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What does research say about the role HRDs could have in sustainable development and, more specifically, in reducing carbon emissions? Is this a field that is beginning to be studied?

"The link between sustainable development and human resources management has been observed for more than a decade in academic work, notably with the development of a trend known as 'Green HRM'. This movement is based on the idea that if a company is to adopt an environmentally-friendly business approach, employees are the key to its success or failure. However, the focus of Green HRM remains very much focused on raising awareness of environmental issues, training employees in adopting greener practices, and encouraging them to find and join initiatives linked to sustainability. One of the interests of getting HRDs to take on a more ambitious role in reducing carbon emissions is to force them out of their comfort zone. As I have long believed, if an HRD wants to be (more) influential, they need to do more than just HRM in the strict sense. Their scope of activity could broaden to various fields, including certainly the field of sustainable development. To do so, they must connect those to three dimensions under their responsibility: everything to do with the organisation of work - particularly New Ways of Working; questions of mobility from home or other places to the workplace and vice versa - which, traditionally, is more in the hands of other actors than HR; and the use of IT tools - notably in relation to remote work."

There is a widespread idea that remote work is "better" for the environment. To what extent is this validated (or not)?

"A lot of academic work shows that the (positive) effect of remote work in reducing carbon emissions is not as automatic as first thought, and that this effect is actually counterbalanced by many other parameters. Just because workers have to travel less to get to the office does not mean that other forms of travel do not occur, related to personal and family life or leisure. The period of forced remote work during the pandemic has also led to a significant growth in e-commerce, which has continued beyond the health crisis, and which is not without impact on travel volumes. Moreover, some workers have taken advantage of the health crisis and the benefits of hybrid work to move and live outside the cities, which generates less frequent but longer trips when they do travel to the office. This can be clearly seen on the roads today: traffic has not been reduced, but it is a different type of traffic than before the Covid-19 crisis. More remote work can therefore have a positive effect, but this effect is not guaranteed, and certainly not as great as expected. This tends to show that acting in favour of a reduction in carbon emissions required taking into account the cultural variable. Only by working on the organisational and managerial culture, as well as on a more reasoned use of travel and IT tools for example, can we achieve changes in behaviour and consumption that will make the balance more positive for the environment."

Does the deployment of the NWoW offer levers to contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions? If so, which ones? In what ways?

"There are two main levers. One is the management of infrastructure, and in particular a reduction in workspaces to accompany the deployment of remote and hybrid forms of work. Remote work can only have a positive environmental impact if the company sizes its workspaces accordingly. If it does not, it heats and lights spaces that are partly emptied of their staff. It is no coincidence that more and more HRDs are now also in charge of facilities, with the aim of reflecting on occupancy rates, optimisation of spaces, adapted heating technologies, etc. The second is the organisation of work itself, with a reflection on the tasks that are best done on site/ in presence and those that are best done remotely, integrating the parameter of environmental impact. The model proposed by David Autissier could be interesting in this respect. It invites us to question the work methods to be considered in terms of face-to-face and remote work through the notions of 'Build' and 'Run' borrowed from Agile methods. Remote working works well in the Run - i.e. in known, recurring activities - but is less adapted for the Build - i.e. all activities which involve investment in the future, such as new projects for example. In other words, we know how to remotely manage the current activity, for which we are processed, but less so the one that requires interactions, exchanges, trust and collective intelligence to get started. In this case, face-to-face will probably be preferable. On this basis, the HRD can stimulate managers to think with their teams about the times or tasks where it is important for everyone to be there, together, and for what purpose; and about the times and tasks that can be gained by conducting certain activities online. For example, an operational project monitoring meeting will be more effective if conducted online. As for welcoming a new staff member to the team, it is better to do it in person. Etc... A carbon impact criterion can then be added to this reflection. This can lead to tasks being grouped together to make a remote work cluster and others to make a face-to-face work cluster, taking into account all the parameters: the number of people involved, the distances they will have to travel and modes of transportation, office occupancy rates, the impact in terms of digital use, etc. The idea is not to have a mathematical approach, but rather an opportunistic one: if a group meeting can have a better result than what would be achieved remotely, despite a higher environmental cost, it is probably still relevant to conduct it face-to-face. It will be a question of choice. The interest will be in being able to equip oneself with the means to decide by constantly weighing up the different parameters of work organisation."

Are there tools to measure the impact of work organisation on greenhouse gas emissions? How can relevant tools be developed in this area?

"There are still very few. One concept that is currently being developed, that I think is interesting, is the digital sobriety certificate. This considers that users have the capacity to significantly reduce their environmental impact through their choice of equipment and online behaviour. Inspired by the energy saving requirements introduced in several European countries from the year 2000 onwards, these certificates would make it possible to internalise the environmental externalities of digital technology and correct certain failings of the digital market. It may be that in the years to come, the use of these certificates could develop in companies, with the idea that it would be up to the HR function to collect data from managers on what has been put in place to encourage employees reduce their use of digital technology: meeting policies, sending emails, hybrid work, video conferences, etc."

What are the HR processes that could be transformed with a view of contributing to reduce carbon emissions?

"Several key processes should be considered. First, recruitment – for example, evaluating candidates' awareness and values related to sustainable development and their compatibility with the ambitions and objectives of the organisation. That said, it is increasingly the candidates and workers who come up with these questions: what is the company's mobility offer, is there a remote working policy, what initiatives are in place to promote sustainable development, etc.? If the company does not have a clear policy, it will be condemned to improvisation and to case-by-case responses, which may fail to attract promising candidates. Second, training, which is the lever we most often think of. But there is also performance management and evaluation. The company is increasingly setting sustainable development objectives for itself, which must be implemented in the teams to be achieved. It is therefore important to evaluate what managers do, with their teams, to achieve those objectives. Very few companies to date translate these sustainability objectives into performance indicators. When they do, they generally refer to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, but I think we need to be much more concrete than that. That is to say to take it as far as daily behaviour: take the sustainability aspect into consideration when organising a meeting, when organising a company party, when deciding on a training offer, when making choices about travel, etc. Finally, there is remuneration, whether in the choice of benefits that make up the salary package or in the integration of criteria linked to sustainable development in the remuneration of directors, managers and even of all employees."