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OBJECTIVES FOR THE UN/CEFACT FORUM

Submitted by the UN/CEFACT Forum Management Group

This document is for **information**

I. Executive Summary

1. This document describes new objectives for the UN/CEFACT Forum which has been restructured as a result of the UN/CEFACT Plenary decision taken during its tenth session in May 2004.
2. The greatest structural difference introduced by this reorganization has been the establishment of a Forum Management Group (FMG), which has replaced the Forum Coordination Team (FCT). The UN/CEFACT Steering Group (CSG) has been disbanded and a Bureau has been established to manage the Plenary tasks.
3. The foremost objective of the Forum is to reinstate UN/CEFACT's leading position amongst the de jure standards organizations. This means regaining credibility such that it becomes widely appreciated that UN/CEFACT can be effective in satisfying today's market and user requirements. It is also important that UN/CEFACT should be perceived as having increased the speed at which its standards are produced, and that these standards are of the highest possible quality.
4. To achieve these objectives, the UN/CEFACT Forum needs to pursue two key goals. Firstly, UN/CEFACT should forge political and technical relationships with other (standards) organizations, in order to increase the participation of experts in the Forum. Secondly, the work of the Forum needs to become more professional, and this will require external funding.

II. From Coordination to Management

5. When the Forum was established in 2002, the Permanent Groups were set up as 'Empowered Groups', and a Forum Coordination Team was formed to coordinate the work between the Groups. The CEFACT Steering Group, acting on behalf of the Plenary, continued to make all management decisions. Two years later it was clear that this structure was not producing the desired results. The work of the Forum was being seriously impeded by procedural issues between the Permanent Groups and also by a lack of focus and decisiveness. It was time to break down the silos and to improve collaboration.
6. In May 2004, the Plenary approved a radically different structure, in which the Permanent Groups will no longer operate in isolation. A Forum Management Group (FMG) has been introduced, which is the executive decision making body of the Forum and which is directly responsible to the Plenary. The newly established Bureau will govern the FMG and has its own Programme of Work. The collaboration between the Bureau and the FMG is ensured by the fact that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the FMG are members of the Bureau together with the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Plenary and the UNECE secretariat.
7. In September 2004, during the Washington Forum, the first FMG was elected. The FMG consists of the Chairs of the Permanent Groups and an elected Chair and Vice-Chair. Two additional members representing the business users were elected from the International Trade and Business Process Group (TBG) as per the Plenary decision taken at its tenth session in May 2004.
8. From the outset, the new Bureau and FMG realised that they faced challenges, and the extent of these challenges soon became clear. In short, the challenges to be faced were to change the mindset of some of the Forum experts towards the new structure, to bring back the spirit and motivation of the Forum, and most of all to restore confidence in UN/CEFACT internally and externally.

III. UN/CEFACT's Role in eBusiness Standardization

9. UN/CEFACT has a unique position in the world. With its focus on facilitating trade globally through simplification and the application of electronic business techniques, it is the only standardization body that has such a broad constituency and where (inter-)government delegations form the decision-making body. This makes a uniquely suitable body to define semantics, which is widely recognised as the most difficult aspect of eBusiness standardization. Reaching agreement on the meaning of business terms is a difficult and lengthy process, requiring input from all relevant parties. To be meaningful the process needs to take place at the global level in order for the resulting standards to become widely adopted. For 20 years, UN/CEFACT has played this role with the development and delivery of the UN/EDIFACT standard, which has been a major success.

10. If standards are to be adopted, they must be in line with market requirements. The market today is moving. Whereas around the so-called 'dotcom boom', some unrealistic goals were set, today realism is back in the market and it is now demanding stable standards that are future proof. Following the completion of the development of the UN/CEFACT Modelling Methodology (UMM) and the UN/CEFACT Core Components Technical Specification (CCTS), UN/CEFACT is in a strong position to provide the required standards. Unfortunately, UN/CEFACT is not perceived to be the solid, global standards organization that it could be, and many other initiatives have sprung up, each of which provides only a partial solution.

IV. Objectives of the Forum

11. Given the current situation, the overall objective for the UN/CEFACT Forum must therefore be to regain the trust of organizations worldwide in it as the most suitable body to standardize semantics globally. When definitions of business semantics are developed in parallel by multiple organizations, it can never lead to facilitating trade in an optimal manner.

12. The Forum, therefore, needs to increase its effectiveness and create far greater awareness of its work. This means increasing the participation of global and regional organizations in its work and accelerating the process of producing standards as much as possible, while at the same time quality.

13. Increasing participation can be achieved by (re-)establishing relations with other standards-setting bodies and vertical industry organizations. The Forum can, thereby, become the standards platform of choice for the collaboration and the reconciliation of semantic definitions.

14. To accelerate the production of standards, the Forum needs to become more professional and the work to be managed more tightly. The current structure of the Forum facilitates that goal but lacks resources to bring in services which are required in order to speed up standards production. This implies additional funding, which is why a sponsorship programme needs to be urgently established.

15. Additional funding is also required to create awareness of the work UN/CEFACT is doing. By explaining the work of UN/CEFACT to the world, we can increase adoption of UN/CEFACT standards, which is the ultimate test for the success of UN/CEFACT.

16. UN/CEFACT can contribute greatly to the growth of global commerce when these objectives are achieved. The enthusiasm to do this is now back in the Forum and the momentum is there to accomplish this.
