

Improving lifelong learning – a toolbox for companies, employees and institutions

Adecco Institute White Paper
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About the Adecco Institute

The Adecco Institute, initiated by the Adecco founder Klaus J. Jacobs in 2006 and chaired by the former German Federal Minister of Economics and Labour Wolfgang Clement, is an independent research body and think tank on the future of work.

Based in London, the Adecco Institute is committed to facilitating discussions on the broad topic of work and how work has an impact on society and all of its stakeholders, from politicians and academics to employers, unions and employees. Through primary and secondary research, conferences and events, the institute provides a forward-looking and fact-based perspective on innovative approaches to help raising employability, productivity and employee satisfaction at work.

Adecco's worldwide reach enriches the institute's views. With over 6,600 offices in more than 70 countries and territories, and managing a workforce of over four million individuals each year, every day Adecco employees face economic and demographic realities that both challenge and foster clients' business goals.

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About Jacobs University

Jacobs University is a private, independent university, registered as a not-for-profit organisation. The primary language of instruction and campus communication is English. It was founded in 1999 and is located in the city-state of Bremen, Germany. It received full accreditation by the Wissenschaftsrat (German Science and Humanities Council) in 2001.

Enrolment in 2008/09 totalled 1,201 undergraduate and graduate students (representing 92 nations) with all undergraduates living in colleges on campus. Teaching is provided by 114 professors plus 194 research and instructional personnel in natural sciences and engineering, social sciences and humanities. Students are accepted for study on the basis of their academic qualifications, not their ability to pay.

This white paper summarises the results of a project funded by the Adecco Institute and conducted at the Jacobs Center on Lifelong Learning and Institutional Development at Jacobs University, co-authored by Stefan Baron, Christian Stamov Rosnagel and Klaus Schömann.

www.jacobs-university.de

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Executive summary

With this white paper the Adecco Institute gives a new impetus to the implementation of lifelong learning beyond the Lisbon targets, which were set for 2010. In cooperation with the Jacobs Center on Lifelong Learning and Institutional Development, a multidisciplinary perspective on lifelong learning has been chosen to stimulate the debate on how to bring new dynamics into the European training landscape. For this purpose results from cognitive sciences and social sciences were put together to yield a fresh perspective on the “evergreen”-topic of lifelong learning.

One of Europe’s core challenges in the 21st century is an improved integration of older employees into the labour market, just as much as taking care of its youth. This, however, can only work if substantial efforts are made to increase further training of older workers and those with low levels of skills in general. The ageing of the workforce and the predictable lack of skilled labour creates an increasing need for workplace training during the whole life course. This concerns employees just as much as companies, as only a small share of companies consider older employees as interested in training. Prevailing negative age stereotypes, which have little scientific substance, deter employees and companies from continued training investment. The white paper identifies five key areas for action:

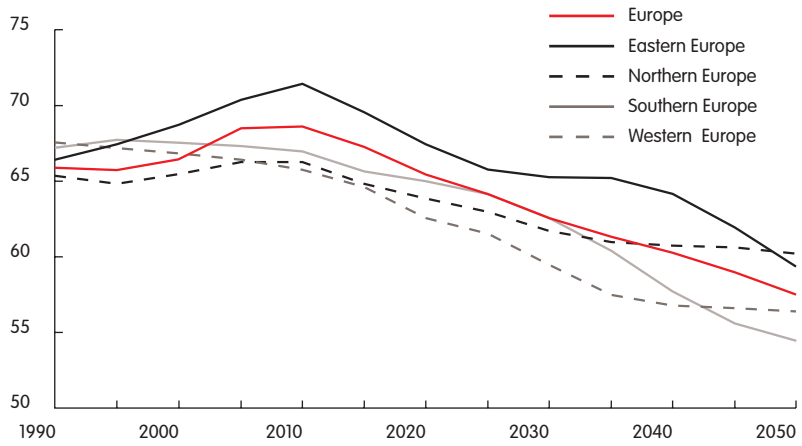
1. Training should be mainly learner-led. This strengthens the motivation for learning efforts and becomes more important with increasing age. The direct involvement of employees in identifying skill needs is a key to fostering motivation.
2. Improving the learning climate in a company is not costly, but it shows significant positive effects on all persons involved.
3. A stimulating working and learning environment facilitates informal learning in a company. Silver workers rely in high numbers on this type of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge transfer from young to old employees as much as from old to young employees depends on the working environment.
4. Learning accounts are an excellent tool to encourage individuals, firms, whole sectors or countries to an investment in human capital. A European level solution similar to the Erasmus programme is conceivable.
5. Partnership approaches like public private partnerships have the potential to improve the link between companies in regional clusters or of large and small firms for training purposes – for the benefit of all actors and learners.

By successfully implementing lifelong learning practices, companies can gain a competitive advantage. To achieve this, cooperation must be deepened between multiple actors: between young and old, employees and companies, and institutionally among the regional, national and European level. We are going to move the boat forward only if all parties involved row in the same direction.

Consequences of Lisbon and Copenhagen: train the ageing workforce

Demographic change creates an additional need for further training of older employees, which in the past have not been the main target group. Over the past five years the share of the population aged 55–64 grew at around 1.3 % per year, whereas the share of the working population has constantly decreased. All forecasts predict a continuation of this development, and the figure below gives an impression of the working population prospects for the next 20 years in different European regions. In this time the share of the working population within the total population will decrease by around 9 % – with consequences for companies in terms of lacking skilled labour, and for employees in terms of a longer work life time.

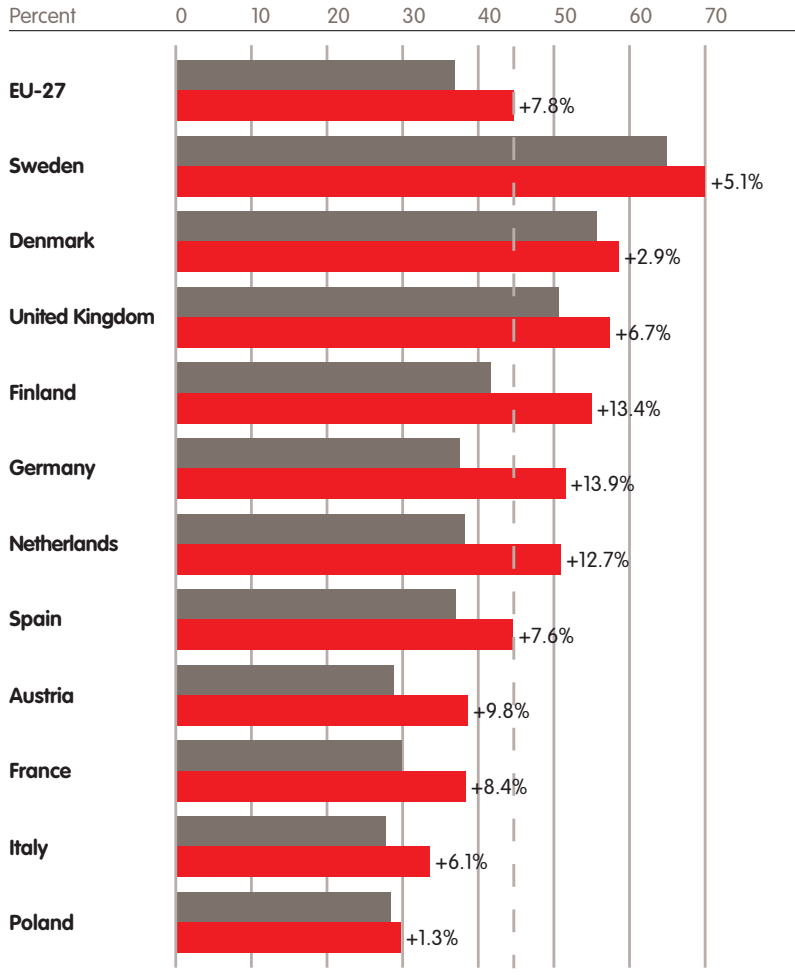
Population prospects for the European Union, population aged 15-64 years (1990-2050)



Source: United Nations Population Division: World Population Prospects. The 2008 Revision Population Database. The regions are defined according the United Nations data base (<http://esa.un.org/unpp/index.asp?panel=5>)

National and European authorities already reacted to this development. During the past decade, national employment rates improved slightly in terms of the employment of older workers. Between 2000 and 2007 the employment rate of the age group 55–64 years increased by around 8 % in the EU-27 and reached an average level of 44.7 %. Sweden (70.0 %) and Denmark (58.6 %) showed the highest rates, and with nearly 14 % the employment rate of older workers has increased faster in Germany than anywhere else. Today, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries have already reached the goal of an employment rate of 50 % among workers above 55 years.

**Employment rates for older employees (55–64 years),
2000 and 2007**

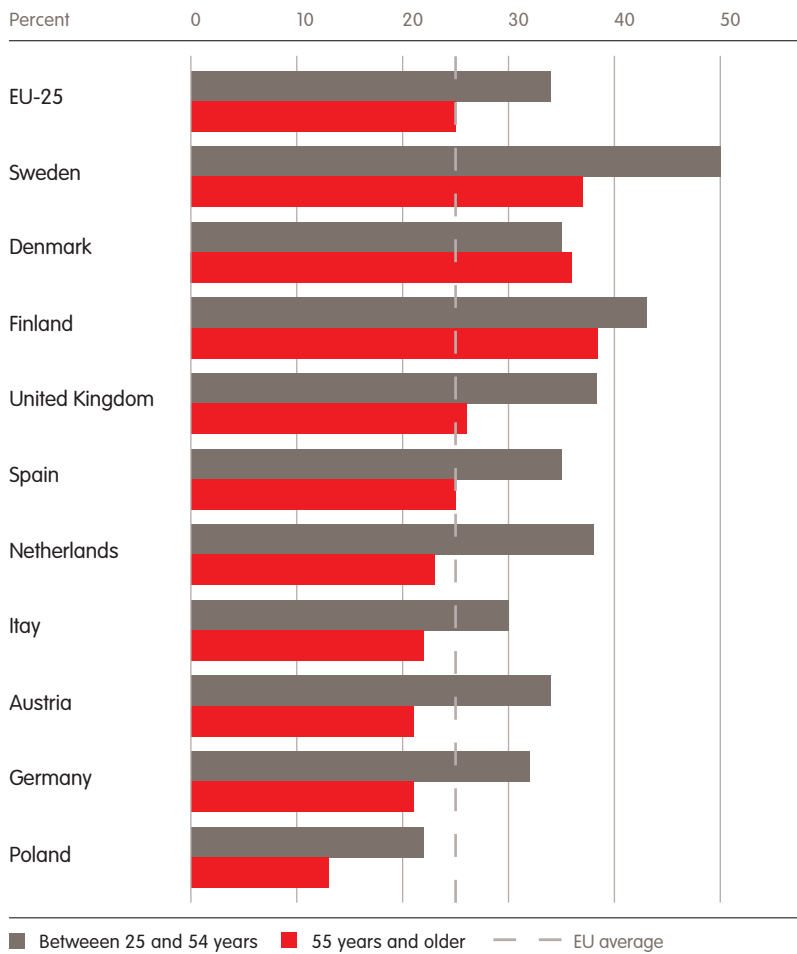


Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey (LFS) ■ 2000 ■ 2007 — — EU average

These figures are in large part attributable to the fact that early retirement is not as common anymore as it was in the 1990s. Whether the positive development of the employment rates among older workers is in fact a result of the political targets rather than just a result of positive labour market conditions during the past years might be verified by the current developments in light of the economic crisis. In any case, as demographic change is an empirical fact, further and more substantial improvements in the employment of older workers are strongly needed. Thus, there is a growing need for a continuous update of knowledge and capabilities, and therefore a need for improvements in lifelong learning not only in the first third of the career, but during the entire working life.

This issue has been on Europe’s agenda for several years, starting with Jaques Delors’ 1993 white paper on growth, competitiveness and employment entitled: “The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century”. It moved into the focus of European labour market policy in 2000, when the European Council passed the action and development plan of the Lisbon Agenda. The Agenda encloses targets for the employment of older workers and defines the ambitious aim of an employment rate of 50 % among people above 55 years. Two years later, the European ministers of vocational education and training released the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development on enhanced European cooperation in vocational training and education. In 2004 the European Council identified non-formal and informal learning as key areas for making lifelong learning a concrete reality.

Percentages of employees participating in CVT courses, by age (2005)



Despite these developments, currently most countries fall behind in further training activities, especially when it comes to older people. In several European countries large discrepancies between labour market and training participation rates for older employees can be observed. In the 25 member states of the European Union on average only 25 % of employees aged 55 – 64 participated in further training in 2005, while it was 34 % across the entire working population. As the figure indicates, the Nordic EU members and the United Kingdom performed above the European average, all other countries' participation rates of older employees lag behind. In Germany only 21 % participated in further training courses, in Italy it were 22 %, and in Greece only 7 % participated.

Hence, participation rates in further training have to be strengthened across all age groups. The results dramatically highlight the strong need for improved training activities well beyond middle adulthood – lifelong learning must be taken literally and educational opportunities made available throughout a career. But just an improvement in either the employers' perspective or the employees' sight is not sufficient for a sustainable increase in participation rates. Policy programmes have to match employers' and employees' needs and consider interests of special focus groups, like older employees. Furthermore, training needs and strategies of the companies have to be linked with employees' training needs, their motivation and their individual learning competencies. It is credible but by no means sufficient to enforce single initiatives. In the light of demographic change and a worsening of skill shortages in the next years, strategies involving employers, employees and politics must be developed.

In just a few years, difficulties in finding young and highly skilled employees will emerge. Older workers will have to work for longer, a development for which they need to be prepared adequately. Employers should rethink their concepts of older employees and offer more training to them – a step that would be beneficial for both sides because it is usually easier to train the existing workforce than to "grow" a new highly skilled workforce. Whilst the latter can take years to achieve, ongoing training for existing employees can be integrated into everyday working life.

Furthermore, in the current economic crisis a lack of skilled labour might not be the main striking topic for companies, but with the next economic upswing, difficulties in finding (young) qualified employees will be even more severe and result in restrictions for growth. Hence, to ensure their success and a sufficient supply of skilled employees in a more competitive labour market, firms should not only try to maintain their current employees, they should also rethink their concepts of the capabilities of older employees, for example the preconception that older workers might be inflexible, slow or less creative. Older workers are just as good as young people if they are trained properly. Therefore offering training to employees beyond middle adulthood is imperative and beneficial for both employees and employers.

On the other side, employees are asked for a change in their expectations: Considering the upcoming demographic change, globalisation and the pressure of a lack of skilled labour, early retirement will be more and more of an exception. Working until 67 years – and in future probably even longer – will be the norm. This gives a new impetus for employees aged fifty and beyond to re-invest in their skills. Politics must provide an environment that prevents the now ageing baby boomer generation from becoming the ‘lost generation’ in tomorrow’s labour market.

It is an often stated argument that these days many older employees see no benefit in further training after they have reached a certain age, because they are close to retirement, and further training seems to be less important. We will show later that this argument is only partially true, but research in an interdisciplinary project on demography (Demopass) at Jacobs University showed¹, that in the mean, employees aged 55 years plus have longer training periods than their younger colleagues. This does not mean that older employees participate less in training than their younger colleagues. They simply participated earlier in their work life, and have as such, already completed vast amounts of training. However, with retirement ages constantly rising, employees need to re-think: At 55, most still have one quarter of their work life ahead of them and therefore should re-invest into their skills set and learning capabilities.

Overcome barriers for lifelong learning

There are various barriers that one needs to overcome when trying to increase the participation of older employees in training programmes or to strengthen their ability to successfully complete training. It is important to identify those barriers in order to develop strategies to overcome age segmentation.

The first barrier is the ‘employees’ learning motivation’. Although the reasons given by older employees as to why they would participate in training programmes did not significantly differ from young workers’ responses, older workers generally do not perceive their remaining work life as a prolonged period worth investing into. The second barrier is ‘low support and encouragement’ for older workers to engage in a learning process. Common stereotypes are that older employees are inflexible and incapable of learning. It must be clearly emphasised however that the capability to learn and to adapt to new circumstances does not depend on age but merely on establishing or maintaining a routine in those areas. A person who has never stopped learning will still be very capable of doing so regardless of age, and a person who has not been required to learn over an extended period of time can re-build their learning capacity. The third barrier for improvement of participation rates in further training is ‘the size of the organisation’. While continuous provision of training is often not that

¹ For more information please see www.jacobs-university.de/demopass.

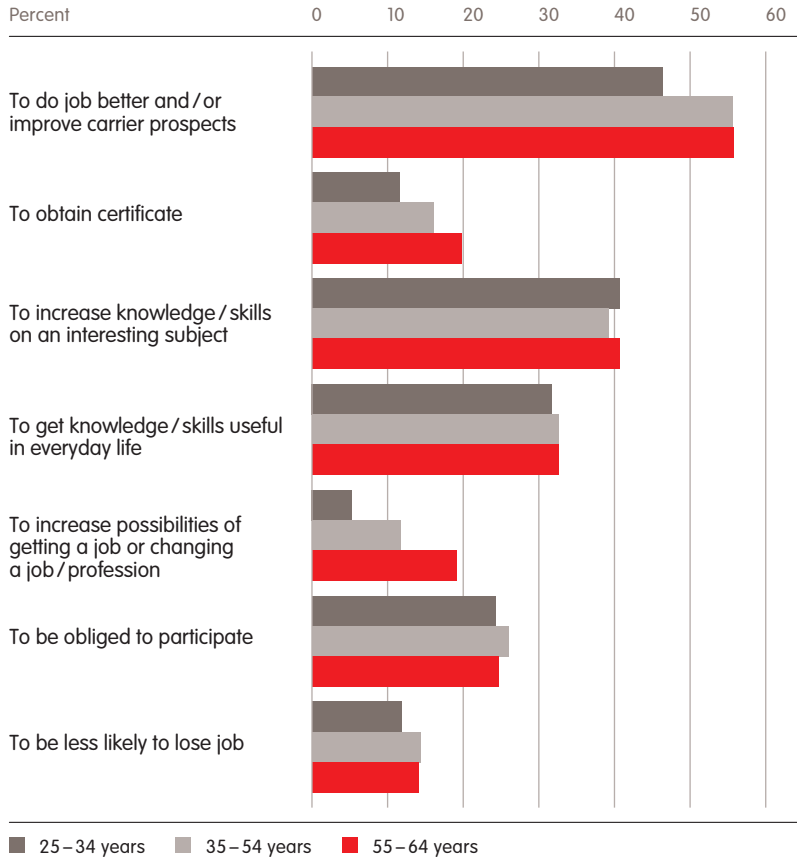
challenging for larger companies, small and also medium sized enterprises often lack time, financial endowment or simply the space to do so.

Employees' learning motivation

The first barrier to improved participation rates in further training is often the employee himself/herself. As previously mentioned, it is often argued that older employees have a lower willingness to learn and therefore to participate in regular training. They have often already reached the highest step in their career and therefore do not see any reason for additional training. They furthermore expect to have only a 'short' time perspective to actually benefit from training in light of their retirement. But again, a working horizon of five to ten years is not as short as some people might suggest – in fact it does not differ from the normal job tenure of the younger working population.

It is then a bit surprising that in the valuation of potential further training benefits, older employees do not deviate from their younger colleagues, although actual participation rates differ. Of course, older employees have normally already obtained many certificates and do not plan job changes, but in many other choices for further training there are no age differences. Nearly 50 percent of older employees would participate in further training to improve job abilities and career prospects, and in all three age groups around 40 percent of employees would participate in further training to increase knowledge and skills on an interesting subject.

**Reasons for participation in continuous vocational training
by age groups (2005)**



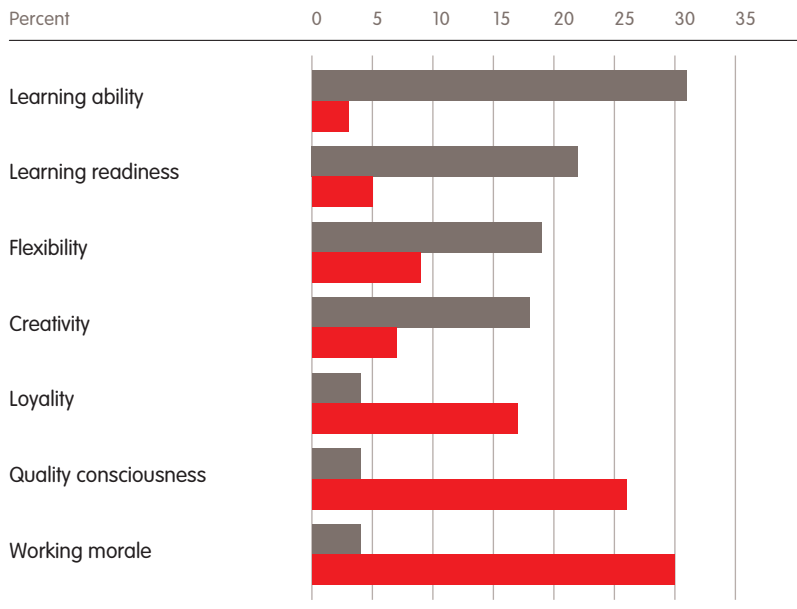
From the employees' perspective, the most important barrier might be the fact that the period since their last learning experience is quite long. Up to 30 years after their initial training and in many cases several years after their last further training, older employees have often "unlearned" to learn. Individuals can lose their learning abilities and knowledge over time, and they often develop a growing fear of learning and they feel less confident in their own training competencies. In many cases they just require more support and some encouragement by their direct supervisors and /or the management team.

Training support for the ageing workforce

A training-oriented working climate and clear signals about the importance of further training, can contribute to the improvement of individual willingness to participate in further training. Recent research at Jacobs University showed that the perception that supervisors who support training can help to strengthen employees' confidence in their training competencies, which is an important precondition for future participation in further training. A lack of support as well as age stereotypes in the company represent the third barrier for improved participation.

In today's working environment, there are widespread stereotypes about older employees, which are partly rooted in the popular belief that most cognitive abilities show linear decline with age: Older employees are perceived to learn slowly, be inflexible, possess insufficient computer skills, or show poor training performance. Data on this topic is rare however the IAB establishment survey gives some insight into company expectations. While employers expect higher flexibility (19 %), learning ability (31 %) and creativity (18 %) from younger employees, they assume higher working morale (30 %), quality consciousness (26 %), and loyalty (17 %) for older employees.

Persistence of age stereotypes in companies



Source: IAB-Establishment Panel 2002 ■ Younger employees ■ Older employees

How much truth is there in these stereotypes? The results from life span research show that the majority of healthy older adults improve their performance just by passing a few sessions of task-related training. However, employers have to keep in mind that many older employees are affected by a reduced speed of information reception, a reduced ability to react, reduced mobility and a decreased capacity to perform jobs under time pressure – all skills that fall under the headline of fluid intelligence. On the other hand, they generally have a higher degree of the so-called crystallised intelligence, like work experience, wisdom, discernment and a higher capability for integrative thinking. Results from neuroscience show that learning capability does not decrease by age but mainly by lack of practice. As long as the brain is trained continuously, learning is possible throughout one's entire life.

Throughout their development, people appear to follow the principles of selection, optimisation, and compensation: they select their strongest areas of intellectual functioning, optimise performance in these areas by training and practice, and compensate for age-related losses by using alternative strategies or abandoning once-pursued goals. Hence, employers have to react with special training programmes for their older employees. Age-differentiated training might help to maintain training competency across work life, enabling workers to flexibly adapt to changing requirements, thus providing them with more control over their own work.

Firm size

It is an empirically well documented fact that the general participation rate in training programmes increases with the size of a company. While in 2005 only 12 % of employees in small firms with less than 20 staff participated in further training, 32 % of employees in large companies with more than 1000 employees did so. This is not too surprising because – as data from the Continuous Vocational Training Survey (CVTS3) shows – only 37 % of small firms offered further training courses, but 95 % of all companies with 1.000 and more employees did so.

There is of course a large variety among smaller firms, and a significant part of small firms are highly active in further training. On the other hand, there are large enterprises underperforming in this field. In many cases however, small and medium-sized firms do not have the time and personnel resources to provide training courses internally. A high workload and a wide responsibility of employees in small firms are some of the reasons against their participation in external training courses. Even the participation of just one or two workers in an external training could result in a severe loss of productivity for a small business. This is one of the main reasons for the fact that small and medium sized companies often switch to more

informal forms of learning like staff meetings, self-learning, quality circles or job-rotation. These methods of training are often more suitable for older employees, because they allow for more flexibility and self-determination, can consider special needs of an ageing workforce (whereas external training often applies to all age groups), take place in a familiar work context, and have normally no formal curriculum.²

A Toolbox to strengthen lifelong learning

Demographic change and an ageing workforce highlight the need for further training along the entire career path of employees. Skills required by companies alter during an individual's career, and therefore these skills have to be adapted continuously. In our knowledge society which is characterised by accelerating processes of economic and technological change, the skill set of the labour force is the main driver of economic growth. This is especially significant in times of economic crisis – firms with trained, motivated and productive employees have a competitive advantage on the market. In the past this resulted in a dilemma that older employees ran a higher risk of remaining in jobs with old or out of date technology, whereas companies with a higher share of younger employees were (and still are) more likely to introduce new technologies than companies with older workers. But in the near future this situation will change. Some industrial sectors already have a lack of skilled labour; and with the coming economic upswing the "war of talents" between different employers will be strengthened.

Companies can improve their chances in a competitive labour market by relying on their older employees who have lengthy work experience, show high quality in their work, and have high motivation and often a stronger company commitment than their younger colleagues. Despite being regarded as old, they often still have several years, sometimes more than a decade, or in other words, one fourth of their work life, until retirement. Therefore, companies can benefit from investing in their skills – perhaps more than from the investments into younger employees who are more flexible and willing to change their employers.

² It is important to note that due to the various forms of informal training, the actual training situation of older employees might be a bit better than sketched out in the statistics, because not every reading of a job-related journal or exchange of ideas with colleagues is counted as training. In fact, many older employees consider this as an everyday natural action rather than an act of learning.

Positive working environment for all age groups

Everything in the course of life is a reflection of the goals, resources and norms of a given society. Older employees' learning competency may decline for several reasons; however a decline is to a large extent the result of changes in their motivation rather than 'real' cognitive changes. Although employees themselves have a certain responsibility for their capabilities, skills and knowledge, companies are the main stakeholders in increasing participation rates in lifelong learning. They have both the knowledge of the actual training needs, and knowledge about training resources currently available – both of these are crucial for an improvement in lifelong learning participation rates.

A positive overall training climate and supervision of training success are of specific importance for older employees. Companies have the capability to promote and design a working and learning environment which requires and supports learning competency and excludes any age-discrimination and social pressure or other reasons preventing older workers from participating in training. Companies can benefit from age-diverse personnel if they follow some crucial advice:

1. Companies have to create a supportive working environment, which allows for the learning of a variety of job-related tasks and offers different challenges, as well as having a positive atmosphere with supportive communication and cooperation. Training demands should complement existing competencies and the current performance of employees; the learning situation should always be relevant to employees' real-life work situations.
2. Companies have to adapt their training provisions to the needs of their workforce, which explicitly includes meeting age-specific needs, e.g. by adjusting the learning speed or choosing age-appropriate learning strategies. Employees not used to learning – a deficiency which is often found in older employees – frequently ask for extended time frames and more flexible training. This is because their training speed is often below the speed of (usually younger) frequent learners. Classical classroom situations should also be avoided when older employees are involved.
3. It is important to combine core competencies of older employees with specific capabilities of their younger colleagues through age diverse working groups. Not only mixing teams in daily work, but also joint training sessions can strengthen the transferral of inter-generational knowledge
4. Employees need goals for their individual development. Since traditional vertical careers are restricted in numbers, horizontal careers can be worthwhile paths of development providing value for both companies and employees.

5. It is strongly recommended to obtain standardized feedback on the quality of the learning environment on a regular basis. A continuous evaluation of the working and learning environment through employees is an important step towards an age-differentiated workplace.

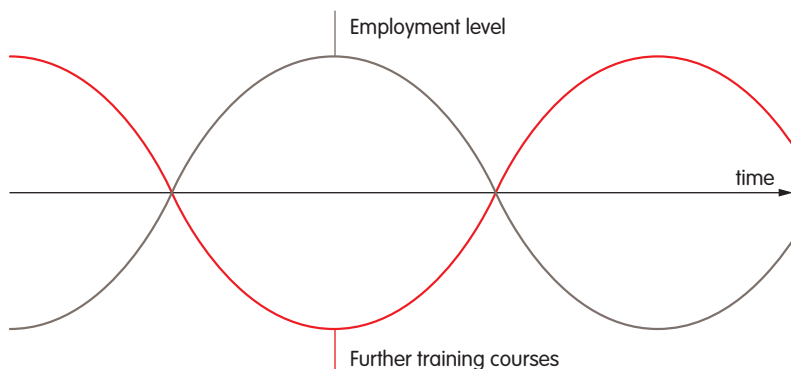
Ensuring accessibility to further training in the economic cycle

The current economic crisis brings with it the chance to make up for previous years in which further training was often neglected, and to qualify employees for upcoming tasks. In the previous boom phase many companies provided insufficient training opportunities because they could not afford to have workers miss days of work while the order books were full. Results from the continuous vocational training survey (CVTS-3) show that with 32 %, time constraints were the most significant reason why companies put off training opportunities.

With the economic crisis and the substantial reduction of orders, the conditions have changed. Time is not a scarcity, and in principle is more readily available. However, in times when entire industries are fighting for their survival, financial restrictions are an obvious reason why companies are against enhanced training provisions – many companies would have to choose between training and bankruptcy. Those companies who can afford introducing short-time work and /or other forms of additional leisure time instead of direct dismissals do this with the knowledge that they will desperately need their qualified and experienced employees during the next upswing. As long as they can afford it, it would be advisable to use some of the extra time at hand for extensive further training.

A very efficient form of managing lifelong learning and an effective tool for HR development are learning accounts. In a token system, employees are able to participate in a set number of training units per year. If training cannot be held due to economic growth and the resulting time constraints, staff can save their tokens and use them at a later stage when falling levels of production allow more time for training and further development. This however is not only complex in organising but also to appropriately finance. An adequate support of companies through highly interlinked public-private-partnerships involving companies, training providers and employment services can increase flexibility and quality in training. The figure below illustrates the idea of such an anti-cyclical further training policy.

Anti-cyclical further Training



Based on: Lassen, Morton, J. H. Soerensen, A. L. Joergensen (2006). Employment Growth, Qualificational Change and Inclusion of Unskilled Workers. IIRA Conference Paper.

Nevertheless, training participation rates are highly segmented between different groups. Whereas younger male employees with higher qualifications are quite likely to participate in further training, older employees and those with lower educational level show disproportionately lower participation rates. In an economic downturn, these segmentations are expected to aggravate. Those from the latter group are usually the first to lose their jobs or to shift into early retirement if they are not supported appropriately. European and national programs should provide additional help to support their survival in the labour market during the current crisis.

The European Social Fund promotes further training to prevent and anticipate unemployment; it supports reforms that make training more relevant to employers' needs and to make people more employable. A further example is the contribution to further training costs during short-time work the German Federal Employment Agency, as part of the German stimulus programme. From the governmental side, income tax deductions and training vouchers can supplement training efforts.

Regional training cooperation

Finally, a special focus must be laid on small and medium sized enterprises, not only because the European economy is in large part driven by employees in such companies. Hence, these enterprises' responsiveness to evolving economic and labour needs is a key focus in modernising education and training systems. While large companies often have sufficient resources and capabilities to organize further training continuously for their employees, smaller firms

often have problems to provide this appropriately. Matching individual training needs might be feasible for large companies; however this can be a big challenge for smaller enterprises.

Regional networks can help to strengthen further training participation, whereas national or European structures often do not match regional needs. Regional networks integrating small and medium sized firms' requirements and bundling efforts in joint training cooperation are the key to a successful and sustainable system of further training. When supported by regional labour market and training authorities, trade unions, employers' associations and training providers these public private partnerships can be even more effective. However, while regional stakeholders have the common goal of improving lifelong learning, they often differ in the specific purposes of their programmes. In networks, organising and channelling divergent interests should therefore be institutionalized appropriately.

Such networks – if successful – can provide benefits for all partners involved, however, such co-operations are also highly demanding for all partners: First and foremost, the participants must trust each other. The network must be based on non-hierarchical, smooth and direct cooperation, high flexibility and an open range of services, intensive exchange, openness to external feedback, and a good flow of information. They are at continuous risk of a mismatch of interests, general scepticism, financial problems, and last but not least time management problems and workload. A coherent policy framework should therefore define the responsibilities of each partner and define procedures for dialogue.

Conclusion and recommendations

Lifelong learning is one of the biggest challenges in the labour market of the 21st century – for individuals, for companies, and for society as a whole. We urgently need to tackle the issue with consistent and bold actions rather than with empty pleas. The success of any strategy addressing demographic ageing in forthcoming years depends on substantial improvements in the participation rates of older workers, particularly those beyond 55 years. A precondition to assuring their integration into the labour market is to retain and develop their employability through their acquirement of up-to-date skills. To build these skills, lifelong learning must become normality, and three main barriers have to be overcome.

First, the motivation to learn needs to be fostered wherever possible, within the work context and beyond. Second, age stereotypes about learning are widely spread, but there is no significant scientific evidence to support this. Silver workers learn more and can be more focussed than their younger colleagues with clearer orientation on applications. Learning to learn programmes assist older people just

as much as young people with low levels of general education to re-enter the world of learning. Third, the size of the company largely determines access and availability to further training.

We developed a toolbox to strengthen lifelong learning through the following measures:

1. Training should mainly be learner-led. A successful lifelong learning policy needs to pay much more attention to improving individual learning competencies. Since lifelong learning is often informal, distributed across time and takes place in different contexts, a lifelong learning policy needs to build the basic skills required for an individual to participate in training. To overcome a lack of motivation for learning, the direct involvement of employees in identifying skill needs is a key to fostering motivation. Similarly, employees and employers should select appropriate age-sensitive training strategies and evaluate learning progress accordingly.
2. Improving the learning climate starts with systematically including silver workers in the planning of training activities. This is a first step towards overcoming pervasive age stereotypes regarding learning. Particularly at times when the hiring of new employees is difficult, the average age of employees in a company will naturally rise. Moreover, there is no clear cut between a 'younger' and an 'older' employee: Some employees aged 55+ still participate regularly in training, whereas colleagues who are 20 years younger have already stopped participating. Training programmes also need to include the age group of middle-aged employees, which otherwise would be at a disadvantage in years to come. In fact, all age groups will benefit from an improved learning climate. Direct supervisors and management will need to take their role as mentors or coaches in learning more seriously. They have a frequently underestimated role in counteracting age stereotypes and in creating a favourable learning climate.
3. A positive working and learning environment facilitates informal learning in a company. Silver workers are likely to rely on this type of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge transfer between age groups depends on the working environment. Learning through knowledge exchange needs to be given adequate time and esteem from line managers and overall management, to be effective.
4. Learning accounts can be applied to individuals, firms, whole sectors or countries. Such learning accounts allow for anti-cyclical further training, with positive effects specifically in periods of low economic growth. In some sectors or businesses, booming periods did not allow to free-up employees from urgent tasks for further training, but in this current economic climate, this argument is not valid any more.
5. Improving links between companies can lead to new training opportunities.

Public private partnerships are a promising approach to operating joint learning centres. These partnership approaches between companies, for example of large and small firms in regional clusters, can overcome the “too small to organise training” excuse. Cooperation between companies, local schools and voluntary associations create stimulating opportunities for formal and informal learning.

In this current difficult economic situation, public programmes can additionally support companies and employees in their training efforts and increase job security for later periods. Training now means getting ready for the next period of economic growth with a motivated and well-trained work force. Investing into lifelong learning is surely better than financing unemployment or early retirement.