

« Inter-generational Links » Workgroup

Expert : Brigitte Hudlot, Ichech Entreprises

Facilitator: Jacques Spelkens, GDF Suez Belgium

Participant companies :

Danone Belgium, Danone France, GDF Suez Belgium, Ichech Entreprises, IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cité, Electrabel, La Poste, Sodexo Belgium, STIB.

Contextual note:

The workshop will focus on the advantages and obstacles to manage inter-generational teams within the workplace. Attention will be paid both to the transfer of competences and to inter-generational links.

Sum up: “Through its career, a flexible person will never be a senior worker!”

Beyond the simple transfer of competences, there is a need to implement trans-generational activities generating social cohesion and creativity in the workplace. Here a few points for attention & reflexion...:

- 1. Attention must be put on building up a common culture with newcomers and senior employees**
- 2. Adopt a systemic approach, including:**
 - 1. Training for members of management**
 - 2. Training for new comers**
 - 3. Senior consulting (i.e. coaching, work in pairs, consulting...)**
 - 4. Transfer of competences**
 - 5. Team building**
 - 6. Relation and communication skills**
- 3. There is an urge to focus more on competence than on careers (beyond CV and diplomas)**
- 4. Internal mobility is a strong lever to mix generations**
- 5. There is a necessity to get support from HR people, and to train them for that**

• Case study: Danone Belgium

The context:

- Sales force renewal, introduction of young new graduates into pure 'Danone' teams
- Demand for more sales than counselling (in the relation with the client)

The issue:

Risks of inter-generational conflict within the new teams

The solutions (experimental phase, on 35 employees and 6 managers, juniors and seniors):

- Accompaniment of managers: leadership training & coaching & personal coaching
- Accompaniment of the sales force: junior training, valorisation of senior expertise (senior become consultants and coaches within the new teams)
- Creation of work-pairs between juniors and seniors, to facilitate the transfer of competences
- Launch of inter-generational brainstorms on specific issues
- Launch of inter-generational team-building activities (more or less physical/ intellectual)

Positive feedback:

- Such activities incite seniors to question themselves, to disrupt their daily routine and to transfer their know-how
- Horizontal and vertical mobility is spurred: Seniors happen to discover/ develop new competences which they can use in different services in the company
- Juniors discover various career paths and learn how to plan their career development on a longer term

Return from experience:

- Managers have benefited from personal development coaching, through the leadership of their teams
- Managers have learned to delegate responsibilities to members of their teams who have been specifically trained for that matter
- Inter-generational work-pairs have been a success and still continue

• Case study: La Poste**The context:**

- Opening to competition with the private sector in 2001
- 36 000 employees: civil servants and contract staff.
- Civil servants are an ageing population (+ 50 years old)

The issue:

- Closing of numerous positions
- Need to reconsider positions and mobility within the company

The solutions:

- Target the civil servants' group, to offer them new opportunities for reconversion (both internal and external):
- External reconversion: possibility to candidate for specific positions within State Ministries. For employees over 50 years old, La Poste offers to pay the difference of salary in case of a pay-gap. 30% to 40% of the candidates succeed in the selection process.
- Internal reconversion: possibility to be placed in other services within the company, for 2 or 3 months, within an "internal interim" framework.
- Specific "Star" program, where the target group is trained to team leadership and to the transfer of competences.

Return from experience:

- Members of the target group are more at ease to present their own competences and talents, based on their personal experience.
- Personal reconversions are easier.

• Case study: Sodexo Belgium**The context:**

- 5 000 employees. Impossible to detect the hidden talents of each of them (beyond their diplomas).
- Change in organization: more centred on the relation to the client.

The issue:

- How to ensure an adequate internal mobility, for both juniors and seniors?
- How to detect these talents?

The solutions:

- Selection of the best managers, in order to replace them in other services within the company.
- All managers are assessed, based on their competences, independently of their age.
- Internal mobility is trans-generational, i.e. based on the competences rather than on age
- Managers are trained on a 2 years basis. A practical training, focused on behaviours, team work and collaboration.

- **Case study: Electrabel**

The context:

- Relational positions, focused on the relation with the client
- Renewal of the workforce: new comers exceed senior employees.
- Mixed teams

The issue:

- Need for specific competences which are very hard to find (specifically amongst the juniors): loss of know-how
- Management is not prepared enough to manage such mixed teams

The solutions:

- Creation of new full-time positions: 12 “technical consultants” are based in each local structure, and are specifically in charge of the newcomers.
- Most of these technical consultants are employees over 55 years old, who have volunteered to such positions. Other consultants are juniors benefiting from specific skills (IT, internet, communication), and external consultants.

Return form experience:

- Such positions are now renowned in the company, and actively researched.
- Managers are relieved in their daily work.

- **Case study: STIB**

The context:

From 1980 to 2000, there was only one career path, and there were no recruitments.
From now on, 20% to 25% of the workforce is to retire.

The issue:

How to ensure the transfer of competence, of knowledge, and the cultural heritage of the company?

The solutions:

Creation of generational workgroups and reflexion groups, to brainstorm on the internal and external image of the company and on its core values: junior groups and seniors groups, who brainstorm separately and put in common their ideas. A framework for 20 actions resulted from this reflexion, in the objective to create a new common culture. An Ethic Charter was launched, displaying the company's new values

Top managers are incited to turn to expert and technical positions within the company, in order to valorise their skills and talents.

Return form experience:

Sometimes difficult to convince managers to change positions (which are perceived as less valorised in the company, and sometimes with a pay-gap)

- **Case study: GDF Suez**

The issue:

- Renewal of the workforce
- Need for succession plans

The solutions:

- Created a new company within the company, “Suez consulting”, de dedicated to the reconversion of top managers to technical positions.