

## **GCRI INTERVIEW**

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### **How do you define lifelong learning and how would you like to see it implemented in Germany?**

Lifelong learning is a term I try to avoid. We are all learning every day: we read the paper, surf the Internet, talk with friends, watch the news. All this is important, but it's nothing noteworthy. In the context of demographic change and challenging development in the labor market, I am more specifically interested in the categories of learning which are relevant for the job, i.e. formal education and training in the early phases of life, continued professional training or job-specific training, but also training for a new career later in life. In Germany, the dominant perspective is a rather rigid model of separate phases in life. First we learn, then we work, and finally we retire. It would be better to link these phases, partly overlapping each other, or introducing learning opportunities after a phase on the job. In the future, a period the initial training might be followed by a number of years on the job, a period of training for a job on a higher level or in a related field, and at some point training for activities in yet another profession. We have to realize that overall, our working lives will be longer in the future.

### **Which areas of the educational system would need to be adjusted to meet the demands of Germany's aging society?**

Germany's successful dual system of vocational training is internationally respected. Apprentices learn both on the job and at vocational school. The exams are taken centrally and are highly standardized, so that knowledge can be easily transferred to other companies in the field. In the U.S., training is more company-specific, each change in employment asks for a certain period of renewed learning on the job. In Germany, we should keep the dual system but develop it further. It has to be adjusted by offering mid-career training for those who need to start a new career and for continued training in the individual's field of expertise. In higher education, many universities have made substantial progress in opening up their classrooms to the elderly. That is an important step, but it is not really relevant for the labor market.

### **How does one facilitate the transfer of knowledge between elderly skilled workers and young employees?**

The generations can profit from each other. Experienced seniors learn from the young generation, and newcomers will profit from the wealth of experience offered by senior

colleagues. It will be very important to see this as a two-way street of learning. Many organizations with a policy of creating intergenerational teams have been very successful.

**Could you please provide some examples of how employers could tap into the potential of the retired population? In what way could this impact industrial productivity and economic development?**

If one defines „retired population“ as the totality of those who do not have gainful employment, it would be advisable for managers to address the millions of women who do not participate in the labor market. Most of them would like to have a job but have lost contact with the labor market because of long family phases. They may lack fresh skills that are up-to-date but also self-assurance to return to the world beyond the family circle. It would be potential for high productivity if these women were to re-enter the labor market, as many of them have a very good initial training.

We should also soften up the rigid age limits and be more flexible about the age of retirement in Germany. Many people are still very productive at the age of 65, especially when they have had continued training over time. Also volunteer work by people over 65 could add to overall productivity, for instance when they tutor children from disadvantaged families and help them in the earning process.

**From your perspective, what are the key factors that contribute to a qualified and productive workforce?**

In the face of demographic change, we will have to work longer. We also need to learn new skills and adapt already existing knowledge on a regular basis. Our resources are becoming increasingly limited and our responsibilities are continuing to grow. Therefore, we have to carefully prioritize how we use our energy: We need energy for work, care, training, but also for phases of rest. I imagine a 32-hour work week, calculated over the entire course of life. This would enable men and women alike to reconcile work, family, and education, also offering time for leisure and friendships. By redistributing work between men and women, who usually have a good education, more evenly, the overall work volume could be raised in many countries.