

# A new approach to transferring know-how

Like many industrialised countries, France faces the progressive ageing of its population. The trend is expected to worsen over the next few years as birth rates keep dropping and life expectancy continues to rise. In this context, promoting active ageing and policies to foster the employability of the over-50s are priority goals. But the number of people taking part in job-related training in France is low compared to other European countries. Moreover, most training is targeted at young people, with only 3% of training programmes designed for those aged 55-64.

The Part'@ge EQUAL Development Partnership aims to counter this problem by promoting lifelong learning opportunities for senior workers in agriculture, and the milk sector in particular. Its objective is to encourage the transfer of know-how between generations within companies faced by an ageing workforce. The DP analyses the needs of each company and develops an individual training programme for transferring skills. It has pioneered a tutoring system where older and younger workers pool knowledge and skills.

## Age management: looking to the long term

The Development Partnership (DP) is led by the Pierre Mendès-France University in Grenoble and works with a number of companies linked to the French Milk Board in the Rhone-Alps region. *"It is essential to offer to ageing workers the possibility to evolve within the company in order to avoid the loss of valuable skills. It is a matter of adaptability, training and career management,"* explains Marie-Antoinette Blondin, responsible for vocational training in one of the companies.

Nevertheless, dealing with ageing workers is not easy: agricultural companies usually focus on short-term problems like market constraints and falling milk prices, while age management goals have to be seen with a long-term view. Putting in place training activities for senior workers requires good communication strategies, based on strong and convincing arguments. Older workers are often difficult to motivate: they lack confidence to take on new learning possibilities and are sceptical about extending their working life. Some decide to take advantage of early retirement schemes which allow workers to retire before the age of 60.

## Training methods adapted to individual needs

Part'@ge developed tailor-made training programmes which were adapted not only to each company, but also to each sector and worker within the company. The training was designed to respond to real needs and use feasible, low-cost learning methods. To fully understand the specific problems of companies and their in-house potential, the DP started with an in-depth analysis of the internal structure and workforce of the four companies taking part. This also took account of the local context, including regional labour market trends, and profiled the workforce, highlighting the added value brought by each worker within the enterprise.

As a result of consultations with managers and employees, Part'@ge understood much better the expectations of both groups, and was able to develop communication and training methods that seamlessly fitted the needs and potential of each company.



Part'@ge is promoting lifelong learning in the milk sector



Tutoring systems help to transfer know-how between colleagues

At Candia, a milk producer, one technician responsible for running a machine filling cartons was trained as a tutor. With the help of training organised by Part'@ge he was able to build up his own technical know-how, formalise his expertise, and then transfer it to colleagues through a series of workshops. Around a third of the company's employees has now benefited from training under programmes developed by the DP.

## Cross-sharing skills between generations

Up to now, most activities aimed at tackling the problem of ageing workers were developed in order to transfer skills from the older generation to the younger one. Part'@ge is reversing this one-sided approach by developing a real and concrete exchange of expertise across generations. The DP has set up a tutoring scheme where younger workers can take advantage of the experience of senior workers while sharing their own knowledge of information technology and new products. This cross-sharing of skills and abilities is aimed at fostering the professional development of workers of both age groups.

By incorporating tailor-made training activities for senior workers, this EQUAL DP has injected a new impulse into a very traditional sector. Activities targeted at senior workers were organised with the specific working context in

mind. Its approach has helped companies face the need to adapt their ageing workforces by making the best use of their own dynamics and resources.

A more detailed version and other EQUAL success stories can be found at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/activities/search\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/search_en.cfm)

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