



LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE GERMAN LABOR MARKET

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Abstract. Labor demand and supply are the driving forces for a company's decision on all human resource management issues. However, the exchange conditions vary from country to country. Only if these conditions are well known a company's human resource management is based on solid ground. This ground is on the one hand the development on the labor market concerning labor demand and supply and on the other hand the environmental conditions in this market. The article presents a literature review of the situation on the German labor market and its environmental conditions. Human resource managers can use this information to adjust their company's human resource management to the demands of the German labor market.

Keywords: German labor market, German labor market exchange conditions, German unemployment rate, German GDP, German employment rate.

JEL classification: J23, J24.

1. Introduction

A market-oriented approach to employees on the labor market is crucial for all organizations. The urgency for focusing on the labor market demands becomes more and more a critical endeavor for German companies as human resources are becoming more and more a rare asset in Germany. This development is based on the labor market in Germany, as this market influences the basis where German companies receive their human resources from. The paper conducts a literature review of the situation on the German labor market and the factors influencing its development. Hereby statistical data is shown to explain briefly the actual situation in Germany. Hereby the paper can support human resource managers in their decision making processes concerning labor demand and supply questions and their importance for human resource management tasks in companies.

The economic task of human resource management is to ensure the most favorable supply and maintenance of adequately capable and performance-oriented personnel in companies (Bisani 1995; Huselid 2005; Iles 2006). If this task is fulfilled, the principal relationship of the company towards organization and its productive forces will be of crucial importance. In this context the relevance of the concept of human resource management as a trigger of positive contributions to the success of the company is increasing. (Lado & Wilson 1994; Pfeffer 1994; Becker & Gerhart

1996; Delaney & Huselid 1996; Youndt *et al.* 1996; Harris & Ogbonna 2001; Pfeffer 2002). The pursuit of effectiveness and efficiency committed to the company's success requires of human resources management an approach which takes into account the conditions on the labor market.

Labor demand and supply are hereby the driving forces for the establishment of human resource management in companies. However, the exchange conditions vary from country to country. In the paper the main exchange factors and the surroundings which are found on the German labor market are exemplarily explained with selected statistical data. They lay the ground for the future relevance of human resource management in Germany.

2. Development on the German labor market

The most important factor influencing labor demand and supply is the economic climate. In 2012 the German economy blundered into the European wide recession, the growth trend of the German economy was lower than the two years before. The gross domestic product of Germany was growing 0.7 percentage points in 2012, after 3.0 in 2011 and 4.2 percentage points in 2010. Meaning the German economy is still on a slight growth path, even if there was a drop back in 2009 due to the overall European recession. The weak dynamic of the German gross domestic product is the expression of the recessive wake of the rest of the European Union, which has in-

affected high parts of the Eurozone due to the European sovereign debt crisis. Positive impacts on the German gross domestic product raised from the export to countries without the Eurozone and the German consumption itself.

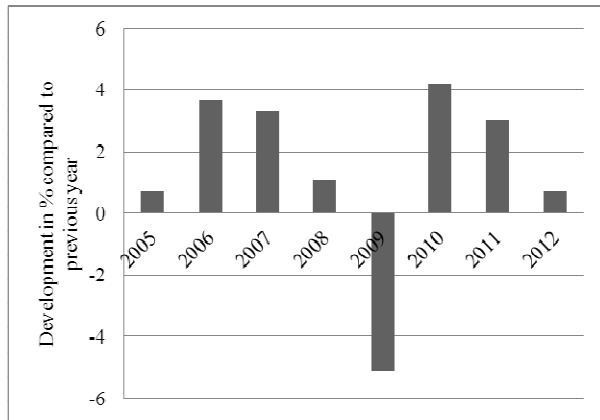


Fig. 1. Development of the German Gross domestic product (in % compared to the previous year) 2005 to 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

Consensus among economist experts for 2013 is that Germany faces major challenges in its economic development. Most economists have already lowered their forecast for 2014 and predict only a slight growth in performance in 2014 (N.N., 2013a). Concerning the labor market the German government supported the market by measures like shorter working hours (Carstensen 2013). However, the fear of job losses has increased significantly over the past year. Thus far, many German companies continued to hire new staff, while existing workers benefited from salary increases secured through collective bargaining agreements. According to the German Institute for Employment Research in Nuremberg, the positive trend in the labor market is not broken (Weber 2013). During the 2009 financial crisis, after the federal government introduced its short-time work program, many German companies successfully avoided layoffs.

The development of the German gross domestic product reflects itself in the solid development on the labor market, which also has a stabilizing effect on the gross domestic product vice-versa. The German labor market is still growing in 2013. Nevertheless the increase dropped slightly compared to 2012. However, the trend is obvious: The German labor market is still progressive. Only in 2009 the trend was turning downward due to the recession in the European Union.

Going hand in hand with the overall development on the German labor market is the actual number of employed people in Germany. In the year 2012 the number of employed people increased by 450.000 to 41,61 million employed people in total.

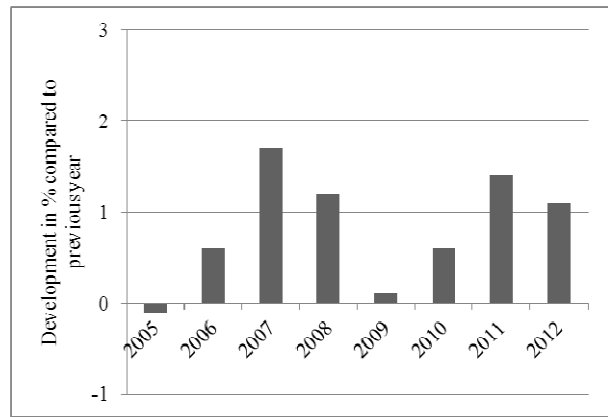


Fig. 2. Development in % compared to the previous year of Germany's employed persons in the years 2005 to 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

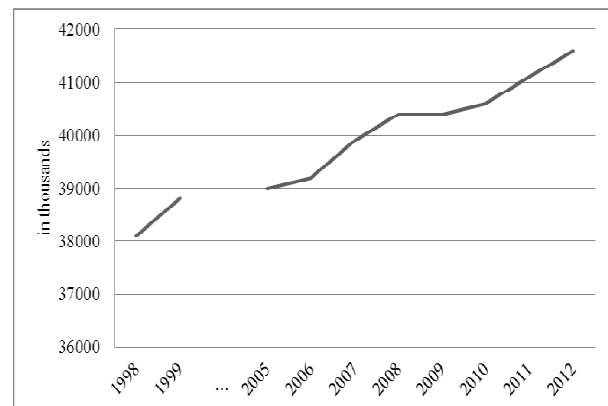


Fig. 3. Development of number of employed persons 1998 to 2012 in Germany (source: N. N., 2013a)

This is the highest number of employed persons in Germany after the Reunification. This trend is predicted to continue also for the next coming years (N.N., 2013a).

Regarding the differentiation between Western and Eastern Germany the increase of employed persons is higher in Western Germany compared to that in Eastern Germany. Nevertheless the overall trend in both parts of Germany is increasing. In the years 2005 to 2012 the number of employed persons in Western Germany increased by 2 million from 31.9 million to 34.0 million. In Eastern Germany this number increased from 7.2 million to 7.6 million.

Besides looking at different industrial sectors in most of them the number of employed persons is growing: The biggest surplus compared to 2011 is in the service industry (+4.5%), the productive sector (+1.8%) and the health- and welfare services (+2.6%). The increase in the service industry can be explained by the increase of employees in consulting service companies, in architecture and engineering services, laboratories and facility management organizations. In the productive industry this increase was due to higher numbers of employed persons in mechanical engineering or-

ganizations, the production of automobiles and the heavy metal industry. Compared to this a slight decrease of employees took place in the civil service (-0.2% compared to 2011). All other industry sectors stayed solid with a slight increase of employed persons.

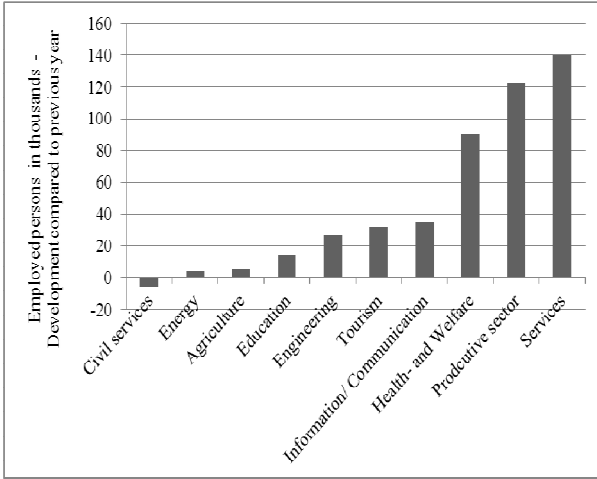


Fig. 4. Development in % compared to previous year of employed persons in Germany's main industry sectors - status June 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

Related to the trend on the German labor market and the development of employed persons the unemployment in Germany has decreased.

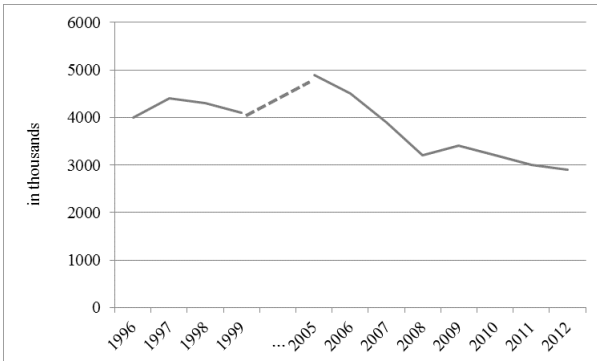


Fig. 5. Number of unemployed persons in Germany from 1996 – 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

Hereby it is important to mention that the decrease of unemployed persons in 2012 is mainly due to a decrease of layoffs. It is not because more unemployed persons get back to work. This trend arose first in 2012, in the years before the number of unemployed persons getting back to a position within an organization was at least equal to the number of not happening layoffs (N. N., 2013a). Nevertheless the trend is expected to continue and the number of unemployed persons is expected to stay below 3 million persons in the next coming years (N. N., 2013c). In times when unemployment rates in

other EU countries are stuck around ten to eleven percent, joblessness in Germany was at about 7 percent, one of the lowest since the post-reunification boom of 20 years ago (N. N., 2013b).

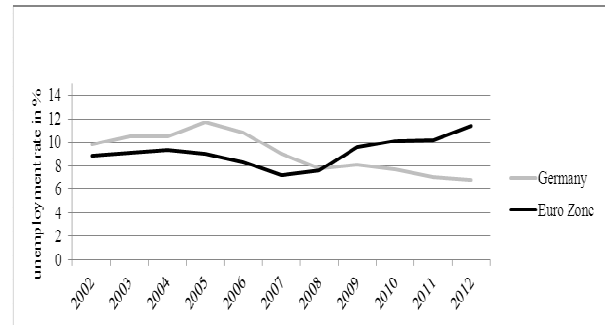


Fig. 6. Unemployment rate in Germany and Euro Zone from 2002 to 2012 (source: retrieved from N. N., 2013b)

In 2012 within the European Union the highest unemployment rates existed in Spain (25.2%) and Greece (24.5%). The lowest rate was in Austria (4.4%), followed by Luxembourg (5.2%) and the Netherlands (5.3%). Comparing the figures of 2012 with those of 2011, the average increase of the unemployment rate within the Euro Zone was 0.9%. Hereby the highest increase was in Greece (+ 6.6%), Cyprus (+ 4.0%) and Spain (+ 3.4%). The Baltic countries Estonia (- 2.4%), Lithuania (- 2.0%) and Latvia (- 1.3%) had the highest decrease of the unemployment rate. Germany is ranking in the middle by a plus of 0.4% (N.N., 2013a).

However, even as roughly 3 million persons were unemployed in Germany, approximately 500,000 job offers were forwarded to the German local employment agencies in 2012. There is a continuing strong demand for specialists – meaning qualified employees (N. N., 2011a) - in all fields and sectors. Nevertheless, as unemployment is higher than vacant job positions, this situation may lead to the misinterpretation that there is no need for more personnel on the labor market. However, there is a significant mismatch of employees available on the labor market and vacant positions. The demand and supply on the labor market do not suit each other: The positions offered are mostly for qualified employees. These rare assets can not easily be found on the labor market and therefore a resource-oriented approach of human resource management serves as starting point for all further human resource management considerations (Dyer & Reeves 1995).

As human resource management manages the acquisition and recruitment of employees

the economic climate and the data concerning the labor market is the driving factor for companies to invest in this process. In Germany the economic climate is positive and an increase of production capacity is expected. Nevertheless, the amount of suitable employees is not inevitably increasing and therefore a shortage of personnel is expected which needs to be met with adequate human resource management measures.

3. Development trends of environmental factors

Organizations have to cope not only with the overall labor market trend but also with different single factors out of the companies' boundaries influencing the labor market. As the labor market itself is the external mainspring in the context of human resource management these trends need to be analyzed and watched carefully in order to choose the best-suited design parameters and actions for human resource management of an organization.

The shown influencing factors on labor demand and labor supply need to be analyzed in more detail as they play a major role in establishing human resource management in companies (Beyer 1991). Because of the multiplicity of influencing factors not all factors can be explicitly mentioned and those stated are very complex in predicting their influence on the German labor market. A valid evaluation of the future trends is difficult as there are trend disruptions or discontinuities possible. Disregarding all difficulties of prediction the fundamental influencing factors on labor demand and supply and their estimated development are described in the following. According to the German institute of labor market research the offer of labor supply increased to 45.33 million persons in 2013 (N.N., 2013a). The main impact on labor supply lies hereby on five aspects: demographic change, average working life time, women's employment, educational situation and mobility

Demographic change is nowadays usually set equal to the idea of an aging society: This is on the one hand a continuously increasing expectancy of life, on the other hand a positive migration proportion and a negative trend in birth rate. This will lead to a decrease in the German population which can not be balanced by immigration. Until the year 2050 the overall German population will have decreased by seven million people to roughly 75 million inhabitants compared to today's 82 million (N.N., 2011b).

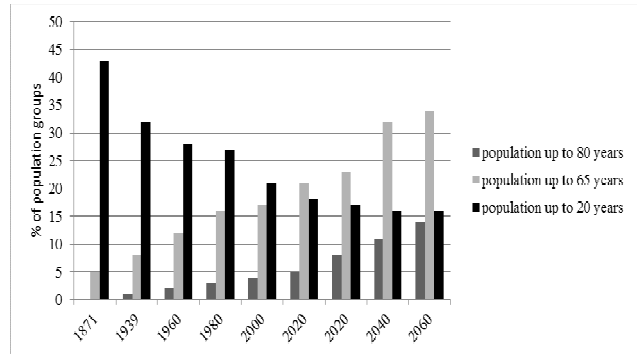


Fig. 7. Percentage of population groups on the German labor market – itemized on age groups, 1871 to 2060 – Status 2010 (source: N.N., 2013f)

This change in the overall population will have a very high impact on the development on the labor market. This has often been discussed in the recent years. The German labor market is dominated by an overall decrease of potential labor force. Nevertheless, an increase is expected in the 55- to 64-year age group (N.N., 2013c). Herein the male employment rate has doubled since the year 2000, the female employment rate has even tripled. In Europe Germany takes a top position in keeping people older than 54 years employed.

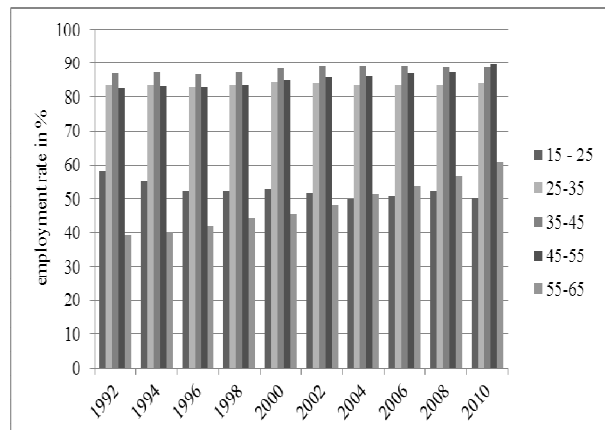


Fig. 8. German employment rate according to age groups in the years 1992 to 2010 (source: N.N., 2013a)

However, the development towards an older population means that organizations' demand for (qualified) employees will not be met in total – even if more and more older persons stay employed. Besides, in Germany less and less children are born since the 1970's. Together with Japan and Italy Germany ranks at the top three countries worldwide with the oldest population (N.N., 2013c).

Employees will therefore gain more market power and become rare assets on the labor market. Companies will need to take into account how these rare assets can be approached in a resource oriented fashion and how employees come to a decision for or against a potential employer. Therefore, human resource management must be

adjusted analog to market demands of the employees. The demographic change in Germany makes it even more crucial for organizations to address their target group on the labor market effectively.

Another aspect to be aware of is the fact that the working life time and average yearly working time has continuously decreased over the last decades (Hüther 2012). Despite the decreasing yearly working time the volume of work in Germany stays more or less stable over the last 15 years (N.N., 2013a). In the years 2000 to 2006 there was a constant decrease of volume of work.

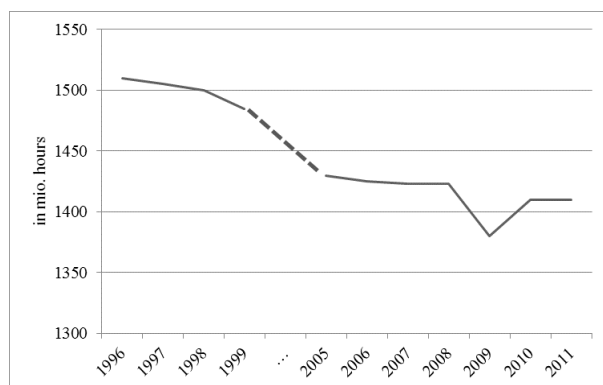


Fig. 9. German average yearly working time 1996 to 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

However, this trend changed in 2006 and – excluding the year 2009 with the state dept crisis – the volume of work increased steadily until 2013 (N. N., 2013a). This trend of stable volume of work and a decreasing yearly working time leaves yet another gap of personnel on the labor market. Concerning the overall working life time the German government has anticipated this trend and has started first reforms, one of them being the increase of the pensionable age from 65 to 67 years.

In addition to the just described general developments affecting the labor market there is also a gender aspect to be considered. The demand and supply on the German labor market is affected by the women's employment rate. An increase of potential labor supply is the consequence. In comparison to the last five decades the number of women on the labor market has increased. In 2012 an average of 71% of women aged between 15 to 64 were available as employees on the labor market (Schmidt 2013). Nevertheless the overall labor force participation rate in Germany has only increased by 1.5% in the last five decades, as 45% of women work part-time in 2012 (N.N., 2013c). Regarding the women's employment rate, the rate is constantly increasing. However, the increase is slightly diminishing and the overall employment participation rate is not so much affected by women's employment as 20 years ago.

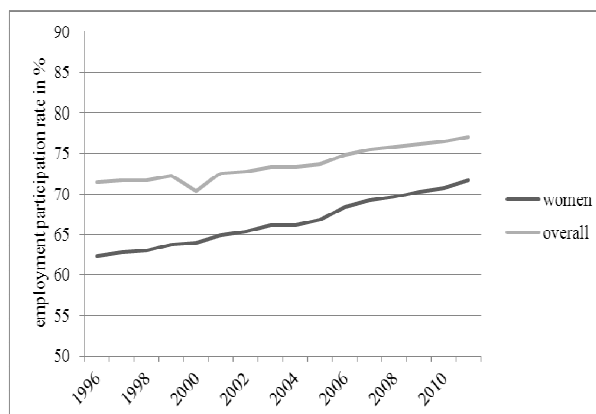


Fig. 10. German women's employment rate in comparison to Germany's overall employment participation rate in the years 1996 to 2012

Due to the fact that women are equally trained and qualified as men they increase the potential labor supply on the German labor market (Bertram, Bujard, Rösler 2011). In the realm of human resource management this means that especially this target group needs to be addressed. Employees constantly judge their (already) made decisions against their perception of the employer company as well as their personal matching to the organization. Hereby, human resource management must address the target group "women" with especially focused actions. Regarding their choice of employer women have different demands than men (Syed, Özbilgin 2009; Steyaert, Janssens 2003). Human resource management needs to focus on these demands and companies must be ready to address that target group on the labor market successfully. Human resource management needs to reflect the relationships of the employer' organization with its (potential) female employees and adapt its processes by addressing this target group on the external labor market accordingly.

Another factor to add to the list of influences on the labor market is the educational situation in Germany. The performance of the educational system and the educational behavior of potential employees influence the labor supply in different segments. The affinity to higher educational organizations like junior high school or high school is increasing. Today over 45 percent of pupils in Germany choose the junior high or high school as their educational system (N.N., 2013c). The percentage of pupils without any educational achievement is steadily decreasing. In 2012 only 3.8% of all pupils in Germany did not pass any school system.

Table 1. Educational achievement of German pupils concerning their final school degree in the years 2010 to 2012 (source: N. N., 2013e)

Educational achievement	2010		2011		2012	
	in thousands	%	in thousands	%	in thousands	%
Secondary modern school	26264	37	25859	36,3	25392	35,6
Junior high school	15404	21,7	15479	21,8	15818	22,1
High school	18329	25,8	18957	26,6	19488	27,3
other schools	8075	11,4	1050	11,5	7896	11,2
Without educational achievement	2926	4,1	2684	3,8	2700	3,8

This trend to a higher school degree reflects itself also in the choice of the next educational step. German school graduates tend to choose also a higher degree in the next educational institution. The number of persons without a degree in their professional education is decreasing. The percentage of persons choosing the German dual vocational training as final professional educational achievement is stable respectively slightly decreasing. However, the number of persons choosing an university degree as their final professional achievement is steadily increasing. And this trend is expected to continue over the next years (N.N., 2013c).

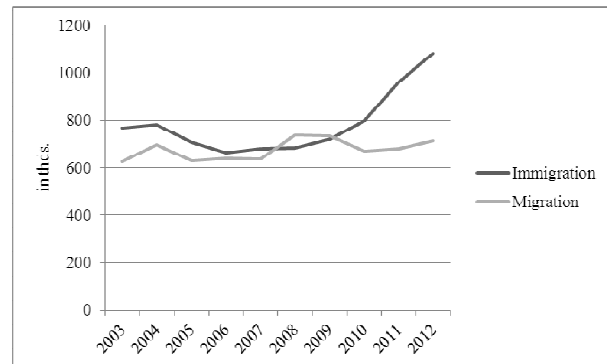
Table 2. Educational achievement of Germans concerning their final professional educational degree in the years 2010 – 2012 (source: N. N., 2013e)

Professional educational achievement	2010		2011		2012	
	in thousands	%	in thousands	%	in thousands	%
Dual vocational training	35661	50,2	35725	50,2	35653	49,9
University of applied science degree	8959	12,7	9753	13,7	9837	13,7
University degree	5322	7,5	5155	7,2	5542	7,8
Dissertation	792	1,1	752	1,1	771	1,1
Without declaration of educational degree	166	0,2	150	0,2	128	0,2
without educational degree	19724	27,8	19230	27	19082	26,7

This trend leads to a higher supply of better educated workforce. Nevertheless it must be clear to organizations that the trend to a higher school - and following this - a higher professional educational degree leads inevitably to a later entry into the labor market. In average the education in universities takes four to five years in Germany compared to only an average of three years duration of the dual vocational training.

A factor that is slightly balancing the later entry of (young) Germans into the labor market is the trend to a higher immigration into Germany. Ac-

ording to the German statistical Bundesamt (N.N., 2013e) Germany is getting more and more attractive as workplace over the last decade.

**Fig. 11.** Migration of persons to and from Germany from 2003 - 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

Over the last five years more people immigrated into Germany than emigrated. Only the years 2007 to 2009 were an exception in this trend. According to the figures provided by the German Statistisches Bundesamt this trend is expected to continue over the next years. Derived from the overall immigration trend it can be stated that the figures for the employee force on the German labor market are also growing. Germany offers an attractive labor market with organizations well positioned, meaning with a highly attractive employer branding.

There is a trend that qualified employees are more mobile than employees with a lower educational status (Pippke, Wolfmeyer 1976). The mobility on the Euro Zone's labor market is increasing. Nevertheless, the trend of the early 50s and 60s where immigration was much higher than migration has stopped long ago. Also, different guidelines by the European Commission do not have a very high impact on the balance of migration and immigration in Germany. The common admission of educational qualification for example has not led to a migration increase after its implementation in Germany (Vogler-Lugwig 1989). This mixture of employees with different educational background and different working experience – even in different countries – confronts the human resource management of a company with different demands of different target groups (Simon *et al.* 1995). To define the content of human resource management activities it is therefore crucial to define the target groups that are necessary for the company and their demands towards an employer. Cultural differences must be considered and – should the situation arise – different target groups must be appealed to together. In the sense of a market-orientation in the realm of human resource management that means that one heterogeneous labor market (all potential and actual

employees) needs to be separated in different homogenous sub-labor-markets (e.g. potential and actual employees from different countries) (Kroeber-Riel, Weinberg 2003).

4. Conclusions

German companies are confronted with an increasing change on the labor market over the last years. Their survival is dependent on their flexible and fast reaction to this new situation as described above.

A driving factor of the organization's handling of change is its employees and the quality of that intangible and rare resource. Hereby the quality of the company's human resources is getting more and more important compared to other resources, know-how, location and costs. (Simon *et al.* 1995)

The explanation above has shown that German organizations have to cope with an ever rapid change. They have to deal with changes in technology, globalization as well as with a constant development on the German labor market. Hereby they can only survive if they react flexible to unexpected influences, take their chances and achieve an optimal benefit for their customers and all other relevant stakeholders.

A limiting factor hereby is the development on the German labor market and its labor supply and demand. Human resources are becoming more and more a bottleneck. This situation will get worse as the workforce on the German labor market will constantly decrease. The labor demand on the German labor market exceeds the labor supply (Klinger *et al.* 2013).

Since 2010 more people are exiting the labor market than entering. This trend started at the turn of the century and continues until today. The only figures out-of-band in this trend existed in the years 2008 and 2009 where – due to the European state debt crisis – this trend was interrupted. And even if in 2012 the changes in percentage are lower than the year before, the overall number of employees on the labor market is decreasing. With the reduction of labor force and the increased demand for human resources within companies, the competition between different organizations for employees will get tougher. Organizations have established external human resource management instruments to position themselves on the labor market.

Human resource management is getting more and more a crucial process and endeavour within organizations to meet the requirements of the labor market in Germany. Human resource managers need to know the development on the labor market, the labor demand and supply, and its environment to fulfil their tasks within an organization successfully.

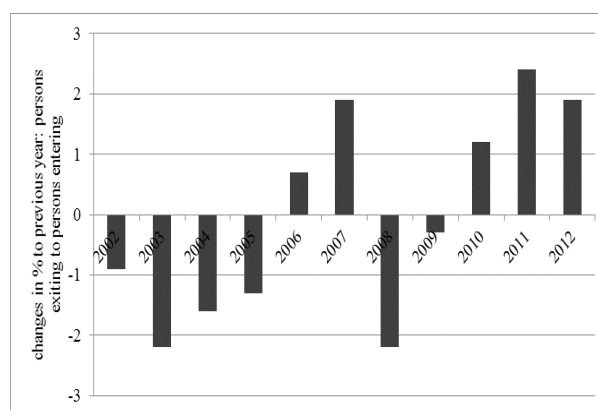


Fig. 12. Change in % compared to the previous year of persons entering and exiting the German labor market in the years 2002 to 2012 (source: N. N., 2013a)

Only if all information available concerning the development on the German labor market is taken into consideration solid decisions concerning human resource management of a company can be made.

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