

SF 13: Creation of flat hierarchies within city administration

| Fr | B | C | NY | S | T | Total |
|----|---|---|----|---|---|-------|
| 4 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 18 |

Beispiel:

With its sustainability management office, **Freiburg** has established a structure which deals with the issue across all sections of the city, without, however, affecting the normal structure of its administrative bodies.

The Office for Long-Term Planning and Sustainability in **New York** is a good example of an administrative structure that gets by without strong hierarchies. Directly under Mayor Bloomberg, it is responsible for „PlaNYC“ and handles the development and implementation of a series of measures in various areas of the city administration.

1. Differentiated description of the key field

Like companies, cities (in the best case scenario) also work on the basis of a clearly defined organisational structure with short (decision-making and implementation) channels. This organisational structure should ensure that the processes that lead to decisions being made can proceed quickly and efficiently. For this purpose, a variety of information is passed on and collected at the appropriate office, especially in the city administrations of larger communities and especially for larger projects. Transparency is a relevant factor in this context. Structurally, therefore, flat hierarchies help the employees of the city administration to get through to the decision makers as quickly as possible and thus to speed up processes.

However, the introduction of a flat hierarchy in the city administration is often associated with a change in culture within the administration (and partly also with customers, the citizens). Flat decision-making and implementation structures presuppose proactiveness and a sense of responsibility in the administrative staff at all levels. This results in (creative) leeway which leads to certain initiatives – such as those that focus on sustainable urban development – being driven forward and put into action by committed individuals. If dialogues and agreements take place on a substantive basis and on an equal footing regardless of hierarchical position, staff motivation will increase thanks to the appreciation of their own ideas beyond the levels of hierarchy.

The results of the efforts of individual employees are, however, also visible thanks to the deliberate creation of additional structures. Thus, cross-sectional tasks can be processed efficiently without having to fundamentally change the tried and trusted structure of administrative bodies, e.g. in Freiburg by the Office of Sustainability Management.

2. Reference to sustainability:

An administrative apparatus with a flat hierarchy structure allows for more efficient decision-making and faster responses to external events (e.g. climate summit, implementation of government regulations, etc.) and permits the promotion of the initiatives dedicated individuals. Motivation increases because employees can contribute their own ideas and suggestions.

3. Relevance to industrial sectors?

Mobility :
Energy:
Production & logistics:
Security:
ICT:
Water infrastructure:
Buildings:
Governance: High

Brief description of the high level importance:

4. Impact (positive & negative)

Positive, increased efficiency:

- For example, due to the clear regulation of responsibilities and powers bringing about more transparency in an urban administration organisation with a flat hierarchy
- Decisions are made through discussions „on an equal footing“ and therefore supported by the majority
- Greater staff morale as they can put forward their own ideas and suggestions.

Negative, increased expense:

- Administrative staff members need to play a part in their own as well as in a few other areas of responsibility. This can lead to individuals becoming overloaded with work or becoming unable to complete core tasks.
- Active control and clear task management scheme for the administrative staff are required, which in turn makes use of (planning) resources.

5. Implementation measures:

In order to create or to add new cross-sectional areas to old and established structures, permanent staff development is firstly necessary to make administrative staff capable of autonomous action.

One measure that may be controversial depending on the cultural background but which is associated with low temporal and personnel (resources) expenditure is the spatial

pooling of various hierarchical levels, such as in open-plan offices where the respective manager has a central position in the room.

Regarding motivation by involving individuals from different hierarchical levels, the question arises as to what extent such participatory or co-decision-making rights should be extended to the citizenry, without unnecessarily making the decision-making process more complicated.

6. *Actors: Who can shape things?*

City administration, individual „incubators“ of structural change
(regional) political actors

7. *Prerequisites:*

Cultural/historical:

The cultural circumstances in a city's administration relate to the general social conditions (individual vs. collectivist culture, acceptance of bottom-up/top-down decisions, see the example of Tokyo) and are also based on a country's historical events.

Proactivity and responsibility of administrative staff members and thus the will to change also presupposes that clear goals have set and that these have also been clearly communicated¹.

Technical:

Investment in state-of-the-art IT is helpful to support communication and networking within the city administration as well as with citizens. It may be necessary to purchase suitable hardware and software (sometimes with the assistance of management-specific industry solutions)².

Structural/political:

Since changing the structures in the city administration is also linked to a large extent to political decisions, the majority of the city council members must first approve the change in structure. In addition, operating procedures which clearly regulate the communication channels and procedural processes as well as the required competences need to be put into circulation³. To make this process as efficient as possible and to create transparency, the people to contact with regard to responsibility and accountability should be clearly specified.

¹ https://www.mannheim.de/sites/default/files/page/369/jahresbericht_web_2012.pdf.

² https://www.ekom21.de/Service/Kundenzeitungen/pdf/ein-fo21_01_2003.pdf.

³ <http://www.derwesten.de/staedte/nachrichten-aus-moers-kamp-lint-fort-neukirchen-vluyn-rheurdt-und-issum/ich-bin-mit-meiner-arbeit-noch-nicht-fertig-id8210489.html#plx1702153178>.

8. *Obstacles/barriers:*

- Fixed, predetermined structures that are specified by the political sphere (city council) or have grown naturally over decades.
- Limited staff costs budget⁴ and strong cost pressure (budgetary constraints) within the city administration: due to financial constraints there is often limited scope for comprehensive restructuring and the creation of additional cross-sectional areas (especially since staff training etc. in the new field would often be necessary, which would be linked to direct (course fees) and indirect costs (loss of employees during the training).
- Bureaucracy and opaque processes lead to a lack of transparency and unnecessary delays (passing on information, etc.), which complicates restructuring.
- Cultural awareness of hierarchies (acceptance of the status quo, resistance to change), which cannot be easily altered.

9. *Indicators:*

- Number of hierarchical levels between the mayor and an administrator
- Number of people from the city administration who are also represented in the decision-making body of the city (city council) with voting rights
- Number of people from the city administration, who are also represented in the city's decision-making body (city council) without voting rights

10. *Special features/remarks:*

⁴ <http://www.derwesten.de/staedte/nachrichten-aus-moers-kamp-lint-fort-neukirchen-vluyn-rheurdt-und-issum/ich-bin-mit-meiner-arbeit-noch-nicht-fertig-id8210489.html>.