

8. PERSONNEL POLICIES

Perhaps the most serious problem standing in the way of effective in-house laboratory work is that of achieving flexibility in handling laboratory personnel. It is generally agreed that, if the management of DoD in-house laboratories could handle personnel with the same degree of flexibility as is possible in comparable industrial organizations, an immediate and substantial improvement in laboratory effectiveness would be realized.

The problems standing in the way of flexibility in personnel matters are too well known to require elaboration here. Foremost among them are the rigidity of job assignment, the difficulty of reassignment to new duties, and the conflict between available funds and spaces. These circumstances are a result of civil-service regulations, in addition to what appears to be an unduly rigid interpretation of civil-service policies by the top management of DoD and the Military Departments. The latter point is not certain, since civil-service regulations may indeed be as inflexible as the Departments believe them to be, but there are some indications that the Departments are not taking advantage of all the flexibility that current civil-service regulations permit.

In any event, no matter how the result is achieved, it is absolutely essential that substantially more flexibility be allowed laboratory management in handling their personnel than is now permitted. If the laboratories are to operate at the expected high level of efficiency and competence, they must have the same degree of control over their staffs that agencies outside the Government have.

It should be recognized that many of the civil-service regulations are the consequence of a system designed in past years when the Government was not faced with major scientific and technical problems. Today, Government salaries are much improved; moreover, the Government is the largest national employer of professional personnel. It is fair to say, therefore, that a drastic revision of personnel policies relating to scientific and technical professionals is not only in order but necessary for the future.

If the Government cannot employ and reward highly skilled professional people with the same flexibility that industry currently practices, the Government cannot expect an equal measure of performance by its technical teams. There appears to be no question that this is one of the major impediments to improved efficiency on the part of the in-house laboratories, and DoD management should give this problem its concentrated attention.