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The right approach to training can help companies get the best out of an ageing workforce



Cedefop seminar 22/9/2011 Investing in an ageing workforce, opening panel

Music and arts classes have been shown to improve wellbeing and life satisfaction at an older age. Yet formal training does not have the same effect. What is formal training doing wrong? Is it ill adapted to the needs of older workers? An international seminar takes a close look at what is needed to make the best use of an ageing workforce.

As several participants in Cedefop's international seminar, **learning later in life: uncovering the potential of investing in an ageing workforce** (Brussels 21-22 September) stressed, prevailing attitudes about training for ageing workers - particularly employer attitudes - need to change.

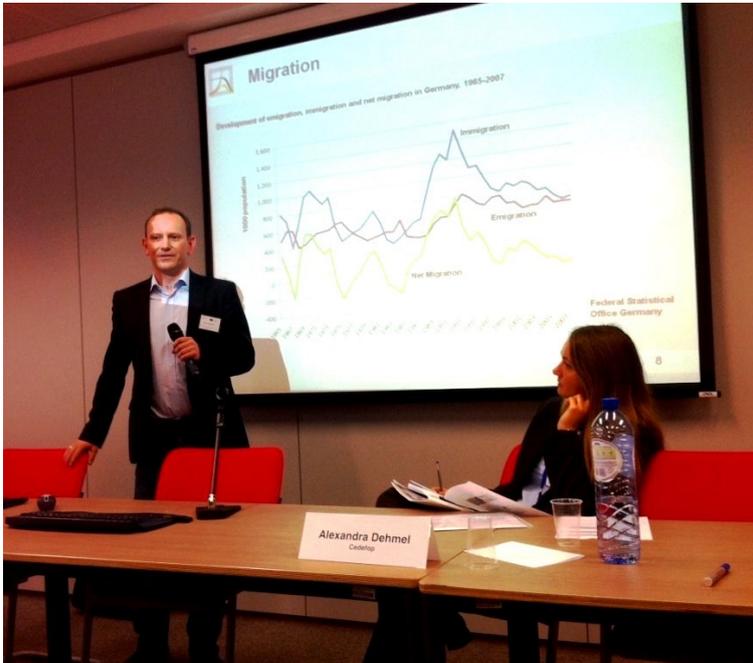
Human resource departments tend to see training as a 'retention strategy' for older workers rather than as a means to improve skills, productivity and job satisfaction. This approach is unlikely to lead to a better use of an ageing workforce.

Companies need to develop a new 'demographic literacy':

- to understand that demographic change is imminent;
- analyse their own company's age structure; and
- ensure that their efficiency, productivity and capacity for innovation are not affected by the rise of the average working age.

To do this successfully, they should factor age into all aspects of human resource management. Firms that have analysed their age structure are already adopting age-friendly HR practices.

Above all companies should not underestimate the value of training to their companies. Employers consider training less important than product development, marketing and work organisation – yet all of these depend on well-trained, creative employees of all ages.



Cedefop seminar on investing in an ageing workforce, second day panel

Employer representatives argued that small and medium companies face difficulties in providing training, as older workers form a greater proportion of their workforce than in larger companies. Such SMEs need a strategy to identify training needs, implement training, and evaluate its results.

Older workers do have specific requirements for training. They want their own experience and knowledge to be taken seriously, and to be integrated into the learning experience. But they enjoy being part of an intergenerational learning environment. Only ICT training, they feel, may require classes separated by age.

Training programmes for entrepreneurship also tend to focus too narrowly on young people. As seminar participants heard, Europe lags behind Latin America in entrepreneurship training for this age group. In fact, 'grey' entrepreneurs, with their greater human and social capital, tend to be more successful.

The seminar was organised in cooperation with the European Commission in the context of 2012, European Year of Active Ageing.

Seminar programme: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/news/18748.aspx>

Relevant Cedefop publications

1. The right skills for silver workers: an empirical analysis
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/17066.aspx>
2. Working and ageing: emerging theories and empirical perspectives
<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/16435.aspx>

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About Cedefop

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), an agency of the European Union based in Thessaloniki, Greece, supports European policy-making in the field of vocational education and training. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu>