

# Shaping intergenerational management, demography, diversity and digitisation in public administration

Written by **Beatrix Behrens and Carolin Eitner**

**Shaping demography, diversity and digitisation – a model for intergenerational management (part 1 of 4)**

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## **Multifaceted challenges for the human resources of the future**

The promotion of employability (skills, health and commitment) at any age and across all life phases requires a strategic and conceptual change to the understanding of the role of HR work. This is something on which the performance and innovation capability of organisations is heavily dependent. An increasingly diverse and changing workforce in particular, but also the change in values between generations, different forms of life partnership, non-linear professional biographies and longer working lives all place increased demands on sustainable, modern HR management. In parallel, HR management will also have to actively shape the transformation towards the digital working environment and 'New Work'. New forms of collaboration and work content necessitate a change in the understanding of roles between managers and employees, as well as changing skills in the workforce.

## **An integrated approach to HR management is required**

The complexity of future task completion and internationalisation are both on the increase, and in that respect, an integrated approach to HR management offers interesting perspectives. All functions, such as recruitment, learning, personnel development and health management focused on prevention must be strategically and conceptionally intertwined and oriented towards a common objective to the fullest extent possible. Closely linked with this view is the development of a modern understanding of organisational development. This should not include only the shaping of the structures and procedures. The challenges of the future also require a change in organisational culture, which should be heavily characterised by appreciation and dialogue at eye level. The three Ds – demography, digitisation and diversity – should be 'jointly conceived' in order for an organisation to achieve long-term performance capability. A fourth D – democracy – is already under discussion. The younger generations in particular demand innovative and collaborative forms of work.

## **Promotion and retention of employees in times of skills shortages**

In view of the skills shortage, many businesses and public administration must therefore position themselves as competitive employers on the market. Multi-faceted and exciting tasks, orientation towards the common good or social responsibility, flexible development perspectives, a good climate of leadership and collaboration, a sense of task completion and the participation of employees are important levers in attracting new talent and retaining existing talent. This also includes a culture of appreciation and equal opportunity – irrespective of age. Employee retention starts with recruitment coupled with good 'onboarding' and usually ends with support into retirement and, in some cases, beyond. How an employer bids farewell to older

colleagues at the end of their working lives, for example, also sends a clear signal to younger employees. In so doing, HR work in internal and external relationships can have a cultural impact and help to bolster leadership and collaboration.

### **Diversity, demography and intergenerational management**

Even if the past weeks and months have focused on topics such as digitisation, digital culture and digital competences, irrespective of the ongoing pandemic, management of the demographic change continues to be a challenge. In view of the increasing agility within change processes and the increasing individualisation of HR work, practical solution approaches are required quickly. Given the high rate of age-related staff turnover, there is a risk of a loss of qualifications within organisations, which is something that must be avoided. Priority areas include sharing knowledge between generations and learning from one another, as well as structured processes for the digitally supported transfer of knowledge. The decreasing shelf life of knowledge requires lifelong learning from employees. At the same time, managers – in their role as ‘coaches’ – will be required to keep track of the way in which work is structured to ensure that it promotes lifelong learning, alongside operational task completion, and they must also respond to individual learning situations.

### **New skills for a modern and digital working environment**

In consideration of the changes to the working environment, business and administration are increasingly strengthening the personal responsibility and self-organisation of employees. This includes, for example, own personal development, lifelong learning and health – supported by relevant offerings from HR departments and support from managers. Relevant skills that are of value for the future, including in consideration of a mobile working environment, are skills such as self-organisation,

resilience, sensitivity and the ability to network. In essence, one needs to possess skills for a modern and digital working environment and not only digitisation skills.

### **Challenges for HR development**

The challenge is in supporting employees to the fullest extent possible to ensure that skills, health and commitment are promoted at all ages and in all life phases. Within this, HR development needs to consider career and life planning so as to be able to secure the loyalty of talent in the long term and take advantage of the potential of older employees. At the same time, this HR policy approach also promotes equality and equal opportunity in professional diversity management. An area of action under the heading ‘Age and generations’, focused entirely on inclusion, can be strategically and conceptionally integrated into this approach. Gender mainstreaming can play a relevant cross-sectional role.

### **Future topics for intergenerational management**

There will be a number of articles over the coming weeks to demonstrate the ways in which this can be achieved in practice, including:

- Life phase-oriented HR management as the basis for generation management
- Promoting the potential of older employees – actively supporting retirement (offboarding)
- An older workforce and preparing for digitisation
- Skills for a modern and digital working environment
- Health strategies to promote employability
- Employee engagement as a factor for success

Read part 2 of this 4 part series

EIPA runs a range of events on these topics, all offering the opportunity to transfer knowledge, network and engage in peer coaching and conceptual development. See our upcoming activities on the topic.

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Since 2012, Carolin has been working on a variety of aspects at the company, including the strategic direction of demographic management and life-phase orientation for the steel sector.

She is also involved in German and European research projects on HR issues. Previously, she worked on various demography projects at the Institute of Gerontology at the TU Dortmund University.

**Life-phase demographic management at thyssenkrupp Steel Europe.**

Based on a 'collective demographic agreement' for the German iron and steel industry (Demografie-Tarifvertrag), thyssenkrupp Steel Europe has been developing a systematic demographic management system for over ten years now. In recent years, this system has

been consistently geared to life and career phase orientation, accompanied by publications on the intranet and other supporting materials. The company has also further developed a large number of measures aimed at promoting a healthy work-life balance over the past years. These include the 'Stahlsternchen' company kindergarten for up to 90 children of employees in Duisburg, or the 'care folder' that provides information to employees who are wondering how to reconcile their care duties with work. A milestone in 2019 was the extensive company agreement on mobile working, which has played an essential role (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) in enabling employees to work from home on a regular basis. In order to strengthen their physical and mental health, employees have access to a wide range of occupational health management and social services.

Vocational rehabilitation focuses on employees whose performance has been impacted due to illness or other life events. Preventative policies and a modern working environment help to strengthen autonomous and equal participation in office and working life. The holistically designed on-boarding process for new employees, as well as in-company role switches, help new team members to quickly get settled in their new company's culture. Alongside the successful pilot project to improve understanding between young and old, the company has for years been running highly rated workshops that prepare employees for their imminent retirement.

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