

UN SECRETARIAT

LEARNING STRATEGY

A joint effort by the Organization Development Section/Office of Human Resources/Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Capacity Development and Operational Training Service/Office of Support Operations/Department of Operational Support. ODS and CDOTS engaged 45 entities in developing the way forward for learning in the Organization.

2021-2025



**United
Nations**

September 2021

Foreword from the Secretary-General

The United Nations depends on a workforce that can respond effectively to current and future challenges. We need to constantly update and upgrade our skills to adapt to a rapidly changing world. Continuous learning and development are fundamental.

Developing and nurturing a learning culture is both a strategic priority and a shared responsibility. This Learning Strategy – the first of its kind – sets out a five-year blueprint for the UN Secretariat, putting professional growth at the centre of our work. It promotes the skills we must nurture for effective mandate delivery and the values we must cultivate for a healthy and respectful workplace where everyone thrives.

As an organization, we must pay closer attention to how we learn, how we perform as teams and how we grow as individuals. We must be more deliberate about learning, acquiring new skills and fostering growth.

The Learning Strategy reminds us that:

- Learning is strategic – for our organization to adapt to the demands of the modern world, so must the skills and abilities of our staff.
- Learning can change behaviour when it occurs continuously and is part of our daily work. We have the unique opportunity to draw on the rich, diverse experience of our colleagues and the inspiration of our collective endeavour.
- Innovation, data and digital capabilities are vital in our approaches to learning, training and professional development.
- Stronger partnerships and collaboration across the learning community will drive greater impact across the Secretariat.

I invite you to reflect on this Learning Strategy and to consider how it can positively transform how we work together so we can shape the Secretariat as an organization prepared for the future.

“ As an organization, we must pay closer attention to how we learn, how we perform as teams and how we grow as individuals. We must be more deliberate about learning, acquiring new skills and fostering growth. ”



António Guterres
UN Secretary-General



Contents

Why this Learning Strategy	4
Learning is strategic	6
What the Learning Strategy aims to achieve	7
Preparing for the future of work	9
Principles	9
Focusing on the strategic learning priorities	15
Key enabling capacities	15
Skills for mandate delivery	16
Organizational culture	17
Connecting learning across pillars and workstreams	18
Development for target groups	18
Model for client-centric learning teams	20
Enhancing the learning experience and fostering collaboration	22
Mainstreaming diversity and inclusion in learning	25
Creating impactful learning solutions	26
Developmental challenges	26
Individual and team activities	27
Managed activities	28
Strengthening learning accountabilities	29
Implementing the Learning Strategy	32
Implementation goals	32
Funding for learning	34
Learning Guidance	36



Why this Learning Strategy

With a new phase of reform in 2019, the Secretary-General refocused the UN's efforts towards the ambitious goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda, agreed by the international community to be achieved by 2030. At the same time, the Organization's peace and security mandates have grown in complexity. The need for coordinated humanitarian action is greater than ever. And the serious threat of climate change is an urgent priority, requiring the UN's unique convening power.

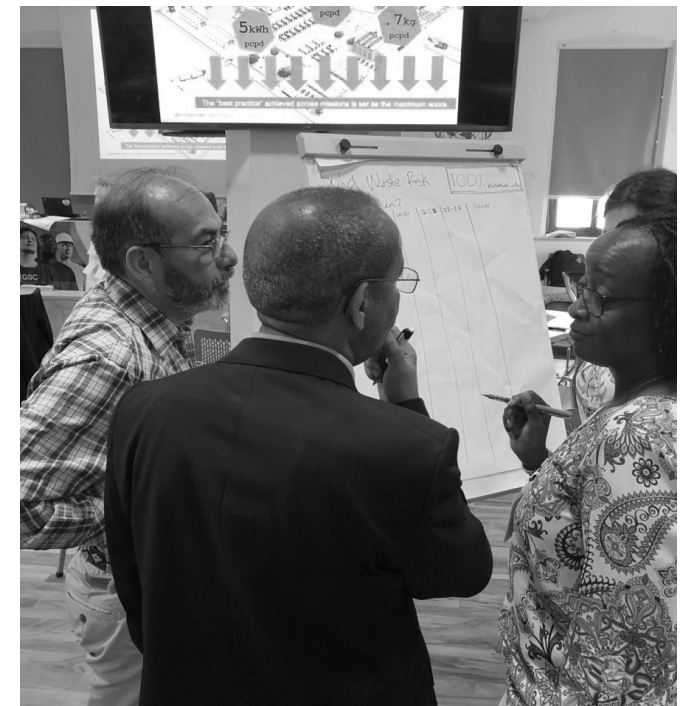
Taking action on the needs and expectations of Member States compels the Organization to respond quickly and effectively; to adopt new skills and working practices; and to position itself to be more agile, innovative, and accountable.

The recent reform established a revamped management structure and a decentralized operating model, granting managers and staff the authority to manage the Organization's resources closer to the point of decision-making.

This momentum of change has included building a responsive and integrated set of frameworks for managing and engaging staff – a global workforce that is capable of anticipating what comes next in the fast-paced UN operating environment to enable the Organization to remain responsive and relevant.

In the last two decades, the Secretariat's workforce has become more diverse and dispersed – over 37,000 staff members deployed globally across 461 duty stations¹ – joined together by an updated suite of systems, technologies, rules, and practices. Staff members can now carry technologies in hand and volumes of knowledge are online independent of location. The Secretariat has over this time engaged staff members and managers in programmes to build capacities, promote the organizational values, support performance, and build teams.

¹ [A/75/591](#), Composition of the Secretariat, para.72., distribution of all staff by geography.



While steady progress has been made, the mapping exercise that was part of the development of this Learning Strategy revealed that the Organization has not yet realized a learning culture. Dialogue with 45 entities and the examination of the current learning landscape indicated the challenges to be overcome:

- Fragmented efforts not coordinated to the strategic priorities or sufficiently responsive to the future of work.
- Reliance on completion of training courses rather than having a true impact through learning and growth.
- Inability to keep pace with the learning people need, when and where they are.
- Funding scheme that reinforces uneven access to learning.

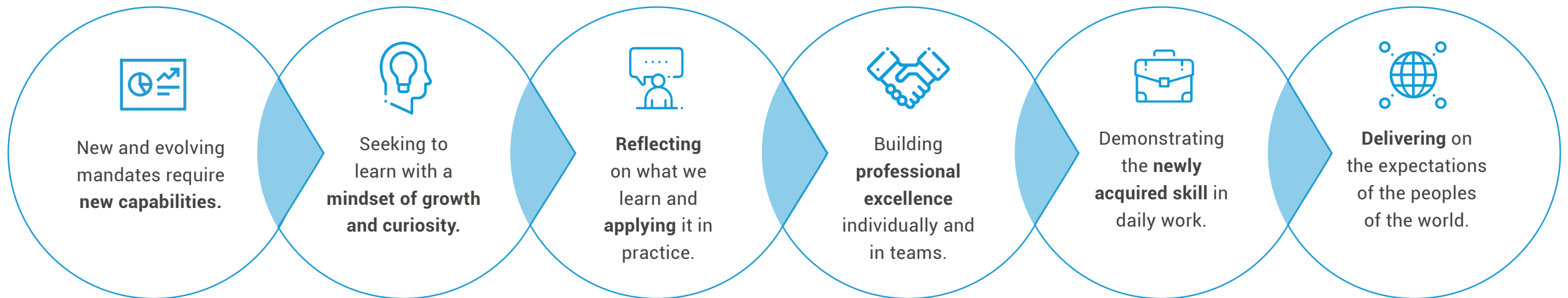
In the wider world of organizations, learning modalities have advanced with cloud technologies and new methods allowing faster development of content into learning formats. Some entities went forward with different platforms and tools, reinforcing silos. Then the COVID-19 crisis forced the majority of the Secretariat workforce to quickly change its operations and work remotely, sparking innovation and just-in-time learning in the flow of work. Enterprise tools such as Office 365 that may not have been used to full potential before are now the everyday prerequisite for getting the job done. Face-to-face training has had to transform or be given up.

Jolted by the impetus of that experience, and a new set of expectations, we must now reimagine how the Organization learns and provide the means to unleash the full potential of its global staff. A new People Strategy and a revamped set of core values and behaviours for staff are both aligned to the organizational imperative for learning and continuous growth among the staff.

With this Learning Strategy, the Organization can build on the foundation of an updated set of agreed values and behaviours, reap the benefits of practices that have worked well, the jump-start in using new tools, and the mindset primed by the pandemic experience, for different ways of learning and working. And bring a new learning culture to life.



Learning is strategic.



What the Learning Strategy aims to achieve

Learning and skills development is key to the achievement of mandates, the good management of human resources, and for transforming organizational behaviour. The success of the strategy will be the demonstrated impact: when the staff members apply relevant new knowledge and learning to deliver the UN's programme of work, fulfilling the mandates requested by the Member States, in line with the organizational set of standards, values and behaviours.

The Strategy will guide learning activities toward creating a more agile learning function. Learning will be more inclusive and easier to access and will reflect the diverse experience and skill level of different UN staff. By placing responsibility for learning at every level of the Organization, the Strategy will reinforce a culture of accountability.

With a five-year horizon, the intention is to update the intermediate components of the Learning Strategy on an annual basis, so that it may serve as a continuous road map for the Organization's learning practitioners and the teams they advise.



The Learning Strategy aims for these strategic outcomes:

1. Preparing for the future of work.

In the Secretariat the concept of continuous learning has evolved into intentional learning, operating from the belief that individuals and teams must continuously expand and change in capability through trying new approaches and applying new ideas. Failures and mistakes create opportunities to use what has been learned to adapt in agile ways and grow further. A growth mindset enables curiosity, an openness to different thinking, and an ability to make connections among data, experiences, and questions, producing more knowledge and learning.

2. Focusing on the strategic learning priorities for the Secretariat.

Functions, jobs, and skills are evolving at an ever-increasing pace. The Organization must stay alert to these changes and adjust learning priorities in response, focusing entities toward preparing a workforce for the future. The strategy will guide entities in the formulation of their learning plans to ensure that the capacities are developed with relevance to their work and mandates.

3. Connecting learning across workstreams for cross-pillar capacity building.

The fragmentation of functional and substantive learning and knowledge produced within entities will be addressed with coordination and curated resources united by new technology so that entities have opportunity to use learning portfolios across pillars to facilitate sharing of knowledge and project collaboration.

4. Creating impactful learning solutions.

Learning practitioners will act quicker to realign workforce capabilities with just-in-time upskilling and reskilling and recalibrate learning to support priorities. The capacity of leaders and managers to inspire high performance and champion common values, behaviours, and practices is crucial. And the leaders of the future must be systematically developed starting early in their experience. Beyond leaders and managers, the majority of staff serve away from headquarters locations, and the greater portion are a combination of General Service, Field Service, and National staff. To engage staff where they serve, sets of courses with long development times will give way to a curated array of learning resources in shorter and varied modalities that better fit into the flow of work for managers and teams. An investment in learning technology tools and skills will allow all staff to connect to the learning resources and to each other.

5. Strengthening learning accountabilities.

The strategy guides all learning programmes and activities undertaken in the Secretariat, including those managed centrally and those managed by entities. Entities' learning plans should align with the Learning Strategy for development of the organizational priorities. At the team level, learning will be planned in the annual goal setting process that is part of the new approach to performance management.



Preparing for the future of work

PRINCIPLES

The way we work is different, and learning has to be different, too. This renovation in how the Organization “does learning” is therefore guided by these principles.

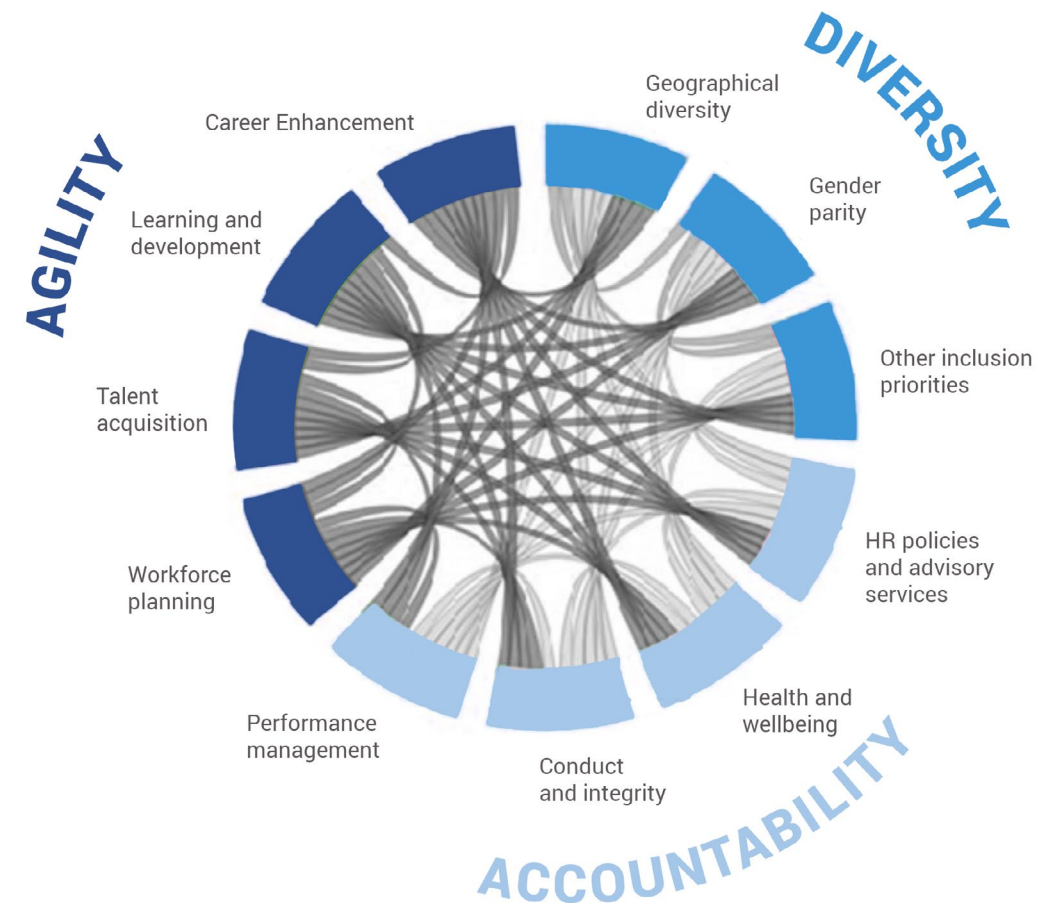
Learning is a mindset of growth and curiosity.

Determining whether true learning has occurred does not depend upon a specific amount of staff time or completion of a particular set of courses or modules. Learning is about each staff member, manager, and team becoming intentional about their growth. They try new ideas, apply a different practice, or conform new knowledge to their area of work. In these ways, learning will productively affect performance, the effectiveness of teams, management skill, and cutting-edge capability.

The focus is on behaviour, not just knowledge. As important as knowledge is, the mandates of the Organization are achieved through changing our behaviour, to more quickly enable us to manage well, innovate, and solve new problems.

Learning is supportive of the People Strategy.

The outcome of learning in the Organization should contribute to and help achieve the people management approach, with the long-term results of organizational agility, diversity and inclusion, and accountability. Learning will be fully aligned with the programmatic priorities and future skill needs across all aspects of the Secretariat’s work.



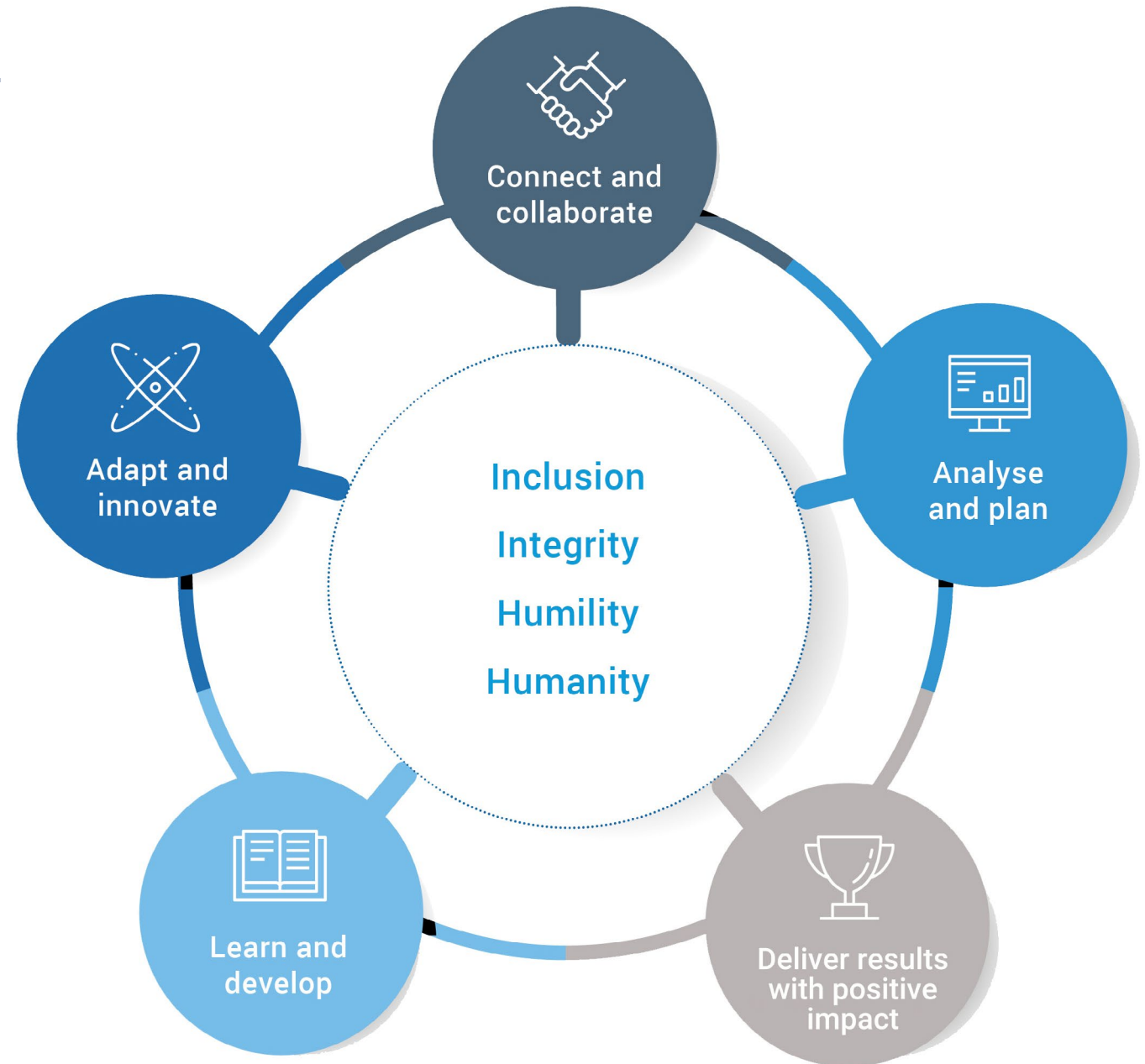
Learning strengthens our values-driven workplace culture.

Everyone working for the UN has a responsibility to be intentional about their behaviour, to act in ways that build and protect a respectful and inclusive culture.

No matter at what level a staff member begins working in the UN Secretariat, or in what role, understanding and embodying the [foundational values and behaviours](#) is essential. We keep these values and behaviours in our line of sight as a guide for decisions and actions, and for the way we work together.

Some of the cultural learning is about knowing and clearly understanding the meaning of the standards of conduct, the rules and regulations, and the policies governing conduct and the appropriate use of the Organization's assets and resources.

But the larger part of this learning is relational – how the values are lived in every-day work, especially when challenging situations arise. Managers and teams will have access to learning activities and support to continue to broaden and deepen their ability to practice different dimensions of the required behaviours. All such learning is expected of managers and teams.



Learning is global.

UN Secretariat learning that is expected of all staff members, or expected of those serving in particular roles, will be made broadly available no matter the function, category, level, duty station, contract type, and funding source.

Learning happens every day in the flow of work.

Most of what staff members learn at work happens every day as teams tackle the challenges of doing their jobs. Ask the most seasoned UN staff members – those who have not only many years in the Organization, but also a breadth of job experience, including in the field – to describe their best learning experiences. They will say the greatest lessons came from working through nuanced situations and tough problems with the aid of the wisdom and guidance of others, usually leaders and informal mentors who took time to show the way.

Learning that occurs when people are constantly acquiring new knowledge and trying out ideas in many different ways has to be intentionally reflected on and connected to what the individuals and team already know, to re-examine assumptions, methods, policies, and practices. With that inspiration, individuals and teams can adapt and upgrade their skills and knowledge to work differently and equip themselves with more capacity.

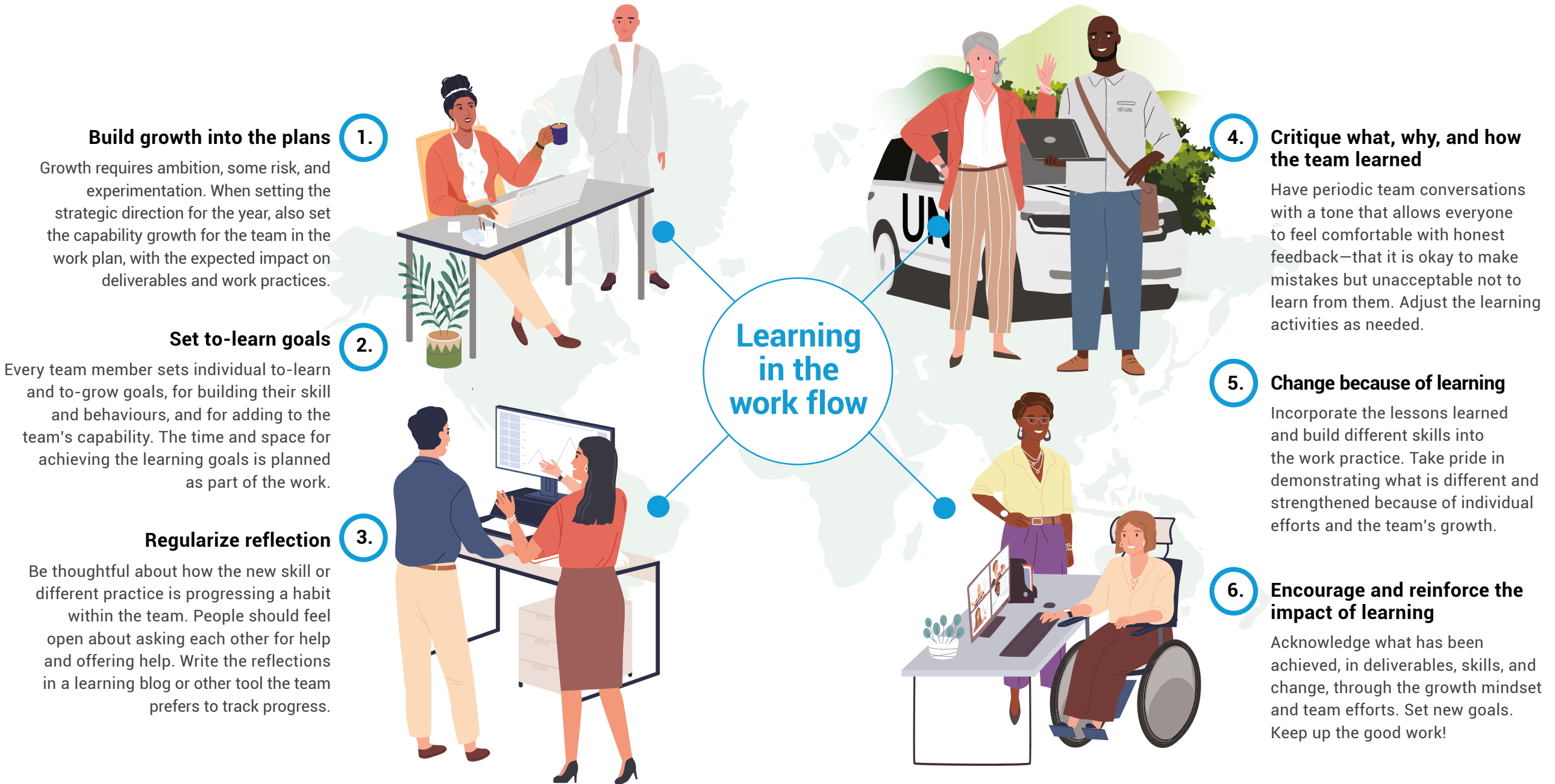
The intention and choice to develop a particular skillset or behaviour, and its application to the deliverables, must be part of the annual performance plan. Managers, in a significantly altered role, will be required to coach staff in the deliberate practice of the areas in which they are expected to grow. Practice in context – trying and refining – is where the skill building and the impact of skill building occurs.

Learning is integral to the effective management of our talent.

Learning is a critical element for developing the workforce. A staff member's learning profile should begin with assessments done during recruitment. Upon selection, the behaviours, and skills relevant to the job role would be developed from that starting point, using the organizational set of values and behaviours as a driver.

As a staff member continues in their career, the progressive indicators linked to core behaviours continue to guide growth, and learning activities build multidimensional capability, with a view to developing priority skills identified in an annual workforce planning process. With different roles, especially with mobility between duty stations, Headquarters locations and the field, more experience and deeper understanding of the Organization is added.





Learning is relevant to every role.

All staff engage in the “critical must-know” learning that is essential to being a UN staff member, first during orientation, and refreshing it periodically to renew the commitment toward our shared objective of keeping our behaviour consistent with UN values. Managers and team members must expect this learning and demonstrated behaviour of each other.

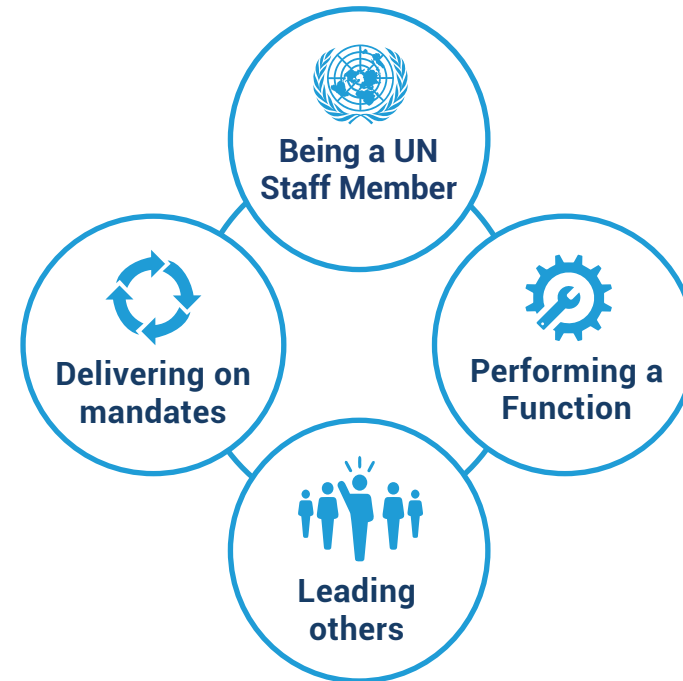
Particular functions require technical training, some with periodic certification. When you have a role in operations, information technology, or security, for example, your learning will expand into those areas of functional expertise.

Managers and leaders have delegated authority for the Organization’s assets—especially its people—meaning they must continuously develop their own capacities for effective stewardship of the programmes, financial resources, and physical assets, and their efforts to grow the skills of the people entrusted to their guidance.

Substantive learning relates to delivering specific mandates of the Secretariat department, office, or mission. Supporting Member States’ deliberations, coordinating humanitarian action, working with members of a UN country team, in a peacekeeping operation, or in a special political mission, requires continuous updating of contextual knowledge and situation-specific techniques.

- Values
- Ethics
- Behaviours
- Multilingualism
- Performance
- Policy
- Teams

Workstreams in Economic & Social Affairs, Humanitarian Affairs, Human Rights, Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Political Affairs, all substantive entities



Workstreams in Operations, Public Information, Management, Safety & Security, Conference services, Enterprise technology

- Senior Leaders
- First & Second Reporting Officers
- Team Leaders
- Supervisors
- Emerging leaders
- All staff members

Learning modality fits the objective.

The learning arena includes many methods to use depending on the objective—to shift a mindset, enhance skills, or gain knowledge.

A primary distinction: training produces standardization; learning produces a difference or change.

Some roles, processes and practices must be carried out in a particular manner, or in full compliance with mandates and organizational standards, and we use training for that purpose.

To acquire relevant knowledge, data and information is curated, and relevant expertise is brought into fora, so that staff can access, leverage, and apply as needed what they require from the expanding volume of knowledge resources.

To develop capabilities, to produce change, transformation, or innovation, managers guide their teams in setting learning goals and achieving them through combining applied knowledge, selected learning activities, and developmental assignments.



Mindset shift

OBJECTIVE

Way we think
What we believe
Alignment with direction

MODALITY

Exposure and exchange,
feedback, coaching, self-reflective assessment,
peer dialogue



Knowledge Gaps

OBJECTIVE

What we know
Information we use

MODALITY

Subject matter research
Exposure to experts



Skill Gaps

OBJECTIVE

What we do
Behaviours we demonstrate
Ability to be successful

MODALITY

Experience: impact projects,
stretch assignments, coaching
observational learning



Learning for the Future

OBJECTIVE

Continuously improving practices
Curiosity about emerging
innovations

MODALITY


Trying ideas
and changing ways
of operating


Focusing on the strategic learning priorities


The Organization understands that continuous change in skills, functions, and jobs is the new normal way of working. Systematic methods are in place to analyse changes and their impact on the Secretariat, from outward and inward perspectives. Strategic learning priorities emerging from the analyses guide decisions about investments made in learning.

Key enabling capacities

Priorities for development of strategic capacities are identified annually through the strategic workforce planning process. Entities must ensure development of those capacities as relevant to their work and mandates. The 2021 budget guidance identifies three emerging skill needs:

 **Data and Analytics Capabilities**
The goal of the [Secretary-General's Data Strategy](#) is to invest in data and analytics capabilities to deliver value and solve real problems for our stakeholders, engaging everyone in data-driven work as appropriate to role. Every staff member is expected to have a data-related learning goal.

 **Innovation**
Invention, origination, and generation of completely different means of considering situations, data, structures, and changes is a field of new expertise and learning, applicable in every type of work, often through use of tools that are also new learning. Process changes and improvements, system changes, and new ways of doing business are expected to move the Organization forward.

 **Coordination & Partnerships**
The broad coalition for advancing the 2030 Agenda requires collaborative skills for working closely with Member States, and the private sector, civil society, NGOs, and other non-state actors, as well as with System entities, in efficient coordination.

Guidance for entities

Entities' learning priorities should align with development of the strategic capacities, in their annual learning plans and in requests for funding (such as Upgrading Substantive and Technical Skills/ Centrally Coordinated Programmes or others). Entities are encouraged to collaborate where the skill needs are similar or the sharing of the learning opportunity (as developed in the entity or pursued with an external source) will have more reach and impact, and be most cost effective.

Learning resources related to enhancing skills within the strategic capacities should be shared for the widest possible access and use by others, no matter which entity initiates the development. A repository for learning resources for the three identified capacities above is established on the [Learning Priorities](#) page (ODS is owner) on the HR Portal and entities are encouraged to use these and contribute further to a shared set of resources.

Skills for mandate delivery

The bi-annual [Learning Needs Analysis](#) identifies skill needs with broad relevance for the global Secretariat and provides entity level data about skill needs. The analysis is informed by evidence retrieved from across the Organization related to the delivery of mandates.

The 2020 LNA identified these cross-cutting skill needs. Entities can visit the [main dashboard](#) to filter data by entity, report type, or learning need.



Knowledge Management

Along with data analytics skills, it is critical to gain and effectively apply the relevant knowledge to impact decisions at all levels, and for innovation. The recently launched [Knowledge Gateway](#) is a prime example of a repository that allows entities to gain knowledge as needed to enhance their work processes. A number of knowledge repositories are maintained separately by entities. The strategy envisions these repositories linked by the central learning point of entry.



Capacity Building

Substantive entities engage in capacity building to enable the 2030 agenda with stakeholders and Member States, for developing their integrated, data-based, inclusive, national plans and strategies to achieve sustainable development. Learning practitioners can assist entities involved in capacity building with applying the blended learning approach to enhance their efforts.



Advanced IT and Programming

Strengthened technical skills and awareness regarding the strategic capabilities of information and communications technologies is important for developing advice for Member States as well to effectively request and apply technology in support of mandated activities. Greater exposure and familiarity with the capabilities of the following technical areas across all Secretariat personnel would strengthen the partnership between business units and Secretariat ICT providers to deliver solutions: artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics process automation, geospatial information systems, cyber threats and cybersecurity, use of data analytics, business intelligence tools, and the use of big data to support strategic decision making.



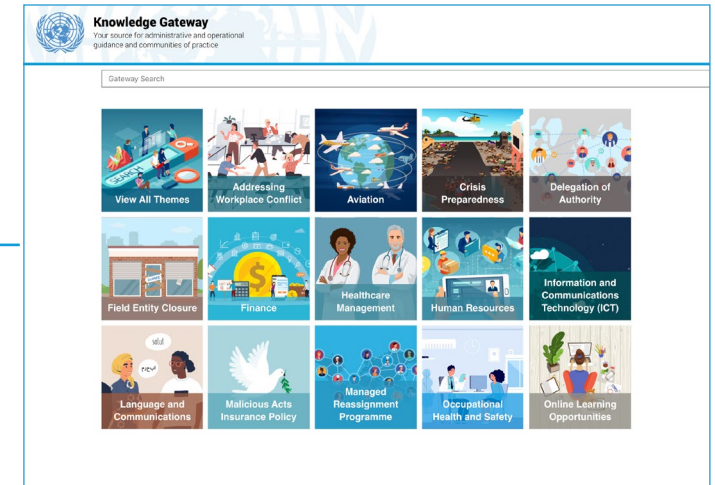
Monitoring and Evaluation

Analysis and advisory skills allow the Organization to improve current and future management of its activities and impact, linking resources to results. The Umoja enterprise system is an internal source enabling data-driven decision making. Using business intelligence in the most strategic way represents a challenge and learning opportunity.



Gender Mainstreaming

Resources to develop and strengthen gender mainstreaming skills already exist within the [System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#), but more efforts are required to support the strategy's implementation.



Organizational culture

Maintaining an organizational culture that fully embodies United Nations values and principles requires that all staff know and behave in accordance with those expectations.



UN Values and Behaviours

The [UN Values and Behaviours](#) provide the foundation of our organizational culture. They are expected to be an integral part of how we build relationships, how we perform our jobs, and how we experience the Organization. They should also guide new ways of doing business, process improvements, and system changes. All staff, including managers and senior leaders, need to be intentional in building their own and their team's capacity to demonstrate the UN Values and Behaviours on a daily basis, adjusting ways of thinking and practices as required.



Mandatory Learnings

Supervisors and heads of departments and offices are responsible for ensuring all the personnel, at every level, have a common understanding of the expectations placed on them through completion of the mandatory learning requirements.

The aim of [mandatory programmes](#) is to build a common base of knowledge and promote a shared organizational culture among staff of the Organization. Most of these trainings should be completed as part of the onboarding and induction process for all new personnel, and are required for some non-personnel, as a pre-requisite for being part of the UN family. If the Organization changes any of the mandatory training, all staff will be informed how to get the training (usually online).



Multilingualism

Learning languages nurtures abilities and skills in communication; promotes professional growth; is essential for mobility and adaptability; and provides staff members with the experience in listening to and learning from others. Multilingualism embodies an attitude of curiosity towards acquiring understanding. In this sense, the [UN Language Framework](#) reinforces the commitment to multilingualism in our work by ensuring that language(s) learning is standardized and has an impact in results performance, at different levels. The UN Language Framework defines language as a competence (knowledge and use) and establishes proficiency at four UN Levels, which are common to all languages, consistent across duty stations and unique to the needs of planning and assessing language learning.

Languages are cross-cutting working skills for all staff members, as they enable the multilingual and multicultural repertoire as a means to succeed in intercultural communication, flexibility in geographical mobility, a more effective collaboration among staff members, and the interaction with local population and representatives.



Performance Management

Learning goals are set as part of the [annual work planning](#) staff members do with their managers. All staff who have supervisory responsibility for the work of others are required to engage in learning for understanding and being able to conduct the performance management process.



Human Resources Policies and Practices

When there are significant changes to the policies or practices that affect life as a Secretariat staff member, knowledge and learning campaigns may be promoted throughout the Secretariat to build staff awareness.

Connecting learning across pillars and workstreams

Development for target groups

The dialogue process with entities for developing the strategy generated a number of target staff groups for whom a focus on their development will have benefits of enhanced engagement and professional satisfaction.



Leadership

To properly support leaders and managers to act in accordance with the desired organizational culture, the strategy will take a blended learning approach: managed programmes plus continuous learning in different modalities to respond to organizational needs as they arise, and to provide a flow of learning resources managers can access for their situational needs. For example, learning in several modalities will support managers to develop their skills in managing hybrid teams, to deliver results while empowering them to work in different times and locations, so that the challenges of remote and hybrid working are managed in a way that allows for the opportunities of these arrangements to be leveraged.

The Secretariat partners with the UN System Staff College (UNSSC) for centrally managed programmes that provide a leadership pathway: the United Nations System Executive Management Programme targeting second reporting officers; the E-Management Certificate for first reporting officers on enhancing people, planning, implementation and resource management skills; Leadership Skills for Emerging Talents, focused on leadership and influence for aspiring leaders; and Blue Line, an online platform that offers a range of online learning resources. A Senior Leadership Induction Programme for new Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General enhances their understanding of the United Nations culture and its operational nuances, with executive coaching, mentoring, and team-building components over a one-year period.

The mapping exercise and dialogues with entities revealed agreement about the need to blend these foundational programmes with continuous learning solutions for leaders and connect them cohesively to the substantive role learning developed by the entities (e.g., for Resident Coordinators, Heads of Missions). A conclusion is that the most impactful modalities for continuous leadership development will come from collaboration among the entities for design of the resources, and most importantly, to build on their relationships with managers and leaders within the entities to understand and respond to needs. The Organization Development Section in OHR will bring together the entities that are sponsoring leadership development to unify this effort.

It is an imperative for the leadership of future UN work that the leaders are developed at different levels with the coherence of one UN. The leadership and management development programmes have been aligned with the delegation of authority framework and the United Nations system leadership framework.



Teams

Whether at Headquarters offices or in the field, the UN Secretariat is organized in a hierarchical structure, but work gets done in teams. Continuing to build capabilities for leading and working in teams, as well as team learning, is the way forward, particularly since working remotely and teaming virtually will continue. Supporting team members and managers to normalise a trust-based team approach requires coaching and support.



Staff in transformed functions

The business model has changed in core areas, and therefore upskilling and reskilling is necessary in roles undergoing significant change, particularly in conference services in Headquarters locations, and in the management of the enterprise technology that underpins all of the Organization's work. Learning practitioners will support entities to develop their learning plans for changes in job profiles.



General Service and related categories

General Service (GS) staff, the largest category, serve across the entities. In the prior ten or so years, many GS staff members experienced transformation in their work when functions of their entities changed, or roles were reprofiled. In certain instances, staff in the GS and related categories manage projects and lead teams. During the imposed remote working arrangements required by the pandemic, many of these staff members rapidly supported their managers and teams to use new tools and to work differently. Every entity is called upon to recognize transformations in the roles fulfilled by staff in the GS and related categories, and work with them to strengthen their developmental pathways in meaningful ways.



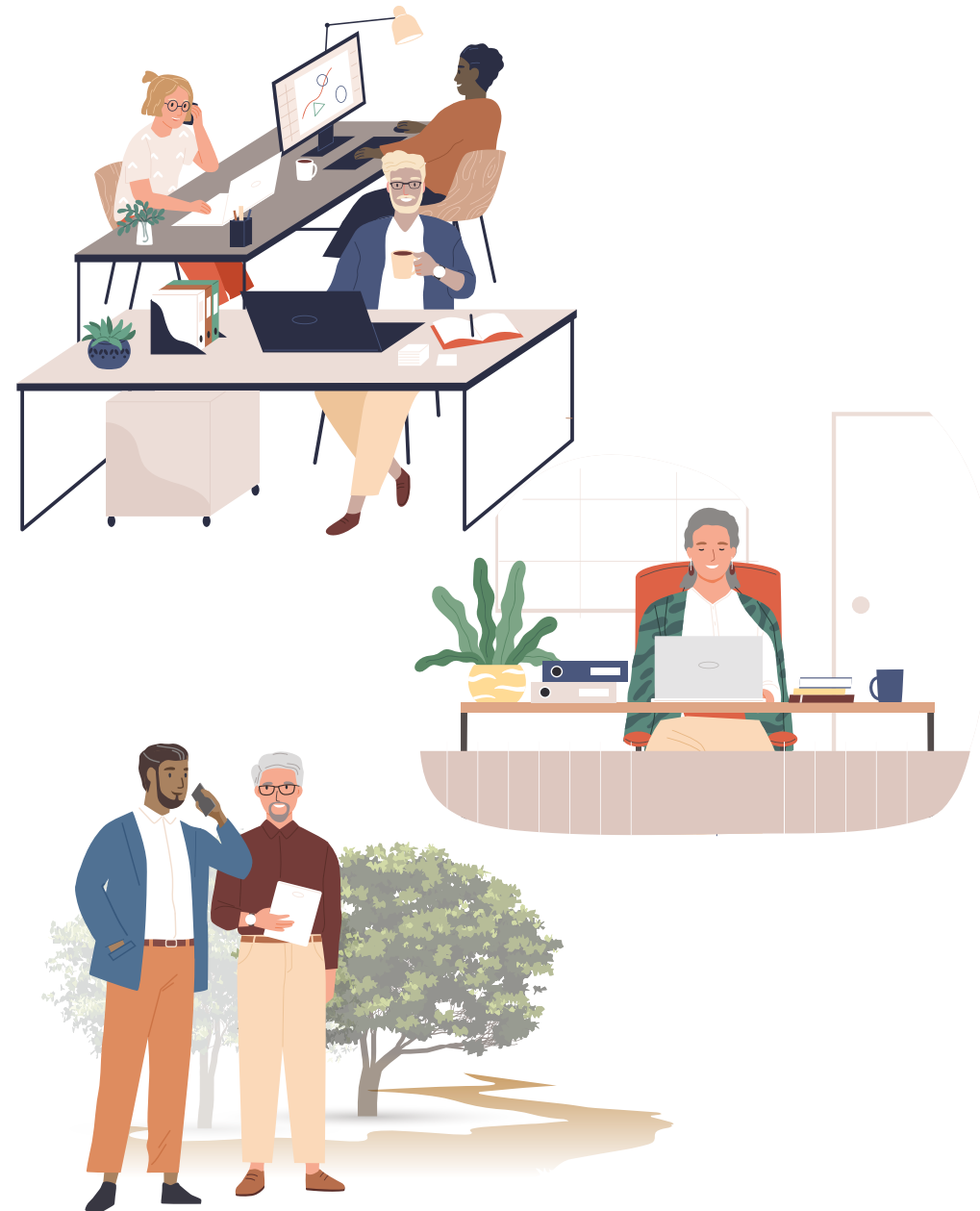
National Professional Officers

National Professional Officers serve in the field and their number is likely to grow. Substantive work in the field and mandate delivery for the SDGs offer opportunities to develop the capacities of National staff. Entities employing National staff are asked to collaborate about strategies for developing the capabilities of the NPOs, in keeping with mandate expectations, with particular attention to empowering female National staff.



Mobility participants

The focus of the new approach to staff mobility is developing the skills of early career staff. Participants will expect to grow through the developmental challenges each position offers. They and their managers will make a developmental plan to ensure growth within the current role and deepen their knowledge of the Organization for future roles.



MODEL FOR CLIENT-CENTRIC LEARNING TEAMS

Today the Organization has 266 staff members responsible for learning in different entities based in 25 duty stations – Headquarters, Offices-Away- from-Headquarters, Regional Commissions, and larger Special Political Missions and Peacekeeping Operations. They are collaborating with over 200 more facilitators, consultants, and substantive staff experts, and the network of Learning Focal Points in entities across all duty stations.

Known as 'staff development' or the 'centre for learning,' the training unit, Integrated Mission Training Centre (IMTC), or members of the HR group, their collective ability to work in the 'language of learning' is enhanced by the different perspectives of the location and client groups they are closest to.

Cooperative arrangements bring practitioners together to operationalize learning initiatives. Together, their work enables Secretariat staff, and members of the UN community, to learn UN values and behaviours, management and leadership, the six official languages, enterprise operations such as Supply Chain, Procurement, HR Umoja roles, Finance, and Business Process Improvement; and the knowledge and skills for Humanitarian Coordination, Human Rights, Political Affairs, Peace Operations, Safety and Security, and thematic knowledge to build capacities among stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Strengthening advisory and solution development services

Going forward, the Learning community of practice will expand the advice provided to entities, working closely with function teams and subject matter experts to guide them about developing learning interventions. Agility will be enabled by a change from first thinking "course or programme" to encouraging best-suited modalities that may be undertaken in the flow of work as a leading response to learning needs. Applying learning technology specialist skills, they will gain maximum leverage from new learning solutions and tools.

Learning Teams Architects of continuous organizational and professional growth



Advisory and advocacy

- Socializing and guiding the learning culture
- Stewardship of the learning function
- Strategic oversight of learning resources
- Internal consulting for developmental focus of learning
- Assessment of learning impact

Developing solutions

- Dynamic and cost effective partnering with function teams and subject matter experts
- Shorter cycle time for end-to-end process
- Digital & virtual capabilities for learning products and communications
- Interconnecting needs/groups with solutions
- Teaming with experts and specialists

Providing learning and engagement

- Agile facilitation of continuous development and knowledge sharing
- Leveraging new learning technology for multichannel access and delivery

Learning teams in the different entities will evolve to this model in the way that fits their mandate but overall, the scope of what managers and staff members can expect from Learning should be consistent with these capabilities.

The key roles:



ENHANCING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND FOSTERING COLLABORATION

The over-arching resource to enable the learning strategy is an up-to-date, expandable learning platform, shared by all entities. This is an essential investment to address the current fragmentation and enable the Organization to provide their global staff with a consolidated view of the available learning resources.

The present learning resources are developed and delivered in a very fragmented environment. Different learning management systems (LMS) are in use centrally and in entities; there are arrangements with the UN System Staff College for some content; there is licensed e-learning content (LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft); and collections are maintained in department SharePoint repositories. The user experience is confusing; there is no common entry point where a staff member, team, or manager can be guided about how to best meet their learning goals². If they have the assistance of their local Learning staff, it is likely that some resources outside that location will not be known, or will not be open to them.

The totality of existing learning content generated across the Secretariat is estimated to be about 85% visible from the mapping exercise undertaken as part of the development of the learning strategy. The exercise revealed a fragmented universe that includes: 1) established programming (multilingualism, leadership and management, operations training, mission training); 2) learning and knowledge creation in different substantive streams within entities; and 3) programmes developed by external providers on behalf of specific entities.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the learning relied on local instructor-led delivery, with cadres of functional staff or trained trainers expected to deliver in various duty stations, making for slow rollouts of new learning. Some learning has moved from in-classroom to online, using a patchwork of delivery environments.

² Existing portals and sites that staff members, teams, and managers can access for learning resources include Inspira, the HR Portal, the Knowledge Gateway, the Schoolhouse, iLearn, iSeek, LinkedIn Learning, the Staff College, and a number of others developed by departments and offices.



Uniting the learning environment

No strategic opportunity will emerge from the present configuration. If Secretariat learning continues operating as it currently does, the identified problems of fragmentation, insufficient coordination, and inefficient use of resources will persist, and the potential opportunities will be lost. Consequently, the Organization finds itself at a pivotal juncture. With an investment in learning technology, the possibility exists to unite a curated universe of resources that can be repositioned for greater impact, rethought for different approaches, and upgraded with new media. The Secretariat envisions implementing a new organizational LMS for facilitating a reimagined learning journey.

With a viable learning platform, the Secretariat can make more efficient choices concerning learning approaches and resource allocation, will be able to upgrade the experience for staff members, minimize some of the duty station boundaries and deliver differently with more options. When substantive expertise within an entity creates learning content, it can be made available to the widest possible group of staff from the central platform. With a centralized point where the totality of content can be searched with links to the various platforms, Learning teams in duty stations could enhance local solutions, drawing from more shared content.

This is not a one-off implementation for a long period of time. Today technology changes rapidly and the investment will need funding for ongoing upgrades and potential moves to whatever comes next. The Organization's experience with the Office 365 platform previews some of what will be available for global staff members. In addition to hosting for hundreds of internally developed modules, as well as linking to selected external content, there will be ability to create interactive, dynamic content and upload video or link to video channels; faster availability of content and wider accessibility; and ability to gain intelligence from the system.

Learning Community of Practice

The staff members responsible for learning in different entities are well-positioned by experience, expertise, and service to different substantive areas to achieve the implementation of the Strategy by acting jointly in some matters, taking responsibility for leading different parts of the implementation projects, and communicating in regular forums to track the process and progress of the implementation.

As an example, in the implementation activities, Learning practitioners must undertake a comprehensive review of existing content. Hard questions must be asked about programmes and modules, for the purposes they are serving, the outcomes they are achieving and their cost, to determine if they should be continued, upgraded, or retired. The full implementation plan will offer many such opportunities for the Learning community to collaborate in new ways.

Partnerships for learning

The Secretariat learning portfolio will benefit from strategic partnerships among the entities, with learning institutions within the UN System, and with academic institutions and other organizations offering specialized expertise and learning resources.

Entity collaboration

It is the intention of the learning strategy that entities collaborate in the development and use of learning resources, to create synergies in addressing common needs and to achieve cost efficiencies. Secretariat staff should have the opportunity to learn about the work of the different pillars; have access to knowledge and data repositories; and have access to learning opportunities with and from other entities that contribute to their growth. The Learning Community of Practice is the forum for proposing, planning, and contributing entity resources to the shared learning.

UN System partners

Entities will continue to engage with the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and other research and learning institutions within the UN System. The UNSSC is a primary partner for UN Secretariat learning and is committed to co-creating learning which promotes leadership, substantive learning, and an organizational culture aligned to the Secretary-General's reforms. As the Learning Strategy is implemented, ODS and CDOTS will lead in advising the entities about opportunities to best leverage the relationship with the UNSSC.

External organizations

The Secretariat will continue to identify opportunities in licensed learning resources (e.g., LinkedIn Learning, Microsoft) that offer robust content at reasonable cost. The aim is to gain resources that extend beyond one-time programmes and limited participation. Entities are encouraged to leverage opportunities with universities and independent organizations, and as much as possible, to broaden these opportunities across entities.



MAINSTREAMING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN LEARNING

The operating principle is that UN Secretariat learning is for all staff members no matter the function, category, level, duty station, or contract type, available across the Secretariat.³ To realize this principle more fully, the Learning community will collectively undertake several efforts.

- [Accessibility](#) is an essential element with the purpose of ensuring that all learners can fully participate in any learning activity and navigate, understand, and interact with any learning modality, regardless of disability condition.
- The envisioned learning technology will offer staff members the possibility of using more learning resources on their own, needing no permissions other than their Secretariat credentials to engage in learning applicable to their functions and roles.
- Multilingualism is a recognized core value and is at the basis of a United Nations culture of inclusion and respect for cultural diversity. Languages are the natural enablers for integrating diversity by challenging stereotypes or assumptions, by giving the context to other points of view, mindsets, and beliefs. The Secretariat strives to provide more of the learning resources as multi-lingual, with attention to entity priority needs for particular resources in multiple official languages.
- The central Learning entities need oversight of learning products for tone, message, intention, and impact. The intention is to promote a collective commitment to expand the diversity of learning providers and incorporate more culturally diverse perspectives in learning design.
- First reporting officers will be expected to develop learning plans with their staff, in every role regardless of the grade or function, so that individual staff have goals for their growth.

³ UN Secretariat staff members are the primary target group addressed in the Learning Strategy. It recognizes that other groups associated with the work of entities are included in and given access to particular learning and training initiatives.



Creating impactful learning solutions

Staff members have opportunities to pursue new knowledge, skills, or abilities through developmental challenges in the job, individual and team activities, and participation in managed activities. Real-work experience and contemporary best practice indicate that the most impactful learning comes from blending different ways of learning, including the many new tools for connecting with others to learn. Learning practitioners will seek to fully leverage the blended learning model with existing and online resources as the first consideration. Managed activities such as courses will, for example, blend online facilitated sessions with individually applied exercises, and may include tutors, coaching, and engaging through social tools.

The Secretariat's delivery for learning will shift from a mostly in-person model to mostly online. When the objective of the learning is best suited for some face-to-face activity, the blend with online aspects should be developed. The efficiencies gained will be in reaching dispersed staff, especially in field locations, the reduced cost from not organizing programmes in as many locations, and less disruption to work schedules. In accordance with the climate goals, learning will also reduce its environmental 'footprint.'

Developmental challenges

Finding the way through harder challenges is probably the best learning opportunity, no matter the job. Staff members and teams should have the greater part of their learning from developmental assignments that stretch them to grow within the present job. Taking on such learning with a growth mindset—and supported by a manager and team that create a safe space to talk openly and ask for help without fear—enlarges the potential learning.

Research and experience have proven that real change—in skill, mindset, capability, innovation, and leadership—is more frequently and more lastingly developed as people do their jobs and interact with each other's skills and knowledge. Individuals and teams are encouraged to identify and ask for these opportunities.

Skills develop and engagement increases with the navigation of such challenges. The manager's and other team members' feedback serves to fine-tune the growth. These types of assignments tend to bring out resilience, teach lessons about leadership and decisiveness, and help to build people skills, and the lessons tend to be remembered.

A few examples of hands-on assignments:

- Respond to questions of an intergovernmental body
- Run a task force on a business problem
- Participate in a project with another function
- Serve on a project review committee
- Supervise a programme start or a programme end

Managers and staff members needing ideas for types of assignments for the development of certain skills may consult their Learning teams.



Individual and team activities

Some tools, modules, and other learning elements will be accessed by staff members independently to support their engagement in developmental assignments. The range of learning resources that staff members and teams can use or join in doing to learn on their own and together include:

- **E-learning**
Videos, podcasts, tutorials, demonstrations, scenarios, and recorded modules or webinars, etc.
- **Technology tools for 'pop up' learning**
Structured reflection and practice exercises for self-awareness.
- **Workbooks**
Structured reflection and practice exercises for self-awareness.
- **Assessment tools**
Self-assessment in particular areas for effectiveness and change.
- **Shadowing**
Observe a skilled person's modelling of how-to.
- **Peer exchanges**
Brainstorming and critique to encourage new approaches and pull out the lessons learned.
- **Observation and debrief**
Sit in on strategic meetings or deliberations (including those with and between Member States) and discuss the dynamics.
- **Research**
Build knowledge through experts found on social media, podcasts, books, articles, case studies, reports and guidance.
- **Workshops**
Group processes to build team effectiveness, brainstorm, solve a problem, plan, or blend knowledge.
- **Job aids**
Easy to find how-to guides for quick help as needed.
- **Forums**
Knowledge sharing from experts and fellow learners.



Managed activities

Learning teams will organize or support the design and implementation of the various managed learning activities, including:

- **Experiential learning**
Interactive group programme facilitated in real-time in a virtual or actual space.
- **Training**
Instruction for standard technique or process to ensure consistent application of policies, procedures, and practices, in real-time in a virtual or actual space.
- **Communities**
Collaboration, knowledge sharing, and problem solving among those with similar work or interconnected purposes, to foster hands-on learning and facilitate exchanges.
- **Mobility**
Development in-the-job through service in different entities or jobs across geographical locations.
- **Learning and Performance Contract**
Manager and staff agreement on learning aims and expected outcomes to guide professional growth, updated with feedback.
- **Coaching**
Impartial feedback and exercises for specific development areas
- **Job rotation** - Work in another role for a time to understand process and gain experience.

conecta



A collaboration community created by UN staff for UN staff. The user community pilot is co-creating an agile UN system prepared for the future of work.

View [video](#)

Learn more about [Conecta](#)

Strengthening Learning Accountabilities

The particular accountabilities by which the Learning community establishes and maintains the learning portfolio, and the expectations for staff members and managers, are as follows.

1 Secretariat-wide

UN Secretariat learning supports professional growth and builds capabilities among staff members, managers, and teams across the Organization, at a dynamic pace, and in a cost-effective manner. The strategy guides all learning related programmes and activities undertaken in the Secretariat, including those centrally managed and those managed by entities.

2 Stewardship

Organizational Development Section (ODS) in DMSPC and Capacity Development and Operational Training Service (CDOTS) in DOS are the stewards of systems and processes for creating cohesiveness among the knowledge, tools, and various curricula used across the Organization. Thematic appropriateness, production quality, tone and design are vetted and cleared through their oversight.

3 Leadership

ODS and CDOTS lead in centrally developing or directing the development of learning for major needs specific to the Organization in their respective areas of focus, provide interdisciplinary learning solutions, and further improve the quality and embrace of a learning culture.

4 Management

The aim is for a unified entry point for learning, from which learners and learning professionals will be directed toward linking to or accessing learning content wherever it is hosted. As much as possible, resources will be managed so learners can use them at the time and point of need.

5 Advisory

The central Learning entities guide the development of learning activities undertaken in the Secretariat. Functional pillars, and business and substantive experts, are supported with advice (within the entity and/ or centrally) for developing their learning plans, and when conceptualizing any new learning solution or response to a learning need. The Learning practitioners will ensure best-suited solutions and value for the investment.

6 Design

Before a learning module or other content is produced, Learning practitioners will advise about design to ensure that solutions are effective, transferable to widest use, and made available in an inclusive way.

Strengthening Learning Accountabilities (continued)

7 Impact

Learning content is considered open (to the extent possible), to be used by staff members in any relevant context, allowing for the fullest and most effective use of learning resources, strengthening the connection between learning activities and the performance of the work. Wider use will also improve the return on the investments made to develop learning resources.

8 Growth

Learning is planned in the annual goal setting process staff members do with their managers. Growing skills and behaviours is an ongoing important priority, and the learning plan should align with the current role and have meaning for longer-term aspirations. Activities within the staff member's professional growth plan depend on the goals set, and the plan must allow for the time and space to carry out learning, reflect on the learning, and bring it into application.

9 Standards

Staff members in roles for which the Organization has established training for doing the job are expected to meet the requirements, and their readiness is in some cases certified. Staff in these roles and their managers must ensure the process and practice protocols are followed.

ACCOUNTABILITIES AT A GLANCE

DMSPC and DOS

- Co-owners and sponsors of organizational learning strategy.
- Advocates for necessary resources for learning.
- Providers of content expertise and functional leadership.

ODS and CDOTS

- Lead socialization and adoption of learning strategy at organizational level.
- Guide integration of the strategy within Talent Management.
- Lead organization-wide implementation of the strategy.
- Lead, design and develop a coherent learning platform.
- Establish mechanisms with entities for alignment and coherence of advisory, solution development, learning and engagement actions.
- Develop and manage centralized learning portfolios in accordance with their specific mandates.
- Develop, coordinate, and manage organizational learning budgets and resources.
- Develop and assess indicators of learning impact.

Heads of Entities

- Ensure the alignment of entity learning with the organizational strategy and the adherence to its principles.
- Sponsor entity learning and engagement actions.
- Expect the entity managers to enable developmental assignments and practices.
- Model the mindset of growth and curiosity in the leadership team.
- Lead the provision of substantive content and expertise in learning resources.

Entity Learning Teams

- Lead socialization of learning strategy within the entity.
- Manage interface between entity and corporate leads.
- Manage integration points within the entity to implement the strategy.
- Owners of entity learning plans compatible with the strategy.
- Owners of specific knowledge base/ content resources.
- Work actively with other entities to build, share, and deliver learning resources through the central platform.
- Develop and assess entity-specific indicators of learning impact.

First Reporting Officers

- Thoughtfully identify the development needs of their staff and plan how to nurture, support and sustain this learning.
- Set goals for individual and team learning plans integrated into deliverables.
- Enable the developmental actions, practices, and activities in the flow of work.
- Dedicate the larger portion of their time to giving feedback on assignments, coaching the practice of skills and behaviours, and guiding the impact of learning on results produced.
- Promote the mindset where it is okay to make mistakes, but unacceptable not to learn from them.

Staff Members

- Actively use learning for professional growth.
- View learning as a continuum – building on all prior learning to grow in the current role, and looking ahead to the learning that will need to occur to be ready for “future” roles.
- Integrate learning goals and plans into ongoing deliverables.
- Use the feedback from manager and team to gain perspective and skill.
- Assess the impact of learning on the results produced as an individual contributor and as a team member
- Give feedback to team members and coach practice of skills and ideas.



For the Learning Strategy to be truly meaningful the prior focus on completing courses must change to ‘what did I learn and how was I able to apply what I learned for a result?’ When staff members approach their learning with the growth mindset, and set to-learn goals, the qualitative evidence should show change in behaviour and performance, so that individuals and teams achieve greater impact in their roles.

Implementing the Learning Strategy

The central entities will lead organization-wide implementation of the Learning Strategy.

Organizational Development Section/OHR/DMSPC (ODS)

ODS leads strategic projects that accelerate organizational development in the context of reform and change. The team designs and implements Organization-wide frameworks to develop staff talent throughout the employee lifecycle including induction, learning and leadership, performance management and career enhancement.

Capacity Development & Operational Training Service/OSO/DOS (CDOTS)

CDOTS builds and strengthens capacities needed to accountably exercise delegated authority, supporting clients in the design, development and delivery of operational training programmes, and advancing professional certification and skills development in operational support functions, enterprise support systems and language learning. The Service is also responsible for facilitating business process improvement and effective knowledge management for operational support.

The intention of the Learning Strategy is to ensure learning is strategically grounded and the resources are used for greatest impact and efficiency. Across the Organization, training, learning, and knowledge management efforts within entities have proliferated. The mapping exercise undertaken as part of the development of the Learning Strategy identified areas where resources could be more efficiently utilized, and substantive and functional learning areas where particular entities, such as DSS, ITS/DPO, OCHA, OHCHR, and OICT, would naturally lead. A key part of implementation is to organize leads and partners for developing learning resources and driving new initiatives. The dialogue process has initiated the bringing together of entities with similar concerns and arenas of work. To further build collaboration, the Learning Community of Practice is to be the forum for entity planning and contributing resources to the shared organizational learning and for addressing common needs.

Implementation Goals

2021

Goal	Related strategic outcome
Senior Leaders and Heads of Entities embrace the concepts of the UN Secretariat Learning Strategy and develop entity learning plans according to the Strategy's principles.	Preparing for the future of work
The Learning Strategy is communicated and socialized throughout the UN Secretariat.	Preparing for the future of work, Strengthening learning accountabilities
The UN Secretariat Learning Community of Practice is established and regularized for coordinated implementation of the strategy.	Creating impactful learning solutions Strengthening learning accountabilities
ODS and CDOTS provide joint oversight of entity USTS and CCP learning plans and regular budget funding allocations.	Focusing on the strategic learning priorities for the Secretariat
The learning related policy documents, ST/SGB/2009/9 Learning and development policy and ST/AI/2010/10 Upgrading Substantive and Technical Skills, are revised to align with the Learning Strategy.	Preparing for the future of work Strengthening learning accountabilities

2021 - 2022

Goal	Related strategic outcome
The single entry point for learning is established and communicated throughout the UN Secretariat.	Connecting learning across workstreams for cross-pillar capacity building
Pilot Learning Management Systems launched and assessed.	Creating impactful learning solutions
Emerging enabling capacities as identified in strategic workforce planning updated annually and integrated into the Learning Strategy.	Focusing on the strategic learning priorities for the Secretariat
Coherence in Leadership and Management Development learning is established.	Creating impactful learning solutions
A Learning Evaluation Framework is established.	Creating impactful learning solutions

2022 - 2023

Goal	Related strategic outcome
The bi-annual Organizational Learning Needs Analysis is undertaken.	Focusing on the strategic learning priorities for the Secretariat
The Learning architecture and portfolios are updated based on changes to learning resources and programming.	Creating impactful learning solutions
New Learning job profiles are developed for common roles across the entities with the skills necessary to support the Organization's learning strategy.	Preparing for the future of work

2023 - 2024

Goal	Related strategic outcome
The funding scheme for Learning is revised based on change in learning programming, potential funding sources, and efficiencies realized.	Strengthening learning accountabilities

Funding for Learning

Funding for learning has always been a challenge. Like the other system organizations, the Secretariat has seen a consistent decrease of funding for Learning. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) noted that “while there is general agreement on the principle that learning is strategic in the life of any organization, in particular for the organizations of the United Nations system, which are catalysts and brokers of knowledge, the allocation of resources does not reflect this principle.”

The main focus of the Learning Strategy aims at addressing these other factors identified above. However, to focus on strategic alignment, improved quality and relevance of the learning activities, the roadblocks set by the funding architecture must be understood.

- Regular budget funding, managed by ODS/OHR and CDOTS/DOS, provides financial resources for Centrally Coordinated Programmes, such as leadership and management development, mandatory learnings, Umoja training and other operational training, language training, cross-cutting learning such as the diversity and inclusion training, and Upgrading Substantive and Technical Skills at the Offices level.
- Peacekeeping funding, managed by ITS/DPO and locally at the mission level, provides financial resources for all training and learning for peacekeeping operations.
- Extra-budgetary and other funding sources, managed at the entity level, provides financial resources for substantive and specialized training at the entity level.

“While the allocation of resources to learning should reflect an organizational commitment to a more strategic approach, it is equally useful not to overstate the importance of the volume of financial resources per se as a key driver for effective learning solutions ... Other factors, such as improved quality and relevance of learning activities, a coordinated focus, the strategic alignment of learning with corporate priorities, specialization and an enhanced focus on mandates through a flexible and well-equipped workforce, are also essential.”⁴

⁴ JIU Report: Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination, and convergence: [JIU/REP/2020/2](https://www.un.org/jiu/reports/2020/2)

This architecture has resulted in fragmented and uncoordinated resourcing for learning, such that:

- Protection of scarce budgets discourages collaboration to optimize the modality and access to learning resources.
- Best-solution learning products are not achieved when entities pursue different solutions with different funds.
- Staff members have or do not have learning opportunities depending on where they are serving.
- Response to the organizational imperatives is not unified enough to measure if they are being achieved.

During the five-year period of the Learning Strategy, the intention is to explore options to expand the funding for learning in ways that overcome the present barriers. As an initial step to best leverage the available funding, ODS and CDOTS, who are serving all of the same client entities for different needs, will jointly issue guidance about developing and submitting annual entity learning plans.

ODS and CDOTS will review entity learning plans through the lens of the Learning Strategy, and together provide governance over what funding can be provided, from what source, in the regular budget allocation.



Learning Guidance

1. [United Nations Values and Behaviours](#) – The framework complements the Learning Strategy.
2. [2020 Learning Needs Analysis](#) – The bi-annual LNA identifies skill needs with broad relevance for the global Secretariat and provides entity level data about skill needs. The analysis is informed by evidence retrieved from across the Organization related to the delivery of mandates.
3. [Learning Priorities](#) – Learning resources compiled to address/develop the learning priorities as identified through the strategic workforce planning process and the 2020 learning needs analysis.
4. [Online Learning Framework](#) – Guidance for the development of online learning at the United Nations (2021 version). The Learning community will use the OLF to guide entity teams in the process for developing e-learning.
5. [United Nations Language Framework](#) – Standards for learning, teaching, and assessing language at the UN. It includes descriptors and curriculum common to all languages, and six language-specific inventories.
6. [Mandatory Learning](#) – The current portfolio of mandatory learning may be found on the HR Portal.
7. [Entity Learning Plan](#) – Department, Offices and Missions.
8. [Setting Learning Goals](#) – Staff Members, Teams, and Managers.
9. [Developmental Learning Opportunities](#) – Suggested types of assignments for developing skills on the job.
10. **Learning Impact Assessment Framework** – (under development)

