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Skills retention strategies of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF)

1. Background

With the advent of a democratic South Africa in 1994, the South African Government drew up the Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996, which is the supreme law of the country, and which also gives guidance on the workings of the public administration. The set of values that guide the South African public service is entrenched in Chapter 10 of the final Constitution, 1996.

195 (1) Public administration must be governed by the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, including the following principles:¹

- a. A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- b. Efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted.
- c. Public administration must be development orientated.
- d. Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
- e. People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making.
- f. Public administration must be accountable.
- g. Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.
- h. Good human-resource management and career-development practices, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated.
- i. Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

Section 197 of the Constitution (1996) further states that:²

Within public administration there is a public service for the Republic, which must function, and be structured, in terms of national legislation, and which must loyally execute the lawful policies of the government of the day. The terms and conditions of employment in the public service must be regulated by national legislation. Employees are entitled to a fair pension as regulated by national legislation. No employee of the public service may be favoured or prejudiced only because that person supports a particular political party or cause.

In order to achieve a public service which is "representative, coherent, transparent, efficient, effective, accountable and responsive to the needs of all", the White Paper on Transformation of the Public Services was released in November 1995. This White Paper was a coherent guide that informed, managed and drove the transformation process. The goals set out in the Paper were further entrenched in the Constitution, 1996. The White Paper advocated the 'Batho Pele' (People First) initiative of 1997.³

The Constitutional guidance gave birth to the integrated legislative and policy framework on performance management administered through the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), but implemented throughout the public service. This framework is designed to effect reforms to improve public

¹ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 108 of 1996.

² Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 108 of 1996.

³ United Nations, Division for Public Administration and Development Management (2004), *Republic of South Africa: Public Administration Country Profile*, January.



sector government performance and service delivery. This is also meant to promote effective employee performance and the creation of a motivated public service.

This framework revolves around the following White Papers, which serve as policy documents within the public service:⁴

- The White Paper on Transformation in the Public Service, 1995. This paper discusses the need for the transformation of the Public Services to make it representative of the demographics of South Africa.
- The White Paper on Transforming Service Delivery, 1997 (Batho Pele White Paper). This paper discusses the principles of Public Service delivery.

These principles are:⁵

- Service standards: promises should be kept.
 - Access: one and all should get their fair share.
 - Courtesy: people should be treated with sensitivity.
 - Information: people are entitled to full information.
 - Consultation: people should be consulted about their needs.
 - Openness and transparency: administration must be an open book.
 - Redress: complaints should spark positive action.
 - Value for money: tax payers' money should be used wisely.
- The White Paper on Affirmative Action and Training and Development, 1996. This paper deals with the need for recognition of the previously disadvantaged groups and the training and development of such groups to enable them to take more responsibility within the public sector.
 - The White Paper on Human Resources Management. This paper deals with the terms and conditions for the management of the Public Service employees in general.

In addition, the framework is guided by the following legislation as well as bargaining council agreements.⁶

- Public Service Act, No. 103 of 1994, which governs the entire public service in South Africa.
- Public Service Regulations, 2001, which brings the Public Service Administration Act into effect.
- Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) Resolution No 13 of 1998 and PSCBC No 9 of 2000.
- Treasury Regulations, 2001.
- Labour Relations Act, 1998, which regulates the relation between management and workers.

According to the performance management handbook (2001), the legal framework governing individual performance management agreements are different for the three categories of staff:

- Heads of department.
- Senior management (level 13 and higher, excluding professionals).
- All other staff.

⁴ Molapo P (2007), *Assessment of the perception of employees on the effective administration of performance management in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) Head Office, March.*

⁵ Molapo P (2007), *Assessment of the perception of employees on the effective administration of performance management in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) Head Office, March.*

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2. Introduction

In relation to the principles underpinning the Public Administration sector with regard to service delivery, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), received a negative audit opinion (2006/07) from the Office of the Auditor-General, and one of the root causes for this was related to capacity or people related issues (high vacancy levels and lack of financial skills). The 2006/07 Annual Report notes that the Department continued to lose skilled personnel mainly due to movements in the sector and the influences of the market on private sector salaries. This, according to the audit report (2006/07), is a major impediment to the acceleration of service delivery and economic growth.⁷

The opinion further states that "where the Department is unable to immediately recruit suitable staff, interim arrangements are made through secondments or the employment of professional service providers. The Department also has an agreement with the People's Republic of Cuba to second engineers to the Department to facilitate service delivery and undertake on-the-job training."⁸

The Department has however, initiated certain partnerships or programmes to address the filling of posts and the skills retention strategy. These broadly encompass the following:⁹

- Partnerships with the Tshwane University of Technology and the Universities of the Western Cape, Free State and Cape Town to develop learning interventions to improve the skills base of the Department. An education programme for school going learners is also being undertaken in partnership with Rand Water and the Water Research Commission (WRC).
- The Department is addressing the problem of imminent skills shortage through the establishment of the Learning Academy which will be an incubator for critical skills development for the Department and the sector. The desired impact of the Academy is to secure an adequate supply of relevant technical skills in engineering and science to meet the anticipated skills demand in the Department and the sector.

3. Review of work undertaken by DWAF: Human Resources

The Department's 2006/07 Annual Report and quarterly reports (2007) presented to the Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry highlight the initiatives taken by the Department to address the filling of posts and skills retention strategy. The 2006/07 Annual Reports notes the following with regard to human resources:¹⁰

- **Organisational development interventions:** The reconfiguration and implementation of organisational structures for the Regions, Finance and Corporate Services Branches were critical to the alignment process. This process was complemented by the human resource capacity assessment that was conducted for the Branch: Regions. A comprehensive Employee Wellness Programme was introduced and implemented during this period aimed at promoting employee wellbeing and empowerment. As part of the programme, HIV and AIDS awareness and education workshops were rolled out across the regions.
- **Capacity building:** In light of the substantial challenges of retaining and growing the Department's technical human resource base, urgent attention was paid to developing and implementing a dedicated Retention Strategy. This Strategy filled the void in the public sector system and allowed the Department to retain a critical mass of engineers, scientists and technicians. A Business Case and Implementation Plan for a Water and Forestry Learning Academy was developed for implementation in the 2007/08

⁷ Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 2006/07, Annual Report.

⁸ Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 2006/07, Annual Report.

⁹ Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 2006/07, Annual Report.

¹⁰ Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 2006/07, Annual Report.



financial year, and this forms the long-term strategy for building and maintaining the technical corps that is critical to the Department's future access to the skills and knowledge required to deliver on its mandate.

A training manual on Performance Management and Development was developed to enhance and institutionalise the implementation of the Department-wide Performance Management and Development System. This was further strengthened by the training that was provided to Senior Management Service (SMS) on performance and financial management.

The procedure and guidelines for renewal of employment contracts were developed to better manage the employment relationships to further embed a culture of performance management in the Department.

A coaching programme has also been implemented as an effective tool for leadership, and competency development as well as support accessed by Senior Management Service (SMS) members.

The learnership and internship programmes have become important vehicles for experiential learning and have increased their intake during this period.

- **External transformation:** The Departmental Service Delivery Improvement Plan was finalised and submitted as per the requirements of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). The recommendations emerging from the Public Service Commission (PSC) Client Satisfaction Survey are being implemented as part of service delivery enhancement. In line with the Department's commitment to continuously improving its services, it also participated in the research conducted by the PSC on Monitoring and Evaluation. A comprehensive audit on the Department's contribution towards Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) was completed as was the draft strategic framework on Transformation and Youth Development.

In addition to the information contained in the Annual Report, quarterly progress on human resources issues was presented to the Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry. The quarterly progress report, for the period January 2007 to March 2007 reflected the following:

- **Asset management training:** a total of forty five technical and finance officials were trained in asset management. Of those trained, ten were women and thirty five men. Two days of training sessions for DDGs were scheduled.

In addition to asset management training, Table 1 below provides an overview of human resources achievements for the period January 2007 to March 2007:

Table 1: Overview of human resources achievements for the period January 2007 to March 2007

Focus Area	Task Area	Outputs
Organisational development	Unlock cases for JE backlogs.	Audit of process completed – findings being used to inform process redesign, policy and procedures.
	Identification of critical staffing requirements from line management.	The following posts were created: Regions – 15. Forestry – 4.
		The identification of staffing needs for the Finance Branch is in progress.
Employee relations	Environmental scan of the effectiveness of employee relations support.	ER audit completed – findings being used to inform process redesign, policy and procedures.
Talent management	Bursaries administration.	Bursary audit finalised and findings being implemented.
	Capacity building	73 officials trained in the following areas:



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Finance Management Act. • Project Management. • Negotiation and conflict management. • Induction for new appointees. • Legal compliance. 35 SMS members underwent coaching.
Recruitment and selection.	Filling of critical posts.	The selection process was finalised for the following posts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Financial Officer. • Chief Director: Finance. • Chief Director: Internal Audit. • 2 Chief Directors for the infrastructure branch. • Project Manager for the Agency.
		Heads of regions/chief directors for Free State, North West, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape.
	Review and streamline of the recruitment and selection process.	New process implemented.
Transactions	Implementation of conditions of service.	Pensions reduced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limpopo 188 to 31 cases. • Eastern Cape 140 to 111 cases. • Kwazulu-Natal 29 to 23.

Source: Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (2007) .

In conjunction to the achievements, the Department projected a human resource road map for April 2007 to September 2007, which guided the work of this particular programme. Table 2 provides the details of this initiative:

Table 2: Human resource road map for April 2007 to September 2007

Focus area	Task area	Outputs
HR policy and strategy framework.	Policies analysed and developed.	Job evaluation policy.
		Standardised job descriptions.
		HIV and AIDS policy.
		Recruitment and selection policy and procedure.
Eradication of backlogs.	Employee relations.	Sexual harassment policy.
		Precautionary and strike management policy.
		Special leave policy.
		SMS performance management policy.
	Talent management.	Attendance at international conference policy.
		Change management strategy.
		Finalise grievance and misconduct cases.
		Finalise performance agreements for 2007/08.
	Recruitment and selection.	Finalise HR plan.
		Finalise probations and pensions.
		Compliance – financial disclosure.
		Finalise employee initiated severance package.
	Transactions.	Update filing system.
		Job profiles.
		Identification of HR staffing requirements for finance.
		Organisational development.
Capacity building.	Training.	Training on:
		Policies and procedures. Strategy development and analysis.



		Training on financial and performance management. Monitoring and evaluation. Gender mainstreaming. Protocol. Customer service/Batho Pele principles.
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Source: Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (2007)

A presentation on 7 September 2007 to the Portfolio Committee by the Department provided an update on human resources achievements. Table 3 below provides input on the achievements made with regard to the focus areas from April 2007 to June 2007:

Table 3: Human resources achievements from April 2007 to June 2007

Focus area	Task area	Outputs
HR policy and strategic frameworks.	Policies reviewed and developed:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and selection. • Job evaluation. • Overtime policy. • Sexual harassment. • Resettlement. • HIV and AIDS. • Special leave. • Grievance policy. • Absenteeism and abscondment policy. • Performance management and development. 	Draft has been finalised. Further consultation processes are in progress. Process of consultation to be finalised by 31 September 2007. Approval by 30 October 2007.
Eradication of backlogs.	Employee relations.	14 grievance cases of 21 from 2006, investigations finalised. 6 cases of 100 from 2007, investigations finalised.
	Talent management.	750 non-SMS work plan signed for the 2007/08 period. 121 SMS performance agreements for 2007/08 signed. Non-SMS performance assessment for 2006/07 finalised. Courses offered and number of beneficiaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction (SMS) – 15. • Wam'kekile – induction for the new public managers – 15. • Competency assessment framework for SMS – 15. • Monitoring and evaluation – 15. • Induction – non SMS – 80. • Protocol – 90. • ABET (ongoing) – 761. • Improved service delivery – 81. • Finance and budget – 30. • Swimming – 25. • Assessor training – 10. • Moderation training – 4. • Frontline training – 81.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship training – 155. • Performance management training (1 on 1 support) – 1000. • Finance training – 11. • Interns – 75. • Talent management – 1. • Presentation skills – 12. • Management principles – 15.
	Recruitment and selection.	Procedure developed and 377 posts were filled.
	Organisational development.	107 posts evaluated. Posts and employee details verified. Persal system clean up and finalised. Vacancy clean up in persal.
	Transactions	30 injuries on duty cases processed. 20 probation cases processed.
HR policy and strategic frameworks.	Strategies and policies developed and consulted.	Change strategy. Human resource development strategy, plan and policy.

Source: Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (2007)

The achievements for the Human Resources road map from July 2007 to September 2007 reflected the following:

Table 4: Human resources road map from July 2007 to September 2007

HR policy and strategic frameworks.	Strategies and policies developed and consulted.	Change strategy. Human resource development strategy, plan and policy.	30 September 2007 for the first draft documents.
Eradication of backlogs.	Employee relations.	Audit of corruption and fraud cases. Implementation of recommendation from finalised investigations.	30 September 2007 status report. 30 October 2007.
	Talent management.	Finalise outstanding performance agreement for 2007/08. Training of moderation committees. Training on performance management.	15 September 2007. 30 October 2007. 30 October 2007.
	Transactions and knowledge management.	30% of reduction outstanding probations finalised. HR files. Outstanding financial disclosures submitted.	30 September 2007.
	Organisational development.	Critical vacancies verified and endorsed. 30% job descriptions and job profiles developed.	30 September 2007.

Source: Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (2007)



At a most recent presentation on 11 March 2008, the Department provided the following overview of the key strategic thrusts and achievements in terms of human resources between 2004 till 2009:

Table 5: Overview of the key strategic thrusts and achievements of human resources between 2004 till 2009.

Key strategic thrusts	Achievements
2004/05	
Building departmental capacity. Transformation and change management. Restructuring and re-organisation in line with resolution 7 of 2002.	Established a departmental chamber in partnership with unions. An information manual (restructuring) was developed and road shows were held. Established the Eastern and Limpopo clusters. Created National Water Resource Infrastructure Branch. Employees underwent training in the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 201 employees underwent diversity management training. • 80 employees underwent strategic management training. • 9 employees participated in the Advanced Management Development. Partnered with the Human Rights Commission on an anti-racism campaign and conducted workshops on human rights and racism.
2005/2006	
Restructuring and re-organisation. Building departmental capacity and capability.	Strengthened the finance branch. Established the forestry branch. Decoupled gender directorate from the transformation unit. Reconfigured and strengthened the human resources, legal services and administration units. Partnered with the Tshwane University of Technology, University of Western Cape, Free State University and the University of Cape Town to create a pool of young technicians and engineers. Reached an agreement with the People's Republic of Congo to source and second engineers to the Department.
2006/2007	
	Coaching – leadership development programme implemented for SMS level. An accelerated development programme for middle managers implemented focusing on project, performance, financial management and supervisory skills. Training also focused on ABET, customer care, computer skills and SAP. Extensive training was provided in forestry compliance and enforcement. 533 technicians and engineers were retained through salary reviews and counter-offers. Retention strategy developed and implemented. Business case for the water and forestry learning academy.
2007/2008/2009	
Restructuring – institutional realignment. Improving departmental capacity and capability to deliver. Improve departmental performance management.	

Source: Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (2008)



4. Conclusion

As aptly noted in the Department's multi-year strategic plan 2007/08 – 2009/10, part 3, section 1, for the Department to perform at the highest possible level, a culture of performance will need to take root. It is therefore critical that the mutually reinforcing tools meant to institutionalise the appropriate ethos in the public service, be integrated and brought to bear and positively contribute to a performance-driven culture. This will entail strict compliance with the provisions of the Performance Management and Development System; prioritising the training and education of managers across various levels in managing the performance and development of employees; improving the quality of performance agreements; aligning the generation of performance reports with reporting requirements; and reconfiguration of the current organisational arrangements in line with the functional and external environmental imperatives.

These actions will ensure that the organisational design is properly aligned to the corporate strategy and effectively supports the implementation of the mandate.

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