Personnel management and staff development in parliamentary administrations, with reference to the German Bundestag, Berlin

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1. Introduction

The Administration of the German Bundestag was established by and provides services for the German Bundestag, a constitutional body which is responsible for its own administration and that of its bodies and institutions in line with specific constitutional and procedural rules, which must be observed by the Bundestag Administration in performing its tasks. As a supreme federal authority, the Administration is subject to the same legal provisions governing conditions of service and remuneration of staff as other federal authorities, especially the federal ministries.

The comprehensive tasks of the German Bundestag in the field of legislation and scrutiny, as well as the associated demands made on its Administration in terms of personnel and expertise, require employees to be extremely well-qualified and demonstrate autonomy, flexibility, and the ability to perform to consistently high standards and cope well under pressure.

The purpose of personnel management is to shape the relations between managers and staff in such a way that cooperation in the workplace can flourish. A cooperative style of management is essential in achieving this goal. Key elements are the delegation of tasks and competences, the right of managers and staff to information, regular staff meetings, employee reviews, monitoring, recognition of performance, and criticism.

Staff must be encouraged to develop individual responsibility in order to maximize performance and facilitate the management process. Modern administrative and corporate management techniques must be taken into account in this context.

2. The staff of the German Bundestag

The Administration of the German Bundestag is subject to the supreme authority of the President of the German Bundestag. The Secretary-General of the German Bundestag heads the Administration on his behalf. The Bundestag Administration currently employs around 2400 staff. 36% of its workforce are civil servants, 50% are salaried employees, and 14% are manual workers. Women account for roughly 52% of its staff.

Civil servants are governed by the provisions of the Federal Civil Service Act [Bundesbeamtenge-setz]. Civil servants are appointed for life and are bound by special obligations regarding service and loyalty. For salaried employees and manual workers, specific wage agreements are in force. Employment can be terminated, and under certain circumstances, the workforce can assert its demands by taking strike action.

The staff of the Bundestag Administration are divided into four career streams. The higher service is open to candidates who have an academic degree and, as a rule, have passed a second state examination as well. The higher intermediate service comprises employees who have completed a course of study at a college for higher professional training. Entry to the intermediate service is open to persons who have undertaken special training in public administration, but also includes the secretarial staff. The ordinary service comprises manual workers, messengers and drivers, etc.
Members' assistants and parliamentary group staff do not form part of the Bundestag Administration. Each parliamentary group can employ its own staff from the funds made available to them by the German Bundestag from its budget on a proportional basis. At present, a total of around 900 staff are employed by the five parliamentary groups in the German Bundestag.

Each Member of the Bundestag is granted an allowance to hire his or her own staff. The Member concludes employment contracts with staff in accordance with guidelines adopted by the Council of Elders. The management of the contracts is the responsibility of the Bundestag Administration. At present, around 2800 staff are employed by the Members. Around 1300 of them work in the Members' offices in Berlin; the rest are employed in the constituencies. Thus in total, around 4600 people are employed in the German Bundestag in Berlin.

3. Recruitment

Due to the constantly changing nature of its tasks, the Administration of the German Bundestag requires extremely well-trained and motivated staff, who must be able to cope with the high level of mental and physical stress associated with employment in the Administration, especially during the very demanding weeks of sittings. Recruitment is therefore one of the key tasks for the management of the Bundestag Administration, especially as the Bundestag does not train its staff itself. The Administration is therefore reliant on recruiting from the labour market in the Federal Republic of Germany, but also other EU countries. In accordance with the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany, every German is equally eligible for any public office according to his aptitude, qualifications, and professional achievements. For the Administration, this means that every vacancy must be advertised. Depending on the status or type of job, the Bundestag Administration advertises its vacancies in the regional press, nationwide or even throughout Europe. Indeed, as a supreme federal authority, it is required by the Constitution to draw its staff from all sixteen Länder in appropriate proportion. This is generally possible in the higher service, and to a limited extent in the higher intermediate service. However, vacancies in the intermediate and ordinary services - with the exception of special posts - are filled from within the region.

Every externally advertised post attracts a great deal of interest. There are often more than 300 applications for each vacancy. The Personnel Administration therefore undertakes a pre-selection process based on a list of criteria and a job profile, with the best candidates being short-listed on the basis of merit.

Short-listed candidates must be interviewed by a selection panel chaired by the Head of the Personnel Division or his representative. For appointments to the higher service, one representative of each of the three directorates-general in the Administration attend the interview, unless appointment is being made to a special post. A representative of the Personnel Council, the Equal Opportunities Officer and - if disabled applicants have been short-listed - the disabled employees' link officer sit in on the interview as observers.

At the interview, the selection panel tests the candidates' specialist knowledge, ability to respond to new situations, and management ability, including social skills. After the interview, the selection panel lists the candidates in order of preference, which must be observed by panel members.

This is not the end of the process, however. The German Bundestag is bound by specific provisions governing the recruitment of personnel, which are set out in its Rules of Procedure. In addition to his political office, the President is also the supreme authority for the staff of the Bundestag Ad-
ministration, and in this role, he decides on the appointment and dismissal of officials of the higher service. In the case of new appointments, he must involve the five Vice-Presidents in a process of consultation. This ensures that the staff of the Bundestag Administration enjoy the confidence of all the parliamentary groups represented in the German Bundestag. The Federal Government has no influence over the German Bundestag's personnel policy. The parliamentary administration is therefore free to pursue its own policies and practice for the recruitment of personnel and career planning, although it is subject to the same legal provisions governing civil service and administration as the Federal Government.

Before the vacancy is advertised externally, it is advertised in-house. Only vacancies which cannot be filled internally are advertised externally. Advertising vacancies internally enables existing staff who were previously appointed externally to find out about other in-house posts. In the higher service, for example, candidates wishing to be considered for appointment to senior positions must have held at least three different specialist posts within the Administration and have performed to a high standard in each of these roles. Firstly, candidates should have worked directly with Members, e.g. in a committee secretariat or research section. The second post should involve contact with the general public, e.g. in the secretariat of the Petitions Committee, the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, or in public relations. Finally, the third post should relate to the central administration, such as personnel, budgetary affairs, organization or internal services. Staff who have proved their capabilities within these roles in the Administration may be considered for management posts. All management staff are appointed from within the Bundestag Administration. No external appointments to managerial posts have been made for many years, as suitable and well-trained staff have been available in-house.

4. The cooperative style of management and staff development

The Personnel Management and Development Guidelines of the Administration of the German Bundestag, which were adopted by the Secretary-General of the German Bundestag and are binding on all staff, prescribe a cooperative style of management. This approach enables staff to work independently and take responsibility for their own areas. However, this does not remove line managers' authority to issues instructions as part of their overall responsibility, or staff members' duty to comply with such instructions.

Line managers should set an example to staff. They have a duty to encourage critical thought, initiative and independence on the part of their staff. They must be open to, and give consideration to, suggestions, constructive criticism and new ideas. All staff members are required to show commitment and creativity in solving the problems arising within their area of work, and to develop their skills further.

A key element of a cooperative style of management is delegation of tasks and competences. Within their areas of work, staff should have the scope and decision-making capacity necessary for the performance of their tasks. This includes, for example, authorization as a signatory, which is held, in principle, by the head of section. In accordance with an in-service instruction, after induction, this should generally be delegated to the policy officers, clerical officers and office staff. In general, line managers are responsible for the management of staff who report to them. This also means that more senior line managers cannot exercise authority over staff who do not report to them. The cooperative style of management also includes a mutual duty to provide information. Line managers must supply their team promptly with the comprehensive information necessary for them to do their jobs. The same applies to staff members, who must inform their line managers about key developments so that they have all the facts on which to base their decisions. A key ele-
A further important element of the cooperative style of management, and also staff development, are the regular employee reviews. These take the form of discussions between individual staff members and their line managers - usually the head of the division, secretariat or research section - responsible for staff assessments. The reviews are intended to focus on the staff member's professional objectives, interests and plans and on suitable measures to promote these goals. The overall work situation should be discussed fully and openly. The personnel divisions have devised a checklist as a basis for all the employee reviews carried out among the staff of the Bundestag Administration. All reviews should be completed by the end of this year, and the findings will then be evaluated. If the evaluation permits, there are plans to launch a further project in the field of staff management and development, which will focus on assessing the performance of line managers. This is intended to give staff an opportunity to provide critical feedback to their line managers, who can then further improve their management skills and performance as required. A methodology for this project has yet to be devised, but there is no doubt that it will be a fresh and unusual step towards a modern approach to personnel management.

Two instruments in the personnel management and development tool-box which tend to be overlooked are recognition of performance and criticism. Based on my many years of experience, I believe that there should be less criticism and more recognition of achievement. Public service law in the Federal Republic of Germany provides for disciplinary measures for civil servants and warnings for salaried employees, and yet there is virtually no opportunity to commend performance. The conditions governing financial incentives are overly restrictive, and only the law applicable to persons serving in the armed forces provides an opportunity to pay tribute to performance through a process known as "formal recognition". This may take the form of one day's leave - or, in special cases, several days leave - or an award such as a book prize.

Staff assessments are another key element of personnel management. In the Bundestag Administration, the relevant guidelines date from 1972. There are plans to introduce new guidelines which establish quotas for the marks awarded in staff assessments. This will mean that the top mark can only be given to 15% of employees and the second-best mark to a maximum of 35% of employees. Whether and when this system will be introduced in the German Bundestag will depend on the outcome of further negotiations, especially with the Personnel Council which is elected by and represents the workforce.

Finally, how can staff performance be improved through appropriate training? This is a key area of staff development and is the subject of a separate paper.
. Curriculum Vitae

Alfred Gregor Drescher
Born 22 August 1938

Joined the staff of the Administration of the German Bundestag in Bonn on 1 October 1971; in Berlin since 1 July 1999.

Key management posts:
5 April 1977 – 8 September 1983
Head of the Office of the Secretary-General of the German Bundestag

9 September 1983 – 14 December 1986
Head of Division WB 4, Personnel Matters concerning Career Soldiers and Temporary Career Volunteers in the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces of the German Bundestag

15 December 1986 – 30 June 1991
Head of ZV 4, Organization Division
During this period, also Head of the Office responsible for the Winding Up of the People's Chamber of the GDR (September 1990 – June 1991)

1 July 1991 – to date
Head of Higher and Higher Intermediate Service Personnel (Personnel Policy) Division

4 November 1993 – to date
Working Group on Staff in Berlin/Commissioner for the Transfer of the German Bundestag to Berlin

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