"DIRECT EXPRESSION" F4E SURVEY
SUMMARY OF GROUP ANSWERS

This document seeks to gather and synthetises the answers submitted in 28 reports in response to Fusion for Energy's "Direct Expression" survey.

Preamble :

Before specifically addressing the synthesis of the 28 groups, it seems appropriate to highlight the main elements that hold our attention:

- First of all, it should be emphasized that the vast majority of F4E employees have played along with the game of the exercise with a view to improving the organization and working conditions. This experience can therefore be considered successful.
- Most of the groups reported that the ITER project gave meaning to their work and created consensus, although some highlighted the absence of a strategy to move towards the objective.
- The vast majority of groups underlined the very good working conditions at F4E.
- The multicultural contribution of 20 nationalities who compete at F4E is underlined as bringing added value to the work even if some mention the difficulties caused by cultural differences.
- Status and employment conditions do not promote internal mobility due to a lack of will and transparency in the various recruitment and promotion processes, which hinders team motivation.
- The rigidity of the structures in place and the discrepancy between the objectives and the means put in place to achieve these objectives is underlined.
- Relations between "the manager" and "the managed" are unsatisfactory according to many groups. In particular, the lack of transparency in the content of day-to-day work, the failure to take into account the comments of those managed and the lack of dialogue and information on the reasons for and the content of the decisions taken by Management are highlighted. Some mention demotivation following ineffective meetings due to a lack of agenda, topics and clear conclusions to which they lead. Management training could usefully be put in place.
- All of these elements must be taken into account because the implementation of several measures hereafter mentioned are likely to improve the working conditions of employees and their motivation and thus improve the productivity and efficiency of the F4E institution

Q1: What do you see as the strengths and positive features of F4E?

The overwhelming majority of the groups' answers – around three fourths (21) – insisted on the **good working conditions** within F4E. These contractual conditions first entail the salary, and then secondary elements such as the place of work or the flexibility.

Around the same number of reports (20) pointed out the **multicultural and diverse** workplace setting. This international staff is enriching, most reports claimed, as it allows new insights and approaches, and therefore favours the work that is done.

Only five reports did not mention that one of F4E's strengths was its staff. The others underlined the **staff's experience and knowledge**, or – to as lesser – the team spirit and motivating atmosphere that is built amongst colleagues.

Then, half (14) of the answers insisted that F4E's advantage was also the **nature of the project** it offered regarding new energies. Describing it as unique and/or helpful, the staff explained it was a motivating element and a driving force in their work.
Similarly, several (9) highlighted that working for F4E gives a **sense of serving the European purpose**, which is motivating. This mission is a driver for work.

Moreover, around fourth (6) of the answers valued the **balance between private and professional life** F4E offered its employees. Many attribute this to flexibility around teleworking, and the overall reaction to the pandemic the organisation had.

A few (6) reports included the existing **workshops** as a strength, as it allows the staff to progress in their line of work and discover new capabilities. Finally, there was mention of the availability of resources – including but not limited to these trainings.

Q2: What do you see as the main difficulties and weaknesses of F4E?

Organisation's Staff

Around two thirds (18) of the reports claimed that one – if not the largest – of F4E's weaknesses is the **treatment of staff**. This "umbrella term" refers to different situation, but that can all be resumed an as unfair attitude towards employees:

- Many of the gathered answers implied there was a <u>difference in the working conditions</u> and remunerations of different roles, who are essentially "doing the same type of job". A few cited examples are between CA, TA, FO… considered unjustified.
- There were repeated claims of <u>excessive stress</u> put on the staff – and the lack of (horizontal) support to compensate for this. This creates a "toxic" environment and a negative culture where failures are emphasised as opposed to successes. The reports stated that in the long-run, the consequence of this would be disengagement – at best.
  - Some respondents complained about the unequal treatment of staff when same rules are applied differently for different teams (flexi-time, teleworking…) ;
  - More severely, several respondents indicated this unfair treatment could go as far as (psychological) <u>harassment</u>.
- The <u>excessive workload and uncompromising deadlines</u> together with the requirement of a high quality standard not always justified were brought up a few times (6), since they were perceived as unrealistic, and burdening the staff.

Slightly less than half (12) of the respondents sensed a general feeling of unease within F4E's employees, namely because of the **absence of transparency and trust**. For many, it is the latter that causes this distrust, especially in regards to the aforementioned unfairness, as well as the recruitment and promotions of staff. Because of this uncomfortable environment, work becomes – according to the employees – much more burdensome.

Hand in hand with the previous point, the **issue of communication** was recurrent within the collected data. By "communication", some reports implied that which occurred (or lacked, thereof) <u>in a same department</u> – amongst colleagues or between managers and employees – and therefore hindered common cooperation and progress (8). "Communication" was also addressed as that <u>between departments</u> (9), whose interactions are scarce, resulting in an inefficient segmentation between teams and overlapping of tasks.

Organisation's Hierarchy / Management

Half of the respondents (13) underlined the **lack of a skilled management**, i.e. one <u>without the technical background fit for its occupied position</u>– and yet still <u>failing to delegate</u> (5).
In addition to their technical deficiencies, many answers related to the <u>lack of social skills and empathy</u> of the recruited managers – who fail to connect with and motivate their employees.
The <u>imbalance between male and female managers</u> was also considered.

Additionally, several answers indicated the **recruitment process of managers** was flawed, and a few even hinted that it might follow a <u>personal agenda</u> rather than the common interest. Because of this, a few reports (8) critical of management stated **political reasons** taken at the head of F4E drove the overall project. In this sense, actions taken by management are seen at best as "<u>window-dressing</u>", and if not, as <u>self-interested</u>.

Finally, some reports (8) agreed management was one of F4E's weakness, but mostly so because of the **continuous changes in the structure** of leadership and the organisation itself. This was seen as <u>inconsistent</u> and counterproductive, as it provides <u>no stability</u> to the employees.

Organisation's Structure

Regarding the structure and the substance of the organisation in itself, the main criticism addressed by practically three fourths (21) of respondents concerned the **lack of clarity** concerning the **day-to-day objectives** as well as **general vision of F4E.**
The main argument concerning the former entailed there are <u>no clearly laid-out priorities</u>, and that decisions are not always explained or announced. Often, the lack of planning also implies a scarce – if any – follow-up and feedback of the employee's project.
The second argument explained there was <u>no "road-map" for F4E in the long-run</u>, and that the failure to have an overarching vision of the project could make the employees' work feel purposeless.
Unable to grasp what was expected of them – and when - the staff would be left not only <u>confused</u> and slowed down but also <u>stressed</u>, the respondents say. At both levels, this issue suggests there is a fundamental absence of strategy – and strategic thinking – for the organisation, of which the employees bear the burden.

Furthermore, the processes and **procedures** are considered by the bulk of the reports as **unnecessarily long and complicated**. Not only are there too many, they write, they are also too lengthy and oftentimes confusing. This creates a major <u>issue of efficiency</u> and effectiveness that hinders work and progress of the employees in their work. Bureaucracy was therefore often pointed out as too harrowing at F4E.

Around the same number of answers (14) complained about the **lack of career mobility** in F4E: instead of offering the staff control over their carrier path, the organisation failed to present new opportunities to change roles or be promoted.

Finally, some other minor issues were discussed, namely :
- Ill-adapted **training** and workshops: either <u>insufficient</u> for the younger generation (4), or too <u>general</u> – and consequently somewhat useless – (2) for the rest.
- Flawed or insufficient **balance of resources** between/within departments (4)
- Scarce knowledge sharing (4)

- **Wrong tools** (SYSPER, Document Management Systems …) and inability to fix quick <u>technical issues</u> (3)
- Insufficient cooperation and integration between the sites (3)
- Excessive **multiculturalism** as a factor of **divergence** among groups (3)

Q3: How can we build on the strengths and improve our weaknesses?

This question offered more disparate answers and propositions, and not one theme was as consensual as for the previous section. In regards to the formulation of the question, the answers did not all specify between which strengths should be built on, and which weaknesses should be improved, but rather offered a few guidelines and/or initiatives they would like to be achieved.

Organisation's structure
The proposition most reports (12) seemed to back was that of **clarifying the objectives of F4E**, i.e., <u>implementing a clear planning</u> of what should be done, when, and how. They suggested following a clear road-map that would help dictate the <u>projects to be undertaken on a day-to-day basis</u>, as well as in regards to an <u>all-encompassing strategic vision</u> of the structure.

From this first proposition emanated another, also generally agreed on (10): **simplifying the organisation's structure** – starting with its <u>procedures and processes</u>. Most of these reports criticised the constant strive for technical perfection and instead suggested a more time-efficient approach that gets the work done just as well, but in a less drawn-out manner.

A few other suggestions in terms of the organisation's structure are alluded to:
- Increased opportunities for **career development** (8)
- Better **management of resources** (7), including time and staff
- More tailored **trainings and workshops** (7) to develop more capacities
- Better knowledge-sharing and networking

Organisation's Staff
Staff well-being and mental health was also one of the main propositions (9) advanced by the consulted groups. In sum, the respondents having mentioned this improvement encouraged management to <u>face the issues at hand and not avoid them</u>, to <u>adapt the workload and deadlines</u> (7), and to strive for an <u>improvement in relationships and trust</u> within the organisation. The reports regretted the sometimes absent sense of community and urged for effort to be made in this direction, as the results would favour F4E as a whole.

As mentioned before, the pleas for **increasing communication** – in an honest and <u>transparent</u> manner – can be related to this larger issue. Particularly since several (8) answers to the survey pushed for F4E to assure its employees they could communicate on their issues without any "finger-pointing."…

Organisation's Management

Responding to the most brought up issue, many reports (8) wished for a **change** - or at least an adapting - of **management**. A <u>replacement of Senior Management</u>, however, was not the only factor the respondents took into account. According to them, there needed to be a rethinking of the style of management in itself. First, <u>accountability for (MM/SM) managers</u> should be increased (2). Secondly, the top-down approach should be questioned, to favor instead a <u>bottom-up</u> one: lowering the level of decision-making and increasing <u>delegation</u> would further valorize the employees and strengthen <u>social dialogue</u>.

Q4: What should be the priorities among these actions above, with a more extensive discussion?

Three main priorities emanate from all (or almost, all) the reports.

1. Planning

Once again, the priority that stood out from the 28 reports in a quasi-unanimous manner (23) was that of **better planning and prioritisation** in <u>day-to-day objectives</u> and in regards to a <u>general vision of F4E</u>. The arguments have already been laid in the previous documents. The bulk of the data indicated that the priority was to remedy organisational issues to simplify and clarify what purpose and actions F4E engages in. A better and long term vision of the general strategy, with its daily specifics, seemed to be the common denominator to all of the survey's answer.

2. Staff wellbeing

Secondly, a third (10) of the reports believed **staff wellbeing** should be a priority for F4E. Again, going over the topic is redundant, but the respondents asserted that improving the employees' wellbeing and **mental health** – with regular <u>check-ups</u>, <u>horizontal support</u>, more <u>tailored activities</u> and workshops, and a <u>more open intra-organisation communication</u> – would empower the staff and thus positively affect the organisation, for which all colleagues could feel a sense of belonging.

3. **Management**

The last priority common to several (7) reports was that of **changing management**, or at least modifying the <u>requirements for leadership</u>. The idea would be to increase management's <u>accountability</u> and responsibility, for instance by making their appointment subject to a revision period.

Because of the leadership-related issue developed above, some respondents (7) also believed it was a priority for management to **clarify the roles** of each department, as well as key positions like Technical Director and the Project/Programme Manager.

These three priorities all have in common the essential need to improve realism, transparency, and honesty within the organisation – a key factor directly expressed, or at least alluded to, in the majority of the reports.

Other (albeit less numerous) reports addressed the issues of improving **career mobility** (4), **training workshops** (4), as well as **managing resources better** (3) as priorities for F4E.

Q5: Extra topics to be defined by the Unit/Group

Hardly any reports here mentioned the same "extra" topics, and it is therefore hard to classify them. Many elements written by the respondents under this category echoed with what has already been written in this general summary. The list below therefore tries to synthesise at best the topics not yet covered.

- *Reinforce the work by pairs to increase the quality of work*
- *Recognise the R&D nature of the project*
- *Increase the allocation of matrixed staff to Programs*
- *Improve the coordination and communication across different departments*
- *Report issues to an independent body*
- *Improve the infrastructure (lack visibility, different conditions…)*
- *Support positive culture (less focus on failures/more focus on success)*
- *Anticipate long-term perspectives (e.g., colleagues working on projects which are coming to an end)*
- *Improve the canteen/cafeteria*
- *Renew ITER project for it not to become obsolete*
- *Increase funding of F4E clubs and training workshops*
- *Specify and apply equally staff rules (teleworking, flexi-time…)*

Many respondents also pointed out such surveys have already been sent out to gather the staff's impressions, but that there has seldom been any follow-up or attention to what has been expressed.