



Centralisation of certain functions

The U4U position on the document "Efficiency and synergies Review. Modernising the HR function"

The Commission recently announced that it would proceed with the centralisation of certain cross-cutting functions (HR, communication, IT) in order to rationalise them, and above all to make savings on staff costs in this period of budgetary constraints. The first document on the centralisation of HR ("Efficiency and Synergies Review. Modernising the HR function") was published in January 2016. It announced an ambitious plan to centralise the HR functions, leading to "efficiency gains" of 380 full-time equivalents (permanent posts and other staff on credit), but above all it leaves unanswered numerous questions about the future of the HR staff in the DGs, and about the efficacy of this recentralisation and of the services planned for the Commission's staff, while the possibility looms of this new central HR function becoming an Office. Clarifications of the intentions and methods of implementing this plan are therefore urgently required.

The document, prepared by 22 Directors General over several meetings (in the presence of the PMO, OIL and EPSO, but without the DG HR), is intended to implement a new three-pillar structure:

- 1) The DGs should have a much reduced HR workforce (from 2 to 6 full-time persons), probably working together in a unit with a broader remit (communication, IT or other) and managed by an "HR Business Correspondent" (perhaps also by a head of unit, but not necessarily).
- 2) The DG HR should inherit a new directorate called the "Account Management Centre" (AMC), staffed by some HR personnel from the DGs and structured in 8 units containing DG "families".
- 3) The DG HR should continue to provide the same services as regards defining policy and regulations and the centralisation of certain services.

Before looking at the background of this project, it should first be noted that the vocabulary used is particularly surprising and appears to be the result of managerial obsessions that seem to be completely unrelated to the human aspect of staff management. Why call these new structures "Business Correspondent" and "Account Management Centre"? It gives the impression that these structures are in place to process and manage figures rather than people. This type of vocabulary unfortunately speaks volumes about the lack of awareness of the human aspect of staff management that is driving this reform. In fact, U4U believes that, on the face of it, a degree of centralisation of the services is not in itself a bad approach. Some procedures, where equal treatment is symbolically important and more effective, are actually worth fully centralising: this is especially the case, for example, with time management (various forms of leave, part-time work, etc.), personal data management and disciplinary procedures, as recommended by the report (page 14). For the rest, it is a matter of finding a balance between central and local capacities.

In the opinion of U4U, the lines of action given in the document "Efficiency and synergies Review. Modernising the HR function" give rise to the following problems:

1) By moving full ahead down the path of staff savings, the document fails to consider the decentralisation of HR established since 2000. It is clear that there has been no assessment of MAP 2000 or its effects. This shows once again the gap between what the Commission promises externally and what it applies internally.

2) The same could also be said with regard to social dialogue, as staff representatives were not invited to the discussions leading up to this report. The Commission continues to see social dialogue within its institutions as simply a means of passing on information after the fact, despite the fact that in its employment policy it encourages social dialogue before the fact, as part of the process of jointly identifying problems and solutions (article 151 of the Treaty)¹.

3) The report is riddled with detailed, but not very convincing, examples of function sharing between the different new actors of the HR policy. For example, those responsible for career guidance will be... in the AMC: what will they know about the local factors that determine the needs of the person asking for help? The training is divided between needs decided locally but executed centrally according to a complicated formula: isn't there a risk of seeing supply determine demand? How will the promotion system be managed? The report also concludes that a new single interface called eSEP will be a panacea for the processing of all individual requests. Despite the report's repeated assertions to the contrary, it seems that the individual aspect tends to disappear and what takes its place is a new Office where, experience has shown, the service to the user is completely secondary to the need to make savings in the system, and where an anonymous computer interface accordingly makes it possible to dehumanise the service. It is also revealing that when we asked the 22 Directors General who wrote this report what their expectations were with regard to this reform, none of them

¹ According to the 2016 report "A new start for social dialogue one year after": "On the representativeness of the social partners (with implications in terms of membership and negotiation mandates) and the need for adequate capacities (including analytical and legal) to create sufficiently strong organisations, a suitable institutional framework for social partners to engage in bipartite and tripartite dialogue is essential" (page 3)

mentioned "becoming a learning organisation" or "improving the work/life balance". The first exchanges with staff show how the latter are under no illusions concerning the so-called desire of the Commission's senior management to help staff.

4) The report remains rather vague on the subject of those members of staff who will be transferred to the AMC (page 18), basing its analysis on strictly mathematical variables (a ratio of 1 to 40 or 1 to 95?). Under these conditions, will the AMC have the necessary resources to implement its policy? Will its 8 units have the special features justifying the differences in endowments? For example, will it be necessary for the DG HR to sacrifice part of its already overstretched workforce to strengthen the AMC, thus further weakening the DG HR? What role will the Secretariat General have, and isn't there a danger that weakening the DG HR will leave staff management divided between it and the SG - and with what negative repercussions? It is essential to provide reliable statistics concerning the staff who will go to the AMC and what exactly their functions will be.

5) Furthermore, the report was particularly vague regarding how this mobility of the HR staff in local DGs would be implemented. 380 full-time staff will have to be transferred and some will remain in place, but according to what criteria (some in the HRs, but what about the others?) Others will go to the AMC at the DG HR (but there will be only 8 head of unit posts, for example), and yet more to other DGs in functions subject to 'calls for expressions of interest'. The report was unclear as to how this mobility will be organised. It is clear, however, that the vast majority of people concerned will be ASTs in whom the Commission has, until now, shown little interest. The announcement of this mobility is an opportunity to take seriously the statements on the use of talent by giving all HR staff on the DGs the chance to make an informed career choice: this means setting up a genuine *Chambre d'Ecoute* (listening chamber) to enable the staff concerned to express their choices, to be listened to and advised, and then supported in terms of their mobility.

6) The report repeatedly insists, quite rightly, on the fact that this new system does not have to mean less humanity and a less personal service. The repetition of this theme in fact shows that the authors of the report are themselves not persuaded that this is a likely outcome. Are the suggestions made, such as, for example, the "proximity hours" for AMC staff at the DGs each week, among the issues being addressed? Are we expected to believe that a few hours on the ground by staff who have no grasp of the local situation will be enough? Are we expected to believe that eSep will provide the answers to all the questions from its databases and FAQs? There is scant detail in the report concerning the tools that will make it possible to assess the effectiveness of the new system. What is more, the report states that "establishing a systematic - and if possible automated - feedback system on customer satisfaction (sic) should be considered so as to check the quality and speed of the answers and the satisfaction of the customers from the different HR services" (page 20). In other words, there could be an assessment based on the comments of the "customers", a term which says a lot about the way staff management is now seen.

7) There is a real, but unstated, possibility in this reform proposal that, in becoming centralised, the HR function will eventually become an Office (along the lines of EPSO, OIB, OIL or PMO), poorly defined and with insufficient staff. Trying to provide staff management at the lowest

possible cost in automated Offices would not constitute a good service for the Commission's staff. The savings at the Commission will once again have been poorly thought out, and it is within the bounds of possibility that this cost-saving measure is another attempt to balance the possible salary adjustment in 2016.

In this worrying situation, it is fortunate that a pilot stage has been defined. It is still necessary for staff representatives to be fully involved, in an atmosphere of trust, in order to define the optimum balance between the functions and HR staff who will have to stay at local level and those who will have to strengthen the DG HR. U4U believes that the Commission's staff policy cannot function without a strong local base for the HR function in each DG. At the same time, it cannot be organised on a discount basis at central level, with the risk of further dehumanising a Commission that has already gone too far in this direction.

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