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Innovative practice in counseling for initial and continuing training in SME in Germany – results from qualitative research

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1. Introduction

- Challenges exist for medium and small sized enterprises (SME) because of mega trends
- Skills shortage and market of employees
- Strategy of SME – increased personell work
- Official counseling offers for employers are little-known in SME and slightly used
- Support from German National Skills Strategy 2019
- Key priority area 3: Strengthening continuous career guidance of individuals and strengthening employer advisory service of the Public Employment Service (PES)

Resources: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2022, p. 231 ff. and 2020, p. 212; Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2021a, pp. 13 ff.; Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2021b, pp. 44-55.

1. Introduction

- Work in employer advisory service of PES has changed
- Job placement has been reduced from 80 to 20 percent
- Now 80 percent is counseling work of SME
- Counselors in employer advisory service get training for their new tasks including more „free“ time for counselling
- Topics comprise personnel work like (alternative) recruiting strategies, continuous education and training, support instruments and funding
- Transformation process in employer advisory service is supported by German National Skills Strategy

Resources: Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2021, pp. 13 ff.; Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2021b, pp. 44-55.

2. Research design

- So far we know little about
 - how career guidance in SME works and changes
 - how experts in the employer advisory service work in SME

Research questions

- How do employers in SME do their counseling work of employees with respect to initial training and continuous education and training?
- How do experts in the employer advisory service support SME regarding to initial training and continuous education and training?
- Which changes in counseling work can be found?

Aim

- Identification of good and innovative counseling practice

Resources: Weber 2020; Schwuchow/Gutmann 2020

2. Research design

200 Questionnaires

- 159 SME (73 + 86 questionnaires, long and short version)
- 41 experts in the employer advisory service of the PES

33 Guided interviews

- 21 SME
- 12 experts in the employer advisory service of the PES

3. Quantitative results

Questioning of SME (n = 73)

- Very active in career guidance of employees
- Counselling with respect to
 - target groups = mostly for managers and leaders
 - Formats = mostly one-to-one interviews, formal, at the workplace
 - Content = all areas of competences, (digital) learning
 - Networking = different partners, very useful
 - Future topics (20%) = planing of succession of factory owner, knowlegde management, topics of learning, digitalisation, extern counselling for (digital) competence development

3. Quantitative results

Questioning of experts in the employer advisory service (n = 41)

- Very different results
- Counseling with respect to
 - Content (very often) = labor market, demographic change, formats of qualification, instruments of support (funding)
 - Content (partly) = recruiting, digitalisation, individualisation
 - Future topics (20-25%) = topics of digitalisation, topics of qualification and learning

4. Qualitative results

Interviews with SME (n = 21)

- Analysis of interviews is partly done and not finished

4. Qualitative results

Interviews with experts in the employer advisory service (n = 12)

- **Target groups** = always employers, partly employees
- **Formats** = traditional (4), good practice (4), innovative (4)
- **Content** = broad range, specialisation, continuum
- **Demographic change** = traditional (3), good practice (8), innovative (1)
- **Digitalisation** = traditional (4), good practice (6), innovative (2)

4. Qualitative results

- **Networking (intern)** = good practice (5), innovative (5)
- **Networking (extern)** = traditional (1), good practice (7), innovative (2)
- **Wishes and perspectives**
 - praise for freedom in the advisory work
 - wishes for more time for counseling
 - less administration (3) and better digital support (3)
 - different single aspects

Examples (quotations) of innovative practice

Formats (innovative)

- „Mostly in the company, because we get an holistic view when we see how the employer works. Telephone counseling nearly rarely happens“ (7, 79-85)

Examples (quotations) of innovative practice

Content (innovative)

- „We try to develop new concepts. We just started to develop an new format to inform employers in different branches to work with key topics. This can be in the care work, in the education sector or in the transport sector for drivers“ (10, 78-82)

Examples (quotations) of innovative practice

Demographic change (innovative)

- Yes, also we developed a learning journey. This is what we do now, but this has also to come into the heads of the leading persons and also to the staff. When we give advice to the companies we tell them that they should look at the learning moduls their employees need. Because a lot of training providers have offers which are build up in a modular structure, so that these moduls can be arranged in a certain space of time and also can be funded by us“ (12, 95-103)

Examples (quotations) of innovative practice

Digitalisation (innovative)

- „We have craftwork companies with partly 40, 50 employees, who are very clever on their way. And they have also implemented the leaning management system also on their homepage. We have here a company which is an example of best practice, which we also have taken in the lunch-talk to show the example of best practice to other companies“ (12, 315-319)

Examples (quotations) of innovative practice

Intern networking (innovative)

- We make networking in our house very narrow with the main advisors of the companies, these are the advisors responsible for economy classes. We also try to make external dates as far as possible always together [...]. This has a high value and it works very good in my opinion“ (10, 62-67).

Examples (quotations) of innovative practice

Extern networking (innovative)

- Yes, in any case. Also we are on the way with the economic promoters, we are on the way with the universities, we are on the way with chambers, chambers of handicrafts, chambers of industry and commerce. Also we include all alliance partners and make common events with them and perform together“ (12, 152-158):
- We also for example make a lunch-talk in the alliance for transformation on the platform here, where we also show expamples of best practice. And we invite employers, of course also SME, so that they can hear this“ (12 152-158).

5. Conclusions

- Vocational counselling of employers and employees becomes more important, extensive and differentiated
- Skills shortage and digitalisation are very present topics in counseling work of employers in SME and in the employer advisory service of PES
- Support of counseling especially for SME is still necessary to manage challenges of skills shortage and digitalisation
- For counsellors in the employer advisory service of PES it is necessary, that their work becomes more extended and deepened in terms of content, formats and networking

5. Conclusions

- In the counseling work of employer advisory service of PES first examples of innovative counseling practice can be seen
- Efforts of German National Skills Strategy to improve counseling work in employer advisory service seems to gain first results

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- Skills shortage and digitalisation are very present topics in counseling work of employers in SME and in the employer advisory service of PES
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- For counsellors in the employer advisory service of PES it is necessary, that their work becomes more extended and deepened in terms of content, formats and networking
- In the counseling work of employer advisory service of PES first examples of innovative counseling practice can be seen

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Thank you for your attention!

Resources

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Resources

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