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Human Resources Training Policy Under Budget Cuts

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Introduction

State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (SSO), as a small Office with limited financial and human resources, has always faced the challenge to organise its work in the best possible manner in order to provide quality, relevant, reliable and timely statistical data.

For several years back, SSO successfully managed to cope with the many challenges. Its successful work was based on developed strategic plans and policies and well defined priorities therein. Their realisation was secured with efficient usage of the available human and technical resources, and the relatively satisfying level of financing.

A very important part of this policies system was the Human Resources Development Policy (HRDP), whose 5 pillars created strong policy for induction, training and development of the staff. This policy, established in 2008, was in close connection to the process of establishing a culture of quality, integrity and professionalism. The last three years were very challenging for the sustainability of the results achieved with this programme, but also for the further planned development of employees. The basic risk came from the several changes that occurred:

1. Government decision of 21.04.2009 in the package for managing with the economic crisis, where the stop of employment in public administration was announced;
2. Exception from this decision of the Government is the employment of members of the ethnic communities, whose profiles mostly do not match SSO needs;
3. Changes in the structure of employees with significant increase of the number of employees with working experience up to 5 years and decrease of the number of experienced statisticians due to retirement;
4. Budget cuts.

In such conditions, it was clear that the HRDP had to be re-designed and aligned with the newly occurred changes and needs.

SSO, in this process of redesigning of the HRDP, puts specific emphasis to in-house training as a good policy to rationalize the use of the available resources, both financial and human. The aims of the paper are to provide an overview of the current human resources training policy under budget cuts, in-house training programme for new employees, as well as to define the milestones of the future human resources development.

1. Human Resources Development Policy

A Human Resources Development Policy (HRDP) was developed in 2008 and it is in direction of the European experiences and good practices.

The HRDP, following the priorities of the Office defined in strategic documents, relies on five (5) pillars:

1. Providing the State Statistical Office with human resources through coordination of the quantitative and qualitative work requirements of the Office with the candidates' competences and potentials;
2. Human resources development;
3. Motivation of employees;
4. Maintaining of the human resources and
5. Human resources department's scope of work.

According to HDRP, development of human resources could be reached through the following activities:

- i. Development of a mentoring system
- ii. Preparing of an annual training programme
- iii. Employee self-training

A mentoring system was introduced in the Office in 2009 as a good supportive system for integration of the new employees and their adaptation to the "team", adjustment to the written and unwritten rules of the work culture in the Office. This process of inclusion of the new employees was assisted by more experienced colleagues named as mentors. The mentoring system has met the expectations of both the management and the new employees.

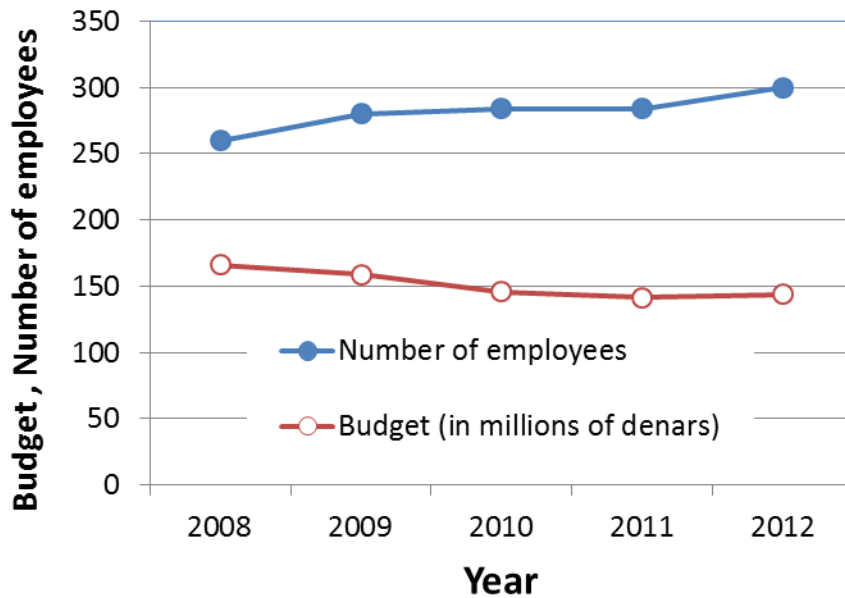
2. Human resources structure and budget changes overtime

The State Statistical Office currently employs a total of 301 persons. The average age of employees is 44 years. 79% of the employees have a university education, of which Bachelor of Science - Economics is dominating with more than 50%. The average working experience is 16.8 years, which presents high loyalty towards the institution.

In the last five years, many changes happened in the human resources structure and the available budget for performing the planned tasks.

At the beginning of this period, in 2008, the number of employees was 260 and in the course of the next years this number increased by 15.8% thus bringing the number of employees to 301 in 2012. These changes were "followed" by budget cut in 2012 by 14% compared to 2008.

Figure1: Number of employees and budget of SSO, 2008-2012



Most of the new employees were distributed for working engagement in SSO at the beginning of 2012 in accordance to the Framework Agreement which implies adequate representation of members of ethnic communities in state institutions based on their percentage representation in the total population of the country. The increase of the number of employees by engaging persons whose first working experience was their employment in SSO considerably changed the employees' structure by age, education and working experience. According to the length of the working experience, the biggest share (26.3%) in the total number of SSO employees belongs to the persons with working experience from 11 to 20 years. The employees of this category have very high participation in the management teams of the Office, as well as a long-term experience in the many project activities that are realised in the institution. The second biggest participation (22.2%) in the total number of employees belongs to the new employees i.e. the persons with working experience up to 5 years. The changes that occurred in the structure of SSO employees led to a situation where dominating profiles are the new employees without specific working experience and the employees with big professional experience. In conditions of decreased budget, this situation with the employees was identified as a possibility to set up a special in-house training programme for education of the new employees by using the experience of the persons who have been included in many trainings and have acquired big experience and knowledge in the past period.

Taking into account this possibility, an Annual Training Programme was created, with special part for training of the persons with working experience up to 5 years.

Table 1. Employees by years of working experience and educational level
Status on 30.06.2012

Years of working experience	Employees by educational level		
	Total	University level	Other*
Less than 5	67	60	7
6 to 10	28	10	18
11 to 20	79	69	10
21 to 25	39	36	3
26 to 30	42	31	11
31 to 35	28	19	9
Over 35	18	14	4
Total	301	239	62

* Other refers to number of employees with secondary education level

3. Annual Training Programme

The professional development is related to the required skills for sustainable development of the specific career development, respectively of the general skills, and which is provided through continuous training in personal development. The development of the key employees' skills provides successful fulfillment of the tasks, higher level of initiatives, change management and matching of the individual with the institutional needs to which they belong.

Training of the employees is one of the most important segments in the human resources management.

The State Statistical Office makes maximum efforts to produce official statistics with high quality, and therefore it needs employees with excellent qualifications. The concept of official statistics is multidimensional and covers several important aspects, such as: completeness, relevance, consistency, continuity, accuracy, timeliness, reliability, availability and user orientation. Based on these postulates of official statistics, statistical information should be based on professional ethics and scientific principles, and on methods and procedures for data collecting, processing, storing and presentation.

In this direction, for SSO it is a challenge to have employees that are trained with skills, capabilities and experience to respond to the quality requests, which jointly lead towards confidence building in the institution.

In the frame of the annual planning, the Statistical Office defined a training programme and the following priority training categories were determined:

1. Generic training
2. Specialized/technical training

Generic training covers the following topics:

1. System of the public administration and civil service in the Republic of Macedonia
2. Administrative tasks
3. Communication
4. Human resource management
5. Project cycle management
6. Quality management
7. Policy creation
8. Financial management
9. EU trainings
10. E-governance
11. IT skills
12. Foreign languages

Specialized/technical trainings cover:

1. Statistical methodologies;
2. Statistical standards, classifications and nomenclatures and
3. Mathematics and statistical methods.

The realization of the training programme is directly connected with the realization of the main strategic documents: Strategic Plan, National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis, evaluation of the trainings realized in the period 2008-2011, analysis of the results from the Cost Calculation System and the Common Assessment Framework.

This training programme covers a lot of external and specialized trainings. Potential beneficiaries of these trainings are all employees with university education. Analysis of this training programme showed that :

- o External trainings could be reached by a limited number of employees;
- o The activities with the external training programme, are financed mostly by foreign donations in a limited period of time;
- o The number of specialised trainings is limited and
- o Profiles of new employees do not match the needs of the Statistical Office and they are not well covered by the content of external and specialized trainings.

In this situation, SSO developed in-house training as a way of internal exchange of knowledge.

4. In-house training

In-house training deals with the main methodological and practical issues identified by employees as a priority.

In-house training has been developed and used as a tool for:

- o Training of staff in the areas that are not well covered by external trainings;
- o Increasing of knowledge of new topics that are covered by external training programmes, but could be visited by a limited number of employees from the Office. Participants in external trainings are obliged to organize lectures for their

- o colleagues in a short period of time after their participation in different programmes out of the Office;
- o Training in the areas of weaknesses that are targeted by some departments in the Office;
- o Closer internal co-operation;
- o Sharing of training materials and
- o Filling the knowledge gaps in some areas.

In-house Training Programme consists of: regular courses and ad hoc courses, and this programme is administrated by the Human Resources Department. The lectures could be attended by representatives of different divisions and departments who are interested in the topics announced some period in advance. For this year, 20 lectures on different topics are planned. The lectures treat different topics and could be divided as: cross-cutting topics, macroeconomic topics, socio-economic topics, dissemination and methodological issues.

After completing each lecture, the participants fill-in an evaluation form in which they assess various aspects of the lecture: they asses the quality of the lecture and give their proposals for improving in-house trainings from organizational point of view. An important part of these evaluation forms consists in giving proposals for future content of the in-house trainings. Most of the lectures are indeed organized based on the proposals given by former participants in their evaluation forms. Further more, many improvements in the way of organizing the lectures result from the ideas of the participants in these lectures.

Lecturers in these trainings are: top management members, heads of departments and advisors (mostly with working experience from 11 to 20 years). After finishing the process of semi-annual evaluation of employees for 2012, according to the Law on Civil Servants, lectures will also be organized and given by the employees who have obtained the highest marks for their job in the previous period.

Profiles of the lecturers are evaluated very high and the main reason is that they participate most often in external trainings and have possibilities to learn from international experiences and practices.

After analyzing SSO's current human and financial resources situation, the planned achievements and training needs of employees, this main in-house training programme was identified as an effective support only for the more experienced statisticians to obtain the knowledge needed for smooth running of the statistical production.

However, the big number of new employees without working experience and with limited knowledge of the process of statistical data production opened the need to establish special in-house training programme for the young SSO employees. The content of this programme covers topics from macroeconomic, business and social statistics. Lecturers are the persons directly responsible for production of the statistics that are subject of the lectures, because the basic objective of this programme is to provide the new employees with knowledge of statistics produced by SSO in terms of: methodological bases, data sources, data collection methods, international standards, recommendations and regulations applied, etc. The participation in this training programme shall mean their preparation for participation in external trainings and in-house general

programme. For this year, 25 lectures with average participation of 30 persons per training are foreseen.

In-house trainings completed till now confirmed that the in-house training programme secures sustainability of the knowledge obtained through other forms of trainings which could be visited by a limited number of employees.

At the same time, the evaluation of the lectures that are part of the special in-house training programme for young employees confirms the fact that these less experienced employees consider the in-house training programme as a particular opportunity to learn basic issues for statistical production and to discuss open questions and dilemmas that they have.

Conclusions

SSO's HRDP is a well established policy that determines its contents in accordance to the available financial and technical resources, and employees' needs.

In conditions of decreased budget and increased number of new employees, the highest priority is given to in-house trainings as the cheapest and, at the same time, most efficient form of employees' training. Comparing the number of participants and topics in external and in in-house trainings, these basic comparisons show that in the in-house trainings, during the same period, bigger number of participants are involved using substantially lower amount of financial resources, compared to the case of external trainings. Average number of participants in in-house trainings was 32, compared to 3 in external trainings.

The establishing of a special programme for the new employees means exceptional possibility for their introducing in the basics of statistics and the content of statistical production, especially when large portion of them are profiles that do not match SSO needs.

Yet, after the realization of both external and in-house trainings, and the special programme for new employees, the same open questions appear. Creating of a profile or enhancing the profile of the employee as to improve employees' skills is not a solution by itself. One cannot be sure if the gained skills would be of benefit for two reasons at least:

- o the level of capability of the employee to absorb the knowledge and
- o the level of capability of the employee to implement the knowledge.

In this regard, the personal profile of each employee is very important, like openness for communication and readiness for teamwork. Especially when flexibility, adaptability and collaboration are not our strong points. However, if we want to develop our human resources and to respond to the challenges, they have to become our strengths. In-house training is a good tool to achieve it.

Based on the results achieved with the present HRDP, SSO determined the future activities linked to the education of its employees for the next short-term period in order to achieve efficient, quality and timely education of employees in a time of limited financial resources:

1. Establishing a training register for registering all trainings, topics and participants by several variables;
2. Meet the career development expectations of the existing employees;
3. Improve employee commitment and retention;
4. Further development of the mentoring system;
5. Further development of the programme for new employees;
6. Establishing of an evaluation system for collective and individual achievements after the trainings.

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