

Sustainable Green Personnel Management in Administration

Written by Beatrix Behrens

It may not be new - but it is still exciting!

Read the German version here.

The economy and administration are simultaneously faced with major challenges in the four Ds – demography, diversity, digitalisation and decarbonisation. With time at a premium, rapid solutions needed (and still need) to be developed in order to reduce energy consumption, for example, and to increase sustainable activity in many fields overall. At the same time, the world of work must be redesigned within the terms of New Work, which features self-organisation, participation and meaningfulness, amongst others. Flexible project structures, participative organisational structures and IT-aided, agile forms of working will therefore become increasingly important. This calls for integrated strategies that combine the four Ds conceptually and result in new opportunities for sustainable personnel management outside the familiar spheres of activity. One significant example is the design of a green, mobile work environment, as Figure 1 below outlines:

Designing a mobile and green working world



Another important topic is the formation of a culture imbued with esteem and acceptance, which is also significant for transformational change as a whole. Cultural change becomes a key area for action, giving rise to a new role model for personnel management. Personnel work will feature increasing individualisation.

New role for (green) personnel management

Specifically with an eye to decarbonisation and transformation into 'green administration', personnel management assumes an important role at the interface between organisational and personnel development. Personnel staff, in addition to managers, of course, are particularly close to employees ex officio. The focus is therefore increasingly on personnel welfare and support. Advice rather than processing is frequently urged, to strengthen personal responsibility and empowerment. Efficiency gains through the use of IT can be usefully reinvested here in order to secure administrative performance long term.

"Green thinking" in all personnel functions can contribute to making change sustainable.

Green personnel management... is to be understood as 'all the [personnel management] aspects and practices [...] that pursue the aim of ecological sustainability' (Dron, Müller-Camen & Obereder 2018, p.44).

Goals for sustainable and integrated personnel management can initially be derived from this at strategic personnel level:

- personnel management aligned according to ecological, economic and user-centred points of view – promotion of a 'green' culture
- Check of essential HR process functions for their influence on sustainability and climate protection (employer branding, recruitment, staff development, learning, management development, diversity, health, incentive schemes, etc.)
- Sensitisation/qualification of employees for sustainability issues and assistance for managers as part of their development
- Strategies and measures focused on employee conduct/attitudes, organisational structure design (operational and organisational structure), process control
- Competence-based personnel management (define green competences!?)
- Structure of HR analytics/personnel controlling for targeted data analysis and knowledge gains via the effectiveness of the measures is generally an important component in evidence-based, sustainable personnel management.

Current investigations in the context of digitalisation very clearly show that the success of measures and a transformational change largely depend on factors such as culture and the 'attitudes' (mindset) of employees. With regard to digital transformation, it becomes clear

that many times there is investment in technology but rather less in the cultural change necessary for long-term changes. 'Green thinking' in administration is not a sure-fire success either, and climate protection is seemingly not being prioritised, as is often thought. Despite the short-term goals achieved and reported successes, ecological transformation is not a sure-fire success in the long term. It cannot be achieved by dictate either, as experience tells us.

According to a survey by the Bertelsmann Foundation, health and wellbeing are the number one priorities in enterprises – the carbon footprint and climate protection in ninth place, after diversity. The generational perspective is also interesting. Age bias or age stereotype are out of place according to the survey. Responsibility for 'Environment and society' is in ninth place for the 18-24 age group, in fifth place for the 55-65 year olds. The inter-generational values are even clearer where identification with corporate values is concerned – ranked from eighth place to fifth place between the age groups mentioned (cf Feinstein, I., Habisch, J., Spilker, M.: Sustainability from the point of view of entrepreneurs. IPSOS/Bertelsmann Foundation, September 2022).

Discussions regarding acquisition of new talent groups are surely needed in this case. Positioning of the authorities as green employers would accordingly be insufficient to appeal to the young target group, or even to attract them long term. The composition of agile groups on ecological topics ought also to be reviewed from the generation management point of view. This is where diversity and innovation management come together, as well as New Work. The following steps and measures seem possible as potential examples:

- **Promotion of a culture shaped by esteem and trust** (guides, climate ambassadors, try out solutions and learn from mistakes....)

- **Formulation of common ‘green values’ and targets – everyone knows how they personal contribute to steering towards the common good or achieving targets** (green teams, green circle... and the onboarding process....)
- **Promotion of social, personal and communication skills**, as (green) conduct and sustainable mindset are greatly influenced by role models and an experienced culture..... in particular by managers (changemakers)
- **Transparent and credible communication of sustainability strategy and processes** for the goals and motivations for personnel policy in particular (networking platforms, file-sharing sites, action days...)
- **Meaningfulness through participation** and thereby a contribution to shaping the modern working environment (thinking from the stakeholder’s point of view) – green teams, green circle, promotion of social engagement, development of communities, networks....)

The focus will furthermore also be on competence management.

Green competence management

With regard to age-dependent personnel churn and the shortage of skilled personnel, it is necessary to access new talent groups with appropriate socially and environmentally orientated skills, as well as social skills. In future, personnel development will be promoted more heavily in this field to define the necessary (green) skills.

Personnel development – a contribution to organisational development

- Raising awareness of green thinking and action in the workplace during the onboarding process
- Identifying key people who act as role models in the context of change management
- Including the topic in mentoring programmes and leadership coaching
- Using agile forms of work – setting up green teams – learning in other contexts
- Defining skills for modern, sustainable, digital administration
- Defining feedback – criteria (assessments, leadership feedback, conversations, surveys)

A discussion of green skills that have the potential to be used subsequently in recruitment, analysis of potential or as feedback recommends itself.

This becomes clear taking employees’ management skill or change competence as an example:

Ability to cope with change

Seizes chances and the need for change in good time; proactively identifies and drives new developments, including interdisciplinary developments and those that go beyond the employee’s own field.

Is willing and ready to adapt to new developments. Helps to shape the change.

Uses spaces for creativity and engagement, and promotes innovation through knowledge and ideas. Can cope with uncertainty.

Considers and promotes sustainability and climate protection in order to reduce the ecological footprint of their own actions. Dedicates themselves to these issues even as part of a team.

There is no doubt that the role of managers will change in the era of New Work. They

have a lasting influence on the transformation and conduct of employees or teams. What might 'green management' that is also needed for the digital world look like though? Here is an attempted description:

Transformational leadership – basic skills for change in the world of work

- Provides a framework for staff, sets clear goals and offers support when needed
- *Engages in value-centred dialogue with employees and highlights each individual's personal contribution to success: explains the meaning of tasks, sustainability and climate-friendly behaviour*
- Adopts a role-model function in promoting a culture of transparency, trust and effective collaboration
- Designs and supervises change processes (including digital change) as well as in-person and virtual collaboration with employees; actively involves them in further developing the organisation or optimising work processes, and is also open to their ideas and new thoughts
- Promotes knowledge transfer and intergenerational learning; recognises and promotes the potential of employees in every phase of life and encourages employees in taking personal responsibility

Opportunities to learn about transformational management, as well as mediation of systemic competences/methods for OE and PE, are required. Training on the job can be facilitated through mentoring, cross-mentoring, reverse mentoring or even ad-hoc friendly advice from colleagues. Annual retreats as an ideas exchange to achieve sustainability goals and

promote networked thinking are another possibility. A change of perspective, i.e. looking behind the scenes of a different administration via work shadowing is another method of supporting managers and winning them as role models.

These examples make clear that modern personnel management has the potential to implement sustainability strategies and ecological conversion better. It is worth acquiring talents and keeping them. Winning over hearts and kindling enthusiasm are also decisive. Personnel managers can also drive innovations and should have a feel for future developments in order to be prepared for these. Personnel management should promote integrated concepts and approaches and dismantle silos. There is much scope for creativity to make the personnel roles 'greener'.

More on this topic

If you'd like to stay up-to-date on the new developments in the world of work, have a look at our upcoming German event: **'Neue Entwicklungen in der Arbeitswelt – New Work in Kürze'**.

The views expressed in this blog are those of the authors and not necessarily those of EIPA.