

‘Support into retirement’ – HR development in a different way

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Shaping demography, diversity and digitisation – a model for intergenerational management (part 3 of 4)

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New requirements in HR development

In the first two parts, we looked closely at the strategic orientation of HR management in terms of the 3D challenges – demography, digitisation and diversity. The strategic approach of a life phase-oriented HR policy as a basis for intergenerational management appears to be a potential alternative to reduce complexity in HR management. In order to promote employability (skills, health, commitment) and establish a culture characterised by trust and appreciation, modern approaches in HR development will be required. Also in focus are the strengthening of personal responsibility for individual development and strength-oriented promotion of employees in every life phase.

In view of the increasing diversity of the workforce, the orientation and promotion of the varied and differing skills of all employees with a view to current and future challenges must be an objective of HR development. Against the backdrop of the modern and digital working environment, there is also the challenge of how to identify the skills needed for organisational success, how to use those skills properly and how to develop them in a targeted manner. Modern HR development is therefore closely linked to the overall strategy in order to respond

quickly and professionally to changes such as digitisation and internationalisation.

Using dialogue-based management instruments such as cooperation discussions in public administration, development discussions, assessment systems or management feedback helps to create a culture characterised by trust and appreciation. HR and organisational development are closely linked in order to help shape the new working environment.

Life phase-oriented promotion of employees – recognising, promoting and utilising the potential of older employees

With a view to the HR structure and anticipated age-related staff turnover in the years ahead, a culture of leadership and collaboration characterised by recognition and appreciation is increasing in importance, alongside age-appropriate organisation of work throughout employment. Modern talent management should cover all employees in all life phases (from recruitment to the end of their professional careers and perhaps beyond).

Systematic identification and use of potential are equally important as skills-based and individual HR development without age limitation. This also includes the possibility of a later career, according to performance and potential as well as individual professional and life plans. Compensation of formal qualifications through professional and life experience as well as performance should, where possible, also be taken into account in the design of development paths. They make both expectation and requirements transparent. A HR development system of this nature, with flexible PE instruments, offers incentives for lifelong learning and secures performance-oriented resources, especially in the promotion of experts.

Its role as a shaper of good working relationships and conditions also contributes to a modern understanding of HR development. This

can also include support into retirement and intergenerational learning through structured transfer of knowledge – an increasingly valuable task in HR development alongside 'onboarding' is also 'offboarding'. Individually designed, this process should start around two or three years in advance of retirement.

The model below provides examples of how shaping the entry into retirement could be a success (Fig. 1):



Fig 1: Examples for measures and offerings for the transition into retirement

Promoting dialogue – existing formats such as utilising cooperation discussions/HR development discussion

In addition to the traditional assessment and associated performance feedback as a basis for horizontal and vertical HR development, individual dialogue is essential as it shapes employee-oriented and transformational management.

In existing formats of dialogue, the transition into retirement can be broached on a voluntary basis, e.g. by discussing opportunities for participating in seminars to prepare for retirement.

Preparing for discussions

Checklists can be used to support managers and employees in their preparation. The following questions could be used:

- What does retirement mean to you?

- Have you thought about what your transition into retirement could look like?
 - What does/could your ideal for a transition look like?
- What would you still like to do in the years remaining of your career?
 - Of those things that you would like to do, which can you accomplish in your current team?
- Are there professional aspects that burden you more today than ten years ago?
- What does it mean for you to be able to pass on your experiences to others?
- Have you ever thought about engaging in any form of post-career work?
 - An honorary position? Informally? In projects?
- Are you interested in participating in seminars to prepare for retirement?

The role of the manager

The manager has a number of important tasks in this process:

- He or she initiates the transfer, specifies the framework and instruments, motivates employees and supports the process.
- He or she presents opportunities for actively shaping retirement, e.g. passing on knowledge to successors, consulting on needs-based tasks or as appropriate, cooperation on projects, mentoring.
- He or she acts as the point of contact for the employee (transition into retirement as a critical life event, possible reassessment of the professional situation)

- He or she demonstrates opportunities for social commitment and facilitates, if applicable, a 'taster day' in a social organisation.

Practical example – thyssenkrupp Steel Europe

Gain from experience: Transfer of knowledge

Transfer of knowledge refers to the transfer of knowledge and many years of experience from the knowledge giver to the knowledge receiver. The reasons for transferring knowledge are varied. An employee with relevant operational knowledge leaves the business or the position. Practical knowledge or processes built up over many years should be safeguarded within the team and documented.

A standard process for the transfer of knowledge helps managers and participants to carry out the process sustainably.

To initiate the start of the transfer there should be a personal preliminary discussion with the manager and the Learning and Transformation Concepts Team to clarify needs and aims, as well as to prepare documents for digital or analogue self-organisation of the transfer of knowledge.

At thyssenkrupp Steel Europe AG, we rely on knowledge transfer supervisors, who are employees from the department in which the transfer of knowledge is taking place. They control the transfer on site and act as a point of contact for all involved. To enable this to happen, these supervisors complete an e-learning course, which alongside background information, includes all documents and aids to help safeguard the transfer of knowledge. By doing this, the employee is given the tools to individually and professionally support the method and can, if required, look after other cases in that specialist area in the future.

Against the backdrop of increasing need for a transfer of knowledge due to age and

retirement-related staff turnover, it makes sense to implement a multiplier concept to support this process on site.

Der Ablauf eines Wissenstransfers @ thyssenkrupp Steel Europe AG



Fig 2: Transfer of knowledge process at thyssenkrupp Steel, © thyssenkrupp Steel Europe AG

Securing resources beyond retirement: Senior Expert Pool for thyssenkrupp

Another opportunity for maintaining contact with former employees with many years of experience beyond their professional lives is to establish a Senior Expert Pool.

The idea is simple: hundreds of employees from the thyssenkrupp Group retire every year and take valuable experience with them. For businesses and organisations, it is becoming increasingly important to temporarily utilise the special knowledge of experts and managers even after they have left their roles, and thereby access sensitive expertise, e.g. as part of projects, quickly and reliably. At the same time, former employees often desire a smooth transition into retirement or a continued, albeit temporary, challenge.

In addition, senior experts know the organisation and corporate culture well and can therefore quickly and efficiently collaborate and support projects. Their expertise is valued and needed, so it is a win-win situation for both parties.

In the case of knowledge for which training is no longer provided, e.g. amongst younger employees, a Senior Expert Pool offers a reliable and quick solution for accessing relevant expertise and shows recognition for the knowledge and expertise built up over many years.

Temporary support is varied and can involve all areas of responsibility and different tasks, e.g.

- An interim manager, as no suitable candidate can be found quickly.
- A senior expert with specific expertise that is not currently available in the group.
- An experienced project manager who supports a young team.
- HR support, e.g. due to maternity leave or long-term illness.

thyssenkrupp Senior Experts GmbH maintains a pool of retired experts and managers who enjoy and are interested in continuing to actively support the group for a fixed period of time. The administrative tasks involved in temporary continued employment are handled by thyssenkrupp Senior Experts GmbH.



Fig 3: Senior Expert Pool at thyssenkrupp AG, © thyssenkrupp AG

Promoting self-information: Brochure – transition into retirement

A simple but respectful and helpful option is an information brochure on the 'transition into retirement'. In the latter phases of a career in particular, there may be many questions about the exit from the business and legal, financial and private matters. A brochure collates these and other questions and serves as an initial source of information for employees who are two to three years away from retirement.

In addition, contact opportunities, information on volunteer work or relevant questions on company pension schemes can also be included, together with points of contact and practical tips.



Fig 4: Practical example – brochure on the transition into retirement at thyssenkrupp Steel, © thyssenkrupp Steel Europe AG

There are a multitude of ways of supporting retirement, and many organisations already have instruments and measures available. This facet of HR work can often be integrated into existing concepts (e.g. discussion formats) with minimal effort.

As an example, establishing a Senior Expert Pool also means identifying appropriate talent promptly. This can be carried out within the context of existing HR development systems in particular. In consideration of the declining shelf life of knowledge, a close relationship with the

employer beyond retirement age is important. To ensure that knowledge does not become obsolete, access to internal systems such as the intranet, involvement in selected meetings or targeted qualification measures can also be useful. Offerings in terms of health should also be made available to this group.

As with many HR topics, support into retirement also requires a culture of trust and motivation amongst employees. Within the context of life phase-oriented HR policy, promoting commitment starts with the application and continues throughout one's entire professional life. In our view, the life phase-oriented approach is an important lever for success and for internal and external employer appeal.

Read part 1 and part 2 of this 4 part series.



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.