

Demographic Change and Employment

A Call for New Corporate Strategies

Memorandum

30 ▶ 40 ▶ 50plus ▶
Gesund arbeiten bis ins Alter

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Work and Demographics: Grasping the Opportunities

The message has got through: our society is growing older. The number of young people is continually declining; the number of older people is increasing, whilst the overall population figures are dropping. The reasons for this are now also familiar: declining birth-rates coupled with rising individual life expectancy. Germany's future will thus be shaped by a population whose average age is higher.

In the world of work, this demographic change is already being felt. It is true that there is an expectation that the shortfall of skilled labour will not kick in for ten or twenty years. But the phenomenon of ageing workforces is already apparent today, and the ageing process will accelerate. So the companies need to learn how to function and to remain innovative with a workforce whose average age is increasing. In addition, they need to find ways to activate additional potential labour, so that they can continue to withstand international competition.

Unlike in other major industrial nations, government, business and the social partners in Germany have for many years fostered a systematic reduction in the age of the workforce. It is now high time for a shift in the trend. Many companies have already recognised the signs of the time and have developed remarkable approaches towards a demographically appropriate labour and personnel policy. The New Quality of Work Initiative (INQA) aims to bring together and enhance these approaches and to contribute towards their rapid dissemination in business and society. INQA is a joint initiative of the Federal Government, the Länder, the social partners, the social insurance partners, the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Hans Böckler Foundation and businesses. The initiative is thus both an alliance and a network. We are convinced that this set-up offers us a great opportunity to quickly regain lost ground and – beyond that – to place ourselves at the forefront of a development which makes a new quality of work a key competitive factor in the world economy.

With this memorandum and the “30, 40, 50

plus – healthy work into old age” campaign, INQA therefore intends to foster the following:

- ▶ that business and society develop a more constructive, realistic picture of the skills and abilities of older people,
- ▶ that they deploy and utilise these skills and abilities better,
- ▶ that corporate health policy aims to safeguard the work ability of the younger members of the workforce in the long term,
- ▶ and that the productive collaboration of younger and older workers develops into a factor driving corporate success.

We are firmly convinced that INQA is the ideal instrument to accelerate the necessary change into “demographics-proof” companies. INQA provides services to companies to help them to recognise and resolve problems and thus to tackle the challenges posed by demographic change to the world of work in a constructive manner. We invite managers and workforce representatives to take advantage of the expertise gathered together on this platform for their company and also to enrich and further develop this expertise with their own experience.

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Summary

How companies can adjust to the demographic shift

This memorandum is part of INQA's new "Work and Demographics" campaign. This campaign poses the questions of how demographic change is altering the world of work, what companies can do to remain competitive with a workforce which will be older in future, and how occupational safety and health can be successfully combined with commercial interests. The campaign's answers to these questions come under the heading: "30, 40, 50 plus – healthy work into old age".

This memorandum aims to provide some pointers in the debate about the future of work in an ageing society. And the brochure presents partner companies participating in the campaign: companies doing pioneering work. As their example shows, the key is not necessarily to be found in practical expertise, sophisticated checklists or refined modifications to the workplace. What is rather needed is a fundamental rethink. This involves a shift from the "deficiency model" to the "competence model". This "mental revolution", which has long been a consensus amongst experts, is now increasingly finding a place in business thinking. The argument is that older workers do not merely – and do not primarily – have deficiencies compared with younger people, but that they dispose of a large number of capabilities which are of vital importance to today's business world: problem-solving skills based on experience, greater tolerance of differing opinions, high degree of flexibility in terms of time, reliability, realistic perceptions, etc. (Chapter 1, pp. 7 to 11).

The importance of this paradigm shift is shown by a glance at the dynamic nature of the demographic trend (Chapter 2, pp. 13 to 16). In comparison with the present situation, the rate at which the workforce ages will become three times faster in the next four decades. This process will be mainly concentrated on the years up to 2020. Experts say that the proportion of the working population aged over 40 will increase up to 2010 – and from 2010 the proportion of over-50s will rise sharply. The consequence: In 2020, more

than one in three workers will be aged over 50. For the first time, there will be more 50-year-olds than 30-year-olds in the companies.

In future, the compressed age structure of many companies can also become a problem. Because older workers have been particularly affected by the job-shedding of recent years – and because only a few younger workers have been recruited due to the difficult economic situation – the middle-aged groups (the generation of baby boomers) are particularly well represented in many companies and account for up to half of the overall workforce. When these age groups all retire together over the next 10-15 years, the companies will be facing a dramatic and abrupt loss of experience; it is necessary to compensate for this in good time.

The formation of mixed-age teams, which permit a systematic transfer of skills and expertise to younger people, will thus become a key element of future personnel policy. In view of this it is becoming much more important for companies to maintain the work ability of those now aged 35-45 over the next 15-25 years. Further to this, the companies need to adjust to the idea of recruiting additional potential labour sources (older people, women, guided immigration), and not least it is necessary to avoid undesired redundancies due to high rates of fluctuation. (Chapter 3, pp. 17 to 24).

In practice, it is first necessary to clarify whether and to what extent a company actually needs to respond to demographic pressures. A key tool here is the "age structure analysis". With the exception of microenterprises, it is always useful to analyse not only the company as a whole, but each individual section, since the age structure – and thus any need for action – can differ sharply between research and development and production. Where the age structure analysis finds imbalances, corrections should be made as soon as possible.

The second task facing companies in terms of the demographic shift is the promotion of health at work. This includes:

► ergonomic workplace design and traditional

- occupational safety and health issues;
- promotion of health and staff fitness;
- optimised work processes (reduction of routine, longer process timings);
- individualised career paths (in case of temporary jobs, forward-looking planning of a switch to other jobs);
- establishment of a systematic corporate health-management scheme.

In addition to directly health-promoting elements, the organisation and design of work should take account of the special needs and special skills of older employees. These include aspects like flexible working-time arrangements, but also a career path which enables people to leave physically and psychologically demanding fields of activity and to take on new tasks in good time.

Furthermore, it is important to develop targeted further-training options for all age groups, e.g. in the form of:

- activities which per se create an incentive to learn (work designed in a manner which promotes learning);
- inter-generational learning in mixed-age teams (tandems, sponsors);
- occupational training plans for all age groups;
- further training specifically for older people (e.g. in new technologies);
- in-house advice on further training.

In addition to this, a key role in coping with demographic change is played by corporate culture and the attitude of the managerial staff. Companies wishing to tackle demographic change will in future have to aspire to a "renaissance of the value of the individual in the company". This involves fostering a positive in-house climate which is characterised by a sense of value of all staff and the promotion of the potential of the individual. Prejudices against older people in the company – and prejudices of older people against younger colleagues – need to be addressed and removed. This must and can occur not only in a verbal manner, but also through practical experience, e.g. in the form of moderated,

mixed-age working groups in which younger and older people can learn and derive practical benefits from one another.

Good managerial skills and good work by superiors are a highly significant factor for an improvement in the work ability of older workers. This includes:

- ▶ a realistic assessment of the potential performance of older workers;
- ▶ promotion of inter-generational dialogue between older and younger staff;
- ▶ a co-operative leadership style;
- ▶ consideration of the individual work plans of older staff members;
- ▶ recognition of the performance of older workers, but also addressing of performance deficiencies and the joint search for solutions.

And, finally, a new type of “demographics-appropriate” personnel policy is required, and it needs to be supported by the company directors. This is because the changes evoked by the demographic shift necessitate professional instruments in the form of a redefined approach to personnel work. Here, the tasks include: generating company loyalty from younger staff, maintaining the ability of older staff to work until retirement age, and including new labour-force potential in the recruitment strategy in good time. Or, to put it another way: imbalances in the corporate age structure must be counteracted in a targeted manner and at an early stage.

In terms of its subject matter, our memorandum covers a similar field to another brochure produced by INQA: “Mit Erfahrung die Zukunft meistern”. Both of these publications form part of INQA’s “Work and Demographics” campaign. The other brochure is formulated in a more accessible manner, and contains a wide range of specific tips and guidelines for action. It is targeted chiefly at companies, with the aim of reaching managers and interested staff members. In contrast, this memorandum is intended to provide the foundations of the specialist platform for the demographics campaign. The systematic and

well-founded presentation of the issue considers not only the various aspects of the demographic shift, but also provides the reader with references to background reading so he can work through the issue himself. The memorandum thus fills a gap between the day-to-day reportage by the media on the one hand and the vast range of social sciences literature on the other. The brochure is aimed chiefly at multipliers in the media, policy-making and business associations, but also at “demography officers” in companies and institutions and at all readers interested in a comprehensive treatment of the issue.

1. A turning-point: the new view of old-age

From the deficiency model to the competence model

Back in the 1960s, ageing was described as a process of loss, of diminution – of strength, of health, of physical attractiveness, and also of the skills one needs in working life. Older people, and in particular older employees, were mainly regarded as falling short – in terms of the ideal of youth and its characteristics and qualities.

Such an understanding was possible in a society which had raised youth and being young to the status of a cult, in which there were enough young people (baby boomers) and in which people apparently believed that the many innovations, not least in technology, meant that nothing could replace the innovative powers of the young.

There are other ways of looking at old age, as Marcus Tullius Cicero knew very well back in Rome's 1st century BC:

“There is therefore nothing in the arguments of those who say that old age takes no part in public business. They are like men who would say that a steersman does nothing in sailing a ship ... He does not do what young men do; nevertheless he does what is much more important and better. The great affairs of life are not performed by physical strength, or activity, or nimbleness of body, but by deliberation, character, expression of opinion. Of these old age is not only not deprived, but, as a rule, has them in a greater degree.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC):
Cato the Elder on Old Age. NEW YORK:
BARTLEBY.COM, 2001

Here, too, people are gradually coming to understand that older workers do not merely – and do not primarily – have deficiencies compared with younger people, but that they dispose of specific skills which are indispens-

able for society and commerce. The deficiency model, which tends to focus on the declining functions and abilities of old-age, has been severely damaged by academic findings. However, this view is still commonly held in society and in day-to-day business operations.

The skills and abilities of older workers

Numerous studies have investigated the abilities of older workers, and the differences between older and younger people, in terms of organisation of work, health and safety at work, and psychology.

Their first, important finding: old age can no longer be regarded as a static condition with certain primarily negative characteristics.

Rather, ageing can be understood as a dynamic and differentiated process of change in which functions decline in the course of life at the same time as other skills develop. This process differs in the case of each individual. Experts speak of “differential ageing” and of an “inter-individual spread” (Maintz 2003a+b) of skills and characteristics which change or emerge with age. By this they mean that the various abilities and facets of personality of individuals can develop to differing degrees, in different directions, and in different time horizons during the ageing process. In addition to innate factors and personal lifestyle, a major role in the respective development of these characteristics is played by work-related influences during the individual's past working life.

This implies that generalised statements about “older people” or “younger people” cannot be made. Nevertheless, there is a pattern of characteristics and skills which is distributed differently between the various age groups and which changes in the course of (working) life.

► A range of abilities – primarily physical and sensory – are subject to what the experts call the “natural ageing process”. In other words – they decline – albeit frequently not to the

“Today, there is an assumption of a differential ageing process, i.e. different abilities and facets of personality can alter to differing degrees and in different directions in the course of ageing.”

(Gunda Maintz 2003 b)

extent which many people used to assume.

- The most important aspect – because it applies both to physical and to mental processes – is the reduction in speed in physical and mental processes as people age. Other declining abilities include senses like hearing and sight.
- The ability to hear starts to decline between the age of 20 and 40, and deteriorates further thereafter. The situation in terms of visual ability is similar: the power and precision of sight gradually deteriorate with the years. However, these losses are not always caused by ageing. One example is hearing losses which occur in early adulthood as a result of noise exposure both in leisure and at work.
- Physical strength and, to a certain degree, physical stamina and resilience also decline when people are in their twenties, and particularly in their forties.
- However, physical strength is often not vital in many of today's jobs, or its loss can be offset by designing the work appropriately. And declining sight and hearing can also be corrected.
- At the same time, some abilities increase or first emerge with increasing age. Often, these are abilities and skills related to experience – experience gained by employees in their professional and their private life. Examples include abilities to resolve complex tasks, to be open to alternative solutions or to show greater tolerance both to divergent opinions and to other people. Older people are often more flexible about time (once the children have grown up); they can feed in experience specific to the

Historical models: ageing in earlier societies

Older and old people were better integrated into earlier societies; their experience was valued, their wisdom respected. Young people treated them with respect. If they grew to a really old age, they were able to round off their life peacefully in the care of their extended family.

One repeatedly hears and reads this sort of opinion when people talk about changes in the position and image of the generations. And there is undoubtedly a germ of truth in such assertions. But they are not free of ideology – “in the old days, everything was better”; “in the old days, there was no need for expensive welfare systems, families looked after their older relatives” – and a differentiated eye needs to consider how true they are.

The first question is: How old actually were these “model” old people?

The world’s oldest person, at least in Western culture, is always claimed to be Methuselah. Methuselah, a descendant of Seth, son of Enoch, father of Lamech and grandfather of Noah, lived to the age of nine hundred and sixty-nine years. (Genesis, 5, 21-29). Even if the calculation of his age is based on a different counting method and time measurement, i.e. if Methuselah did not really live to be 969, he is still regarded as the essence of a very old person (cf. e.g. Schirmacher 2004: Das Methusalem-Komplott). The respectful term still in use today “a Biblical age” refers however not to Methuselah, but to the eighty years which are mentioned in Psalm 90 as the maximum lifespan of a person – and which are now the average life expectancy (cf. Chapter 2).

Some of the philosophers in Ancient Greece also reached an impressive age. For example, Democritus lived to be 90, Plato 80, Socrates 70 (and he would have lived longer had he not had to drink hemlock for “corrupting the youth”), and Aristotle made it to 62. All of these philosophers were mem-

bers of the Greek nobility, and all enjoyed general respect. It is reported that all of them were always surrounded by younger pupils whom they taught and with whom they worked on developing their ideas.

Special respect was due – and is still due today – to old people in societies lacking writing and thus any written tradition. In such communities, their experience formed the knowledge and tradition of the society.

Ageing in pre-industrial societies

Old people also enjoyed esteem and respect in the agrarian societies of later centuries. The spectrum of work to be done in such societies was broad enough for older people to remain valuable and productive members of society and to shoulder tasks in the family.

However, researchers speak of the “myth of the pre-industrial extended family” (Mitterauer/Sieder 1977) and warn against a generalised idealisation of the family situation of old people in the pre-industrial era. Simply for demographic reasons, the large family embracing several generations was not very common: The relatively short life expectancy of the older people, the late marriage and starting of families by younger people reduced the period in which three (or more) generations could actually live together. There were regional disparities. And coexistence in the extended family – especially in poorer rural areas – was not free of conflicts or material limitations (cf. also Ehmer / Gutschner 2000).

Nevertheless, it remains true that the structures of the family and the status of older people only encountered a fundamental change during the transition from the pre-industrial to the industrial society. The spatial separation of the dwelling and the place of work, mobility, changed ways of life of the younger generation and declining birth rates have meant that a co-existence of several generations is virtually impossible today – at least in the towns and cities. And even though

old age is still regarded as an advantage in some areas (e.g. in politics), older workers are increasingly being forced out of working life at an early stage, even though they are still certainly capable of being productive.

job, thereby helping to optimise work and decision-making processes, and they are better positioned to assess their own capabilities and limitations (and those of their team). Also, older people often – at least in terms of their work – are able to express themselves well: they have communicative skills.

- ▶ Finally, there are a whole range of skills which remain constant over the years – as long as they are not subjected to extreme pressures and thus worn out before their time. Basically, these include all the skills one needs to adapt to normal physical and mental requirements and to produce the performance needed during a day at work (concentration, application of acquired knowledge, verbal skills; cf. Figure 1).

These findings are confirmed with the results of surveys of companies. For example, the Institute for Employment Research has conducted interviews with representatives of employers and heads of personnel in 16,000 companies, asking which skills were associated with older or younger employees (IAB-Betriebspanel 2002).

The results of the survey confirm some expectations (younger employees are better in terms of physical resilience, ability to learn, etc.) But some of the findings are surprising:

- ▶ On the one hand, it is surprising that, in the eyes of the companies, young people seem to hold virtually no advantage over older employees in terms of their ability to work in teams, and are not much better in terms of creativity and flexibility. In terms of “psychological resilience”, older workers were actually assessed somewhat more positively than younger employees (cf. Figure 2).
- ▶ But it is particularly noticeable that those characteristics which employers tend to associate with older employees are regarded as being especially important. Asked which qualities they basically regard as being very important for their company operations, a majority of employers’ representatives cited traditional virtues like work ethic and

Figure 1

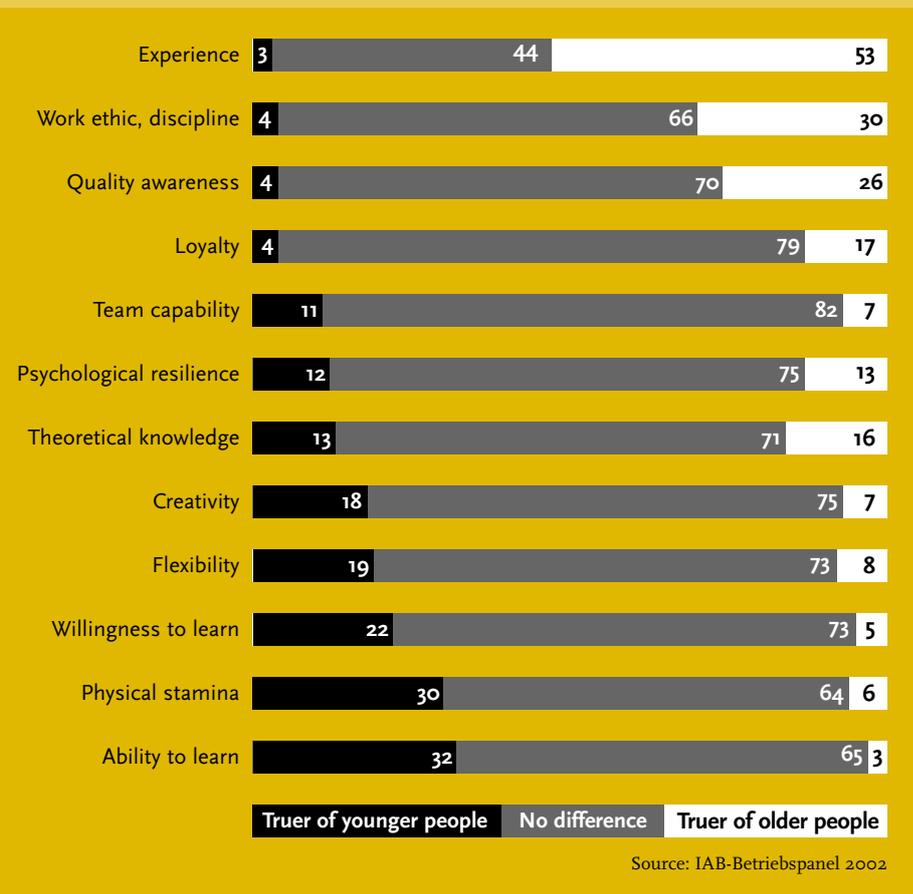
Older people are often better at:

- solving complex tasks
- being open to alternative solutions (less affected, greater tolerance)
- being more flexible on working hours (no children)
- optimising decision-making processes and action
- recognising their own potential and limitations
- introducing in-house experience
- assessing the subjective factors more realistically

Ältere Ebert 0304
maintz.gunda@buaa.bund.de

Figure 2

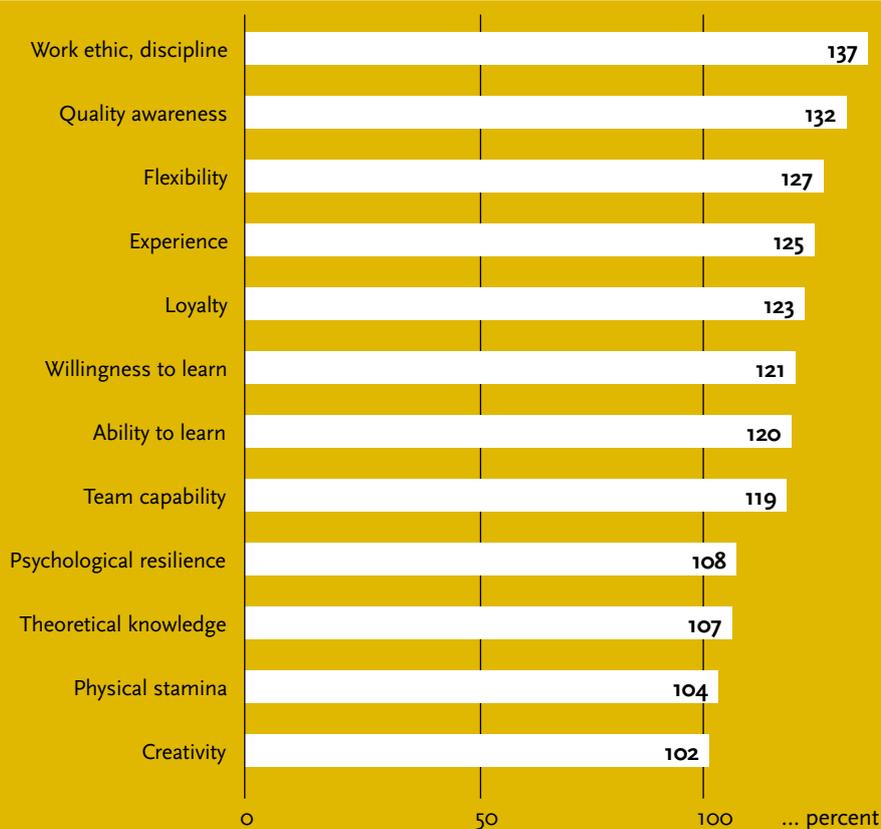
Comparison of the qualities/performance parameters of younger v. older 2002



Source: IAB-Betriebspanel 2002

Figure 3

Importance of individual qualities/performance parameters for jobs in companies 2002



very important = 150 percent, important = 100 percent, less important = 50 percent
That means: the higher the average figure, the more important the quality (performance parameter)

Source: IAB-Betriebspanel 2002

discipline (first place), quality awareness (second place) and experience (fourth place). They thus valued characteristics associated more with older people over “modern” virtues like flexibility (third place), ability to work in teams (eighth) and creativity (twelfth place) (cf. figure 3).

This latter point coincides with the findings of other studies on the competence model, which have also shown that “the modern world of work demands those factors which are better developed in older people” (Maintz 2004b). High priority is given to communication skills, experience in life and work, or the ability to grasp complex material and to solve complex tasks.

The older workers are said to offer greater composure, reliability, realistic assessment skills, ability to cope in a crisis, etc. So with increasing age, the skills tend to shift from the dynamic to the steady side. These contrast with the abilities of the younger people like flexibility, openness, dynamism and an orientation to the future. It can be taken as read that companies cannot survive only on the basis of the dynamic characteristics of the younger employees, but that they also need the qualities and skills of experienced, older workers.

However, despite the generally positive assessment of the skills of older workers and the value attached to them, what happens in companies (still) unfortunately looks rather different. Here, traditional views of deficient abilities of older workers often still prevail – or they are used to avoid recruiting older people or to reduce the average age of the workforce as a “rationalisation”. Only relatively few companies aiming at a sustainable personnel policy are banking on a deliberate blend of older and younger workers who, with their comprehensive package of skills, can work together particularly well in a team.

Forever young

The contemporary view of youth and old age

Where has this new perception come from?

The paradigm shift described here, which has brought about a new understanding of old age, has of course not developed independently of social processes. The background is a deep-reaching demographic change in our society with its consequences – forecast or already partially visible – for commerce, culture, the welfare systems and, inevitably, the labour market and companies. In view of an ageing society and thus an ageing potential workforce, we will not be able to rely in future only on the dynamism and vigour of young workers whilst dispensing with the expertise and experience of older people. Furthermore, our welfare and pension systems will only be able to cope with the growing number of older people in the long term if these people remain in work for longer.

We will learn more about the social and economic facts underlying the debate about demographic change in Chapter 2. Let us merely note for the time being that we ourselves – as a society and as individuals – need to review and correct our image of old age if we wish to cope with a changed, older society. Or, as the journalist Frank Schirmmacher (2004) put it, “we need to set in motion ... a spectacular cultural shift” and resolutely counter the still-dominant “negative views of age” in our own interest.

Don’t trust anyone aged over 30.” This sentence started out as a cultural criticism of the “Establishment” by the students’ movement. It was directed against the generation of their parents, who were regarded as being too self-satisfied and conformist, and against authoritarian structures. The generation of 1968, which coined the phrase, has itself grown older; many of its protagonists are now themselves in high office and well-established.

The students’ movement of 1968 was part of the generation of baby boomers, the high-birth-rate age-groups born in the first two decades after World War II. Not all of the baby boomers were involved in the critical youth and students’ movements, but – starting from the United States – they brought about a lasting change in culture and lifestyle in many Western countries. This includes things like music (pop and rock), fashion, but also changed lifestyles and relationship patterns, and even the “sexual revolution”.

And alongside these innovative, in some cases critical changes, the baby boomers also engendered a tangible material expansion. “En masse,” says Frank Schirmmacher (2004), “they enjoyed a level of purchasing power never previously accessed by young people.” Their numbers, and the amount of money at their disposal, made them the most important target group for business: the “consumer society”. So what people sometimes describe today as “obsession with youth” is also a “manifestation of purchasing power” (Schirmmacher).

is related to fear of the loss of one’s own attractiveness and fitness, the related social recognition, the fear of one’s own decline and ultimately of death. “No-one likes to grow old.” (Schirmmacher 2004)

However, in view of the obvious and inevitable demographic changes, advertising is gradually looking to older people as a new target group with a lot of purchasing power. Here, it is noticeable that advertising/marketing which is addressed specifically at older people (the younger oldies – 50 plus) tends to stress their youthfulness (“well preserved”), selling fitness products and anti-ageing products. In other words, they are not really breaking the taboo, they are merely postponing old age.

The dream of immortality

Furthermore, the media occasionally feed new dreams of immortality. With the aid of genetic technology and modern medicine, people are supposed to be able to grow older and older (whilst remaining healthy); the aim is to “stop the biological clock” in the near future.

So how would our society and its members look then: “As old as Methuselah” or “forever young”?

Old age as a taboo

However, the very fact that this “obsession”, the all-dominant ideal of youth, is persisting so obstinately – even if the baby boomers have since grown older – suggests that other motives are also involved. Ageing was and remains virtually a taboo in our society. This

2. The reality in society: demographic change and the world of work

What is demographic change?

The Ancient Greeks are responsible for the term “demographics”. In Ancient Greek, “demos” means people and “graphein” writing. So demographics is “people writing” – or to use scientific terminology: statistically based population science.

It is deemed a subdiscipline of social sciences, a study of the emergence, life and demise of human populations – albeit in terms not of philosophy, but statistics. In other words, demographics is interested in everything about the population that can be captured and measured by numbers. Major demographic factors include the birth rate, the death rate and the migratory pattern of the population.

In Germany, the demographic data which are regularly collated and published by the Federal Statistical Office were first collected in 1871. Demographics therefore existed back in the days of the Kaiser – although there was no sign then of a demographic shift. On the contrary: the demographic structure of the population

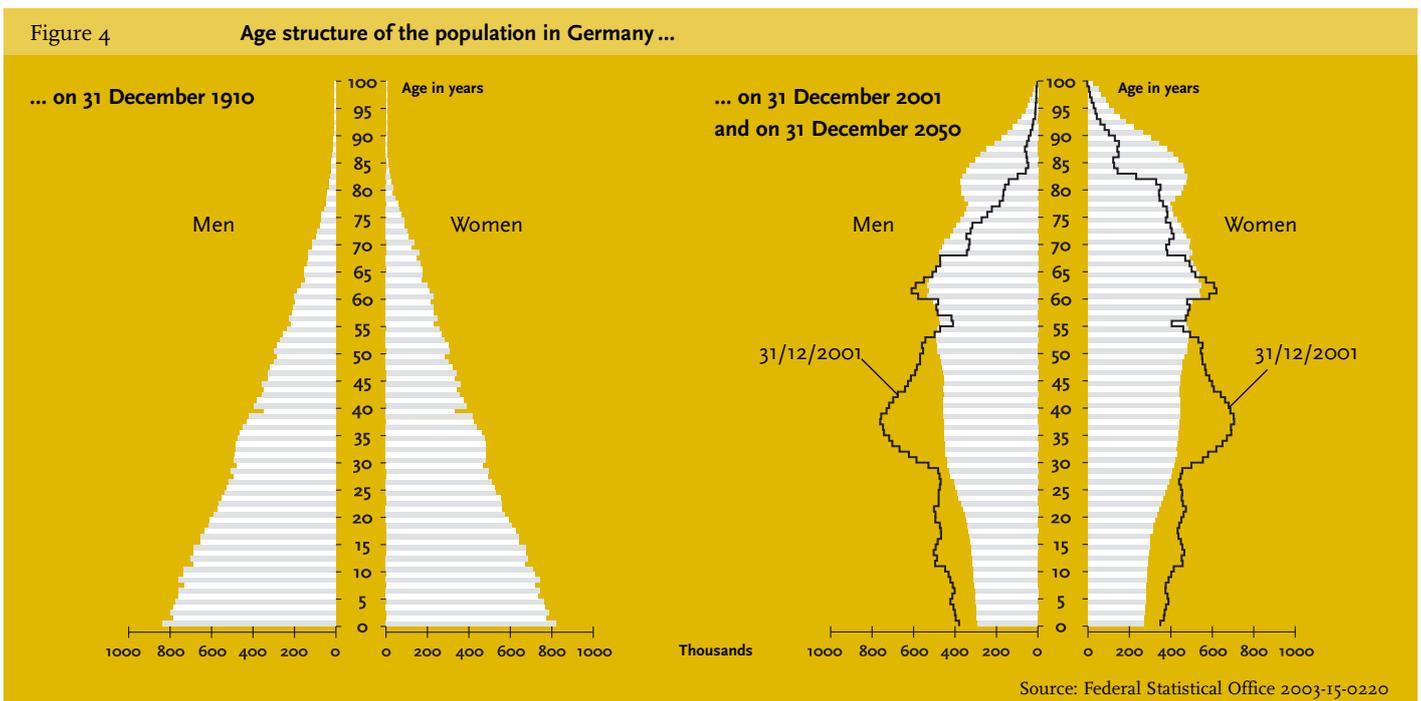
was constant, at least in one important aspect: the number of births always exceeded the number of deaths, and there were few very old people. In visual terms, the age structure of society was similar to that of a pyramid. The large number of children formed the broad base; the few “Methuselahs” the narrow peak of the pyramid; between them came the middle-aged groups.

This demographic structure, which became known colloquially as the “age pyramid”, proved extremely resilient. It outlived not only the monarchy, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, but also extended well into the Bonn democracy.

It was not until the early 1970s that what we now call “demographic change” began: the pyramid lost its traditional form and became imbalanced – in several different ways. The changes at the bottom of the pyramid were particularly severe: it virtually melted away as the number of births declined rapidly. During the baby boom of the 1960s, the average number of births per woman achieved a peak

of 2.5 children; it then fell substantially in the following decade, and has now levelled out at 1.4 children. At the same time, the peak of the pyramid became wider and wider – although this was a development which had been emerging for some time. The reason is the increasing level of individual life expectancy: due to advances in health care, hygiene and nutrition and to the general rise in prosperity and the improvement in standards of living, life expectancy has increased continuously over the last hundred years.

Even today, the pyramid is continuing to crumble away, and its shape is turning more and more into a mushroom. In other words, the population is decreasing numerically – and the proportion of young people in society is declining more and more, whilst the number of old and increasingly aged people keeps increasing. This is what is meant by demographic change today (cf. Figure 4).



Research into demographic change

At least 15 years' worth of research findings are available on the incipient demographic change and its consequences for businesses and the economy. Back in 1989, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) set up a research priority entitled "Demographic change". Over the last five years, the framework concept entitled "Innovative job design – the future of work" has aimed at a clear search for solutions. The association called "PR and marketing strategy on demographic change" has developed company-based and industry-wide approaches to coping with demographic change, including hints for action (www.demotrans.de; Buck / Schletz 2002).

Facts and figures on demographic change

The latest figures on demographic change are from 2003; they derive from the "10th co-ordinated population projection" by the Federal Statistical Office. It forecasts the population development up to 2050 and confirms the trend described above: the population in Germany will become smaller and older.

With regard to the number of inhabitants, the statisticians make the following forecasts: from 82.5 million inhabitants at present, the population will rise slightly to 83 million and then decline from 2013; ten years later (2023) it will be roughly at today's level; in 2035 it will fall just below 80 million for the first time and then decline to a little more than 75 million by 2050.

As has been the case for the last 30 years, more people will die than will be born in the German population during the coming decades. Today's annual birth figure of about 730,000 babies will drop to around 560,000 in 2050 and will then be only half the number of people dying each year. Up to 1997, it was possible to offset this "birth deficit" through immigration – in terms of numbers. Since

then, Germany's overall population has been declining and all the forecasts suggest that it will – as indicated – continue to shrink.

The combination of a low number of births and the increase in life expectancy is now having a substantial impact on the age structure of the population. The younger age-groups (up to about the age of 50) will generally have fewer people in them than the older ones. The proportion of under-20s will decline from 20 percent of the population today to 16 percent in 2050. The proportion of people aged 60-plus will then be twice as large, at 37 percent. And an impressive 12 percent of the population will be aged 80 or more in 2050 (compared with just under 4 percent in 2001).

The expected shifts in the age structure are particularly apparent in the "age quotients", which describe how many people of retirement age (60 and over) there are compared with 100 people of working age (20-59). Whilst this quotient stood at 44 in 2001, it will – assuming today's average retirement age of 60 – rise to 71 in 2030 and further to 78 in 2050.

The world of work and the age structure

How will this development affect the world of work and the labour market? With regard to the potential labour force, the forecasts of the Federal Statistical Office assume that there will be virtually no decline prior to 2015; rather, it will start to fall from the present level of around 40 million from 2020. So until then there will not be a general decline in the supply of labour. However, the effects of demographic change do vary from sector to sector, since individual sectors both have differing age structures with some very marked concentrations in some age cohorts and also vary substantially in terms of the burden imposed on the individual's work ability and thus on the age at which people cease work (examples: air traffic controllers, roofers).

However, from 2020 there will be a drop in

the potential labour force – which immigration will only alleviate to a limited extent. Even if one continues to assume annual immigration of 200,000 people (with good career paths and good skills), the statisticians forecast that the potential labour force will shrink to 30 million people by 2050 (without immigration: to 24 million).

A separate development will have a much earlier impact. This is the ageing of the overall workforce and thus of company workforces. This process is already underway and will accelerate in future. It will be mainly concentrated on the years up to 2020. Experts say that the proportion of the working population aged over 40 will increase up to 2010 – and that from 2010 the proportion of over-50s will rise sharply. In 2020, more than one in three workers will be aged over 50. For the first time, there will be more 50-year-olds than 30-year-olds in the companies.

A good description of the ageing process occurring here is the image of the "wandering cohorts". The group of 35-49-year-olds, originally the largest age group, and now with almost 20 million people and just under 40 percent of the working-age population, will start to decline substantially in the next few years. From 2010, the proportion of over-50s will rise sharply.

The reason for this development is that the high-birth-rate age groups, the baby boomers, are getting older. These cohorts of those now aged between 35-49 will inevitably grow into the group of "older" people in the next two decades. That is a good reason why the companies will be well advised to build the aspect of demographic change into their personnel strategy as soon as possible.

Status quo: participation rate and employment amongst older people

The fact that the average age of the workforce has been rising for years does not, however, mean that all potential older workers are

actually employed. The opposite is rather the case. According to the figures of the 2001 microcensus (the most recent one with a differentiated evaluation by age), only just over one-third of the 55-64-year-olds in Germany were still in work (Koller et al. 2003). There were particularly few workers in the group of the over-60s, of whom many – and especially women – have already reached the normal retirement age or have left the labour market via early-retirement schemes or via unemployment. Of the men aged 55-60, 68.5 percent (west of Germany) and 59.7 percent (east of Germany and East Berlin) were in work; the corresponding figures for women were 48.5 and 48.6 percent. The non-employment rate of older people is generally higher than the rate for the overall population.

In view of the forecasts indicating that the working-age population will decline from around 2020, businesses will do well to make better use of the existing potential labour of older people – and also of women, since their labour participation rate in Germany is still below the average of other Western countries.

Germany in an international comparison

As an international comparison shows, not all countries have a low participation rate and high unemployment of older people. Whilst the proportion of people aged 55-64 in Germany in work in 2003 stood at 38.4 percent, Sweden (68.3 percent), Switzerland (64.8 percent), Japan (61.6 percent) and the United States (59.5 percent) all employed a substantially larger proportion of older people. Countries with similar figures to Germany are France (34.2 percent) and Italy (28.9 percent). On average, the other industrial countries are about ten percent higher than the German figures. Germany thus has a lower mid-table ranking in the statistics (source: OECD 2003; cf. Figure 5).

One of the chief reasons for Germany's



poor performance is political in nature. Whilst people in other countries started thinking early on about how to maintain the work ability of older people and to take targeted measures to keep them in the companies, Germany went for several policies of early "externalisation", i.e. in particular the early retirement of older workers.

This German approach has now reached its limits. The policies are in place for a turnaround. It is becoming increasingly difficult to afford the early release of employees into retirement. Also, people have realised that enormous financial damage is done to the economy by this approach: firstly due to the loss of taxes and social security contributions and secondly due to the waste of human capital. If part of the existing labour force is not used, this represents billions lost in added value for the economy.

Career paths: "Cash in up to 55 and then get out"

The German practice of early retirement – not only tolerated, but viewed positively by society for a long time – had problematic consequences in many companies. The need to design jobs and career paths in such a manner that they extended until retirement age seemed to be overlooked, as did the further training of older workers. And even though it is far from certain that older employees always ceased working voluntarily, many people still seem to be basing their career expectations on the basis of "Cash in up to 55 and then get out" (cf. Behrens et al. 2002). This has meant that stable social patterns of expectation have developed in terms of early retirement from working life which continue to prevail even today – at a time when the non-viability of the ongoing practice of early retirement is mani-

fest. Rising work pressures and non-ageing-appropriate working conditions are still tacitly tolerated in view of the prospect of early retirement.

In Germany, for example, the political strategy of early retirement, coupled with the “deficiency hypothesis” philosophy, has not only created many negative patterns of behaviour and action which are still having an effect today, but has also wasted many opportunities. In the light of the demographic development described here, it is high time to grasp these opportunities once again and to utilise them in the interest of employers and employees. Not least, this entails a shift in mentality which enables people to consciously opt for new, extended career paths (cf. Chapter 3).

The impact on the companies

Because older workers have been particularly affected by the job-shedding of recent years – and because only a few younger workers have been recruited due to the difficult economic situation – the middle-aged groups (the generation of baby boomers) are particularly well represented in many companies and account for up to half of the overall workforce. Companies with this sort of “compressed age structure” (Buck et al. 2002: 51) can be found in many sectors. The problem for the companies is now that these age groups will grow old together, “en bloc”, and will retire almost simultaneously in the next 10-15 years. Specifically, this means the risk of a dramatic and abrupt loss of experience which can hardly be compensated for once the people have retired.

The formation of mixed-age teams, which permit a systematic transfer of skills and expertise to younger people, will thus become a key element of future personnel policy. In view of this it is suddenly becoming much more important for companies to maintain the work ability of those now aged 35-45 over the next 15-25 years. And it is necessary to

ensure that both younger and older employees attend further training courses on an ongoing basis, in order not only to maintain their skills, but also to keep expanding and updating them. The concept of “life-long learning” gains a fresh significance in an ageing world of work. It needs to be taken literally – at least in terms of a working life.

Needs of an ageing society

Finally, one further aspect speaks in favour of employing older people: not only the workers, but also the consumers are growing older. This means that the requirements imposed on products, services and advice are changing. Products need to be diversified and adapted to the needs of older people. And older people like being served and advised by other older people. “Having a 21-year-old sales girl advising people on furniture made in the Gelsenkirchen baroque style doesn’t work” (Reinhold Gütebier, head of sales at the Segmüller furniture store in Bavaria, in the Frankfurter Rundschau of 11 May 2004).

So it is a question of maintaining the competitiveness of the companies and the quality of the products – but also of the preservation of the health and work ability of the workers and the participation of older and ageing people in the world of work and society.

3. In practice: the consequences of demographic change for companies and the world of work

Cornelia Seitz of the Research Office of the Business Training Centre in the State of Hesse sums it up like this: “Despite the warnings from researchers and labour-market policy-makers, companies are not fully aware of a need to depart from the youth-centeredness of their personnel policy. Optimisation and job-shedding are the norm. There is virtually no space there for old people.” (Seitz 2003)

It is clear that too many companies still believe that the demographic changes are of no relevance to them (yet). Chapter 2 aimed to show that this misconception can have serious consequences. In order to remain forward-looking and competitive, the companies need to “face up to the challenges of demographic change now and with immediate effect” (Richenhagen 2004a) – all the more since changes in recruitment and personnel policy cannot be realised “ad hoc”, but need to be implemented gradually.

The analysis of the status quo

But how can companies handle the challenge of demographic change? What specifically needs to be done, and what is important? This chapter aims to present possible solutions and examples of good practice.

A “quick check” as the first step

In practice, it is first necessary to clarify whether and to what extent a company actually needs to respond to demographic pressures.

Answering the following questions can provide some initial indications.

- ▶ Is the company aware of the age structure of its workforce – and does this knowledge feed into personnel policy?
- ▶ Does the workforce consist of equal proportions of young, middle-aged and older workers?
- ▶ Is the work being done in the company designed in such a way that the employees are actually able to do it until they are 65?

- ▶ Are the workers actively involved in the design of the conditions in which they work?
- ▶ Are there any problems with training or recruiting enough young specialists?
- ▶ Do all employees, including older ones, have the opportunity to train and to build on their skills?
- ▶ Is there a targeted support of the transfer of knowledge between older and younger employees?
- ▶ Are all the staff in the company offered the prospect of career development?

This quick checklist was developed by the “Healthier Work Joint Initiative” of North-Rhine/Westphalia (GIGA). Evaluating it is extremely simple: the higher the number of “noes”, the greater the need for the company to respond to demographic pressures.

The instrument of age structure analysis

The next step then consists of a detailed age structure analysis of the workforce. Apart from microenterprises, it is always useful to analyse not only the company as a whole, but each individual section, since the age structure – and thus any need for action – can differ sharply between research and development and production.

In small firms, it is easy for the company itself to gain an overview of problems related to the age structure by using the dates of birth of the employees. But, as the example of APR shows, larger firms should not rely solely on the subjective assessment of their own “demographic compatibility”, but should undertake a detailed corporate analysis on the basis of the numerous checklists and guidelines now available.

Here, the guidelines on self-analysis of age structure problems in companies (“Leitfaden zur Selbstanalyse alterstruktureller Probleme in Unternehmen”) (Köchling 2003) can prove useful. They were drawn up – based on the age structure analysis – by the Society for Research into OSH and Humanisation

Often, outward appearances are deceptive, as shown by the example of APR in Minden. ABB Automation Products GmbH (APR) in Minden is part of a world-wide group based in Zurich. As the only large industrial firm in the Ostwestfalen-Lippe region, APR has no serious recruitment problems. The company is viewed as an attractive employer, even by people living as far away as Hanover and Bielefeld; the initial training rate is five percent, the average length of service is very high, at more than 16 years, and the rate of fluctuation is less than one percent. The move from one generation to the next has been occurring for several years via an old-age part-time work arrangement; resulting pension losses are offset by pension provision models. At the end of 2001, APR Minden had an age structure centred on the middle-aged year groups.

At first glance, hardly anyone would suspect a demographic problem in the firm. Nevertheless, a comprehensive age structure analysis showed that the existing personnel strategy (five year plans with one-year or two-year operative plans) was insufficient. A ten-year plan based on this analysis showed that the company was at risk of a lot of problems in the foreseeable future. The number of people leaving the company would be extremely high in year X; the manpower gap would be hard to fill – and there would be high staff costs due to the old-age part-time work arrangements. For this reason, the company decided in spring 2002 to make future old-age part-time work arrangements dependent on the possibility to replace the older employees with suitable successors. Work began on a systematic succession plan, the transfer of knowledge from older to younger workers was organised, and long-term concepts on maintaining employee health were developed.¹

¹ Detailed description of the project: www.zvei.org/demographie/ergebepapiere/abbdoku.pdf

(GfAH) as part of the demotrans project supported by the Research Ministry. The publication provides an easy-to-understand presentation of the principles of age structure analysis, focuses on the key fields of action in terms of personnel policy (each including a catalogue of optional measures) and contains a host of information on literature and the internet as well as pointers to advice on specific topics.

The guidelines are based on many years of experience from research and realisation with some 90 companies of various sectors, sizes and age structures. The first time they were widely applied was when 30 companies in electrical engineering and electronics took part in the demographics initiative of the Central Association of the Electrical Industry promoted by the Research Ministry (ZVEI 2002, 2003).

The guidelines on early recognition of in-house age structure problems (“Leitfaden zur Früherkennung altersstruktureller Probleme im Betrieb”) developed by the GfAH (Köchling 2000), which were also developed in the context of the demotrans project, are available free-of-charge via the internet.² Basically, they consist of five core questions and detailed comments which give personnel officers an entry point into any age structure problems in their company:

1. Is there a risk of “bleeding to death” on the personnel front? Will it cease to be possible in future to offset manpower losses due to retirement (older people) and fluctuation (younger people) by incoming staff?
2. Is work ability ensured for all age groups up to retirement?
Work ability = combination of health, skills, emotional capacity and innovative ability.
3. Is there an ongoing renewal of the expertise of relevance to the company?
Is investment in staff taking place? Is the in-house transfer of knowledge organised?

Is the company a member of an external network of knowledge?

4. Is the corporate culture oriented to a co-existence of the generations?
Equal attractiveness for younger and older workers? Care on the social side? Promotion of the potential?
5. Does personnel work look into problems related to the age structure?
Does career planning apply only to younger staff? Do staff of all age groups have a say in their career paths?
There are obvious – and inevitable – overlappings between the eight criteria of the GIGA quick checklist and the five core questions from the guidelines on early recognition. They point to the key tasks of demographically compatible personnel work. We have summarised them in five fields of action:
 1. Health
 2. Organisation and design of work
 3. Skills, further training and life-long learning
 4. Management
 5. Demographics-appropriate personnel and recruitment policies

Field of action 1: Health

Ensure employability for all age groups up to retirement

Comprehensive epidemiological and empirical research coupled with day-to-day observations has now shown clearly that difficulties encountered by older people in delivering at work are not due solely to biological causes. The “biological clock” is exposed to substantial modifications due to unfavourable influences from lifestyle, the world of work and the social environment (cf. Chapter 1). Or as the metal workers’ union puts it: “The problem is the premature wearing out of work ability. Not the ageing process or the age.” (IGM: Gesünder @rbeiten 2004) It is indeed the case that some older workers suffer from a range of functional deteriorations. These are often a result of a long-lasting, one-sided burden of work. Someone who has spent years having to keep lifting or carrying heavy loads (e.g. steel industry, foundries), who was exposed to frequent changes of location and weather (assembly, construction) or who had to do night work, shift work or worked under time pressures, etc., will often be ready for retirement at 55 or younger. The same also goes for excessive mental stress, e.g. in the case of burnt-out managers and jobs with a high level of early invalidity. The figures make the point very clearly: for 1999 alone, the statistics of the Federation of German Pension Insurance Institutions record 218,817 new pensioners due to reduced ability to work. These accounted for 20 percent of all people taking up a pension. Other significant statistical data include those of the Scientific Institute of the AOK health fund on incapacity to work: these show that there are particularly steep age-related increases in muscular and skeletal problems and in cardiovascular diseases – and that the problems start around the age of 35. These health problems are chronic, i.e. they do not arise overnight, but develop over the years and can at some point result in incapacity to work

² http://www.demographie-transfer.iao.fhg.de/teilprojekte/gfah/info_LFAP.html

and early retirement.

However, they are not inevitable, but result from the fact that there are a number of jobs which, chiefly for health reasons, cannot be coped with by the majority of employees up to the statutory retirement age, but permit only a limited period of activity. However, the more the companies are unable to dispense with the potential and the skills of older workers, the more aspects like “job design and health promotion” and “career design” will be found on corporate agendas. At the same time, safety at work must be ensured by appropriate protective measures, giving consideration to a poten-

The example of Opel. Works Council member Udo Löwenbrück: “Anyone who saw how people used to assemble the dashboard – half-kneeling, half lying down, knew that you couldn’t work here and stay healthy for long. Those types of jobs have gone. We have moving walkways, virtually no overhead work, height-adjustable workplaces, and the process timings are set so that a younger colleague will have too little to do, whilst the 50-year-old can keep up.”³

Example of Continental in Hanover. Works doctor Christoph Sommer: “In order to investigate jobs in terms of age-compatibility, we use not only a risk assessment but also a workplace survey covering safety and ergonomics/job design. Each job is placed in one of three categories: Age-appropriate means: if you are in good health, you can work in this job until you are 65. Conditionally age-appropriate means: specific changes need to be made to the job or the conditions of work (e.g. shift system). Not age-appropriate means: a person working here will in the long term suffer in terms of health and will need to change job before retirement age. There is an urgent need for career planning and targeted further training.”⁴

tial reduction in the perception of dangers and other age-related limitations. Happily, some steps have already been taken in practice.

So health promotion embraces a range of diverse measures which differ from company to company. They include:

- ▶ ergonomic workplace design and traditional occupational safety and health issues;
- ▶ promotion of the health and fitness of the staff (e.g. work-related courses on avoiding back pain or on coping with stress);
- ▶ optimised work processes (reduction in routine, reduced process intervals);
- ▶ individualised career paths (in case of work done for a limited period, forward-looking planning of a switch to other jobs);
- ▶ establishment of a systematic corporate health-management scheme.

In-company health promotion also includes measures for disabled staff. Here, good rehabilitation and care at company level are important.

Field of action 2: Organisation and design of work

Designing not only jobs, but also the work itself in an age-appropriate manner

In addition to the above-mentioned health-promoting elements, there is also, for example, the possibility of appropriate working time arrangements to meet the needs of older workers. Furthermore, older workers – in line with the competence model – can be entrusted with tasks which they tend to be better at than younger employees. These are tasks which are familiar and well-rehearsed, which permit generally independent working (amount, rhythm and process of work), or require special experience like social competence.

Job design includes an approach to career design which assumes that the employees are to remain in their job for longer and to retain their health until they retire, and which enables a conscious, age-appropriate design of the career path. Whereas many employees used to encounter entrenched vertical career and promotion paths (promotion from the assembly line to quality control), many of these paths are now blocked as a result of

Behrens et al. (2002) write ironically – following on from Paul Watzlawick’s Unhappiness Guide – five dead-sure hints on “how to make your people look old before their time”:

- ▶ Tip no. 1: Make sure you do not offer a variety of activities in good time.
- ▶ Tip no. 2: Promote virtuoso specialisations in ageing knowledge.
- ▶ Tip no. 3: Avoid the “predictability” of horizontal careers.
- ▶ Tip no. 4: Avoid the recruitment of older workers (unbalanced age structures).
- ▶ Tip no. 5: Never adapt what the company offers to the specific skills of the employees.

³ Source: IGM, *Gesünder @rbeiten*. No. 22, March 2004

⁴ Source: *ibidem*

levelled-out hierarchies and a lack of jobs to move into. Here, it is important to plan and implement new in-house paths enabling horizontal careers, in order to be able to counteract a foreseeable loss of skills, health and motivation at an early stage. “The orientation should no longer be towards the job or the job description or the occupation or activity, but towards fields of activity with specialist and personal development potential.” (Buck et al. 2002: 78)

The WAI Index

The organisation and design of work must therefore aim to maintain the work ability of each employee as long and as well as possible. “Work ability” has been defined by Finnish scientists as the “sum of factors which enable a person in a certain situation to master a set task successfully” (Ilmarinen / Tempel 2002).

But how does one measure an employee’s work ability? This question was raised by the Finnish academics back in the 1980s. Their answer: The Work Ability Index (WAI), an instrument which has been constantly developed over the course of some 20 years of academic research into work. The result: a questionnaire on individual work ability which can be filled out either by the individual worker or by a third party, e.g. a company doctor. The questionnaire not only supplies up-to-date information about the potential of the individual worker, but also permits specific forecasts. For example, Finnish longitudinal studies showed that, of the 45-47-year-old workers with a poor WAI, 60 percent became incapable of working in their occupation or of working at all in the following 11 years.

However, the WAI does more than just highlight the risk of early retirement. The index also permits the pinpointing of resources which can improve the work ability of employees and thus represents a contribution towards the optimisation of a company’s economic efficiency. It is based on four pillars of work-ability:

- ▶ health
- ▶ training and skills (including specific skills and occupational experience)
- ▶ values and attitudes (including motivation, job satisfaction)
- ▶ work (demands)

An authorised translation of the WAI into German is available as a publication of the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.⁵ At the end of 2003, work (commissioned by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in co-operation with INQA and Wuppertal University) commenced on the formation of a WAI network in Germany. This network is intended to enable all active and potential users of the WAI to come together and exchange views. (Further information about the WAI network follows this chapter on p. 24.)

Field of action 3: Skills, further training and life-long learning:

Continuously renewing the stock of company-relevant knowledge

Knowledge – as homo sapiens’ very own domain – is increasingly acquiring a new value in the information society. The concept of “life-long learning” has now become generally accepted. However, it does not seem to apply properly to older people. They play virtually no role in the companies’ further training activities. The results of a survey by France’s ISMEA Institute on the ageing of the workforce in Europe and its participation in further vocational training (Coomans 2001: 60) show a significant decline amongst the 40-49-year-olds and again to a greater extent amongst the 50-59-year-olds. And in Germany, according to figures from the “Further Training Reporting System”, only 18 percent of 50-64-year-olds participated in further vocational training in 2000; in the case of the 19-34-year-olds, the figure was 31 percent, and 36 percent for the 35-49-year-olds (BMBF 2003).

The reasons are to be found partly in the well-known prejudices (“Older people are no longer able to learn” – cf. the “deficiency hypothesis” in Chapter 1), and partly in the fact that older people often really do lack any interest in further training: demotivated, out of practice at learning – and themselves victims of the deficiency hypothesis – they do not believe in their ability to learn and they fear failure. Not least, the practice of early retirement has also impeded the in-house further training of older employees. The attitude is: if they’re leaving soon, they don’t need any more training.

Researchers have established a close correlation between jobs which affect health and a lack of training. Johann Behrens speaks of a vicious circle: “Jobs which affect people’s health often offer no training, and the lack of formal qualifications limits the opportunities to take up a new activity when people have

⁵ Tuomi, K. / Ilmarinen, J. / Jahkola, A. / Katajarinne, L. / Tulkki, A. (2001): Arbeitsbewältigungsindex – Work Ability Index. Schriftenreihe der BAuA, Bd. Ü 14, Dortmund

In the European project entitled “RESPECT”, models and measures are developed to enhance the work ability of older people in various fields. RESPECT stands for “Research action for improving elderly workers safety, productivity, efficiency and competence towards the new working environment”. For example, in the context of the RESPECT project, Daimler Chrysler is studying how working hours and job design can be better adapted to the needs of older employees. At Deutsche Bank, in contrast, new forms of learning and further training are being tested out under the project. Older and younger employees work together in tandem teams. Both sides should benefit from the differing age-specific strengths.⁶

Field of action 4: Management

Orienting the corporate culture to inter-generational co-existence

The question of the co-existence of generations in the context of corporate culture inevitably begs the question of the corporate culture per se – so to speak as an environment in which the co-existence of young and old can thrive. To this end, the organisational and management structures, which in many companies are still rooted in the rigid structures of industrialisation, need to be flexibilised. In the age of globalisation and short product cycles, both companies and staff need to be flexible if they are to survive. That is the belief of Professor Bullinger, the former director of the Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering. “Today, in a service-oriented and knowledge-based economy, there is almost a renaissance of the value of the individual in the company.” (Bullinger et al. 2003: 99)

So much for the theory. In practice, as we know, the opposite seems rather to be the case at present. In view of the high level of unemployment and the difficult overall economic position, the value of the individual is at risk of diminishing, not increasing. The fact that this is not just a subjective assessment by individual observers, but may well be a general trend, is demonstrated by various studies. For example, in a survey by the internet job market Stepstone.de of 5 May 2003, 70 percent of those surveyed felt that the atmosphere at work had deteriorated tangibly due to the poor economic situation. And – according to the latest Gallup survey of 2003 – employee motivation has reached a new low:⁷ only 12 percent of all employees in Germany felt a strong emotional commitment to their work and their company in 2003. (In the USA, the comparable figure is 30 percent.)

6 Source: <http://www.jobpilot.de/content/journal/weiterbildung/aelter30-02.html>
7 Source: <http://www.gallup.de> ; <http://www.presseportal.de/story.htm?nr=494849&search=gallup>

Without wishing to assess these statements, it can be said here that companies wishing to tackle demographic change will in future have to aspire to a “renaissance of the value of the individual in the company” (Bullinger). Experts say that anyone who, against the background of demographic change, aspires to a healthy age blend, job fitness and expertise on the part of his employees as well as successful recruitment and low employee fluctuation, must not only ensure healthy and performance-enhancing conditions of work for all age groups, but must also foster a positive atmosphere which is characterised by valuing everyone, including older workers, and promoting the potential of each individual.

Only on the basis of this sort of working atmosphere, either in practice (or at least aspired to), does it make sense at all to speak of an orientation of corporate culture to a “co-existence of young and old”. It is obvious that this is quite a substantial challenge which cannot be tackled overnight: after all, it involves a change of mentality in a (business) culture which is still obsessed with youth.

However, anyone who takes the co-existence of young and old seriously in the corporate culture will inevitably have to address and remove prejudices against older people at work – as well as prejudices held by the old against the young: not only verbally, but also through practical experience, e.g. in the form of moderated, mixed-age working groups in which younger and older people can learn and derive practical benefits from one another.

Here, the conduct of managers is vital. Good managerial skills and good work by superiors are a highly significant factor for an improvement in the work ability of older workers – as has been found by the researchers Juhani Ilmarinen and Jürgen Tempel (Ilmarinen / Tempel 2002). According to them, age-appropriate management is an important element of corporate culture and includes:

- ▶ the realistic and unprejudiced assessment of the potential performance of older workers;

health problems.” (Behrens 2001)

In order to break out of the vicious circle and to safeguard the ability of companies to innovate in a situation of demographic change, it is important to develop further training opportunities for all age groups of employees. Examples of measures in the field of further training include:

- ▶ activities which per se create an incentive to learn (work designed in a manner which promotes learning);
- ▶ inter-generational learning in mixed-age teams (tandems, sponsors);
- ▶ occupational training plans for all age groups;
- ▶ in-house advice on further training.
- ▶ further training specifically for older people (e.g. in new technologies).

When it comes to offering further training specifically for older people, this is a contentious issue amongst experts, since such training courses may foster prejudices against older people at work. On the other hand, older people can be more relaxed and open in a group of people their own age. Since many older people have also got out of the learning habit and are out of practice, it is necessary first to reactivate this, and this implies the need for appropriate didactic measures.

- ▶ promotion of inter-generational dialogue and exchange of experience between older and younger staff;
- ▶ a co-operative leadership style;
- ▶ consideration of the individual work plans of older staff members;
- ▶ recognition of the performance of older people, but also addressing of deficiencies.

In the context of the European project entitled RESPECT, which was described above, measures have also been developed to better prepare superiors for the management of their ageing workforces. The managers should learn how to make a better assessment and optimal use of the capabilities of their older staff. One measure involved the development and testing of so-called age-awareness workshops for managers and master-craftsmen. The workshops begin with thoughts about one's own ageing process and – building on this – about attitudes to older employees.⁸

Field of action 5: Demographic-appropriate personnel and recruitment policy

Personnel policy must confront the challenge of the age structure in good time

Being aware of the necessity of a modern personnel and work policy is not sufficient. Rather, there is a need for entrepreneurs and managers who are already preparing the ground for demographically appropriate strategies and who are gaining a competitive advantage by acting early. The instrument for this paradigm shift is a new-style personnel policy promoted by management. This is

Just how successfully the recruitment of new staff can be managed in order to correct imbalances in the age structure is shown by the example of **Brose**, the automotive components manufacturer. The Coburg-based company sought new staff aged 50+ via newspaper advertisements. It did this because the average age of the Brose workforce, which had grown rapidly to around 7,500 employees, had kept dropping in the course of this growth. Ultimately, there were fewer and fewer older employees around to pass on their knowledge to younger ones. As a result, tried and trusted methods of work were neglected, mistakes became more frequent, and the level of efficiency deteriorated. There came a point at which the company management decided to abandon its obsession with youth. The job advertisements not only resulted in the recruitment of new employees in the desired age group, but also attracted nation-wide attention and amounted to an – unintended – free PR and image campaign.⁹

because the changes evoked by the demographic shift require professional instruments in the form of a redefined approach to personnel work. The old-style head of personnel is replaced by the “change agent” (Buck 2001), one of whose most urgent tasks is age man-

Lufthansa-Technik, which is the second-largest industrial employer in Hamburg with a workforce of 6,000, is also relying on older workers today. On the one hand, the high cost of initial and further training means that it makes sense to keep older people employed in the plant. After all, mechanics and testers need to train for eight years before they are allowed to certain work on aeroplanes. On the other hand, like many technology companies, the firm has been suffering from a massive shortage of skilled workers.

The need for skilled workers was also the reason why **Fahrion Engineering** specifically recruited older people. During the New Economy boom, IT specialists and engineers were given red-carpet treatment and massive salaries. At the time, Fahrion lost six engineers to other companies, so that it was forced to find new staff. Only 17 applicants responded to the advertisement from the Kornwestheim-based company, and they did not have the necessary qualifications. So Otmar Fahrion placed a new – but different – advertisement. In response to his ad, which read “Too old at 45 – superfluous at 55?” he received 522 applications within six weeks, including 180 applicants which fitted the requirements very well, and 100 which fitted well. In view of the great response, Fahrion recruited twelve new staff – rather than the four originally planned. And the company's boss has had no regrets about his decision. Fahrion says: “Older engineers are like precious stones” (Süddeutsche Zeitung dated 29 February 2003).

⁸ For more information visit: <http://www.ias-stiftung.de/forschung/respect.pdf>

⁹ For example Brose, that caused a sensation, compare e.g. the articles in AUTO BILD, 10/10/2003 and lastly DER SPIEGEL 17/2004

agement. Put simply, that means: creating company loyalty amongst the younger workers and preserving the work ability of the older workers up to retirement age.

But first and foremost it means taking prompt action to counter the risk of a “bleeding to death” in terms of staff losses:

If the age blend is not balanced (roughly equal proportions of young, middle-aged and older employees), there will be the risk in the medium to long term that normal retirement and early retirement will result in both the labour and the experience of older workers being lost overnight. At the latest, the retirement wave will necessarily involve a recruitment wave – both of which will entail a substantial organisational and financial burden on the companies. It is therefore necessary to make corrections as soon as possible to any imbalances found by the age structure analysis. The example of Fahrion Engineering highlights a possible solution for many other companies faced with a staff shortage: broadening the recruitment spectrum. Many companies make recruitment unnecessarily difficult for themselves because they only want to take on young male skilled workers. So in future it will be important to focus on other target groups for recruitment. These include not only older people, but also women and foreigners (in the context of guided immigration) and semi-skilled workers, the disabled, people returning to work and (long-term) unemployed (Köchling 2001).

Shaping the change

The demographic change described in this and the last two chapters is not only a challenge, it is also a great opportunity. After all, the coming changes will create an unprecedented win-win situation: health and safety at work, work organisation and a corporate culture oriented to the needs of people, and the competitiveness of the companies do not need to be opposites any more, but can be the building blocks of a new, post-industrial world of work.

In order to master the future tasks, the companies can and should mobilise the resources of their staff. The findings of the age structure analysis can be discussed between the works council and the personnel department. Subsequently, the results of these discussions feed into a specific programme for the future which is oriented towards the above-mentioned fields of action and which in turn becomes the subject of open discussions in the firm. These discussions can set up milestones for the implementation of the necessary changes.

The companies can join forces in the New Quality of Work Initiative in order to shape tomorrow’s world of work together and to position themselves as pioneering INQA companies with regard to demographic change. As INQA companies, they benefit from the experience of other companies in the network and can make their own experience, innovation and examples of good practice available to others. Furthermore, they can take advantage of the resources of experts on demographic change provided by the INQA network.

Services for the companies

The INQA initiative offers various ways for companies and all other interested parties to utilise the experience and skills of its network or to become partners of the network themselves. The following possibilities currently exist for the issue of “Demographic change and employment”:

Thematic Initiative Group “Growing older in employment”

The Thematic Initiative Group “Growing older in employment” was set up under INQA in 2003. It regards itself as a network of experts interested in the dissemination of their knowledge, experience and activities to enhance the employability of older workers and wishing to make their own contributions towards it. As part of the campaign in 2005 and 2006, the thematic initiative group will develop into a

“consultancy network 30, 40, 50plus”.

Numerous institutions with projects and activities on demographic change have come together in the “Growing older in employment” group.

- ▶ Federal Government: Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), Federal Ministry of Health and Social Security (BMGS), Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour (BMWA), Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA)
- ▶ Länder: Ministry of Economics and Labour of North-Rhine/Westphalia together with employers’ associations and the German Trade Union Federation: Healthier Work Joint Initiative
- ▶ Social partners: Metal-workers’ Union, Confederation of German Employers’ Associations
- ▶ Welfare insurance partners: BKK Bundesverband, LVA Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg
- ▶ Foundations: Bertelsmann Foundation, Hans Böckler Foundation
- ▶ Accident insurance funds: Federation of Industrial Accident Insurance Funds, construction industry accident fund in Hamburg
- ▶ Business associations: German Machinery and Plant Manufacturers Association, Central Association of the Electrical Industry
- ▶ Companies: Deutsche Bank, Daimler Chrysler
- ▶ Rationalisation Board of German Industry: Federal office
- ▶ Universities and research institutes: IAS, Karlsruhe University, SFS Dortmund, IAP Institute Frankfurt am Main, Dortmund Gerontology Research Company, Wuppertal University

A full list of all participating players and institutions – with **links and contacts** – is available on the INQA website at http://www.inqa.de/themen/demographie_tik.cfm

It also provides a **diary** of the events in the topics covered by the thematic initiative group and its consultancy circle, as well as the events of everyone involved in the network:
http://www.inqa.de/pdf/Vortragstaetigkeiten_d er_TIK_Akteure.pdf

National WAI network with international involvement

At the end of 2003, work (commissioned by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in co-operation with INQA and Wuppertal University) commenced on the formation of a WAI network in Germany. This network is intended to enable all active and potential users of the Work Ability Index (WAI) to come together and exchange experience. Further objectives include the establishment of a national WAI database and the provision of a downloadable WAI user programme. Contacts and further information at http://www.inqa.de/pdf/WAI_deutsch.pdf and <http://www.arbeitsfaehigkeit.de>.

Your contacts at INQA

If companies wish to establish a sustainable, age-appropriate personnel policy, we help them on all questions related to the specific implementation of measures – e.g. on age structure analysis, promotion of in-company health, work organisation, life-long learning, etc.

The contacts are: Dr. Gunda Maintz, Director and Professor at the *Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health* (BAuA), and Dr. Edith Perlebach, head of department responsible for health at work and research promotion at the *Federation of Industrial Accident Insurance Funds* (HVBG). They can be contacted at 30-40-50plus@inqa.de.

Further to this, experts in the field of the “Growing older in employment” thematic initiative group are available on the internet for regular chat sessions. The dates can be found at www.inqa-demographie.de.

FAQs

The www.inqa-demographie.de website has more than twenty frequently asked questions and answers on “Demographic change and employment”.

Hotline

The phone number of the 30, 40, 50plus campaign is 0180 – 30 40 50 9.

4. The partner companies in the campaign

The INQA partner companies: pioneers in an important field

In the run-up to the INQA campaign, the following five companies said they would act as pioneers in the field of demographics and provide some "start-up funding" both in material and in conceptual terms. The commitment of ASSTEL, Deutsche Telekom, ING-DiBa, Lilly and Opel shows how significant the demographics issue is for the competitiveness of German industry – and it may encourage other companies to join the campaign as INQA partner companies.

Our partner companies will briefly introduce themselves on the following pages:

ASSTEL Insurance Group: "We believe in Germany's competitiveness"

The ASSTEL insurance group is an independent member of the Gothaer Group, which is one of the top ten on the German insurance market with revenues of EUR 3.5 billion a year. As a specialist for workforces, ASSTEL offers all types of company pensions and insurance policies for the private needs of employees – by means of target-group-oriented direct marketing. In the comparison of insurance companies (Capital 2/2004), ASSTEL gains top marks across the board not only for its products, but also for the best customer service.

Why is ASSTEL promoting the 30, 40, 50plus initiative? Well, we believe that Germany is a competitive place to do business and we are showing by our example that innovative ideas and personnel concepts can also realise lasting growth – and thus secure jobs for all ages – in the rather conservative insurance industry. Here, we are relying on our innovative concepts and on competent and performance-oriented staff. We attach particular importance to the following:

1. Our business culture with the three pillars of progressivity, straightforwardness and solidity. By this we mean qualities like flexibility, openness/honesty, competence and trust. We impart these basic values to our future staff during the recruitment process, and we constantly measure our actions and the results of our activities against these values. In this way, the basic values are firmly anchored in each staff member. And in this way we create a culture which can meet the needs of tomorrow.
2. Our health promotion, with a firmly established health management system which includes ergonomic office equipment (interference-free headsets, individually height-adjustable tables) and active health campaigns ("Use the stairs, not the lift" or the ASSTEL family summer festival with body balancing or spinning).

3. Our staff-oriented environment, e.g. flexible working hours, coupled with a yearly working-hours account. This means that, despite service-oriented working hours (8 a.m. to 9 p.m.) it is also possible to give sufficient consideration to the needs of the employees. On top of this there is a performance-based pay system which combines corporate objectives with individual performance. This results in clear, realistic job requirements which take account of the individual performance standard and serve as a basis of an individual career path. Last, but not least, we promote co-operation between all sides – young and old – as part of our "team objectives".

4. Our staff training, i.e. investment in personal and specialist further training of our staff. A "development-oriented personnel discussion" is held once a year. The aim is to support, to challenge and to develop employees in a needs-oriented manner. The measures therefore differ from person to person. They extend from personal coaching in the context of client-oriented discussion management to further training to become an insurance economist (Versicherungsbetriebswirt) and to specialised seminars. This is supplemented by an interdepartmental job enrichment service. The particular strengths of a member of staff are given appropriate consideration via the skills-oriented work approach.

5. Our understanding of management, which assumes that our staff are the pillars of our success. We interact with one another correspondingly: open and direct in the way we communicate, with a flat hierarchy and short decision-making paths. With regard to the "quality of staff management", we undertake a regular survey of the workforce to gain objective feedback and suggestions for any changes. We regard such suggestions as tasks to be tackled without delay.

6. Our personnel policy, which is based on the concept that openness creates trust. We tell the employees right from the start what we expect from them and what their work will look like. So everyone knows what is coming.

That creates bonds to and with the employee. And our job requirements are non-age-specific. Whether someone is 30, 40, 50 or older: anyone who seems able to cope with the job has a realistic chance in our company. As a growth-oriented company, we are of course also interested in the development of fresh sources of labour. Since we know the age structure of our company as a whole, as well as the age structure of individual departments, we can act in good time. We believe that all of these measures have enabled to ASSTEL to move forward successfully in a forward-looking way. In other words, we are confronting the challenges of the future – today and in good time.

Deutsche Telekom – corporate climate promotes diversity, innovation and enjoyment of hard work

Some 248,000 people work for Deutsche Telekom around the world. Their motivation, training and willingness to work hard are a major guarantor of success: they make the company capable of surviving the future. The knowledge, experience and commitment of the employees are a valuable resource which needs to be systematically promoted as part of our diversity management and utilised for the company's objectives. For this reason, our sustainable personnel strategy is based on the principle that Deutsche Telekom designs its work in such a way that the company, employees and clients benefit equally.

Based on the corporate mission statement "T-Spirit", Deutsche Telekom creates a corporate climate which promotes and honours diversity, innovation and enjoyment of performing well – irrespective of factors like age, gender, religion, ethnic origin, disability or sexual orientation.

Naturally, future-oriented firms engaged in innovative sectors like Deutsche Telekom thrive on fresh ideas and flexibility. The half-life of knowledge keeps falling. Despite this, nothing will function in a company without the experience and balanced views of older people who are long-serving employees of the company. For this reason, diversity at Deutsche Telekom also means inter-generational co-existence. The company is pursuing an inter-generational personnel policy which is reflected in day-to-day life, for example in work in mixed-age teams. This type of transfer of knowledge between the generations works well. For this reason, Deutsche Telekom is promoting the idea of tandems between experienced staff and new recruits, e.g. in the form of coaching, sponsorship or mentorship. Deutsche Telekom also aims at a lasting increase in the labour participation rate of women. Here, the company is focused particularly on the question of compatibility of family

and work. In addition to more flexible working hours, Deutsche Telekom offers various programmes to promote female managers.

Due to its development from a government agency into an internationally-based provider, Deutsche Telekom has to cope with special challenges in its personnel structure. The company's economic situation is currently necessitating a block on recruitment. New employees can be only taken on for special functions and via a trainee programme. Furthermore, the restructuring as a company has necessitated a lot of staff movement in the last ten years, which has resulted in a very heterogeneous age structure. Personnel policy is clearly reduction-driven. This means that the 55+ age group is correspondingly small; a large proportion of older employees have left the company via socially compatible job-shedding instruments like early retirement, old-age part-time work and bridging allowances. The average age of the workforce keeps increasing; the length of service is unusually long. Today's 35-45-year-olds are easily the largest group of employees at Deutsche Telekom – something that reflects the national labour force.

But even though the company has yet to be affected by demographic change, it wishes to be armed for the future and it needs to put in place a preventative personnel policy with health-promoting work and organisational conditions for all employees. Deutsche Telekom is investing in preventative health work and its services include free health checks, courses on avoiding back pain and stress reduction programmes. The workstations are designed in an ergonomic way and the conditions in which people work are reviewed annually. Deutsche Telekom is convinced that the more health-promoting the structures and processes are, and the more appropriate and effective the health management, the healthier and more efficient the staff will be, including the older employees.

With around 11,500 trainees, Deutsche Telekom is one of the largest providers of training

in Germany. For this reason, finding skilled new employees is not a problem at present. Nevertheless, Deutsche Telekom is working hard in view of the future development to build further on its positive image as an employer, so that it will continue to be able to attract the best the job market can offer.

ING-DiBa: Success is not a question of age

Simple, quick, cheap – that is the motto which has made ING-DiBa well-known and successful. Internally, the slogan is altered significantly: fair, open, tolerant – those are the characteristics which embody the corporate culture and the way the employees treat one another. At ING-DiBa, the emphasis is on the individual, his or her personality, ability and performance. Age does not play a role. Initial training, further training and promotion are not restricted by age limits.

This is confirmed by the results of this year's survey of "Germany's best employers", in which ING-DiBa participated for the first time this year. According to this survey, DiBa's special strengths lie in the field of fair and non-discriminatory treatment. The vast majority of staff members confirm that the company treats people fairly, irrespective of age, nationality, gender and disability. Furthermore, the company gets top marks for the equipping of the workstation, the friendly atmosphere and the ensuring of physical safety.

ING-DiBa has found that, whilst younger employees may beat their older colleagues on speed, this is offset by the older colleagues' experience. One conclusion from this awareness: there are no longer any age restrictions in job advertisements. And our thinking goes a logical step further: the new training campaign also includes trainees who are well past the school-leaving age. In fact, it is the unusual staff résumés which lend ING-DiBa its unmistakable profile.

Even though age plays such an unimportant role, the company takes preparations for it very seriously. This includes promotion of employee health and fitness, as well as a growing availability of flexible working hour models. Good lighting and air, ergonomic chairs, optimally positioned flat screens and – where necessary – spectacles for work at computer screens ensure a "feel-good workstation". The health care includes not only the

compulsory examination during recruitment but also regular paid check-ups, every two years after the age of 50. There are company ball games and running sports services for beginners and the advanced. The individual needs and life planning of the employees are reflected in increasingly flexible working time arrangements. For example, the annual working time model "JAZ", which has recently been introduced in certain departments, offers a lot of freedom: the individual annual working time is selected; a time account permits individual fluctuations above and below during the year, and the saving up of time credits for a lengthy sabbatical.

The proportion of staff at ING-DiBa aged over 50 still stands at about 15 percent. But the company intends to be well equipped and to take the decisions in good time to cope with the changes and to utilise them to its advantage. The participation in the 30, 40, 50plus campaign – healthy work into old age – is an important step in this direction.

ING-DiBa, which is part of a Dutch financial group, had 3.7 million customers and an operating result of EUR 36.6 million in 2003; it is the European market leader in the direct banking business. It employs more than 1,800 people from 36 countries at its offices in Frankfurt, Nuremberg and Hanover.

Lilly: Competitive advantage from demographic change

As is well known, Germany's population is growing older and older. The question of how this demographic change will affect the employee structure in German firms and of what advantages companies which recognise and utilise this opportunity can derive from it is an important one, and it creates a need to act now.

As a global pharmaceutical company, Lilly has set itself the goal of providing answers to urgent medical problems – in the form of innovative medicines, education and information – based on the motto “How healthily can I grow old?” However, Lilly does not regard itself as being responsible only for patients and society, but also has a duty of care to its employees. For this reason, Lilly intends to face up to demographic change and is participating as one of the pioneering companies in the INQA campaign “30, 40, 50plus – healthy work into old age”.

Here, it is of key importance that the campaign's pioneering companies provide a good example and learn from one another how innovative personnel concepts can be successfully implemented in practice for an ageing workforce. In view of its corporate culture and personnel policy, Lilly can offer significant contributions to the exchange of experience. In the “Lilly Red Book”, the commitments made by the company include treating all staff with respect and ensuring diversity, equal rights, and protection against inappropriate behaviour and discrimination at work. The creation and upholding of safe and health-preserving working conditions are also a clear element of the company's promise.

The fact that this corporate culture is being put into practice at Lilly is particularly evident from the results of the “Germany's best employers” survey, which was conducted last year by the Psychonomics research institute with the magazine “Capital” and in which Lilly took part. Here, Lilly was awarded top marks by its

employees in the fields of fairness, respect and team orientation, and it was celebrated as one of the best German employers. In addition, Lilly received the special prize for equal opportunities. A total of 87 percent of employees, and as many as 91 percent of older employees (55+), said that Lilly was a good employer. Furthermore, 100 percent of those aged over 54 said that physical safety is ensured at work, that they are proud of their work and that it is not “just a job” for them. This is also an indication that older employees have an excellent picture of Lilly.

The outstanding results of the survey of “Germany's best employers” represent additional motivation for Lilly to resolutely continue its company policies and to implement innovative personnel concepts in the interest of the success of the company and the good of the employees. Here, taking part in the 30, 40, 50plus campaign – healthy work into old age – plays a key role. Lilly would like to take advantage of this unique opportunity to act as a pioneering company with INQA and the other partner companies, in order to contribute to a fundamental rethink in Germany.

Eli Lilly and Company is one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies; its headquarters are in Indianapolis, USA. In Germany, Lilly is represented at locations including Hamburg, Bad Homburg and Giessen and employs a total of more than 1,400 staff. Globally, Eli Lilly and Company earned USD 12.6 billion last year; turnover in Germany was EUR 440.4 million.

Opel: Responsibility for safety and health

Health and safety at work traditionally enjoy a high priority at Opel – out of responsibility for staff and society. For this reason, the company attaches great importance to optimised ergonomic design of the jobs in the automotive production itself: and further to this, the cars made by Opel are also always clearly oriented to the latest standards of safety, ergonomics and comfort. After all, for many people the car itself is an important element of their working environment, and they spend many hours in it.

As part of General Motors, the world's largest car manufacturer, Opel is committed to the high, company-wide standards of health and safety at work. The new factory at Rüsselsheim is an outstanding example of the ergonomic optimisation of workstations; Opel invested EUR 750 million in the plant, which was opened in 2002. It is regarded as the world's most modern car factory.

Optimal ergonomics in the world's most modern car factory

The entire plant was first created in virtual reality at the computer – from the building design to the manufacturing and logistics flows and the ergonomic optimisation of the work processes. The engineers and developers used three-dimensional animated factory and design plans, as well as innovative simulation tools. Ultimately, virtual employees were building cars at virtual workstations even before the foundation stone of the factory was laid. For this reason, the final assembly section is forward-looking in ergonomic terms. Conveyors transport the car bodies and automatically provide the optimal work height for the respective assembly stage. The overhead assembly of the fuel tank and the fuel and brake tubing has been consigned to the past at Rüsselsheim. Instead, these components are carried over a mobile assembly platform to the underbody and screwed on. Moving walkways

ensure that no-one has to walk along beside the car any more. Handling aids are available for all components weighing more than ten kilograms; these relieve the burden on the employees still further.

Comfort and safety in the vehicle

The developers and engineers at Opel also pay just as much attention to the safe and comfortable design of the vehicles. Here, great importance is attached to correct, body-appropriate seated posture in the car. After all, the increasing density of traffic and distances travelled mean that professional drivers are not the only ones spending more time behind the wheel. Opel is therefore putting a lot of effort into continuous optimisation of the seat ergonomics in all vehicle classes.

When designing seats to offer back support, the engineers at Opel's International Technical Development Centre pay close attention to a list of requirements formulated by the "Healthy Back Working Group" (AGR). The standard seats in Opel models therefore offer exemplary ergonomics. The company went a step further in developing the orthopaedically optimised MultiContour driver's seat, which is available as an option in the Vectra and the Signum. For the first time, this seat was honoured with the AGR test mark, a mark that has rarely been awarded so far. The MultiContour driver's seat has height-adjustable lumbar support and a seating area which can be extended. Further to this, active in-seat air conditioning also contributes to the driver's well-being. With its MultiContour driver's seat, Opel is making an active contribution to the prevention of back problems – Germany's most common health problem. At the same time, the individually fitted form enables untiring and concentrated car driving, and this also has a positive impact on traffic safety.

Innovative headlight technology

Opel has made a clear step forward in active safety and comfort with its innovative headlight technology Adaptive Forward Lighting

(AFL). For the first time, this offers a lighting system which steers with the car, using a junction light for crossroads and tight bends. The highlight of Adaptive Forward Lighting is a swivelling xenon headlight module which ensures improved lighting of bends. The light shed on the road is thus increased by up to 90 percent compared with fixed headlights. The second function of the new AFL-Bi-Xenon headlights is the junction light, which offers valuable assistance in urban traffic in particular. An additional fixed reflector lights up the area up to 90 degrees to the left or right of the car for about 30 metres. This means that the headlights not only light up the road ahead of the vehicle, but also, ahead of crossroads and tight bends, enable the driver to look in the direction he wishes to turn into. Potential obstacles can thus be seen early and accidents can be avoided.

Rapid assistance in emergencies

Opel also offers a service which provides car drivers with greater safety in the form of its OnStar mobility service: the OnStar SOS Service Call offers round-the-clock personal emergency assistance. Depending on the type of accident, crash sensors are activated in the vehicle which release airbags or tighten the seatbelts. The system also pinpoints the precise location of the vehicle via the satellite-based Global Positioning System (GPS) and sends this with the vehicle data in an SMS via a radio-integrated mobile phone to the OnStar SOS Service Centre. In parallel to this, a voice link is established with an OnStar SOS adviser, who co-ordinates the necessary assistance and maintains contact with the people in the vehicle until help arrives. In case of an acute illness, or if the people in the car are witnesses to an accident, they can also press an SOS button to send off a manual emergency call at any time. If, following the activation of the automatic or manual emergency call, an OnStar SOS adviser is unable to contact anyone in the car, a rescue team is automatically sent to the location of the vehicle.

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Responsible persons:

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c/o Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin
Friedrich-Henkel-Weg 1–25
44149 Dortmund

Phone +49.2 31.90 71-22 50
Fax +49.2 31.90 71-23 63
E-mail inqa@baua.bund.de
Internet www.inqa.de