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Transforming Human Resources: The Experience of the German Foreign Office

An LKI Roundtable with Alfred Grannas
Deputy Director General, Infrastructure and
Security, German Foreign Office

Discussants: Dr. Michael Dohmen, Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy; and Mr. Sarath Dissanayake, Senior Director General of the Overseas Administration Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and other officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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April 2017

Introduction

- Mr. Alfred Grannas, Deputy Director General of Infrastructure and Security at the German Foreign Office, was a keynote speaker at LKI's Foreign Policy Round Table on 5 April 2017, where he spoke on "Transforming Human Resources: The Experience of the German Foreign Office."
- The round table was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and attended by the Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy, Dr. Michael Dohmen, Senior Director General of the Overseas Administration Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sarath Dissanayake, and other officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The discussion was moderated by Dr. Dinusha Panditaratne, Executive Director of LKI. Dr. Panditaratne highlighted the significance of Mr. Grannas' presentation, noting that his topic concerns perhaps the most important aspect of foreign policy – that is, the people who make it.

Key Takeaways:

Review 2014

- The German Foreign Office examined and reformed its human resources following a year-long project, "[Review 2014 – A Fresh Look at German Foreign Policy](#)."
- Review 2014 sought to:
 1. Obtain answers to the questions "What is wrong with German foreign policy?" and "What should be changed?": Approximately [57 experts](#) from Germany, partner countries, and the new powers in the world were requested to articulate their expectations and criticism of Germany's international activities.
 2. Advance openness and debate in German civil society on aspects of Germany's foreign policy and international relations.
 3. Advance discussion of foreign policy and effective communication among officers of the German Foreign Service.

Review 2014: Aligning Human Resources with Foreign Policy Goals

- It was noted that the human resources of a Foreign Office should be organised in a way that reflects and furthers the country's foreign policy goals.
- Following Review 2014, the organisational structure of the German Foreign Office was reformed to better respond to Germany's foreign policy goals and the current trends in international relations. For example:
 - A new Directorate-General for International Order, the United Nations and Arms Control, and a new Directorate-General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, and Post-Conflict Reconstruction was introduced following Review 2014.
 - The German Foreign Service was re-organised in a manner that allowed the country to better respond to their European Union (EU) partners, recognising that working with EU partners is different to working with other bilateral partners.

Recruitment Process

- Mr. Grannas discussed the details of how the German Foreign Office seeks to recruit the best officers, to advance Germany's foreign policy over the long term.
- The recruitment of officers for "Higher Service" (executive level) includes the following components:
 - A pre-selection process where applicants are invited to take a written test. The written test examines different areas such as General Knowledge, History, Politics, Economics, and International and European Law. It also includes an essay, and candidates are expected to know English and one other UN language.
 - Those who pass the written test are invited to attend an assessment centre that examines foreign language skills and other skills, including the applicants' collaborative abilities, through mechanisms such as psychological assessments and group exercises.
 - Those who pass the stage at the assessment centre are invited to undertake a fourteen month, full-time, training programme at a diplomatic academy. The diplomatic academy programme includes formal learning and other activities, such as excursions to international organisations like the EU and NATO.
 - At the end of the one year, applicants sit a final test and those who pass are admitted to the German Foreign Service.
 - Applicants are generally first posted to the headquarters of the German Foreign Office in Berlin, though occasionally some applicants may be posted to missions abroad.

Human Resource Development

- German Foreign Service officers can expect to be rotated every three years, and their career will include compulsory periods at the headquarters in Berlin.
- While officers with specialist backgrounds are admitted to the Foreign Service, they are not confined to roles or areas related to their specialisation. They are expected to develop broad general expertise and experience, and greater flexibility assists the Federal Office to fill vacancies with a smaller workforce.
- Officers are placed in roles across a variety of departments and areas. This also enables the Foreign Office to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each officer.
- The Foreign Office includes personnel from other ministries as well, who come on one-year rotation periods. Upon completing the one-year rotation, they return to their respective ministries. However, they may later come back to the Foreign Office for additional one-year rotations.
- Human Resources staff of the German Foreign Office are not specialists or experts in personnel management. They are officers of the German Foreign Service.

Appraisals

- Appraisals of officers and other staff are governed by a legislative framework.
 - Staff appraisals are carried out every two years.
 - They must be completed by two officers: the immediate supervisor and one other (e.g. the Director General or Deputy Director General).
 - The review submitted by the supervisor and Director General or Deputy Director General is evaluated by another officer.
 - To determine if the staff member has qualified for a promotion, staff appraisals must include concrete examples of achievements or work that has been done.
 - There is a 'grading curve' (defined by law and compulsory to all Ministries) to mitigate grade inflation and ensure promotions are based on merit.
- The German Foreign Office also uses appraisals of superiors (upward review). Officers anonymously review their supervisors, and the supervisor is presented with an analysis of the submitted reviews. This helps in shaping better management skills.
- Officers are also expected to use concrete examples when reviewing their supervisors.

Suggested Further Readings

Bendiek, A. (2015). The “2014 Review”: Understanding the Pillars of German Foreign Policy and the Expectations of the rest of the World. Ifri.org.

<https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/enotes/notes-cerfa/2014-review-understanding-pillars-german-foreign-policy-and>

Review 2014 – A Fresh Look at Foreign Policy. (2015). [online] Berlin: Federal Foreign Office.

<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/699442/publicationFile/202986/Schlussbericht.pdf>

Steinmeier, F. (2014). A Fresh Look at German Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy.

<https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/akt/20423857.html>

Steinmeier, F. (2016). Germany’s New Global Role. Foreign Affairs.

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Techau, J. (2015). The Steinmeier Review of German Foreign Policy. Carnegie Europe.

<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=59422>

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