

Material p4.14m

## CAREER COUNSELING AS HRM SERVICES: THREE CASE STUDIES

Counseling plays a role in human resources management in different manners, and it can be predicted that that this role will keep on growing in the future. Especially challenges that arise from a stronger external orientation of HRM, a more intense individualization of HRM and a high volatility of labor markets suggest to pay more attention to employees' individual careers or career developments, respectively, because it is increasingly the employees themselves who decide which enterprise they would like to work for (Ertelt/Frey, 2012, p. 99). These challenges can be taken up more proactively by enterprises by offering services to their employees which deal with and reflect career issues as well as questions of qualification and continuing learning. Such a counseling can be (and should be) conducted separately from the usual human resources development measures and annual dialogues with the employees.

### ***Case example „career coaching at a software company“***

The company is one of the largest software enterprises in Europe. For several years and worldwide the company is offering internal coaching to all employees and not directly linked to human resources or the current leadership (Wiebke, 2014, p. 3). „Activating self-reflection of employees“ is the main orientation. Coaches work with systemic methods and encourage the advice-seeking to reflexion and self-reflexion. It is the aim to put the advice-seeking into the position to solve a self-formulated problem independently and autonomously. Counseling thereby typically focusses on an employee's recent career issues, e.g. in terms of prospective development possibilities, taking on a new duty or a new role, one's own competency development, work-life-balance, collaboration within the own team. Not least, employees made use of this open form of counseling to receive independent feedback for themselves, their previous development or other questions that arise from their work (ibid., p. 5).

Thus, this format distances itself from other (rather technically/professionally oriented) formats of counseling within an enterprise. Also the immediate superiors function as coaches. There are



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mentorship programs for new employees, there are technical counselors for different work-related problems and there is coaching that directly targets an improved performance or a solution for technical problems within the context of human resources measures (ibid., p. 3).

Over the last 12 years this form of internal coaching at the company developed from a bottom up initiative by some employees to an internal service offered worldwide. A special characteristic of the program is that the coaches are no professional counselors, but employees within the enterprise who acquired coaching skills through qualified external training and supervised exercises. By now almost 300 internal coaches were trained and are available to the employees. The approach to a coach is organized through an internal platform and is free of charge. The program and the coaches are supervised and supported by several internal entities (ibid., p. 8f.). The program is continuously being evaluated and further developed (ibid., p. 13).

### ***Case example learning guidance and career orientation at a industry company***

The company, located in south of Germany, offers learning guidance and career orientation to its 39.000 employees. Both offers are anchored in the corporate strategy and human resources development strategy „Best Team Strategy“. „Learning and development/growth“ is one of the strategic aims that shall contribute to the superordinate aim „outstanding employees“ (Isemann-Horney, 2015, p. 4). The enterprise strives for recruiting the best employees and provide them with space for their performances and growth. „Structurally, the counseling services are part of the learning center at company and are attached to the department of „global talent management“ (ibid.).

The counseling services are attributed to the broader context of continuous and autonomous advancement of employees (ibid., p. 7). Both guidance formats are part of the learning center at the company, which also provides learning media, online trainings and learning events, and functions as a learning venue. Learning guidance is a counseling service that is accessible to all employees at any time. Employees can, for example, seek counseling for learning and qualification goals.

Also the issue of how to pursue and meet a learning target are subject to this service. It also supports employees for organizing learning, and selecting and using learning programs/learning op-

portunities. Often it also deals with preparation for examinations (e.g. apprentices, master training), language learning, familiarization with a new work task or preparation for one's own employee dialogue.

The service provision of learning guidance exists since 2006. Over this period of time it became apparent that the question „Which direction am I heading to?“ came to the fore. „Clarify advancement wishes“, „information on regulations and opportunities within the company“, „planning concrete next steps“ are all issues which are dealt with through a specific service in career orientation. Topics include: individual strengths and potentials, individual advancement planning, development possibilities within the company, possibilities of internal job change, information on the competency framework at the company, possible follow-up actions for professional orientation, questions about advanced further trainings and in general a higher qualification, or extra-occupational studies. It also deals with specific job opportunities within the company, a discovery of individual strengths and interests, or the tie of work and private life. Also in regards to career orientation an individual's autonomy and responsibility is emphasized and the counseling service as perceived as a support within an „employee development process“ (Where do I want to be in 5-10 years?) (ibid., p. 11).

Counseling is offered by 5 employees with different work profiles. All advisors gain additional training in the field of counseling and frequently participate in continuing training programs. It is further emphasized that technical knowledge about qualification questions, careers with the company, existing human resources development instruments as well as continuing learning and qualification opportunities are an essential part of the advisor's field of knowledge.

Questions for analysis and reflection:

- What is the benefit for employees?
- What is the benefit and motivation for company to invest in this measures?
- What are strong points from the examples?
- What are your questions or critical thoughts?