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Agenda item 7

C 118/7/1
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CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE FACILITATION COMMITTEE

Creation of a Collaborative Web-based Workspace

Note by the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document provides information related to the creation of a collaborative web-based workspace by the Organization as a common area for correspondence groups and similar collaborative groups for their work, including accessibility to the system and cost implications for its development and maintenance

Strategic direction: No related provisions

High-level action: No related provisions

Output: No related provisions

Action to be taken: Paragraph 23

Related documents: A 29/8, A 29/INF.9; FAL 41/17; C 118/7 and MSC 98/22/3

Introduction

1 A 29 was informed in document A 29/INF.9 on the work of the Secretariat in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) related to online workspaces for correspondence or other groups, when needed. This ongoing work was under pillar 1 of the Secretariat's interim ICT strategy: "Support for international meetings: Capturing and preserving organizational knowledge for easy reference in future".

2 FAL 40 considered the proposal by a delegation to create a collaborative web-based workspace, as a common area for working groups, correspondence groups and similar collaboration groups to have a virtual meeting area for their work, to share documents such as long comments, draft guidelines, industry standards, draft reports, etc., amongst their members. FAL 40 requested the Secretariat to investigate the implications of this proposal, including the budget implications, and to inform FAL 41 and other IMO bodies accordingly.

3 FAL 41 considered document FAL 41/16/2 (Secretariat), and noted that the project could be developed internally by the ICT Services of the Organization, with some budgetary implications. In this context, in order to make a realistic estimation of the costs, it would be necessary to clearly define the scope, indicating the range of services the system would provide taking into account the users' needs.

4 FAL 41 recognized the potential benefits of implementing a collaborative web-based workspace in the Organization, and noted that other international organizations already had similar systems in place. The Committee further noted the concerns expressed by some delegations on aspects such as whether the system would be applicable for working groups, the impact of the system on the current work practices of correspondence groups and working groups, and on the need to receive further information on budgetary implications. Based on these concerns, the Committee agreed that this discussion should not be considered further by committees but by the Council.

5 FAL 41 agreed to inform C 118 accordingly, and invited Member States to submit proposals for the creation of a collaborative web-based workspace to C 118.

6 The Committee instructed the Secretariat to present further information to the Council giving details on the collaborative web-based workspace and, in particular, on accessibility to the system and the budgetary implications for developing and maintenance of the system.

Collaborative web-based workspaces of other organizations

7 The Secretariat has contacted the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to collect information on their collaborative web-based workspaces. The main characteristics of these systems are as follows:

WCO

8 WCO created the "CLiKC!" Platform to share some e-learning courses and to be the portal for WCO training activities. It is based on the open-source Moodle LMS (www.moodle.org), due to licensing costs and because its modularity will allow WCO to grow the features progressively. The nature of WCO's e-learning programme is that it is accessible to all Customs officers at no charge, and WCO has no visibility on the number of users. A software as a service (SaaS) or other commercial solutions with user-based licensing was not an option for WCO.

9 CLiKC! has grown over the years and, as Moodle has a number of social features, WCO decided to use it for other purposes than pure training, thus avoiding the multiplication of platforms and benefitting from existing features on the website. WCO currently uses it for various purposes such as:

- .1 e-learning through self-paced Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) modules;
- .2 tutored Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) with webinars/exercises;
- .3 blended learning activities when organizing classroom sessions;
- .4 online questionnaires;
- .5 forums and working groups; and
- .6 repositories of training materials.

10 Costs to WCO are limited to hosting and maintenance which is outsourced to a company specialized in Moodle hosting. To run some of the CLiKC! features WCO also uses additional commercial software that is plugged in to Moodle: Kaltura for video hosting and BigBlueButton for enabling live virtual classrooms. WCO has a quite aggressive hosting plan due to the volume of contents hosted and the number of registered users (more than 16,000), and the annual cost for Moodle is around €25,000, which includes maintenance, updates and hotline. The initial set-up costs were a few thousand euros. However, some investments in custom developments for specific purposes, designing new themes or other customization have been done by external companies over the years.

11 Regarding access to CLiKC!, there are two different procedures depending on the content that should be available to the users:

- .1 registration for access to e-learning courses is made by WCO's contact points in each country; and
- .2 registration to closed groups of users such as forums, and specific classroom sessions, etc. is managed by the WCO Secretariat.

12 Moodle allows a very precise definition of roles and access control, and users access only those areas for which they have been registered.

13 Further information, including presentations and manuals on the CLiKC! Platform are available on the public homepage at <http://cliikc.wcoomd.org>.

ISO

14 ISO developed the Open Text Content management system (<http://www.opentext.com/what-we-do/opentext-release-16/opentext-content-suite-16>) as a pilot project so as to facilitate the development of more than 1,000 standards each year and build consensus among 7,000 different standard-creation project groups. It will be a scalable platform giving users easier access to the OpenText Content Server. It provides online document storage and management facilities that allow several people to cooperate on one or more documents. However, users are expected to cooperatively create and modify documents.

15 The system can automatically keep track of versions of a document, it allows users to store and retrieve documents, and can lock documents when they are in use by one of the users. It has different workspaces (e.g. for different work groups, correspondence groups or similar) and each workspace can be managed through a folder system if desired. It also has various facilities to link to other applications (e.g. calendar, ballots etc.), but these are integrated in the Content Server. It does not allow multiple users to edit the same document concurrently. The system enables organizations to take the complexity out of collaborative, content-driven knowledge work while easing the burden on IT departments, making information governance an innate part of everyday business processes and encouraging user adoption with an easy-to-use interface and promise of improved efficiency.

16 ISO has finished the pilot phase for Open Text Content, and decided to assign more resources to create a collaboration tool that is more robust than what the pilot project was using. Hence, it could be ready for ISO committees to use late in 2018.

Collaborative web-based workspace for the Organization

17 Preliminary work has been carried out by the Secretariat and a prototype of a web-based collaborative workspace platform (IMOSpace) has been built using Microsoft SharePoint technologies as the platform and the IMO Web Accounts framework for security.

18 The benefits of the collaborative web-based workspace platform and some features and characteristics for accessibility of the system are described below:

.1 Intersessionally: correspondence groups created by IMO bodies would benefit from the use of a collaborative web-based workspace platform. Currently, most of the communications in the correspondence groups are by email. However, the use of emails imposes work pressure and administrative burdens on the coordinators of the correspondence groups when managing the information interchanged by the members of the correspondence groups. This system of communication does not facilitate the recollection of comments and suggestions made by the participants. However, the new system would facilitate sharing comments and documents among the members of the correspondence group, in a timely and more transparent manner, and it would facilitate the work of the coordinator of the correspondence group. Other characteristics of the platform for correspondence groups are:

.1 the accessibility to the system would be restricted to holders of IMO web accounts only;

.2 only authorized participants would have access to the specific correspondence group, and they would receive a notification via email on any comment made by other participants; and

.3 the participants would have access to the comments made by other participants, and could share documents.

.2 During the sessions of IMO bodies: working groups created by IMO bodies would benefit from the use of a collaborative web-based workspace platform. Participants in working groups would register using their IMO web accounts, and only those accredited to a particular session would be able to register to the working group. Using this system during the discussions of the working group would facilitate contact between participants outside the normal working hours of the group, and aid sharing of documents and proposals. The draft report of the working group could be disseminated through the platform for consideration prior to its approval by the working group. Access to comments made during the session of the group would be restricted to the participants of the group, and there would be a restricted area for bilateral discussions as well as a public area.

19 Further details and characteristics of the prototype of the web-based collaborative workspace platform (IMOSpace) are included in the annex.

20 While the budgetary implications for the development and maintenance of the system from an ICT perspective could be at no additional cost to the Organization as it fits into the Secretariat's collaboration and knowledge management strategy, the technical divisions do have concerns regarding the additional administrative burdens that may arise from the establishment of this collaborative workspace platform.

21 In this context, the technical divisions anticipate that even though, as per the ICT strategy proposal, IMOSpace would be under the responsibility of the Chair of working and drafting groups or the Coordinator of correspondence groups, invariably technical officers would have to monitor and moderate to ensure that the work is carried out smoothly. At this stage, the technical divisions do not have the resources to undertake these additional administrative responsibilities.

22 The Secretariat would welcome inputs from Member States and international organizations on any additional features that they would like to see on the collaborative web-based workspace (IMOSpace) for their work. These inputs will be taken into consideration when finalizing the IMOSpace platform for testing and implementation, if approved by the Council.

Action requested of the Council

23 The Council is invited to consider the information provided, and to decide as appropriate.

ANNEX

PROTOTYPE OF A WEB-BASED COLLABORATIVE WORKSPACE PLATFORM IMOSpace

Overview of IMOSpace

1 IMOSpace provides a web-based portal that may be set up for correspondence groups and other groups of any IMO body to facilitate their work in a secured environment. IMOSpace is mobile device compatible and allows connectivity anywhere using the IMO Web Accounts framework for authentication.

2 The functionalities available in each workspace are as follows:

- .1 Home Page: a landing page where both documents under preparation and those submitted by the group are displayed. Instructions on how to use the workspace will be accessible on this page. Collaboration features include discussion, editing and co-authoring of documents in MS Word using an IMO template;
- .2 discussion forum (with ability to attach documents);
- .3 announcements;
- .4 smart search that delivers personalized results for better decision-making;
- .5 connected experience: ability to share and discuss content directly from SharePoint;
- .6 notifications and settings to help tackle the most important messages and announcements across the workspace; and
- .7 access to related IMO meeting documents both past and present, readily available at a click of a button. For example all FAL meeting documents from IMODOCS will be readily available in the FAL collaborative platform area, for its correspondence groups and other groups.

Security and Accessibility to the system via the IMO Web Accounts framework

3 IMOSpace uses IMO Web Accounts to authenticate users – same username and password to access IMO web applications such as GISIS and IMODOCS – for secure data transfer and collaboration.

4 Security groups for each workspace are:

- .1 Secretariat (authorized user(s));
- .2 Workspace administrator (Chair of group); and
- .3 Workspace members.

Roles and responsibilities

5 The Secretariat of an IMO meeting can create a new workspace for any correspondence group, working group or similar collaboration group and assign a workspace administrator (chair of group) to this workspace via a few clicks. IMOSpace sends an email notification with the name of the workspace and the link to it to the workspace administrator.

6 The workspace administrator can grant permissions to members of a collaborative workspace (add users), set up a new discussion forum, collaborate with others in the group, upload final documents of the meeting from the group to the Secretariat and carry out all other administrative functions as set out in the correspondence group site administrator's manual which will be available on the IMOSpace portal.

7 Members of a collaborative group can create/submit a document in any of the three working languages of the Organization (English, French and Spanish) using templates available at the IMOSpace, similar to those on IMODOCS. In addition, they can co-edit documents or participate in a discussion forum by subscribing to it or they can unsubscribe from a discussion forum, rate a topic, like a comment, update their personal profile etc. Once a document is finalized the "workspace administrator" will be notified for further action.

Accessibility

8 IMOSpace can be accessed via a web browser from any location, provided the device has an Internet connection. It works seamlessly with desktop PCs and Microsoft Office applications. IMOSpace is mobile device compatible.

Budgetary implication

9 Finally, regarding the budgetary implications, the development of the collaborative web-based workspace (IMOSpace) fits well into the Secretariat's collaboration and knowledge management strategy. The final product can be delivered and supported from the ICT resource requirement within existing appropriations at no additional cost to the Organization.
