Spoken text accompanying the PPT on Practical Workflow Analysis

Welcome to the EHRI online module Workflow Analysis and Tools. My name is Nicolai Zimmermann, I work at the Third Reich Department or *Abteilung Deutsches Reich* in the German Federal Archives. In the following, I would like to delve into the procedures for administrative tasks in Nazi government agencies.

First we will discuss what is meant by workflow. During the Nazi period, workflows were determined in the main by the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Reich Ministries, the *Gemeinsamen Geschäftsordnung der Reichsministerien* or GGO, which went into force in 1927 to reform office procedures and whose most important regulations we shall discuss in the following. These regulations include the hierarchical structure of government agencies and the varying pencil colours that indicate each level of hierarchy. After illustrating a typical workflow in a government agency, the presentation ends with a short introduction to a few tools that can aid in the reconstruction of a workflow.

We begin with the question: what is a workflow?

A workflow is defined as the procedure for processing an administrative task within a government agency. This task can be anything, although usually it is an incoming letter or telephone call.

A workflow is not arbitrary but is governed by rules and regulations set down in a registry plan or rules of procedure. In the process of following these regulations, traces of the workflow are made on the document itself in the form of notes and directives. These marks make it possible to retrospectively trace the workflow, ideally even making it possible to determine which person contributed which mark, making the course of actions taken within an administrative agency more transparent and enabling the verification of administrative actions. The aim of a unified workflow is to be able at any time to trace and determine the stand and development of any administrative task.

Over the course of a workflow, an incoming missive will usually pass through the stations: receipt, registration, provision of a file reference, processing, output, and disposition. Each of these stations will be discussed in more detail in this presentation.

It has already been said that workflows are governed by set rules and regulations. These are usually defined in written rules of procedure. The rules of procedure determine the stages of processing a given administrative task, who is responsible for what, and which tools they should use. They also regulate general rules for the working and organisation of a government agency.

Government agencies in the Nazi era were subject to the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Reich Ministries, effective as of 1 January 1927, including the Rules of Procedure for Registries and Chancelleries, as well as the 1928 Joint Rules of Procedure of the High-level Reich Agencies, the *Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung für die höheren Reichsbehörden*, or GOH. Since the administration of the Reich as a whole functioned as a model for all administrations in Germany, many of the regulations were also applied in states and local municipalities. The GGO remained in effect for such a long time because it did not provide a detailed list of regulations, but rather guiding principles for administrative organisation. Many of these regulations are still in effect today in the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Ministries.

The Joint Rules of Procedure of the Reich Ministries (GGO) and of the High-level Reich Agencies (GOH) from 1927 and 1928 respectively implemented ideas about reforms in office procedures that resulted in a sweeping modernisation and simplification of workflows and procedures in chancellery and registry offices in the 1920. The main goal of this office reform was a marked acceleration and simplification of workflows. To this end, the role of the registry office was trimmed considerably. It no longer needed to necessarily be involved in the handling of every document, as had previously been the case. It was even possible for agencies to file documents without the involvement of the registry at all. To this end, the competency of division clerks and heads was expanded, and they became able to receive incoming documents directly and also to decide for themselves whether to send outgoing documents.

The 'concept' or draft also shrank in importance, since clean copies could now be made directly—or following stenographic directions—without first producing a draft. In lieu of drafts, carbon copies of the clean copy were now added to the file. This first became possible after the technological invention of the typewriter. Stenography, the telephone, and the repeal of the strict obligation to have all processes in writing, along with the simultaneous expectation of oral clarification of cases as simply as possible, changed many bureaucratic procedures. To simplify and expedite the handling of tasks that needed to be dealt with habitually and in large numbers, various forms and form letters were introduced.

As a rule, in Reich ministries, that is, in the top-level Reich agencies, the following hierarchy could be found: The head of the agency, the minister, was appointed a state secretary who acted as his permanent representative. Under this post were a variety of *Abteilungen* or departments, each responsible for a different function, with a department head at the top. Within each department, the work itself was allocated among a number of smaller working units, usually referred to as *Referate* or divisions. However, it should be noted that these denotations often vary greatly. There are for example *Ämter* and *Hauptämter* or offices and main offices, and a department can also be a main department or *Hauptabteilung* or a subdepartment or *Unterabteilung*. Within each division, one must also distinguish between the various grades of the officials employed there. Civil service career paths were divided into *Laufbahngruppen* with service grades: *höherer* or top-level, *gehobener* or senior, *mittlerer* or mid-level, and *einfach* or low-level.

Important to remember is that the Rules of Procedure determined which level used which colour pencil. The green pencil for example, was reserved for the head of the agency, his representative usually used red. In the Reich Ministry of Finance, however, I found a directive stating that State Secretary Reinhardt was to use a brown pencil rather than red. Blue was the colour for the division heads, everyone else used black. In the top-level Reich agencies, in which there were no state secretaries, the colours were adapted accordingly.

We now arrive at the heart of this module, the actual workflow in a government agency. Firstly, it should be stated that the GGO does not provide clear regulations for all cases. For example, the task of the registry office varies from institution to institution, since the GGO allows clerks to file documents without the involvement of the registry. Usually, the registry was the first office to be involved—at least in non-urgent cases—immediately after a missive was received by the entry point. In urgent cases however, it was not informed until a missive reached the division head or clerk, and sometimes it was not involved at all until after a case had been handled.

The workflow usually began with the entry point, known as the *Hauptbüro* or main office. The clerk there opened the envelope, stamped the incoming missive with the date of receipt and noted which office was responsible for handling the letter. Usually, only the division was written down, but sometimes a particular clerk was named, or a particular registry office. The entry point also checked that all attachments said to accompany a text had in fact been included. It also made the decision about which missives should be shown to the head of the agency. Every agency had internal guidelines for this decision, for example all letters from the Reich Chancellery or the Reich President, or all mail that had been addressed by hand, or every missive that had been signed personally by a minister or state secretary, etc. Sensitive or important content could also be the reason for a decision that a text should be a top-level matter. However, to lighten the workload at the higher echelons, most incoming letters were sent to the desk of a department head. The GGO also stated that it was possible to specify a particular clerk who should receive a letter directly.

In many cases, an incoming letter went through the registry office on its way from the entry point to the recipient. There, receipt would be noted and a file reference provided. If there was already a file on the case, the other documents in it were attached before the letter was passed on.

If the main office had decided that the missive was of particular importance or that, following agency guidelines, the letter needed to presented to the head of the agency, the minister and then the state secretary—or in smaller agency with no state secretaries, only the director of the agency—would be given the letter. He or they added their endorsement as a sign of having seen the letter, and sometimes used the opportunity to comment, make a decision, or add a directive for the further handling of the document. They could also direct that there be a consultation or presentation of the case on a later date or reserve the right to personally sign the final answer.

After the higher-ups had seen the letter—or in the case of a normal incoming document, immediately after it had been registered by the entry point—the document went to the division head, who confirmed that he had seen it and added his own commentary, directives or orders. When the entry point had only determined which division the letter should go to, the head of the division also named the clerk who should handle the case.

Finally, the administrative task landed on the desk of the division officer who was responsible for all further action. At this point, he added his initials to confirm that he had seen the document. He was to make sure that all people who needed to be involved in the answer were consulted, and to collect responses to the case if necessary. If he felt that the letter did not fall under his purview, he passed it on to the relevant department. Either he would formulate the answer himself, or forward it to a clerk with instructions (known as *Angaben*) on the content of the draft. If the letter had not yet been to the registry office, it would now be forwarded through said office.

In the next step, the clerk tasked with answering, known as an *Expedient*, usually a lower-level clerk but sometimes a higher-level division officer, would prepare the answer and add his date and initials. At this stage, the draft was approved or corrected. Usually, the division officer corrected and approved the answer himself. If there had been a directive to have the letter signed by a higher-up, or if the officer felt the need for the backing of a superior, the draft would again climb through the hierarchy—from the division head to the state secretary to the minister himself. Each of these people gave their endorsement in the form of a date and initial, and the final, highest-ranked person to see it would add the date of the letter itself.

After all final endorsements were made, the draft went to the chancellery, where a chancellery scribe would create a clean copy. Then someone—often but not always the person who had written the draft—would control the clean copy to ensure that its content exactly matched the draft. At this point, the clean copy needed a signature as a final endorsement. As a rule, or when a directive had been made concerning the signature, a letter was signed by the last person to endorse it. In order to lessen his workload, the Joint Rules of Procedure allowed less important documents to be signed on behalf of that person by the chancellery clerk or by the person who wrote the draft.

The chancellery was responsible for sending the final copy and noted the date on the draft. The registry noted the sending in its journal and filed the incoming and outgoing letter by sewing them into the file and disposing of them securely. In a final step, which however is no longer part of the normal workflow, because it took place years later, each case file was sent to an archive where foliation or pagination took place and the disposal of the file was recorded.

This chart provides—as well as possible—a graphic illustration of the workflow described above. The top half shows a classic workflow: A missive arrives at the entry point and is sent—sometimes via the registry office—to the initial recipient. From there it went down the ladder to a clerk who drafted a response and sent it back up the hierarchy for endorsement. Next come all steps leading to the creation of a final copy; from the chancellery to the examination against the draft to the signature and the actual sending of the letter and depositing the draft at the registry office.

The lower half of the chart illustrates a simplified workflow in which no draft is written and in its stead, a carbon copy of the clean copy is filed. This response must also be endorsed, but usually by someone lower down the agency's ladder. As a rule, it is endorsed by a division clear or the head of the division, at the latest by the department head. The signature is then often added by the chancellor. I hope that this diagram, which makes no claim to completeness, has been helpful for understanding a classic workflow.

In the following I would like to present a series of tools that can be used to reconstruct the workflow for a particular document. The challenge is to decipher the various initials and pencil colours by applying one's knowledge about the structure of the government agency and the hierarchy of the people within the agency, including their authority, position, and function. This is possible only when one has certain aids that can provide the information needed.

Here you see a list of the documents that shall be discussed. I would like to stress that in the next subchapter of this online course, you will find aids tools as downloadable documents with commentary, including the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Reich Ministries.

We shall discuss these documents in turn, beginning with the Joint Rules or GGO. The general section of the GGO contains regulations for:

- Organisational structure
- Workflow
- Handling of the subject matter
- Work routines and possible directives
- External communication

Here you see the table of contents of the GGO.

Key to a normal workflow, available in the attachment to the GGO, are the rules concerning

- the registry plan,
- the chancellery plan,
- and the forms for and samples of all manner of possible administrative tasks.

Less important for determining workflows is the section of the GGO that goes into the particularities of cooperation with law-making bodies and into how laws are created within government.

Here you see the table of contents for that section.

Internal government cooperation, that is between the Chancellery of the Reich and the various ministries, was regulated in the main by the May 1924 Rules of Procedure of the Reich Government, although the Nazi government made multiple changes to this document. The regulations for the appointment of civil servants, discussed in our initial sample letter, are found in Article 18 of this document.

I would also like to remind you that many government agencies had their own rules of procedure for their operations, etc., in which the respective bodies fine-tuned the general regulations found within the GGO to meet their specific needs. These internal rules of procedure are extremely important for a full understanding of the workflow within those agencies. Here you see a May 1933 directive from the Chancellery of the Reich, which had the intention of accelerating workflows. The first thing this directive stresses is that in a normal workflow, documents need not be registered. That was a reaction to the earlier practice of registering each step of a document's processing with the registry office. In fact, this practice was discontinued by the reform of the GGO in 1927, but clearly it was still found necessary to underline this procedure in 1933. Paragraph five—to look at an example of the kind of details regulated in such agency rules of procedure—contains regulations on the use of the differently coloured floating files in which records were sent through the agency.

As a second illustration, I would like to show you a short directive from the Reich Ministry of Finance. Finding this document allowed me to finally understand some aspects of the ministry's workflow that until this discovery had baffled me. It explains varying special signs known as 'workflow notes' or *Geschäftsgangvermerke.* For example, a caret means that a draft must be shown to the minister before it is sent. It also says in passing that State Secretary Reinhardt uses a brown pencil, which provided a long-sought explanation for the lack of the state secretary's red marks on Ministry of Finance documents.

In order to interpret the file reference found on almost every official document, it is imperative to look into the agency's filing plan. A filing plan is a systematic, hierarchically structured classification of an institution's tasks. A page of the Ministry of Finance filing plan is pictured here in illustration. It clearly shows that each subject matter is assigned an index number, which Is then structured hierarchically. We can see this in the O 5200 file numbers. O 5200 was the number for confiscation of asset in the occupied territories. The file numbers in this series, O 5205, O5210, etc. each stand for a different kind of asset: seized assets, forfeited assets, gifts and inheritances, etc.

The same is true for the file number series O 5800. This file number was for all documents relating to the *Haupttreuhandstelle Ost* or HTO, Main Trusteeship Office East. The HTO's various offices, subsidiaries, and tasks were each given their own number in this series.

Now we turn to the next tool: the journal. It has already been said that the registry offices noted all important incoming and outgoing documents in a journal or diary. This is a scan of such a journal from the Ministry of Finance for the file number S 3621, capital taxes. Entry 32 (left) notes the 1941 capital tax assessment for the occupied eastern territories, as the text in the middle reads.

It would perhaps also be possible to find the written document to which this refers.

In the following we will look at documents that can help us to understand the organisation of and rules of authority for each agency, that is, aids for determining who was responsible for what. These could be, firstly, organisational decrees or similar directives on organisational structure. For example, here you see a November 1941 organizational decree from the Reich Minister of the Occupied Eastern Territories, ordering the creation of additional divisions.

An organisation chart or organigram provides a very good overview of the organisational structure of an agency. Such a graphic representation of an organisation's departments and divisions clearly shows the hierarchy within an agency and provides a good idea of the division of authority. As an example, here we have the organigram of the Reich Ministry of the Occupied Territories. One should however keep in mind that both organisational structure and the names of the various divisions often changed over time. Sometimes organisation charts also include the names of the head of the respective divisions, making them even more useful as a source of information.

There is however one more tool that provides a detailed list of the responsibilities of each individual member of a government agency, even the lowly couriers: the *Geschäftsverteilungsplan* or schedule of authority. A schedule of authority lists every working unit of an agency, details the tasks in its purview, and names the relevant officer for each task, including their official title. Here you see the July 1943 Schedule of Authority of the Reich Ministry of Finance under Minister Graf Schwerin von Krosigk.

The aim of the schedule of authority is to lay out a sharply delineated map of the working areas of a government agency, leaving as little room as possible for doubt as to who is responsible for what and avoiding overlap. The schedule of authority also assigns each person working at the agency to a particular unit and delineates their particular tasks. The schedule of authority is therefore key to deciphering initials and identifying the people who handled a document.

Even more helpful for deciphering initials, the abbreviations used internally by employees of an agency, is the directory of initials or *Paraphenverzeichnis.* Every government agency was required to keep such a directory, unfortunately they rarely survived the war. Here you see a page from the signature and initial directory of the Reich Ministry of Finance, with the entry for Dr. Maedel, the division head responsible for the management and administration of assets that were seized by or forfeited to the Reich—including the assets of all Jews who were deported or emigrated.

When none of the above-mentioned tools are extant for a particular government agency, it is sometimes possible to determine the person responsible for a division from the address or telephone directory, such as this one from December 1944 for the Reich Ministry of Finance. In light of the many relocations of and changes in government agencies and their working units, in particular near the end of the war, these directories were of great practical importance in their time.

Finally, as a last aid for deciphering initials, memoranda and nominal directives can often be found in the files that when examined closely can help to attribute initials and functions to people and to find the names of employees. An example of such a document is this missive from the Reich Chancellery, that includes the initials of the State Secretary and the heads of the units and divisions.

Finally, we should also mention the *Verwaltungshandbücher* or administrative handbooks, which were published regularly at the time and often included an overview of an agency's structure, including addresses and top-level personnel.

If you would like to take a closer look at the aids described in this module, the following pages link to scans of the tools introduced in this unit. The GGO, which I would recommend to anyone with an interest in diplomatics, is available here in full.

Thank you for your attention.