MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES

Definition of Professional Categories & Common Language In the IRFFG

2020

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDELINE

- This guideline should be seen as complementary to the International Reference Field Function Grid (IRFFG) with the objective of creating a better understanding of the main functions and professional categories and their use in MSF.
- This guideline should be used next to the IRFFG during the process of creating new functions in the field or remapping existing functions into the new function grid.
- When reading this document please bear in mind that the IRFFG functions and professional categories include all field positions (filled by National and International Staff)
- Finally, note that this document is not meant to provide final answers about the use of a function in a given context. On the contrary, it may raise new questions, which then need to be added to the debate and clarified at Coordination and HQ levels.

The latest version of the IRFFG as well as the standard JPs and all related guidelines (including this one) can be found on irffg.msf.org

I. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this document is to support the user in better understanding the logic behind the IRFFG, in particular the organisation of functions into professional categories and the common language used to do this.

The use of a function is closely linked to the organisational design of a mission/project. This Guideline and its examples provide a general orientation that needs to be adjusted to the reality of the project.

II. ACTIVITY VS. COMPONENT OF AN ACTIVITY

When defining the set-up of a project and having to choose the positions needed, it is very important that we realise the difference between an '**activity'** and the '**components of an activity'**, since this is one of the key points underlying the IRFFG.

For example:
The Nutrition Programme can be the activity.
Inpatient Therapeutic Feeding Centre, Outreach/Nutritional Screening, Supplementary Feeding Programme can be components of this activity.

a) Definition

We can define "activity" as a programme unit which because of its size and/or complexity has to be considered an entity on its own, having specific objectives and exclusively allocated resources (human, budget, equipment...), demanding for a senior position to manage it.

An "activity" can often be divided into "components", whereby all of the components together make up the "activity".

The status of an "activity" or a "component of an activity" is depending on the size/complexity of the program and the need to properly manage it.

We may find that one area (i.e. Watsan) is considered a 'component' of Logistics in one project and an 'activity' by itself in another project.

Also, note that this status can change over time depending on the evolution of the project. For example, it can happen that a Component of an Activity starts gaining size or importance and, at some point, the organisation decides to separate it from the "Activity" and give it status of "Activity" on its own to ensure better management.

b) Responsibilities

A person in charge of an "activity" will belong to the professional category of "**activity managers**" while a person in charge of one (or more) "component(s) of an activity" will be a "**supervisor/ specialist**" or "**skilled position**" with the consequent differences in responsibilities.

Note also that when an area changes from being a "component" to "activity" it may happen that the person who was "supervisor" of the area will not be senior enough to run it as "activity manager" (activity managers require more knowledge, autonomy, responsibility, management skills, etc…), therefore we may have to recruit a new person for the position of "activity manager" or define a development plan for the supervisor to become activity manager.

III. PROFESSIONAL CATEGORIES IN THE IRFFG

The IRFFG organizes all functions into 5 categories, with 3 of them having a higher risk of getting confused (*Activity Manager vs. Supervisors & Specialists vs. Skilled Positions*).

1. COORDINATORS (AND RELATED ROLES)

Coordinator (level 12-15)

Definition:

- **Coordinators'** scope of responsibility is the whole mission, a whole functional area or a whole project within a mission
- Reports hierarchically to the Head of Mission and is an active member of the Country Management Team (CMT). Reports to the HoM on the development of ongoing programmes
- Is responsible for strategic thinking and planning; needs analysis, and the definition of objectives and priorities for their area in the Mission
- The planning horizon will be more than one year
- Leads the annual project planning, managing budgets, defining strategies and providing advice to HOM on functional area of responsibility. Adjusts strategies when needed
- Has the highest degree of decision-making power in his area, validating proposals coming from the teams
- Represents MSF in meetings with authorities and other NGOs on issues related to the functional area of responsibility
- Is responsible for the technical reference, expertise and support for all issues within his functional area of responsibility

Common Language:

- Defining, monitoring and regularly updating local policy within his/her functional area of responsibility.
- Defining the missions' strategy and objectives together with the coordination team
- Defining and implementing the organizational set-up for the mission: structure, size, knowledge, levels of responsibility, reporting lines and corresponding organigrams and job profiles
- Being accountable for the monitoring and implementation of the activities for her/his area of responsibility. Ensuring compliance to MSF standards and ensuring that organizational goals and objectives are met.
- Reporting to the HoM on the development of ongoing programs
- Ensuring all Mission staff is briefed on the proper use of MSF resources within his/her functional area of responsibility
- Being responsible for project / mission reporting, as required, on his area of responsibility

- Being responsible for managing, supervising and developing staff under his/her direct responsibility including coaching, training, motivating and ensuring their capability to carry out their job achieving MSF quality standards
- Representing MSF in meetings with authorities and other NGOs on issues related to his area of responsibility

Requirements:

- Education: An understanding and application of higher-level theoretical knowledge, gained through an academic qualification and through extensive experience
- Experience: At least two years relevant experience and previous humanitarian experience in MSF or other NGOs in developing countries
- Language: Mission language essential, Local language desirable
- Knowledge: Computer literacy
- Main Competencies:
    - Strategic Vision **L2**
    - Leadership **L2**
    - People Management and Development **L3**
    - Service Orientation **L3**
    - Teamwork and Cooperation **L4**

NB: Some Coordinators have **deputies** and/or **assistants**. These are sometimes confused, while they actually represent quite distinct roles:

Deputy Coordinator

Definition:

- A deputy (coordinator category) will take over (a designated part of) the responsibilities from the position s/he deputizes for, s/he gets delegated responsibilities and is accountable for them (i.e. the deputy MedCo will replace the MedCo in his absence)

Common Language:

- Supporting the (functional area) Coordinator in the mission, participating and contributing to the overall efficient management of day to day operations
- Activities includes reviewing, controlling, checking, ensuring follow up, ensuring proper use of, application of quality /efficiency of operations and reporting to the functional Coordinator
- Participating actively in the definition and update of annual project planning and budgets…defining strategy and advising functional Coordinator in the translation of the identified needs into objectives, priorities and resources needed for achieving the mission's operational goals and objectives
- Supporting the Coordinator / PC in planning and organizing the human resources, participating in their day to day management, induction of new staff, undertaking evaluation of staff under his / her supervision and defining trainings accordingly
- Providing support to field coordinators / admin staff / team members

Support (level 8 upwards)

Definition:

Supporting the coordinator/director with specific delegated activities or parts of activities (requiring similar levels of problem solving and thinking skills as a manager/ specialist); ensuring smooth relations with local and national authorities, contributing to the context analysis and follow-up, providing translations and interpretations according to MSF protocols, standards and procedures in order to facilitate the mission's coordination tasks.

- A support is given delegated tasks by the line-manager.
- A support will not replace the line manager (whereas a deputy will).

Common Language:

- Supporting the line manager in the planning, organizing and supervising of specific activities or parts of activities delegated by the line manager.
- Supporting and/or assisting the line manager with monitoring, evaluation, implementation and proper functioning/running of delegated tasks/activities
- Supporting the Coordinator with the relations/networking with local actors and representing MSF when delegated
- Monitoring, analyzing, reporting and briefing on key issues (context, culture, security, risk, etc.) and/or activities, and assisting in assessments and/or explos

Assistant

Definition:

Assisting the line manager/ department with administrative tasks (requiring similar levels of problem solving and thinking skills as a supervisor); ensuring smooth relations with local and national authorities, providing translations and interpretations according to MSF protocols, standards and procedures in order to facilitate the mission's coordination tasks.

- An assistant is given concrete tasks
- An assistant will not replace the line manager

Common Language:

- Planning, organizing and supervising concrete administrative tasks delegated by the line manager.
- Assisting the line manager with the proper functioning/running of delegated tasks

2. ACTIVITY MANAGERS AND CLINICAL MEDICAL SPECIALISTS

Activity Manager

Definition:

- Activity Managers are responsible for a whole activity of the project within a job family (Medical Activity Manager, Supply Manager, Personnel Administration Manager) and

reports directly to a corresponding member of the coordination team. This can be at a higher level covering a range of activities across a professional area e.g. all medical, all pharmacy, all logistics etc. or at a more specific, lower, level within a professional area e.g. nursing, health promotion, and supply.

- Reports directly to a corresponding member of the Coordination Team
- Manages a team, with defined objectives and is accountable for the resources allocated to implement the activity (human, budget, equipment…). Normally does not have personal direct involvement in the delivery of the activities
- The planning horizon: yearly
- Expected to provide "operational/technical input" to the area of responsibility
- Defines, coordinates, analyses, proposes solutions/alternatives
- Accountable for global results
- Has a high level of autonomy and may be required to represent MSF
- Requires expert knowledge and vast experience in the area of activity

Common Language:

- Coordinating and managing all components of the activity in the project area according to MSF standards, protocols and guidelines. Defining procedures and tools in area of activity,
- Participating / contributing to the preparation and update of budgets, inputs to annual planning
- Managing and monitoring the implementation of …, the functioning of …, following up and reporting on progress in area or responsibility
- Compiling, analyzing and reporting on area or responsibility ….
- Participating in monthly reports
- Planning in close coordination with the Coordinator/HR department, the processes to ensure both the sizing of necessary staff and knowledge
- Managing, supervising and developing staff under his/her direct responsibility
- Providing expertise and support …. in his/her area of expertise

Requirements:

- Education: Technical qualifications or diploma, or equivalent professional experience. Degree is required for certain posts
- Experience: Minimum 2 years working experience. Work experience with MSF, other NGOs and in developing countries desirable
- Language: Mission language essential, local language desirable
- Knowledge: Computer literacy
- Main competencies:
    - People management and Development **L2**
    - Commitment to MSF Principles **L2**
    - Behavioural Flexibility **L3**
    - Results and Quality Orientation **L3**
    - Teamwork and Cooperation **L3**

Clinical Medical Specialist

Definition:

- (Medical Doctor, Surgeon, Gynaecologist, Psychiatrist and Anaesthetist) are coupled with the Activity Manager category because of their key contribution to the project activities, but their scope is more limited since they mainly perform hands-on activity.
- These are positions requiring deep expert knowledge in highly specialized areas (e.g. Surgeon, Gynaecologist)

3. SPECIALISTS AND SUPERVISORS

Specialist

Definition:

- An expert responsible for applying his / her specific know how and expertise for the benefit of the mission or project to achieve short term organizational goals
- Reports to an Activity Manager
- He / she might be responsible for managing a team but is not usually responsible for the wider planning, implementation and coordination of the project
- The planning horizon will be monthly/quarterly
- Has a high degree of hands-on activity and technical input to their area of responsibility
- Problems are solved and solutions found through the interpretation of procedures within clearly established frameworks and guidelines. Support and technical advice are widely available to these positions
- Is responsible for a limited part of an activity (component) and the range of problems to deal with is more limited than for activity managers
- Is responsible for maintaining work standards within their area
- Has a high level of professional qualification, often with specialisation in specific areas

Common Language:

- Organizing and carrying out specific acts / the application of specific knowledge and expertise, according to MSF policies, protocols and standards, in order to ensure high quality outcome to achieve organizational objectives
- Monitoring quality within area of expertise
- Collecting statistical and monitoring data in area of specialization (files, forms, statistics, data base, documents, etc.), undertake analysis as appropriate, and ensuring regular and detailed reporting of results, proceedings, and problematic situations
- Researchers: Managing data systems, ensuring accurate, high quality data, checking validity, disseminating information
- Providing training and supervising team working within specialist area
- Acting as a technical referent and sharing professional knowledge and expertise as widely as possible with others within project / mission

- Supervising and advising on functioning and maintenance of associated specialist equipment, resources

Requirements:

- Education: Degree / medical diploma, additional specialisation normally required
- Experience: At least 2 years plus in specialist area. Work experience with MSF, other NGOs and in developing countries desirable
- Language: Mission language essential, local language desirable
- Knowledge: Computer literacy
- Main competencies:
  - Results and Quality Orientation **L2**
  - Teamwork and Cooperation **L2**
  - Behavioural Flexibility **L2**
  - Commitment to MSF Principles **L2**
  - Stress Management **L3**

Supervisor

Definition:

- Responsible for the day-to-day implementation of a component of an activity within a closely defined field of action, department or unit.
- Higher supervisory levels will work under the supervision of a member of the coordination team / Activities Manager and will also be directly responsible for certain delegated tasks within their field of action.
- Some supervisors oversee an activity component, and do not supervise staff.
- Implements plans, procedures, guidelines and protocols, and supervises their team to follow the same standards, to ensure quality of work in area of specialty.
- Planning horizon: weekly/monthly
- Provides “functioning input” to the area of responsibility
- Supervision of the implementation of pre-defined plans, procedures, guidelines and protocols.
- Accountable for specific activities within a closely defined field of action, department or unit.
- Works in close coordination with, and under the supervision of, an activity manager or a member of the coordination team. There are likely to be similar positions in the project (others supervising similar units, which added together make up the whole activity).

Common Language:

- Organizing, coordinating, supervising and monitoring the day to day activities within their department or unit.
- Supervising a team and their work (daily supervision and checking quality of work).
- Coordinating and leading the team under their responsibility including the definition of each person's tasks, working schedule.
- Implementing specific administrative tasks as defined or instructed.

- Ensuring smooth running of administration and procedures.
- Participating in data collection and reporting as required.
- Monitoring, checking, verifying, updating and inputting relevant data.
- Supervising, in close coordination with the HR department, the associated processes (recruitment, training/induction, evaluation, potential detection, development and communication) of the staff under his/her responsibility in order to ensure both the sizing and the amount of knowledge required.
- Organizing training for other staff when applicable.
- Informing their supervisor of progress or advising of anomalies.

Requirements:

- Education: Diploma or professional qualifications required. Certain posts may require more specific requirements e.g. ICT Manager requires additional programmes and computer languages
- Experience: 2 years relevant experience required; some lower level posts may only require one
- Language: Mission language essential, local language desirable
- Knowledge: Computer literacy
- Main competencies:
  - Results and Quality Orientation **L2**
  - Teamwork and Cooperation **L2**
  - Behavioural Flexibility **L2**
  - Commitment to MSF Principles **L2**
  - Stress Management **L3**

Officer (level 6 upwards)

Definition:

- An officer (supervisor/specialist category or higher) is defined in line with other supervisor and specialist positions (or higher) as outlined above….
- Reports to an Activity Manager

Common Language:

- Is defined in line with other supervisor and specialist positions (or higher) as outlined above

Requirements:

- Are defined in line with other supervisor and specialist positions (or higher) as outlined above.

4. SKILLED POSITIONS

Officer (level 4-5)

Definition:

- An officer (skilled positions category) is defined in line with other general skilled positions as outlined below.

- Reports to a supervisor

Common Language:

- Is defined in line with other general skilled positions as outlined below.

Requirements:

- Are defined in line with other general skilled positions as outlined below.

Skilled position (general)

Definition:

- These are basically hands-on positions requiring a practical knowledge and the application of specific work techniques usually acquired through some form of specialized technical training (i.e. Nurse, Driver, Secretary, Storekeeper).
- Reports to a supervisor.
- Is responsible for the implementation of predefined tasks but allowing certain room for planning/organizing their own time in coordination with others.
- The planning horizon will be daily/weekly.
- Provides “hands-on/direct input” to the area of responsibility.
- Works within standardized procedures and instructions.
- Scope and variety of problems dealt with is limited.

Common Language:

- Planning, carrying out / providing series of coordinated actions in area of technical knowledge
- Assessing / identifying needs / following-up… materials / levels / consumption of…
- Monitoring and following up on instructions/ cleanliness… / maintaining equipment…
- Keeping records, statistics and files updated

Requirements:

- Education: Depends on function. Some require secondary education and Specialist functions require diploma / qualified training in their field
- Experience: Depends on function. Specialist functions require experience in their field. Work experience with MSF and/or other NGOs desirable
- Language: Mission language essential, local language desirable
- Knowledge: Computer literacy
- Main competencies:
  - Results and Quality Orientation **L1**
  - Teamwork and Cooperation **L1**
  - Behavioural Flexibility **L1**
  - Commitment to MSF Principles **L1**
  - Stress Management **L2**

5. BASIC SKILLED POSITIONS

Head of… (level 2-5)

Definition:

- Reports to a supervisor or manager
- Is a member of a team with additional organizational tasks (whereas a supervisor's main task would be to supervise a certain activity, while also providing hands on support)
- Gives input about the performance of team members to his line manager but does not officially evaluate them. This should be done by the supervisor or manager.

Common Language:

- Performing hands on tasks as part of the team
- Passing on management directives to the teams
- Informing his manager of any human resources problems
- Checking that the instructions guidelines are systematically followed and applied.
- Assuring that the tasks are completed in the given period.
- Filling in and following up the schedules according to activities and needs and handing the schedule over to his line manager.
- Ensuring the replacement of tools or materials if needed
- Reporting to the line manager about the progress of the work and eventual incidents.

Basic skilled position (general)

Definition:

- These are largely task focused, under close direction and constant supervision (e.g. waste zone operator, cook, watchman, cleaner).
- Planning horizon: daily
- Limited scope for decision-making
- Requires knowledge of standardized work routines, general facts and information and/or the use of basic equipment, machines and materials.
- Work situations are similar and repetitive.

Common Language:

- Performing work according to his/her line manager's instructions.
- Taking all necessary security measures for each work done.
- Ensuring proper use, storage and maintenance of the tools and equipment provided.
- Ensuring cleanliness of working area.
- Informing superiors of any incidents that may occur in the course of his/her work.

Requirements:

- Education: Literacy essential. In some functions, related diploma or training is desirable.

- Experience: Previous work experience is not required. On the job training is given
- Language: Local language essential
- Knowledge:
- Competencies:
  - Commitment to MSF Principles **L1**
  - Behavioural Flexibility **L1**
  - Stress Management **L1**
  - Results and Quality Orientation **L1**
  - Teamwork and Cooperation **L1**
  - Service Orientation **L1**

IV. USE OF FUNCTION TITLES

Try to be consistent in the use of function titles.

- Coordinator: level 12-15
- Manager: level 9-11
- Support (to coordination): level 8 upwards
- Specialist: level 8 upwards
- Supervisor: level 6-8
- Officer: level 4 upwards
- Head of...: level 2-5

V. EXAMPLE

Considering all of the above, we must realize that a generic profile will be placed in a function category depending on the level of responsibilities assigned to the actual position. What contribution to the general objective of the organization is this function accountable for?

Using the example of “Nurse”:

- if we are talking about a hands-on position, with detailed list of tasks to be done, in charge of one specific part of the medical care (ex. dressings) we will normally be talking about a “Skilled position - Nurse Level 5”.
- if the position supervises a team of nurses and organizes their schedule, follows-up on data, but with limited autonomy, we will normally be talking about a “Supervisor – Nursing Team Supervisor Level 8”, whereas.
- if we talk about a position in charge of a whole nursing activity in the project (e.g. nutrition, IPD, etc.), responsible for the planning and budget, leading the team, accountable for the results in the area and working with autonomy, then we will normally be talking about an “Activity Manager - Nursing Activity Manager Level 10”.

VI. APPENDIX – Quick Comparative Table

This table is to assist with general comprehension only. Please see the main text of this document and the job profiles for details.

	Coordinator	**Support (to coord.)**	**Assistant (to coord.)**	**Activity Manager**	**Specialist**	**Supervisor**	**Officer L6-8**	**Skilled & Officer L4-5**	**Head of…**	**Basic skilled**
Scope of responsibilities	Whole mission /functional area /project	Defined areas in support of coordinator	Defined areas assisting the coordinator	Whole activity	Specialized component of an activity	Component of an activity	Component of an activity	Task focused	Task focused	Task focused
Reporting to (main trend)	Head of Mission	Coordinator	Coordinator	Coordinator	Coordinator/ Activity manager	Activity manager	Coordinator/ Activity Manager	Supervisor/ Activity Manager	Supervisor /Manager	Supervisor
Planning horizon	> 1 year	1 year	Week/ Month	Year	Month /Quarter	Month /Quarter	Month /Quarter	Daily /Weekly	Daily /Weekly	Daily
Level of autonomy	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low
Level operational involvement	Strategic plan OC, Country policy	Input Country Policy	Following Standardized procedures, instructions	Developing Protocols /technical input to the area of responsibility. Overseeing correct implementation	Specialized technical input protocols, procedures Supporting their correct implementation	Implementation of procedures, instructions	Technical input protocols, procedures Supporting their correct implementation	Following Standardized procedures, instructions	Similar, repetitive, standardised	Similar, repetitive, standardised

	Coordinator	Support (to coord.)	Assistant (to coord.)	Activity Manager	Specialist	Supervisor	Officer L6-8	Skilled & Officer L4-5	Head of…	Basic skilled
Budget Responsibility	Accountable for the resources allocated to the Mission	No	No	Accountable for the resources allocated to implement the activity	No	No	No	No	No	No
Representing MSF in meetings with external parties	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Technical expert/referent	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Hierarchical management	Yes	Possible	No	Yes	Possible	Yes	Possible	No	No	No
Training staff	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Reporting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Educational Requirements	Academic degree	University degree or similar level of education	Degree or professional qualification required	Technical qualifications or diploma	Degree with additional specialisation	Diploma or professional qualification required	Degree or professional qualification required	Diploma/ official training requirements depending on function.	Literacy. Training/ diploma desirable.	Literacy. Training /diploma desirable.