

# Life phase-oriented HR management as a basis for intergenerational management

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Shaping demography, diversity and digitisation – a model for intergenerational management (part 2 of 4)

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## Changes in the world of work

The recruitment and retention of employees has become a key challenge for both the economy and public authorities. Career and income continue to be motivating factors, but are having to compete with other offerings in terms work/life balance. In addition to financial incentives, organisations are having to think carefully about what they can offer their current and future skilled workers in order to boost their appeal as employers.

Today's professional life can be individually subdivided into or interrupted by multiple learning phases. This trend is supported by modular training courses, internal training and further training, as well as flexible working hours and locations. As an example, sabbaticals are being used in later life phases as a time to study, undertake a doctorate or take personal time off. The 'rush hour' of life can increasingly shift to a later life phase, while caregiving tasks or changes to one's private life may also play a role. Double burdens need to be overcome without professional or private life – or a potential career – having to suffer too greatly.

Against this backdrop, the focus is also on promoting equality and equal opportunity.

## Changing values as an HR policy challenge

The change in values between generations plays a key role. The younger generation has higher expectations of its employers – a good working relationship (optional connection) and attractive working conditions are very much in demand. A culture characterised by appreciation is desirable across all age groups. In addition, older employees are eager to pass on what they know to the next generation. In view of the rate of age-related staff turnover that can be expected in the future, a structured procedure for knowledge transfer is essential in order to ensure that organisations remain efficient.

## Life phase-oriented HR policy

The objective of a life phase-oriented HR policy is to guide employees individually through every life and professional phase and to support them in their own personal development. It also seeks to bolster personal responsibility and self-organisation. The aim is to promote performance and employability at all ages and in every life phase (skills, health, commitment). Consequently, a life phase-oriented HR policy is not an end in itself. Instead, the measures and offerings that it contains are oriented towards the goals of the organisations, increasing performance and service orientation. The following Figure 1 provides a general indicative framework:

### *Fig.: Overview of life phases*

Between the start of one's career and the transition to active retirement, employees' individual professional and life plans, life events and needs vary. Employees' professional and private lives are shaped by different events, including parenthood, caring for relatives, illness, training, career start, study and career advancement. Private interests such as

honorary positions and hobbies can also impact a person's professional development.

### All instruments and measures of HR development can be implemented flexibly

The life phase-oriented framework provides a flexible approach and is the HR policy 'umbrella' for sustainable integration of different areas of existing HR work into a holistic HR management process. HR policy offerings and dialogue-focused management instruments such as discussions, assessments, or management feedback as well as offerings for HR development in all age groups support the individualisation of HR work. In many cases, offerings are already available and can be taken advantage of. There is no focus on 'more is better'; rather, there is more sense in coordinating existing measures, uncovering synergies and identifying blank patches in a concrete, demand-focused way, such as through workshops with stakeholders and in offering solutions.

### Instruments and measures for intergenerational management – the modular model

The following Figure 2 provides examples of the elements that a module of measures could contain. The instruments can be used flexibly in order to support managers in their work as well as to bring employees' individual professional and life plans into line with business or operational requirements. In this context, reference is also made to the BMI guideline 'Demography-sensitive HR management in federal administration – a guideline for developing a life phase-oriented HR policy'.

*Figure: Examples for measures and offerings*

#### 2. Practical examples – German Federal Employment Agency and thyssenkrupp Steel

In 2010 and 2011, the German Federal Employment Agency was awarded the international employer prize by the American

Association of Retired Persons for its life phase-oriented HR management. Most of the measures and instruments listed are already being used with the aim of promoting employability. For example, a programme has been designed specifically to support employees in leaving and returning to work after lengthy periods of absence in order to minimise the loss of knowledge and to promote employee loyalty.

The following seminars, which are also of relevance to HR development, have been and remain a success.

*Figure: Examples of seminars to support individual development by the German Federal Employment Agency*

The Agency has, for example, deliberately decided against age limits in the current assessment guidelines in view of the extension of people's working lives and the need for lifelong learning. Career options also exist at all ages, depending on potential and suitability. A holistic approach to diversity management

The framework outlined and the accompanying measures, e.g. to support exit from and entry into employment, promotion of health, or further training are, therefore, important implementation measures in the overall strategy designed to positively shape demographic change, diversity management and digitisation. In addition, life phase-oriented HR management also supports the diversity efforts of companies and public authorities. Workforces are becoming increasingly 'colourful' and more diverse.

### Intercultural opening

Not only in terms of age, gender, or sexual orientation. In times of globalisation or migration, multicultural teams are an undisputed feature of working life. People from an ethnic minority background are an important target group for job profiles where there is a skills shortage. Intercultural cooperation does, however, pose challenges to management, HR offerings and communication, and dispelling stereotypes.

Intercultural skills amongst managers and team members are becoming increasingly important as a means of joint success.

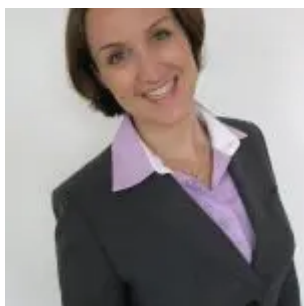
### Targeted information and communication

An important aspect is the open, target group-oriented communication of offerings. In many cases, employees are unaware of the opportunities available to them or do not feel that they appeal to them, as these opportunities concentrate more on weaknesses rather than strengths. Managers also sometimes fail to notice the relevance of the offerings in supporting the performance and employability of the workforce. A joint, integrated presence, e.g. on an intranet, can be a helpful platform. The creation of virtual communities can also be used for communication. The key communication channel is, however, the manager. The manager seeks dialogue-oriented solutions in order to balance the needs of employees and the business. In this respect, the HR department's task is to support managers just as much as it does employees.

The life phase-oriented HR policy therefore takes a holistic view of the employee. In so doing, it promotes motivation, satisfaction, productivity and commitment and is an important element in attracting skilled workers, securing their loyalty and operating successfully in the market.

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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.

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