

**STAFF RECRUITMENT: THE NEW SELECTION PROCEDURE FOR MEMBERS OF
ACADEMIC STAFF IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT
CONCEPT ¹**

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A) Introduction

Over the last few years, there has been a process of rethinking the utilisation of human resources in the public administration in Germany.

Questions of staff selection and personnel development have become a central issue of modernising the administration. It has been realised that the administration needs managers

- who think ahead and think laterally, who can communicate with partners at different levels, nationally and internationally, who are qualified and contribute to the performance of the staff, who convey values and goals and can thus control tasks in a targeted way, and
- qualified and motivated staff members who can identify with their ever changing organisation, who are ready for change and are flexible in solving problems and performing tasks.

It has also been realised that errors and failures in staff selection lead to long-term and far-reaching problems in the agency which are difficult to solve afterwards.

At the Federal Statistical Office, quality improvement activities have a long tradition.

With the “Statistical Quality Offensive”, which started in 1999, a comprehensive overall quality management concept was introduced. The main difference between that concept and quality improvement activities performed before 1999 is that past activities were performed sporadically and according to current demand, whereas today a targeted and systematic quality improvement approach is applied. The overall concept of the “Statistical Quality Offensive” has been developed on the basis of the model of the European Foundation for Quality Management – EFQM. The Federal Statistical Office has taken various tools and measures from that model and has integrated them into the overall concept of the quality offensive. One of those tools is the personnel development concept, which was developed by a project group set up in 2000 and was presented in 2003². One of the concept’s aims is

¹ This paper has been prepared at the invitation of the secretariat by Wolfgang Schulze, Federal Statistical Office of Germany.

² Project group members came from staff administration, specialised units, and bodies of staff representation.

to adjust the job structure at the Federal Statistical Office to international standards of statistical agencies by increasing the number of high-level academic posts. In addition to the modules

- individual advanced training plans,
- appraisal interviews,
- staff survey / feedback to superiors,
- career start programme,
- mentoring,

the selection procedure for recruiting new higher service staff is a major element of that concept.

The selection procedure, which is presented in detail below, has been applied at the Federal Statistical Office since 2004.

B) Concept

Opting for the Assessment Center (AC)

The goal of any selection procedure is to find the best suited candidate from a number of candidates. Due to the complexity of professional requirements, it is very difficult to recognise a person's suitability for a job without using specific tools. What is needed is tools enabling those responsible to produce a fairly safe forecast regarding a person's future aptitude, competence and specialist performance for a specific job.

Among a variety of tools/procedures for a well-founded selection of candidates, the Federal Statistical Office has opted for the AC. The advantages of the AC are high flexibility, an extended assessment of potentials through the systematic combination of several individual procedures, and the opportunity to observe and compare several candidates communicating with each other.

Selecting the candidates for the AC

Preselecting up to eight candidates which will be invited to the AC is done jointly by the staff department and the relevant specialised department by evaluating the application documents. The staff department checks formal criteria such as a university level degree, while the specialised department examines the specialist requirements to be met by the candidate.

Composition of the AC selection commission

The AC takes two days and is designed as follows:

On the first day, group and individual exercises are used to assess whether the candidate meets the requirements of a manager. Social competences are crucial here. To assess those requirements, a selection commission is set up consisting of four experienced managers from different units and one staff member of the personnel management unit. The four managers are prepared for their observer status through a one-day seminar. The AC is moderated by the personnel management colleague. The severely disabled persons' representative and the commissioner for gender equality are involved in the procedure. The head of the unit looking for a new staff member may participate in the first day of the AC as a neutral observer if he wishes to do so.

If the candidate meets the requirements, a specialist discussion, chaired by a manager of the unit looking for a new staff member, will be held on the second day. The discussion is based on a structured list of questions oriented towards the requirements of the job advertised.

Training and tasks of the AC commission members

Any experienced manager may participate in a selection commission as an observer if he/she has undergone a one-day training on “Observing and assessing in a selection procedure”. The training covers:

- communication techniques (verbal and non-verbal communication)
- perceiving and observing (perception errors, observance errors, assessment errors)
- the feedback discussion (discussion guide)

To standardise the observance and thus to ensure the forecasting capacity of the AC, the observers assess the group discussion, self-presentation and negotiation using the following pattern:

	Group discussion / presentation				Self-presentation				Negotiation				Total
	hardly existing	promising	well developed	excellent	hardly existing	promising	well developed	excellent	hardly existing	promising	well developed	excellent	
Argumentation/ Persuasive power					1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Self-confidence	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4					
Capacity for teamwork/ Social behaviour in the group	1	2	3	4					1	2	3	4	
Active listening	1	2	3	4					1	2	3	4	
Assertiveness	1	2	3	4					1	2	3	4	
Total:													

The observer is thus requested to note qualitative impressions. He/She must use relevant impressions to exclude inadequate interpretation of rare, though conspicuous individual things observed.

At the end of the first day, the commission jointly decides about whether a candidate has the required social action competence. The successful candidate is informed about how the second AC day will proceed.

C) Proceeding of 1st day: Assessing the social competence

8.00 a.m.	–	9.00 a.m.	Receiving the candidates
9.00 a.m.	–	9.15 a.m.	Welcome
9.15 a.m.	–	10.15 a.m.	Group discussion
10.15 a.m.	–	10.30 a.m.	Break
10.30 a.m.	–	12.30 p.m.	Self-presentation and in-basket
12.30 p.m.	–	1.30 p.m.	Lunch break, common lunch
1.30 p.m.	–	2.00 p.m.	Compiling a press release
2.00 p.m.	–	3.00 p.m.	Role play with discussion
3.00 p.m.	–	4.00 p.m.	Decision of the observer conference

8.00 a.m. – 9.00 a.m.: Receiving the candidates, information about reimbursement of travel expenses, etc.. Meeting of the observers and a staff member of the personnel management unit.

9.00 a.m. – 9.15 a.m.: Welcome and information on how the selection procedure will proceed; introduction of the observers.

9.15 a.m. – 10.15 a.m.: Group discussion without chairperson:

The candidates discuss a given topic without preparation time and jointly present a result at the end of the discussion. The proceeding of the discussion and the distribution of tasks must be fixed by the candidates themselves.

The purpose of the exercise is to check

- whether the candidates are able to assert their ideas in the group,
- to what extent they respond to each other, and
- who in the group leads towards the goal.

10.15 a.m. – 10.30 a.m.: Break

10.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.: Self-presentation and in-basket:

The total time available to the candidate for both exercises is 120 minutes.

After being instructed on the in-basket exercise, the first candidate has 15 minutes to prepare for the self-presentation in a separate room and another 15 minutes to present himself to the selection commission. So every candidate has 90 minutes to deal with the in-basket.

Content of the self-presentation exercise

The candidate is given the relevant job advertisement and is asked to explain why he meets the desired requirement profile. The candidate should assume that the selection commission is not aware of his application documents.

The purpose of the exercise is to

- check a structured approach,
- test comprehensibility and enthusiasm,
- assess the candidate's rhetoric skills and self-confidence.

Content of the in-basket exercise

The candidate is asked to handle, as a manager, specific documents within a given time limit. He has to analyse what problems are involved, set priorities and give instructions on how to proceed for each document.

The purpose of the exercise is to test the candidate's

- ability to work under pressure,
- decision-making abilities,
- goal/result orientation, and
- capability to delegate.

12.30 p.m. – 1.30 p.m.: Common lunch of candidates and observers

1.30 p.m. – 2.00 p.m.: Compiling a press release

The candidate has 30 minutes to write a press release on a statistical topic.

The purpose of the exercise is to find out whether the candidate is able to write in a structured manner, give a comprehensible written explanation of a statistical result, respond to the customer's need for information and concentrate on what is important.

The exercise, which is aimed at testing specialist rather than social competence, has been included into the procedure this year because press releases are compiled in nearly all specialised units.

2.00 p.m. – 3.00 p.m.: Role play

Two groups are asked to take given and opposing positions on a given topic in a discussion and to convince the other group of their own position. The groups have 15 minutes to prepare for the discussion in separate rooms. The groups have 75 minutes to discuss and formulate a common final statement of both groups.

The purpose of the exercise is to assess

- argumentation,
- assertiveness,
- capacity for teamwork/ Social behaviour in the group
- active listening.

3.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.: Observers' conference and decision-making; organisation of the 2nd day

D) 2nd day: Assessing the specialist competence

To assess the specialist competence, representatives of the department looking for a new staff member hold a discussion with the candidate for about one hour. Direct after the discussion, the candidate is told whether or not the department supports his recruitment and whether a positive selection report will be submitted to the President and the staff bodies for the final recruitment decision.

E) Experience acquired with the selection procedure

The most informative indicator assessing the selection procedure introduced in 2004 is the question of whether the newly recruited colleague has proved himself. Consistently positive reaction of the superiors to their new staff member's specialist and social abilities confirms the procedure's success.

Another success factor is the involvement of managers as observers in the selection procedure. Their participation allows them to question their own management behaviour and to take part in taking decisions that have far-reaching consequences for their own agency. The AC thus contributes to better acceptance of the selection decision within our agency.

The candidates themselves, too, consider as positive the AC procedure and the Federal Statistical Office's image conveyed by it. For many candidates, that positive impression had an influence on their decision to choose the Federal Statistical Office as their future employer.

What should critically be questioned is whether the effort of performing an AC is justified for the recruitment of academic staff members who will get only fixed-term employment contracts to carry out specific projects. A current idea is to select suited staff members through a recruitment interview and, if they prove themselves, to allow them to participate in an AC for getting an open-end contract.

It should also be questioned whether leadership competence must definitely be required as a precondition for filling any vacancy in the higher service of the Federal Statistical Office. First, there are purely specialist areas at the Federal Statistical Office which do not involve any leadership or management tasks. Second, there is only a limited number of management jobs, which means that a problematic competitive situation is expected for the future generation of managers wishing to get those limited jobs.