Administrations need diversity, and diversity needs administrations!

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Let's shape the future together – New Work live

United in diversity! The European Union's motto couldn't be more relevant to living and working in the EU and in our organisations today, as we face the challenges of demographic change, digitalisation, decarbonisation and increasing diversity. Our world and our staff composition are becoming more varied, not least because of Europeanisation and internationalisation. At the same time, change in the world of work (so-called New Work) and changing values in society and between generations call for innovative ideas and solutions. New Work involves a firmer focus on putting citizens at the heart of concept development, yet also meaningful activities, personal responsibility and employees' engagement in processes and developing innovative solutions. However, with topics becoming increasingly complex and new tasks emerging, employees require a wide range of different skills.

This complexity is constantly expanding, meaning we need to respond proactively, instantly and rapidly. The mixture of similarities and differences in the skills of our staff is key to success! Underpinned by agile and new participatory forms of work, supported by technology, skills can be introduced and fully developed in a way that plays to strengths. In this respect, various aspects of change in the world of work can be cleverly combined as part of a holistic approach, as illustrated in Fig. 1

below. And diversity is part and parcel of New Work.

Create space for experimenting/innovation laboratories
Culture of learning from mistakes
Make working location and times more flexible

Promote and require personal responsibility
Establish self-organisation models

Strengthen identification with employer
Clearly designate individual contributions to achieving objectives
Make every day meaningful

Freedom   Self-responsibility

Diversity   Development   Meaning

Exploit ideas as an innovation factor
Use a variety of skills
Create awareness of biases

Promote lifelong and intergenerational learning
Strengths-based individual development
Establish collective learning structures across all hierarchies
Based on the 'New Work Charter': https://humanfy.de/new-work-charta/

New Work and sustainable HR management

Administrations need diversity

The ability to innovate, as well effective and efficient governance, is a fundamental reason why we need diversity and varied workforce. After all, our citizens as much as our colleagues are becoming more and more varied in terms of age, ethnic origin and nationality, gender and gender identity, physical and mental skills, religion and beliefs, sexual orientation and social background. There is a need for demographics, diversity, decarbonisation and digitalisation to be 'thought out together' and to be strategically anchored in business and HR policy. This could see several generations increasingly working together and learning at the same time, for example. Intercultural openness must be fostered, and questions about the compatibility of work and family/personal life will be raised in the context of different life models based on partnership. These are but a few examples.

The young generation has different expectations of life balance, but also of a culture of

appreciation, acceptance and non-discrimination. An inclusive working atmosphere for everyone, regardless of 'what makes them diverse', is important for employers to attract and retain people. Leadership and cooperation 'on an equal level' are a vital basis for promoting this kind of culture. For example, the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) has included the promotion and acceptance of diversity and differences, as well as team cohesion, as requirements for managers and employees in its new principles for leadership and cooperation. Team cohesion is more important than ever for an organisation to position itself as a resilient one in times of crisis. Social, personal and communicative skills are therefore indispensable for employees, in addition to the technical and methodological skills.

Equality and equal opportunities are crucial levers for individual engagement and well-being in the workplace. So, there are good reasons for administrations to develop diversity strategies, including as part of their employer branding:

- We want to work with employees, citizens and all stakeholders without prejudice and act accordingly. Diversity and differences are imperative to overcoming the complex challenges of the future.

- We champion equal opportunities, particularly in recruitment and staff development. We promote and leverage the diversity of our employees' skills in a targeted manner, in consideration of citizens' expectations. We make the most of those differences as well as the similarities.

- We advocate an inclusive culture for all employees. Appreciation and trust form the basis for feeling part of a team and making a dedicated individual contribution to achieving the goals together.

- Agile working requires diverse teams composed in a strengths-based manner, especially when it comes to sustainability issues. 'Green teams' will therefore become even more successful and innovative in developing solutions.

But there is another important topic that we also need to work on: the biases that we all have (about people of a certain age, people who work part-time, people with a certain background and so on). What are our biases and where do they come from? And how can we become aware of them and deal with them accordingly? We need to be aware of our biases, especially to ensure diversity management, negotiations and decisions are successful. The aim is to create a culture of appreciation, acceptance and non-discrimination. We all need to play our part in this.

Unconscious biases can affect the quality of work and implementation of concepts

- Recruitment
- Personnel development
- Organisational development
- Diversity management
- Equal opportunities in the team
- Perception of managerial tasks
- Negotiations
- Conceptual developments
- Decisions
- Relations with citizens

Biases can prove to be both positive and negative. One example that came out of a workshop on unconscious bias at a ministry concerns a man who works part-time:

Negative and hindering: Softy, under the thumb, not interested in a career, unmanly,

doesn't want to work…

Positive and beneficial: Family man, progressive, looks after his family, modern understanding of his role in the family…

It is always helpful to be aware of your own biases – conscious as well as unconscious ones – and to question the conclusions you jump to when something or someone is different from you. It is also beneficial to reflect during and after certain situations on whether you deal with others fairly or you stand in your own way because of your preconceptions of certain groups. This requires a high degree of self-reflection and a willingness to change personally. It is not always easy to unlearn your biases, but it can be done through training, which many companies and administrations are increasingly offering. A self-check can also come in handy.

Behaviour and attitudes are therefore as important to 'diversity in administrations' as much as strategies, actions and events. As with digitalisation and decarbonisation, it is crucial for us to change our culture and to take the time to ensure the changes last, as many concepts – even good and well thought-out ones – fail at this hurdle.

Diversity needs administrations

We do not only need diversity within administrations. We also need to represent our citizens or our customer base, who are just as, if not more, diverse as we are. In this respect, HR can be combined with promoting diversity in external relations, as part of a dual strategy.

Public administrations are increasingly positioning themselves not only as attractive employers, but also as service providers – depending on the portfolio of tasks. However, they must also serve as a role model, positively promoting, projecting and practising the idea of diversity in society. Practising the culture you preach, sharing examples of success and supporting private employers too are the building blocks of a diverse and inclusive society. It is worth providing resources for professional diversity management and thinking from a citizen or employee point of view. This is where we take on the demands of New Work and an agile working world, while making a major contribution to sustainable, green HR management.

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