
Shaping sustainability with green human resources management: a new and vital field of action in environmental management

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Sustainability and New Work

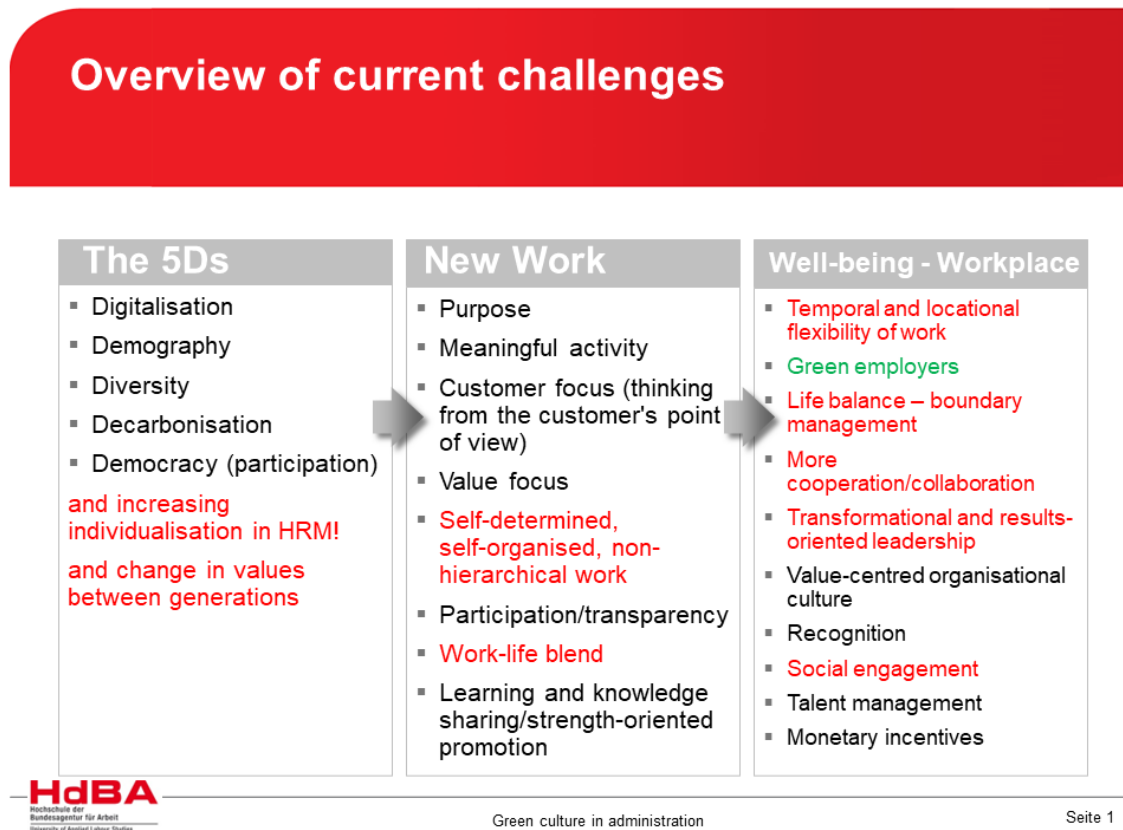
Germany is required by law to become climate-neutral at a federal level by 2030 and serve as a role model for public authorities. At the same time, innovation and other activities are to set to receive a boost.

Environmental sustainability is also becoming an increasingly important part of corporate strategy within companies and is closely tied to the topic of corporate social responsibility (see Dron et al. 2018). The focus is on the common good for public administration and is therefore transferable as a strategy. All organisations have a complex challenge to overcome: the digital, economic, ecological, societal and social transformation must be tackled practically simultaneously, and they must weather all the effects that go with it (see HR Report 2022). In view of current developments and the expected shortage of resources, there will be even more pressure to take action, especially to decarbonise or reduce their environmental footprint. Action is needed now. This is typically what makes organisations crisis-proof or resilient.

To help get the transformation in motion and make environmentally beneficial changes, companies as much as administrations need to define their shared values, come up with joint-action programmes and ensure they have motivated and dedicated employees across all age groups. Staff are increasingly expected to be highly willing and able to adapt. Thinking and acting green should be encouraged and even demanded in everyday professional life at an individual and team level. This also requires ecological and sustainable action on the part of public administration and its managers if they are to serve as a role model.

At the same time as these challenges, the world of work is changing itself. New Work focuses on employees wanting to be involved and do something meaningful, their desire to contribute to the common good, and giving them more personal responsibility and autonomy. This also applies to agile teams, who can innovate through cross-organisational collaboration. These changes can also be used to shape an environmentally sustainable working environment. New ways of working together are needed to harness the diverse range of skills required to overcome the complex challenges posed. Figure 1 below summarises the current challenges.

Figure 1:



Own research

Putting users in the centre, an idea anchored in New Work, is also crucial in developing measures that actually meet their needs. 'Green circles', self-organised environmental teams, sustainability managers with partial exemption, climate activists, project pilots and even IT-supported networking platforms are already being used in organisations (see WORKPLACE PORTAL). This will allow as many ideas, wishes, concerns and experiences as possible to be taken into account when developing the concept further. At the same time, dedicated and motivated employees are also good and persuasive champions of the change process in the long term with regard to the climate goals. Exchange forums and action days organised by employees themselves are further examples that have already been tested in practice.

Overall, it is also important to tap into the diversity of the workforce and actively involve diversity management. The gender-mainstreaming perspective is important because of different behaviours and attitudes towards environmental restructuring between the genders. Digitalisation, demography, diversity and decarbonisation require a holistic approach in order to create synergy effects.

A new vision of human resources: green HR management and shaping environmental change

Many organisations still frequently have climate-related actions in place, particularly aimed at reducing CO2 emissions in property, green IT, mobility, procurement, events, canteens, services and products. More and more companies and administrations are seeing not only their work environment become more digital, but also the fact that a change in the working

world can be better achieved by increasing employee engagement and support in the long term. A new form of sustainable management and cooperation (managers as role models), the underlying green skills, values and attitudes, as well as appropriate change management are needed to help administrations change and to shape that change in an environmentally sustainable way. They must also position themselves as attractive employers, which is where the idea of a green employer label for administrations comes in.

A relatively new field of action, including for research, is the development of green human resources management (GHRM). This forms part of a sustainable human resources management system, which is often already anchored in strategies (see Hornung, 2020). According to Renwick, this includes all measures and fields of action (employer branding, recruitment, qualification, HR development, management development, incentive systems, but also health management) that pursue the goal of environmental sustainability (see Renwick et al. 2013). HR management can actively contribute to achieving the overall goals in terms of sustainability and supporting processes. Any activity at any level helps to achieve national or global goals.

Figure 2:



Own research

A key task of green HR management is to design a green culture, in collaboration with employees, which requires them to adopt environmentally friendly attitudes, outlooks and values. As with digitalisation or diversity management, employees and managers must be qualified, supported and prepared for their tasks. Another goal is also to raise the awareness within the workforce about environmental issues and to encourage them to want

to reduce the environmental footprint by examining their own actions. This is likely to have a positive impact on employee engagement and, in turn, on performance.

The main objectives of green HR management are summarised in Figure 3 (see Dron et.al. 2018; *Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart* [Stuttgart Economic Development Region] 2022).

Figure 3:

Green HRM – Green and environmentally sustainable human resource management

- Goal: Gearing human resources policy and management toward ecological, economic and user-centred aspects
- Checking essential process functions such as recruitment, mobility, learning and incentive systems for their impact on sustainability and climate protection
- Raising staff's awareness of sustainability issues and supporting leaders in the change
- Skills-based human resource management/
- establishing HR analytics/staff control for targeted data analysis and basis for evidence-based management / knowledge gains about the effectiveness of measures

Own research

Appropriate principles for leadership and cooperation, which determine the requirements for both managers and employees, could create the desired transparency here.

HR management should therefore be a key field of action for environmental management, bringing together organisational development and HR development.

Expectations of green HR management

Tasks are required in almost every field of action or process functions of HR management. They are briefly outlined below.

Green employer branding / recruitment

This starts with HR marketing or employer branding with a view to recruiting new talent with the right interpersonal skills as well as environmental values and attitudes. Ideally, these requirements will already be contained in competency-based job profiles. It is also necessary to tailor the potential analysis in the selection process to learn more about applicants'

environmental attitudes and perspectives. IT-based competency self-checks offer further alternatives, including for pre-selection.

This is why, in times when skilled staff, trainees and managers are all in short supply, positioning an administration as a green employer is becoming ever more important. Environmental management tasks, for example, are already included in job advertisements, or they are referred to in environmental reports. Getting communication and marketing right is becoming a factor of success in finding new potential candidates. The culture actually experienced on the job is then also important to retain the talent (see Likhitkar, P. et al. 2017).

Ultimately, online recruiting procedures can also play a part by reducing the need to travel to interviews (online interviews), which also reduces paperwork and achieves savings in that respect. The pandemic has certainly accelerated this and compelled us to reconsider these possibilities instead of sticking to 'business as usual'.

Training, qualification and leadership development

Measures to attract specialist and methodological skills (environmental competencies) are needed depending on the requirement of the particular role. The aim is also to promote environmental awareness and action, through informal methods for example. Cultural influence begins with incorporating relevant topics into training or study programmes, as well as the onboarding process, especially after recruiting externally. Projects for trainees or students are also practical alternatives.

In addition, providing appropriate information on how to change attitudes and behaviour is recommended. Blended learning, learning nuggets, networking and the like offer further options for on-the-job professional development.

The same applies to leadership development; transformational leadership in particular needs to be bolstered. Managers have a decisive role to play here in winning over the hearts of the employees when it comes to environmental sustainability goals. Furthermore, HR tools such as mentoring, coaching and cross-organisational networking are crucial. Training on environmental management or on generating innovative ideas and encouraging knowledge transfer between generations are also recommended to avoid the pitfalls of unconscious bias. It remains to be seen whether the accelerated departure of baby boomers will automatically make sustainability par for the course.

Overall, agile forms of work can also help foster learning in other contexts. Intergenerational green teams, for example, are another alternative, as is the application of design thinking.

HR development

In addition to the traditional functions of talent management, it is important to define competencies relevant for the future, if necessary by using a competency model or a description of roles. Green skills could be anchored in job profiles, but also support HR processes and organisational development. This creates transparency over expectations and also guides management in communicating the requirements they derive. Green skills and feedback on employees' sustainable behaviour can be included as criteria in appraisal procedures, manager feedback or other feedback systems. This also contributes to raising awareness of environmental issues and internal action programmes.

Mentoring programs could be supplemented with environmental culture education – an HR instrument that has repeatedly demonstrated its importance.

Performance management

Finally, the possibilities of rethinking target management holistically, in addition to non-monetary incentives, should also be discussed in order to anchor sustainability goals, for example in individual target agreements with managers. Discussions should focus on the question of individually rewarding ‘environmental and sustainable behaviour’ and personal commitment to the cause. Sustainability could become part of management performance and therefore performance-based pay.

Online seminar at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA)

The ideas for action listed here are certainly not exhaustive. Individual actions – which depend on the tasks, traditions and experiences as well as the lived culture specific to administrations – must be developed by HR management in order to support the managers and employees alike.

Join us at the online event on Green HR Management, titled “[Shaping a sustainable green culture inside Public Administration – Ever thought of a “green \(HR\) management” to support leadership?](#)”. The event takes place on 6 October 2022 and participation is free. Register [here](#).

Other literature:

ARBEITSWELT PORTAL (WORKPLACE PORTAL): Grünes Engagement von Beschäftigten stärken- Instrumente für die Unternehmenspraxis (Strengthening green employee engagement – instruments for company practice)/ So nutzen Firmen die Nachhaltigkeitsideen ihrer Beschäftigten (how companies apply sustainability ideas from their employees) (arbeitswelt-portal.de)

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Hornung, St. (2020). Green HR: Prof. Müller-Camen in an interview /Haufe/Personal. „Der Grat zum Greenwashing ist schmal“ (The boundary with greenwashing is a fine line). 30 January 2020 https://www.haufe.de/personal/hr-management/green-hr-prof-mueller-camen-im-interview_80_508572.html

HR-Report (2022). Organisationen unter Druck, Zu wenig Zeit, Geld, Personal- wie die Pandemie den Kampf um knappe Ressourcen beeinflusst (Organisations under pressure: too little time, money, human resources. How the pandemic affects the struggle for scarce resources). An empirical study by the Institut für Beschäftigung und Employability (Institute of Employment and Employability, IBE) and Hays. hays.de/hr-report.

Likhitkar, P., Verma, P. (2017). Impact of green HRM practices on organization sustainability and employee retention. International Journal For Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field. ISSN-2455-0620, 3(5), May.

Renwick, D.W.S., Redman, T. Maguire, S. (2013). Green human resources management: A review and research agenda: Green human resource management. International Journal of Management Review, 15 (1), 1-14.

Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart (Stuttgart Economic Development Region) (Ed.) (2021): Talente. Personal gewinnen, entwickeln, binden. Arbeitswelt gestalten (Talent. Attracting, developing and retaining staff. Shaping the world of work). Issue 2

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