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IO2

NATIONAL REPORT

Germany

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National survey on the current practices, needs and requirements of
experts and professionals in the fields of CGC and HRM in Germany

Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1	Target Groups	3
2	Current practices, needs and requirements of CGC professionals	4
2.1	Respondents and their organisational and professional contexts	4
2.2	Involvement in the HRM life cycle	5
2.3	The role of CGC in enterprises	9
2.4	Developing knowledge, skills and competences of the career worker	11
2.5	Interactions/networking and co-operations between the actors of CGC and HRM	12
2.6	Challenging issues	13
2.7	Emerging themes	14
3	Current practices, needs and requirements of HRM professionals	15
3.1	Respondents	15
3.2	Involvement in the professional life cycle	16
3.3	The role of CGC in enterprises	18
3.4	Developing knowledge, skills and competences of the career worker	20
3.5	Interactions/networking and co-operations between the actors of CGC and HRM	21
3.6	Challenging issues	21
3.7	Emerging themes	23
4	Conclusions	24
4.1	Communalities and differences of roles and tasks of HRM and CGC professionals in the professional life cycle	24
4.2	Motivation offering career guidance in enterprises	24
4.3	Updating of professional knowledge, skills and competences	25
4.4	Interactions/networking/cooperation	25
4.5	Perspectives	25

1 INTRODUCTION

In this report we are presenting the results of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with personnel development and career counselling experts inquiring current practices, challenges and needs in their fields inside organisations and in cooperation with external actors. We conducted interviews with human resource development specialists in private businesses and public service organisations as well as counsellors, consultants and training specialists providing services to organisations and individuals, either for profit or as part of a not-for-profit or government institution. So far (from September to December 2020), twenty interviews have been conducted – ten in each of the two target groups. 18 interviews have been recorded and are being transcribed. In two cases where interviewees were not comfortable with a recording, extensive notes have been taken. Interviews have been conducted in German. Due to Covid19-related contact and travel restrictions, only one of the interviews has been conducted in person. Six interviews were conducted via landline telephone, 13 via video-conference tools such as MS Teams.

The report will mainly draw on the data gained from these interviews. As the research is ongoing, this report is based on notes derived from the recordings and directly taken. During the interviews, and in some cases before or after, questionnaires have been completed by the interviewer on the basis of the interviewees' responses. These data will go into the overall evaluation to be found in the Transnational Report. For this, the German-language version as provided by the Austrian team has been used. Further, we also looked at organisational material such as the careers pages of the company website, consultants' blogs and external publications etc. – both to fine-tune interview schedules and to triangulate accounts.

Further interviews are planned and once the transcriptions are completed, they will be coded used MaxQDA to create a basis for further analyses.

1.1 Target Groups

As mentioned above, up to date we have spoken to ten respondents from personnel development departments of private and public sector organisations (in the following HRD) and to ten external human resources development and career guidance and counselling specialists (in the following CGC).

We have contacted 110 individuals and organisations in total – 86 fall into the HRD group, 24 in the CGC group. While setting a regional, albeit not exclusive, focus on the South West of Germany, we were aiming for a variety of perspectives overall in respect of size, organisational form, sector etc. While in some cases organisations were contacted in a generic form, in most cases we identified potential contacts via internet searches, also using networks like LinkedIn.

2 CURRENT PRACTICES, NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF CGC PROFESSIONALS

2.1 Respondents and their organisational and professional contexts

Of the ten interviewees, three work in an employer-facing advisor role in the **public employment system (PES)**. Their branch of the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA) collects job openings from employers, advises them on placements, and on qualification opportunities for new and, increasingly also, existing staff. They can also, if certain conditions are met, partially or fully fund upskilling programmes.

Four respondents work for **industry and business associations**. Three of our respondents work for regional chambers of commerce and industry (Industrie- und Handelskammern IHK). IHKs are responsible for matters of vocational training (both at entry and higher levels), and they advise particularly smaller and medium sized companies regarding further training and human resources development, both with a view to vocational and leadership skills. Membership in the regional IHK is obligatory for businesses, i.e. it is a corporatist association. All three respondents had both managerial/administrative roles and acted as consultants to businesses and/or advisors to individuals. One of them managed the IHK academy of his region, the other two as heads of training and development departments. One respondent works, in a similar role (administrator and counsellor), for a cross-sector economic association promoting learning and development. The difference to the IHKs is that his association covers a larger region (a federal state rather than a sub-region) and, crucially, that membership is voluntary.

Three of our respondents work as **consultants** in the private sector, one of them as owner-manager of his own consultancy, one as a freelance consultant and one is employed by a consultancy. Notwithstanding their different organisational statuses, all three are counselling practitioners.

As the organisational position and function turned out to inform participants' perspectives and activities in a meaningful way, we will group them where appropriate in the following way: the PES and IHK respondents work for institutions which are either, in the case of PES, government agencies (albeit with controlling input from employers' associations and trade unions) or corporatist in the sense that, albeit autonomous, their role is defined by Law and membership is obligatory. When grouping them together we will refer to those six respondents as "**institutional respondents**" and the other four as "**non-institutional**". The IHKs have also associational character, so sometimes it makes sense to count in the one non-institutional respondent who represents a cross-industry business association. We will refer to these four as "**Association respondents**".

2.2 Involvement in the HRM life cycle

Participants were asked at which stages of the personnel life cycle they are involved the most. Specifically mentioned were recruitment, onboarding and integration of new employees, development of vocational/professional skills, development of personal and social competencies, change management, dismissal and retirement.

Along the personnel life cycle, **recruitment** takes up much importance for the PES respondents, one of the four Association respondents and all three consultants. This was, however, for different reasons. For PES respondents, job placements are always a central aspect of their role, even if they specialise in advising on training and development. This is largely owed to the fact that the main occasion for employers contacting the Employment Agency for advice is when they cannot fill a position. So advice is always both on upskilling existing staff *and* supporting the upskilling of a currently unemployed person through public funds.

For the Association respondent involved in recruitment processes this role focused on the recruitment of apprentices in the German dual education system. He here engages in consulting for employer marketing for apprenticeships for which the competition from continued education and college-based qualifications is growing. This is generally a concern for IHKs, but in our sample only one of the respondents was directly involved.

For the consultants, recruitment was an important topic as all three also specialised on “talent”, i.e. helping organisation to fill positions from a competitive labour market for business and technological experts. However, the interviews revealed that there is a wide range of what involvement at this stage can mean. So while for one it was compatible to the activities of a high-end recruitment agency, for another it was closely interconnected with other aspects of the personnel life cycle which underpins efforts in employer branding functional in recruitment. And in the last case the main focus was not so much on marketing employers to applicants but on developing potential applicants while they are still at university.

Regarding the **integration of new employees**, the PES respondents saw no role for themselves. One of the Association respondents is involved in the integration process mostly for apprentices and trainees in the process of transition into a career at the business where they have undergone their vocational training. Here the concern is equipping them with personal and methodological skills that transcend the scope of vocational training received. Two of the consultants supported processes of integration. One as part of a holistic approach as continuation of the role in recruitment, the other as part of a project to boost talent from the start to ensure they do not get stuck in traditional structures. For the latter, however, there was far not enough opportunity to get involved at this stage.

Most importance across the board was given to the **development of skills and competences**, with different emphases on **vocational and professional skills** on the one hand and **personal and social competencies** on the other, depending on the respondents’ roles and approaches.

For the respondents from PES and chambers, vocational skills were more important, since both institutions have a strong focus on technical qualifications. For the PES it is a declared goal to transform unskilled into skilled labour – a goal that is also set out in legislation. Chambers have a central role in the dual education system, particularly in the certification of vocational trainings and provision of trainings that build on them. Another reason given is faster technological change that requires more frequent updates and upgrades to existing skill sets. Nonetheless, for these respondents personal and social competences, too, were at least somewhat important, for half of them they were important or very important. They frequently reported a growing importance of these competences against the background of new ways of working and organisational changes. One respondent, for example, emphasised the importance of providing leadership skills to those who make the transition from skilled technical or commercial staff to managerial roles.

For the other respondents the picture is reverse, while all but one give at least some importance to vocational skills, they all strongly emphasised the importance of personal and social skills. The reason one consultant gave no importance to professional skills was that she was working with academics who have no need for support in this regard. These professionals were clearly at home with the provision personal and social competencies. Interestingly, for them this was also a lever for organisational change overall. One consultant, for example, told us that such leadership skills are the asset everything else hinges on.

Change management was given importance to by the four non-institutional respondents. However, only one of them said she was contracted to directly support such changes. The others saw it as a function of providing leadership skills, from which such change was hoped to follow.

Except one consultant, our respondents gave no importance to **dismissal** and **retirement**. The consultant who gave those issues importance offers counselling with an eye to a strategic alternative to outsourcing, which in parts is interwoven with intra- and interorganisational learning processes.

We have asked respondents to provide information about the various **activities** they engage while involved in the respective stages of the personnel life cycle. Here we specifically inquired into the following: providing information about careers, skills assessment and testing, counselling on career decisions, advising on and planning of career paths, designing and managing training programmes, furthering social responsibility, and involvement in quality and innovation processes. Again, answers showed different foci of activity, depending on the function of the respondent.

Regarding the **provision of career information**, the institutional respondents were all involved in often. However, for PES respondents who, as mentioned, belong to the employer-facing branch of the Employment Agency, this was not primarily information provided to employees (although this was sometimes the case when discussing individual pathways), but to personnel managers and managing directors inquiring about they can be supported developing staff through (part or entirely) Employment Agency when training courses. The Agency does provide, of course, such information directly to jobseekers, employees and young people, but it does so through different branches (careers counselling, placement). In some cases, counselling was done together with colleagues from the employee-facing placement service. Respondents from chambers of

commerce and industry, on the other hand, were heavily involved in advising on registered occupation as part of their role promoting vocational training under the dual education system. Here the recipients were predominantly young people about to leave school. In fewer cases, advice is also on career options resulting from chamber-certified further-training courses. Among the others, only one consultant provides career information on a regular basis (in connection to the proactive recruitment role building a pool of high-talent academic experts)

Only three participants are involved in **skills and competency assessment** in a more than occasional manner. Again, the reasons are varied. One PES respondent was engaged in a project to extend the Employment Agency's role in advising employers on qualification which includes applying an analysis of staff potential. One chamber respondent was also involved in the process of assessing outcomes of courses (delivered by the chamber and by independent, chamber-certified providers), and for one consultant, an in-depth aptitude testing was part of his involvement in the recruitment process.

Counselling on career decisions is done frequently by two of the chamber respondents in conjunction with career information, mainly for younger people, but also and less frequently for people looking for chamber-certified courses to help them make a career change within or outside their current organisation (this applies to all three chamber respondents). For the consultant, too, counselling was linked to career orientation before the entry into working life. For a second consultant it was integral part of her holistic approach – emphasising that counselling here is also with the express option that a resulting career decision can also mean changing employers. For the other respondents this issue was highly infrequent or inexistent among their activities. With the PES respondents this is to be explained by the division of labour within the institution – when issues requiring counselling on career decisions arise they would usually refer to a placement officer or careers counsellor, depending on the status of the person.

Advising on and planning of career paths was done frequently by two and less frequently by one Association respondents. Inquiries by industry here seemed often linked to the fine-tuning of advancing people, developing the organisation and available training courses. One consultant also reported advising on this issue very frequently. For the other two, as they focuses mainly on helping getting people into and then coach managerial and expert staff through existing structures, this issue did not play a role. For the PES respondents involvement would conflict with their mandatory neutrality. However, as part of the extended remit for qualification advice one of them operates under, facilitating internal promotions supported by training where positions cannot be filled from the external labour market. In such cases he would support the employer identifying internal candidates who could fill the position if given adequate further training (the idea being that the lower skill position thus freed up then can be filled more easily by a jobseeker)

Designing and managing training programmes again was linked to the professional context of the respondents. Those who worked for organisations that offered training courses were all often involved the planning and administration of programmes in one way or another. This applies to the four Association respondents and one of the consultants. A second consultant was sometimes involved. The consultants supported organisations in setting up programmes as well as offering custom-tailored trainings through her

own agencies – both assumed teaching roles in such programmes. The Association respondents mainly focused on the external provision (i.e. set course programmes) and were more exclusively involved in managing them, not designing and teaching. The PES respondents had no role in such activities whatsoever, as training facilitated by them is exclusively sourced externally (both with respect to the institution and the businesses they advise). This means that, while nearly all cited their role in the development of skills and competencies as the most important aspect of their roles, their involvement in designing, managing and delivering training was highly diverse.

Social responsibility was not thematic in the PES interviews, although one could say that their activities by nature or being a public service could generally count under this header. Two of the Association respondents reported no activity here – one because it was not part of his role, the other because he said in his region there was no demand from businesses. The two other Association respondents often engaged in the promotion and support of social responsibility. For one of them inclusion was a highly relevant theme, for the other it was various issues depending on the companies involved. Two of the consultants were highly active in this field, both citing diversity as the dominating theme. While the third consultant saw his role as socially beneficial, it was not directly related to the classical themes of corporate social responsibility.

Three of the Association respondents reported high involvement in activities supporting **innovation and quality** initiatives. This was done partly through promotion of industry or cross-industry initiatives in cooperation with businesses and universities, partly through supporting organisational change advising how to foster this through training. While two of the consultants saw such activities as outside their remit which focused on personnel development (while seeing increased likelihood of innovation as an indirect effect of this), one consultant combined advising on change management with talent development.

As to **other**, unprompted themes, one consultant reported frequent involvement in organising intra- and inter-organisational internships. She also provides and co-hosts exchanges between organisations on personnel development issues. Further she and a second consultant are sharing insights in learning and development issues online open access on their respective agencies' websites and by contributing to other publications (one of them did not bring this up in the interview). Presenting and promoting the programmes and counselling of their organisations was also high on the agenda of three of the four Association respondents.

An overall insight in this field of inquiry is that This adds to an emerging picture, namely that access to individual employees for careers counselling is difficult to get for external professionals and that their role (at least those in our sample) is an *indirect* one, in which the development needs of employees are reported by a representative of the organisation (normally a human resource development manager or, especially with smaller firms, the managing director). This is partly due to the way we selected interviewees: We specifically contacted professionals of whom we knew that they work with business organisations. This excluded career counselling professionals offering job coaching directly either as independent coaches or as employees of providers of training. These would have, of course, had a much more direct access to individual employees. However, they would see individuals outside the context of their organisations (and, if not working with a very well-off clientele, mostly with jobseekers who pay them by vouchers issued by a PES institution)- Based on

circumstantial evidence we would then assume that there is a disconnect between career counselling and guidance as provided to individual employees and human resource development in organisations, which calls for further investigation.

2.3 The role of CGC in enterprises

Regarding their role in organisations, we asked CGC professionals what motivates organisations to cooperate with them, which specific groups of employees they work with, which issues come up the most and how they provide counselling.

Regarding the **motives**, specific items we asked them to comment on were individual solutions, consensual decisions, learning outcomes and their sustainability, the independence and professionalism of counselling and the effect on organisational commitment.

Finding individualised solutions was an aim all respondents found important – this was seen as self-evident by all. In contrast, **consensual decision making**, was seen as less relevant. While for one consultant, one PES and one Association respondent emphasised the issue as important to achieve sustainable results, while the others often emphasised that of course they are aiming for consensus, but did not place the issue as a specific reason to get in their support.

Learning results were important for all, except for one consultant who did not see it as problematic for the specific group (high-achieving university students). This is not surprising given the centrality given to training. Regarding the **sustainability of learning outcomes**, responses matched the ones for results – many could not see a difference as they viewed sustainability of outcomes as an essential part of the quality of teaching. The three PES respondents are an exception here since they did not see themselves in a position to make claims about sustainability as once measures like training begin their role normally ends. The Association respondents, in contrast, had their own training programmes and the two consultants had longer term contacts with business organisations during such processes.

Professionalism and **independence** was rated as important motives by nearly all respondents. The exception is one of the consultants was clear about working for the employer and saw trust being founded exclusively on his professional competence and the high reputation of his agency. This did not mean that he would not value standards like confidentiality and a focus on individual personality, but that it was clear that in the end the organisational aim is what counts. Another consultant, in contrast, saw independence as key to the trust-relation essential to professional counselling. For her, proof was in the pudding, that is, it was important for clients to experience her neutrality in counselling (which means that she also communicates to employers that it is in their best interest to give access to neutral advice, even if it is not in the company's direct interest every single time). For the PES and Association respondents independence as vouchsafed by their institutions' legal statuses and/or membership composition was seen as a major benefit in their counselling practice.

Strengthening **organisational commitment** was generally not seen as a primary motivator. For the PES respondents and two of the Association respondents it was not an important factor. With PES one could even

say that it must not be a motivator as the focus in their contribution to learning and development is committed to transferable skills for the most part.

When it comes to specific **groups of employees**, we again see variation which again appears to relate to the various positions and functions of the respondents in their respective fields. For three of our four Association respondents had a strong focus on apprentices, which is grounded in their organisations' role in the dual education system (two of the three represent chambers), but also in urgent concerns about the continuing decrease in interest in apprenticeships among young people. In fact, this also implies a focus on this group before they enter apprenticeships, i.e. on **school leavers**. One of the chamber respondents specialised in adult further training and reports that while it is not his focus, it is still a very important target group for his organisation. One consultant focused on **university students** and their initial development within organisations, i.e. had a focus on **trainees**.

New employees are in the focus of two of the three PES respondents. This was because they were involved with support schemes in which employers can apply for integration grants when hiring jobseekers whom they need to upskill for a longer period of time so they meet the requirement of the position. The chamber respondent with a specialism on adult further training reported often advising people at early career stages who are eager to fast-track their careers by adding chamber-certified qualifications to their vocational training certificates. For one Association respondent the transition from apprenticeship into regular employment was a focus, hence he also often worked with new employees (albeit most of them already were employed for a two- or three year apprenticeship with the same business)

People with **migration backgrounds** were a focus for one consultant who had a strong emphasis on diversity as way of extending the talent pool. One other consultant who specialised on diversity was working with women in particular and told us that with an eye on recognising intersectionality, other aspects of equal opportunity were of growing importance, but that this was still in the making. The PES respondents all paid particular attention to this group as labour market integration of newly arrived migrants as well as using the full potential of existing groups is an official objective of the Employment Agency.

Only one respondent (from the Association group) reported working with **people returning from parental leave** on a regular basis. PES respondents occasionally work with parents re-entering the labour market after a longer family time, but mostly do so in cooperation with a specialist service within the institution.

Older employees were often in the spotlight only for PES respondents, as both with integration grants and support for further training there is special legal provision.

Employees with disabilities, again, were on the priority list of PES respondents who worked towards labour market inclusion of this group, often in cooperation with their colleagues from the specialist occupational rehabilitation placement and counselling service. One Association member often advised people who saw their current jobs as risk to their health regarding alternatives and courses to help them improve their prospects in this respect.

Employees at risk of redundancy were a priority of PES respondents, responding to their brief which is not just placing jobseeker but also preventing unemployment. One Association respondent reported being often in contact with employees who try to keep their positions by adding qualifications to their profile and one consultant often worked with staff at risk to find alternatives within and outside the organisation and talk through what kind of development measures need to be taken to facilitate such moves.

None of the respondents worked specifically with employees preparing for retirement.

Regarding **issues** requiring counselling the item **further training** is of importance to all but one respondent (this being the consultant working with university students). For this one consultant and one further consultant **career planning** was a highly important issue. The third consultant usually works with organisation where career paths as such are relatively clear defined, i.e. focuses more on support for people advancing through them. For two Association and one PES respondents the issue was also of importance as they combined advice on training with an exploration of the career paths these trainings could contribute to. **Learning and performance problems** were an issue for three of the four Association respondents, while **team problems** were thematic for two Association respondents and one of the consultants. Only one respondent reported some indirect involvement with **personal problems** and quoted issues like substance abuse problems which some companies in his region are troubled by. Again we see the indirect nature of career counselling activities into businesses in this group as indicated by the last issue: a job coach contracted by the PES or privately paid for by an employee would probably experience more exposure to personal as well as learning issues as part of a professional analysis of the client's situation.

The consultants would normally work on a one-to-one and sometimes group basis, depending on the nature of the task or contract. This can mean working with students at a workshop at one's organisation's location, counselling/coaching early career managers at their offices, or organising innovative formats such as co-creation, nowadays increasingly also online. Association respondents would normally travel to clients, but offer workshops and trainings on their own premises. PES respondents would talk to employees (mostly together with a colleague from the placement or other specialist services) at the local Employment Agency and with employers at their companies. The one emerging insight here, perhaps, is the relative remoteness to rank-and-file staff. In many cases the primary "audience" generally consisted in managers, so that to an extent that one may talk of "**remote counselling**"

2.4 Developing knowledge, skills and competences of the career worker

We asked participants about their sources of knowledge and skills. Generally all ways of enhancing knowledge and developing competencies were valued by this group – which comes as no surprise given that for most of them further training is the central professional field. Different respondents accentuated different formats and sources according to personal preference, but if a source was not used it was more for lack of opportunity than for a lack of interest.

To begin with, educational and **study backgrounds** were ascribed continued importance, mostly not so much for concrete pieces of knowledge but more for a general ability to pick up new knowledges and abilities, analytical skills etc. Backgrounds were various. A number of respondents told us that a mixture of business and social sciences and/or humanities perspectives were particularly helpful in this respect. Most of them keep abreast with new developments through **independent studies**, varying sources according to personal preference (some showed more affinity to online sources than others) and trust (one respondent for example dismissed much of what is channelled via networks like Xing and LinkedIn, but ardently studied the online publications of a number of trusted institutions and organisations – another used just those networks, but here relied on a sizeable circle of personally known partners within these networks).

Further trainings and shorter **seminars/workshops** also were seen as generally helpful by most – but generally top of the list for nearly all of them was the exchange with **internal and external peers and experts**. In the conversations, although all sources of knowledge were given importance, there was a real sense that interaction with peers and experts were the given the highest value. For most, this source was immediately framed in terms of **networking** and not necessarily distinct from other sources (i.e. online sources and personal expertise coincide on careers networking sites, exchanges are often organised in seminars and workshops, networks often have been woven since university etc.)

2.5 Interactions/networking and co-operations between the actors of CGC and HRM

The **networks** mentioned at the end of the preceding section mostly crossed the divide what here is grouped as CGC on the one hand and HRM on the other. All but one (who is relatively new in her function) very frequently interact with HRM professionals. Most of them often also cooperate with them, albeit slightly less often (which can be taken as a given if one is not to assume that every interaction has to result in a cooperation, but cooperation always presumes interaction). This is not surprising, as we deliberately approached professionals who work with business organisations. The two exceptions here are one PES respondent new to her function, i.e. not yet fully involved in such cooperation and one Association respondent whose main role was related to the provision of the institution's learning provision open to individuals and businesses, which was a standing offer as was the counselling available, but not actively marketed to businesses.

As to the benefits of such networks there was a near unanimous endorsement of all items put to them: **information, exchange of experiences, best practice examples, cooperation, seminars and workshops, and generally learning from each other**. While cooperation for specific purposes was seen as distinct important item (as cooperation with partners in organisations was, generally, the centrepiece of their professional activity), the other items seemed, for most, to be aspects of an integrated set of activities. Most pronounced, perhaps was the notion of exchanging experiences, which included other aspects (finding out about best practice, learning from each other) or resulted from them (seminars and workshops).

2.6 Challenging issues

We have been opening the interviews by asking respondents to explain what they see as the major challenges in their fields and the cooperation between them and business organisations. We have closed the interviews by asking them about their needs, ideas and suggestions as to what would improve efficiency, efficacy and cooperation in their fields. In the following we are synthesising the named items. Some of them have been named by multiple respondents, sometimes with different reasoning attached to them.

The following **challenges** were brought up:

The mere **pace of change** is seen as challenging as it is increasingly difficult to anticipate what skills and what kind of learning is fit for the future, while invalidating swathes of existing knowledge and skills.

Digitalisation was seen as a major challenge, regardless of skill situation in any given sector, all are equally affected by the necessity to catch up with skills and competencies for a digital age. There is also thought to be major changes in the labour market ahead, with many jobs descriptions being transformed, some disappearing and new ones emerging. Here an important issue is the spotlight on small and medium-sized businesses since they often lack the resources for engaging in the proactive personnel development called for by this situation. One Association respondent pointed out that digitalisation also calls for new, less prescriptive leadership styles which more traditional-minded businesses find hard to accept.

Part of the challenge of digitalisation is the increasing importance of **remote work**, which is accelerated but not caused by the Covid19 situation. This poses new challenges to the way we are learning and also requires new sets of both social and technological skills.

The fact that human resource development in **smaller firms** tends to be under-resourced and under-staffed was highlighted, which often meant that a strategic approach could not be established and challenges like digitalisation, population change, skill shortages etc. are only addressed late once they make themselves felt in the production process. This is exacerbated by the low visibility of and lack of knowledge about affordable or free-of-charge support by institutional actors.

An **aging population** is seen as a challenge as it is related to an already felt and exacerbating skills shortage as there are fewer young people entering the labour market to replace those retiring.

The situation in **rural areas** was mentioned as challenging in that it is difficult for companies there to attract and retain skilled staff. This affects, for example, the “hidden champions”, i.e. provincial high-technology firms, hospitality industries, and logistics and storage.

Skills shortages are linked to this trend, but also and ironically by young people increasingly shunning apprenticeships in the dual education system in favour of continuing school education, aiming for college and university degrees. This not only drains the market for craft and technical skills but also weakens the link to occupational practice in favour of more theory-heavy degrees.

Employee **health** is seen by some as increasingly under threat and existing opportunities to keep staff in work by retraining for alternative positions are underutilised.

Career opportunities for women are still highly unsatisfactory despite beginning efforts to change this.

The following **suggestions** were made:

Regarding the increasing fluidity and unpredictability of the new world of work, a more playful and **experimental approach to learning** and development was advocated. For example new formats for seminars and a more creative use of internships at all levels as part of an experience-based way of learning that leave behind the standard access via the dual educational system.

On the other hand, **stronger awareness** of the possibilities and potential within **the classical apprenticeship system** and its quite flexible extensions **in further training** was called for.

This relates to calls for **a more proactive marketing** of the existing easy-access and low-cost offers in training and counselling by institutional actors, also with a view of reaching broader constituencies (beyond managers), beginning with more clearly structured **information** on regionally available training, coaching and counselling. On the other hand there was also a suggestion to maintain a **focus on managers** as whether or not the challenges of human resources development are to be met largely depended on leadership.

While counselling competencies were, if mentioned at all, seen as a self-evident requirement, training of counsellors to imbue extensive and secure **knowledge of the labour market, skills requirements and business knowledge** was seen as desirable.

2.7 Emerging themes

There were some marked communalities in the ten respondents' accounts. One was the strong emphasis on matters pertaining to **training** and the importance **of developing both technical and personal skills** in a fast changing environment, especially with an eye on **digitalisation, population change and skills shortages**. There was a shared sense that **professionalism and independence** or neutrality are key assets. All of them presented as **keen learners**, albeit with slightly different emphasis on various learning formats. Most valued was the **expertise of networking partners**. All but two had extensive networks and made ample use of them for cooperation. One thing the qualitative interviews brought to light was just how important are individual **professional contexts and functions**. This communicated with **different emphases** on different stages of the recruitment process and resulting activities and issues counsellors applied themselves to. It also corresponded to different spotlights on the various groups of employees in question.

From the responses reported and comments which participants added in addition to what was asked, four thematic fields could be identified, which may be relevant with a view to developing resources and curricula for counsellors: the importance of independence and impartiality of counselling, the importance of a broad knowledge foundation, the importance of strengthening personal, social and methodological competencies, and of the indirect access to rank-and-file staff with an apparent prevalence of them being seen as indirect beneficiary of developing capable leaders.

Independence and impartiality of counselling as foundation of trust in professional counselling seem to be vital. Respondents operate under different conditions in which trust in their neutrality rests on different foundations. For PES respondents neutrality is a given as they are committed to it by law, working for a government agency which is co-controlled by representatives of both industry associations and labour unions.

For counsellors working for chambers of commerce and industry neutrality is a requirement as far as they have to be neutral regarding providers of training and coaching, since competing providers can be members of the same chamber – and the chambers are also committed not to compete with private-sector providers. While for PES and chamber actors' neutrality is less problematic to assure, it is also limiting the scope for counselling, as they need to be careful not to tread on private-sector territory. The image is reverse for the independent consultants, as they act on companies' behalf. While for one respondent this was less of a problem as he works at the entry stage and at providing counselling at leadership levels, i.e. where there is less uncertainty about potential divergence of interest between company and employee, another works at trickier issues (especially where transitions are concerned) and therefore needs to invest time and effort in relationship work during which here independence and professionalism is to be made tangible for both employers and employees.

Knowledge is important. While the sources are very diverse (with emphasis on professional experience in multiple roles, intensive networking for knowledge, and strong motivation to learn independently), for all respondents it was clear that the best counselling skills will not be of much use if they are not undergirded by material knowledge about conditions, processes, and current needs. Consultants in the private sector drew on strong combinations of academic achievement which also expressed itself in ongoing publication activities, professional experience (in multiple roles) and wide and strong networks (both with other counsellors and HRM professionals). Some of the institutional counsellors brought up that while assured neutrality is an inherent advantage, more needs to be done to ensure such knowledge can be acquired by counsellors.

On the demand side there seems to be not so much need on counselling what kind of technical or professional skills need developing, while chambers and employment agencies see themselves as being in a good position to point to adequate courses and in some cases also funding. The central issue thus is often presented to be **development of personal and social skills, but also methodological competencies**. This refers mostly to leadership skills to respond to the needs of rapidly changing organisational structures and cultures.

Not only the private-sector provider but also others (in part at least) focus on **managers as levers of change** and multipliers of good practice. There certainly is truth in this as will be most difficult to circumvent management in matters of personnel development. However, one could also suspect that it is difficult for independent counsellors to get into a position where they can focus more on less advantaged groups of employees directly. Public employment services and chambers can, to an extent, achieve this as they are approached by individuals looking for support for career changes – but in these cases there normally will be no opportunity to integrate their trajectories with organisations' personnel development.

3 CURRENT PRACTICES, NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF HRM PROFESSIONALS

3.1 Respondents

Participants were asked at which stages of the personnel life cycle they are involved the most. Specifically mentioned were recruitment, onboarding and integration of new employees, development of

vocational/professional skills, development of personal and social competencies, change management, dismissal and retirement.

Of the ten human resource development professionals we have spoken to, two worked in **public administration**, three in **retail**, one in **IT**, three in **manufacturing** and one in **insurance**. Two of the organisations employed between 250 and 500 people, the other eight over 500. Eight of them were human resource development managers (one of them doubling as coach), and two were heads of human resources management. Two of the interviewees had additional tasks outside the human resource development responsibilities. One of them also was health-and-safety director, the other had additional organisational development responsibilities.

The prevalence of managers is very likely not just due to the way we addressed our requests for interviews. Invariably it turned out that, even in larger companies, a large part of personnel development groundwork was seen as part of line managers' brief and HRD experts supported them rather than staff to be developed directly.

3.2 Involvement in the professional life cycle

Five respondents saw the personnel development process already starting with **recruitment**. This was, in most cases, a matter of organisational structure and the way, human resource development was located within HRM. One respondent made it clear that from a personnel development standpoint it would be ideal to be involved in recruitment in such a way that learning needs were already clear at the point of entry. Seven respondents emphasised the importance of the **integration of new employees**, with the orientation regarding processes and opportunities, including learning facilities being central. The importance given to the **development of skills and competences** was as pronounced as in the CGC professionals. With the exception that two respondents did not give much importance to vocational skills. One of the respondents in retail pointed out that in their area the extent to which technical/vocational skills can be furthered in a profitable way is limited and in most cases well-provided for by the vocational training that staff already has. All but one also emphasised **change management** as an important issue (the exception being a respondent from a public administration institution who saw his organisation caught up in set bureaucratic structures). Generally, respondents saw this issue being intertwined with development of competencies in various ways. For all it was a given that organisational change as response to new challenges needs to be reflected in efforts to equip employees with the personal competencies and technological skills to keep up. In one company which the respondent characterised to be rather traditional in their approach, such development was also seen as a way to induce changes in organisational culture that would then be conducive to broader change. In three cases human resource development was portrayed as a key advocate active driver of change. In one case the development of a strategic approach to human resource development was seen as a part of managing changes in itself. **Dismissal** and **re-**

tirement were seen as important issue only by one human resource development manager who had developed specific ways to manage socially responsible exit processes.

We have, again, also looked into how these valuations translated into activities.

Providing **information on careers** was a frequent activity for four of the participants. Mostly they referred this item to their activities promoting apprenticeships under the dual education system, e.g. at careers fairs. E.g. one respondent from an organisation which needs diverse and highly specific skills in a variety of areas reported that getting people interested at this stage was vital as people with the required qualifications are extremely hard to find on the external labour market. Counselling about **career decisions**, on the other hand, was only done on a more than just occasional basis by two of the respondents. In most organisations, this function was assigned to line managers with personnel development providing second order counselling, i.e. they saw their task in providing training for line managers to acquire basic counselling skills and, where they needed advice, discuss individual cases with them. One of the two respondents who engaged in such counselling himself did this not in his function as human resource development manager, but as line manager within his department. The other respondent engaged in such counselling in cases where the case was highly complex or career moves could not be discussed with the line manager for reasons of confidentiality. The same respondent emphasised, however, that human resource development was not just an additional function in line managers but that they should see it as their core task. In three cases, the career opportunities inside the company were very limited so the topic would not come up in any case. These were, subsequently also among the respondents for whom **planning career paths** was not a frequent activity. This item was understood to be more conceptual and therefore more in the field of human resource development proper – half of the respondents were involved in related activities. This could take a more organisational character, developing general models of progression (as, for example, in one large retailer where the redrawing of career paths from store managers up was a central element of his role – which also then was tightly linked to the design of course programmes). It could also be more hands-on, e.g. making sure succession planning is always up to scratch.

Assessing skills and abilities was reported as a frequent activity by five of the respondents. Again, the item was understood in different ways by different participants. Some saw it in relation with their role in the recruitment process. Given the indirect to human resource development counselling laid out above, most referred to their role in developing and selecting testing tools (as for example one of them had specialised on aptitude and ability diagnostics in his psychology studies), others to designing and reviewing procedures for personal review in order to ensure existing training needs are identified.

Overwhelmingly the most frequent item was (as to be expected given the importance given to skills and competences) the **design and management of training programmes**. Only one respondent said she was not directly involved in this activity, due to the way tasks were divided in her personnel development unit. However, the item meant different things to different people. One personnel manager, for example, had very strong ideas about the coherence of the function of the training programmes which, mandatory for all managers, was to be inculcated with coherent concepts of strategic management, including their role in human resources management. Another personnel development manager saw himself in a more reactive role, making sure that courses

needed by individual departments in a highly multifunctional organisation are made available. There were highly individualised approaches, but two respondents also aimed at a modular system in which employees could self-assemble course programmes from a standardised catalogue.

For some, facilitating internal work experience in other departments leading up to new assignments were part of this category.

Corporate social responsibility was emphasised in all companies, but only in the three retailers it was also a theme in which personnel development had a significant part. One pointed out the integration of refugees in the workforce as related to CSR, which required specific commitment to support, e.g. through language courses. The other two had programmes for sustainability in which environmental awareness trainings provided through HRD were an essential part.

Quality and innovation in general was an important field of activity for half of our participants. In one case the development of strategic human resource development within a traditionally bureaucratic organisation was seen as such an initiative in its own right. For the others the issue was more about linking personnel development to innovation processes in service and production. For example one respondent from a manufacturer referred to her role in making sure that the process digitalisation of production and technological changes in the products run smoothly as such an involvement in quality and innovation. Another cited HRD's role in ensuring quality of services provided are maintained through ensuring courses for certification are available and taken up.

3.3 The role of CGC in enterprises

Again, we inquired for motivations or aims, specific target groups and issues arising and how they were catered for.

Regarding the **motives**, specific items we asked them to comment on were **individual solutions, consensual decisions, learning outcomes and their sustainability**, and the effect on **organisational commitment**. The results can be summarised quite easily by stating that all items were deemed important by everyone, with two exceptions.

The exceptions are that three did not finding individualised solution an important driver in their activities and one rated the importance of consensus as not high. Two respondents did not give great importance to individualised solution as they emphasised that this is not a real problem in their work. Both of them had in place or aimed for modular systems of learning provision in which the employees were able to pick and choose suitable development solutions. If they encounter problems, they could still turn to line managers and, in more complicated cases, to someone from human resource development for advice, but generally individualisation was seen to be built into the system and hence unproblematic. The third respondent pointed out that in his

organisation there was no real scope for individual solution. The same respondent was also the only one who did not see much importance given to consensual decisions – again because there was not much scope for that. However, that does not mean that he would not personally value these items, i.e. the answer was down entirely to organisational constraints.

The reasons why specific items were valued could be more diverse than the convergence that all of these are quite obviously “good things”. For example, one manager emphasised the importance of signalling employees that they have good prospects through development options despite current staff reductions, while for another the main issue was to attract good applicants by being able to highlight development in **employer branding**, the latter concept being mentioned by several respondents as being of increased importance. Sustainability of learning was a given to all as part of learning success – but for two respondents there were strong links to vital aspects of work routines: for one (in manufacturing) it was important for workplace health and safety (i.e. a matter of life and death, in some cases), for the other it was of importance to ensure maintained compliance to legal standards.

Within the items one could, from many of the arguments made, construe a centrality of the learning goals. While not necessarily expressing this in terms of valuation, the chain of reasoning often went, for example, from good and sustainable learning outcomes for managers to a better workplace and higher commitment. Again we encounter the notion that inculcating managers with good leadership skills through coaching and courses renders them transmission belts for achieving a better organisational culture, for example also in that they develop approaches aiming at consensual decision making and valuing employees as individuals.

Asked for their focus on specific **groups of employees**, it became clear that for most, the approach was functionalist. The most attention was given to ‘**talents**’ and **future managers** – which seems to follow from the role ascribed to these groups in effecting broader changes in the organisation. The only exception here was on respondents whose organisation’s structure placed severe limits on upward mobility. Eight of the ten respondents focused also on **new staff**. Here the reasoning often was that a smooth transition into the organisation was a foundation for development within it. Half of the respondents also had a strong focus on **apprentices and trainees**. Here the reasons seemed to lie more in how responsibilities are divided up between HRD and HRM departments. Sometimes there was, however, also a strategic component tangible: In one organisation there was a rather strict (albeit not unsurmountable) divide between operative and managerial staff, the latter requiring a higher education level degree at entry. Here apprentices were not in the focus of human resource development which concentrated efforts very much on developing leaders. In another organisation there was strong emphasis on creating open career pathways in which there always would be a next level to be achieved through learning. Here apprentices were a clear priority.

As to groups with particular needs, the general tenor was that all are treated the same and that legally set procedures are followed with good will to support disadvantaged employees. Only one respondent said that there were special provisions to include people with **disabilities**. This was partly because for some positions which were hard to fill otherwise, highly-qualified workers switching from highly stressful high-pay jobs to a less stressful but still high-skill specialist position. The other respondents, in this field referred to compliance

with statutory rules regarding prevention, accommodation and inclusion. Because of these legal conditions, it was often the responsibility of HR business partners or a specialised department to ensure this and thereby fell outside the remit of personnel development. **Migrants** were a high-priority group for two of the retailers. One of them explained that the company had been at the forefront of integrating refugees into the labour force over the past year and, accordingly, has invested in programmes furthering social and cultural inclusion. Generally, the retail sector had to deal with a drained labour market (and has continued to do so during the Covid crisis), so migration is an important source of labour for them. **Older employees** were a focus only in two manufacturing companies, in both cases the idea was to keep them on board during rapid technological changes. Only one company also had specific provision for **retirees** and for **staff at risk** of redundancy. This was linked to ongoing staff reductions, which they tried to process in a socially responsible way, e.g. through early retirement schemes.

For all respondents **education and training** was the centrepiece of their role and the issue with which they busied themselves the most, closely followed by **career planning**, which only one respondent was not involved in often. Given that direct counselling on career decisions was not as central to their roles, it is important to take into the equation that the item was sometimes more understood as relating to individual support in mapping out a career path, in other cases referred to a thorough succession planning process, and yet other cases to casting a structure of set career paths. The one respondent saying that career planning is not an issue, said that this is the case right now, but that this was going to be changed in the future. Linked to the importance of education and training, **learning problems** were named by half of the respondents as frequent issue. **Personal problems** were named as frequent issues only by two of the respondents. One of them reported them not so much as an issue he dealt with directly, but through case discussions with the HR business partners dealing with them. The other saw it as part of the coaching offer, but was careful to delineate personal problems (e.g. work-life-balance, difficulties dealing with a specific colleague) from problems requiring therapy, which was not on offer. She also emphasised that here they used external coaches to make sure that there is a trust base.

The most frequent formats were individual discussions, such as in the annual personal review with, usually the line manager – or briefings to discuss cases between line managers, HR business partners and personnel developer. Trainings were mostly in groups. Depending on size, they were delivered on site or by an external provider in their facilities. Many reported increasingly using video calls and expected to keep some of this up after the end of the pandemic.

3.4 Developing knowledge, skills and competences of the career worker

We asked participants about their sources of knowledge and skills. Generally, as with the CGC group, enhancing knowledge and developing competencies were valued highly by the HRM respondents.

Seven of the respondents saw their **study backgrounds** as still relevant. They contributed some knowledge (so for example those with a background in management studies valued their understanding of business processes, educationists their knowledge on pedagogical techniques etc.), but mostly it was the secondary, meth-

odological and analytical competences that proved indispensable. Those who did not rate their study background as of greater importance mainly referred to the knowledge aspect (one of them having studied a completely unrelated science degree, for example). Seven of them also relied on **independent studies**, and like their peers citing different sources (newsletters, online material, books etc.). Eight enlisted in longer training courses and/or shorter seminars and workshops (mostly both, so seven on each). Advice from **colleagues and experts inside the organisations** was valued by all but one – the latter stating that there is not much specific expertise on the subject within the organisation. **External peers and experts**, too, were an important source for all respondents but one (not the same as in the previous question). The only respondent for whom they were not an important source cited time scarcity for this and stated that he would very much like to draw on such expertise.

3.5 Interactions/networking and co-operations between the actors of CGC and HRM

Eight of our respondents reported frequent **interaction** with external experts, four reported frequent **collaboration**. This needs to be qualified, however: As eight of the ten organisations have more than 500 employees and, accordingly, are more likely to have the resources for a strategic human resource development with resources to entertain a pool of independent consultants, coaches and trainers. The information provided by respondents from public employment services, associations and chambers indicate that the picture would have been much different had we had predominantly small enterprises in our sample.

As could be expected, those reporting frequent collaboration also saw **cooperating for specific tasks or projects** as a major benefits of such contacts. The respondent not having time to invest in networking reported not having benefits from such contacts – all others saw benefits and consistently saw importance in all other proposed items, which were **information, exchange of experience, learning from each other, examples of best practice, and attending seminars and workshops** (this last one being seen as less important by one further respondent).

Given the high value given to external expertise it is not surprising that the cognitive benefits of interaction with CGC professionals were also rated highly.

The responses need to be qualified in one respect – there was not necessarily a clear distinction between CGC and HRD professionals in the mind of respondents, their networks typically consisting of both.

One benefit frequently mentioned was to be able to source external services from a pool of trusted professionals to ensure a consistent standard in quality.

3.6 Challenging issues

Digitalisation was seen as a major issue by most respondents. This challenge would make itself felt in a myriad of guises. For example it could mean more **integrated and fine-tuned processes** and procedures requiring not just new skills for operating digital applications but also new analytical and methodological competencies on all levels, be it assembly lines, distribution, controlling or personnel management. It also meant new

communication and learning formats which were developing for quite a while but whose implementation was accelerated by the requirements of doing business under the conditions of the pandemic.

For some, the **structuring career paths** to create clarity and transparency was an ongoing issue – for different reasons. In one case it was the modernisation of a traditional family firm, in another that of an administrative bureaucracy, and in yet another the necessity arose from the company being relatively young and still finding its organisational structure. In the smaller organisations (and the self-perception as “relatively small” reached up to companies with about 3000 employees) it was seen as a problem that there were not always the development opportunities highly ambitious employees would wish for – especially if there was a high degree of specialisation also making horizontal development difficult.

Digitalisation was seen by one respondent as a contributor to a wider trend to a **transformation of management styles** which emphasised less direct control and more consensual agreements on targets while delegating processes. While this manager brought it up when asked for challenges, it featured in other accounts when it came to the role of line managers in human resource development – as frequently a main issue was to improve leadership skills with particular attention to competencies in coaching, feed back etc.

Demographic change was named by several respondents as a challenge. It was seen as a contributing factor to another challenge, that of **skills shortages**, which was sometimes also listed independently. Such shortages took on different forms. For some it was difficulties to attract enough young people to enter apprenticeships – in one case in vocations that were in high demand, but also quite niche and thus could be viewed as offering limited prospects. For others it was scarce IT skills or specialist marketing skills.

Interestingly, only for the public sector respondents integration of **career changers** was a challenge – meaning that for the others taking in high-skill workers and retraining them for the job at hand was not a common option. In the public sector organisations this related mainly to entrants with degrees in the social sciences or humanities, and referred not just to specialist administrative knowledge (as here public administration specialists regularly needed further training for new areas themselves), but mainly also to integration into the specific organisational culture of a public service bureaucracy. One respondent from a retail company reported that career changes emerged as an unintended side-effect of Covid, since as outlets had to close, sales staff was reassigned to over-heating warehouses and some of them asked to switch to a position in storage and logistics permanently.

While some HRD professionals confidently asserted that **strategic personnel development** was seen as a priority in their organisation, some others reported that it is difficult to maintain a focus during times of crisis as personnel development is not seen to contribute to the bottom line in the same identifiable way as other departments, wishing for a more consistent approach.

Maybe related, human resource development seemed to be, in itself, a limited resource that was mostly for more “privileged” users, i.e. managers and high-potentials. Only two of the respondents emphasised an outreach to rank-and-file staff, one of them explicitly trying to challenge the blue-collar / white-collar divide.

Two of the respondents criticised the inflexibilities in the dual education system, one being fairly vocal about red tape involved for employers and the necessity to make good for shortcomings in the curricula of vocational colleges by additional on-site training. Both were less than impressed by the way vocational colleges reacted to the pandemic.

3.7 Emerging themes

The central issues for our respondents centred on issues of recruitment and integration of new employees and, most emphatically, on matters of (further) **education and training**. **Learning** seemed to be the main tool to respond to the challenges identified from their perspective. This appeared, too, to be the main point of interaction and cooperation with external actors – career counselling as such being mentioned rather rarely and mostly in the form of coaching provided to staff further up the organisational hierarchies.

From the responses reported and comments which participants added in addition to what was asked, four thematic fields could be identified, which may be relevant with a view to developing resources and curricula for counsellors, namely the largely indirect nature of intra-organisational counselling and the role of line managers as accessories to human resource development, the focus on leadership and relatively little attention to specific needs of other groups, the manoeuvring between standardised, individualised and modularised provision of training, and the role of experiential learning through work experience:

- **Role of line management in personnel development and career guidance and counselling:** As most of the firms in the sample are on the bigger end of SME, personnel development managers talked to so far do not have a direct role in CGC, although they do so regarding staff reporting to them directly (i.e. when acting as their line managers). In all cases, the first point of call for issues regarding further training and career options was the line manager, not specialist HRD staff. So the main activity of HRD managers was to establish, organise and oversee the process, training and coaching line managers for the task. This tallies with the emphasis on using managerial staff as levers for change we have seen in the CGC sample and which has been echoed by some of the HRM respondents as well
- **Focus on talent and leadership, few programmes addressing lower echelons of hierarchy and disadvantaged groups:** While there are, in some cases, tendencies and plans to have a stronger focus on lower levels of the hierarchies, much of career counselling and personnel development focuses on leadership and talent. There also seems little attention to particular disadvantaged groups of employees. Where there is, it is either linked to the strength of employee representation and legal obligation. In most cases, this is outside the brief of human resource developers.
- **Individual counselling and standardized modularised provision:** In a number of cases, organisational platforms for information on development opportunities were in place or being developed. Ideally this

could also be used to book training and coaching. This was not just for rationalisation but also meant to increase transparency and encourage uptake. But there was, even in the one case where a modular, off-the-shelf approach was followed most rigorously, a sense that individual counselling could never be made obsolescent completely, as here, too, it was ensured that there is a person to approach with development needs is available in each department.

- **Internal internships / shadowing** – Some organisations see this as a helpful tool in career counselling within organisations. For at least three of our respondents they are integral part of the personnel development strategy, offering to explore horizontal but mainly also vertical development paths. One participant emphasised that these opportunities for learning by experience are useful especially as they already come with responsibility for assigned tasks.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, we find convergences and divergences between the groups. But generally, the perspectives seem to overlap considerably.

4.1 Communalities and differences of roles and tasks of HRM and CGC professionals in the professional life cycle

For both groups in our sample, the overarching emphasis was on activities and goals of **training** for both specifically **occupational skills** and, even more so, **personal and social competencies**. In both groups. **Recruitment** was important in both groups, which on the CGC side was partly due to the nature of the consultancy offered by the three independent/private providers and the statutory role of the public employment system participants. **Integration** was key to HRM participants, but only to some of the CGC participants. While **management of changes** was central to HRM participants, this was not important to many on the CGC side, with the exception of consultants. On both sides there was little importance given to the end of the personnel life cycle (dismissal, retirement). Notably, on both sides there was a strong focus on leadership and management as levers of change and much second-order counselling, i.e. a focus on ensuring that managers develop competencies to further the development of their staff and facilitating the provision/selection of development options from internal and external providers.

In terms of activities, there was similar overlap around training and education. The accent with CGC participants was slightly more on counselling about career decisions while with HRM participants it was more on planning career paths.

4.2 Motivation offering career guidance in enterprises

Subsequently, **learning results and their sustainability** were a field of convergence in both groups. CGC participants tended to emphasise more the aspect of **individually appropriate solutions** while **consensus** was more a motivation on the HRM side. That **organisational commitment** was more highly rated by HRM

respondents than by CGC ones may not come as a surprise. An interesting, albeit circumstantial, point is that one of the consultants who emphasised the independence of counselling as one main motivator for using external consultants insisted that, ironically, it is the fact that she can make credible the fact that she is not aligned with company interests has, in most cases, the effect that organisational commitment is strengthened. (on the role of professionalism and independence for the CGC actors see 2.3. and 2.7. above)

4.3 **Updating of professional knowledge, skills and competences**

The high value placed on learning throughout the respondents reflected in their professed eagerness to stay informed and keep developing their knowledge and competencies. All forms of learning were seen as helpful by most participants. Being professionals, however, they were also quite specific about what kind of sources and formats within the categories they prefer. Trust was an issue that was brought up not only regarding the purchase of external educational provision but also what they saw as reliable and productive sources for themselves. So while new ideas and educational programmes will find their interest, they are likely to approach them with specific expectations regarding their relevance and the quality of content and delivery.

4.4 **Interactions/networking/cooperation**

Most of the participants on both sides being very active networkers, they reported frequent interaction and also cooperation. Cognitive (learning, experience, information, seminars etc.) and practical (specific projects) benefits were reported. However, what we did not find much is companies actively offering career guidance and counselling using external providers. There have been some instances: one consultant and one human resource developer reported cases where such counselling (or coaching) involved discussing options outside the organisation. In a way, this could be seen as the litmus test for independent professional counselling – but it may also be understandable that as long as recruiting is a pressing issue under conditions of demographic change and skills shortages, the idea of advising employees to develop by taking up a position with another company, is not immediately attractive. Here it may be interesting to look at examples where such instances helped strengthen inter-organisational networks.

4.5 **Perspectives**

Given the common interests in human development shown by our participants and their interest in supporting the development of others as well as their readiness to develop themselves, initiatives, resources and trainings to further this interest may be attractive to them. They are open to and already involved in intensive networking activities and rely on these activities for information and work. However, given the relative absence of such practices and the discerning assessment of external providers by HRM actors, the case for a stronger implementation of CGC practices proper into HRD practice, integrating professional services from independent and/or institutional providers will have to be argued competently with a view to tangible benefits for the organisation in question.



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