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Human Resource Management No. 7

Country Report: Zimbabwe

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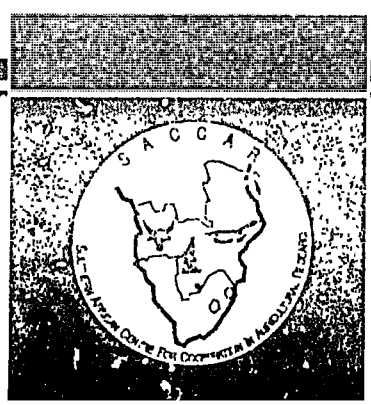

ISNAR TRAINING SERIES — *Human Resource Management No. 7*

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CABI Descriptors:

Agricultural Research; Management; Managers; Personnel Management; Research Workers; Scientists; Zimbabwe

AGROVOC Descriptors:

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COUNTRY REPORT
ZIMBABWE

R. J. Fenner, D. T. R. Ford, M. B. K. Hakutangwi, B. J. Mabhena, R. M. Mufandaedza, L. Muswere, T. N. Ngongoni, S. B. Stacey, and P. Tongoona

Preamble

The Department of Research and Specialist Services (DR&SS) was formally established in 1948, though some of its units are more than 70 years old. It is one of four departments or units within the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, and Rural Resettlement, the other three being the Department of Agriculture Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX), the Department of Veterinary Services, and Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Control.

The DR&SS has three main divisions: crops, livestock and pastures, and research services. Each is headed by an assistant director. Central administration at the agricultural research center in Harare is the responsibility of a unit consisting of seven executive officers

Since DR&SS is a public institution, administrative procedures are determined by government rules and regulations. The public service commission and the treasury, therefore, have overall responsibility for matters relating to personnel and financial administration, respectively.

Human Resource Assessment

The procedures for collecting and assessing information about research scientists in DR&SS are outlined in the appointment and advancement procedures for the professional group in DR&SS. Confidential annual and narrative reports are submitted by office heads for each officer under their supervision. These reports outline areas of expertise, skills and capabilities, and strengths and weaknesses.

Strategic Human Resource Planning

The objective of the DR&SS strategic human resource plan is to produce effective, efficient officers for the improvement of the agricultural industry. Along with division heads and heads of stations, institutes, and units, department heads are also involved in human resource planning. This is done in association with the public service commission which coordinates all human resource plans within the civil service. There is no external influence on the plan whatsoever. DR&SS is wholly responsible for the plan, which is submitted to the public service commission through the ministry for approval.

The planning period for strategic human resource plans is five years. The department's requirements, in line with departmental policy and programs, are used as sources of information.

Recruitment/Selection

DR&SS has a procedure for filling vacant positions, as stipulated in the public service commission regulations. Positions come open as individuals resign. Identification of vacant positions is the responsibility of the senior executive officer in personnel. This is done through monthly establishment returns filled in by each station head. The skills required to fill a vacant post are defined by the relevant section/station head in consultation with the assistant director. Positions are defined by administrative grade, function, and educational requirements.

Vacant positions are advertised in all the national newspapers, with job descriptions and educational requirements stipulated. A few scientists join the department through the government bursary scheme whereby bursaries are allocated to the department for undergraduates at the university. These are advertised on the faculty notice board and interested students can apply. If they are selected and successfully complete their studies, they then have an obligation to serve the department for a period not less than the duration of the period during which they received support – provided the department has a vacant post to offer them.

Advertisements are also circulated within the ministry so that interested people can apply for a transfer (either laterally or on promotion) from sister departments or even within the same department.

The recruitment section of the public service commission can also refer applications to the department for cases they consider suitable for the position.

Most of the candidates come from the University of Zimbabwe and a few come on transfer from sister departments. The other resource for DR&SS personnel is universities outside the country, and these applicants generally have higher qualifications.

All candidates, including those in the bursary scheme, have to be interviewed by a panel, which should be made up of an expert in the specific field of the vacancy, the officer who will be responsible for the supervision of the new employee, the office head, and a personnel officer. The panel members record their observations on scoresheets in order to come up with an objective assessment of the candidates.

Socialization

When new employees join DR&SS, the station head is responsible for seeing that they are properly oriented. Social needs, mainly in the form of housing, belongings, and fulfilling the initial requirements of the station, department, and civil service, is handled by the personnel section of the station on behalf of the station head. The immediate supervisor sees to the on-the-job induction with the assistance of the new employees' colleagues. The supervisor orients them according to their job description, function within the department, career path and development. now they are expected to contribute to the department's objectives, and how their performance on the job will be assessed.

The DR&SS training section organizes a one-week induction course during February each year, since this is a time when a large number of new scientists will have been with the department a month, having entered from the University of Zimbabwe at the end of the academic year. Among other things, the structure, objectives, and functions of DR&SS; the communication process, relationship of the department with the ministry and sister departments; and linkages with farmers are all covered. The director and assistant directors have an opportunity at this time to address the new scientists so as to give them some idea of what is expected of them. The training officer conducts special induction courses for new employees who join at other times during the year.

Heads of stations/institutions informally reorient staff members who have been away form the station for some time.

Training/Development

DR&SS has a training plan for research officers and research technicians, as well as one for support staff. The training officer is responsible for identifying training needs and training opportunities in consultation with supervisors, station heads, and assistant directors.

Training needs are identified through questionnaires, interviews, and discussions with individual scientists, their supervisor, and the station head.

An outline of training needs is sent to the relevant universities, international agricultural research centers, training institutions, bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies (such as the British Council and USAID) in the form of applications for training opportunities. When offers are received from donor agencies, they are matched with the needs of individual employees, but training organizations also have their own selection criteria.

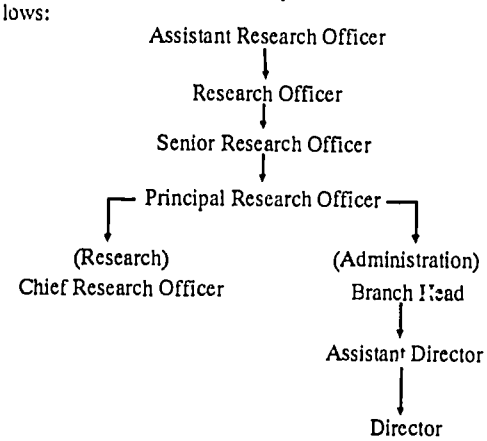
Selection criteria are outlined by the public service commission because the scientist will need to be paid while on study leave.

DR&SS offers a variety of training programs according to the needs of its employees. Stations and institutes plan their own programs to suit their needs. Departmental training programs include induction courses, public speaking, economic analysis of data, experimental design, data analysis, and result interpretation.

All training is coordinated by the training officer and supervised by the respective course director. Impact evaluation is carried out through on-the-job observation and by questionnaires.

Career Development

The path for staff career development in DR&SS is as follows:



Public service commission advancement procedures spell out conditions for advancement from one level to another. A departmental suitability board considers the advancement of each individual officer. Confidential narrative reports are made each year by the office head and are also used in the assessment process.

Performance Management

The performance of each research officer is formally evaluated each year through the confidential narrative reports. Informal evaluation, however, is continually implemented by the supervisor in order to correct mistakes and encourage good work. The objective of individual performance assessment is to identify strenths and/or weakness, determine the potential for greater responsibilities within the system, and correct the weaknesses before serious problems can develop. It also helps identify training needs, since some of the weaknesses can be corrected by training

The office head, in consultation with the individual's immediate supervisor, is responsible for assessing an officer's performance. The suitablility board makes decisions based on reports from the office head. Criteria are based on performance, innovativeness, leadership qualities, and intelligence.