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Implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

> The present report outlines the Secretariat's approach to implementing a flexible workplace. Best practice shows that the requirements for successful implementation include enhanced information technology and other services, revised human resource policies and an iterative process adapted to constantly evolving work practices involving robust internal communications, consultations and training programmes, internal surveys, focus group studies and test environments. The benefits of a flexible workplace when well implemented are greater staff productivity, enhanced collaboration in the workplace, improved business continuity and disaster recovery, improved staff retention and reduced real estate needs and costs. The risks associated with poor implementation of the flexible workplace are reluctance on the part of the staff and impaired staff morale, reduced productivity and reputational risk.

The present report is also intended to inform the consideration by Member States of the report of the Secretary-General on long-term accommodation needs at Headquarters, in which the Secretariat projects future staff populations at United Nations Headquarters and their office space needs, taking into account flexible workplace strategies. In the previous report on the issue (A/67/720) a 10 per cent planning assumption was used for the real estate efficiencies to be achieved through a flexible workplace. The present report draws on further analysis of the organizational context of the United Nations and international best practices and lessons learned. In the light of the potential real estate savings estimated after a brief study, the Secretariat has revised its baseline figure and established 20 per cent efficiency as a prudent planning assumption, subject to further analysis of the specific needs and constraints of various departments, and the investments in reconfiguration of space, information and communications technology and human resources needed to support the successful implementation of a flexible workplace.

The road map identifies two main tracks for further action. The Secretariat will initiate a programme of internal communications and consultations to educate staff and achieve buy-in to the initiative and will develop a business case for implementation.

The General Assembly is invited to take note of the report and to request the Secretary-General to submit a further report to the Assembly at its sixty-ninth session containing details of the business case for the implementation of a flexible workplace at the United Nations.

Contents

I. Introduction

1.   Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/282 and related recommendations in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions contained in document A/66/7/Add.3, the Secretary-General conducted a comprehensive feasibility study during the biennium 2010-2011 of long-term accommodation needs at Headquarters, and an expanded feasibility study during the biennium 2012-2013. The original feasibility study (A/66/349) took into account the use of a flexible workplace to potentially reduce the need for additional space over the long term. The expanded feasibility study (A/67/720) analysed in more detail the use and types of flexible workplace to reduce the space requirements per person with respect to the Secretariat's long-term office accommodation needs.

2.   In response to the expanded feasibility study, the General Assembly, in section III, paragraph 9 of its resolution 67/254 noted the initiative of the Secretariat to commission a report on the application of flexible workspace strategies and working arrangements in the Organization, and looked forward to receiving the report of the Secretary-General at the main part of its sixty-eighth session.

3.   In view of the fact that implementation of a flexible workplace would require a number of significant human resources, information and communications technology and facilities management issues and challenges to be taken into consideration, an interdisciplinary working group was established in the Department of Management, chaired by the Office of Central Support Services, and including representatives of the Office of Human Resources Management, and the Office of Information and Communications Technology, with support from external experts with experience in the design and implementation of flexible workplace solutions.

II. Definitions

4.   The distinction between flexible working arrangements, a flexible workplace, alternative workplace strategies and flexible working is outlined below.

Flexible working arrangements

5.   "Flexible working arrangements" are the arrangements already in place (see ST/SGB/2003/4), that align the work practices of the Secretariat with those of many national civil services and other parts of the United Nations system by offering more flexible working options that lead to a better balance between the professional and personal lives of the staff of the Secretariat. Currently, the flexible working arrangements are purely voluntary, are undertaken at the initiative of the staff member and are approved at the discretion of the head of department/office concerned, who may authorize, adjust or revoke those arrangements, taking into account operational needs. The four flexible working arrangement options available are staggered working hours; a compressed work schedule; a scheduled break for external learning activities; and work away from the office (telecommuting).

Flexible workplace

6.   "Flexible workplace" is the term used to describe a combination of factors, including the organization and management of physical space, technology support, training programmes and other policies, that support a flexible and mobile way of

working. When used in relation to facilities and real estate, this term refers to a physical workplace that is organized and managed to enable flexible working to take place. "Flexible workplace strategies" was the term used in previous documents for "flexible workplace", but it has been modified for greater clarity and to distinguish it from flexible working arrangements.

Alternative workplace (or workspace) strategies

7.   "Alternative workplace strategies" was the term used in the first feasibility report (A/66/349) and in the expanded feasibility report (A/67/720). It is a real estate industry term and refers to physical spaces and organizational policies adapted to different work styles, particularly when they include the use of unassigned or shared workspaces.

Flexible working

8.   "Flexible working" is a general term referring to staff working in a flexible manner. This includes the use of technology and a variety of spaces in order to provide greater choice as to where, when and how they perform their work.

III. The modern workplace

A. Global trends

9.   The last 20 years have seen (a) the development of new information technology tools which have facilitated new working methods, including mobile working and more electronic working in virtual environments and (b) global economic pressures and significant rises in real estate costs which have led to organizations seeking to increase the density of their workforce and maximize utilization of the workspace.

10.   Those developments have changed the relationship between the worker and the workspace in many organizations and have had a major impact on organizational culture. The result has been a greater emphasis on the need for the workplace to be designed to better meet organizational and operational needs and increase productivity. This requires close coordination between human resources, information technology and facilities management in the organization of the workplace, and in designing and implementing policies to enable more flexible working.

11.   Managing and allocating office accommodation to maximize staff productivity and organizational competitiveness remains a constant challenge for all organizations, primarily because they need to meet functional demands with limited resources. With the continuing global advance of the information age, the workplace, generally, is becoming increasingly complex. In a global knowledge economy, competition to attract and retain talented workers, as well as competition for prime office locations, adds to the urgency of cost- and productivity-efficient facilities and management strategies. Also, increasingly, the new generation of workers is attracted to more flexible working arrangements.

12.   Organizations across the public and private sectors are seeing these organizational challenges as an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between

their business mission and strategies and the office environment. While the nature of opportunities perceived and the array of responses vary across organizations, a common point of orientation is efficient stewardship of corporate real estate. The concept of the "flexible workplace" has a prominent role in this regard.
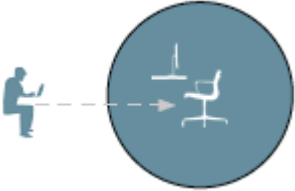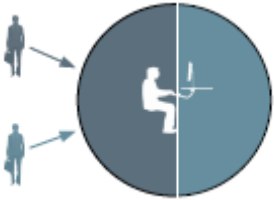
B. Anatomy of the flexible workplace

13.   The flexible workplace is a space management strategy that strives to align the management of an organization's real estate portfolio with the organization's overall mission and purpose. The basic premise is that substantial financial, social and environmental benefits are achievable by organizing real estate operations efficiently and effectively. Because an organization's staff are usually its most valuable assets, the first step in this alignment process is to identify the needs of staff in different departments and work groups. The real estate management, informed by this understanding, then approaches real estate and facilities operations with the aim of designing and providing space that helps maximize staff and departmental performance.

14.   Flexible workplace features allow for a customized approach in terms of when, where and how staff work, tailored to the needs of individual departments and their staff. Some parts of the flexible workplace toolkit intensify the use of office space, while others extend beyond the office by facilitating work while in transit, from home, or from nearby but non-traditional spaces like campus cafeterias and local parks. These services and features recognize and leverage the value of social interaction in the workplace, seeking to facilitate cross-functional and intra-departmental interaction.

15.   Some of the most common components of flexible working allow work through an alternative worksite (telecommuting), through sharing a common desk/workstation (desk-sharing), working in multiple buildings depending on availability (hotelling) or increasing the number of staff that a given building could support through the deployment of non-dedicated work stations (hot-desking). Other components of flexible working are derived from the knowledge that collaboration can occur in a variety of places, ranging from formal meeting rooms to public spaces. From a real estate management perspective, these flexible workplace components require the installation of data ports or Wi-Fi and slightly modified seating configurations in existing interstitial spaces like lobbies, hallways and mini-parks.

Table 1
Components of flexible working

Component	Description
Telework/telecommuting (often combined with flextime/flexi-place arrangements)	All or a portion of work functions are performed at an alternative worksite (e.g. from home or a telework centre) to reduce or eliminate a staff member's commute. Telework usually occurs at least one day per week on a regular and recurring basis and does not include situational telework (unscheduled, project-oriented, non-recurring and/or irregular telework and/or any teleworking that occurs less frequently than once a week on a recurring basis) or full-time mobile work arrangements. ICT tools facilitate linkage to the office workplace. A flextime policy allows staff to determine when they will work, while a flexi-place policy allows staff to determine where they will work.
Desk-sharing 	A work arrangement in which two or more staff members share the same workstation, typically in a pre-arranged manner that allows each of the staff members to have sole access to the specified workstation at given times while the others involved in the sharing arrangement work elsewhere. Touchdown areas provide ad hoc desk-sharing arrangements without advance reservation. They are available to everyone in an organization, including visitors.
Hot-desking 	Staff work in one facility part of the time and at one or more alternate worksites the rest of the time, with non-dedicated, non-permanent workspaces assigned on a first come, first served basis.

Component	Description
Hotelling	Staff work in one facility part of the time and at one or more alternative worksites the rest of the time. Workspace is reserved on a first-call basis and is not dedicated to any specific staff member beyond a specified occupation time. Typically a small permanent group of staff will handle reservations and prepare the reserved workspace for occupancy.
Virtual office	A work environment in which staff work cooperatively from different locations (in lieu of a single building or other single physical location) using a computer network to collaborate and/or carry out other work activities. The physical location where the work is done can be temporary or permanent and can be nearly anywhere, e.g. home, satellite office, hotel room, corporate office (shared workspace), airport, airplane.

IV. Review and lessons for the United Nations Secretariat

16.   Flexible working strategies are used by various industries and sectors around the world. To inform the present report, a review was undertaken to capture international benchmarks, study global trends and identify lessons learned relating to flexible working, with particular focus on relevant experience of organizations in the public sector with comparable operational circumstances to those of United Nations Headquarters. To that end, a wide range of case studies and benchmarking reports issued by government entities and professional associations was consulted.[1]

A.   Factors that influence workspace configuration

17.   Generally, workspace strategies do not follow one-size-fits-all standards. Rather they are tailored to location- and occupant-specific characteristics and are customized to the distinct organizational context of the entity for which they are devised. The characteristics specific to location are the regional context and level of economic development, the specificities of relevant real estate markets, the cultural context and climate. The characteristics specific to occupants are the industry sector, working practices and the organizational culture.

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[1] These projects and the associated data were collected from published and unpublished material. The government workplace data are from United States General Services Administration, *Workplace Matters* (Washington, D.C., 2006); National Audit Office, *Getting the Best from Public Sector Office Accommodation* (London, 2006); and British Council for Offices, "International office specifications — a tale of six cities", September 2010.

B.   Trends and benchmarks from public-sector entities

18.   Despite the variances noted above, certain common trends regarding flexible working can be identified. The key drivers of successful change in organizations implementing flexible working are staff engagement and satisfaction, sustainable practices and resource conservation. The use of open floor plans is widespread. It is also generally found that changes in real estate usage are closely linked to investment in ICT services.

19.   One of the benchmarking reports[2] studied trends in six major cities where the rate of growth of the local economy and the global status of the city had led to demand from government entities for greater efficiencies in office real estate. The findings reflect the characteristics of different cultures as well as different stages of economic development. Between 2005 and 2010, office densification increased as a result of more widespread adoption of open-plan and flexible working.

20.   Overall, over the past 10 years the amount of square feet of office space per person has declined. Of the projects reviewed in the public sector that followed a traditional one person per office space layout and use, the highest density was 116 square feet per person, the lowest density was 233 square feet per person and the average was 190 square feet per person. Public-sector projects reviewed that have adopted a flexible workplace environment were found to have a highest density of 66 square feet per person and a lowest density of 180 square feet per person, while the average was 125 square feet per person.[3]

C.   Lessons

21.   The experiences of a range of organizations and markets provided a number of lessons to inform efforts towards implementing flexible workspace strategies:

(a)   **Gradual development**. Flexible working strategies evolve through an iterative process that develops over time and adjusts workspaces, working methods and support services in a phased manner, in parallel with the observed changed practices of employees, who adapt their working habits to the new working arrangements.

(b)   **Multidisciplinary approach**. An effective flexible workspace strategy requires a concerted approach and close collaboration between facilities, ICT and human resources management.

(c)   **Alignment with organizational mission**. The most successful flexible workspace projects have aligned their workspace strategy closely with the overall organizational mission. Workplace change has been used as a process to improve the organizational culture and deliver organizational priorities rather than merely as a means to achieve space savings.

(d)   **Change management and inclusive communication**. The approach to delivering a flexible workplace is as important as the space changes themselves in

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[2] British Council for Offices, "International office specifications — a tale of six cities".
[3] These figures were calculated on the basis of data sets of 17 public-sector projects executed between 2002 and 2010 in the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

terms of influencing staff satisfaction and performance. Inclusive communication, active change management and training and learning programmes across the organization are key to a successful outcome.

(e) **Extent of space saving to be expected**. The extent of space saving differs significantly from entity to entity and is dependent on the functions of the occupants, the existing organizational culture and the available technological support.

(f) **Cost savings**. While the introduction of flexible work is often motivated by a search for spatial efficiencies, the potential for bottom line benefits can also be generated in other areas and may include lower operational costs, more sustainable business practices, improved business continuity and disaster recovery and a higher level of employee productivity.

(g) **Need for investments**. Investments in ICT, facilities upgrades and renovations, improved workplace services and the training of staff and managers are essential for the successful implementation of a flexible workplace.

V. Current Secretariat population and real estate

A. Real estate footprint at United Nations Headquarters

22. As of December 2012, the United Nations Secretariat in New York accommodated 8,521 persons, occupying a total of 2,541,002 gross square feet. This space includes office floors with individual workspaces, circulation areas and miscellaneous areas such as meeting rooms and copy areas. Table 2 provides a breakdown of where this population is housed, both in United Nations-owned property and in leased space.

Table 2
A. United Nations Secretariat population accommodated at United Nations Headquarters

Population at United Nations Headquarters in 2012	8 521

B. Population housed in United Nations-owned space

Location	Gross square feet	Headcount
Secretariat Building	900 000	2 859
Other on-campus locations (Conference Building, basement, General Assembly, Library/North Lawn/North Lawn Building/South Annex Building)	416 250	1 117
United Nations Institute for Training and Research	23 000	156
Non-seated staff		771
Total	**1 339 250**	**4 903**

C. Population housed in leased space

Location	Gross square feet	Headcount capacity/ occupancy
DC-1	196 566	865
DC-2	312 064	1 172
FF Building, 304 East 45th St.	138 301	452
Alcoa Building	30 845	10
Falchi ARMS Archives warehouse, Long Island City	50 413	11
Daily News Building	74 822	15
Innovation Building, 300 East 42nd St.	132 602	364
Court Square Place	79 079	120
Albano Building	187 060	609
Total	**1 201 752**	**3 618**

23.   While the distribution of staff shown in table 2 in United Nations-owned buildings is typical of usual occupancy, in December 2012 adjustments to the occupancy of some leased buildings were still being made as part of the reshuffle after the reoccupation of the Secretariat Building following capital master plan renovations. The Alcoa Building and the Daily News Building had few occupants in December 2012 but since that time more typical occupancy levels have been restored. In August 2013, the Alcoa Building accommodated 91 staff and the Daily News Building accommodated 111 staff. It is also noted that the Falchi Building in Long Island City mostly houses archive stacks and the 11 staff accommodated there occupy standard-sized workspaces in accordance with table 3 A below.

24.   Following the completion of the renovation of the Secretariat Building under the capital master plan and the return of staff to the premises, the Office of Central Support Services made a survey of available office space in order to optimize occupancy and minimize vacancy through the reassignment of available workspaces. After this exercise, the occupancy rate of the Secretariat Building in August 2013 was 95 per cent.

B. Current workspace arrangements

25.   The concept of flexible workspace was outside of the scope of the capital master plan as established by the General Assembly in December 2007. Nevertheless, as part of the capital master plan, a modern working environment was created and more energy efficient building features were installed. The introduction of an open floor plan and the development of new office space guidelines, in particular, allow for the allocation of office space in a rational, simple and streamlined way, and provide for more flexibility in the use of space. More open, common space and less closed and hierarchically defined individual space encourages greater team work.

26.   The renovation of the Secretariat Building has also provided small touchdown workspaces and informal meeting areas which serve to accommodate travelling staff, consultants and interns.

27.   The office space guidelines (see table 3) were implemented for the capital master plan renovations. They specify how much workspace is allocated to each individual staff member, depending on grade, and assign shared resource space for each floor and for a cluster of dedicated workspaces. Taking into account the current distribution of grades in the Secretariat staffing structure, the shared support spaces necessary in each area and the required circulation space, currently an average of 220 square feet per workspace is achieved in the Secretariat Building.

28.   The office space guidelines were developed specifically for the floor-plate of the Secretariat Building. They are applied in all United Nations Headquarters off-campus buildings to the extent possible, since they have to be adapted to the floor-plate of each building and have to take into account specific building characteristics and occupancy needs.

Table 3
Space allocation in United Nations Secretariat on-campus buildings, in accordance with the United Nations space-planning guidelines of August 2012

A.   **Individual workspaces**

Level of occupant	Workspace style	Area in square feet	Area in square metres
Under-Secretary-General/ Assistant Secretary-General	Enclosed	384	35.6
Director	Enclosed	192	17.8
Professional	Open plan	96	8.9
General Service	Open plan	64	6.3

B.   **Shared meeting spaces, typical configuration per floor**

Small meeting room (2x)	96 square feet
Medium meeting room (2x)	192 square feet
Open informal space (1x)	64 square feet
Soft meeting space (1x)	64 square feet

C.   **Shared resources, typical configuration per floor**

Arrival point space (1x)	96 square feet
Resource area (2x)	192 square feet
Focus booths (3x)	24 square feet
Visitors touchdown (8 seats)	64 square feet
Browsery (3x)	48 square feet
Pantry	20 square feet

C. Preliminary assessment of space utilization at United Nations Headquarters

29.   In the Secretary-General's report on the expanded feasibility study (A/67/720), a 10 per cent space reduction through the gradual implementation of flexible working was included as a planning assumption. This figure was derived from interviews conducted with departmental representatives for the original feasibility study. The assumption was that a flexible workplace would be phased in over time, achieving this 10 per cent efficiency through greater utilization of existing workspaces.

30.   To further test this planning assumption and to undertake a preliminary assessment of flexible workplace potential at the United Nations Secretariat, an abbreviated methodology was developed to explore two key indicators: (a) current space utilization at United Nations Headquarters and (b) staff attitudes towards the flexible workplace and towards change of their existing working environment. In order to meet the reporting deadline for the present report, the initial data gathering for this exercise was limited to a small sample of the total United Nations real estate portfolio at Headquarters and engaged a small focus group of staff members over the course of three weeks during July and August 2013. It was recognized that during the summer months above-average absences occur owing to leave and vacation and this was factored into the evaluation. Despite that constraint, the exercise was carried out in a rigorous manner, consistent with industry best practice.

31.   To determine the actual utilization of spaces through the course of a typical work day at the United Nations, an observational study was conducted of both assigned workspace, such as offices or work stations, and of adjacent meeting rooms, lobbies and corridors. Floors and locations for assessment were chosen to best represent the broader United Nations Headquarters population, and an observational route across a total of six floors, including a conference room floor, of the Secretariat and the DC-1 Buildings was designed to methodically record data on workplace utilization and behaviour. Over a four-day period, utilization data were collected on an hourly basis along this route by trained observers. Qualitative findings about alternate use of spaces, behavioural features and potential improvements were also noted.

32.   Average utilization of the sample floors in the Secretariat and DC-1 Buildings was observed on an hourly basis to be around 50 per cent. This utilization rate peaked at 70 per cent and dropped as low as 30 per cent at certain times and locations. These observed utilization rates are typical of public-sector entities that do not implement a flexible workplace. Current floor-plates of the Secretariat Building support between 80 and 100 people, resulting from the 220 square feet per person planning approach. Preliminary research further showed that building systems could support greater density and could accommodate an increased seat count.

33.   If a more comprehensive study were to confirm that current space utilization on an hourly basis is approximately 50 per cent across all office space at United Nations Headquarters, temporarily available space could be more efficiently utilized by implementing flexible working and desk-sharing. Industry practices suggest that space savings of up to 25 per cent could result from such measures.

34. However, two significant factors need to be considered that are likely to affect the overall potential for space savings at United Nations Headquarters. First, the successful deployment of flexible working would require the Organization to implement a flexible workplace programme more holistically, and to build a range of spaces better suited to flexible working, such as a variety of meeting areas, common areas for interactive communication, spaces for collaborative working and other spaces for private focused working. This would serve to mitigate the risk of reduced productivity and a possible loss in efficiency. Second, the actual achievable space savings figure is dependent on the specific organizational context of the Secretariat staff. This is subject to further detailed assessment of the operational needs of different staff populations and organizational entities and the extent to which flexible working and particularly teleworking can be applied. The introduction of flexible working is an iterative and consultative process. In the light of those factors, the Secretariat is revising its planning assumption to 20 per cent space savings with respect to the existing workspace planning figure of 220 square feet per person.

35. In four workshops, small focus groups of randomly selected Professional and General Service staff engaged in structured discussions on their own work styles, personal preferences, needs for concentration and collaboration and the features of their ideal work environments. Additionally, the workshop participants completed questionnaires to ascertain their individual disposition and aptitude for flexible working. A generational perspective was captured by collecting opinions and attitudes of staff in correlation to their retention potential with the Organization, to allow long-term planning to factor in demographic shifts in the overall staff population and take into account different attitudes towards working practices and preferences.

36. The results revealed that the workshop participants had a high interest in flexible working, with nearly 60 per cent of respondents to the questionnaires agreeing with the statement "I am willing to give up owning my desk in order to gain the benefits of being able to work in different places on campus or away from campus". They expressed confidence in their own technological skills and their ability to manage work in remote ways. Staff members under the age of 40, in particular, expressed great support for more flexible and non-traditional working environments and were comfortable with the use of the technology needed to facilitate remote working. At the same time, staff members stated that the ICT services currently available were not well adapted for mobile work. They also expressed concern over the organizational culture and related management of flexible working. Finally, the discussions identified a range of workplace features that would be desirable. These include natural environments, access to amenities for fitness and well-being, and meaningful assimilation of the substantive objectives of the United Nations in the workplace experience.

37. Further study is required to identify future requirements to enable and support flexible working, including investments in ICT infrastructure upgrades and facilities management and training for staff and managers, as well as reviews of pertinent policies.

38. The working group also identified the need to study in greater detail the various work entities (offices and departments) and their operational requirements in order to determine their respective potential for adopting flexible working

strategies, and to ascertain their level of readiness to embrace this approach. It was noted that the Secretariat needed to work towards achieving a tailored and decentralized approach to flexible working that was customizable to different staff populations.

39. Finally, the working group acknowledged that flexible working would constitute a major change in the organizational culture and noted that some resistance to change could be expected, especially at a time when other major organizational transformation initiatives are being implemented and the capacity to absorb further change and engage in additional initiatives is limited. A sustained and participatory process and open communication are absolutely critical in order to solicit views, identify divergent needs, and achieve common ownership and buy-in across the Organization. These are prerequisites for successful flexible workplace implementation.

40. As a result of the study, the Secretariat has revised its planning assumption with regard to the impact that the introduction of the flexible workplace may have on space needs at United Nations Headquarters. Based on the findings of the preliminary analysis and mindful of the major investments required, it would seem prudent to assume an overall average 20 per cent reduction from the current 220 square feet per person as a result of implementing the flexible workplace. Under the revised 20 per cent planning assumption, the current workspace per person in the United Nations Secretariat, which averages 220 square feet, would evolve to an average of 176 square feet with the flexible workplace. This assumption is subject to further review and a full organizational analysis of specific departmental requirements that may reveal variations in organizational needs. The revised planning target marks an increase from the Secretary-General's report on the expanded feasibility study on the United Nations Headquarters accommodation needs 2014-2034 (A/67/720), in which a 10 per cent reduction was projected.

D. Flexible working and linkages to other ongoing initiatives

41. The concept of flexible working aligns closely with other transformative initiatives currently under way in the United Nations, foremost among them the efforts to create a more mobile workforce and the deployment of Umoja. Umoja transcends organizational, geographical and functional barriers, fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, empowerment, sharing and unity across the United Nations. Umoja will allow transactions to be performed with a high degree of consistency, quality, security and control by authorized staff at United Nations locations across the world. As staff will be able to draw on the common enterprise resource planning platform and execute many workflows in a harmonized and location-independent manner, the deployment of Umoja will be conducive to flexible working.

42. In further considering flexible working, the Secretariat will also explore ways to create synergies with, and leverage, flexible working arrangements, ICT, a digital Secretariat, a climate neutral United Nations, and organizational resilience management.

Flexible working arrangements

43.   The Secretariat's flexible working arrangements policy was promulgated in 2003 in the Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2003/4. Its specific aim is to support staff in achieving a better balance between their professional and personal lives and has not, thus far, been related to practices aimed at optimizing the use of office workspace. Flexible working arrangements are currently discretionary, i.e. managers may agree to them if they deem that the operational needs of the department/office will continue to be met; the associated costs are borne by the staff member. Flexible working arrangements may be revised or revoked by the department/office, where deemed necessary. Of the four options available under the flexible working arrangements policy, two (telecommuting and a compressed work schedule) involve a staff member being away from his/her office workspace, typically for one day at a time.

44.   Based on reporting received from 17 departments and offices, including the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in New York, 487 Secretariat staff members made use of flexible working arrangements during 2012.

Information and communications technology

45.   Regular upgrades and the improvements undertaken in the context of the capital master plan have strengthened the Secretariat's ICT infrastructure to support certain types of flexible working. All office space at Headquarters in New York is now ICT-equipped to support hot-desking, and the new Internet Protocol telephone system permits the use of any telephone by persons with an assigned United Nations telephone extension. Mobile office standard service enables all users to access data or certain United Nations enterprise applications from any computer with an Internet connection, including from outside United Nations premises. Additionally, a managed laptop service pilot has been successfully completed by the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the service is now offered to all staff. Among the first users to receive the managed laptop were the staff of the Umoja project. The managed laptop programme allows staff to connect via cable to the network in any United Nations building and have the same access as they would have in their office.

46.   If the flexible workplace were adopted more broadly, a more mobile workforce would have a significant impact on ICT requirements. The trend towards greater use of laptops with wireless LAN access will give rise to the need for increased network capacity on the existing guest network, thus triggering requirements for major upgrades to high-density Wi-Fi network technology in order to cope with the additional demand. This would require additional tools and skill sets, with extended hours of coverage for helpdesk support, thus expanding the scope of services currently being provided. The cost implications of this change would need further assessment. Network printing strategies would need to be developed to accommodate mobile users operating on the guest network via VPN. It is likely that additional print servers would need to be installed to support this community of users.

47.   Infrastructure access and network management would need to be redesigned to respond to various additional business requirements, independently of geographic location. In addition to ICT applications that will become available with the roll-out of Umoja, full facilitation of mobile access would need to be developed, together

with a service management strategy that responds to the specific needs of a more mobile workforce. A different set of information security risks could be expected, for which appropriate controls at all levels would need to be established to ensure adequate risk management.

48. To manage space in a more comprehensive manner and improve the speed and accuracy of facilities management services, the Office of Central Support Services is currently updating its information systems. The software program Archibus is being introduced in October 2013 to collect space planning information in an integrated digital format. This system would require review of upgrades and the associated financial implications in order for it to support the management of a flexible workplace.

Sustainability

49. Since 2008 and in line with the strategy for a climate neutral United Nations, the Secretariat has been part of an inter-agency network promoting environmental sustainability management of United Nations workplaces worldwide. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Member States called on the United Nations system to improve the management of its facilities and operations by taking into account sustainable development practices, building on existing efforts and promoting cost-effectiveness. The flexible workplace would form part of the response to that call.

Organizational resilience management system

50. Mobile work, as envisaged as part of the flexible workplace, would form part of the structured maintenance, exercise and review regime of the organizational resilience management system, supporting efforts to further strengthen business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities. As outlined in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Organizational resilience management system: emergency management framework" (A/67/266), telecommuting and the ability to remotely execute critical functions, are key capacities for Secretariat staff to effectively respond to emergencies, and are therefore essential for the implementation of the organizational resilience management system.

VI. Road map: towards a longer-term flexible workplace strategy for the United Nations Secretariat

51. It is time to rethink the way in which space is allocated and managed in the Secretariat. The flexible workplace holds great potential in this regard. From the perspective of resource stewardship, some of the most important objectives should be improved staff productivity, satisfaction, retention and mobility while reducing real estate costs. Other positive outcomes would be improved business continuity and disaster recovery.

52. Based on the findings of the review of best practices and industry trends and on the potential of the Secretariat to adopt a flexible workplace, the Secretariat is revising its planning assumption to 20 per cent space savings with respect to the existing planning figure of 220 square feet per person. This planning assumption is further guided by the understanding that flexible working needs to be responsive to

the operational needs of the Organization and staff populations in different departments and offices, and has to be enabled by investments in the requisite information technology tools, in space reconfiguration and in other areas. As this new way of working would constitute a major shift in Organizational culture, careful change management needs to be undertaken.

53.   In line with international best practice, the Secretariat is adopting a phased and iterative approach towards the flexible workplace implementation. Critical elements of that approach include a communications programme to engage with and educate staff, and further detailed study of the operational needs of different staff populations and organizational entities. The revised planning assumption will be reflected in the long-term assessment of accommodation needs at Headquarters. A detailed review of the United Nations real estate portfolio of commercial leased office space is needed to establish the parameters for a possible roll-out of the flexible workplace at Headquarters. The Secretariat will present a business case for the flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters to the General Assembly for consideration during the main part of its sixty-ninth session.

Communications programme

54.   A communications programme will be undertaken in parallel with the further detailed study needed to develop the business case. This will enable clear and effective bidirectional communication between staff and senior management, providing an information path for the flow of building utilization and staff opinion research. It will also improve staff engagement and seek meaningful staff feedback through surveys across selected focus groups and the entire Organization. This communications programme will need to identify key audiences, establish critical milestones relating to business case research and create an overall change management plan.

Development of a business case for a flexible workplace

55.   This effort will include:

(a)   A United Nations Headquarters-wide assessment of the potential for implementing a flexible workplace, based on staff views, working methods, organizational needs and opportunities for a flexible workplace and conducted via a web-based survey and selected working sessions;

(b)   A New York portfolio-wide study to understand total workplace utilization and related workplace concerns;

(c)   A detailed exploration of the costs and implications of policy adjustments in each of the key areas relating to a flexible workplace: human resources policy review; ICT policy review; facilities management systems; and space guideline review and implementation assessment;

(d)   An integrated model for cost accounting and the development of value generators in a flexible workplace strategy.

VII. Proposed action to be taken by the General Assembly

56. **The Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly:**

(a) **Take note of the present report of the Secretary-General on flexible workplace implementation at United Nations Headquarters;**

(b) **Request the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session containing a business case for the implementation of a flexible workplace at the United Nations Secretariat, for its consideration and decision.**

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