

Transforming HUMANE

a policy proposal

Presented at the 2015 HUMANE Round Table, Berlin, 26 June 2015

This document proposes a new mission for HUMANE. It starts with describing the present situation, then continues with a short description of the perceived problems and ends with a proposal to transform and reborn HUMANE.

HUMANE portfolio

The present mission of HUMANE as discussed in the last couple of EC-meetings and RT-meetings is essentially adding value to the members of HUMANE. HUMANE was founded in 1997 to create a network of Heads of Administration from European universities. Adding value to the members meant originally organizing seminars where colleagues could meet and where expertise and experience was shared through presentations and discussions. Normally a group of about 15-30 members participate at a seminar. In recent years the participation at the seminars broadened to a wider group of staff from the university administrations. The organization of the seminars is in the hands of the network manager together with the host institution where the seminar takes place.

After a while the need was felt to organize a new activity aimed at the group directly below the level of heads of administration, especially those that could become Heads of Administration in the future. This is the HUMANE/EFMD (earlier the HUMANE/ESMU) Winter School. This WS groups about 35 senior staff members of university administrations from all over Europe during a week around a central case study. Experts from universities highlight relevant aspects during the week at lectures. University strategy is the core theme of the WS.

The WS is organized by a professional expert from EFMD (earlier ESMU), under supervision of a Steering Committee.

A third activity that was added to the program of HUMANE were the study trips to benchmark universities in Europe. In the course of the years amongst others the universities Heidelberg, Warwick, Helsinki, Utrecht, Uppsala, TU Vienna, Zürich and Amsterdam hosted the study trips. A study trip lasts three days.

These study trips took the case of the host university to investigate some aspects of university management. The host university acts as an example and also benefits from the comments of the participants.

The study trips are being organized by an expert who is being paid for the task out of the participation fees.

At this moment a fourth line of activity is being prepared: a junior training program consisting of four modules (finance, HR, strategy, international). Without being a MBA course, the setup of an MBA acts as an example. The University of Bologna, the Institute of Education UCL and a - yet to be selected - Business School will oversee the program aimed at junior promising staff in university administrations.

In the past HUMANE also participated in EU-projects, most notably the EUDIS-project chaired by EUA. Although interesting and useful these projects were in the end a financial liability for HUMANE. This line of action was stopped.

Evaluation HUMANE portfolio

The seminars continue to be a more or less constant factor in the HUMANE portfolio. During the years different formats have been tried out. The seminars are being positively evaluated. It seems to be interesting to include presenters and participants from a broader university administration audience and even from outside universities. Typical 'management' topics like finance, facilities and HR seem to be more popular than topics with a higher proportion of strategy or IT.

HUMANE now tries to organize at least one seminar/year in cooperation with another organization (EUA, EFMD, IMHE). Up until now only seminars in cooperation with EUA have been successful.

We have tried out whether 'popular' destinations within easy reach (e.g. Paris, Rome) would be more attractive than seminars at universities at more exotic locations (e.g. Riga, Aveiro). It seems that topic and presenters are more important than place.

The WS continues to be the flagship program of HUMANE. Each year the number of applications is higher than the number of available places. The change from ESMU to EFMD changes the 'culture' in the program and this will need some attention in the near future. A second issue is that the present (second) case study needs to be replaced by a more present-day topic.

The study trips have been successful during a couple of editions. But in the last two years there seems to be a certain saturation and the number of participants dropped. The content of the study trips continues to be very attractive and relevant. Another issue is that the vast majority of participants come from the UK, the Netherlands and Finland.

HUMANE organization and membership

From the start HUMANE has been a 'membership' organization: the members are heads of administration in universities. They organize the activities and host the events. The chair of HUMANE and the members of the Executive Committee are in office in their jobs as Head of Administration. The Round Table, with representatives from the universities in the different countries where member universities are located, discusses, amends and approves the work of the chair and the EC.

The support organization is small: the network manager (\pm 20 hours/week), the network secretariat (approximately two days/week), an organizer of the study trips and an 'ambassador' taking part in the marketing effort. The WS is organized separately. Much of the remaining work is being done by members on a voluntary basis.

Some time ago the issue whether HUMANE should be further professionalized was raised. At that time it was concluded to continue with the existing structure.

Members of HUMANE are Head of Administration in a European university. This position differs from country to country when it comes to the extent of executive power. Nonetheless it is clear that there are enough common denominators.

In the early years the membership quickly grew to slightly more than 200 members. After that we saw a long time of stability around 200 members with or a small decline in membership over the years. In recent years we notice a sharper decline in membership to presently about 160 members. This seems to be the result of severe budget cuts in many EU countries and at the same time lesser interest in the European higher education project at large.

HUMANE's present mission

HUMANE's mission is adding value to the professional life of its members. HUMANE fulfills this mission by offering a variety of activities.

The question is whether the present mission should continue to be the core of HUMANE.

The number of members is declining and the activities are open for a wider audience from the university administrations and even outside.

The question is therefore also whether the present mission is still applicable. One might conclude that the development of activities focusing on other staff than the members itself already changed the nature of HUMANE.

Towards a new mission

The European perspective for university administrations remains a very distinct profiling characteristic of HUMANE. Adding to that HUMANE also offers the opportunity to participants to learn from best practices and bench mark institutions in other countries in Europe, which no other organization does in a comparable way.

The EC of HUMANE believes that there is a considerable demand for training, professionalization, exchange and networking among European university administrations. The EC concludes also that there is less demand for a conscription and contribution based membership organization.

The opportunity and the challenge is the transformation of HUMANE into an organization that offers international training and professionalization for staff in European university administrations, using the experience of colleagues and hosted at universities.

This transformation can be done because of the experience and contacts of HUMANE with university administrations all over Europe. It can also make use of its contacts with EUA, EFMD and national organizations.

An important question is whether the new HUMANE will continue to be a membership organization. One might consider other possibilities when the time comes. A construct where HUMANE becomes a market oriented firm and universities take a share in the new venture or where HUMANE becomes a part of another organization are also possibilities, but other opportunities might also be considered. It is advised to first transform HUMANE using the present governance system and then change the governance if it is needed to do so. An important and much valued aspect of the present situation is the contacts and connectedness to the culture of university administrations.

Time schedule and transformation period

The transformation should be done through gradual change, using the existing and emerging activities and building the new organization on top of the old one. It is difficult to exactly foresee the time needed to change from the present situation to the new mission of HUMANE, but it will take at least one to two years. This means that the new chair of HUMANE, as of June 2015, will lead the change in this transformation period and that will also be his/her main task. The continuation of the seminars and the organization of the EC-meetings can be delegated to the present network manager.

Under the supervision of the new chair an assessment of what would be future needs of university administrations, a new business plan and a marketing plan need to be developed. These activities need to be supported. One can think of hiring or involving some WS alumni who are presently occupied with tasks similar to the ones needed for the HUMANE transformation.

First priorities now are: finding the new chair, decision from the EC and RT, a plan for the transformation period including people involved.