Experiences and results of a project in Austria to motivate SMEs for age-based workplaces

Carmen Aringer⁹, Michael Wichtl⁸, Herbert Rausch⁸

⁹Institute of Ergonomics, TU München, GERMANY; ⁸Austrian Workers Compensation Board, Department of Prevention, Vienna, AUSTRIA

1. Introduction

Because of the discussion about demographic change and in particular since the uprating of retirement age in Austria, we can find an increasing number of initiatives and projects for designing age-based workplaces. The subject includes different fields like workplace design, work organization, workplace health promotion and business culture (Matthäi & Morschhäuser, 2009). Although there is much information dealing with this topic available, especially Small-and–Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) seem to have problems to introduce the suggestions in their own businesses. Maybe there is too little motivation to deal with the topic within the organizations or the information to this topic is not specific and motivating enough. At this point the project funded by the AUVA (Austrian Workers Compensation Board) starts. In the project sustainable trainings and booklets for SMEs are developed and evaluated with the aim, that SMEs will deal more with the subject of demographic change and age-based workplaces. The project finishes in April 2015, so that all results can be reported.

2. Practice Innovation

The theoretical background is a motivation theory which claims, that among other things the individual importance of a consequence and the probability of success of ones actions are essential factors for people to act in a situation or to be interested in it (Rheinberg, 2008). On these aspects focused the first study, an online survey (I) including 56 businesses in South-Germany and Austria. In the survey we collected information about how far the organizations are already affected by the outcomes of demographic change and what experiences they have made with activities in this field. The second step was a detailed literature review (II) to physical and psychological abilities with increasing age and possible provisions. Especially SME’s gather ideas and benefit from real examples of other businesses (Sczesny, Keindorf, Droß, Jasper, 2014). To gather more practical examples, (group-) interviews (III) with 21 persons from four companies, which are already engaged in the topic, were conducted. The evaluation (IV) of the designed trainings is planned in two steps. The first one is a “before after” survey, measuring interest, current motivation, pressure to act etc. The second takes place three months after the trainings, to evaluate how far the trainings had a sustainable impact and which ideas of the trainings were successfully transferred.

3. Findings

- The results of the online survey show, that the pressure to act in the field of demographic change is not very intense at the moment. Committed organizations act in a way of prevention. Only every fourth organization reports appreciable outcomes like less job candidates. Less than 50% of the sample agrees that the topic is very important at the moment, but more than 80% are convinced that it will get more relevant until the next 10 years. More than 65% of the asked businesses are already engaged more or less in the topic of demographic change. Participating companies which implemented more activities (f.e. ergonomic workplace design, workplace health promotion, etc.), feel significant better prepared for demographic change than companies with less engagement. Engaged companies report positive experiences with the activities in most of the cases.
- The detailed literature review to the development of more than 20 physical and psychological abilities with increasing age was summarized in a booklet and a catalogue. Every description
like flexibility or reaction time contains examples of relevant working fields, a diagram which shows the development of the ability with increasing age and possible solutions for workplaces.

- As results of the (group-) interviews we got genuine examples for workplace design in different industries for the trainings and materials. Furthermore we got ideas, how SMEs can start with the implementation and what problems can appear in this process. The base for age-based workplace design was in all organizations, that we have visited, an evaluation of the workplaces (physical and psychological) and reliable information about age-structure, sick days, fluctuation of employees etc.

- The trainings and the evaluation will take place in January 2015 and will be presented at the conference.

4. Discussion

The previous research in this project can deliver useful findings. The pressure of demographic change is not as strong as we thought, so in the trainings and the materials the prevention character will be pointed out to motivate more of the participants. More and less interesting topics for the SME’s in trainings and booklets as well as successful activities have been identified in the online-survey. The interviews provide real examples and solutions from successful organizations, which can be implemented easily and reported problems of this organizations can be discussed and prepared in the trainings. The evaluation of the trainings with the SME’s will show how far the individual factors of the concept will influence motivation.

References