

STATE OF ISRAEL

Prime Minister's Office

Central Bureau of Statistics

Training Sector

Statistics Aren't Enough.....

Anat Asraf Hayut, Margalit Moshe Plasner
Human Resources Department
Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel

'Excellence' in the Public Sector?

'Professionalism' and 'Rewards for Expertise' in Government Offices?

For us – the workers of the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel, a professional, advanced body, and expert in its field – the above are linked to what we call the Professional Advancement Track.

The Professional Advancement Track was established in 1998, and each year we can feel its influence more and more on the work processes, products and standards of our work.

The Professional Advancement Track was conceived by the administration of the organization, who viewed it as a track that could serve firstly as a tool to advance the goals of the organization and its aims; and concurrently, as an opportunity to advance professional workers, without necessarily turning them into administrators.

The revolutionary idea that workers in the public sector would be evaluated and promoted on the basis of their contribution to the advancement and achievement of the organization's goals, was enthusiastically accepted by most of those involved in the concept stage of the process, and was approved by the Civil Service Commission.

While devising the track it was found that over and above its declared goals, the "secondary benefits" are many and more significant than was first thought. These benefits will be examined below, from two angles: the organization's perspective and the worker's perspective.

What is the "Professional Advancement Track" at the Central Bureau of Statistics?

The Professional Advancement Track is a channel that presents an opportunity for promotion and development based on proven professional ability. The unique feature of the track is that the responsibility, initiative and impetus of the process are in the hands of the worker. The organization supplies the worker with the guidance,

supportive tools and resources required for his project. A worker interested in advancing within this framework is invited to develop and advance professional issues (to be called 'projects'). Each project is presented for evaluation by a committee and professional readers in the field the project deals with; based on this evaluation, the worker receives an additional standard grade.

This track allows academic workers from the subject units (approximately 400 workers, who constitute approximately 33% of all organization workers) to advance; it is not intended for non-academic or administration workers.

When establishing the track the Steering Committee, headed by the Director of the Training Sector, had to take several steps:

1. Defining the criteria, achievements and standards for promotion (regarding scope, innovation, complexity and depth), at each and every stage. These criteria were updated and adapted in the last two years, in light of the needs in the field.
2. Devising a procedure to inculcate the track and its principles into the organization.
3. Devising the procedures for activating the track (committees, directives, forms, evaluation tools, etc.)
4. Devising a training/learning model – a model that supports the professional challenges that confront both workers and administrators.

How is it done?

The process can be divided into two: development of the project and evaluation of the project.

Development of the project

1. Definition of the project and finding a professional advisor – a worker interested in advancing within the track will begin work on the project after choosing (together with his superiors) the project he wishes to develop, and the professional advisor who will guide, advise and direct him.
2. Development, execution and implementation of the project.
3. Documentation – organization, formulating and writing the project report in such a manner that a reader who is not an expert in the field will be able to learn and understand what has been done.

Evaluation of the project

1. Presentation of the project to the track coordinator.
2. Reading of the project report by the track committee and a professional reader in the field the project deals with.
3. A discussion and subsequent recommendation by the track committee, and a decision by the committee and a representative of the Civil Service Commission, regarding the promotion or non-promotion of the worker, based on the project he presented.
4. Provision of professional feedback to the worker and his superiors, and publication of the project in the organization.

What is a 'Project'?

A project can be any type of development that furthers the professional tasks of the organization: improvement of work processes, upgrading data or statistical products, research projects based on existing information, analysis and processing of data, construction of an advanced coding system, etc. It goes without saying that the higher the level, the more the project should be innovative, complex, comprehensive, in-depth, etc.

Projects can be presented to one of two main channels:

1. The research channel
2. The statistical products channel

The research channel – this channel contains research analyses based on the statistical and economic data collected by the CBS, or papers that deal with mathematical-statistical development. Projects included in this channel are no different in their contents from those conducted in academia.

The statistical products channel – this channel includes analyses, research and documentation of projects related to the official data collection process itself. The projects presented in this channel are projects that can be implemented in the immediate or long-term future. The unique aspect of these projects is that they offer an immediate contribution to the unit's function, and they sometimes have an influence at the level of the entire organization.

When a project is presented to the Professional Advancement Track, it is first determined to which of the above two channels it will be presented, and it is evaluated on the basis of the criteria specific to that channel.

What is a 'Professional Reader'?

As stated above, each project report is read and examined by members of an evaluation committee, as well as a professional reader from the field the project deals with. The 'Professional Reader' is an expert in the field of the project's contents, an evaluator chosen for each project based on its subject and level of difficulty. Professional readers may be from the public sector, clients of the CBS, the Bank of Israel, researchers, academicians or (in the case of projects at the lowest levels) administrators from the organization.

The reader is requested to read the project proposal and give his written opinion of it - its quality, innovation and contribution.

The expert's opinion is important for two reasons:

1. It provides feedback that makes it possible to improve, revise and expand projects in a professional manner.
2. It promotes interactions, cooperation and work connections with experts outside the organization.

The training/learning model – provides support for the professional challenges that the track presents

The professional advancement track presents the worker and his superiors with professional challenges, which they will only be able to achieve if they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and tools.

To that end the training model was devised; a model that presents each worker with the training sessions he needs in order to advance from stage to stage. This model defines the worker's professional development – both in terms of products but also in terms of the continuing process of acquisition of knowledge and professionalization.

A continuing process of learning is one of the conditions for progress in the professional advancement track, but its great importance is in reinforcing the CBS as a 'learning organization'.

The internal school of the organization conducts, on a continuous basis, an extensive and high-quality system of on-site lectures and courses to impart the required knowledge, tools and skills to its workers.

Some facts and figures

During the 12 years the organization has conducted the professional advancement track, 272 workers have advanced (out of approximately 400 candidates) at least one time! Of those, some have already advanced twice and three times (2-3 grades).

What is it good for?

It is obvious that much effort and countless hours are invested in the Professional Advancement Track. Is this great investment worthwhile?

In examining this question we must consider not only the products of the track (the projects), but also the 'secondary benefits' derived from it.

In order to do a true business calculation, additional important products must be identified:

1. From the organization's point of view:
 - Documentation of work processes, knowledge and expertise – so that they'll be available to all the workers. This issue is extremely important, because information and knowledge may "escape" with workers who have left or retired.
 - Inculcating a culture of expertise, initiative and personal excellence; a culture which is not found among a large number of workers in the public sector.
 - Creating interactions, cooperation, work connections and discussions with experts external to the organization.
 - Definition of high professional standards.
2. From the worker's point of view:

- Fast promotion (as opposed to promotion in the administrative track, based on available positions) on a previously planned track. The worker's promotion depends on him – his initiative and motivation.
- An opportunity to specialize and receive professional recognition.

Many projects brought about the advancement of ideas and subjects; interactions with professionals and academicians were created; processes of integration between units; and, of course, an opportunity to promote workers based on professional excellence.

With the creation of the track standards were defined, and today many high-quality, in-depth and innovative projects are presented to the track, and these set high standards and a professional challenge.

The beauty, uniqueness and power of the track – both as a method and as a course – lies in the fact that it combines the goals of the organization with the personal goals of the worker, and that can't be anything but a winning combination.