

FUTURE SKILLS

Changing competences in the
Bildungshaus of the future

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FUTURE SKILLS

Changing Competences in the Bildungshaus of the Future

In this brochure, the expression „Bildungshaus“ (plural: Bildungshäuser) is not translated into English, since no adequate english expression could be found. However, the term Folk High School, as it is used in some northern European countries, was used in addition.

Definition of a Bildungshaus:

A Bildungshaus is a general adult education institution with its own educational mission and a corresponding philosophy.

An independent pedagogical management is responsible for a regular educational programme, which is created on the basis of an educational analysis by professional adult education staff. It facilitates a learning culture that enables successful educational processes for own and guest events by providing rooms, organisational structure, professional know-how and the possibility of overnight accommodation.

(Peter Schwarzenbacher, Markus Riegler, Elke Gruber, Gaby Filzmoser, 2009)



PREAMBLE

Today more than ever, Bildungshäuser, Folk High Schools and educational centers need innovative concepts and strategies in order to anticipate the changes in work processes brought about by digitalization and technologization. At the same time, they must design the job profiles of their employees in an adequate and attractive way. It is crucial to further develop these institutions in a way that allows them to remain fit for the future for both learners and employees.

Employees of the ARGE Bildungshäuser Österreich, the Verbandes der Bildungszentren im ländlichen Raum and the SPES Zukunftsakademie spent a year working on this topic in the **Erasmus+ project "Future Skills - Changing competences in the Bildungshaus of the Future"**.

Following on from the previous project "Bildungshäuser of the future - Needs-oriented learning space concepts in adult education", the focus was no longer on the target groups of the Bildungshäuser, but on their employees. The aim was to develop solutions for staff recruitment and development and to identify skills that would help educational institutions to prepare for future challenges.

Inspiring best practices, clever tips, exciting examples from excursions, practical experiences of Bildungshäuser as well as information from discussions in focus groups were collected. This document provides a concise summary of the key insights and questions related to „Future Skills“. It is intended as a guide and a source of inspiration – designed to inform, inspire, and encourage action.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone involved in the project for their dedicated and wonderful collaboration.

We wish you an enjoyable and insightful read!



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Managing Director of
ARGE Bildungshäuser Österreich



Dr. Peter Buhmann

Managing Director of
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„In times of change,
the greatest danger is not the
change itself – it's acting with
yesterday's logic.“

– Peter Drucker



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Questions that got us started..... | 6 |
|------------------------------------|---|

DEFINITIONS

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Future Skills..... | 8 |
| New Work..... | 10 |

FOCUS TOPICS

| | |
|---|----|
| Future Skills & Recruiting..... | 12 |
| Future Skills & Organisational Development..... | 15 |
| Future Skills & Leadership..... | 17 |
| Future Skills & Personnel development..... | 19 |

FUTURE SKILLS

| | |
|--|----|
| Future Skills in the Bildungshaus of the Future..... | 22 |
| Future Skills do not develop on their own..... | 29 |

RESUME

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Questions that remain..... | 32 |
|----------------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| LIST OF REFERENCES..... | 34 |
|--------------------------------|-----------|

| | |
|--|-----------|
| WE WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU..... | 36 |
|--|-----------|



INTRODUCTION

LOOKING BACK

Questions that got us started

Two central questions have been occupying managers in German and Austrian Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools for some time:

How can we find and/or retain employees who are equipped to meet future challenges, who are eager to contribute, and who are capable of actively shaping our educational institutions?

Which competences set them apart, and how can we support them in developing these skills?

These questions formed the starting point and core focus of the Erasmus+ project „Future Skills - Changing Competences in the Bildungshaus of the Future“ (project duration: March 2024 - March 2025), which addressed the topics of recruitment, leadership, organisational structures, and staff development. The project ultimately centered around the following guiding questions:

What skills, values and attitudes will employees need in the Bildungshaus/Folk High School of the future??

How can we make Bildungshäuser/Folk High Schools attractive to new, potential employees?

To explore these questions, the ARGE Bildungshäuser Österreich (ARGE BHÖ), the Verband der Bildungszentren im ländlichen Raum (VBLR) and the SPES Zukunftsakademie joined forces in an Erasmus+

„Curiosity is always at the beginning of a problem that seeks to be solved.“

- Galileo Galilei



DEFINITIONS

SUPERPOWERS OF TOMORROW'S WORKING WORLD?

Future Skills

What are future skills? Future skills are primarily interdisciplinary skills. The WeQ Institute, publisher of the Future Skills Practice Book and the [futureskills.org platform](https://futureskills.org), defines the term as follows:

„Future skills are the indispensable social and life skills that are of fundamental importance for positive personal, social and planetary development in the 21st century.

Future Skills are in particular those human abilities that are becoming increasingly important in an increasingly digitalized world. They enable us to develop our human potential and work together towards a positive future worth living. A future that is characterized by a new humanity.“

(WeQ Institut, 2024, o.S.)

In general, professional competences are divided into technical, methodological, social, and personal competences. Technical competences are job-specific and traditionally receive the most attention in (vocational) education and training. Future skills, however, are assigned to the remaining three categories. These include:

Methodological competences = can I select and apply appropriate approaches, techniques, and methods for my work?

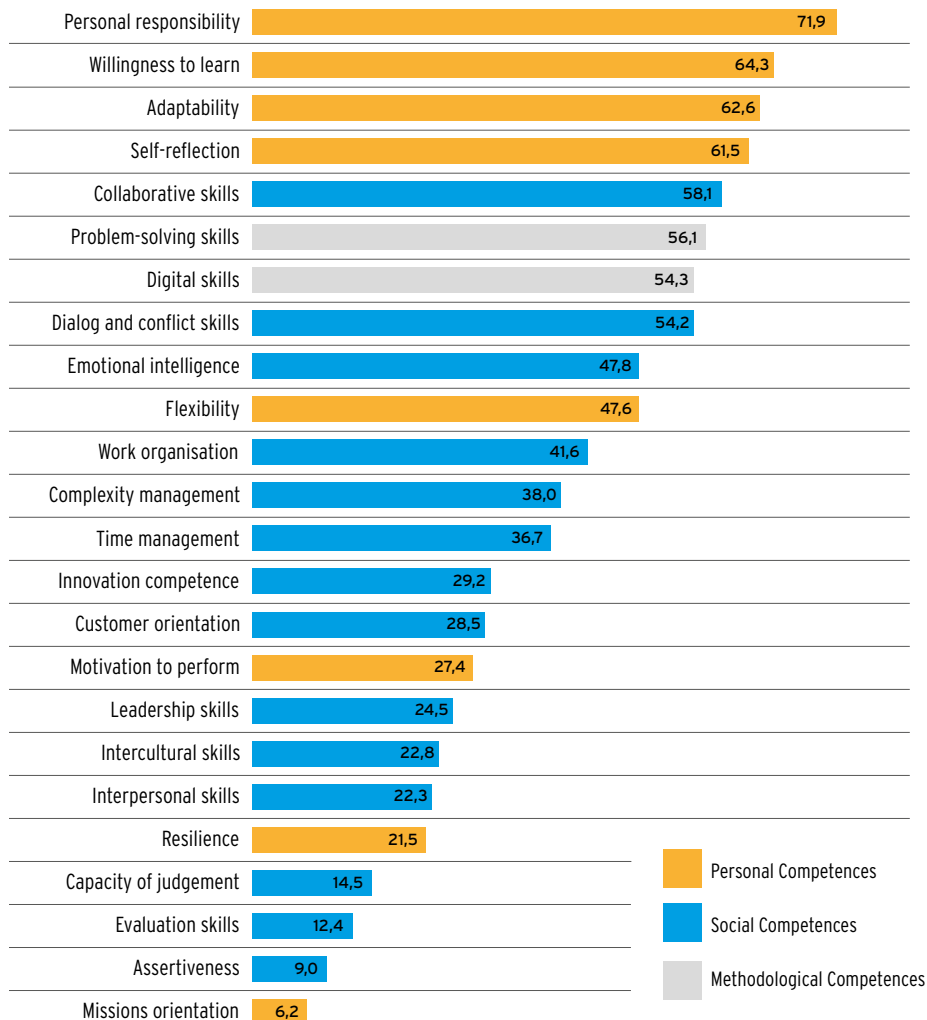
Social competences = can I behave appropriately in social situations?

Personal competences = can I manage myself well while working?

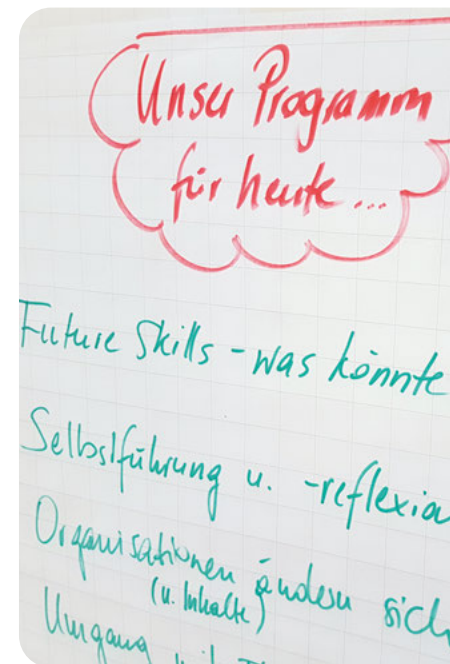
(Kauffeld, 2006 p. 23ff cited in Schermuly & Meifert 2023, S. 18)

The „New Work Barometer“ (Schermuly & Meifert, 2023, p. 18) assigns the following skills to these categories - ranked by importance according to a survey of over 600 company representatives from various sectors (each respondent could select ten competences):

Key competences according to the „New Work Barometer“



Personal skills in particular are considered important for the future.





The term “New Work” is often understood in very different ways.

BETWEEN SOCIAL CHANGE AND HOME OFFICE

New Work

The term „New Work“ is often used as an umbrella term for a variety of “new forms of work“. According to the Austrian Chamber of Commerce (2024), this includes: remote work, job sharing, digital nomads, agile organisations, employee sharing, interim management, etc. In this context, they also refer to four major types of „decoupling“:

- **Spatial decoupling** = separation between the employee’s place of residence and the company’s location
- **Temporal decoupling** = flexible working hours
- **Relational decoupling** = multiple employees share one job or work for several employers
- **Institutional decoupling** = due to spatial separation, different institutional frameworks may apply (e.g. labor laws)

These new forms of work offer more freedom, but also carry risks such as precarious working conditions and psychological strain due to increased self-responsibility. Their successful implementation requires critical, self-reflective abilities, increased communication among employees, and ongoing negotiation processes between staff and leadership (Filzmoser, 2021, p. 225).

Frithjof Bergmann and the Bildungshaus concept

The term „New Work“ is by no means new. However, its original meaning differs significantly from how it is commonly used today. The philosopher and anthropologist Frithjof Bergmann laid the actual foundation for the New Work movement back in the 1970s. At the heart of his theory lies the aim of making people less dependent on traditional wage labor and instead **shaping work into something that provides strength and meaning.**

Bergmann criticized the traditional work system, in which employees often experienced work as a kind of “mild illness” due to a lack of opportunities for self-realization and the development of talents. In contrast, the New Work movement seeks to support people in finding their true calling – something Bergmann referred to as „what one really, really wants.“ The goal is to place individual human needs more firmly at the center (New Work New Culture, 2024). Bergmann emphasized that realizing one’s calling is not always associated with fun or ease. Rather, it requires a deeply rooted intrinsic motivation that also involves effort and dedication.

Bergmann viewed technology as the key lever for granting people the freedom to discover and actually pursue what they truly want. Technology, according to Bergmann, could relieve society of tasks that are

necessary but unfulfilling - thereby creating space for personal freedom. Core values of Bergmann's theory include autonomy and self-determination, greater human freedom, meaningful work, and increased participation in community life through stronger social integration (Foelsing & Schmitz, 2021, p. 1ff).

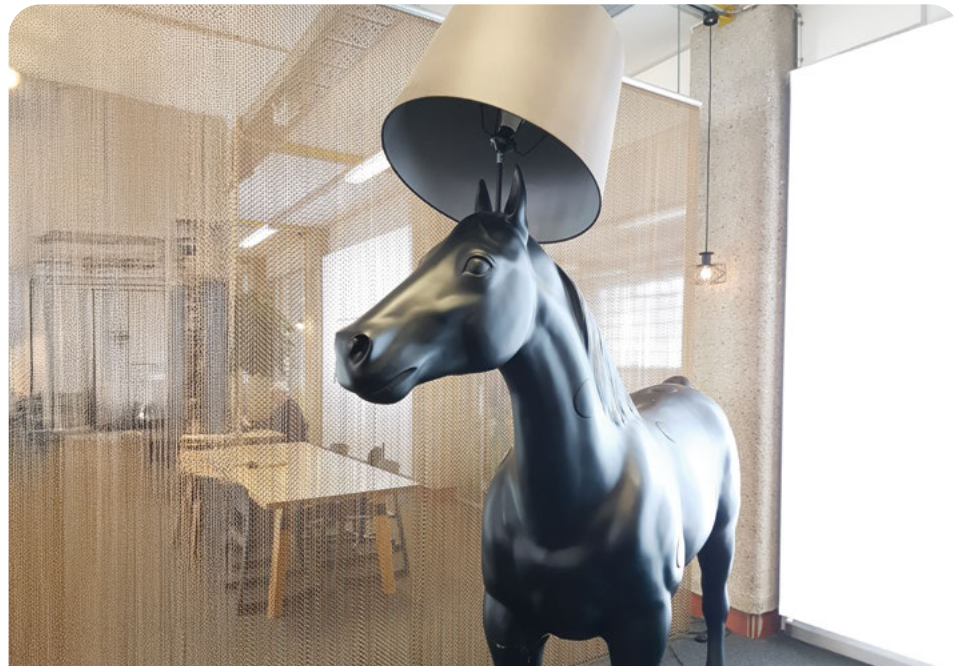
In this spirit, Bergmann was not enthusiastic about today's common interpretation of the term "New Work," which he mockingly referred to as "old work in a miniskirt." Foelsing and Schmitz (2021, p. 2ff) also emphasize that „implementing New Work in organisations requires much more fundamental changes than just flexible working hours or adding the proverbial office foosball table“.

Bergmann's approach aligns well with the spirit of Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools, where themes such as social responsibility, inclusive and appreciative attitudes, lifelong and communal learning, and sustainability are central to their mission statements.

People often speak of meaningful work in a place of personal growth and human connection. In practice, putting these ideals into action can be challenging. Nevertheless, this shared human-centered vision offers valuable orientation - and the opportunity for Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools to position themselves clearly as attractive employers.



The world of work is undergoing a cultural change. What does this mean for you and your educational institution?





FOCUS TOPICS

WINNING PEOPLE FOR BILDUNGSHÄUSER AND FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS

Future Skills & Recruiting

A strategic and inclusive search for new members of the Bildungshaus team requires clarity on certain key questions: Whom do we want to attract? Where can we reach these people most effectively? How can we address them in the best possible way?

Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools need to actively promote diversity in thought and action by intentionally integrating new ideas, leveraging the (often hidden) potential of their staff, and thinking beyond standard profiles when defining role requirements (e.g. in terms of age, generational traits, or disabilities). Standardised application processes often make it difficult for unconventional thinkers to present their strengths effectively - even though it is precisely these individuals who could be key to the future viability of an institution.

Therefore, Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools must adapt their recruitment and selection processes to not only identify professional expertise but also to spot and foster future-oriented skills. Those who put Future Skills at the centre of their recruiting strategy not only attract the right talent but also strengthen their long-term competitiveness.



TIP:

People connect through conversation. For example, a casual conversation with a guest could reveal potential for a future job opportunity.

Traditional Recruiting: obstacles and opportunities

Recruiting new staff can be a challenging task for Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools. The reasons are varied and complex: for example, qualified professionals are often already employed, top talents are less likely to use traditional job platforms, and applicants now research potential employers in their region more thoroughly. Even the location can be both a blessing and a curse: while Bildungshäuser are often located

in particularly beautiful rural areas, this can mean long commutes and poor accessibility for employees – despite the inspiring work environment. For this reason, Bildungshäuser need to offer holistic incentives that go beyond their unique location in order to attract and retain staff in the long term.

An opportunity lies in **employees who are open to change**, which, according to Mediapool and Xing (2024), account for 37% to 48% of the workforce. The most common reasons for switching jobs are higher salaries, flexible working hours, and attractive locations, as well as job security, work-life balance, and the chance to engage in meaningful work. Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools have a clear advantage when they offer a positive culture, meaningful tasks, and opportunities for personal and professional development. In this way, personal goals, the desire for self-fulfilment, and the organisational mission become interwoven (Laloux, 2015).

Additional **benefits and incentives** also matter, but they must be part of a larger, strategic concept for recruiting and retaining employees (Berger, 2024). According to the study „Attracting Talent 2024,“ 47% of job switchers consider benefits an important factor when choosing a job, while 36% of loyal employees cite them as a reason to stay. However, traditional perks alone are often insufficient for long-term retention, as they represent extrinsic motivation. What really makes a lasting difference is the meaningfulness of the work, the opportunity for growth, and a positive organisational culture that nurtures intrinsic motivation.

Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools should not hide their light under a bushel when it comes to competing on employee benefits. They can confidently position themselves as partners in personal development, lifelong learning, and meaningful work. This message should be actively communicated both externally and internally. **The only condition: it must be genuinely lived out in practice.**

Modern Recruiting: innovative ideas und strategies

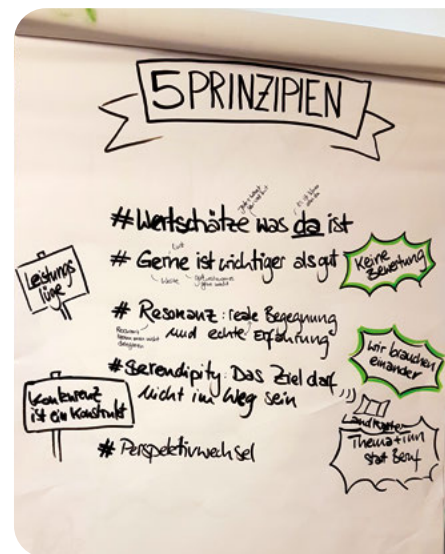
In addition to traditional recruiting, creative approaches are increasingly being used. Values-based methods, such as **recruiting without a cover letter or résumé**, promote equal opportunities by assessing candidates based on relevant skills rather than formal criteria.

Employee referral programs and **corporate influencing** rely on authentic recommendations from current staff. Targeted use of **social media recruiting** and **interactive career pages** helps reach potential candidates where they actively seek information. **Talent pools** and **strategic networks** support long-term workforce planning and open up new recruitment channels. According to Flipped Job Market (2024), networking is a key element in today's job market. If a Bildungshaus knows what kind of people it wants to attract, it can conduct targeted research into the networks where such individuals are active.

Regional cooperation offers opportunities to attract skilled workers through joint strategies. Instead of relying solely on “ready-made” professionals, Bildungshäuser can train and retain new talent through **mentoring and assistant programs**. And for those who like it a bit more unconventional: **“recruitainment”** and **gamification** (e.g. digital escape rooms) introduce playful elements to make the application process more interactive and appealing. **Guerrilla recruiting**, on the other hand, uses bold and unconventional tactics to stand out cheekily from the competition. Not to forget **re-hiring**, i.e. former employees returning - which is why you should always part on good terms.

BEST PRACTICE for MEANINGfull work: **FLIPPED JOB MARKET and the „WITH-PLEASURE-PRINCIPLE“**

We received a best practice tip on meaningful work at the “Flipped Job Market” excursion destination in Berlin, an innovative consultancy that has developed the “With-Pleasure-Principle”. This emphasizes that doing something with pleasure is more important than perfection. And: meaning is not created by the job itself, but by the personal significance you give it. “If you enjoy doing something, you are in great danger of being good at it” (Narrimann, 2023).



Modern recruiting should not only be innovative but also honest and authentic, so that candidates are not only attracted but also convinced in the long term. In addition, it's important to shine with a professional **onboarding process** - which begins the moment an offer is accepted.

The **Inner Development Goals** (IDGs) can support Bildungshäuser in positioning themselves as values-driven employers that promote both professional and personal growth, thus strengthening staff retention.

It may also be necessary to fundamentally rethink and streamline work processes, such as housekeeping - **reorganisation** is the keyword here. **Internal potential** often remains untapped: How can staff be further developed or moved into new roles? What unused capabilities exist within the team? Can tasks be redistributed? **Job sharing** enables roles to be split flexibly or shared across organisations. This creates synergies, encourages knowledge exchange, and supports the desire for greater flexibility (Drucker & Mittermann, 2023).



TIP:

A special benefit that educational institutions can offer their employees is **learning mobility via the Erasmus+ program**.

This funding channel enables employees to visit other educational institutions or workshops in other countries, for example.

Future Skills & Organisational Development

The term „organisation“ is derived from the word for „tool“ and refers to an instrument for achieving strategic goals. This tool must be continuously adapted - especially when the organisation's direction changes. For example, if the aim is to strengthen self-management, this requires structural adjustments, such as more flexible hierarchies, new meeting formats, and revised decision-making processes. Future skills are essential for mastering these kinds of changes.

Organisational theories and their approaches

Organisational theories often aim to describe the „ideal“ organisation - with the hope of eliminating every-day problems. This is frequently linked to (overly) high expectations of leaders: They are expected to motivate, give meaning to work, achieve economic success, and satisfy stakeholder interests all at once.

According to **Fredmund Malik** organisations are inherently imperfect and inevitably involve conflicts and challenges. Instead of striving for a “perfect” organisation, he recommends that leaders focus on five core tasks: setting goals, organising, making decisions, controlling, and developing employees.

The key question, he argues, is how to design structures so that customers, employees, and management alike can work effectively. For him, efficient management is the key to navigating societal transformation processes. He insists that any reflection on one's own organisation must answer the following three questions:

- How must we organise ourselves so that what customers pay us for is at the centre of our attention?
- How must we organise ourselves so that what we pay our employees for can actually be done by them?
- How must we organise ourselves so that what the management is paid for can actually be accomplished? (Malik, 2006, p. 192)

Malik's main focus is thus on how existing organisations and their structures can be empowered by competent managers to work efficiently and function reliably.

Frédéric Laloux on the other hand, presents a very different approach in his book *Reinventing Organisations*. He sees organisations standing at a threshold of transformation: according to him, the traditional structures that relied on unlimited growth for survival are reaching their limits. This makes sustainable action impossible in the long run, in every respect. At the same time, many people find no sense of purpose in their work.

Spinner
betreten
neue
Wege.

WIR UNTERSTÜTZEN DAS.

„That is the true genius of organisations: They can help people as a group to surpass themselves and achieve results that they would never have achieved on their own.“

- Frédéric Laloux

Laloux therefore advocates for a new form of organisation that focuses more on fairness, community, and cooperation.

He believes that advances in recent centuries - such as improvements in healthcare and global nutrition - have laid the foundation for a transformation in how we organise. More and more people are now able to consciously shape their own lives. They overcome fears, build on their strengths, develop wisdom beyond pure rationality, and seek wholeness and connection with nature. These individuals, Laloux argues, will create new organisational forms, as they recognise how restrictive the old models have become and how little they are able to respond to today's major challenges. Laloux refers to these new models as "evolutionary organisations," which are characterised by three key principles:

- **Self-managemen:** a move away from traditional hierarchies
- **Wholeness:** integrating personal values and identity into one's work
- **Evolutionary purpose:** the future is not predicted and controlled - it is shaped collectively (Laloux, 2015)

Laloux's vision may seem revolutionary - even somewhat utopian.

But it raises essential questions:

Can organisations really function this way?

What should the future of our Bildungshaus organisation look like - and with what tools can we shape it?



Future Skills & Leadership

When dealing with topics such as organisational development and future skills, leadership moves into focus – but with a self-reflective view of one's own role, rather than idealised notions of leadership:

- How must leadership evolve if employees want more individualised guidance and are expected to take on greater responsibility?
- What does this mean in practical terms for leaders in Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools?
- How can I, as a leader, take the first steps toward change?

Reflecting on, adapting, and opening up leadership culture

Change requires both willingness and courage. It is the leader's role to keep the conversation about change alive within the organisation and to act as a source of motivation during challenging times.

Reflecting on one's own leadership behaviour helps to better understand the current state and to formulate personal desires and visions for leadership. Leaders should be kind to themselves in this process: knowledge of good leadership is often difficult to translate into daily behaviour and requires persistence and strength. The long-term task of leading and working together well is to continually evolve, rethink leadership responsibility, and live it authentically. A radical overnight transformation is unrealistic and would be overwhelming for both the Bildungshaus and its people.

Many employers promise individual support and family-friendly working hours – but how do leaders actually bring these values to life? How can they communicate and implement them effectively with their teams? How much individual treatment can be expected and handled? And what level of individualisation actually leads to greater satisfaction, balance, and motivation among staff? Leaders must acknowledge – both to themselves and to their teams – that individualised leadership is a significant challenge. Nonetheless, it is essential to respond to the personal needs, strengths, and weaknesses of each individual in order to unlock the team's full potential. The role of leadership is to be an enabler, advisor, and mentor, tailored to the unique needs of each employee.

Once leaders have clarified their vision and are willing to share responsibility, it is time to involve employees – this marks a first step toward an open, participative leadership culture. Not all employees will accept this invitation, but those who do will have the opportunity to actively contribute and help shape improvements. A major concern for many leaders are those employees who “do their job by the book” and are unwilling to take on responsibility for change – but they, too, are important and must be accepted.

„Fear is the enemy of realising potential.“

- Stiftung Bürgertum



More courage to leave the comfort zone

Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools are wonderful places, and they have the potential to be inspiring workplaces as well. They offer engaging content, beautiful environments, meaningful contributions to society, and a family-like atmosphere - not just for their guests, but also for their employees. These are, in fact, ideal conditions for setting themselves apart from other employers, especially in rural areas.

However, in practice, the reality often looks different. Throughout this project and in conversations with directors and staff, we repeatedly encountered reservations toward new methods and even small changes in areas like organisational development and leadership. As places of community and democracy, Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools should serve as role models though. We offer courses on resilience and relaxation, yet are often relentless with ourselves and our colleagues? We promote democracy and participation, yet do not reflect these values in our working models? We aim to provide (continuing) education for all, but remain stuck in old patterns, thinking, and knowledge? „Fear is the enemy of realising potential“ (Stiftung Bürger-tum, 2023, p. 37) - and that applies to leadership as well.

Taking a look at one's own fears - and those of the Bildungshaus itself - can be a valuable opportunity to confront them with courage and gain a fresh perspective on one's work. Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools are wonderful places with the potential to become spaces for everyone - places where even small efforts can have a big impact, and where people help shape democratic dialogue and political education in Germany and Austria.

Having the courage to own one's mistakes, recognising success even outside of major funding programs, trying out new things - and ultimately, enjoying the important work being done: The leaders of Bildungshäuser are doing meaningful work and have every reason to be proud of what they achieve every day - for their staff, their guests, and for democracy.

Ultimately, everything needed for good leadership is often already there: a purpose and great employees and educational centres.

Sometimes all it takes is a change of perspective and a little courage.

Future Skills & Personnel development

In addition to organisational development, personnel planning and recruiting, responsibility for staff development in Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools often lies with the management.

Promoting Future Skills can provide relief for both leaders and employees. Through continuous staff development, employees are empowered to use new technologies and working methods, and to work more independently. The goal is to foster collaborative work in a spirit of trust, appreciation, and participation, and to create a work environment that strengthens people.

According to Frédéric Laloux (2015), personnel development should not aim to make employees more efficient within an existing system, but rather to unlock their potential, nurture intrinsic motivation, and enable a culture of trust.

More trust, more transparency and genuine appreciation

Why does your Bildungshaus/Folk High School exist? Why do your employees do what they do? Our organisations should clearly define their purpose, communicate it both internally and externally, and most importantly: *live it*. Particularly powerful is the **alignment between the organisation's purpose and the individual purpose of its employees** - their personal motivations for working. Because those who find meaning in their work are more engaged and satisfied.

Bildungshäuser have great potential to inspire staff through **authentic purpose and values**. With this in mind, it is wise to integrate values and core principles into everyday work. Future-oriented organisations train their teams in shared principles such as communication and conflict resolution, to promote clarity and productive collaboration. An especially effective approach can be to develop a "values manifesto" together with all staff members. But one thing is crucial: values must be actively lived. Few things erode motivation and trust faster than empty promises.

Perhaps the most important prerequisite for effective teamwork is **trust** - especially when responsibility is delegated and self-management is encouraged. In this context, trust does not mean cautiously waiting until it is earned, but rather adopting a deliberate **mindset of confidence and belief in others**. Honesty and openness from leadership are essential to creating a culture in which employees act with personal responsibility and support one another.

When employees are given responsibility and **decision-making freedom**, intrinsic motivation can emerge. A crucial element is the learning process through which employees develop the ability to handle responsibility.

*„Without great people,
even great ideas are useless.“*

- Simon Sinek



The Advice Process, as described by Laloux (2015, pp. 102ff), supports employees in making independent and responsible decisions - in consultation with those affected, but without requiring full consensus. Importantly, delegating responsibility should not be a way of shifting work onto others, but rather a means of simplifying processes.

Self-organised teams are particularly effective in this context. Traditional leadership tasks - such as goal setting, planning, guidance, control, and evaluation - are distributed across multiple people and functions within the organisation. The [digital service company Netural](#), based in Linz, was visited as a best practice example in the course of this project. At Netural, teams carry revenue responsibility, oversee projects from start to finish, and make their own staffing decisions.

Flexibility is also increasingly expected by employees - and it must go both ways. While Bildungshäuser need flexible employees, they must also, in return, offer flexibility in terms of working hours, locations, and areas of responsibility. The goal is to help employees better balance work and personal commitments, which increases satisfaction and reduces stress. When it comes to task areas, using roles instead of fixed positions can make work processes more agile.

Transparency is also essential: employees need to clearly understand what is expected of them and how their contributions impact the success of the team and the organisation. It also involves a mindset of trust in people's ability to handle responsibility, especially when the organisation's challenges are openly communicated. This creates a genuine sense of shared responsibility. When not only leadership but all employees take ownership of the organisation's purpose, culture, and success, a sense of **psychological ownership** emerges. In this process, the involvement of the sponsoring organisation is also important.

Compensation is a central aspect of any workplace. Clear and fair salary structures are essential: How are salaries determined? How can they be designed fairly? What levels of pay disparity are considered acceptable? In the spirit of fairness, it is advisable to cap high salaries and raise lower ones. A fair wage is a sign of **appreciation**. And genuine appreciation also means recognising all contributions - regardless of position - and making visible those efforts that are often overlooked. When was the last time your cleaning staff or kitchen team received an honest "You're doing a great job"?

Employees also desire **personal and individual feedback**. In this context, subjective and reflective feedback is often more effective than so-called "objective" evaluations. One particularly enriching method is the use of peer feedback.

Alongside all these things, performance remains a key issue. Performance comes from satisfaction. Satisfied employees are more productive and committed. Celebrating successes is just as important. It makes performance visible, which is sometimes overlooked in the hustle and bustle of everyday life at the Bildungshaus or Folk High School.



Photo: Karolina Grabowska



„It's still about inspiring people to do something for the organisation - the question is how.“

– Bodo Janssen

Photo: Christine Hofer-Lukie



FUTURE SKILLS

RETHINKING THE EXISTING

Future Skills in the Bildungshaus of the Future

The Future Skills identified and presented in the course of this project aim to offer guidance and inspiration, without claiming to be exhaustive.

Communication and conflict resolution skills

Communication competence is **one of the most essential tools of our time**. Effective communication strengthens employees' sense of belonging - because those who feel heard and seen develop a deeper connection to the organisation. A culture of appreciation begins with language:

- How do we *speak* with one another?
- How do we make *decisions*?
- How do we resolve *conflicts*?
- How do we give *feedback*?
- How do we express *appreciation*?

Trainings in nonviolent communication or giving effective feedback can be very helpful here. By consistently developing interpersonal skills, employees are empowered to engage with each other confidently and

„There will be many tasks in the future that we neither know that they will have to be done, nor how they will have to be done.“

- Flipped Job Market

responsibly. This approach not only supports individual growth, but also enhances the quality of collaborative work (Reinventing Organizations Wiki, 2024).

A key aspect of effective communication is the **ability to resolve conflicts**. The first step - addressing the conflict - is often the hardest one. Direct confrontation is frequently avoided. Instead of resolving the issue openly with the person concerned, the problem is passed on to the managers, who must then invest their own time and resources to handle it. Ideally, conflict triggers are recognised early on. This requires establishing processes that make tensions and conflicts visible.

Regular reflection sessions, an open feedback culture, and clear communication structures can all contribute. Clearly defined procedures also help address existing conflicts constructively and encourage respectful engagement with others (Reinventing Organizations Wiki, 2024). By implementing such processes, employees can be empowered to find solutions independently. The leader may still be involved later as a mediator or part of a support group, if needed. In cases of more complex or prolonged conflict, coaching can be a valuable support tool.

Laloux describes a model of a conflict resolution process:

(2015, p. 114)

Step 1: Direct dialogue between the parties

This requires communication skills: Can I address issues effectively?
Can I respectfully express what my needs are? Can I hear and understand the other person's needs?

Step 2: Involve a neutral colleague as a mediator

If step 1 does not lead to a solution, a colleague can be asked to act as a mediator. This person remains neutral and does not force a decision. The focus remains on the joint solution, not on apportioning blame.

Step 3: Clarification by a committee of affected colleagues

If the conflict cannot be resolved even with support, a small committee of colleagues familiar with the issues is convened. The committee does not prescribe a solution either, but should help to analyse the situation, weigh up the arguments, ask questions, etc., as was previously the case with the neutral mediation.





Self-responsibility

Employees who act with self-responsibility can **make decisions, set priorities, and complete their tasks independently**, without constantly needing instructions. It also means being able to take ownership of one's actions - both in success and in failure - where a positive error culture is essential.

In Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools, where increasing individualisation, digitalisation, and limited resources pose ongoing challenges, self-responsibility helps staff to act flexibly and solution-oriented.

Flexibility and willingness to change

Educational needs, technologies, and societal conditions are evolving rapidly. For staff in Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools, it is therefore increasingly important to **remain open to new things, continue learning**, and approach challenges with flexibility, creativity, and responsibility. Flexibility and willingness to change cover many areas - from mindsets and values to working hours, methods, and processes. These two competences enable people to respond quickly to new challenges - such as introducing digital learning formats, adjusting content, engaging with diverse target groups and guests, or compensating for staff shortages.

In traditionally run institutions, where things have been done the same way for years, change can be viewed with suspicion or fear, making it a particularly difficult and sensitive process. Change also requires effort - which is another reason why it is often resisted. In such cases, it helps to cultivate a culture of continuous development and personal growth within the Bildungshaus. Change becomes easier when others lead by example. Ideally, employees are involved transparently and directly in change processes - for example, when integrating new departments. This allows them not only to react to change, but to actively shape it - leading to greater and faster acceptance.

Multiperspectivity

Multiperspectivity means consciously seeking out, perceiving, and adopting different perspectives - and using the insights gained to one's advantage (Hirsch, 2023).

Tips to encourage and strengthen this skill:

- Bring **fresh perspectives** into the Bildungshaus, for example by inviting external consultants who can introduce new impulses - even if they challenge existing routines.
- **Integrate new people temporarily**, such as interns or by collaborating with students on master's theses - they bring fresh air and new ideas into the team.



TIP:

Change gets easier
when others lead by example.

- **„Get-rid-of-garbage-process“:** This is about reflecting on processes, structures, and ways of thinking and, if necessary, „clearing them out.“ Guiding questions include:

What, of the things we do, would we not start doing again today?

What do we want to continue doing as is?

What do we want to do differently?

What do we want to start doing?

What do we no longer want to do?

- Undertaking **learning journeys** or **excursions** into other industries in order to discover new approaches and gain experience. The motto is: get out of your comfort zone!
- Generating new ideas through the **exchange of good practice examples**, for example through discussions about podcasts or other short, inspiring formats.

Examples of implementing Multiperspectivity in a Bildungshaus/Folk High School:

Perspective shifts in difficult situations with guests

In challenging encounters with a guest, it can be helpful to consciously put yourself in their shoes. What needs might underlie their behavior? Adopting this perspective can help staying calm and acting with empathy and a solution-oriented mindset.

Generating ideas through cross-departmental collaboration

When educational staff are looking for new ideas for events, a change of perspective can bring fresh impulses. For example, by initiating conversations with colleagues from other departments (e.g. kitchen, service), and incorporating their viewpoints and suggestions.

Breaking thought patterns through a change of environment

When thought processes are stuck, a simple change of environment can work wonders. A meeting in a different room, outdoors, or in a creatively designed setting can stimulate thinking and open up new perspectives.



Photo: TBI Grillhof

Ability to find solutions

The ability to develop solutions to challenges is more essential today than ever before. In a dynamic, often unpredictable world, **creativity, adaptability, and the willingness to break away from familiar patterns of thinking** are crucial – expertise alone is not enough (Schipek, n.d.). Educational institutions also face increasingly complex challenges: staff shortages, individualization of staff and guests, budget constraints, new dietary needs of guests, etc. It is essential to actively involve employees in solution processes. Instead of focusing on problems, attention should be directed toward constructive approaches and solutions. The ability to find solutions exists within every person and can be specifically fostered (Schipek, n.d.). Here are some practical tips on how this can succeed:

Examples for promoting the ability to find solutions

Describing problems as specifically as possible (Jungmeier, 2024):

The more specific, the easier it is to formulate next steps or goals. To do this, the problem can be broken down into its components using the recurring question „Why“. Example: An educational center is having difficulty finding a director. Why is that? The answers resulting from this question can again be questioned with „Why“, and so on.

Promoting peer consultation (Laloux, 2015, p. 99ff):

Employees can ask colleagues to help them solve problems by requesting their opinion and/or expertise. Ideally, the team is trained to ask good questions and to listen actively.

Solution-finding ability arises through action (Flipped Job Market, 2024):

Just let employees do their thing every once in a while. Even if the solution is not yet fully clear, it can be important to just “get going” and perhaps make mistakes, rather than remain stuck. If necessary, the course can be corrected „along the way“ (see next point “Serendipity”).

„I believe in serendipity. Preparing for the future is never an event, but always an ongoing process.“

- Markus Hengstschläger

Serendipity

Never heard of it before? Neither had we before our excursion to the Flipped Job Market in Berlin, where serendipity is one of the central principles. Serendipity refers to the **art of discovering something valuable that one was not actively searching for** – something that, however, significantly contributes to solving a challenge or greatly improves a situation. To make such „happy coincidences“ more likely, one needs the ability to remain open to what comes our way.

This works best without concrete expectations or active force, but with conscious awareness and observation of what is experienced. In this way, one develops the ability to be, proverbially, “lucky.” This attitude is especially helpful when no ready-made solution exists for a current challenge, but action is still required. Instead of remaining passively stuck, one simply sets out and adjusts the course flexibly if necessary.

Trust

This skill is primarily about learning to trust oneself as well as others, or to have confidence in them. It is also about developing trust as a basis for collaboration (Hirsch, 2023). Employees, and especially leaders, who are able to give and receive trust, strengthen relationships with colleagues, guests, and cooperation partners. It also involves **letting go of control**, which is especially necessary when fear is present. After all, mechanisms of control are often based on mistrust. It also concerns the **image of humanity** that resides within us: Do I assume that my employees/colleagues are good people? That they want to do their work well? That they are making an effort?

Trust creates an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable. It fosters personal responsibility and motivation. This is important when independent work and flexible, rapid solutions are needed. It enables dealing with mistakes as opportunities for growth and improves resilience in challenging situations. The goal is a sufficiently strong culture of trust in the Bildungshaus or Folk High School, one that can also withstand occasional breaches of trust (Laloux, 2015, pp. 80 and 242).

Intuitive abilities / Inner compass

Especially when employees are expected to work independently and in a self-organised manner and to make decisions on their own, sharpening one’s intuition plays a crucial role. In a complex, fast-paced world where the flood of data, opinions, and information often feels overwhelming, a developed sense of intuition helps to distinguish the essential from the non-essential. This makes it possible to make decisions more quickly and confidently. It is about developing the ability to more **consciously perceive what is actually necessary**, where opportunities arise, and where potential risks are lurking—or where it makes sense to take a closer look or ask targeted questions (Laloux, 2015, pp. 203ff; The Inner Development Goals Foundation, 2024).

Example for “*recognizing opportunities*”: The front desk staff notices an increase in inquiries about a particular topic. This need is acknowledged and passed on as information to the educational staff.

Self-reflection

Self-reflection is the ability to **consciously engage with one’s own thoughts, feelings, and desires** and to reflect on them. It helps to develop a realistic self-image and the ability to self-regulate (Dobmeier, 2023). Through self-reflection, employees can recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, question their actions, and learn from experiences. It supports responding to challenges, understanding one’s own role as well as the needs of learners more clearly, and fosters the ability to accept constructive feedback and turn it into improvements. In addition, self-reflection supports the development of **empathy** by helping to



Trust, intuition, and self-reflection are tools that help us find personal stability and remain calm in complex situations. This allows us to stay solution-oriented and capable of action. What are your experiences in this regard?



Photo: Anastasia Shuraeva

recognize the impact of one's own behavior on others. It thus contributes not only to individual development but also to the creation of an appreciative and professional working environment. To promote self-reflection in the Bildungshaus or the Folk High School, group coaching sessions or team supervision can be organised—for preventive purposes as well, not just when problems already exist (Laloux, 2015, p. 155).

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence describes the ability to **perceive, understand, and appropriately respond to one's own emotions and the emotions of others**. It combines self-reflection, empathy, and social competence (StudySmarter, 2024). In a working world increasingly shaped by individualization, employees are bringing more of their whole personality into their work. Therefore, it is essential for leaders to invest time in providing individual support, addressing personal needs, and specifically accompanying learning processes.

Digital competences and dealing with AI

The significance of digitalization for work in the Bildungshaus varies depending on the area of activity. While educational managers increasingly require extensive digital skills, the need may be lower, for example, among cleaning staff. Nevertheless, the impact of digitalization should not be underestimated. Digital devices such as tablets or smartphones could also be used in cleaning services as communication interfaces with reception or colleagues. **Basic digital education is therefore useful for all employees.**

It should be noted that the use of digital tools alone does not automatically mean digital competence. Targeted skills development measures are needed, tailored to the specific requirements of the Bildungshaus or Folk High Schools. The [„Digital Competence Framework for Citizens“](#) (DigComp) of the European Commission provides guidance here, offering a standardized definition of digital competences. It includes five key areas with a total of 21 specific competences.

The same applies to artificial intelligence (AI). Even if it may not seem immediately relevant to some employees, basic training can help reduce fears and better assess the potential of AI. This not only strengthens individual competence but also promotes the ability to navigate a steadily more digitalized working world with greater confidence.



Which future skills are already being practiced in your Bildungshaus?

How are they being promoted and integrated in your institution?

Which ones would you add?

Future Skills do not develop on their own

Future Skills must be trained, consciously promoted, and continuously applied. Training sessions, continuing education, consultations, and the ongoing practice of proven methods, as well as the support and role modeling of leaders, help to sustainably anchor these competences in the Bildungshaus. This “anchoring process” should begin as early as the onboarding of new employees. As Frédéric Laloux (2015, p. 153) emphasizes, „evolutionary organisations” consciously invest time and energy to train their employees in the basic rules of healthy and productive collaboration. These include, for example, self-management, deep listening, and dealing with conflicts.

It is crucial to ensure that employees have sufficient resources to learn new things. Those who are already at the limit of their capacity have neither the energy nor the time to participate in training or workshops. Especially in such situations, thoughts like “Now I have to learn/do this too” or “I’m not good enough, I have to improve” can creep in – an attitude that can increase stress and anxiety (Krennhuber, 2024).

What is needed is a corporate culture that promotes openness and learning on the one hand, while at the same time preserving people’s personal resources. This means creating **clear decision-making paths, processes, and roles** that relieve people in their everyday work instead of burdening them with additional expectations. Caution is advised when a focus on individual skills development leads to structural problems within the organisation being overlooked or obscured—and employees being held accountable for structural deficits (Webhofer, 2024).

„To encourage someone, I must believe myself that it’s possible.
To inspire someone, I must be inspired myself.“

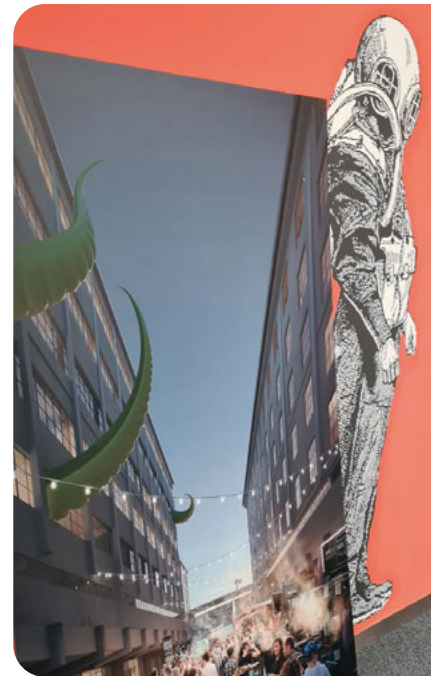
- Gerald Hüther

From theory to practice - practical tips

Training for new employees

In the first weeks, new employees could be trained on the values and basic rules of collaboration in the Bildungshaus or Folk High School. In addition, training in key skills such as self-management, communication (active listening, asking questions, expressing needs), constructive handling of conflicts, and creating a safe working environment can be helpful. These competences form the basis for respectful and solution-oriented collaboration (Laloux, 2015, p. 153).

Important: *What is learned must be lived authentically in the Bildungshaus.*





TIP:

Learning something new takes time.
In the spirit of sustainable change,
small but continuous steps
are recommended.



These training sessions can certainly be conducted by employees of the Bildungshaus/Folk High School, who in this way can enrich their work through an exciting role and pass on their enthusiasm for the institution.

In general, internal training and workshops of all kinds are especially successful when conducted by colleagues who are passionate about the topic and enjoy sharing their knowledge (Laloux, 2015, p. 181).

Regular events

An annual values day or team workshops can help to continuously reflect on and strengthen attitudes, values, and principles. The Inner Development Goals model helps to identify which competences are already functioning well in the Bildungshaus, where there is a need for improvement, and which new impulses might be meaningful. This model could, for example, be worked on collectively during a team retreat or similar setting (see: <https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org/framework/>)

Approach of self-directed learning

Continuing education for employees is not prescribed by management. Instead, an annual budget could be made available that allows individual employees/ teams to attend any training they find interesting and meaningful for their (collaborative) work – without needing approval. These external trainings and continuing education sessions are less about traditional career advancement and more about personal development and building a shared organisational culture within the organisation (Laloux, 2015, pp. 180ff).

ARGE Bildungshäuser Österreich and the Verband der Bildungszentren im ländlichen Raum, for example, offer a variety of annual seminars tailored to the professional groups within Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools.

„If you live the questions,
you may gradually,
without even noticing it,
live your way into the answer
one day.“

LAGER

– Rainer Maria Rilke

The Future
is Yours.

But Which O
Will You Cho



RESUME

LOOKING AHEAD

Questions that remain

What will be the future competences for employees and leaders in Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools?

At first, this question seemed relatively simple. But already the first focus group with leaders from German and Austrian Bildungshäuser/Folk High Schools revealed that the context in which this initial question must be asked is extensive and complex.

First, it must be clarified and defined what the meaning, purpose, and self-conception of Bildungshäuser should be in the future. Then arises the question of whether and how suitable personnel can be addressed and recruited. And what competences the people to be hired actually need.

Do Bildungshäuser really need people with “high-flyer skills” such as expertise in AI applications, digital design competence, Scrum Master certifications, and other qualifications that are still largely unfamiliar to us? Or simply people who do their work properly because they have a healthy attitude toward work and who can communicate well with others? What do the much-discussed representatives of “Generation Z” bring with them? What expectations, behaviors, and value systems will shape the employees of the future? How does that align with the DNA of our Bildungshäuser and Folk High Schools? How do we, as Bildungshäuser, adapt to the future co-creators? What organisational forms and leadership styles should we develop for this?

You can already tell that within the framework of this project, the questions that have become more numerous and far-reaching. Instead of clear and simple answers, we have encountered multi-layered approaches – each of which has sparked new questions in turn.

But as Rainer Maria Rilke once said: "If you live the questions, you may gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer one day."

This means: living the questions that are currently emerging around the topic of future skills in the Bildungshaus—with trust and confidence—creates the fertile ground on which something new, and at times unexpected, can grow.

We hope this brochure has offered you an inspiring essence of practice and theory.
May it contain one or two impulses that encourage you to take action!



Get to know us!

You have questions or suggestions?

Or you would like to learn more about our work and other projects?

Write to us or visit our websites.

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WE WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU...

... to the excursion destinations

Factory300, Linz (AT): An innovation center and co-working space in the Tabakfabrik Linz that supports creative startups, entrepreneurs, and tech enthusiasts by providing space for collaboration, idea development, and digital transformation.

<https://factory300.at>

Netural, Linz (AT): A digital pioneer that has been developing sustainable digital services and business models for renowned companies since 1998. Netural is also located in the Tabakfabrik in Linz. <https://www.netural.com>

Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland, Berlin (DE): A non-profit organisation committed to promoting open data, open knowledge, and open government to support free access to information and knowledge. <https://okfn.de>

SuperCoop, Berlin (DE): A cooperatively organised supermarket chain that focuses on sustainable, local products and enables its members to actively participate in shaping the business model and decision-making processes. <https://supercoop.de>

Flipped Job Market, Berlin (DE): Cathy Narriman and Juliane Berghauser Pont from Flipped Job Market are activists for a better working world. The Flipped Job Market, founded by them, stands for a fair world of work in which essential societal tasks are done willingly and well – by people who experience themselves as self-effective and feel good doing their work. They have developed an innovative method and offer training and formats for everyone who wants to shape the working world in general – and their own in particular – in a (self-)responsible way. <https://flipped-job-market.de>

... to the experts

Johannes Buß, Director of the Caritas Association of the Diocese of Osnabrück and former head of a Folk High School

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Julia Stierberger, human resources expert, managing director of Kreuzschwestern Sierning GmbH

Verena Huber, consultant and coach for communication and organisational development, <https://verenahuber.com>

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks for sharing knowledge from theory and practice as well as sharing practical approaches, experiences, ideas, and impulses. All of this greatly inspired us and significantly contributed to our collection of results.



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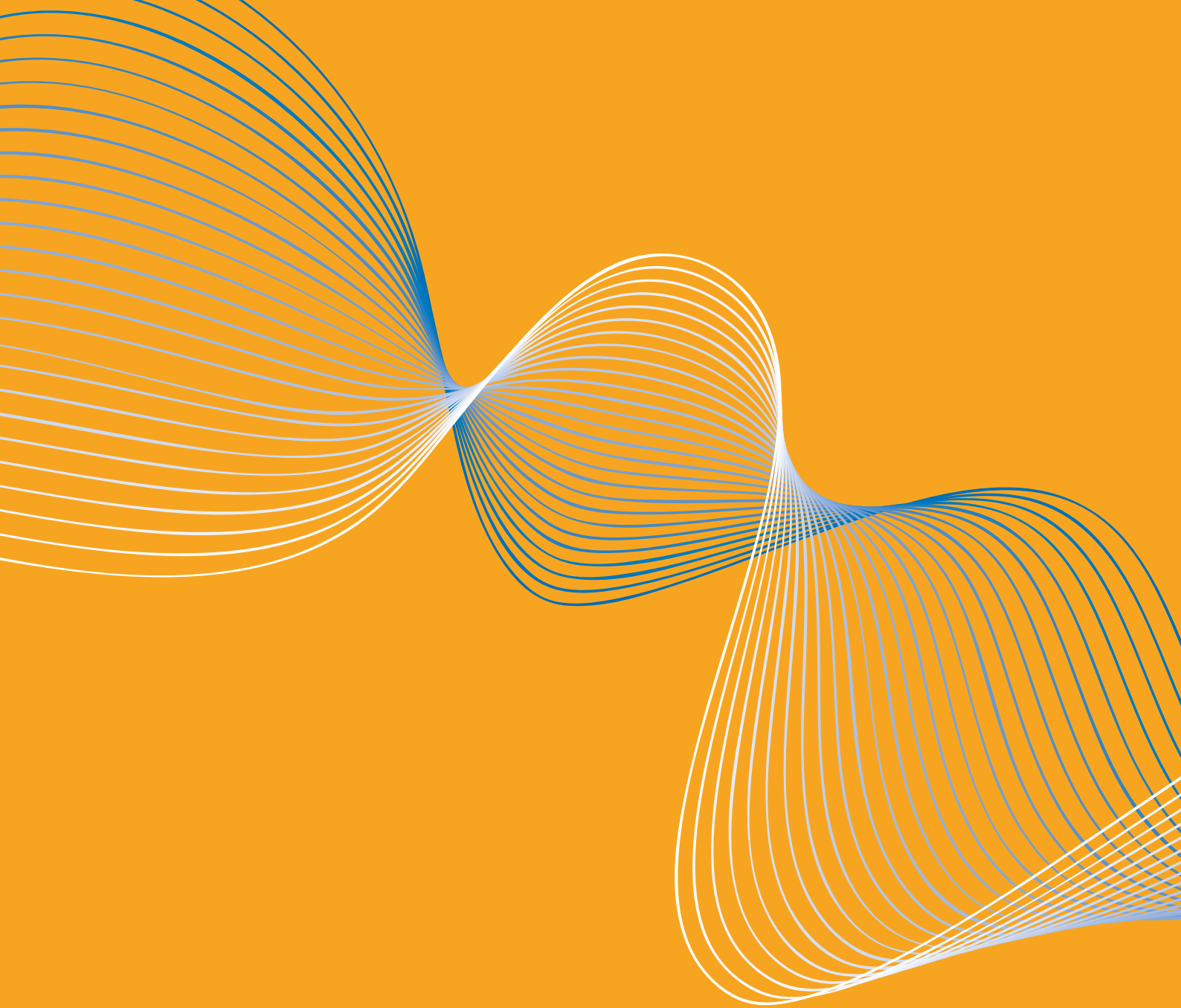
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