

A EUROPEAN GUIDE FOR A 'SECOND CAREER'

Developing an age-positive policy within a company, amongst the managers and the workforce: this is the aim of the EQUAL *Partage* partnership. But *Partage* is no ordinary partnership. On the contrary, it is a very inspiring alliance between two EQUAL projects, one in France, the other in Italy, both of which are concerned with the validation of work experience and the development of competences during the second stage of one's career - one's 'second career'. And the outcome of this alliance is by no means ordinary either, far from it! The Italian and French partners are in fact collaborating to produce a European guide to help companies to improve their age management policies and practices, thereby developing opportunities for staff who have many years work experience.

A guide such as this is undoubtedly needed in Italy and France. Both countries have high rates of inactivity for the over 45s, and especially the over 55s. These rates fall well short of the European Commission targets for 2010: according to a Eurostat survey^[1], the total employment rate of older workers (55-64 years) is just above 40% for France and Italy, which are listed as the worst cases along with 10 other Member States. Clearly, a lot needs to be done to improve these rates to the target rate of over 50%.

But what is the origin of these low rates? Well, the inherent problems include the fact that companies do not encourage the employment of their older workers. People over 45, and particularly those from disadvantaged groups who have a low level of qualification, are unable to evolve in their job, do not have access to lifelong learning to update their skills and competences and can suffer from disabilities. Thanks to EQUAL though, *Partage* is developing ideas and good practice that help to counter these problems and promote the active participation of people of all ages in work as part of a longer working life cycle. Through the European guide, as well as other collaborative efforts, the French and Italian partners are working to making a real difference in the field of age management.

A critical stage in all of this work is bringing together and 'making sense' of different national perspectives. This is why the French and Italian partners have been meeting regularly together, to communicate, consult and ultimately collaborate. In fact, the partners have just held their fourth meeting. And this is essentially what this article is all about: presenting some of the highlights from this transnational gathering, and seeing how it helped to foster learning and exchange as part of the process of developing the European guide.

ONE TRANSNATIONAL MEETING, TWO NATIONAL PROJECTS

The fourth transnational meeting was held on 1 December 2006 in Paris. It was attended by around 50 people, including not only EQUAL partners from the Italian and French projects, but also external actors, such as representatives from universities and other organisations engaged in second career issues. The overall aim of the meeting was to compare the different national backgrounds, contexts, attitudes, obstacles, company practices and existing tools in relation to the development a second career and access to lifelong learning when employees are 45 plus.

Against this background and different contexts, the two EQUAL projects are very similar, and have complementary goals and objectives as explained Gerard Cornet coordinator of the transnational activities and Florence Baptiste, representative of the Italian project. The French partnership, *Alliage*, is working to enhance the value of diversity and equality within companies, especially within SMEs, by developing ways to anticipate and plan for future human resource needs. It is led by ADECCO, the temporary placement agency, and involves organisations that have access to SMEs, like AGRIC-ARRCO (which is a cooperative institute for the development of complementary pension schemes for white and blue collar workers), and ACMS (whose business concerns bringing occupational doctors together with preventative safety consultants).

The Italian partnership, *Ricomincio da 45*, led by Tecnorete non profit-consortium promoted by Regional Agency for Development of Piedmont, has been undertaking awareness-raising activities, and developing tools and surveys with enterprises in the Piedmont region so that

general attitudes towards employees of 45 and over can (hopefully) change, and so as to offer more lifelong learning opportunities to the more mature echelons of the workforce.

So, now to the transnational meeting itself...

OPENING OBSERVATIONS, THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

Mr. Michel Boisset, Manager of Inter-institutional Relations at AGIRC-ARRCO, opened the conference by referring to a study undertaken by his organisation in 2005. The study showed that out of 28,000 employees, the average number of days training a year varies drastically according to their age:

- 1.2 days training for employees up to the age of 26; but
- 0.5 days training for employees of 50 years old and more.



According to Mr Boisset, these figures are not only the result of company policies that do not always invest in senior workers, but also the fact that senior staff do not feel the need to be trained! This observation was followed by a very useful reminder and summary of *Partage's* objectives, given by Mounia Chbani from MCC Mobility, the organisation coordinating the national and transnational activities. Based on numerous company surveys carried out by the EQUAL partners, it is clear that age management and diversity policies have been developed in many organisations for a number of years: competency analyses have been carried out, job profiles and human resource needs have been scoped out, and also qualitative assessments have been undertaken on the relative difficulty of work, and health and safety at work. Nevertheless, despite all of these steps to assess and analyse, companies, and especially SMEs, are still not equipped with the necessary tools to go further and develop fully integrated age management policies and practices. And so this is where the *Partage* partnership can help!

A SECTORAL OBSERVATORY TO ADAPT TO TOMORROW

Mrs Sophie de Rancourt AGIRC-ARRCO's officer, gave a really interesting presentation on a professional observatory that was set up in 2005 (involving the social partners) to monitor and support businesses in the field of complementary pension schemes and contingency funds. By way of background, current demographic trends show that the number of employees working in complementary pension/contingency fund businesses will increase by up to 20% by 2008-2010. This increase will have a major impact on the labour, as well as the product market. For instance, new legal mechanisms arising from pension reforms will impact on product and client choices, the European market will expand, and there will also be new and emerging technologies. All of these and other developments mean that there will be an increasing need for tools that can help companies to identify key competences and set up human resource actions that respond to their own, as well as their employees' needs – covering employees of *all* ages.

The observatory provides a very helpful tool within this context. It has the specific purpose of monitoring and anticipating the numbers and types of jobs, drawing up job lists, and establishing a repertory of professions for this growing business area. A particular advantage of the observatory is that it is able to help predict and analyse trends that can inform the development of company, branch and regional-level policies. In fact, seven professional 'families' and 26 professional 'sub-families' have already been agreed upon. Another interesting feature of the observatory is that it has established links with other observatories, like the national social security offices observatory (UCANSS) and the national insurance observatory – clearly examples of good, collaborative practice!

Ms de Rancourt's presentation was followed by many insightful reactions from the audience. Mr Bernard Gaisset from ACMS (one of the French project partners), pointed out that important work needs to be done to avoid or delay the moment when employees feel like quitting their job. This work must be centred on principles of lifelong learning, coupled with the identification of new job

profiles and an increased emphasis on the way in which training is delivered: all of these elements are critical in ensuring the motivation, performance and ultimately the retention of the employee concerned.

One interesting question arose from the discussions: the observatory seems to be well developed on a sectoral basis, thanks to the efforts of the social partners, but would individual companies also be interested in developing such a tool? According to the audience, yes, providing the companies are made aware of its existence. At present, according to the intermediate results of a survey looking at company training practices, lifelong learning is very low down on the company agenda. Out of a sample of 500 companies interviewed in the Ile de France region, 57% said that lifelong learning was not a priority, but might be in the future. Only 25% saw lifelong learning as a priority for tomorrow and a major challenge that the company would have to face. The development of an observatory at the company or business branch level would undoubtedly help to address these issues.

Looking ahead, further development of the observatory is planned. During 2007 a new survey will be carried out in France, combined with the collection of qualitative data to 'fine-tune' the survey picture. After this, towards the end of 2007, a national communication campaign is planned, which will be a major opportunity to promote and raise awareness of the observatory.

AGE-INTEGRATED AND ADAPTED MODELS

Pr. Anne –Marie Guillemard, University Paris V Sorbonne, gave a presentation on international comparisons on how enterprises work to transfer experience and promote access to lifelong learning within the context of a second career. In France, there is a two-fold problem:

- The low activity rate of people over 45 years: 58 years is the average age for people to exit from the labour market; and
- The low activity rate of young people: their delay in entering the labour market.

But is segregation by age group a solution to these problems? Not really, according to Pr. Guillemard. It only increases discrimination and has not been proven in the past to be successful despite ambitious programmes.

So if these measures are not the solution, what are? Well, companies need to motivate and retain their senior staff, and also attract and keep their younger employees. They, along with policy makers, need to develop an integrated approach to diversity, that takes account of skills, employment prospects, health issues and other areas to maintain workers within the labour market at all ages. This proposal is supported by the experiments that have been carried out in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the UK. In Finland, for example, the 1998-2002 senior pact has been renewed for 2003-2007 to include diversity. The aim of the arising national [Veto Programme](#) is to maintain and promote the attractiveness of work and working life, encouraging people to voluntarily lengthen their career by 2-3 years. The Programme supports the spreading of good practice through training and communication, new forms of cooperation with research institutes, training organisations, occupational health care services, and various actors in the field of occupational safety and health.

Another solution can be found in the presentation given by Florence Baptiste on the adaptation of learning models for adults within the work context. The premise behind this adaptation is the importance of establishing and showing links between training, work and the recognition of tacit knowledge. Ms Baptiste reported that there is a wealth of available studies and work in this area under European programmes like EQUAL, Leonardo and Adapt. A good example is the EQUAL project called [OPTIO](#). Between 2002 and 2004, the Finish partners in this project developed an approach that complemented their national employment programme. They evolved a system whereby diversity management was integrated into the development of training modules that were made suitable for all; as such, the modules could be applied to any one and for all kinds of training. Moreover, this approach meant that people aged 45 and over could access a greater number of training opportunities, and learn in groups with people of different ages – a clear innovation. Another novel feature of OPTIO was the development of an accreditation system, integrating an individual training plan and training evaluation, to help support the concept of training in one's second career.

The results of the project have been particularly positive. The experience has proved that the company can be helped to see the challenges of diversity management in a concrete way and match the reality of the company and the employees' expectations. In addition, learning in a group can boost the motivation of the individual group members.

But, reflecting on all above-mentioned examples and experiences, can they actually be transferred?

TRANSFERRING EXPERIENCES AND THE FUTURE...

This was one of the closing questions posed and discussed in the conference. And the conclusion was that not all experiences are directly '*transferable*'. Limits for transferability can come from differences in political, cultural, market and environmental contexts. In addition, one of the major difficulties is the difference in the levels of social dialogue in the various Member States, which is linked to the national legal systems and understandings of concepts such as pensions, lifelong learning, etc.

The question of transferability is further complicated as all contexts and concepts are not really comparable: for example, the above Finnish model has been introduced to the French Orientation Advisory body for Pensions. However, although the model has been highly welcomed in France, all of its features will probably not be wholly adopted - even if they represent the pre-conditions for successful implementation; for example, the scientific committee for evaluation (an element of the model) will probably not be taken forward as the evaluation arrangements are very different from one country to the other.

Despite the varying scope for transferability, there is still plenty to yield from cross-national collaboration. And the transnational partners still have very high hopes for their remaining activities planned next year according to Gerard Cornet. In fact, 500 people have already requested the *Partage* newsletter produced by the Italian and French partners! Moreover, the French project is benefiting from the direct support of the French Economic and Social Committee! Clearly, with this level of engagement and interest, and fuelled with the ideas and insights of the fourth transnational conference, there is no stopping the *Partage* partners in developing a highly-sought-after and effective European guide for a second career!

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