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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

FEDERAL PERSONNEL AND
COMPENSATION DIVISION

B-203776

JULY 23, 1981

The Honorable Caspar W. Weinberger
The Secretary of Defense

Attention: Assistant for Audit Reports

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Followup on Actions To Improve Coordination
and Utilization of Human Resources Research
and Development (FPCD-81-62)

Investments in human resources research and development have often produced substantial benefits in terms of improved safety, military readiness, and operating efficiency. In 1977, we reported that the Department of Defense (DOD) needed to improve its management of the use of human resources research and development results. 1/ We recently completed a limited examination of the actions taken by each of the services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to coordinate and increase the use of human resources research and development. Although they have taken many positive initiatives, OSD needs to insure that these initiatives are carried out and that other improvements to research coordination and utilization are made.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

To identify the actions taken to coordinate and encourage the use of human resources research and development, we interviewed key personnel within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (OASD) (Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics (MRA&L)) and the Office of the Under Secretary of

1/"Human Resources Research and Development Results Can Be Better Managed" (FPCD-77-43, Apr. 22, 1977).

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Defense for Research and Engineering (Research and Advanced Technology) and at the major laboratories in each service which conduct human resources research:

- The Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI), Alexandria, Virginia.
- The Navy Personnel Research and Development Center (NPRDC), San Diego, California.
- The Air Force Human Resources Laboratory (AFHRL), San Antonio, Texas.

We also reviewed the laboratories' research plans and programs, their activities aimed at increasing utilization of human resources research and development, and tri-service efforts to improve research coordination and the use of results. In addition, we reviewed a wide variety of literature published since 1965 on knowledge transfer and research utilization.

The scope of our review was limited in that we did not assess how much the actions taken have increased utilization, nor did we try to review the entire human resources research and development program or to judge its scientific merit and professionalism. Our review of laboratories focused on ARI, NPRDC, and AFHRL because they are the principal DOD human resources laboratories, accounting for 58 percent of military science and technology in this area during 1980.

OSD'S ACTIONS TO IMPROVE RESEARCH COORDINATION

The two OSD staffs most concerned with human resources research have been working together to improve its management and utilization. On the policy side, this staff works for the Assistant Secretary of Defense (MRA&L). On the research side, this staff works for the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. The efforts of these staffs have been geared to insuring that the research community is working on pertinent manpower problems and that researchers and users communicate effectively. Agreements have been formalized to jointly manage and review human resources research programs, both in terms of technical and scientific worth and policy relevance.

A particularly noteworthy joint project has been the development and prototyping of an automated research information system for tracking and reviewing human resources

research and development programs in all the services. When completed, this system will improve the capability for DOD-wide planning and management of human resources research and will help to identify gaps and unnecessary duplication in service research. This capability will become increasingly critical if OSD is to effectively respond to the House Committee on Armed Services' stated belief that many of the pressing defense manpower research issues should be addressed from a DOD-wide perspective rather than from the perspective of the individual services.

While we were impressed with the coordination of these two OSD staffs, we believe that additional attention should be given to the following matters to insure that initiatives are carried out:

- In October 1979, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (MRA&L) and the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (Research and Advanced Technology) signed a memorandum of agreement which specified both their individual and mutual responsibilities to jointly manage and review the research programs. The memorandum had limited circulation and is scheduled for review every 2 years. We believe a DOD directive or instruction on this subject is preferable. A directive or instruction would circulate throughout DOD and thus permit the entire manpower and personnel community to be informed of the goals, responsibilities, and any changes of the two offices in managing human resources research and development programs.
- There has been no assurance the automated research information system will receive OSD-level priority for development. We believe the system would improve research management through its formal tracking of services' research projects and should receive priority support.
- Within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, one individual is responsible for insuring that human resources research proposals are coordinated among the interested organizations and for determining whether proposals should be funded through research and development channels. We have previously questioned whether one individual can (1) have a detailed understanding of all the research projects and (2) keep abreast of the latest

developments in these areas. 1/ We doubt that the same individual could also assume the additional responsibility for joint administration of defense manpower research issues, directed by the House Committee on Armed Services in the DOD Authorization Act of 1981. Funding and coordinating work outside established service chains of commands are particularly difficult and time consuming.

- In terms of reporting on research utilization (Research and Advanced Technology) the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, Research and Advance Technology, and OASD (MRA&L) are not complying with their agreement to jointly produce an annual report of the past years' research and development efforts. We believe such a report is needed and could be used to answer congressional hearings requests for information about the value and impact derived from this area.

JOINT SERVICE ACTIONS
TO IMPROVE COORDINATION

There have been a number of joint service actions to improve coordination and utilization of human resources research and development. Significant actions have included:

- The signing of a memorandum by the technical directors of each of the principal human resources research laboratories in which they agreed to promote cooperation and coordination in the area of people-related research and development.
- The holding of regular meetings involving the laboratory commanders and their senior staff to explore opportunities for joint service approaches to research, as well as to share information on projects and mutual problems.
- The establishing of technical advisory groups at the working scientist level to provide a mechanism for lateral communication and for addressing common concerns across the laboratories.

1/ "Needed--A More Complete Definition of a Quality First-Term Enlisted Person" (FPCD-79-34, Apr. 25, 1979).

- The use of joint working groups to coordinate DOD-wide human resources research on particular topics.

Despite the potential of these actions for increasing the coordination and use of human resources research, several personnel told us that both the technical advisory groups and the joint working groups have experienced difficulties in obtaining fiscal, personnel, and command support from the services. We have previously noted several barriers to the effective operation of such groups, including their temporary nature and limited focus, the part-time involvement by their members, and the lack of direct control over research efforts. ^{1/} In addition, all of the senior personnel we spoke with stated that the technical advisory groups have been adversely affected by restrictions on travel and by a DOD directive on reducing the number of meetings. In other words, there appears to be a reluctance within the services to actively support the use of temporary organizations, including lead laboratories, because each service believes it has unique needs and changing funding priorities and should be a leader instead of a follower.

We believe that the many different service perspectives on the value and control of temporary working groups continue to limit the use and effectiveness of joint service actions. We believe these differing perspectives will only be overcome when OSD can articulate:

- The primary defense manpower issues needing research on a DOD-wide basis.
- The common areas of knowledge which must be produced to address those issues.
- The type and amount of resources in each of the laboratories being devoted to research.
- The conditions under which gaps in knowledge produced by research or unnecessary duplication in research can be remedied through joint service efforts.

^{1/}"Needed--A More Complete Definition of a Quality First-Term Enlisted Person" (FPCD-79-34, Apr. 25, 1979).

LABORATORIES' ACTIONS TO IMPROVE
UTILIZATION

In recent years, the laboratories have tried to improve the rate of utilization of their research products. Each laboratory has established an office to provide information to user groups. Researcher awareness of the need to improve utilization of human resources research and development has led to increased communication with users. In the case of ARI and NPRDC, merit pay performance standards require researchers to communicate with user communities. In particular, ARI has taken actions to improve utilization by top-level Army managers. These managers have become involved in the review and approval of ARI's research program--functioning much like a corporate board of directors.

NPRDC sponsored two conferences which addressed ways for all services to improve utilization. NPRDC has also developed an automated information system which catalogs the ongoing and recently completed human resources research done by or for 75 DOD organizations. This system can be used by those working in a research area to avoid duplication and identify deficiencies in the coverage of issues. AFHRL has implemented a product-tracking system to provide detailed information on research use and customer evaluation of research products. The system is based on structured user questionnaires--the results of which have been used for management analysis and feedback purposes.

Additional areas remain for the services to further improve the use of research results. For example, ARI is presently not complying with Army regulations requiring utilization tracking. A tracking system is needed to insure that attention is given to both top management concerns and product implementation and user concerns. Given the breadth of the Navy organization, NPRDC could intensify its activities aimed at increasing user awareness and insuring that top-level, Navy-wide human resources research interests are being addressed. To accomplish this, NPRDC might consider adopting the "board of directors" concept recently instituted by ARI.

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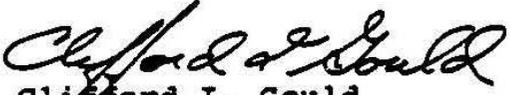
In summary, we believe the initial actions taken by OSD and the services to improve coordination and utilization of human resources research have been sound and timely. However, to fully realize the potential benefits of these improvements,

OSD and the services need to direct attention and action to the matters discussed in this letter. We discussed our observations with responsible OSD and service officials and they were in general agreement with us.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

We would appreciate your keeping us advised of any additional followup.

Sincerely yours,


Clifford I. Gould
Director

THE END

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