

UN MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REFORM ATTEMPTS

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Governments and organizations worldwide are struggling to install performance management and accountability cultures, in order to operate more effectively in a volatile global environment.

The UN, however, remains far, far behind, as vividly shown by its long list of attempts at management system reforms from 1950-1995, which were already introduced in the Management Systems subsection of the UN Performance Problems section of this archive.

When the UN Secretariat is periodically prodded by the General Assembly, it presents new initiatives, plans, and even detailed procedures for better management. But it always avoids the "day of reckoning" when it will actually implement them, and, as the key part of the 1990s effort, hold staff and units accountable for results produced versus objectives set, in light of the billions of dollars expended.

As discussed in the preceding subsection, the General Assembly's excellent management accountability initiative has faded into history, its presence marked only by a dwindling number of Secretariat assertions that the system exists. There has been no clear evidence that the Secretariat is implementing the system, that it is producing results, that it is being enforced to provide rewards and especially sanctions for poor performance, or that it is being steadily refined and reassessed to improve its impact.

Thus, by default, any hopes for a true performance management culture must depend upon other, sound, internal management systems. But these have received even less attention and remedial effort. The usual good intentions and plans and flurry of activities are being presented. However, UN senior officials still largely employ only soothing words to persuade Member State diplomats and the public that they are actually making their erratic life-and-death field operations more effective.

This section briefly reviews recent events and problems in the major UN management systems. This further highlights the defects of the UN Secretariat management culture in these areas, and more details will be added here in due course. The most critical areas seem to be "Human resources" management" (so important that it is discussed in much more detail later under the inadequate oversight section; the mysteries of UN financial management (where do all those billions of dollars really go?); the "Programme Planning System (PPBE)" , which continues to indicate the determination of UN Secretariat programme managers and department and office heads to steadily postpone the establishment of accountability for their performance; and the determined non-transparency of UN reporting to the General Assembly and other bodies.