Within the UN, SRSGs and DSRSGs are usually appointed at the USG or ASG-level. The Secretary-General has delegated the authority to run the selection process to the respective lead departments. The departments develop lists of candidates, usually conduct interviews, and then propose recommended candidates to the Secretary-General for final decision and appointment.

⁵ We chose this term to emphasize that these individuals belong to the bureaucratic part of the secretariats, agencies, and other entities of IOs. The term is not intended to convey any normative message about the value or limitations of bureaucracies. We also selected this term instead of ‘senior managers/management’, which is being used to designate senior political-level leaders at the UN Secretariat (see 4.2).

tions and preconditions for senior leaders' performance and the main focus of the competencies, activities, and efforts contributed by individual senior leaders themselves. In other words, we maintain a clear distinction between the individual exercise of performance appraisal and the wider set of practices and mechanisms referred to as performance management. The navigation between and clear distinction of these inter-related areas appears to us to be a key ingredient for effective performance management systems.

All three IOs included in this report have performance appraisal mechanisms that are carried out on an annual basis and that include goal setting at the beginning of the cycle, a mid-point review, and an assessment of how goals have been achieved at the end of the cycle.⁶ However, as we will show, senior political leadership is not subject to this standard approach, but to a number of other reporting duties (e.g. vis-à-vis the European Parliament in the EU) and performance management systems (such as senior manager compacts at the UN Secretariat). We have included any observable accountability mechanisms and other electronic planning and results-based management mechanisms and their effects on performance management in mapping senior political leadership's performance management mechanisms in section 4.1.

3.3 Case selection

The selection of cases concerns both the choice of IOs to study during this pilot phase and the selection of specific entities within these organizations – because they are large, studying them in their entirety was unfeasible. Regarding the former, four IOs were originally selected as case studies for this project, of which three are presented in this report: the UN, the EU, and NATO. These organizations were selected through purposive sampling that sought to strike a balance between similarity and difference in order to enable comparability. A number of criteria were applied. First, all of the organizations are intergovernmental and therefore have a dual structure consisting of member states and secretariats; at the same time, the EU's supranational nature distinguishes it partly from the other organizations. Second, though the membership of NATO is more limited geographically, the membership of all three organizations is diverse. In this way, each organization has to balance between members' unique interests and the common vision and objectives that unite them. Finally, while the organizations operate in very different functional areas, ranging from military to finance, humanitarian assistance, and development, all undertake interventions of an international nature in other states around the world. Thus, while their specific constraints and contexts will vary, they have structural and operational similarities and therefore face similar challenges and opportunities relating to leadership and performance appraisal.

The selection of entities within the IOs was geared towards obtaining a broad range of material and perspectives from staff within the respective secretariats or bureaucratic entities more generally, as opposed to, for instance, member state delegation staff. The purposeful selection of entities within IOs was largely focused on executive directorates that usually include human resource management units, as well as Chief of Staff offices. To gain insight into the implementation and functioning of policies and mechanisms administered in these central units we included staff from sectoral departments as well. Here, we generally targeted departments working on issues relating to peace, security, and external cooperation for comparative purposes.

The selection of entities at NATO was focused on the Executive Division where the Human Resource Directorate is housed, as well as the Emerging Security Challenges Division. At the recommendation of other interviewees, we also elected to interview select staff from member state delegations to gain an understanding their points of view on senior leadership performance management.

⁶ The United Nations Secretariat and EU Commission use the term 'performance appraisal,' while NATO's corresponding system is called 'Performance Review and Development'. Senior bureaucratic managers in all three IOs are subject to these performance appraisal systems, with some adding further features.

In the EU, we focused data collection on the European Commission, which, with its status of an executive bureaucracy, carries out similar functions as the secretariats of the other IOs – although some differences in the mandate and nature of this organization need to be taken into account.⁷ For comparative purposes we conducted interviews in and analysis of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which did not yield significant variation to the Commission. The main focus of our participant recruitment efforts in the Commission was the Directorate-General Human Resources & Security, which is the entity that devises and implements HR policies, including performance management on senior and lower staff levels, for the Commission. Besides the Secretariat-General as second central entity of interest, we targeted officials in the Directorates-General ‘International Cooperation and Development’ (DEVCO), ‘European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations’ (ECHO), and ‘European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations’ (NEAR).

In the UN, we focused our analysis mostly on select entities in the Secretariat, although we conducted a few interviews in Specialized Agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to compare and corroborate the study’s overall finding. Besides targeting current and former staff from departments and offices within the Secretariat, including both headquarters in New York – specifically the Department of Management and Office of Human Resources Management – and the Geneva Office, we focused more specifically on the Department of Peacekeeping Organizations (DPKO) and its Shared Services with the Department of Field Service (DFS), as well as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Due to the large and complex structure of the UN, as with the other IOs, we stress that our findings from this pilot study are indicative and therefore we underscore the need for further in-depth research across departments.

3.4 Interviewee recruitment

The key challenge in recruiting participants for the study was to secure experts in the areas of human resources management and central management and executive units more generally, while also gathering information on the actual functioning of performance management on the senior level(s) and across different departments. The limited availability of senior leaders in IOs is well known and posed a challenge for this study as well, which was at times successfully navigated.

We generally employed purposive sampling of offices and functions that are of importance for the study. For instance, apart from recruiting as many HR or performance management specialists as possible, we also tried to speak to HR or general resource management officials in the sectoral policy departments of the IOs. When possible, we used snowballing to receive contacts and recommendations and thereby secure access in an environment where the study was perceived as interesting and necessary but also as being of a sensitive and potentially controversial nature. To prevent the latter perception from making potential participants disengage, we chose a proactive approach to communication and management of ethical concerns (see 3.6).

3.5 Other material and data

In preparation for visits to the selected IOs, we gathered all accessible documents on performance management and related procedures in the organization. While the European Union and the United Nations provide documentation and especially legislative documents on this area in an open access regime, NATO makes very little information publicly available, except for some open access presentations uploaded by NATO staff in recent years, which were verified for their validity with interviewees.

⁷ Most importantly, being part of a supra-national organization that regulates and governs a wide variety of policy areas affecting Europeans’ lives, the Commission enjoys an unmatched amount of human and financial resources, but also faces the corresponding set of contractual duties and expectations from its constituencies.

Accordingly, unpublished documents that were shared by officials from the three IOs make up a second key component of the material on which the analysis is based. They often helped to corroborate or illustrate information provided by interviewees.

3.6 Ethics

Questions of consent and transparency on general conditions of research and data handling were approached proactively in order to ensure that potential participants felt comfortable agreeing to interviews. Consent conditions included the production of a transcript for retrospective review, verification, and revision if desired by the interviewee. Upon request, interviewees were informed about direct quotes of their statements and were sent the draft report of the study to further facilitate transparency about the research results. This approach proved effective to facilitate recruitment and participants' relative openness.

4 DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS BY ORGANIZATION

This section presents detailed descriptive findings of our mapping exercise, based on both document analysis and interviews with representatives from the three IOs. Each section is broken down into a description of performance management mechanisms for each of the three staff categories mentioned – ‘Senior political leadership’, ‘Senior bureaucratic management,’ and ‘Middle management & ordinary staff’ – and five key dimensions of performance management:

- i. ‘Performance appraisal key facts: Rating scale, calibration’ lists key characteristics of the performance appraisal systems. These are important for understanding the dynamics of performance appraisal management on the senior bureaucratic management level, as this group is subject to the standard appraisal systems (or variations thereof) in all three IOs. Though not the main focus of the report, we draw on this data as necessary for the analysis of performance management at different levels.
- ii. ‘Incentivizing framework’ captures mechanisms that are intended to encourage good performance or, conversely, discourage underperformance. The question of how to incentivize good performance and strong commitment to stated objectives appears to be key for all three examined IOs. For the senior political leadership, we discuss the cognate mechanisms of accountability, control, and incentives for good performance – all of which can be understood as performance management in the wider sense, especially in the absence of a concrete performance appraisal system like those to which other staff are subject.
- iii. ‘Competency framework’ identifies any unified standards for the competencies, skills, and characteristics that staff at different levels are expected to demonstrate, and against which their performance may be measured.
- iv. ‘Central planning and management tools, and their integration with performance appraisal systems’ enhances our understanding of performance appraisal processes on the individual level and the wider array of mechanisms and practices of performance management. The degree to which individual performance appraisal systems are linked to or integrated with electronic planning and management systems, or so-called electronic resource-planning (ERP) systems can determine an individuals’ sense of how they contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives of their unit or of the organization as a whole.
- v. ‘Changes & adaptations’ identifies any recent or on-going initiatives to adjust, improve, or alter both performance management and performance appraisal mechanisms. The historical background of such systems is discussed where it adds further analytical insight but is not systematically compared.

Key points for comparison are compiled in the table below, which is structured according to the three staff categories and five dimensions discussed above.

Table 1: Overview of key aspects of performance management across organizations

PM aspect: IO:	Senior political leadership	Senior bureaucratic management	Middle mgt. & ordinary staff	PA key facts: Rating scale, calibration	Incentivizing framework	Competency framework	Central planning & mgt. tools, integration w/ PA	Changes & adaptations
NATO	Secretary-General (SG)/Deputy-SG/Assistant SG (heading Directorates): Internal, vis-à-vis North Atlantic Council & Committees	Deputy ASGs: Performance Review & Development (PRD) as other staff	Annual performance assessment exercise in PRD System	Six values: Exceptional, Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Unsatisfactory; Calibration across entire International Staff	Promotion & salary increments tied to satisfactory performance; since 2012 mostly 3 to 4-year contracts	Framework including 16 competencies to describe posts, carry out PM, selection, promotion	NATO corporate information system, currently being integrated with PRD	Meaning of PRD and integration with broader TM initiatives currently being discussed; staff cut through 'functional review' & move to new HQ
EU	28 Commissioners, President & four Vice-Presidents: Internal vis-à-vis President, College; Publicly vis-à-vis Parliament, e.g. annual discharge procedure, reporting duties as per treaties	Directors-General (DGs), Deputy DGs, Directors: Separate perf. assessment template w/ quantitative component (efficiency, ability, conduct)	Annual performance assessment, only narrative components	<u>Senior managers:</u> Efficiency: 0- 10, Ability: 0-6, Conduct: 0-4 → Σ= 0-20; <u>All staff incl. snr. mgrs.:</u> Performance satisfactory? Yes/No; Calibration within DGs	Salary increments linked to satisfactory perf.; perf. assessment records considered in promotion exercises; 'perf. improvement plan' as 'negative' incentive	'Abilities, skills and conduct' as general three pillars of PM; 'Competency framework for middle managers' defining necessary skills	Four-year Strategic Plans, Annual Mgt. Plans, Annual Activity Reports (AAP), cascaded to unit level; loosely linked to PM	No major changes ongoing; talks & discussions with sen. & middle mgt. of all DGs on topics like underperformance, better collaboration
UN	SG, Assistant SGs, Under-SGs, SRSGs: Internal via 'senior manager compacts', managed by USG Mgt' and, for SRSGs, by the Office of Chief of Staff DPKO/FS; Deputy SRSGs: ('Sub'-) Compacts managed by superior's office	Assistant Director General, Deputy Director General, Directors (D2 and D1 levels): Normal PM with superior as lower staff categories	Annual exercise in Electronic Performance Assessment System (EPAS)	<u>Rating for values & competencies:</u> Outstanding, Fully competent, Requires development, Unsatisfactory; <u>Overall ratings:</u> Exceeds/Successfully/Partially meets/Does not meet perf. expectations	Salary increments tied to meeting of perf. expectations; perf. records considered in promotion but of limited effect, 'perf. improvement plan' as 'negative' incentive	UN Core Values and Senior Leader Competency Framework as templates for PM, although very broad & ambitious	Umoja ('unity') central planning tool integrated into snr. manager compacts, no link with EPAS	New Mgt. Architecture Reform, introduction of 360-degree review planned for all staff levels (tbc)

4.1 NATO

At NATO, we interviewed eight members of the International Staff, including from national delegations, and corroborated the analysis with review of relevant policy documents and a few available documents on HR management, including publicly available training material on performance management generally and the Performance Review and Development (PRD) System in particular. Interviews were conducted in person and by phone between 27 February and 08 May 2018.

Senior political leadership

The most senior officials in NATO, i.e. the Secretary General, Deputy Secretaries-General, and Assistant Secretary-Generals (ASGs), are politically appointed⁸ and not subject to the Performance Review and Development (PRD) System which is used to appraise the performance of NATO's International Staff (IS) and International Military Staff (IMS) on an annual basis (see below). ASGs, who lead the seven Divisions of the NATO International Staff, had been subject to PRD exercises until 2008, after which they were exempted from them.⁹

Since then, the performance of senior leaders has been assessed primarily through their duty to report on how their respective Division or Office delivers against objectives to the Secretary-General and the North Atlantic Council, the primary decision-making organ of the organization, as well as the different subordinate committees and working groups of the Council. This reporting of overall Division outputs and objectives, however, does not evaluate *how* a Division or Office reached a result or output. Senior leaders' leadership skills and performance within their respective units are not subject to this collective performance management. This system thus represents a version of performance management that focuses on overall organizational delivery, rather than individual leadership.

In the absence of official information on other performance criteria for senior political leadership, a prime mechanism for holding them to account is the decision on their re-appointment. Every two to four years, depending on political negotiations between member states and informal relations at senior levels, individuals may rotate horizontally into new positions. However, if their contract extension is not supported, they usually return to their national diplomatic services. While many argue that senior (re-) appointments are such an inherently political issue that no additional procedural provisions should be made on this process, others assert that the role of informal negotiations and grey areas should be limited by at least specifying some minimum criteria that senior leaders should fulfil. 'For DASGs, the recruitment process is still not very transparent and it appears like a scripted procedure with a big grey zone behind decisions', stated one senior official.¹⁰ They added that even priorities such as balanced representation of nation states did not justify this status quo. The same official admonished the absence of performance management mechanisms for ASGs that would give an indication of the quality of their work. 'There are at best implicit indications of the quality of ASGs' work, such as the frequency with which ASGs' statements and reports are incorporated into meetings by the Secretary General', the official added.¹¹ Interviewees did not report any other means by which the work of ASGs or other senior leaders is scrutinized, but further research is necessary in this area.

Senior bureaucratic management

The senior level of the bureaucratic management, i.e. Deputy Assistant Secretary-Generals (DASGs) and lower grade managers from Grades A6 and A7 are subject to NATO's Performance Review and Development (PRD) System. The PRD involves an annual cycle of goal setting, mid-term review, and final assessment, which every staff member undertakes with their supervisor. Results are 'calibrated' for senior

⁸ Although the selection of ASGs is based on merits and qualifications verified through Assessment Centers, among other elements, while political considerations are only made in the final stage of the appointment decision.

⁹ Senior Official, HR Division, Executive Management Division, Phone Interview, 08 May 2018.

¹⁰ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018.

¹¹ Ibid.

leaders across Divisions, that is, the number of ratings given across the scale is adjusted so that it follows a normal distribution (a 'bell curve') that concentrates most performance ratings around mid-scale values.

Some interviewees indicated that managers at that level had little systemic incentive to deliver high performance or to comply with the PRD system. There are two alleged reasons for this. The first relates to career trajectories in the International Staff: because DASGs cannot move up to a political-level ASG post (they have done so only in two exceptional cases), they have little incentive to comply with the PRD system in order to secure further career prospects.¹² Second, DASGs are on average already older and will likely soon retire or return to their national diplomatic or civil services where their PRD rating will play little to no role.¹³ These officials indicated that, as a consequence, some senior bureaucrats may not conscientiously use the PRD system as a tool to scrutinize and certify their or their subordinates' performance.¹⁴ As a knock-on effect, a degree of ineffectiveness within the PRD 'trickles down' from the top into lower levels within International Staff grades.¹⁵

Middle management and ordinary staff

Middle management and ordinary members of staff are, like senior bureaucratic management, subject to the annual 'Performance Review and Development' (PRD) cycle, which also includes a mid-term review. In a 2016 Staff Survey conducted by the NATO Staff Association, 53.6 per cent of respondents stated that they found the system was not useful and 50.5 per cent stated that it was not 'applied in a fair and objective manner'.¹⁶ One official indicated that such discontent stemmed partly from the fact that performance ratings depended not only on individual performance, but also on the limited availability of high ratings, due to the normal (bell curve) distribution of performance ratings within and across Divisions mentioned above. Furthermore, when a given member of staff is at a stage where their contract needs to be extended or they have a chance for promotion, some managers would allocate these individuals 'excellent' or 'exceptional' ratings, so that such ratings become exhausted by 'purposive' allocation.¹⁷ This perception of the PRD as being unjust and lacking objectivity presents a stark contrast with the senior bureaucratic management, where PRD ratings are not seen as overly important or consequential, while the doubts about its use seem to be present on all seniority levels.

Incentivizing framework

As can be seen, the incentives for rigorous performance management are thus limited and vary across different levels. Further complicating this situation is the apparent disconnect between performance management and contract and hiring policy. For senior leaders, as noted, appointment and performance are linked only in a limited fashion. For middle and senior managers (grades A4-7), the PRD is not formally taken into account. This is partly because recruitment calls are open to external applicants who may not have performance assessments equivalent to the PRD. Therefore, it is clear that PRD appraisals will have implications for promotion and hiring decisions informally at best, which in turn disincentivizes people in mid-level management from striving for excellent PRD scores. According to some interviewees, the current contract and hiring policy requires improvement and precludes a fully effective performance management.¹⁸

A related issue is that some older, long-time staff have indefinite contracts and thus little incentive to strive for high performance ratings, while staff hired since 2012 (Dijkstra 2016: 98) are often limited to four-year or shorter contracts. The latter therefore try to ensure renewal of their contracts through more informal mechanisms given the relative unimportance of PRD scores. In this sense, the shorter contracts awarded

¹² Ibid., Senior International Staff, 27 February 2018.

¹³ Although follow up research is needed on exit talks or other tools following senior leadership's NATO exit.

¹⁴ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018; Senior International Staff, 27 February 2018.

¹⁵ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018.

¹⁶ These values are lower than the respective 2014 values (55.0% and 57.3%) (NATO Staff Association 2016: 39).

¹⁷ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018.

¹⁸ Two Senior Officials from Human Resources, Executive Management Division, NATO International Staff, 28 February 2018.

in recent years create some scrutiny on officials' work. For senior leaders, as discussed, (re)appointments depends on the informal negotiations of the Secretary-General and his office with the member states. Still, staff perceptions about the PRD system's lack of objectivity and about the exemption of senior leadership from real scrutiny may create a general culture disposed against rigorous performance management.

Competency framework

NATO's competency framework comprises 16 competencies, and the PRD system is used to define which are of key importance in each official's work and to assess demonstration of these by officials in end-of-year performance evaluations (Welch 2017). Apart from ensuring demonstration of necessary competencies through the performance management system directly, HR representatives have put forward different training and coaching programmes such as the 'Management Development Programme', 'Leadership Journey' or 'Leadership Matters', or 'Senior Circle Sessions' to foster exchange of experience and best practices among senior leaders. Such training and competency frameworks are more effective in ensuring senior staff preparation and good managerial performance than is the PRD system, according to one official.¹⁹ Another initiative in this direction is a new Management Accreditation Program, the approval of which is now being prepared and which will be mandatory for all members of staff who will be managing people in their roles.²⁰ Besides these, some optional management programmes have already been on offer for members of staff, including senior leadership, which are aimed at initiating discussions and creating common standards for how people are managed in the International Staff.

Central planning and management tools

NATO IS works with a corporate Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) system that integrates financial, procurement and some modules of HR in a single platform. Integration is currently underway to ensure, for example, that the PRD module integrates with other Talent Management modules. The PRD system is currently not integrated with wider planning and monitoring mechanisms. However, the organization states that the latter ensures the alignment of 'individual objectives with broader Organization objectives', which is secured by assessed individuals and their reporting officers defining objectives in such a way that they correspond to division and lower-level unit work plans (NATO 2018).

Changes and adaptations

Apart from the above-mentioned Management Accreditation Program that may help to standardize managerial competencies among middle and higher bureaucratic management staff, interviewees mentioned ongoing discussions about the integration of the PRD system with broader talent management (TM) initiatives. Most changes take a long time to prepare, as in-depth analysis and a strong case for the benefits of reforms needs to be made vis-à-vis member states. The interviews conducted with member state delegations and comments from interviewees in general indicate that member states are split on how much internal performance management mechanisms for senior leaders (and more generally) should be formalized and extended. Some countries, including Denmark, the UK, and Germany, are pushing for more systematic arrangements in performance reporting as part of a wider process of 'institutional adaptation' in light of the new conflict in Ukraine and plans to deter Russian actions in Eastern Europe. They are concerned with improving and ensuring NATO's ability to carry out deployments, crisis management, and other actions effectively and in real time. Other countries prefer to rely on existing decision-making mechanisms while more or less trusting that the execution of actions will work according to established hierarchy of command mechanisms. However, both of these positions reveal a preoccupation with overall organizational delivery, rather than individual managerial or leadership competency.

¹⁹ Senior Official, Human Resources, Executive Management Division, Phone Interview, 08 May 2018.

²⁰ Ibid.

Overall, senior leadership performance management within NATO focuses on the organization's delivery against stated objectives, rather than the skills and leadership of particular senior individuals to manage, motivate, and develop staff or efficiently run the office or division for which they are responsible. In addition, there are no plans to reform NATO senior leadership mechanisms towards more specific accountability and performance management. This is partly because some delegations prefer the informal spaces for political negotiation that the absence of formal senior leadership performance management mechanisms allows, as it affords them greater control than they would have if mechanisms were more formalized. It is also partly because of an accepted wisdom that senior leadership, in light of the importance of their office and the expectations directed towards them, have to 'perform anyways'.²¹ In the latter vein, one interviewee argued that ASGs have such intensive work schedules that making them comply with additional performance appraisal processes is unfeasible.²²

One the whole, however, interviewees did not subscribe to this point of view and argued that senior level staff should be subjected to more scrutiny²³ and that exempting ASGs from the PRD exercise was not beneficial for their performance overall.²⁴ One official suggested that the rule barring DASGs from running for ASG office should be abandoned in order to enable the rise of talented managers into the political leadership.²⁵ It appears, however, that the rule will stay in place given member states' desire to retain maximum control over the appointment process and to avoid additional competition from candidates from within the NATO bureaucracy. In a similar vein, the additional regulation and formalization of senior leaders' performance management at NATO would come at the cost of the Secretary-General's and member states' control over appointment and contract extension of senior leaders. It is thus unlikely to occur unless a critical mass of member states regarded this as a more effective or necessary means of governance.

4.2 European Union

In the European Commission (see 3.3 for explanation of sub-case selection), we interviewed 12 individuals from the Directorate-General (DG) of Human Resources and Security, DG International Development Cooperation, and the DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations between 16 April and 03 July 2018. The document analysis included the respective DGs' four-year strategic plans, annual management plans, and annual activity reports (see explanation below); documents detailing HR policies on senior officials and middle management²⁶; as well as unpublished documents providing further details on performance management, including performance evaluation forms.

Senior political leadership

Similar to Assistant Secretaries-General in NATO or the UN (see below), the position of European Commissioner is a political role, which means that questions about management skills are usually sidelined. Commissioners are proposed for appointment by their member states, and then go through a recruitment process that includes hearings in Parliament and written questions. They are subsequently not subject to the Commission's performance appraisal system. However, there is an annual discharge procedure, where the Budget Committee of Parliament invites individual Commissioners to conversations or hearings that focus primarily on their use of funds in their respective DG, but also on other matters that, according to one senior official, enable some *ex-post* qualitative assessment of the Commissioners' work.²⁷ Commissioners report directly to the President, who, together with the four Vice-Presidents, steers the overall work of the College of Commissioners and the shaping of the policy of the Commission. This process is to an extent public. At the beginning of his current term of office in 2014, President Juncker issued so-called mission

²¹ Senior International Staff, 27 February 2018.

²² Ibid.

²³ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018.

²⁴ Senior Official, Human Resources, Executive Management Division, Phone Interview, 08 May 2018.

²⁵ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018.

²⁶ For an overview, see European Commission, n.d.

²⁷ Senior Official, Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, Phone Interview, 03 July 2018.

letters to each Commissioner, who in turn devised four-year strategic plans and annual work programmes, the fulfilment of which is tracked in Annual Activity Reports (see central planning and management tools for more details). A senior official concluded that this ‘internal controlling [and] more transparent and more co-ordinated approach’ has helped the Commission to overcome some of the incoherencies created by a more decentralized way of planning and tracking activities.²⁸

There are further reporting duties to which the DGs and Commissioners are subject, for instance vis-à-vis the European Parliament or the College. The initiative to introduce and implement a women’s quota, for instance, required reporting towards the College on a quarterly basis, and reports about the geographic balance of Commission staff are made every three years. A number of reporting duties also emanate from the EU treaties, such as, for example, an in-depth report on disciplinary proceedings and harassment in the Commission delivered by the Commissioner for HR & Security, Guenther Oettinger, in early 2018. These reports analyse specific issues in depth while other policy or white papers analyse and prepare policies in different areas.

Similar to the performance management and accountability mechanisms of the top leadership in the other IOs, there are no clearly defined rules or mechanisms for dealing with insufficient or non-fulfilment of such duties, which are also partly subject to the prioritization of the Commissioners and Directorates-General themselves. The President’s ability to withdraw trust from individual Commissioners can be seen as a control mechanism, but is once again subject to informal criteria. Within the Directorates-General, the Head of Cabinet of each Commissioner performs an internal control and administrative function, as they examine the Commissioner’s budget for travel costs and other expenses.²⁹ In terms of formal and publicly visible mechanisms, the communication of strategies and annual work plans and tracking of the extent to which objectives are delivered, and especially reporting duties vis-à-vis the European Parliament, present a visible public accountability while corresponding mechanisms in the other three IOs are non-public.

Senior bureaucratic management

The performance of senior bureaucratic management in the Commission, i.e. Directors-General, Deputy Directors-General, and Directors, is appraised by the same performance appraisal system to which middle management and staff are subject. This includes an annual cycle with objective setting, a mid-point review and self-assessment, and a final report at the end of year. However, for this level, there are distinct templates that include quantitative scales for the three components of ‘efficiency’ (0 to 10), ‘abilities’ (0 to 6), and ‘conduct’ (0 to 4).³⁰ These are aggregated into an overall rating ranging from 0 to 20, which is augmented with narrative components to justify the rating awarded. In this sense, the appraisal of senior managers is more disaggregated and differentiated than for middle management and ordinary staff (see below).

Middle management and ordinary staff

The performance appraisal of middle managers and ordinary staff consists of the same components of ‘efficiency’, ‘abilities’, and ‘conduct’, but these are only assessed in a narrative fashion and are divided into overall ratings of ‘satisfactory’ and ‘unsatisfactory’ only. This reflects the Commission’s ‘soft approach’ to performance management, which is supposed to provide the basis for a ‘constructive dialogue’ on areas for improvement for staff. These areas can be discussed separately from the appraisal report itself, but may also be included in it without affecting the staff member’s rating or diminishing promotion and career prospects. In 2012, this system replaced a points-based system that previously provided the basis for pro-

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Senior Official, DG HR & Security, Phone Interview, 08 June 2018.

³⁰ To be precise, these are the areas rated by the reporting officer, alongside the respective official’s ‘potential’ in terms of career development perspectives, mobility and higher postings. The self-assessment of the official includes the aspects of ‘achievements’, ‘personal development’, i.e. abilities and skills demonstrated, and ‘contribution to other activities’ of the Commission that lie beyond one’s individual work plan.

motion decisions. It had, however, led to distorted incentives, as appraisal exercises were sometimes abused in order to ensure the promotion of particular people, resulting in widespread tensions and conflicts, as well as a relatively high number of appeals against promotion decisions and appraisal reports.³¹ The 'softer' and more dialogue-oriented system has provided the basis for a 'social peace' according to one official³², who also stated that they can recommend the system to other multilateral organizations – though with the caveat that the Commission follows a career-based system, in which salary progression and promotion are relatively rapid in early career stages compared to other IOs.

Incentivizing framework

As a result of the separation of progression and promotion from performance management, the incentives linked to performance assessments are implicit if not altogether absent: performance records are generally considered in promotion exercises, but there is no set weighting of their importance vis-à-vis other factors. Another potential deterrent against underperformance are 'performance improvement plans', which, similar to other IOs, foresee a very intense interaction and tracking of the development of a staff member's work performance towards satisfactory levels and are thus generally perceived as something to be avoided. At the same time, one interviewee remarked that incentivizing and enforcement measures were not seen as very important, especially at the middle and more senior management levels: 'people have a very high intrinsic motivation working in the Commission, because, compared to the CV that we are requiring, our salaries are correct but they are in competition with sometimes much higher salaries and better conditions in the private, and even the public sector'.³³ Consequently, rather than control and tracking, people 'need much more personnel management, motivation, the right framework and engagement', the official argued.

Competency framework

The competencies that officials are supposed to demonstrate to achieve satisfactory appraisals are clearly defined within three pillars and are used for all staff levels. They include: 1) 'efficiency', meaning the ratio between efforts invested and results that an official delivers; 2) 'abilities', i.e. the skills, including language skills, technical knowledge, and command of software or other equipment that an official has demonstrated; and 3) 'conduct', i.e. whether and how an official demonstrated integrity and other core values of the EU. Furthermore, the DG HR & Security has developed a 'Competency framework for middle managers' that defines necessary skills and abilities that middle managers need to demonstrate in light of the fact that they are directly responsible for the highest number of staff, while Directors or higher-level officials are only directly responsible for Heads of Unit and other direct subordinates.

Perhaps more than in the other organizations – and owing to the Commission's unique resource structure and portfolio of policy areas – the DG HR & Security, the Commission's central HR management unit, has in recent years undertaken comprehensive measures to ensure both compliance with and quality of the performance appraisal system on different levels and to strengthen other aspects of policies regarding human resources, organizational design and learning. For instance, new reporting officers are encouraged (although not obliged) to undertake training before conducting their first performance evaluation. The trainings focus on how to give critical feedback, which, as officials are aware, can be challenging in a multicultural organization like the EU, and on how to detect early signs of underperformance and deal with it if it does occur. Further discussion events and support services on performance management are focused on facilitating discussion and emphasizing the importance of collaboration between middle and senior managers early on, given the fact that any appeals or conflicts have to be dealt with by them. In this sense, human resource policies are geared towards fostering the inevitably 'very close working relationship' between

³¹ One middle manager in the Commission (18 April 2018) gave the following numbers: 'In the previous system, we had 20,000 appraisals and we had 4,000 appeals, because the appraisal was linked to the promotion. And now we are below a thousand – 200 appeals against appraisal decisions, i.e. a 0.1 rate, and 1,000 internal appeals against promotion decisions – which is a huge improvement in terms of administrative efficiency.'

³² Ibid.

³³ Middle Manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018.

middle and senior managers who are eventually, in the words of one senior official, 'assessed by the overall product they deliver'.³⁴

Central planning and management tools

The European Commission constitutes a case of a rather loose integration of PM and electronic planning and management tools. This is not least due to the fact that performance management in this institution is much more focused on competencies and skills than on outputs. Still, recent adjustments in these tools present a useful way of ensuring good communication and unifying the efforts of staff from the rank-and-file to the senior leadership level. The Commission has introduced so-called Management Plans that are devised on an annual basis and tracked through Annual Activity Reports and augmented by Strategic Plans setting out strategic priorities and activities of Directorates-General over four years of a term of office. Together with the Directorate-Generals' structure sheets which present the leadership of these entities down to the unit level, these plans and reports provide a useful means of orientation for members of staff, who can see how their unit feeds into the overall objectives of the Directorate-General and the Commission's work programme more generally. As these documents are all publicly available, they create a level of transparency that is not matched by the other IOs. In that sense, they also provide a substantive basis for the performance assessment of the Commission's senior management.³⁵

Changes and adaptations

Interviewees did not report any major activities relating to further changes and adaptations and only mentioned that central planning and monitoring systems were under observation as to their effectiveness and whether further adjustments are needed.

Senior leadership performance management in the Commission is carried out in the most publicly visible form compared to the other two IOs studied. This is likely linked to the EU's supranational nature and the accountability that senior officials at the Commission need to maintain vis-à-vis member states and their constituencies. As indicated above, however, the parliamentary hearings that Commissioners, as well as Presidents and Vice-Presidents, undergo as part of their election procedure and in the annual discharge procedure (for Commissioners only) cannot be seen as performance management in the classical sense. Instead, they merely present an accountability mechanism for these individuals as representatives of their respective Directorates-General. The overall accountability framework of these leaders is thus technically fairly similar to the one faced by political-level leaders in the other organizations, even though they are more exposed to the public. The senior bureaucratic management is, like their counterparts in NATO, subject to the same performance appraisal system as other members of staff – though as noted it is somewhat more disaggregated and quantitative. Still, as in the other organizations, the question remains as to whether and how a more comprehensive mechanism, e.g. with 'upward feedback' elements, could be more appropriate for assessing the performance of the highest-level managers.

4.3 United Nations

In our case study on the UN, we interviewed 19 individuals from the UN Secretariat, the UN Office in Geneva, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Department of Field Services (DFS), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and Specialized Agencies (see 3.3 for an explanation of sub-case selection). We have also analyzed official documents such as regulations, senior leader guidebooks, and non-public templates for senior leader performance management.

³⁴ Senior Official, DG HR & Security, Phone Interview, 08 June 2018.

³⁵ Middle Manager, DG HR & Security, Phone Interview, 25 April 2018.

Senior political leadership

Performance management of senior level managers (ASG, USG, SRSG) is conducted through 'Senior Management Compacts.' These are composed of, first, a combination of programmatic objectives and managerial targets in the form of narrative components and target indicators, and second, short narrative components explaining the individual's contribution to the achievement of objectives, diversity, and the broader interests of the UN and on how they demonstrate effective leadership. In this sense, the compacts are largely an exercise in performance management and are geared to Department-, Office- or Mission-level assessment, with only a minority of elements focusing on the appraisal of the individual senior leader's performance.

Box 1: Key components of senior manager compacts in 2018³⁶

Examples for target indicators are indicative and vary over time and across Departments.

A: Achieving Objectives and High-Quality Results:

- 1) five key objectives for the respective Department or Office;
- 2) senior managers' contribution to the attainment of the key objectives stated;
- 3) how senior managers intend to serve as effective leaders (using UN core values);
- 4) how they contribute to the Secretary-General's reform agenda, e.g.

B: Compliance with new standards, such as in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment

C: Responsible Stewardship of Resources: Objectives in financial and human resource management

D: Diversity: Gender and geographical diversity targets in hiring and promotion

E: Implementation of Oversight Body Recommendations: Anti-money laundering or anti-fraud measures

F: Contribution to the Broader Interests of the United Nations: Standard declaration that senior manager will actively engage in role model functions and advocacy of UN values & policies, promotion of UN image, commitment to advancing organization's overall goals

The compacts are usually drafted, agreed, and signed at the beginning of an annual cycle and their fulfilment is assessed at the end of the cycle by the Office of the USG for Management or the Office of the Chief of Staff in DPKO/DFS or the Office of the Chief of Staff in the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), depending on whether the senior manager is located at headquarters or in a peacekeeping or special political mission. The owners of different target indicators (e.g. on resource use or diversity) provide data on the performance of a given Department/Mission in their respective area. After the compact assessments are negotiated and concluded on the office level, they are signed by the respective senior leaders and forwarded to the Management Performance Board for review, and the results are ultimately shared with the Secretary-General.³⁷ Apart from this, there is no formal follow-up mechanism to the compacts and the 'Essential guidebook for senior leaders' merely states that the Secretary-General 'will take appropriate action, as necessary'. A specific sub-case in this category are Deputy SRSGs, who also complete compacts, which feed into their respective superior SRSG's compacts, but these 'sub-compacts' are not subject to the same procedures as described above and instead are merely managed and tracked within Departments or Missions.

No interviewees reported being aware of any instances where the insufficient fulfilment of compacts led to career repercussions or disciplinary action for senior leaders, at least not officially. On the contrary, some contended that the outcome of compact assessments is not formally linked to career decisions for senior

³⁶ Based on interview with Senior Management Analyst, UN Department of Management, New York, 22 May 2018; United Nations 2018; and interview with Senior Official, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Geneva, 14 May 2018.

³⁷ Senior Management Analyst, UN Department of Management, New York, 22 May 2018; Administrative Officer, OHCHR, Geneva, 15 May 2018.

leaders, such as contract extension or re-appointment after they have completed their mandate.³⁸ Instead, it was indicated that such decisions often lack substantial foundation in terms of performance assessments or indicators on the respective senior leader, not least because of the political implications of such decisions.³⁹

Still, that the content and ratings in the compacts do matter is illustrated by the often lengthy discussions of appropriate phrasing in self-assessments at the end of the compact cycle, which are drafted by senior leaders' offices and reviewed by the office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management in the case of senior managers located at headquarters, field offices, or regional commissions. One person involved in the process explained that when they push back on certain formulations that did not appear fully accurate, they could be either negotiated on the office level or lead to the respective Under-Secretary-General contacting the Under-Secretary-General for Management to seek an agreement on a particular question.⁴⁰ An official dealing with compacts in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations confirmed that when the status of some objectives was 'red' – that is, not fulfilled – 'there is sometimes a bit of haggling over the results'.⁴¹ These accounts imply a kind of symbolic or psychological importance attached to senior manager compacts as an exercise where senior leaders clearly do not want to appear to be underperforming. At the same time, the two interviewees cited above also agreed that the mechanisms for following up on and imposing consequences in case of insufficient fulfilment of compacts or weak individual performance by senior leaders require improvement if performance management is to be more effective.

Senior bureaucratic management

Officials at the secondary senior level, i.e. Assistant Directors General, Deputy Directors General, and Directors at the D1 and D2 levels, are subject to the Electronic Performance Appraisal System (EPAS) that applies to all members of staff in the P and G categories, and they are thus assessed by their direct superiors and the respective ASG/USG/SRSG. Their appraisal is confidential and their performance mostly managed through general performance and work planning mechanisms, such as the compacts, which are cascaded down into Division work plans, as well as by other resource and management planning tools.

Middle management and ordinary staff and incentivizing framework

The EPAS system, by which staff from the G category up to D1 and D2 are appraised, evoked very divergent reactions among interviewees. Some said it was useful, but admitted that it cannot be effective on its own and must be augmented with elements such as skills training and career development and planning, which often depend on the initiative of the respective reporting officer or the assessed official themselves. A proportion of interviewees across offices and agencies also stated that they regarded the EPAS as rather ineffective because either their reporting officers or they themselves did not believe it was fit for purpose and they thus did not devote much time or attention to it.⁴² Yet others suggested that performance appraisal could be made more effective through incentives in the form of bonuses or a clearer link between performance appraisal and promotion exercises.⁴³ At the same time, incentivising measures such as the awarding of continuous contracts to staff who receive five consecutive 'very good' performance ratings, produced the unintended effect of staff being very preoccupied with their EPAS evaluations at the expense of other aspects of their work.⁴⁴

³⁸ For instance, Senior Official, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Skype Interview, 20 July 2018; Three Senior Officials, Department of Field Support, 23 May 2018.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Senior Management Analyst, UN Department of Management, 22 May 2018.

⁴¹ Senior Official, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Skype Interview, 20 July 2018.

⁴² For instance, Senior Official, OHCHR, Geneva, 17 May 2018; Administrative Officer, OHCHR, Geneva, 15 May 2018.

⁴³ For instance, Senior Official, Department of Field Support, 23 May 2018.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Competency framework

The performance of UN officials is assessed against a framework of core values and competencies, as well as managerial competencies, which are communicated as part of every staff member's induction. These are listed in table 2 below. As already described in table 1 above, in assessing officials' performance, their demonstration of the different values and competencies is rated with the four values 'Outstanding', 'Fully competent', 'Requires development', and 'Unsatisfactory'. In this sense, performance assessment at the UN Secretariat is set up in a way to provide comprehensive feedback, but still requires reporting officers to take the time and assess their subordinate officials' performance in such detail. Correspondingly, as remarked above, some team leaders, middle managers and higher-level officials perceive performance management exercises as burdensome and try to avoid going into too much detail.

Table 2: UN Core Values, Core Competencies and Managerial Competencies

Core Values	Core Competencies	Managerial Competencies
Integrity	Communication	Leadership
Professionalism	Teamwork	Vision
Respect for Diversity	Planning and Organization	Empowering Others
	Accountability	Building Trust
	Creativity	Managing Performance
	Client Orientation	Judgement/Decision-making
	Commitment to Continuous Learning	
	Technology Awareness	

(United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping and Field Support 2015: 146).

Central planning and management tools

As discussed above, senior manager compacts include a section on 'Responsible Stewardship of Resources' (E), in which the fulfilment of target values set in the electronic resource planning system called Umoja is tracked. Apart from this, links between Umoja and the Electronic Performance Appraisal System (EPAS) have neither been reported by interviewees nor identified in the document analysis. A secondary or implicit function of collective objective setting and tracking can in fact be seen in the application of senior manager compacts: as already stated, Deputy ASG, USGs, and SRSGs devise and sign their own personal 'sub-compacts' that feed into the compact of their respective superiors. Furthermore, the different objectives set for a given department, mission, or office are cascaded down into the various divisions, sections, and units that are involved in realizing the particular outcomes. However, the exactitude of this cascading process and the conscientiousness of the tracking of these broken-down objectives vary greatly across different UN entities, and interviewees did not report efforts to unify this mechanism. While the benefits of doing so may seem obvious, one senior official in the Office of Human Resources Management stated, 'I have an issue with over-institutionalizing things. [...] Let's separate systems from how people should normally interact. I would encourage officers to get together and talk about the coming year. ... [As far as the use of electronic planning tools is concerned] I would say it is something that should be optional. If you believe that your work would benefit from that kind of systematic review, fine, go ahead and do so. But it should not be seen ... as that notion of one-size-fits-all.'⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Senior Official, Office of Human Resources Management, 22 May 2018.

Changes and adaptations

With the current 'New Management Architecture' Reform, OHRM will introduce 360-degree feedback⁴⁶ on senior staff levels and possibly below.⁴⁷ Although the extent to which these changes will be implemented remains to be seen, they are relatively major compared to the recent history of performance management at the Secretariat. Correspondingly, changes in the compacts or EPAS are not envisaged so far, as the augmenting of personal self-reflection on competencies and development through the 360-degree review may complement the existing mechanisms in a sufficient manner. Some interviewees⁴⁸ emphasized that this extension of performance management – possibly in the form of additional 360-degree reviews⁴⁹ – should also be introduced for SRSGs. A parallel shift can be observed in some organizations' piloting of 'upward feedback' mechanisms (including in UN Specialized Agencies), i.e. confidential assessments from staff in the unit/team of the assessed senior official to provide additional information for reporting officers to include in the performance report. However, an effective implementation of such mechanisms seems to necessitate both a change to IO staff regulations and the agreement of all members of the governing body. Present discussions and initiatives in the IOs studied in this project remain a long way from such steps and thus make the prospects for more comprehensive senior leadership performance management unclear.

In conclusion, we note that the formal mechanism for managing senior political leaders' performance at the United Nations is the most comprehensive and rigorous, and, together with the EU Commissioners' public hearings in Parliament, the most visible, although the 'senior manager compacts' are only available in the organization's intranet. However, as indicated, the comprehensiveness and internal visibility of this mechanism also underscore its limitations. Specifically, officials handling compacts highlighted the often declaratory nature of the objectives set and self-assessments given, and the absence of clear enforcement mechanisms or consequences for senior leaders who do not perform sufficiently. Still, as we have indicated, the compacts at least create a symbolic or psychological form of accountability, which is apparent in the 'haggling' and negotiations around the degree of fulfilment of objectives and the narratives justifying them. Still, while some degree of importance is thus attributed to the exercise, the overall consensus among interviewees was that the component of performance management of the individual senior leader of a given compact needs to be further strengthened and focused more clearly on the competencies and skills demonstrated by the leader, instead of the merely narrative components that currently exist.

⁴⁶ 360-degree feedback refers to the gathering of feedback from subordinates, peers, and superordinate members of staff on a confidential and usually voluntary basis.

⁴⁷ The exact level is yet to be confirmed, but is likely to be the USG or ASG level.

⁴⁸ Three Senior Officials, Department of Field Support, 23 May 2018.

⁴⁹ For instance, Senior Official, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Skype Interview, 20 July 2018.

5 CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES

The data gathered from our three case studies have revealed a number of key cross-cutting issues and challenges. They are relevant for senior leadership performance management but also for the mechanisms and practices of performance management on other seniority levels. We address five key issues: 1) selection and (re-appointment) procedures; 2) the challenges of complex political contexts in external missions/offices; 3) diplomatic and conflict-avoiding culture often observed in IOs; 4) feedback and development measures for senior leaders; and 5) misconduct and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

5.1 Selection, appointment, and re-appointment of senior leaders

The procedures by which senior leaders are selected, appointed, and reappointed are of key importance for their performance, as they often determine the conditions and particular commitments under which they enter into office. Notably, selection and appointment at the highest levels were usually not brought up by interviewees, as these are accepted as highly politicized processes that are carried out through internal and informal negotiations between member states. One exception is the appointment procedure for candidates for the offices of EU Commissioner and Commission President, whose positions are scrutinized in hearings in the European Parliament. Similarly, the hearings of candidates for the UN Secretary-General and the recent public town hall meetings that were part of the ‘1 for 7 billion’ campaign not only serve to strengthen scrutiny of the candidates but also raise public awareness of the organization’s scope, potentials, and importance (1 for 7 Billion Campaign n.d.). As noted above, such mechanisms are of limited relevance for organizations like NATO given its relatively smaller size and more specific mandate. Nevertheless, the additional legitimizing effect of public hearings in collective decision-making bodies is generally worth some consideration, potentially for candidates for the offices of ASG and USG in the UN, and potentially senior leaders in NATO as well.

While interviewees generally did not discuss the selection and appointment of these positions in the UN Secretariat, some expressed concerns regarding the selection and appointment procedure for Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) (i.e. external representatives of the Secretariat) by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).⁵⁰ Similar to the above-mentioned finding that (non-) fulfilment of compacts has no consequence for A/USGs’ career prospects, they drew attention to the fact that performance appraisal records are not used when renewing contracts of SRSGs. The renewal of one-year contracts given to some SRSGs has become, according to interviewees, something of a standard practice. Furthermore, renewals are guided by the sentiment that being too open or critical can create political issues for missions/offices or destabilize the contexts in which they operate. In light of this, some officials suggested that ‘a more comprehensive appraisal process should be developed’ and should include, in addition to a streamlined monitoring mechanism based on compacts, a ‘complementary mechanism, such as a 360 appraisal, and the institutionalization of bi-annual discussions between the SRSGs and Heads of the lead departments (such as those conducted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with their Humanitarian Coordinators)’.⁵¹ This would also enable a more systematic integration of performance management data with the management of the pool of personnel from which SRSGs and other senior mission leaders are recruited. It was indicated that these two areas are currently relatively disconnected as well and therefore require navigation of the selection and (re-)appointment on other, possibly more informal criteria.⁵²

⁵⁰ The SRSG selection process usually includes an interview conducted by the lead department, which in turn recommends candidates to the SG. In addition, Departments have recently introduced scenario-based questions and intend to introduce leadership style questionnaires in an effort to strengthen assessment tools.

⁵¹ Three Senior Officials, Department of Field Support, E-mail correspondence, 16 July 2018.

⁵² Ibid.

The selection and appointment process for senior bureaucratic managers in all three organizations includes, in addition to the usual panel interviews, assessment exercises run by external companies, in which candidates have to prove their skills and abilities in simulations of everyday work situations. Compared to the political level leadership, which is largely exempt from such measures, this serves to set a high threshold for the profiles and experience of a senior manager. Whether the skills and competencies initially demanded in the selection process are then reviewed and scrutinized on a regular basis depends on the way in which performance management is carried out with these senior bureaucrats. As explained above, this is often individualized and strongly dependent on the respective reporting officer and may thus potentially be subject to large variation. The introduction of mandatory 360-degree feedback in the UN Secretariat, or similar 'upward' or 'bottom-up feedback' processes, presents a first step towards a performance assessment that is not only regular but also involves multiple points of view on whether and how senior managers still prove the competencies and skills necessary in their job, and in this sense a link between performance management and the quality assurance function of selection and appointment procedures.

Another point that interviewees raised is the need for a 'talent pipeline', that is, a supply of suitable candidates for leadership positions. A senior official in the Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources in the EU said the organization still needed a more systematic approach for 'finding, nurturing and fostering managers from the Head of Unit up to Director-General'. They continued: 'I think many managers are good experts in a specific field, let's say, fisheries or fisheries agreements, but they are not necessarily managers in the sense of leading teams, distributing work, or being genuine leaders. And if you have weaknesses on the unit level, then these are logically transported through to the top at some point.'⁵³ A solution to this challenge would be to further adopt a dedicated 'approach [to] finding and defining of young leaders', which could include training sessions, special seminars, and leadership courses that would nurture their managerial competencies and help re-balance the skill set of a 'bureaucracy [that] is too much specialized in subject matters and not in management'.⁵⁴ This could be extended to include the provision of feedback to unsuccessful internal candidates for leadership or managerial roles, so that they can prepare better for future opportunities and take a longer-term view of their career development.

5.2 Complex political contexts in external missions/offices or specific policy areas

Another central challenge to senior leadership performance management, both in individual and collective, organizational-level terms, is posed by the often volatile and fast-changing contexts in which IOs operate. This problem was particularly salient in the UN, and especially with regards to its peace operations. As performance is usually assessed and managed against objectives and target values set with a certain time horizon and with certain assumptions about the situation in a given context, changes to this situation can make the targets and objectives unreachable or altogether obsolete. As one senior official in the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations stated, these contexts are 'very fluid, very political, you have multiple actors so it blurs the line of responsibility and attributability of success'.⁵⁵ One way of taking into account such changes is to adjust the objectives; however, given that such objectives are usually set through political processes involving member states and other donors, this is often not feasible.

Furthermore, performance management is tailored to the skills that are necessary in such contexts, such as diplomatic skills required when interacting with national authorities and other key actors, or strategic knowledge necessary to orientate or adjust an office or mission's strategy, as well as any skills necessary for internal management.⁵⁶ This does not mean, however, that performance management becomes solely focused on the input side of the political processes in which UN representations are involved. As a senior official in a Delegation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated, objec-

⁵³ Senior Official, Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, Phone Interview, 03 July 2018.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Skype Interview, 20 July 2018.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

tives and target values for indicators in the political and policy landscape of the host country are still of key importance. For instance, while it is possible that changes to the dynamics in government or parliament or to the overall political climate reverse certain advances, concrete indicators such as the abolition of the death penalty or of implemented anti-torture measures are still of interest and therefore feature in the work programmes that OHCHCR's country delegations agree on and review on an annual basis.⁵⁷

There were fewer concerns about the attributability of success or failure to senior leaders in the other two organizations. This may be due to the fact that their senior leadership is not assessed through compacts, which are at least visible to an internal audience. To the extent that achievements and objectives are tracked through strategic results-based management tools, the adjustment of the latter by taking into account the changed environment has provided enough leeway so far. Still, it is worth noting that some officials reported disagreements with their superiors in discussing their performance and agreeing on a rating, precisely because changed circumstances prevented the delivery of initial targets. The EU's three performance appraisal components, i.e. 'conduct', 'abilities' and 'skills', go some way to taking on the challenge of acknowledging the efforts and inputs delivered by an official, and, similar to the UN's usage of core values and competencies in the performance management framework, present a good practice that could be modelled in other organizations. However, differentiating between individual performance and organizational performance remains a challenge for all organizations.

Finally, an important element in understanding performance management in external missions is the support offered to senior staff. The more useful and demand-driven such support is, the more likely senior managers are to be able to deal with the challenges they face when managing missions. A potentially useful practice is the 'Cooperation Days' co-organized by the European Commission's Directorate-Generals for International Cooperation and Development and for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. The cooperation days provide a platform for knowledge sharing among managers and trainings on leadership and other topics, such as intercultural working environments, and are undertaken back-to-back with the days both for headquarters and delegation staff.⁵⁸ A similar measure that is focused more on the leadership of delegations only are the annual meetings of Heads of Delegation (Missions) in Brussels, which, though costly, constitute a more appropriate way of aligning strategies and working approaches than the virtual trainings or mentoring that occur in some organizations. Finally, a two-and-a-half-week-long induction training is co-organised by the European Commission (DG DEVCO) and the EEAS every year for newly appointed Heads of Delegation. Such measures point to the importance of training and feedback activities, which are further examined below.

5.3 From cultures of diplomacy and conflict avoidance to a culture of critical feedback

A third cross-cutting issue that affects how performance management systems can function effectively is the culture of diplomacy and intercultural politeness in IOs, which has been raised by a number of scholars (Hochschild 2010, Moodian 2008). Both in the wider literature and in interviews during our study, it appears that people's efforts to respect other cultures and to not be seen as criticizing behaviour that is culturally specific can lead to the avoidance of certain kinds of feedback and criticism altogether. Such 'conflict avoidance' highlights the importance of perceptions in senior leadership performance management and has important implications for its effectiveness. While such cultural sensitivity is of course an important element of most IOs' values, one that helps to maintain mutually respectful and harmonic relations among staff, people's enactment of this intercultural politeness can also hamper or preclude honest feedback that could enable senior leaders to further develop their interaction, communication, and management skills. This problem exists equally at other levels, and constitutes a key element of the organizational culture in which performance management takes place in IOs.

⁵⁷ Phone interview, 18 May 2018.

⁵⁸ Deputy Head of Unit, DG International Cooperation and Development, 17 April 2018.

In NATO, for instance, one senior official stated that the working environment at NATO IS is characterized by a 'dilutive diplomatic culture', where people shy away from addressing deficits and 'everything is being encoded or expressed in commonplace formulations, as it is done in the political space of NATO'.⁵⁹ A senior official in the Human Resources section concurred, saying that the culture of conflict avoidance should gradually be replaced with a culture of conflict management, in which disagreements and the advantages and disadvantages of different leadership and management styles and general approaches to work should be discussed in an open and controlled manner.⁶⁰ Instead, the culture of conflict avoidance and political correctness partly paralyse teams from dealing with challenges in a constructive manner, as criticisms and controversial arguments are not explicated or even avoided. The effect of cultural belonging on performance management practices was also mentioned by another two senior officials in Human Resources, who observed that the military background of some members of the International Staff made them carry out performance management in a dutiful manner but also made them highly regard values of hierarchy and obedience.⁶¹ Such individuals would then accept in a relatively straightforward manner what their higher superiors told them, rather than seeking open and potentially controversial discussions.

Interviews at the European Commission's DG HR & Security revealed that the intercultural dynamics of the EU bureaucracy play a significant role in performance management as well. A mid-level manager reported that the main focus of the trainings carried out for new reporting officers are very much focused on 'how to give critical feedback, which can be challenging in a multicultural organization like ours'.⁶² They continued:

Our work really is to teach managers to give, both in the appraisal dialogue and in daily work, critical feedback without hurting people, which is not always easy in our intercultural context. We try to give them phrases for the appraisal report, which help to express where people can improve, without diminishing the chances of promotion or writing something overly negative.⁶³

In this sense, apart from trying to encourage officers to overcome an all too cautious stance on critical feedback, the DG also attempts to shape a common language to address different levels of performance quality. This does not entail a complete standardization of the Commission's largely narrative performance management templates, however. As the same interviewee explained, 'how you call it is secondary as long as you can prove your point. If you begin to tell these 2,000 managers, "no, that's a standard phrase and nothing else!", that doesn't work.' One senior official further emphasized the importance of the content and the self-reflective function of performance assessment discussions: 'The appraisal procedure as we have it now, is also part of the dialogue, that is, of this constructive dialogue, the task of the manager on whatever level, to help people to self-assess themselves correctly [...]'.⁶⁴ Still, the impact of the specific language used in providing feedback is clearly a sensitive issue, and one that poses a particular challenge to ensuring that feedback is critical and constructive.

At the same time, awareness of cultural sensitivities and careful use of language can also *help* to create a culture of critical feedback. The 'social peace' mentioned previously is easier to create when performance management is undertaken in a narrative fashion, rather than purely based on quantifiable targets and indicators. The official quoted earlier noted that the European Commission's previous points-based system, used until 2004, 'was very conflictive'.⁶⁵ They went on, 'If you nail it down too much on points and standards you will put people in a straitjacket, and performance management will be meaningless'. This shows how the incentivizing or enforcement mechanisms tied to performance management and discussed in the previous section are a key factor driving dynamics around the 'diplomatic dilution' and conflict avoidance within performance management. The more significant the consequences of potential negative feedback, the more uncomfortable it becomes for officials to express them, and the more likely are they to avoid them and seek refuge in the aforementioned 'commonplace' and diplomatic formulations.

⁵⁹ 01 March 2018.

⁶⁰ Phone Interview, 08 May 2018.

⁶¹ 28 February 2018.

⁶² Middle Manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Senior Official, Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, Phone Interview, 03 July 2018.

⁶⁵ Middle Manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018.

The significance of intercultural dynamics and their bearing on performance management and critical feedback (or the absence thereof) was also acknowledged by interviewees in the UN. One senior official in the Office of Human Resources Management affirmed that in carrying out measures such as mandatory training courses ‘it becomes important to make sure everybody embraces the philosophy we have with regards to [particular] things, [especially] when you are dealing with our world of 193 different cultures.’⁶⁶ Interviewees at OHCHR pointed out that processes of intercultural learning and inevitable misunderstandings occurring in their course complicate not only performance management as such⁶⁷ but also, quite simply, everyday interactions both on the job and beyond.⁶⁸ An important aspect is the intersection of intercultural dynamics with conceptions of hierarchy. For instance, in regard to the introduction of 360-degree feedback, the formerly mentioned senior official explained that a very cautious approach towards introducing new HR policies is taken and includes identifying and testing innovations through pilots and awareness-raising among member states before making the actual proposals for change.

Because of course we have 193 different cultures in the United Nations, and so if you suddenly start telling somebody, ‘Oh by the way, your direct reporting officers are always going to have a say’, there will be an uproar. So, key to that is awareness raising [...], and followed by awareness is interest, that we get acceptance, you know that [is the] continuum of change.⁶⁹

A further challenge to such change processes is the fact that a number of external appointees join the UN directly from their national foreign service. Some of them have commented on the substantial differences between the way performance management is conducted within their diplomatic service and the light appraisal tools and mechanisms used within the UN system.⁷⁰ This variety of professional backgrounds makes it clear how the development of a culture of critical feedback is not only a matter of effectively dealing with the challenges of intercultural dynamics and (mis-) understandings, but also one of setting the right expectations and attitudes on all levels of staff, so that an open and (self-) critical approach is embraced. The use of ‘bottom-up’ and ‘upward feedback’ processes may constitute a potentially effective way of holding senior leaders to account for how they do performance management with subordinate members of staff. Such mechanisms can help to demonstrate that feedback need not only feed into an official’s performance assessment report but can also create internal awareness as to what an organization expects of its senior leadership.

As a critical counter-part to the culture of avoidance, developing a culture of modern and critical leadership, which puts at its centre activities like self-reflection, taking on tough conversations, interacting and communicating with staff and colleagues in any type of situation, and being a role model may also be a promising remedy. However, practical experiences in many organizations show that even where models or competency frameworks propagating such skills and values are in place, it does not guarantee that such a culture will indeed take root. Accordingly, organizations need to not only encourage the development of such a leadership culture, but also design and implement concrete measures for leadership, responsibility, and openness to be mainstreamed into the daily business of the organization, and for diplomatic and diluted ways of dealing with performance issues to be overcome.

5.4 Feedback and development measures for senior leaders

The entry points for dealing with the culture of conflict avoidance discussed above lead us to consider feedback and development measures that might help to further improve senior leaders’ capacities and competencies to deliver sound performance in challenging environments. We discuss three tools that have

⁶⁶ 22 May 2018.

⁶⁷ Administrative Officer, Geneva, 15 May 2018.

⁶⁸ One senior official told an anecdote about the irritation caused by the fact that in some Scandinavian cultures it is seen as appropriate to only accept the third invitation for dinner by a colleague but to decline the first two. Senior Official, OHCHR, Geneva, 16 May 2018.

⁶⁹ Senior Official, Office of Human Resources Management, 22 May 2018.

⁷⁰ Three Senior Officials, Department of Field Support, 23 May 2018.

been used in identifying development needs and providing feedback to senior leaders – 360-degree reviews, upward feedback, and staff surveys. We also consider some of the challenges that the three IOs have encountered in carrying out such measures and trying to further develop the skills and competencies of senior leaders.

As indicated, there exist few mechanisms for senior leadership in IOs to receive constructive feedback regarding their individual managerial competencies. However, recent pilot exercises in several organizations have attempted to address this. The first is the so-called 360-degree review, which, as described, entails an exercise in which a member of staff (on any level) receives feedback from subordinates, peers, and superiors, as well as from clients or other actors who interact with that person. This exercise is similar to performance management in that the feedback given to a staff member assesses their actions, performance and, demonstrated skills and competencies against the expectations and standards to which they are subject. The key difference repeatedly emphasized by HR experts is that 360 degree reviews are normally used as a development tool only, meaning that the member of staff undertaking the exercise receives the feedback and then decides whether and how they accommodate the encouragements, criticisms, and suggestions from their colleagues. Additionally, it is important to note that many HR experts insisted that talent development and performance management should be kept decidedly separate.⁷¹

A different approach involves augmenting performance management with the inclusion of upward feedback from team or division members, which some organizations have introduced on a pilot basis. However, upward feedback systems leave ambiguous whether and how the feedback feeds into the actual report of a given manager, and different reporting or HR officers may approach this differently. Where upward feedback is used simply to corroborate the main report this may be uncontroversial, but where the assessments are contradictory, the inclusion of criticism may be viewed as constituting an unfair penalty against an official, particularly if it is done at the discretion of a single individual. Where instead upward feedback is openly shared, serious concerns about anonymity may arise.

Just how delicate an issue it is to gather feedback from staff to their superiors is further illustrated by the fact that the conceptualization and development of these ‘bottom-up’ feedback pilots took several years. One official in the European Commission characterized the cautiousness towards exposing managers to the criticisms of staff as follows:

360-degree reviews are only used as a development tool. So, we are not proposing that at some point [my subordinate] will evaluate me and that will be my performance rating. He will maybe at some point give his opinion, how I should develop as a manager, but it's really different. And I think that I can say, it's probably not palatable at this stage for senior managers in the Commission to say, 'I am evaluated formally by my Heads of Unit', that's not where we are.⁷²

Still, most organizations seem to understand that there is value in gathering and transmitting feedback from subordinates to senior level managers. The UN Secretariat's introduction of 360-degree reviews is based upon expected benefits in terms of identifying underperformance and providing additional support to leadership:

In the last two or three years or so we have had more discussions on introducing 360-degree feedback for senior officials. It has been piloted in a few offices and this year we are going to roll it out comprehensively as tool that will be used for the senior most managers in the house. [...] We envisaged [...] that it is going to be done on a regular basis for all staff. And on the senior level, depending on what results we have, we plan to have, coupled with that, some executive coaching for senior people. So that we can put them on the right course if we find that there is something that is lacking in their portfolio. Now, that being said, I think it should be seen as a standard for all the other levels in the hierarchy. So, if I have a junior officer working for me and I see the results from the 360-degree re-

⁷¹ For instance, middle manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018.

⁷² Middle manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018.

view are relatively negative, you need to do some course correction, you need to put that person on the right path.⁷³

This pathway for future HR policy in the UN Secretariat clearly illustrates the interrelatedness of talent development and performance management processes, despite the insistence by some that they should remain separate, and how a systematic and bold approach in the former area is likely to lead to more rigorous and effective mechanisms in the latter.

Another tool that merits consideration and that presents to some extent a logical continuation of the more personal performance management mechanisms is staff satisfaction surveys. These can help HR or other central units gauge the staff body's assessment of the working environment in a given IO and thereby corroborate, at least partly, the performance assessments of senior leaders. While these surveys require significant effort and resources to carry out and are thus often undertaken only biennially, they can yield important and decisive data about staff perceptions of leadership and management. A senior official in the European Commission indicated that impressions from staff surveys are used to triangulate the performance assessments of particular Directors-General or lower-level Directors.⁷⁴ 'The DG Human Resources does have a lot of disaggregated analyses from these staff surveys, [so] that you can see what is the climate like in a DG, what is the workload', explained the official.⁷⁵ Another middle manager confirmed that, given that the staff surveys yield disaggregated data down to the Directorate level, it creates additional accountability and sets a basis for follow-up measures to improve working conditions, and thus, ultimately, people's performance.⁷⁶

Staff surveys are also used in the other two IOs. At the UN, surveys are conducted both by the Chief Executives Board (CEB)⁷⁷ as well as by the staff union. The most recent 'Staff Engagement Survey' received a response rate of 39 per cent (14,622 individuals) among staff of included entities and it included important questions as to the effectiveness of senior leadership communication and readiness to implement best practices (Central Executives Board 2018: 11-12). The staff association survey, which is the first of its kind, received a ten per cent response rate (ca. 4,000 individuals) of staff with all contract types (hence different base population numbers). It is especially remarkable for the compilation of 'comments by department and mission', which very openly address issues such as insufficient skills and competencies among leadership or abuse (United Nations Staff Coordination Council 2017: 5, 37 ff.). While such comments are not the most reliable source for investigating such issues, the very fact that they are raised can be seen as a starting point for attempts to improve the internal working and overall performance of the respective entities.

At NATO, staff surveys are also carried out by the staff association on a biennial basis. The last survey from 2016 is based on 540 responses, which constituted about a quarter of the headquarters population at that time (NATO 2016: 2). With the substantive amounts of data they gather over time, staff surveys present a useful source of information on internal challenges and developments in IOs, which can be explored in future research.

While these feedback and development mechanisms present a wealth of opportunities for improving senior leaders' competencies and performance, the key barrier for realizing this potential is the difficulty of integrating these tools, and related measures such as training or extra planning sessions, into the operative everyday of senior leaders. In the UN, for example, interviewees told us that carrying out 360-degree review exercises has met some resistance, based at least partly on the implications of such exercises for the standing and perception of the authority of the managers concerned. Another issue pointed out by an interviewee at NATO is the missing uptake of training and development opportunities by senior bureaucratic

⁷³ Senior Official, Office of Human Resources Management, New York, 22 May 2018.

⁷⁴ Senior Official, Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, Phone Interview, 03 July 2018.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Middle Manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018.

⁷⁷ It comprises all heads of all departments in the Secretariat, and heads of Special Agencies, Funds, Programmes and related Organizations such as the WTO or IAEA. Its purpose is to provide 'broad guidance, coordination and strategic direction for the system as a whole in the areas under the responsibility of executive heads.' See United Nations System 2016.

managers and senior political leaders.⁷⁸ The same interviewee, similar to officials at the UN⁷⁹, indicated that senior political leaders in particular did not consider it necessary to improve their managerial skills or organizational knowledge, as they often relied on their back-office staff or Deputies to manage affairs while they focused on policymaking and their good offices role. A similar impression emerges from interviewees with European Commission officials, who indicated that differences in the activity level and overall performance of different Commissioners are more or less obvious but do not usually lead to training or strategy reconsideration measures.⁸⁰ Another trend in this realm is that negative results in staff surveys lead to measures for improvement of working conditions in a DG – as they might in a specific UN entity – and are thus sometimes approached in a collective manner. In this sense, as with the senior manager compacts at the UN, the general limitation of staff surveys as a feedback instrument is that their results are often projected onto an entity as a whole, and therefore incur reactions and measures conceived and implemented by that entity rather than the respective senior political leader or group of senior bureaucratic managers.

⁷⁸ Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018.

⁷⁹ Three Senior Officials, Department of Field Support, 23 May 2018.

⁸⁰ Senior Official, Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, Phone Interview, 03 July 2018.

6 BEST PRACTICES

On the basis of the descriptive comparison of the three IOs in Section 4 and discussion of cross-cutting challenges in Section 5, we have developed a list of emerging best practices. A number of caveats apply here. It is important to note that, as mentioned throughout this report, some of these findings apply only to some of our case study organizations and/or apply to differing degrees in different organizations. Furthermore, while the full effect of these practices remains to be seen, as several are only at the pilot stage in the organizations we have studied, they merit closer scrutiny, both in these organizations and for application in other ones. Indeed, we do not suggest that the application of these measures will automatically lead to an improvement of senior leadership performance management and related processes in all organizations. On the contrary, what is a beneficial practice in one organization may not work at all or even be counter-productive in another one. However, through our mapping exercise, the following practices appeared to be either working well or have promise in at least one organization, and therefore it may be useful for other organizations to consider them. The provision of such information is a key objective of this study.

1. Setting expectations from the outset

A key ingredient for successful senior leadership performance management is to clearly set the expectations towards this population from the outset of their tenure. If the terms of reference of a senior leader's appointment are unclear or diverge among different parties, then this will almost always lead to misunderstandings and contestations around what senior leaders should and should not do. This also, importantly, concerns the extent and quality of performance management and wider accountability mechanisms they should be subject to.

While in the European Commission parliamentary hearings ahead of Commissioners' appointments create a degree of public visibility and scrutiny as to the candidates' knowledge and competencies, similar mechanisms in the other IOs are not publicized and thus limited to an internal scrutiny function to the extent that they exist. Hearings for Secretary-General candidates at the United Nations seem to fulfil a similar function of creating scrutiny as well as legitimacy. On the senior bureaucratic management level, expectations are often set in a more straightforward manner as shortlisted IOs organizations.

On a more conceptual level, expectations need to also be managed, however, as to what a strong performance management system for senior leaders in IOs can achieve. This population is often subject to directives and requirements from multiple actors and audiences who have conflicting expectations and whose relational constellations may change over time. In this sense, a certain degree of separation between the work of a senior leader, the performance that may be secured through certain systems, and the influence of the external environment on a senior leader's ability to deliver their goals is important.

2. Importance of enforcement and incentivizing mechanisms

The previous point leads directly to the question of how the expectations and requirements of senior leaders' competencies and overall performance are measured once they have commenced their term of office. In this regard, mechanisms for enforcing compliance with performance and other behavioural and ethical frameworks are of key importance. Both on the political leadership and senior bureaucratic management level, these mechanisms are relatively weak across all three IOs. Only in very rare instances are senior officials dismissed or reprimanded for the failure to meet performance criteria. Instead, many organizations rely on the limited duration of senior level leaders' contracts and the decision over their extension or non-extension at the end of that period. However, as our analysis has indicated, while this may create some pressure on senior leaders to deliver good performance, the absence of clear rules as to the conditions of contract extension diminishes this accountability effect and may, on the contrary, lead to controversies around such decisions. This is not to suggest that senior leaders do not strive for excellent performance anyway. But the relatively loose link between the results of senior leader assessments and their career prospects does point to the lack of enforcement mechanisms. Of course, the analysis of performance

management mechanisms and practices on middle management and lower staff levels also showed that linking performance management too strongly to incentives such as salary increments, contract extension, or promotion can also have the counter-intuitive effect that officials are overly focused on the assessment of their work rather than the work process itself.

3. Tackle avoidance of honest assessment and nurture culture of critical feedback

One precondition for effective performance management on the senior level, as well as all other staff levels, is to overcome the culture of avoidance of honest and open assessments and potential conflict. As our analysis showed, reaching such a state is especially challenging where intercultural sensitivities, which are highly valued in IOs, come into play. The situation can be even more challenging when performance management is linked to incentivizing measures such as advancement in salary increments or promotion prospects. Transforming the issuing of critical feedback into a constructive dialogue where individuals can ask for particular forms of support to facilitate their performance could help to diminish these challenges. Although some organizations, such as the European Commission, have partly succeeded in fostering such a constructive dialogue, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations of this approach in an environment that is characterized by highly competitive individual attitudes and high expectations both from internal stakeholders and the wider public.

4. Introduce extensions and changes on a pilot and non-consequential basis

Given the challenges and resistance against more extensive and publicly visible performance management mechanisms, the previous practice is important to bear in mind when considering the introduction of changes and reforms to performance management. The introduction of 360-degree reviews and other similar 'upward feedback' mechanisms are likely to be most effective when they are introduced on a normative-operative level, in the form of pilots that do not affect the standard procedure for performance management, at least not immediately. The effect of such innovations and adjustments on the operative level may be limited, but it will nevertheless have a symbolic and perceptive influence on the way that senior managers perceive their work and their responsibilities vis-à-vis subordinates and the wider organization. Whether and how such piloted changes subsequently translate into legislative changes to the performance management framework of IOs is admittedly uncertain, but the introduction of 360-degree reviews for staff at the UN Secretariat in a similar, gradual manner may provide a useful 'testing' of such mechanisms. Furthermore, a common denominator of HR experts' views on this issue is that keeping changes below the level of legal adaptations enables a much more flexible and adaptable approach to managing performance, which can be foregone if changes are enshrined in staff regulations and cannot be easily abandoned when proving unproductive.

5. Clearly separate individual from organizational/entity-level performance

As noted throughout this report, there is often a blurring between individual performance and organizational delivery at the most senior levels. While there were diverging points of view on this in the UN, the majority of interviewees agreed that the personal responsibilities and demonstration of values and skills of senior leaders need to be clearly distinguishable, and including them into compacts that at the same time assess the overall performance of an individual leader's entity is not necessarily productive. This impression also emerged in the other organizations, where the primary role of senior leaders as representatives of their respective Directorates-General, Directorates, or Divisions appears to render secondary the extent to which their own performance affects these entities' performance. Some study participants posited that such accountability of senior leaders for the performance of their respective entity needs to be measured as objectively as possible through organizational performance management systems. These seem to be in various stages of emergence and development in IOs, which often have a number of output and impact measurement systems, but do not always use tangible and quantitative data in them. That said, a large number of interviewees across organizations stated that they found the accountability and scrutiny mechanism for senior political leaders that are currently in place, i.e. compacts and Parliamentary hearing procedures which rely a good deal on narrative components, to be sufficient.

6. Find the right balance between qualitative and quantitative components

The IO officials dealing with compacts or other senior leadership performance management tools pointed out that while quantitative indicators and statistics can never tell the whole story, an over-reliance on narrative components can render performance management a declaratory and superficial exercise. In this sense, it appears reasonable to develop indicators and set concrete targets in working areas where reliable data and statistics are available, while narrative components and qualitative elements can be a helpful way to augment the information provided by quantitative components of performance management. Particularly in the wake of technological change and the emergence of 'big data' methodologies, new opportunities emerge for IOs to better substantiate the impact and the degree of achievement of their targets on the ground. That said, we should be cautious of an over-reliance on quantitative data, and the conceptualization and utilization of such data must be considered and weighted against other types and sources of data.

7. Set the necessary incentives and preconditions

Senior leaders are often accustomed to adapting to and operating within the overall constraints and incentive frameworks set by a given organization and its top leadership (as well as governing bodies and member states). This incurs the risk that senior leaders may not be ready to go out of their way to signal and take up, let alone proactively prevent fundamental problems and challenges such as in recent cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and harassment. Measures and mechanisms that are put in place require constant updating and adjustment to the changing realities and environments faced by IOs. Frameworks for performance management and the incentives and constraints faced by senior leaders need to take this into account, for instance by reflecting recent challenges and actions undertaken to deal with them in performance management templates.

7 REMAINING QUESTIONS

In addition to the best practices discussed above, we have identified a number of key questions surrounding performance management for senior leaders in IOs. These questions lie at the heart of senior leadership performance management and the governance and self-legitimation of such entities more generally. They therefore merit internal discussion within the organizations as well as attention in future research.

1. To what extent should political level leadership be exempt from systematic performance management mechanisms?

As our analysis has shown, the fact that senior leaders' appointments and contract extensions are determined by political decision-making and negotiation processes between member states appears to create a relatively high threshold for the introduction of systematic and (internally) visible performance management procedures for this population. The fact that they are subject to a different scrutiny mechanism than other staff, and that little is known about what it looks like or whether it really constitutes a form of scrutiny at all, can create diverging interests, agendas or, potentially divisive dynamics between senior and mid-level or junior staff.

2. How transparent and publicly visible should senior leadership performance management be?

The points discussed in regards to the previous question do not necessarily lead to the conclusion, however, that full transparency and public visibility are always good and the only means to carry out good senior leadership performance management. Our analysis of existing mechanisms for performance management and related accountability and scrutiny mechanisms at the UN Secretariat and European Commission has shown that the availability of compacts for an internal staff audience or the public exposure of parliamentary hearings do not always lead to the most detailed and objective checks and balances for senior leaders. On the contrary, the symbolic importance and psychological pressure associated with such exposed discussions often leads to both the official in question – but also actors tasked with establishing scrutiny, such as European parliamentarians – seeking refuge in standard formulations and legal provisions, rather than providing details on the internal workings or reasons for specific decisions or outcomes. It thus becomes obvious that keeping performance management exercises classified or limiting their internal availability can be a way to enable a more constructive and open conversation.

3. Should performance management be linked to contract extension, training, and development?

How can organizations avoid creating perverse incentives or disincentives, either by getting people to fixate on their performance evaluations or, alternatively, to ignore them because there are no consequences associated to them? This question is important for performance management mechanisms on all levels, but is still worth considering with regards to senior bureaucratic management. As we have shown, linking the extension of contracts to performance of senior leaders can be a viable means to ensure their performance, although it can also lead to controversy and challenges to an IO's decision-making procedures when there are no clear criteria or mechanisms in place to take such decisions. Another point that caught our attention was the relative acceptance towards the fact that senior leaders or senior bureaucratic managers rarely, if at all, undertake training and development exercises given their seniority and far progression within their career trajectory. It seems that ideas like the maintenance of state-of-the-art management and organizational practice and life-long learning should inspire a more open approach towards such measures and could thereby help to sensitize political leaders for questions of management rather than maintaining a division of labour where top leaders are relatively little concerned with internal processes and implementation.

4. How to manage performance of officials who cannot progress higher in their career path?

The useful feature of linking promotion prospects to performance management results often does not apply to senior political level leadership, nor to senior bureaucratic management, as these positions present the highest stage of their respective career paths. Our analysis has shown that this raises questions about the incentives and enforcement mechanisms for performance management at these levels. Offering the possibility for senior bureaucratic managers to further progress into the political level leadership, and thereby opening up the relatively rigid separation of bureaucratic and political level leadership, would be one way to unlock new potentials in senior bureaucratic managers who may feel the motivation to advance into a higher leadership stage. That said, it should be acknowledged that this would be a major change that requires due consideration in terms of its implications.

5. To what extent should performance management be tailored to the senior level?

A further point that arose in our analysis of senior leadership performance management practices is the relatively low degree of tailoring or specific performance management measures that senior bureaucratic managers are subject to. While training and development offers were more specifically devised for this population, performance management was carried out in largely the same ways as for staff on middle management and rank-and-file levels. Initiatives like the definition and tracking of additional strategic objectives for senior bureaucratic staff as well as 'upward' or 'bottom-up' feedback may present useful innovations in this regard. But as we have argued, to date such initiatives have been carried out on a normative-operational level and not yet turned into standard tools. While there are good reasons for this gradual introduction, it leaves unanswered the question of whether senior bureaucratic managers should still go through the same rather intimate and invisible procedure of performance management with their immediate superior. A similar point could be made for the senior political level leadership, although, as stated above, this level of leadership faces the more fundamental question whether and how a systematic performance management should be undertaken in the first place.

8 CONCLUSION

As this report has shown, performance management at the senior levels in IOs entails a complex set of processes that depends heavily on the specific legal, practical, material, and cultural setting of each organization. At the same time, many organizations share common challenges, though to different degrees and with variation over time. First, as noted, while all of the organizations that we examined in this report have well-developed performance management systems for junior, mid-level, and senior staff, they tend to have less well-specified mechanisms in place for top level leadership. This is due primarily to the political nature of appointments at this level, and the potential for negative political repercussions in case of weak appraisals. Against this background, the tendency to exempt such officials from formal performance management procedures may be understandable; however, we have also shown that the degree of publicization of performance management and accountability at the top-level leadership varies across organizations, suggesting that there is room for maneuver in this regard. Moreover, performance management for the next-highest officials, 'senior bureaucratic managers', is defined in publicly accessible staff rules of IOs, but faces the challenge of appropriate tailoring to the task portfolios and high level of responsibility characterizing these positions.

Second, to what extent senior leadership performance management should examine managerial competencies and achievements of senior leaders individually, or the delivery of stated objectives – that is, organizational or department/division/unit-level performance – remains unclear in many instances. Combining and mixing these two components can lead to the blurring of the distinction between them and the dilution of individual responsibility and shortcomings more broadly, and make it difficult to attribute outcomes to particular actions and individuals. As a knock-on effect, this can also complicate the cultivation of future leaders and the development of a talent pipeline that can contribute to organizational success over time.

Third, many IOs suffer from a conflict-averse culture due to their diplomatic and multicultural nature. This means that constructive critical feedback is often lacking and instead individuals rely on standard language and unhelpful legal or technical formulations in evaluating performance and professional development. In addition, this can contribute to a lack of leadership culture that values self-reflection, mentorship, transparency, and debate.

In spite of these challenges, the organizations examined in this study expressed enthusiasm for continuous development and innovation of their performance management systems, with some making noteworthy progress in this regard. To that end, although this pilot study has begun to build an evidence base that can help organizations to have productive internal discussions, ask self-reflective questions, and subsequently further develop their senior leadership performance management systems where necessary, more work remains to be done. In addition to the remaining questions that we outlined in the previous section, we have identified several specific areas for future research.

First, there is a need for in-depth analysis within individual organizations. Comparison across organizations is a useful first step in identifying overall questions relating to performance management at senior levels, but each organization will face particular contextual, budgetary, and legal obstacles and opportunities that make reforms or amendments more or less desirable and feasible. In the UN, for example, it may be highly productive to examine the performance management mechanisms of member states – both to develop further knowledge on best practices, but also as a way of generating further buy-in for reforms to the UN's management architecture.

Second, there is a need for additional research into cultural aspects of organizations that may prevent or enable effective performance management. These include not only the culture of conflict avoidance that we have described, but also the culture surrounding leadership in IOs. Indeed, leadership in IOs is different than in other contexts, as considerations like political stability, geographic representation, and reputation often figure heavily, and space for political maneuverability must be preserved. Still, these conditions and the imperatives they imply should not preclude a discussion of the usefulness and potential of performance

management mechanisms, which under certain conditions may help IOs to accomplish their goals more effectively.

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APPENDIX 1: List of interviews by organization

NATO

Senior International Staff, 27 February 2018
Two Senior Officials, Human Resources, Executive Management Division, International Staff, 28 February 2018
Senior Official, Permanent Delegation of NATO Member State, 28 February 2018
Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018
Senior International Staff, 01 March 2018
Political Advisor & Counsellor, Permanent Delegation of NATO Member State, 01 March 2018
Senior Official & Counsellor, Permanent Delegation of NATO Member State, 01 March 2018
Senior Official, Human Resources, Executive Management Division, International Staff, Phone Interview, 08 May 2018

European Union

Two Middle Managers, European Commission, 16 April 2018
Senior Official, European External Action Service, 16 April 2018
Middle Manager, DG HR & Security, European Commission, 16 April 2018
Senior Official, Union for Unity Staff Union, 16 April 2018
Senior Official, DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, 17 April 2018
Deputy Head of Unit, DG International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, 17 April 2018
Middle Manager, European External Action Service, 18 April 2018
Middle Manager, European Commission, 18 April 2018
Senior Official, European Commission, 18 April 2018
Senior Official, DG HR & Security, European Commission, 18 April 2018
Middle Manager, DG HR & Security, European Commission, Phone Interview, 25 April 2018
Middle Manager, DG HR & Security, European Commission, Phone Interview, 27 April 2018
Senior Official, Secretariat-General, European Commission, Phone Interview, 30 April 2018
Senior Official, DG HR & Security, European Commission, Phone Interview, 08 June 2018
Senior Official, Cabinet of the Commissioner responsible for Budget and Human Resources, Phone Interview, 03 July 2018

United Nations

Senior Official, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Geneva, 14 May 2018
Administrative Officer, OHCHR, Geneva, 15 May 2018
Senior Official, UN Office in Geneva, 16 May 2018
Anonymous Official, 16 May 2018
Senior Official, OHCHR, Geneva, 16 May 2018
Senior Official, OHCHR, Geneva, 17 May 2018
Senior Official, OHCHR Country Office, Phone Interview, 18 May 2018
Ex-Special Representative of the Secretary General, New York, 21 May 2018
Senior Management Analyst, Department of Management, New York, 22 May 2018
Senior Official, UN Secretariat, New York, 22 May 2018
Senior Official, Office of Human Resources Management, New York, 22 May 2018
Three Senior Officials, Department of Field Support, New York, 23 May 2018
Senior Official, Department of Field Support (DFS), New York, 23 May 2018
Senior Official, OHCHR, New York, 23 May 2018
Senior Official, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York, 23 May 2018
Ex-Senior Official, OHCHR, Skype Interview, 25 May 2018
Senior Official, DPKO, Phone Interview, 19 July 2018
Senior Official, DPKO, Skype Interview, 20 July 2018