

# MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT AND TRAINING

Management improvement and management training actions are considered vital signs of organizational health and dynamism in modern organizations. In the UN, however, management improvement prospered (relatively speaking) during a series of initiatives during the 1970s and 1980s before fading away, while management training only made a very modest and tardy appearance in the early 1990s.

## Management improvement

Once again JIU reports have provided the only overall chronology of such efforts. In 1988 the JIU found that various UN units were devoting more attention to management efficiency and performance. In 1968 an expert group had called for a strong management review service, and in 1981 JIU had recommended regular reporting to governing bodies on savings achieved and improvements made in administrative units. Unfortunately, as in so many other areas, promises of effective staff utilization, intensified management improvement efforts, and technological innovations had been made, but there were no subsequent reports on whether these admirable aims had been achieved. The JIU then noted a performance reporting void in five areas:

(a) establishing and reporting on performance indicators for support activities;

(b) an Administrative Management Service (AMS), established by the General Assembly in 1976 as an essential need with regular reports to ACABQ, was downgraded in 1985 and stopped reporting;

(c) in 1984 the Secretary-General announced a comprehensive Management Improvement programme and a "Staff Incentive Programme" to encourage dynamism, but its results were modest and by 1987 it was fading away;

(d) JIU had urged effective computerized information system planning in 1985, but only in 1987 did a Secretariat evaluation confirm that the Secretariat had neither

identified new opportunities nor assessed the status and results of existing systems [and a comprehensive performance management information system was still not installed more than a decade-and-a-half later];

(e) Finally, the Secretariat had not been very responsive to requests to establish the internal evaluation system that the General Assembly had repeatedly required, to reorganize existing management information systems, to strengthen management systems at non-headquarters units (where the AMS did not operate), and to better manage interpretation and meetings services.

From Chapter IV.F, "Management improvement," in "Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations programmes: Monitoring, evaluation and management review components", UN document A/43/124, 1988, paras. 165-177.

The JIU summed up the management improvement situation in 1988 as follows:

" ... there is at present very little systematic reporting to intergovernmental bodies on the programme performance of [support] activities. ... As a result, legislative bodies presently know very little about [the results of] the \$US 660 million of biennial support services expenditures ... amounting to almost half the UN regular budget. ... 'output reporting' is still fragmented and superficial ... Internal audit [does] not report at all ... and AMS reports have ceased.

The Inspector recommends that ... the ACABQ, Fifth Committee, and Committee on Conferences consider requesting an annual in-depth review report on management improvement actions and results in a specific support services area. ... such studies would be a powerful, systematic stimulus to continuing improvement and greater efficiency of the extensive United Nations administrative and conference activities."

Chapter IV.F, "Management improvement," in "Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations programmes: Monitoring, evaluation and management review components", UN document A/43/124, 1988, paras. 178-180.

The 1993 JIU report on accountability and oversight found once more that little progress had been made:

" ... A 1992 status report noted that [the 1984 "Staff Incentive Programme"] had been very modest, with only about 40 proposals yearly from some 15,000 staff, of which only 3 or 4 a year are accepted and not all are actually implemented. The report recommended ... a broader focus, more support and visibility ... and perhaps a report by the Secretary-General each year ...

In early 1993 ... a small model project [initiated by consultants, helped] staff in the Diplomatic Pouch Unit analyze their work processes and tasks ... to improve their productivity. Similar projects [assisted by AMS] are expected ... in any other DAM units that wish to participate.

The General Assembly showed its concern with the vast untapped potentials in this area when it called on the Secretary-General in late 1992 'to introduce appropriate measures [with the ICSC] to enhance the motivation of the staff in order to increase creativity and productivity.' The Inspectors believe ... that [a] good further step could be

to resurrect the 1984 proposal of the Secretary-General, never implemented, to help make management improvement a priority measure by reporting on it regularly to the General Assembly."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat", UN document A/48/420, **1993**, paras. 107-109.

A 1995 JIU report on accountability and oversight throughout the UN system identified management improvement units and programmes that were established or being established in about half the organizations. The UN was not represented, however, since its Staff Incentive Programme had faded away. The AMS had undergone many organizational reshufflings and a general decline, and then it too was phased out and absorbed by the new OIOS in 1994. The JIU report on management reform progress in late 1995 concluded that:

"The General Assembly expressed its concern in 1976 that 'an effective and continuing management improvement programme is essential.' and 'requires a competent central internal machinery' with the necessary mandate, senior management support, and resources to enhance management improvement efforts. In a 1991 review of [AMS, by then retitled as MAS], the JIU urged that it be revitalized to aid in managerial analysis and problem-solving, developing productivity standards, streamlining operations, determining staffing requirements, and enhancing organizational and administrative analysis and review. [In the Secretariat] ... an [AMS/MAS] unit is still clearly needed. The lack of such a unit is a disturbing 'hole' in the new system of accountability."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Management in the United Nations: Work in progress", JIU/REP/95/8, UN document A/50/507, **1995**, paras. 164-165.

[Note: the first report mentioned above is Joint Inspection Unit, "Accountability, management improvement, and oversight in the United Nations System", Parts I and II, A/50/503, 1995, Part I, paras. 116-126, and Part II, tables 4 and 8.

Management improvement efforts were renewed for a time in the mid-1990s by a widely-publicized and enthusiastic, but apparently temporary, "Efficiency Board" programme. Subsequently, the OIOS has become more and more involved with consulting work and improvement efforts with managers, which is useful but presents problems because it detracts from the unique and major OIOS responsibilities for auditing and investigation, and creates a basic conflict of interest problem if the Office must later independently audit a process that it helped create.

"UN 21: Better service, better value, better management," Progress Report of the Efficiency Board to the Secretary-General, United Nations, New York, **September 1996**.

However, a quite positive new management improvement effort emerged in a Secretariat report in April 2003. The report, the first one in what the Committee for Programme and Coordination has requested as a regular biennial exercise, presents a systematic overview of management improvement measures across the UN global Secretariat, "as a first step to reorienting the

Organization's reporting to address the Member States focus on results." It is an initial phase in developing a progress and impact reporting system for analytical reporting and to promote the sharing of good practices, using a new UN online tool for tracking management reforms, the Progress and Impact Reporting System (PIRS.) The CPC wants it to progress "both as a monitoring tool and as a means of assessing more rigorously the impact of management improvement measures." It hopefully will lead toward a new UN management improvement strategy and become an important, and long overdue, part of UN management reporting.

"Progress and impact assessment of management improvement measures: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/58/70 of **15 April 2003**, summary and paras. 1-4, 68-71.

Why can such an effort get up and running while other areas, such as PPBE or other performance management requirements, are a major struggle to implement? IO Watch believes that it is because management improvement activity is voluntary. It is something for UN "self-starters" and good managers, who want to improve their programmes and the Secretariat's processes. Weak or bad managers, in this instance, can just observe, or ignore the whole thing and go about their own preoccupations.

## Management training

If management improvement was almost disappearing in the UN Secretariat in the mid-1990s, management training was finally making a first timid appearance, after several decades in which the UN Secretariat almost totally ignored this essential organizational process. The 1988 JIU report on performance reporting had found that the rather weak management improvement efforts of the 1980s left only a reliance on UN staff members themselves. But the Secretariat had a long-acknowledged management skills problem:

"In [1978 comments on an earlier Management Improvement programme], ACABQ noted with some concern the difficulties of establishing in-house management training courses to 'create and sustain a management climate' in the Secretariat. Unfortunately, in 1986 the Secretary-General once again had to cite the need for improved Secretariat management 'at all levels.' He stated that a 'principal task' for him would be to 'ensure that management skills are given high priority in recruitment and in training. In 1987 he further acknowledged the need for effective training in such areas as computer systems and 'modern management skills.'"

"Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations programmes: Monitoring, evaluation and management review components", UN document A/43/124, **1988**, para. 175.

As evidence of the severe damage done to UN management systems by the lack of even narrowly-focused management training, the 1988 JIU report also found a very sorry record of training managers to employ the supposedly high-priority PPBE system:

"The [Secretariat] stated in 1978 that it was obvious that each programming unit must have people adequately trained in [PPBE] techniques in order to make the programme planning system work effectively. [Yet eight years later the 1986 medium-term plan] ... states that organized training activities will be used to help program managers learn how to use self-evaluation, ideally as part of overall training in programme planning, budgeting and monitoring.

Unfortunately, [only minimal training sessions were held in 1987, but anything more is] uncertain because [such] training has not been accepted as a formal part of the United Nations training programme.

... the Secretariat has now prepared nine programme budgets and five medium-term plans, [but multiple outside reviews] have all criticized poor design during this period. ... A significant portion of United Nations activities is still not 'precisely programmed,' and the Secretariat has acknowledged the inadequate involvement and lack of experience of at least some Secretariat officials. ...

The lack of staff training is of extra concern now that programme managers are adding self-evaluation work to their responsibilities ... [and because of a broad discretionary loophole that allows] programme managers themselves [to] decide whether to evaluate ... or not and in what depth ... depending *inter alia* on 'the existing level of evaluation experience' ... and because evaluation units will be phasing out as programme managers take over self-evaluation. This would eliminate a major source of advisory support, training, and especially quality control ...

[UN] training ... is difficult because so little training money is available. ... Nevertheless ... since training in design and evaluation will be essential for self-evaluation, and ... to complete the programme planning system and make it operational, the Inspector believes that [such] training should be the top management training priority."

"Reporting on the performance and results of United Nations programmes: Monitoring, evaluation and management review components", UN document A/43/124, **1988**, paras. 148-152.

The Thornburgh report of March 1993 to Secretary-General Butros-Ghali was, characteristically, blunt on the UN problems in this area.

"In your November speech to the Fifth Committee you called for the rapid implementation of a comprehensive career development system. ... As you have stated, 'it is now time for action.'

In one area, a significant change is already under way. Thanks to the efforts of OHRM's Training Service and the financial support of the Japanese government, a long-awaited management training initiative is currently in the process of implementation. This will address one of the major shortcomings of the United Nations identified by nearly everyone who has examined its operations - the shortage of qualified managers, especially at the middle management level."

Dick Thornburgh, Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, "Report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations" ["The Thornburgh report"], **1 March 1993**, pp. 11-12.

The 1993 JIU report on accountability and oversight noted that in the absence of strong oversight and management improvement units, organizations like the UN must rely heavily on staff members themselves, supported by training not only in management skills but in implementing programmes. Yet in 1993:

"Observers have consistently noted the problems of poorly-designed UN programmes, poorly-stated objectives, and unsatisfactory evaluation reports, ... in considerable part because programme managers have not had proper training ...

Similarly, [a 1990 JIU report] noted, and the Secretary-General concurred, that ... programme managers did not know the rules and procedures on acceptance and use of extrabudgetary funds, leading to uncertainties, confusion, and vague reporting on [this] major funding source for United Nations programmes.

The Secretary-General reported in late 1992 that he would implement a comprehensive ... [training system for staff at all levels.] The report noted ... [a] 'serious gap' between what almost 15,000 staff would need and the resources available for training. For instance, the priority programme -- supervisory training -- reached only 120 people in the 1991-1992 training year and only 550 people since its inception. The United Nations presently spends only 0.29 percent of its staff costs for occupational and management training, well below the comparable 2 to 3 percent that comparable United Nations entities and some governments spend."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat", UN document A/48/420, **1993**, paras. 107-109.

[Note: the second report referred to is Joint Inspection Unit, "Extrabudgetary resources of the United Nations: Towards transparency of presentation, management, and reporting", UN document A/45/797, 1990.

Despite all these pitfalls, the Secretariat report of 1994 on establishing the system of accountability and responsibility stated with much enthusiasm that:

"Programme managers and supervisors must be clear not only about their authority, but also how to use it ... [and therefore must be] provided with training ... related to management skills development. Programme managers and supervisors ... could derive benefit from practical training in ... the concepts of decision-making processes ... The major objective ... is to empower programme managers and supervisors to see the benefits of employing the full resources available to them, particularly through their staff.

... The Training Service has delivered a number of integrated courses with a specific focus on empowering managers ... and has planned others ...

[The Service will also conduct] a special orientation programme for under-secretaries-general and assistant secretaries-general on programme planning, financial management and the budget process, human resources management and other current management issues ... [and] develop an orientation guide or handbook for [them] ..."

"Establishment of a transparent and effective system of accountability and responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/C.5/49/1 of **5 August 1994**, paras. 60-62.

At the same time, many initiatives were beginning throughout the UN system to utilize management development as a

powerful instrument for change. They emphasized the need for top management support and visible commitment; integration with larger strategies; establishing a "learning climate;" and highlighting new management skills and techniques. Two significant efforts were also undertaken to begin to establish a "performance management culture" throughout the UN system, and an inter-agency training center for UN system field representatives at the ILO International Training Center in Turin, Italy.

Joint Inspection Unit, "Accountability, management improvement, and oversight in the United Nations System", Parts I and II, UN document A/50/503, **1995**, paras. 107-115.

The 1995 JIU report on management reform progress noted Secretary-General Butros-Ghali's 1992 pronouncement that "the quality of [UN] leadership and management is crucial" to meet new programme challenges, and the ensuing decision to install a management training programme as the "link between managerial skills and programme delivery." Training in "people management skills for top managers began in 1995, and a first catalog of Staff Development Programme courses appeared. But even the new programme provided only \$3.5 million in funding -- a mere 0.14 percent of the 1996-1997 UN regular budget total, far below the several percent figure that many other public and private organizations were spending.

Joint Inspection Unit, "Management in the United Nations: Work in progress", UN document A/50/507, **1995**, paras. 32-35.

In the same report, the JIU analyzed three categories of the UN's vaguely-defined "programme managers," responsible for the UN's 24 programmes, 246 subprogrammes, and the many additional and varied extra-budgetary activities. A first group of good managers included those who entered the UN with good experience and training, or who are just "natural managers." A second group, the largest, was unprepared managers. A 1993 independent analysis of the UN managerial situation cited the very high frequency with which untrained people were placed in managerial positions in the secretariat, although they who were "entirely unfamiliar" with modern management experience.

Chapter VI, "Who are the managers?", in Joint Inspection Unit, "Management in the United Nations: Work in progress", UN document A/50/507, **1995**, paras. 103-109.

Beyond the two groupings -- the dynamic and accountable, and the unprepared -- was a third category, bad managers. The study found widespread support for changing this situation. But it observed that UN management training must be accompanied by changes in incentives, systems and procedures (such as the management accountability system) to be effective.

Chapter VI, "Who are the managers?", in Joint Inspection Unit, "Management in

the United Nations: Work in progress", UN document A/50/507, **1995**, paras. 113-117.

[Note: the extraordinary damage done to UN programmes and staff morale by these bad UN managers is introduced in the subsection on "The Winner: Free the Managers" which follows, and then further explored at some length in the next subsection on "Unleashed managers", and then as the first of the items under Other major problems in Recent Developments .]

A long-time observer of UN operations succinctly underscored the long-standing lack of trained UN managers in 1996.

"With a budgeting process as antiquated and arcane as the UN's, the dearth of training -- the key to instituting a truly cost-effective management culture -- is shocking. Managers often start out with no notion of how to administer their own office budgets. "Management training', confined mostly to the UN's Performance Appraisal System, still takes a back seat to language-training programmes which dominate staff improvement time. Managerial expertise is but a faint consideration in the promotion of managers at any level, including the Secretary-General."

Morris B. Abram, "Save the UN", The Geneva Post, No. 9, **May 17-22, 1996**.

Note: Mr. Abram was a former permanent representative of the United States to the UN, and subsequently chairman of "UN-Watch".]

The GAO report of February 2004 on UN management reforms noted that the UN Secretariat had "increased the emphasis on training and developing managers' skills" and cited 'mandatory people management training for supervisory staff' [yet another attempt, since the Secretariat had said it was emphasizing such courses a decade ago, see the items of 5 August 1994 and the two of 1995 above.] The GAO also noted that UN officials acknowledged -- as they have so consistently for so long -- that "more resources are needed for training."

U.S. General Accounting Office, United Nations: Reforms progressing, but comprehensive assessments needed to measure impact, GAO 04-339, **February 2004**, p. 16.

In his report on further management reforms in 2002, Secretary-General Annan stressed that more attention must be paid to staff training. The UN spends only about one percent of its total budget on learning activities, which is significantly less than the amount spent by comparable organizations.

"Strengthening of the United Nations: An agenda for further change: Report of the Secretary-General, UN document A/57/387 of **9 September 2002**, para. 187.

IO Watch will continue to follow up on UN management training issues. However, the modest Secretariat efforts that have gradually been established are only a bandage slapped over the severe and fundamental problems of somehow turning untrained UN managers into informed and effective ones; firmly addressing

the many problems caused by domineering and incompetent managers; and overcoming the decades-old UN managerial climate with its many dysfunctional processes and systems, as discussed throughout this subsection.

In summary, the failures of the past decade to firmly install, use, and insist upon the management accountability system required by the General Assembly in 1993, and to seriously strengthen the various weak internal management systems, make real UN management reform and accountability all the more difficult. In fact, IO Watch finds that this situation has furthered the ascendancy of the Secretariat's own, and only successful, management reform effort of the 1990s -- the counter-reform of "freeing the managers to manage," as discussed in the next subsection.