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Second Report on the Career Concept

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CORRIGENDUM NO.1

Page 10, para. 28, last line:
the words "annex IV" should be replaced by "annex II";

Page 18, footnote 8:
"annex III" should be replaced by "annex II".

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Introductory Note

The present report concludes the report on "Personnel policy options" issued by the Joint Inspection Unit in August 1981. 1/ Hence, for a clearer understanding, the two documents have to be considered together. These reports deal with policy issues regarding the over-all approach to the international civil service and, as a result, they are intended for all the organizations of the United Nations system. Each recommendation is followed by an indication of how it is to be applied. Procedural matters regarding consideration of these recommendations by the General Assembly of the United Nations and by the legislative bodies of the organizations of the United Nations system are discussed in annex I.

1/ Document JIU/REP/81/11, circulated by the United Nations under the symbol A/36/432 and Add.1, of 14 September and 29 October 1981. It will be referred to here as "Report No. 1". Comments on it by the Secretary-General of the United Nations are to be found in document A/36/432/Add.2.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO SOLUTIONS

A. The staff situation in the international civil service and the main problems

1. An attempt has already been made in Report No. 1 to describe the basic features of the existing situation (cf. paragraphs 16-34 of that report), particularly with regard to the Professional category. That situation undoubtedly differs from organization to organization and even, within a given organization, from one service or occupational group to another; nevertheless, in the light of numerous earlier reports, it can be stated that:

The recruitment methods in use are, with some exceptions, neither objective nor technically suited to the requirements of the organization;

The performance appraisal and promotion systems afford few guarantees of objectivity;

Allowing for exceptions, the cardinal importance of the concept of "professionalism" is not recognized. The concept of a generalist capable of doing everything and holding any post whatsoever provided he knows the customs of the organization exists alongside the method of job classification, which implies the opposite idea of intensive specialization; so far, the inconsistencies or contradictions between these differing approaches have not been resolved;

2. Moreover, although a very substantial proportion of the staff become career officials in all the organizations.

The fact that recruitments are made at all grade levels and only for specific posts (without, at the time of recruitment, consideration of the qualifications necessary for holding successive posts within a given occupational group) does not make for rational career development.

There is no career development system either, nor has the utilization of methods comparable to those followed in national civil services in this connection (definition of standard career paths for each broad occupational group, average rate of advancement, prospect of reaching a minimum grade level by the end of one's career, etc.) ever been properly considered in the organizations of the United Nations system.

3. In the main, these remarks hold true not only for the Professional category but also, mutatis mutandis, for General Service staff. They do not relate to technical co-operation experts. 2/

2/ However, paragraphs 126-127 of the Report on the Role of Experts in Development Co-operation (JIU/REP/78/3) contained proposals to enable certain experts (agency Chief Technical Advisers) to obtain the status of career staff of the United Nations agency appointing them.

4. Obviously, such a situation is bad for the morale and, consequently, the efficiency of the staff. It is not in the interest of the organizations nor is it in keeping with the criteria, set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and in most of the constituent instruments of the specialized agencies, regarding the highest standards of efficiency and competence.

5. Similarly, the Member States are not satisfied with this situation. The discussion of staff issues is accompanied by uneasiness because of the continuing idealogical debate referred to in Report No. 1, the absence of clarity, the complexity and often the seemingly insoluble nature of matters pertaining to salaries, benefits and pensions, the difficulties that still remain in implementing the resolutions on equitable geographical distribution or the employment of women, and so forth. The recent debates in the General Assembly of the United Nations on these matters confirm this deep dissatisfaction, while discussions in the governing bodies of the other organizations reveal that concern on such issues exists throughout the United Nations system. For these various reasons it has become a matter of great urgency to formulate common principles and introduce a process of reform that will help to solve today's two major problems of the international civil service, namely:

How to ensure the very highest standards of efficiency, in other words a high degree of professionalism, in all fields; and

How to create a satisfying climate of work with both job security and reasonable and fair opportunities for advancement.

B. Possible approaches to solutions

6. Solutions to these two problems must take account of their complexity and of the diversity of situations that exist among the organizations. Questions of size and the need for different kinds of staff are important factors in identifying possible approaches to solutions.

7. Career development is obviously a very difficult task for organizations below a certain size. This is the case with all the small organizations employing between 60 and 130 Professional staff (WMO, UPU, WIPO, IMCO, IFAD, GATT), and even those like ICAO and ITU which have between 200 and 300; it is particularly so in the many instances where specialists are needed and where a substantial number of staff are therefore recruited on fixed-term contracts. The General Service staffs of the above organizations vary between 80 and 600, which makes it easier to provide career development for them, at least in the larger of these organizations. What is more, since the small organizations account for only a tiny percentage of the total staff involved, there is no great disadvantage in leaving them to work out individual solutions to their problems, instead of expecting them to follow the same principles as the big organizations. Table 1, giving the organizations' staffs at 31 December 1980, 3/

3/ This table has been prepared from CCAQ statistics (document ACC/1981/PER/14 of 2 June 1981).

shows that all the small organizations together (including a few small units such as the International Court of Justice) account for as little as 7.3 per cent of the total number of Professional staff and 4.2 per cent of the total General Service staff.

8. Out of a total Professional staff of more than 11,500 and a total of nearly 30,000 General Service staff, the United Nations and the three major programmes attached to it (UNDP, UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees) account for 46.3 per cent of the Professionals and 55.2 per cent of the General Service staff. Moreover, the five big agencies (ILO, FAO, UNESCO, WHO and IAEA) account for 41.7 per cent of all Professionals and 37.7 per cent of all General Service staff, each of them having between 500 and 1,500 of the former and between 900 and 3,300 of the latter. Altogether, the United Nations, its three major programmes and the five big agencies account for approximately 90 per cent of the total staff in the Professional and General Service categories. It is therefore clear that in seeking ways and means of improving the staff career structure, particular attention must be paid to those nine bodies (six organizations and three major programmes).

9. The need for different kinds of staff is the second important factor to be considered, particularly as far as the Professional category is concerned. In every organization a substantial proportion of the personnel must obviously be professional staff dealing with finance, administration, personnel management, accounting, data processing and audit and providing library, information and language (translation and interpretation) services. For substantive activities, however, the requirements vary according to the kind of programme which the organization has to execute. For this purpose the United Nations, for instance, requires political officers, economists, jurists, social development specialists, statisticians, and so on.

UNICEF:	programme officers, external relations officers, procurement officers, etc.
WHO:	physicians, public health engineers, etc.
ILO:	economists and jurists, social affairs officers, etc.
FAO:	agricultural engineers, economists, jurists, etc.
UNESCO:	educationists, environment specialists, etc.

The fact that in each of the big agencies the various occupational groups mentioned above 4/ account for large numbers of staff makes it possible for career paths to be established within each group in most cases.

4/ These lists are far from being exhaustive.

Professional staffs (employed at headquarters and permanent offices) and General Service staffs

By organization

Organization	Professional staff	Percentage of total	General Service staff	Percentage of total
UN	3 814		9 342	
UNDP UNHCR UNICEF	760 325 435		4 559 552 1 691	
Subtotal	5 334	46.3	16 144	55.2
ILO FAO UNESCO WHO IAEA	714 1 526 1 086 953 523		1 266 3 377 1 982 3 316 907	
Subtotal	4 802	41.7	10 848	37
ICAO ITU	314 213		629 441	
Subtotal	527	4.6	1 070	3.7
UPU WMO IMCO WIPO IFAD GATT	66 120 92 83 61 126		79 194 157 170 76 174	
Subtotal	548	4.8	850	2.8
Other small bodies (UNITAR, ICJ, UNU, UNRWA, etc.)	287	2.5	372	1.3
Grand total	11 498	100	29 284	100

10. In addition to the above, all the organizations need to recruit officials for fixed terms. It is no secret that the policies in this respect vary considerably from one organization to another (see the figures given in annex IV to Report No. 1). These policies are the result of successive decisions taken by the director-general or secretary-general and governing body concerned; generally speaking they have aimed at catering for the needs of the organization as efficiently as possible, and have created traditions which are certainly worthy of respect. The United Nations, UNDP, UNICEF, ILO and FAO all have a majority of career staff (in most cases 60-70 per cent of Professional staff have permanent appointments). WHO, UNESCO and IAEA, on the other hand, have rather different policies (as few as 10-20 per cent have permanent appointments, although the actual proportion of career staff is far higher; in WHO, for example, 56.7 per cent of staff on fixed-term appointments do in fact serve for more than 5 years, and over 30 per cent of them for more than 10 years). The big agencies whose activities are particularly technical in nature (IAEA and WHO) follow a deliberate policy of employing fixed-term staff.

11. It would be an exaggeration to say that these approaches, methods, traditions or policies are the only possible ones and that they are the best in all cases. On the contrary, the situation described above shows that improvements are desirable. The concept of "requirements peculiar to the organization" is not sufficient to explain everything and calls for some scrutiny. The "occupational group" concept, on the other hand, enables these requirements to be translated into terms which are far easier to understand and verify.

12. In the long run, in defining principles which are common to all the big organizations and help to solve the two basic problems mentioned above, the first step should be to clarify the concepts of profession and career, which are closely linked; after that, it will be necessary to lay down recruitment, training and career development methods that ensure maximum professionalism and at the same time maximum job satisfaction for staff.

CHAPTER II

PROFESSION AND CAREER

A. The concepts of profession and occupational group

13. The concepts of profession and career are so closely linked that it is surprising to find that their relationship has not yet received greater attention in connection with the fundamental principles of the international civil service. There have been many reasons for this in the past, but they are no longer any justification for maintaining the same approach today.

14. Generally speaking, a career in a national civil service obeys precise and universally accepted criteria, one of the most important being recognition that pursuing a career for a reasonable number of years within a particular occupational group is essential if genuine professionalism is to be acquired. Thus career paths are generally organized into distinct groups such as professionals of ministries of finance, industry, agriculture or public works, specialized corps of engineers in telecommunications or military ministries, corps of physicians for public health administration, diplomats, etc.

15. The example that can be most easily checked by the members of the delegations of Member States is that of the diplomatic service, in which the usual features are:

Career development in a profession: diplomacy;

Entrance requirements that call for qualifications in the fields of history of diplomacy, economics, international law and drafting and speaking abilities, ascertained by tests or competitive examinations;

A very high probability of advancement to a particular grade (highest rank of counsellor, minister or ambassador, as appropriate);

Normally quite strict conditions as regards the length of stay in successive postings (generally three to five years for each posting) and a periodic return to the central administration in the ministry;

External recruitments for the first secretary or counsellor grades normally confined to officials from other administrations (with verification of their skills, mostly by examination); wider external recruitment at the ambassador level, but frequently with a percentage ceiling.

Naturally, this more or less standard pattern varies, depending on the countries concerned.

16. Consequently, the concept of a career system does not need to be reinvented. The national civil service systems which have stood the test of time have very similar characteristics for all professions. Generally speaking, the systems involve:

(a) Standard career paths in a particular occupation or occupational group;

(b) Recruitment by objective methods: written and oral tests or competitive examinations;

(c) Recruitments largely at the junior starting grade (apart from a few exceptional cases);

(d) Prospects of normal career development, in other words, of advancement at least to a particular level by the end of one's career, with equitable opportunities for promotion and an average rate of advancement that is fairly well known in advance;

(e) A strict limit on the number of possible external recruitments at levels higher than the starting grade, precisely so as to facilitate normal career advancement for staff members recruited in that grade;

(f) Methods for punishing and dismissing from office staff whose work is persistently unsatisfactory;

(g) In addition to these basic features, the more progressive systems allow the persons concerned to take a part in determining the shape of their professional lives.

17. Such are the features of the arrangements in the civil services of most nations, both in the socialist countries and in the western-type countries or developing countries. The transfer to the international civil service of the concept of occupation or occupational group did not seem essential at the outset, largely owing to the small size of organizations. But with the increase in the numbers of their staff, the link between profession and career is tending to become as basic in international organizations as it is in national ones.

18. The arguments for the need to define occupational groups and to view them as standard career paths are set forth in paragraphs 56-71 of Report No. 1. It cannot be emphasized too much that:

(a) Genuine "professionalism" can be achieved only through a combination of basic qualifications and experience in the profession or occupation over a number of years. The basic qualifications must be the theoretical knowledge required for the occupation and they must be verified on recruitment by objective methods; professional expertise normally comes with experience;

(b) The secretariats of the international organizations increasingly need personnel who have great skill in their profession, so that the organizations' programmes are implemented with the requisite efficiency;

(c) The fact that this professional competence often implies multiple skills cannot, for all that, vindicate the idea that generalists with a sound knowledge of the international organizations are suited to any kind of task and any kind of post.

19. The concept of occupational groups, as defined in Report No. 1, enables these needs to be met. The definition is as follows: "An occupational group is a series of occupations which are sufficiently similar, in particular with regard to basic academic and professional qualifications, for possibilities of transfer or promotion between the posts making up the group to exist for holders of the posts concerned". Hence:

Each of the groups must be defined in terms of the requisite entrance qualifications for the group;

The occupational groups must be viewed as standard career paths;

The conditions for transfer from one group to another must be subject to precise rules, so as to verify that the staff members transferred have all the requisite basic skills, on the understanding that a system of in-service training should, in certain cases and particularly for the General Service category, make such transfers easier for the persons who want them.

20. The national administrations in most countries do in fact use a system of occupational groups of this kind. Moreover, the study in Report No. 1 on the practice followed in international organizations outside the United Nations system (cf. paras. 34-37 and annex V) also confirms that occupational groups are used in the larger organizations.

21. Again, among the organizations of the United Nations system, the United Nations itself has shown the way in this respect by embarking on a definition of occupational groups. In his comments on Report No. 1, the Secretary-General states in this connection (cf. document A/36/432/Add.2, para. 15):

"The Secretary-General in 1978 issued a Bulletin which affirmed the principle that an occupational group structure should serve as the basis for managing the staff of the Secretariat (ST/SGB/166 of 18 May 1978). Furthermore, as noted by the JIU in its report, the Secretary-General has established a system of competitive examination by occupation both for the promotion of staff from the General Service to the Professional category and for the recruitment of candidates who are expected to have a career in the Organization. The Secretary-General is convinced that a sound personnel policy requires that candidates entering the Professional category must be selected according to objective criteria in a way which will ensure that they will be able to perform a variety of functions within a broad occupational group and will be able to advance in that occupation. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 35/210, descriptions of the qualifications required for entry in each occupational group have been published to meet the specific requirements of the United Nations in the areas of recruitment and career development."

It is highly desirable for the other organizations of the United Nations system to embark on the same course.

22. To facilitate the introduction of such procedures, a distinction should be drawn between the career paths for the part of the career in the junior and middle grades (generally speaking, P-2, P-3 and P-4) and the part of the career at the senior and director grades (generally speaking, P-5 and above). The concept of an occupational group has more precise significance at the junior and middle grades than at the grades which involve levels of responsibility and management.

23. For example, in a study being prepared for UNICEF, one of the authors of this report deemed it advisable to recommend career paths for eight occupational groups ranging from P-2 to P-4 for (a) programme officers; (b) management and administration; (c) external relations (these first three groups are by far the largest in terms of the number of posts); (d) supplies; (e) technical services; (f) auditors; (g) accountants; (h) data processing specialists; and then only two occupational group-career paths for grades P-5 and above, namely, (a) UNICEF representatives, heads of field offices; and (b) heads of services in the central administration.

24. In the case of the United Nations, where precise identification of occupational groups is under way, as indicated in paragraph 21 above, the list of occupational descriptions published in document A/C.5/36/CRP.2 is as follows:

Administration
Economics
Electronic data processing
Engineering, architecture and related work
Finance
Language and related work
Legal and related work
Library and related work
Political affairs and related work
Public information
Publishing and printing
Science and technology
Social development
Statistics.

25. The task of identifying the posts in each of these groups has been undertaken and an effort is being made to harmonize the job titles with their position in the occupational groups. When this work has been supplemented by a study of the relevant career paths (number of posts, average rate of advancement in each group, grade pyramid, etc.), it will probably be found that most of the groups are made up essentially of posts at the P-2, P-3 and P-4 levels. The work on job classification under the tier II master standards prepared by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) should be of considerable help in determining these career paths. Generally speaking, the level of responsibility reached over and above the P-4 grade is such that, in most instances, it changes the nature of the problems and the type of "professionalism" required.

26. Arrangements of the same kind should be studied by the other organizations, but in the light of their own particular characteristics of course. Especially, it has to be recognized that for certain functions it may prove essential to confine recruitment to established specialists who already have several years' professional experience behind them. For instance, recruitment for certain occupational groups might be direct and begin at over 35 years of age and at the P-4 level. These would be exceptions. At all events, clarification should focus