WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Human resources: policy development

Report by the Director-General

BACKGROUND

1.   Reform of human resources is an integral part of WHO's programme for management change. The object of management reform is to enable the Organization to respond better to the needs of Member States in the twenty-first century.

2.   WHO's corporate strategy provides clear objectives for the Organization which require excellence in six core functions: policy and advocacy, technical and policy support, technologies, tools and guidelines, norms and standards, partnership building, and information management.[1] To fulfil those functions WHO must be able to recruit and work with the most capable people from government, the civil service, academia, the public health sector, and civil society. It must be able to maintain high-level performance in its staff. It has therefore to be an attractive employer, with forward-looking human resources policies, organization and processes, and a commitment to excellence.

3.   Current practices for managing human resources have developed over time, without a coherent framework. They are generally regarded as overly complex, inflexible and unresponsive. In September 1999, the Director-General appointed a Task Force on Human Resources Management Reform comprising staff and management from technical and administrative programmes at headquarters and in the regions. In October 2000, the Task Force proposed a strategic framework which recommended improvements in a number of key areas of human resources management and modalities of implementation. The different elements would be introduced over two or three bienniums.

4.   The strategic framework was prepared on the basis of a broad participative process and the conclusions of a major study by a consulting firm. It draws on international best practice in both the public and private sectors, and is consistent with the policy statement on human resources reform adopted by the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system,[2] and with the framework on human resources management produced by the International Civil Service Commission.[3]

---

[1] See document EB105/3.

[2] The reform of Human Resources Management in the United Nations system. Geneva, CCAQ, 1998.

[3] Report of ICSC for the year 2000. Document A/55/30, Annex II.

HUMAN RESOURCES CHANGE IN WHO

5.   The Director-General has decided that work on the proposals put forward by the Task Force should be implemented in a phased fashion. Many proposals can be implemented immediately; some will require further work; others may require changes in the Staff Rules, which need to be submitted to the Executive Board for confirmation.

6.   The various changes are outlined below for the Board's consideration. They are based largely on the Task Force's recommendations and form part of a comprehensive package with interlinked components. Costs given are for the remainder of the current biennium.

Agreed elements on which work is progressing

Reorganization of human resources functions, including a new information system

7.   Work is progressing on setting up an overall, integrated management-information system of which human resources would be an important component. Introduction of such a system is not foreseen before the end of the current biennium; meanwhile, the functionality of the human resources component of the current system needs to be improved urgently. In parallel, processes such as recruitment and classification will be defined and streamlined, and roles and responsibilities in human resources management will be reviewed.

8.   The cost of the necessary technical expertise for human resources applications is estimated at US$ 1.1 million.

Workforce planning

9.   Sound workforce planning underpins many of the reforms foreseen, and is a key aspect of effective recruitment, mobility and rotation, staff development, and performance management. Guidelines are in preparation for workforce planning and its application. Workforce analysis and planning will be integrated into implementation of the current programme budget. It is therefore being given priority in 2001. Costs are estimated at US$ 300 000.

Staffing, including gender and geographical balance

10.   Efforts will concentrate on further improvement of existing processes in order to maintain staff excellence. Search capabilities are being enhanced by, for example, enlisting help from Member States, WHO Representatives and search companies, in order to strengthen recruitment and selection, and competency-based recruitment and assessment pools will be created. New tools are being designed and applied to meet targets for geographical representation and gender balance and to monitor progress. These activities are under way and costs are estimated at US$ 100 000.

Performance management

11.   A new performance management system has been developed which links individual and team objectives to WHO work plans; standardizes performance review; improves monitoring, accountability and oversight; and provides specific guidance on handling underperformance. Measures to reward high performance are being revised and nonmonetary recognition is foreseen, building on successful experience.

12. The system should be introduced in January 2002; planning and staff training will take place during 2001. Direct additional costs are estimated at US$ 100 000.

Grievance procedures

13. Procedures for mediation and conflict resolution were improved during 2000, and a new policy introduced on harassment in the workplace; the Ombudsman has been given a stronger Organization-wide role. Further work on refining grievance processes will continue in 2001. Cost is estimated at US$ 175 000.

Supportive work environment

14. Policies and practices that help respond to the often conflicting demands of professional and personal lives are essential to attracting and retaining good staff. The proposals to create a more supportive work environment reflect the work/family policy adopted by the executive heads of organizations of the United Nations system.[1] They are intended to achieve a better balance between work and home responsibilities through:

- reaffirmation or clearer articulation of existing policies on such matters as maternity leave, adoption leave, and more flexible use of uncertified sick leave;

- introduction of new policies and practices on, for instance, paternity leave, compassionate leave, duty travel with breastfeeding infants.

15. Some of these changes entail amendments to the Staff Rules. In the main they bring WHO's practice into line with those prevailing in the United Nations common system or WHO policy recommendations. The provision for paternity leave is not yet a feature of the United Nations common system; an absence of five days is therefore proposed, the minimum figure under discussion in the common system.[2]

16. The proposals are cost neutral; direct additional costs would arise only in the event of staff replacement.

Staff development and career management

17. The key elements of the staff development component of the strategic framework are:

- a dynamic programme of staff development based on the principles that managers at all levels of the Organization have a responsibility to help develop the careers of their staff; and individual development plans should be linked to assessment of individual performance and WHO's workforce needs;

- giving of priority to those staff members in whom the Organization plans to make a longer term investment and to staff central to the change process, e.g. managerial and supervisory staff, in whom leadership should be developed, and country-level staff;

---

[1] Work/Family Agenda. Policy Statement by ACC. Document ACC/1995/PER/R.3.

[2] See document EB107/15 Add.1.

- training, mentoring, and other methods of staff development that not only upgrade technical skills and core competencies, but also strengthen essential principles, such as high ethical standards, equal opportunities, nondiscrimination, transparency, accountability and responsibility;

- full implementation of the policy for rotation and mobility approved by senior management in 1998;

- work with the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) on the subject of a senior executive service or a senior management group (to be further investigated in 2001);

- career management based on the principle that the responsibility is shared by the Organization, which must provide structural support and a framework of opportunities such as mobility and rotation by managers, who must support staff development, and by staff, who must be committed to continuous professional development.

18.   The Organization will commit 1.5% of salary costs to staff development. The cost of the mobility component will be US$ 200 000 in 2001.

Areas of further study

Contractual arrangements

19.   Reform of contract policy, a preoccupation for many organizations of the United Nations system, is a major element of the strategic plan. The Task Force recommended a managed mix of service appointments for continuing needs, with revised probation and separation arrangements, project contracts for task-specific and time-limited work, short-term contracts for truly short-term or temporary requirements (up to 11 months), and contracting out of selected services and products. Proposals for phasing out the long-term use of short-term contracts are under review, with a view to defining implementation modalities. A report will be submitted to the Executive Board in 2002.

Staffing

20.   The matter of moving away from the labelling of staff categories (general services, professional, director) will be examined in conjunction with a review of job titles.

Post system

21.   In the context of overall management efficiency, the system for establishing and managing posts will be reviewed in 2001.

Staff-management relations

22.   Within the context of the United Nations common system, staff-management relations throughout the Organization, which are built on trust, mutual respect, effective communication and consultation, and due process, will be further strengthened. Work will include clearly defining a framework for communication, consultation and problem-solving, identifying best practices, and facilitating their application throughout the Organization.

Revision of Staff Regulations and Staff Rules

23.   At the conclusion of the work, it will be likely that the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules will need to be comprehensively reviewed. Any changes will be submitted to the governing bodies in accordance with the established procedures.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

24.   One-time costs for implementation of the strategic framework during the biennium 2000-2001 amount to approximately US$ 2 million. It is not expected that additional funding will be sought from Member States in respect of the current biennium. The continuing reform of human resources will require additional investment, but the changes should yield considerable dividends in the form of better management of human resources and improved performance, productivity and efficiency.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

25.   The Executive Board is invited to note the report and to confirm related amendments to the Staff Rules, contained in document EB107/15 Add.1.

ANNEX

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN: SUMMARY TIMETABLE

Major elements	Specific task	Planning, development and implementation						
		2000	**2001**		**2002**		**2003**	
I. Agreed elements on which work is progressing			1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half
Reorganization of human resources functions	Develop information technology system	P	P	P	P	I	I	I
	Define and streamline processes such as recruitment and classification	I	I	I				
	Review roles and responsibilities in human resources management	P	P	I				
Workforce planning	Prepare and apply guidelines		P	I				
Staffing, including gender and geographical balance	Strengthen recruitment and selection			P	I	I		
	Develop and implement tools for meeting geographical and gender targets	P	I	I	I	I		
Performance management	Revise reward and recognition measures		P	P	I	I	I	
	Provide training for, and introduce, new performance management system		P	P	I			
Grievance procedures	Improve grievance procedures		P	I	I	I		
Supportive work environment	Introduce "work/family" practices		P	I				
Staff development and career management	Implement staff development programme, giving priority to managerial, supervisory and country-level staff		P	I				
	Provide training or mentoring to upgrade skills and strengthen essential principles	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
	Implement mobility policy				I			
	Senior executive service study: work with ICSC			P				

Legend: P = Planning, development (grey) — I = Implementation (black)

Major elements	Specific task	Planning, development and implementation						
		2000	2001		2002		2003	
II. Areas of further study			1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half	1st half	2nd half
Contractual arrangements	Revise or introduce probation and separation arrangements							
	Approve and introduce new contracts for short-term staff							
	Plan transition away from long-term use of short-term staff							
Staffing	Review job titles							
Post system	Seek alternative means of managing the system							
Staff-management relations	Refine framework for staff-management relations							
	Apply best practice							
Revision of Staff Regulations and Staff Rules	Review comprehensively							