

Press Release

"Don't order temp workers like stationery"

The crisis can be overcome with flexible staffing, advises the Institute for Employment and Employability

London – July 21, 2009. "In times of economic instability and uncertainty, temporary staff is vital for a company's success." With this statement made during an Adecco Institute interview, Professor Jutta Rump, the Director of the Institute for Employment and Employability, refuted the common conception that temporary staffing is only beneficial during economic upswings.

Rump was disappointed that only few companies take up state offers of short-time work in combination with further training programmes. She called it essential to prevent companies from participating in state-offered schemes simply to receive subsidies.

Regarding the near future, Rump warned against premature hopes: "We shouldn't fool ourselves. The longer the current crisis lasts, the more frequent redundancies will become. This sword of Damocles is over our heads."

The scientist therefore urged entrepreneurs to foster a "dedicated and qualified work force" during the crisis rather than resorting to layoffs immediately. It might even be beneficial to hire highly qualified temp staff to work on projects for which the core staff lack the skills. Once a project, such as the introduction of a new product, has been implemented, the existing staff can take over the newly created routine tasks. The highly qualified temp workers can be used in further projects or be passed on to the next customer.

Such "mixed teams" of core and temp staff can boost companies' speed and flexibility, thereby keeping them in balance. Rump: "That is true during economic booms just as much as during crises."

To achieve such a future-oriented HR management, permanent and temporary staff need to be sufficiently qualified. Forming "strategic alliances" between companies and temp work agencies is therefore imperative. The agencies must become their customers' "sparring partners" and be integrated into their strategic planning.

This ideal solution is far from today's reality. On the one hand, companies need to change their attitudes towards temporary staffing. Rather than "ordering temp workers through the purchasing department just like stationery", temp staff needs to be recruited by HR. On the other hand, the concept of temporary staffing needs an image makeover.

In any economic situation and cycle, flexibility is a key reason for choosing temporary staffing. During upswings temp work agencies can provide additional staff quickly, during downturns flexible work terms can keep companies alive, and in the long-term strategic perspective, temporary staffing is a tool for proactive HR management.

For employees, the German system of temp work offers both flexibility and security. Unlike in other European countries, where temp staff is hired and fired, German temp workers generally have a regular, non-temporary work contract with their agency.

Rump advised companies that are coping well with the crisis to use the slump to go on a "labour market shopping spree". According to recent surveys conducted by her Ludwigshafen based institute, companies can currently attract highly qualified and dedicated staff who might not be freely available during upswings.

The survey also revealed that many companies are using the crisis to create a spirit of community among staff and management. According to Rump, a sense of identity is emerging.

The institute has published its survey of 350 companies, entitled "HR management in times of crisis" on its website www.fh-lu.de/ibe.

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About the Adecco Institute

The Adecco Institute, founded in 2006 and based in London, is a think tank on the future of work; it is committed to facilitating discussions on the topic of work. Through primary and secondary research as well as white papers and forums for discussion, the Adecco Institute provides forward-looking approaches to help companies and economies raise employability, productivity and employee satisfaction at work. www.adeccoinstitute.com

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