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Workshop Report

Older workers in restructuring – maintenance and development of health, productivity and competence

Failed restructuring like Hertie, Quelle and the Bremer Vulkan or successful restructuring such as EON or LOEWE – many employees experience changes in companies as a personal and professional crisis. Thereby, health, identity and professional skills of the workforce are under pressure. At the conference "Older workers in restructuring – maintenance and development of health, productivity and competence" at the 18.06.2010 were at first dealt with the legal and labour market conditions which older workers can find in professional change processes. Second, it was investigated whether there are occupational and health challenges for older employees and what they look like. Third, offers to promote health and professional resources in change processes were presented. Fourth, the role and opportunities of social partners were discussed. Finally, in the sense of 'good governance' an institutional framework for the successful management of professional change processes was introduced.

Older workers, health and restructuring - first results from the project ELDERS



In the introductory lecture Dr. Goetz Richter, a research fellow of the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, at first makes a conceptual clarification of the concept of restructuring. Richter draws a distinction between internal and external restructuring. Then he goes into the state of the scientific discussion on the correlation of biological age and professional capability. Age alone is not a adequate predictor for the professional capability, but must be seen in relation to the occupational activity and the lifestyle

Health, professional competence and personal initiative of older workers are the results of one-sided stress and an unhealthy lifestyle, often accompanied by factors such as shift work, physical postures, or time pressure. But the picture is contradictory, because older workers on internal labour markets are more secure against dismissal as younger workers and the proportion of temporary work is lower among older than among younger people.

Legal framework of restructuring



Rolf Fischer from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, talked about social, pension and labour market choices of the recent past in regard to the employment of older workers with the image of 'closure and opening of

spaces'. The policy has confined on the one hand the scope for early retirement strategies and on the other hand expanded the space for the employment of older workers by promoting flexible working hours, professional development and pilot projects as part of INQA, the Initiative for New Quality of Work.

Proposals from the project HIRES



Dr. Karl Kuhn has presented the findings of the HIRES-Project about restructuring and society in which the BAUA was involved. Healthy restructuring is characterised by existing norms, values and cultures. An awareness of the different perspectives of different (old) people is as important as the participation of those affected. Transparent

and constructive communication strategy allows the open management of conflicts. In order to achieve these requirements during restructuring, a social convoy is necessary. Not only the "victims" but also the "survivors" of restructuring can benefit, just as the productivity of enterprises.

The protection of workers against health and social risks is the focus of the discussion. Health promotion, corporate culture and personnel development and training are the crucial areas to maintain capability.

Older workers in business change processes - a practice report from the occupational health point of view



Dr. Hubertus von Schwarzkopf, Occupational Health Service, Hospital Bremen Mitte, described the health effects of an internal restructuring, where the employees remained in the company, based on his own data. He emphasise the importance of prevention in change processes, the participation of the works council and company agreements covering measures of labour and health protection. Therefore the aim is to exploit existing laws, collective agreements, instruments and opportunities to cooperate in practice.

The psychological contract in the transformational change



Dr. Beatrix Behrens, Head of Personnel at the Federal Labour Agency in Nuremberg, has gone into the importance of the psychological contract in the internal change process of the Federal Labour Agency. The psychological contract (explicit and implicit) denominates mutual expectations and obligations of employees and managers. This is changing in the course of an aging workforce. Hence, in the process of restructuring the Federal Labour Agency targets specific life-stage strategies. Thus problems such as unclear affiliation to organisational units and the limited influence of middle management, which are typical of internal restructuring, are handled.

Corporate culture and well-being as a framework for individual initiative in change processes



Sibyl Backe-Proske, Project IT 50 Plus, a joint initiative of IG Metall and BITKOM, acts on the assumptions of a high pace of innovation and the common restructuring in the IT industry. By a health-promoting corporate culture with a "feel good factor" opportunities for the organisation, executives and employees open up. The major source of the emerging opportunities is that the employees can realise on the basis of this corporate culture the meaning of their work. The organisation gains flexibility in the use of personnel, monetary and time resources of their employees. The executives gain confidence and understanding of the teams and the employees receive orientation and awareness in dealing with the tasks.

Older workers in restructuring



Dr. Uwe Jürgehake, CEO of the consulting firm Social Innovation in Dortmund, has introduced a concept to strengthen the professional competence of older workers in restructuring processes. In this form of workplace-learning internal experts are supported by consultants to pass on their skills to colleagues. Also interdisciplinary qualifications are preferably implemented in the spatial and personnel context of the company in restructuring. Important elements include the preparation of knowledge brokers, developing workplace solutions and the use of tandems. Procedures that build on their own work experiences, find a high level of acceptance by older workers and those with little further training.

The struggle for identity - the psychomental situation of older workers in restructuring



Dr. Wolfgang Hien, Research Office of Labour, Health and Biography in Bremen, broaches the issue of the demands of external restructuring for older workers. He makes different patterns of subjective processing of restructuring the starting point of its contribution. In addition to frustration and resignation, endurance but also discovering new personal potential are widespread subjective reactions to the loss of employment. Impending layoffs, layoffs and unemployment are often life phases of personal identity crises. Specific for older workers is that they have with experience, emotionality and responsibility special, but often unconscious, resources. Social Security and other institutions are involved in the monitoring and care of older workers after losing their jobs, but often there is a lack of competences and instruments to mobilise through a subject-specific access the potential of older workers. In addition, the offerings of existing institutions for the target groups are often not very transparent and also often not coordinated.

Possibilities and limits of the unemployment insurance



Heribert Markoni, team leader at the employment agency in Essen, extracts the possibilities and limits of the unemployment insurance. In addition to the broad instruments of promotion in the search for new employment, there are special offers for over 50 year olds. While e.g. transitional agencies have been engaged only comparatively rarely, transi-

tional companies are established as a tool for handling restructuring processes. But in the minds of employees and employers are barriers. Older workers often lack the willingness to learn, many employers lack the willingness to recruit older applicants.

Possibilities and limits of the health insurance



Health promotion in change processes is the subject of Jürgen Wolters from BKK Bundesverband (Federation of Company Health Insurance Fund), Essen. With § 20 SGB V there is a legal framework for offers. The focuses of the presented project "Health-conscious self-management in case of imminent unemployment" are individual changes in dealing with stress, diet, exercise and drug use. These changes are part of a concept to enhance employability and capability, health and quality of life. However, the focus of the company in the process of change is first on other aspects. In large companies support for offers to support health were only achieved after decisions on a social plan. To support workers in restructuring with health-monitoring, additional cooperation with e.g. transitions companies or the employment agency should be used in the future

Possibilities and limits of the social partners



In the discussion panel Stefan Pfeifer, DGB NRW (German Trade Union Federation NRW), Dr. Peter Janssen, arbeitgeber nrw (employer nrw), and Dr. Karl Kuhn debated the "possibilities and limits of social partners". The balance between flexibility and security was the focus of the discussion. The starting point was the idea of the social convoy, which was developed in the project HIREs. How can social convoy look like in practice and what roles have the social partners? The education voucher in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is considered as a successful and unbureaucratic tool to ensure the professional qualification of workers, as well as potential consulting used by various small and medium-sized companies. In many companies and industries in NRW the social partners practice close cooperation with regional employment service providers during restructuring. The social partners also participate in local networks for health prevention.

Flexicurity - Flexibility and Social Protection in restructuring processes



In the final contribution, Dr. George Worthmann, Institute Work and Qualification, has designed a framework with the aims of 'Good Governance' for the organisation of professional transition processes.

The starting point is the flexicurity concept of the EU. It is clear with regard to older workers in restructuring processes, that especially the design of the employment relationships is crucial for the distribution of social risks in mobility processes: The "normal employment" gives workers institutional protection through the Works Constitution Act and the affiliation to the company, in the case of atypical employment this protection is missing partially. But career change processes need flexibility and security. So that the social risks of occupational mobility are mitigated for all workers, a social paradigm shift is necessary. Appreciation of professional experience, foresight, prevention and diversity management are core elements of a new working world.

The workshop was attended by 80 personnel managers and representation of interests as well as representatives of consulting agencies and occupational medicine, from social security, labour administration, associations and trade unions.