



## Walk the talk: a talented Commission at the service of a talented Europe

*"In a changing world, the Union must become an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive economy. These three mutually supportive priorities must help the EU and its Member States to provide higher levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion."*  
(Presentation of Strategy Europe 2020 on the Commission's website)

Europe needs to develop its talents in order to continue to develop its living standards, to promote its values, to face global challenges and to increase its influence in the world. This statement forms the basis of Strategy Europe 2020. It is also the basis of the priorities put forward by the Juncker Commission at the beginning of its term: increasing investment and digital innovation, improving Europe's energy resilience, returning a social dimension to Europe, all of this is only possible by developing our talents and making the best use of them.

A Commission capable of helping the States and Citizens of Europe to develop their talents and make them work is also a Commission that knows how to develop and enhance its own talents.

Vice-President Georgieva has clearly understood this, as she announced that she wanted to make talent management one of her priorities. She is beginning this project with middle management and the advisors. We are counting on her not to stop before the job is done, to address talent management upstream as well as downstream of middle management

She has set herself 5 goals:

- to target the excellence of the managers and promote female colleagues in this context;
- to speed up the development of all staff, especially via mobility;
- to contribute to strengthening a collaborative culture (which, in our opinion, cannot be limited to an internal communication strategy and launching an improved version of Myintracomm);
- to improve staff performance, in particular by better monitoring of staff deficiencies;
- to clarify career expectations, particularly for contract workers via internal competitions, and via increased support for planning their careers.

This is an initiative we can only welcome, without, however, failing to draw immediate attention to the problems that such an initiative will undoubtedly encounter. It really means no less than going against the flow of a number of bad management habits which have only been worsened by certain damaging aspects of the 2004 and 2014 reforms.

Before going into the details of middle management proposals, particularly in terms of training, mobility and reversibility, we would like to focus on the cultural aspect regarding the organisation of this dossier. Indeed, making a real commitment to developing the talents within the Commission means nothing less than making a real change in the cultural paradigm by choosing to promote the potential of each individual, rather than the individual's conformity to pre-established models that have undoubtedly given good service in the past, but have, in our rapidly changing world, shown their limitations.

It also means re-establishing a true culture of trust, recognition and respect across the entire organisation, which also forms the foundation of a 'well-being at work' policy (see the U4U "well-being" and "teleworking" files). It means acquiring the means to dispose of harmful managerial practices such as those that crop up far too often in our Institution.

Preserving and developing talents means, first of all, recognising them and recognising the contribution of everyone in a common endeavour.

In accordance with its non-corporatist union position and committed to the defence of a quality European Civil Service working for a clearly affirmed European project, U4U therefore submits, for the attention of the teams responsible for establishing future talent development programmes, ten proposals it believes to be crucial on this subject, ahead of the texts presented by our Vice-President.

## **For a new organisation culture: Our ten proposals on talent management:**

### **1. Re-establishing a culture of trust and collaboration at the Commission**

Talent management and development are not possible without proactive measures intended to make profound changes to the culture that is still too often predominant in our institutions. Talents can only be fully expressed when they are implemented in a climate of encouragement and trust.

Every effort that can be made to break down silos, encourage contacts between colleagues in different DGs and institutions, and promote exchanges of knowledge and expertise will also make a very real contribution to the development of the talents of the staff of the European Civil Service.

Let us once again encourage initiative, risk-taking and teamwork. Who would have invented ERASMUS without the commitment of a few visionary officials supported by their management structure?

## **2. Instituting new ways of working within each unit**

These changes in working methods and culture must also be applied within each unit and each team. Ways of working together must be developed to promote the talents of each individual and also to make it possible for those who wish to do so to "take things one step further" and experiment.

In order to support this effort, exchanges of experience and best practices are also a tool that must be developed across the Commission.

The European Commission quite rightly invites the public administrations of the Member States to modernise. We should all become involved in this dynamic by following the example of structures we are familiar with that are less hierarchized, less compartmentalised, and offer open spaces for dialogue. This effort must be accompanied by a new conception, new working spaces and a major reorganisation of the location of services.

The encouragement of the European Commission for such proactive activities must also enable better use of the talents developed by the officials.

## **3. Developing real tools to promote mobility**

Talent management also means ensuring that the right person is in the right place at the right time. This involves members of staff being able to move. Unfortunately, mobility within the Commission is, in reality, extremely inadequate. It has been significantly reduced in recent years, in a context of human resource cuts in most of the Directorates General.

A number of initiatives could be developed on this subject, for example:

- short or long-term (3 to 6 months) staff exchange systems between DGs or even institutions;
- "two-way" transfer procedures (working for one year in another DG with a guarantee of being able, if desired, to return to the original DG).

More specifically, U4U has already made a proposal on this subject (see document on mobility): - the introduction of a real mobility policy that strengthens the Commission culture rather than the DG culture, while preserving sufficient specialist skills (policy of a balance between generalists and specialists). In the opinion of U4U, 10% of posts should be open to mobility for colleagues from other DGs to allow more varied careers and to develop a common culture within the Institution. This mobility, which must not jeopardise the specialist fields of the DGs, will be prepared by making training courses specific to each DG available to all staff.

- the creation of special career "paths" for staff at the end of their careers from grades AST 9 and AD12 to make best use of the experience acquired.
- a more specific link between the mobility policy and the policy for equal opportunities between genders to provide better support for the careers of the less represented sex and achieve reasonable parity of the sexes within a reasonable period of time.
- a Heads of Unit appointment after a) a successful mobility period in at least 2 DGs, b) minimum management experience of at least 3 years acquired either

within the Commission or outside, in particular in public sector posts. These appointments must be based on a talent identification policy and a mapped out training programme, and must include the gender factor. The management policy must be intelligent, avoid the rigid imposition of mobility rules and respect the need to preserve significant specialisations within the Commission. It must also make it possible for heads of units to remain in position if the needs of the service so require. It must also provide a framework for horizontal mobility to “senior expert” posts or equivalent (and vice versa in the other direction), without this being automatic, but within the framework of a genuine policy on the use of skills and career planning in the interests of the individuals and the Institution.

- better mobility arrangements in the interest of the service to enable a better relationship between the interests of the individual and the skills needs of the services. Any mobility of this kind must be initiated by the appointing authority (the AIPN).
- full use of the number of posts for the certification procedure, taking account of the high level of qualification and experience of a large number of AST colleagues. With this objective in mind, the identification of potential candidates should be improved and they should be given the opportunity for preparatory training. In addition, selection criteria and practices concerning these candidates should be made more transparent.
- the establishment of a genuine policy for the use of skills of officials aged 55+ including, in particular, a mobility system based on skills and the creation of financial resources for posts, available for the SCOP or its equivalent at the DG HR, for this category of staff.
- the adoption of measures to protect officials in mobility positions during the promotion exercise to guarantee them equal treatment.
- inter-institutional mobility at a rate of 2% of the workforce per year. This will make it possible to develop skills, harness varied experience and strengthen the feeling of belonging to a unified Civil Service.
- improved mobility between the Institutions and national civil services at a rate of 2% of the workforce per year through the development of exchanges of officials, which will make it possible to establish the Commission better in the reality of the European domain.

#### **4. Promoting exchanges between managerial and non-managerial posts**

Mobility must be planned dynamically.

Talent management also means facilitating access to management functions for all colleagues who want it and have the necessary capacities.

It requires the raising of barriers that still exist on this path to improve opportunities for everyone.

This movement can only actually be achieved if those colleagues who no longer occupy management positions are offered duties worthy of their experience. (To be developed).

Likewise, special attention must be paid to the upstream training of managers to replace those who are the subject of a reversibility procedure.

Finally, it will be necessary to ensure that this measure does not weaken the independence of middle management that constitutes one of the elements of the independence of the European Civil Service. That is why we advocate a reduction in the annual proportion of the managers concerned. (No more than 10%)

### **5. Clearly redefining the role of managers as developers of talent.**

Too often, those with a formal or informal management role at the Commission have been encouraged to think of themselves as project or budget managers. It must be clearly stated that team and talent management is at the heart of their job responsibilities.

This involves in particular:

- making the ability to manage people a central criterion for recruitment and promotion to this type of post,
- reducing the administrative pressure on managers so as to enable them to devote more of their time to the essential tasks related to the management of teams and people,,
- developing special networks for the exchange of best practices between managers with regard to the development and management of people,
- promoting and implementing initiatives taken by managers concerning the development and support of members of their teams,
- introducing special support and remediation measures to help managers assume this part of their role when necessary,
- providing managers with the training and support (coaching, mentoring, role modelling, etc.) they need to develop these skills.

Managerial action alone is not enough. It is crucial to ensure that structures are created for the support and monitoring of individual careers.

### **6. Generalising the 360° assessment of managers with special attention to their talent development work**

To ensure the effective follow-up of the changes that the measures described in the previous section will bring to the managerial culture of the Commission, a generalised 360° process for the assessment of managers must be established.

While preserving the anonymity of the individual assessments of each manager, the general situation in each DG or Office should be monitored by a joint committee.

Special measures should be proposed to those DGs with the worst managerial performance scores of their supervisory staff.

### **7. Placing the "talent" at the centre of the annual assessment and systemising the use of career guidance, if possible every 5 years and at least every 10 years**

Without making any changes to the regulations governing annual staff assessments, it would be possible to apply them using an approach based entirely on the identification and development of talent (we might refer to this as the "appreciative approach").

Such an approach would give meaning to the assessment interviews and undoubtedly enable them to have a greater impact, both for each unit as a whole and for each member of staff individually.

The 2004 reform had introduced a central and decentralised professional guidance system gambling on the use of talent and mobility.

In a difficult organisational and cultural context, this mission has unfortunately remained on the back burner and the investment in it misused: colleagues responsible for this guidance function are choosing to spend money on psychological support rather than career advice, with career paths at the Commission becoming uncertain for AST grades and AD's alike.

### **8. Developing talents rather than hunting underperformance**

The obsession of numerous managers with the issue of the underperformance of certain members of their teams is a surprising and particularly counter-productive characteristic of our institutions. Very often, situations stigmatised with this sort of label concern difficult personal circumstances, relational difficulties or a simple incompatibility between a person's skills and changes in the person's job. Possible "foot-dragging" of staff is more often the consequence than the cause of this type of situation.

Apart from the damage these situations cause their direct protagonists (the manager as well as the person deemed to be underperforming), these situations also very often have consequences for the functioning of an entire team.

Developing a talent management policy can therefore also create the chance to manage this type of situation differently, for example by systematically developing and proposing mobility or reorientation programmes that would make it possible to promote the special talents of the staff concerned and enable them to use these in the jobs that suit them best.

## **9. Have done with the slogan "doing more with less".**

Talent, like effectiveness, is a matter of quality, not quantity. We should therefore have done with the slogan approach and the notorious "doing more with less". The Commission's services obviously have a number of new responsibilities to take on, but these tasks will not be accomplished by further overloading staff with extra administrative duties or by the removal of posts by senior management in line with the number of staff.

The proactive staff reduction policy increasingly ends in an impasse contrary to the declared concern for well-being. Reducing the workforce cannot be done without an evaluation of priorities and our working methods. Our multiple control systems and procedures, which continue to exist everywhere, must be simplified. Focusing on what is essential is not "doing more". It is essentially doing better and more effectively and using one's talent on tasks that are of real added value. U4U has made some specific proposals with regard to well-being at work (see U4U document).

## **10. Giving greater impact to the Certification and reclassification of CAs**

The Commission needs more staff at AD level capable of taking on the role of policy monitoring and coordination. Certification makes it possible to develop the abilities of AST staff so that they can improve their knowledge of the Institution to invest it in more complex responsibilities. The same applies to CA staff, including those on fixed-term contracts.

Developing talent means increasing the number of AST colleagues given this opportunity every year. It means focusing on the talents already present in the Institution.

U4U has developed its proposals for reform concerning the careers of AST officials and contract agents.