

Elders project special training session

Vienna, 18 October 2010

On October 2010, the partners of the Elders project met at the *ibw* in Vienna for a training session to present and discuss the national results of the research mostly in terms of training tools and expectations for older workers. **Rebekka Vedina**, the project manager of the Spanish team (ESADE-IEL) explained the outcomes of their national research. The Spanish team worked with two local trade unions, the Spanish Institute of Health and Safety at Work, which provided data of the National Survey on working conditions and *Edad & Vida* (NGO). The Spanish research underlined the legal circumstances of elder workers, like the retirement age of 65 years (60 years for partial retirement), the incentives for labour contracts with workers over 52 and the favourable conditions for late retirement. Nevertheless, the labour activity level of those between 55 and 64 years old has been shown to be lower than the general labour activity. The activity of people older than 65 years is only marginal (4%). Workers over 50 show a very low labour market mobility. The level of vocational training of elder employees is the lowest in Europe and the general attitude of elder workers towards life-long learning is mostly passive. In general, older workers are not seen as a competent workforce. Spanish companies don't have strategies to keep older workers in the workplace or to recruit them. The „solution“ to deal with elder workers is early retirement. This is also reflected in the wish of 67% of Spaniards aged between 50 and 59 to retire as soon as possible.

The Spanish research included a survey among 89 workers, 46 of them aged over 50 years, 26 male and 20 female. The survey shows, although the data is not representative, that restructuring is seen more negative by older workers. There is a positive correlation between one-time layoffs and emotional and cognitive burnout and depression, while information and problem solving during the restructuring process, as well as the provision of training by the supervisor was negatively correlated with depression. From the survey emerges that the workers were mostly poorly provided with career advice and support during restructuring. Among the group of the workers aged over 50 the high percentage of respondents who regarded the issue of career advice and support as “not applicable” stands out.

In Finland, as **Jukka Vuori** from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) explains, the challenge of aging was already addressed by the end of the 1990s. Some issues of age management have been included in Government policy programmes on health promotion and employment. In 2005, the Finnish labour market parties decided to implement the law on „change security“. The law stipulates paid leave for redundant employees in order to search for a new job, more efficient information from the employer, re-employment plans for the personnel and personal re-employment plans, set up by the local employment offices. Nearly all employees who have worked for at least three years are entitled to change security. Nevertheless, a high number of employees quit work during restructuring processes, due to the so-called „unemployment pension tube“: older employees can get higher level earnings related unemployment benefits and then unemployment pension followed by regular pension. Therefore, prolonging working careers is still an issue in Finland. The labour market parties and the Finnish Government agreed on the prolongation of working careers by three years before 2025. In addition, an important training tool to prevent employees' work-related mental health problems and to promote their career management in organisational restructuring has been created: the „Towards Successful Seniority (TSS)“ method connects the goals of early prevention, work ability maintenance and personnel training. The method is meant to be implemented in the organisations through a collaboration between OHS and HR. In the TSS method, organisational measures and the preparation of the employees are put together to promote a functioning career management. The employees focus in groups on the identification of challenges, obstacles and solutions in their own work career and focus on behavioral control and motivation. On the organisation side, occupational health care and human resources units work together. The

career management focuses on proactivity of work and life goals, mental well-being, work engagement and motivation, as well as job retention and the reduction of sick-absences. A study carried out between 2006 and 2010 showed, that the TSS intervention increased significantly the career management preparedness and the number of work goals. In a longer term (7 months), the intervention decreased symptoms of depression, intentions to retire and increased mental resources. The group methods are now also applied to younger workers, since an increasing percentage of younger workers is disabled due to depression and other mental health problems. The Finnish study recommends to strengthen employees' career management during work-life transitions and in work organisations, since these measures have significant long-term beneficial effects on employees' careers and mental health. To reach these goals, OHS and other parties should evaluate their capabilities and preparedness for organisational restructuring of their customers and organisations should enhance the transfer of the valuable know-how of elderly employees to younger workers and should keep in mind the impact, that the treatment of older workers can have on the younger workers' vision of the company as a potential employer.

The third national report was presented by **Matt Flynn** (Middlesex University). The British research team prepared a literature review, including studies linking job insecurity to health, good practices found by EUROFOUND and UK good practices. The UK research focused further on discussions with social partners and a questionnaire survey of older workers. The research analysed the link between organisational restructuring and health and well-being. They found out that buffers to job loss are social capital, networks and knowledge, whilst cumulative effects of job loss are heart disease and psychological morbidity. Workers affected by restructuring are more likely to have accidents at work and have a higher risk of alcohol and substance abuse.

Although the current recession had a bigger impact on younger workers in the UK, older workers are affected by policy changes regarding retirement, like the closure of early retirement routes and public sector cuts. The actual retirement age is set with 65 years, but mandatory retirement will be abolished in 2012. There do exist some provisions for older workers, but many policies are not well implemented. A 2006 regulation on age discrimination and health and safety codes of practice should enhance the mental well-being of older workers, but there is still no code of practice on stress. Regulations on consultation obligations are weak, since in many cases trade unions are not recognised. State provided learning and training is limited.

The UK group analysed a survey in civil service including 115 respondents, among them privatised workforce, IT technicians, managers, administrative staff and support staff. All but six of the respondents have experienced at least one organisational change. The survey analysed the impact of restructuring on well-being. Most respondents affected by job-loss felt tired, physically fatigued and exhausted, worried about the future, lost their confidence and felt emotionally exhausted. There could be shown a clear association between restructuring and health and well-being, the emphasis should be set on adaptability, life-long learning, communications and flexibility.

The German research, presented by **Janine Dorsch** (BauA, Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) during the training session, analysed the risks of restructuring for employees. People affected by restructuring often experience powerlessness or are challenged by new job requirements and work intensification. They often miss professional development perspectives and experience a collapse of confidence in the company culture. Job insecurity then leads to stress. The research underlines, that restructuring can also bring new prospects for employees: they can be able to expand their professional personal competences or improve their professional positions. If one-sided stress and strain is prevented or compensated, restructuring can also lead to well-being. The German research included a case study on a semi-public bank with over 2000 employees. They questioned 234 employees and got 117 responses. The questioned employees were between 28 and 57 years old and could be split up in two groups: 72 employees built the younger and 45 employees

the older (over 50) group. 68% of the respondents were female. Most participants in the survey answered that their position in the company's hierarchy remained unchanged during various forms of organisational change, as well as their income and duration of the weekly working time. Most responded that their overall level of responsibility remained unchanged, but an also considerable percentage responded that it increased or decreased. Differences between younger and older workers are only marginal. Only a small percentage of the participants were provided with reskilling training during the restructuring, but most of the respondents experienced assistance and support by their co-workers. Concerning job security, younger employees tend to see problems to keep their job, older employees tend to see problems on the labour market. Many companies seem to underestimate the impact of changes, which for older employees often means physical and emotional exhaustion and for younger employees a loss of confidence and motivation. Therefore, companies should avoid lay-offs and implement a clear business communication. They should provide management training, further education and health measures during restructuring processes, motivation incentives for younger and older employees and evaluate the workload of employees who kept their job.

In Italy, according to the Quality of life survey (2003-2007), the levels of stress increase together with age. The survey also shows that Italian older workers often undertake uninspiring tasks and the number of bored workers is higher than the European average. Unemployment among older workers (45 to 64 years old) has almost tripled in the last 20 years. To meet these challenges, Italy has developed new strategies for training and life-long learning, as *Maria Giovannone* (Adapt) highlights. Lifelong learning should be a means for skills' maintenance and active inclusion in the labour market. Training must fit with the workers' age and training, knowledge and skills must be validated and effective. For this purposes, the use of a „training book of citizens“ was introduced by the Biagi Law in 2003. Mature workers could work as tutors for younger ones. The Guidelines on training (17 February 2010) suggest, that training shall include vulnerable workers, that training should be held on the job and must be addressed to the qualification or requalification. The Italian Consolidate Act on Occupational Health and Safety (2008) promotes a new approach to diversity management. In addition, the Consolidate Act offers new strategies for training of employers, workers and managers and special training on new risks (e.g. age-related risks, work-related stress and psychosocial risks. For the training, new technologies and new instruments for the validation of competencies and skills shall be used, OHS training shall be provided also in schools, Universities and educational institutions and training in SMEs shall be funded by public institutions. The issue of restructuring has been traditionally faced with early retirement strategies and collective dismissals. Today, other approaches are promoted to keep workers in employment during restructuring: part-time and fixed term contracts, as well as new forms of atypical labour contacts (access-to-work-contracts for workers aged over 55) in combination with the implementation of apprenticeship and VET schemes for younger workers. At the same time, the retirement age for women has been increased from 61 to 65 years and financial support for late retirement has been introduced.

The Italian study carried out empirical research, including questionnaires with 80 participants and 40 respondents from different sectors and from different parts of Italy. Over 90% of the workers experienced job loss. Most of them lamented, that information about the organisational change was very poor, as well as the career advice and personal re-qualification. Interviews with NGOs, Trade Unions, ISPESL, the Ministry of Labour and Confindustria showed, that social dialogue and consultation of workers' representatives in risk assessment and training should be enforced, validated instruments to work related stress assessment should be used. The assessment should be carried out through checklists and individual questionnaires for deep analysis. Only Confindustria militated against individual questionnaires and prefers objective checklists for the assessment.

Three case studies, which were included in the Italian research, show companies efforts to include

mature workers in consultation and industrial relation systems in the process of restructuring.

Kurt Schmid from the Austrian partner of the elders project (ibw) presented data for Austria from a survey concerning work related health problems in a comparative perspective (EWCS 2005). This analysis shows that about 1/3 of Austrian employees report work related health problems, mainly backache, muscular pains and stress. Half of the employees moan about high working intensity, whilst only one in three employees reports monotonous and repetitive tasks. One in ten employees over 50 has personally experienced age discrimination, which is the fourth highest share of 32 European countries. For elders, the Austrian research team carried out an explorative survey of 59 employees over 50 in companies which have experienced restructuring and who have activities with respect to health provision. The organisational changes made by these companies regarded mostly the management-system, the hierarchy, the separation and merger of working units and only rarely closures and dismissals. In these restructuring processes, employees experienced changes of working tasks and superiors or co-workers. For 20 to 30% of the employees, position, working time, income and responsibility increased, for the rest it remained mostly unchanged. The assessment of the management during the restructuring process was good, half of the employees was well informed and got support. The survey also showed that the stronger the effect of the changes was on work, the more positive the changes were received. Nevertheless, the stronger the impact of changes was, the higher was the degree of emotional exhaustion. The emotional exhaustion is lower though, where the changes are assessed positively and a better communication of the change process takes place.

Concerning training of older workers, data show that the probability for vocational training participation decreases significantly for older workers (over 55). Nevertheless, companies consider training as important until retirement. Reasons for lower training participation of older employees are, that training for this group of employees doesn't pay off or because employees think their higher experience is sufficient. Many older employees are afraid of failures or they simply aren't motivated.

Conclusions

All participating national experts reported that they had difficulties to find companies for case studies, since the management of older workers is usually part of the general diversity management, but is not a specific concern of companies at the moment. The researchers all agreed that special policies for older employees in restructuring processes are missing in most of the countries and training tools for this special group of employees are necessary.