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Future Strategies for Ageing Management in the Working World of Salzburg Province

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Purpose

The projected demographic change and the resulting necessity of a longer working life represent considerable challenges for (1) the individual quality of life and work of employees, (2) the innovative capacity and productivity of companies and (3) the negotiability of the welfare state. As its goal, the foresight project set out to analyse the concrete situation and development potential of the working world in the Province of Salzburg and depict the options for taking action at the micro-level (individual), meso-level (organisations) and macro-level (socio-political actors) in the form of scenarios. The project placed particular emphasis on transferring research results into practice.

Demographic Change in Salzburg Province

As in all of Europe, Salzburg Province also conforms to the population development trend that has been evident now for decades: a rising number of older people in retirement in contrast to a consistently sinking number of younger people of employment age. Because of this, a longer term of employment is required in order to secure the social systems and to maintain economic strength.

Simultaneously, the employment-related difficulties are increasing for those in the workforce, for instance, through more rapid and increasingly complex work processes, time pressure or the devaluation of professional qualifications over time. In addition, a lack of professional specialists is expected, which is heightened further by the demographic development.

In order to meet the challenges arising from the change in population structures and the workforce, it is important to become proactive and take determined measures in a timely fashion.

In research and politics, the need for action is recognised in principle; however, there are deficits in implementing large-scale and in-depth problem-solving options in practice. Therefore, the project begins with sensitising and supporting actors in implementing age management in the working world.

Flaws in Existing Concepts

Existing concepts...

... neglect the holistic perspective, are attentive exclusively to the target group of employees who are already older at present, and focus only on certain fields of action;

... do not give enough attention to individual actors whose interests often contradict each other and result from short-term thinking;

... presuppose that companies have a certain resource potential. These concepts are therefore not suitable to the general conditions of the smaller companies characteristic of Salzburg Province.

In addition, many actors appear to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the problem and the numerous recommendations of how to tackle it. They often react to



this by postponing necessary measures or even refusing to take action.

A Holistic View on Ageing in the Working World

Against this background, a two-part project structure emerged. First of all, it was important to grasp the specific situation in Salzburg Province in a basic research phase and to analyse the developmental stages to be expected in each of the topic areas and fields of action at the different societal levels (individuals, organisations, socio-political actors) that are significant for the further development of the regional labour market. Parallel to this, the project sought to identify the factors so far preventing employment appropriate for an ageing workforce. A further emphasis of this research phase was how age management concepts should be conceived for small companies to be able to apply them.

On the other hand, the focus was placed on attempts to put the research findings into practice in an implementation-oriented transfer phase. Particular attention was paid to the enterprise and branch structure of Salzburg Province. The transfer phase involved an awareness-raising process regarding age management in the working world. The target groups here were both the companies as well as their employees – from the apprentice on up to the senior employee.

The aim of the project "Future Strategies for Ageing Management in the Working World of Salzburg Province" is to set impulses for a working world in which companies facilitate the work capabilities of employees and societal structures are created to enable longer employment with a high quality of work life for everyone. In the process, it is important to take the diverse fields of action into consideration that together form a working world appropriate to ageing (Fig. 1).

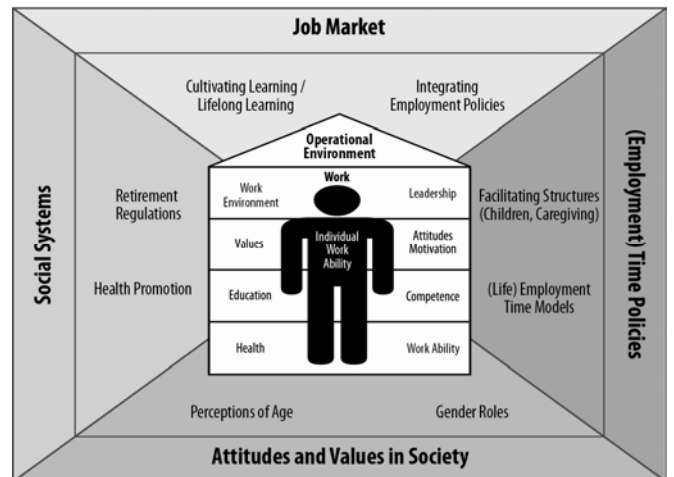


Fig. 1: Expanded and adapted model of the “House of Work Ability” according to Ilmarinen and Tempel

Innovations for Demographic Change in Work Life

The target variables in the basic research phase were (1) the individual quality of life and work of employees, (2) the innovative capability and productivity of the companies and (3) the negotiability of the welfare state. With an eye to these main target variables, we analysed the challenges resulting from the ageing of the population for individuals, companies and socio-political actors and determined the measures to be taken to establish a living and working environment appropriate to ageing and the barriers in the way of implementing urgently needed measures. The complexity of the problems was described from multiple perspectives using the scenario technique in which the potential consequences of successful or, in some cases, unsuccessful age management was systematically varied on several levels.

Methodical Procedure

In an initial step, we reviewed the findings in the relevant research literature and of previous projects. In a second step, we conducted interviews with regional and supra-regional experts who were able to give a first overview of the relevant factors regarding developments in the working world.

Expanding on the analysis of research to date and the explorative interviews with the experts, a total of four extensive structural analysis workshops (MICMAC) were organised for the central fields of action (education, health, business operations and society). These structural analyses were conducted by involving regional actors who were noted for their positions of authority and professional competence in each particular field of action.

Based on the workshop results, influential factors decisive for the working world of Salzburg Province were identified and their reciprocal effects were described in a consistency analysis. Systematic variations allowed projecting numerous potential paths of development in the Salzburg working world. The three most plausible and significant development tracks were then compactly designed as scenarios.

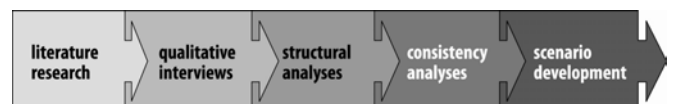


Fig. 2: Methodological steps towards the scenarios

In this way, the first project track led to differentiated scenarios that illustrate the complexity of the topic while allowing to integrate the individual research results. Thus, the scenarios primarily enabled formulating the comprehensive and complex connections resulting from the demographic changes for the company context and

beyond. They were meant to create awareness for the problem and were used as the basis for a second, practice-oriented project track, involving a maximum diversity of actors across all sectors. This second step was aimed at devising ways of giving higher priority to the necessary long-term structural and behavioural changes over short-term planning horizons.

Scenarios: Creating a Working World Appropriate for Ageing

The scenario process revealed that the degree of activity on the political and operational level is significant for establishing age management in the working world. Political and operational activity thus form two axes along which the scenarios vary, leading to three conceivable scenarios. The fourth scenario in this scheme based on active political and reactive operational activity was excluded as implausible.

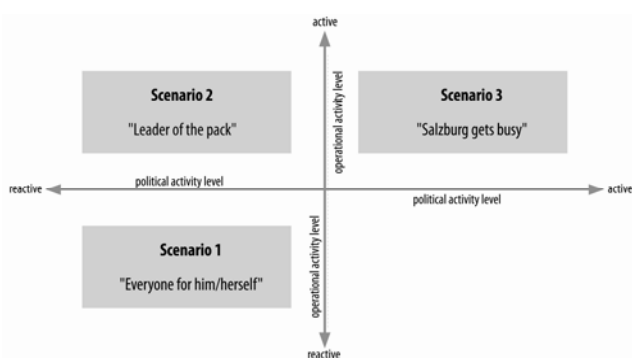


Fig. 3: Scenario grid

Scenario 1: Everyone for Him/Herself

In the first scenario, neither political nor company actors are actively involved in age management in the working world. Everyone struggles on his or her own and is driven by the demands prevailing in the modern working world.

Scenario 2: Leader of the Pack

The second scenario depends on high initiative within the company itself. With persistence and readiness to make investments, a few succeed in mastering the challenges of a changing working world. The political initiative is missing that is necessary to push the less

innovative and strong enterprises towards appropriate management of ageing.

Scenario 3: Salzburg Gets Busy

In this scenario, the political and organisational actors take collaborative action and establish suitable working structures. Step by step, they create a working world appropriate to ageing.

Involving Older Employees, Young Workers & Socio-political Actors

The second line of the project centred on putting the research results into practice. Three scopes of application with different priorities were realised in order to make use of the lessons learned from the scenarios in the working world.

1. The first module was to develop a model for age management in small and medium-sized businesses. Considering the particular situation especially of small-sized businesses, we developed instruments for assessing the current situation and sensitising actors to the problem of demographic change and devised measures to address the challenges. In a scenario workshop, employees were able to expand on what they expected regarding their own future career.

2. A second module aimed at sensitising young workers. The apprentices were given opportunities to become familiar with the topic of "Labour and Age" in a creative way. They received information about the demographic change and its consequences for the working world and were instructed in a theatre workshop about preparing for the future challenges to be faced.

3. The third and most important use of the scenarios was to sensitize socio-political actors. The scenarios provided a means of demonstrating to politicians, social partners and public institutions the underlying factors and connections and allowed to derive recommendations for action to establish age management in the working world.

The practical experience modules were carried out in close collaboration with the Salzburg Occupational Health Services Centre for healthful employment, which plans to implement the project results in its future work with companies and their employees.

Individual and Structural Adaptation Strategies

Demographic changes take place over relatively long periods of time. Seen from one angle, this enables projecting demographic trends relatively reliably, but it also makes it more difficult to influence them in the short- and medium-term. For the actors in Salzburg Province, this means two things: they can influence the process of demographic change only to a very limited

extent, and in shaping the working world, the task consists mostly of adapting to future developments with expectancy and efficiency. Against this background, the research process brought forth the following findings:

1. Structure:

Successfully surmounting the challenges of demographic change requires that the actors in Salzburg Province coordinate their efforts. A particular responsibility falls to the political actors who are in charge of the general structural conditions providing the framework for the job

market in Salzburg Province. Due to the complexity of the topic and the economic structure of the region with its many small businesses, it is hardly realistic to expect any comprehensive initiative on the organisational level, or as the case may be, independent initiative on the individual level. Decisive factors for the formation of age management in the working world in Salzburg Province are closely linked with the amount of political action, on the one hand, and with the amount of involvement at the company level, on the other. Individual behaviour in the working world in Salzburg Province can be viewed as a consequence of action at higher levels of social organization and cannot be expected to act as a major force in initiating change.

2. Actual age at the onset of retirement:

The workforce must adapt to a longer working life. The political goal is to prolong working life and delay retirement. Early retirement based on exceptional circumstances and in cases of hardship is now more difficult. What measures are taken at the level of legislation and implementation will be decisive as to whether the extension of working life will be cushioned by welfare state regulations in socially responsible ways or whether the additional burden must be carried by each and every individual alone.

3. Working capability:

The prerequisite for a longer working life is maintaining the ability to work. This poses a problem particularly in professions defined by hard physical labour and mental stress. Here it is rarely possible to remain healthy and motivated until legal retirement age. Thus, the primary goal must be to retain the individual ability to work. This pertains most of all to physical and mental health but also to skills and motivation.

4. Skilled workers:

It is worth considering that a shortage of qualified workers in the wake of demographic change could lead to competition for the "best and brightest", a situation already found today to some extent within some companies. Companies as well as the Salzburg Province itself are well-advised to shape the economic and

other framework conditions so that the region remains an attractive economic location.

5. Qualification and job market:

Not every group in the job market can be expected to live up to the demands of life-long learning. For this reason, we can assume that there will be stronger polarity in the job market between a group of well to very well qualified workers and a group of rather poorly qualified ones.

The better qualified will be highly sought after in the future and will perform challenging tasks whereas the rather poorly qualified workers will be left with the simpler and fairly stressful activities. The situation of the less qualified will worsen in the future due to the fact that certain qualifications will probably be required even for simple jobs. The demands in regard to knowledge, skills and proficiency will tend to rise even for positions requiring lower qualifications. Initiatives will thus be required in order to profitably integrate this part of the workforce in the working world throughout their entire working life.

6. Women:

More strongly integrating women and retaining the ageing population in the job market would contribute to better utilising the potential workforce and better distributing stress in the working world. A very effective measure to that effect is improving structures for childcare.

7. Attitudes and values:

Less concrete but no less effective than welfare state and company regulations are the ideas entertained throughout society about the working world. The images of the working world in the minds of the general population have a considerable influence on behaviour in the labour market, for instance, concerning job preferences and choice of profession. Deficit-oriented perceptions of ageing, stereotypical gender roles or assumptions about the stages in an employment biography strongly affect individual working behaviour. Changes in the "labour market culture" in the service of age management in the working world could be one of the most powerful influences of all.

Sources and References

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