

A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

The demands of a new world of work

BY ANJA FAHS

Digitalisation is changing the world of work. Flexible working models are moving in on less firmly structured working environments, work 4.0 requires a general change in thinking. What resources and technologies do modern companies need today, and how do they have to change? How do they meet employees' new expectations? Not only is the need for IT staff on the increase, but the number of higher qualified occupations is growing

overall. Companies are required to adapt to changing requirements. We spoke with University Professor Dr Marion A. Weissenberger-Eibl, who holds the Innovation and Technology Management (ITM) Chair at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), and Thomas Sperrfechter, Managing Director of the passionate consulting firm which accompanies businesses on their way to digitalisation. »

Why has work taken on a different significance in people's lives today?

PROF. WEISSENBERGER-EIBL: In recent years, a societal change towards a more post-materialistic way of life has emerged, while we simultaneously see the individualisation and pluralisation of lifestyles and family structures taking place. As a result, salaries and former status symbols such as company cars and expensive mobile phones now play a less important role to employees, as long as their salary covers their bare necessities. Aspects such as sustainability, self-determination, personal fulfilment, creativity and freedom at work and a balanced work-life relationship are more important. In future it could also be less important to strictly separate your private life time from your working time as the boundaries become more fluid.

THOMAS SPERRFECHTER: We also observe the fact that jobs are no longer selected by existential criteria. In addition, job benefits that have now become customary, such as free gym access et cetera, are no longer a significant loyalty instrument for employees, instead they are rather tools for an atmosphere of wellbeing. Of course, we wish for the wellbeing of our employees, but it's much more important to ensure that they can recognise and comprehend the meaning of their work.



University Professor Dr. Marion A. Weissenberger-Eibl, who holds the Innovation and Technology Management Chair at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

How should companies react to this?

PROF. W.-E.: Against the backdrop of demographic changes, companies must do everything in their power to win the strong and long-term loyalty of qualified professionals. They can do this for example by offering employees increased opportunities of flexibility, such as working from home or individual part-time solutions to support the compatibility of their private and professional lives. Highly qualified, innovative and creative employees in particular will by all means change jobs even if the salary meets their expectations, but the environment doesn't correspond to their aims of personal fulfilment and creativity. Companies need to know that innovations ensue through exchanges, openness, communication and freedom during the process of working and creation. This also requires certain rules of course, which embed processes and procedures within a company into a framework. Incidentally, employees also want this for orientation purposes.

Can you confirm this from a company's point of view?

T.S.: Openness and communication are essential – as companies, we must be more transparent towards employees. If the employee understands what the company stands for and is able to identify with it, then they will see meaning in what they do and for which purpose they do it for. We look for employees who define themselves through the meaning of their work. They ask themselves the question: where do I want to go to? As a company, we need to provide them with the right assistance to find this way. The employee will therefore feel successful and achieve something with the customer, receive feedback, trust, and the opportunity to also be able to make mistakes from time to time without having to fear severe consequences. The main thing for us as employers or directors is to create the right framework conditions for this. It is our responsibility to remove obstacles that stand in the way of our employees' success, and therefore our success as a company.

What are the framework conditions that enable a team's optimum customer performance?

T.S.: Basic questions, such as do the people have the right training to be able to do their job really well? Do they have the opportunity to receive further training and to develop themselves, and to attend conferences and training sessions? Is there sound project planning, in other words, does the employee have enough time for their project tasks to even be able to be successful? We also ensure that consultants don't have too many projects on their desks at once; they should be able to concentrate on each one individually in an optimal manner. Last but not least, employees must be able to draw on a comprehensive collection of methodology and best practices. This supports consultations through workshops and concepts, guaranteeing consistently high levels of quality for our customers.

Have digitalisation and internationalisation also changed the role of consultants? What type of person is this job suited to in general?

T.S.: I don't think that the job of consultant has changed in terms of basic skills such as communication skills in comparison to ten years ago. Today, consultants certainly have to realign themselves in terms of subject-matter knowledge,



especially in terms of speed and flexibility. We deliberately don't work with more detailed job descriptions, as an example. The candidate should rather have a focal point and the opportunity to creatively create the job position in such a manner that it becomes "their" job. After all, when it comes to customers there is also never one prefabricated approach, and the consultant must find new ways every day without losing sight of the big picture. The topics of recruiting and staff development are part of our company strategy at parsionate, and are therefore clearly the responsibility of management. Employees are strategically just as important to us as product development is to manufacturing companies.

Which skills in general will we increasingly require for our work in future?

PROF. W.-E.: I am certain that characteristics already proven today such as curiosity, reliability, determination and good self-organisation will continue to be useful and helpful in future. But aspects such as personal digital reputation and the ability to (digitally) network will also be decisive factors for professional success in future.

T.S.: In companies, the changes of the future will correlate to their increasing speed. We must create the opportunity to institutionalise this "change" against this backdrop. Companies that have not anchored the fact that they continuously want to change within their DNA are destined to fail. In four years, parsionate has already completely turned itself upside down three times. Our focus has always remained the same, while only the way in which we do things has changed. The



Thomas Sperrfechter, Managing Director of parsionate

cycle rate and the willingness to change across all instances is at a high level. After all, we accompany our customers during their changes – we must therefore also be capable of questioning things starting with ourselves and be willing to change.

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DR. MARION A. WEISSENBERGER-EIBL

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THOMAS SPERRFECHTER

As Managing Director, Thomas Sperrfechter is responsible for finance and human resources as well as the strategic development and organisation of parsionate GmbH alongside consulting and system integration. He founded the company in 2013 together with long-term consulting colleagues, and the company is now one of Europe's most renowned consulting firms for Master Data Management and digitalisation.