

UNU Global Office – an Overview

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The need for a shared ICT vision

ICT is revolutionizing the way we live and work. How can we use ICT to enable UNU to operate more efficiently and effectively at the office level and at the organization level? Can we set out a vision to help UNU harness the power of the globally distributed human power, which is the heart and soul of the university, to achieve the effect of the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts?

Fragmentation and Silos

Offices of the UNU system invest in a wide range of technology solutions and services to meet their objectives and strengthen their competitive edge. However, without a shared strategic ICT vision, the investment decisions can only respond to the local requirements at best. The inertia of the individual IT units responding solely to the local requirements of their respective offices ignores completely that many of such requirements are not unique, and hence, they are best addressed globally as a common solution. This encourages duplication of effort, which can spiral into fragmentation and development of disparate ICT systems that don't interoperate with one another. The lack of coordination and standardization also undermines any attempt to strengthen our global corporate identity and branding. For example, UNU exposes to outside a mishmash of email domains, which do not convey a unified image of the university.

In other instances, our ingrained culture of thinking locally can easily blindfold us from seeing the broader picture and embracing joint initiatives that are for the common good of the university. One perfect example is the dispersion of our knowledge assets over many independently developed, compartmentalized websites. Worse yet, these sites convey multiple and often incoherent images of UNU. This translates into a navigation nightmare and a total confusion about what UNU does and who we are. We don't have a coordinated and systematic way to capture the knowledge that UNU has produced and produces into a one-stop knowledge portal/institutional repository (IR). We should be reminded that many academic institutions are judged on the presence (or absence) and the quality of their IRs.

Clearly, disjointed ICT systems do not serve well in a global organization. To illustrate this point further, we examine a even more fundamental issue. Isolated and often varying authentication mechanisms are being used to grant users access to the network resources throughout the UNU system. This silo of identities, security policies and processes greatly complicates the *discovery* of information resources available from the different offices and severely limits *what* can be shared.

The absence of a common efficient authentication framework has productivity ramifications for our users when they access resources across office boundaries. End users are required to remember multiple IDs and passwords and burdened with multiple logins. Support staff has to frequently deal with account issues (e.g., forgotten passwords). Developers building portals, which need to integrate with the backend resources from the various offices of UNU, have to deal with a plethora of authentication mechanisms.

Toward One Global Office

The Global Office is part of a wider effort to enable the Research and Training Centers and Programs in UNU to “deliver as one”. From the organization perspective, it is a win-win strategy that fosters collaboration across boundaries in initiatives that help UNU as a whole to harness the potential of ICT by building *shared* systems and applications that benefit the university in implementing its mission and achieving preeminence. It is a process of change that propels UNU out of the current state of stratification and fragmentation toward standardization to unification. From the service delivery perspective, it is the technological fabric that aims to provide a consistent and streamlined user experience to a core set of high-quality, and accountable ICT services from anywhere on the UNU Global Office network. When fully realized, the users would have the illusion of a single UNU office regardless of location – a single desktop everywhere you go. In the same vein, the external information seekers - our sponsors, guests, and audiences, would have easy access to UNU’s intellectual outputs through a coherent interface.

The shift to a global office culture requires agreement on a common set of standards, where possible, international and best practices should be adopted. A common foundation of *baseline* infrastructure is the key to the concept of Global Office. It is possible to draw a parallel between the origin and development of the Internet and the Global Office. The Internet, nurtured by a set of standards, has grown to become an innovation platform, which can be used in a myriad of creative ways. Similarly, the UNU will also benefit from a common core foundation, acting as a platform for innovation much like the Internet has. This would bring cohesiveness to our research and innovation efforts, breaking down the traditional walls between disjoint ICT systems, and opening the pathway for a huge advance in the way we communicate, collaborate, connect and create content across UNU.

Shared Services and 24/7 Global ICT Team

The concept of Global Office is a viable one. It can be achieved using a shared services approach, which advocates the coordinated management of activities and resources in the organization. It is focused on service excellence and accountability to the user. This would require UNU to eliminate duplication of effort, streamline and reorganize the scattered, autonomous, similar services and operations into an integrated platform, drawing the best from centralization and decentralization. Where appropriate,

certain services would be consolidated whereas others would be distributed to ensure an adequate level of performance and fault-tolerance. Advances in ICT should also help us transform the way in which the disconnected and dispersed teams should be re-organized to increase the agility of UNU to respond to changing business needs and economic dynamics. This harmonization effort can enable the individual ICT units to work closely together as one team, making ICT services in UNU more resilient against impacts caused by manpower outages and shortages at particular office locations. And as we pool our resources together, we would be able to afford the best technology for enhancing and advancing our ICT services in alignment with the vision and goals of the university.

The framework is even more relevant to the Rector's twinning institutions vision. As the UNU global footprint expands and multiplies in developing countries, these new offices do not have to build their ICT infrastructure from the ground up. These offices have the flexibility to find the right mix of local and shared services to cater to their ICT requirements. Where appropriate they can develop their own solutions to support their unique requirements. In this manner, the management can release resources to focus on the core specialized business objectives.