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Fulfilling work

What do older workers value about work and why?

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1 Key Findings

What do older workers value about work and why?

Factors that make work fulfilling for older workers are largely the same as they are for other ages.

Older workers look for employment that is personally meaningful, flexible, intellectually stimulating, sociable, age-inclusive and offers any adjustments needed for health conditions and disabilities. Older workers are more likely to stay in work if they think that their work matters, their employer supports them and their needs are taken seriously.

They value opportunities for learning, mentoring others and career progression. These factors support a positive work-life balance and strengthen connections to employers, colleagues and customers. Fulfilling work helps to promote self-esteem, confidence, engagement and performance.

How does this differ from the rest of the working age population?

There are very few differences between the preferences of older and young workers. However, there are a few factors that become more important with age. Health has the biggest effect on older workers' decisions about continuing to work, more so than job satisfaction or job quality. Some older workers will therefore place greater value on flexibility at work, adjustments or part-time working hours to accommodate health needs or caring.

Older workers are also more likely to look for organisational values they identify with, and value opportunities to maintain strong workplace relationships, have responsibility and autonomy in how they do their work and to pass on their knowledge to others.

What does this mean for employers?

The principles for managing older workers effectively are the same as for staff of any age. It is important that line managers are properly trained to manage individuals and teams fairly, and that policies such as flexible working are available and promoted positively to all staff. Older workers should have the same access to training, progression, mentoring or leadership as workers of other ages.

What makes work fulfilling for older workers?

Work Content

- Older workers want meaningful work that is interesting, stretches them and makes full use of their skills and experience.

- Older workers are more likely to feel engaged and have higher levels of motivation if they feel their work is varied and worthwhile.

- Autonomy over how, when and what kind of tasks older workers do is very important because it signals their knowledge, experience and judgement is valued and respected.

- Older workers are more likely to want opportunities to work in teams, collaborate with colleagues or have a lot of contact with clients or members of the public.

Work Culture

- Older workers seek organisational cultures that are open, inclusive, where their voices are heard, and that prevent and tackle any discrimination and prejudice at all levels.

- Older workers want to be managed well as individuals, as well as in effective mixed-age teams.

- Older workers tend to seek out organisations whose vision, mission objectives and values align with their own.

- Older workers want to have open and fair access to career development including informal or vocational training and promotion opportunities. They want to learn and develop skills (including use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT)) use existing skills in new ways, and share their knowledge and experience with others.

Workplace adjustments

- Ill health overrides all positive factors in shaping older workers' decisions about staying in work, unless organisations make suitable adjustments.

- Organisations should make sure all workers have full and equal access to occupational health and wellbeing support and appropriate physical adjustments, equipment and flexible working arrangements, and all forms of adaptation are seen as normal by staff.

- Flexible working arrangements, reduced hours or ability to adjust the time and place of work are fundamental to making work more age-friendly.

- Older workers are more likely to have a preference for reduced commuting time than younger people. ICT solutions, along with appropriate training, can help with working remotely and flexibly.

How do experiences vary for different groups of people aged over 50?

The evidence reviewed for this report made few comparisons of how the experience of work is different for different groups of older workers, but four clear areas of difference did emerge:

- People with health conditions and disabilities can have complex and diverse needs and some older workers may experience multiple conditions. The adjustments required can be very different for each employee.

- People in physical work (such as construction and distribution) may find assistive technology, equipment or tools can help them do their job.

- Older women can be more likely to leave work if they receive lower pay compared to average wage levels, feel socially isolated at work or are the victim of sexism in the workplace. This is exacerbated if they do not think their work is fulfilling.

- Highly-skilled older workers are particularly keen to have control over what work they do and how they do it. They may be more likely to become self-employed or leave work if they feel they lack autonomy.

What can employers do?

The findings on what older workers value about work suggest a number of steps that employers can take to promote fulfilling work and create age-friendly workplaces. Employers can:

- Support older workers to align their personal aspirations, job roles and organisational objectives

- Ensure that older workers have variety in their work and opportunities to learn new skills

- Give older workers as much autonomy as is possible in their work

- Design roles for older people that maximise social contact and interaction

- Communicate organisational values, goals and performance transparently, and provide opportunities for all staff to contribute their opinions and ideas

- Create a positive and inclusive culture that treats age as seriously as other protected characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and disability

- Apply effective and fair HR practices to all staff, including older workers

- Ensure that training and development opportunities are open and available to all staff, regardless of age

- Create opportunities for older workers to share their knowledge and experience with other colleagues

- Offer occupational health and wellbeing support to staff of all ages

- Promote flexible working positively and openly to all staff

- Redesign job roles around the person if they have long term health conditions or other functional limitations

- Offer secure contracts to both older and younger workers, wherever possible

- Provide equal access to work adjustments for all working carers

2   Introduction

This report outlines the evidence for what workplace and job-related factors make employment fulfilling for older workers. It explains why they are important to both individuals and employers. The report also provides suggestions of what employers can do to support older workers. Understanding what older workers want is the first step in helping employers, policy makers and others to create age-friendly workplaces.

Why does fulfilling work matter?

There is an economic and societal need to support older workers to be in fulfilling work that supports a good later life. It matters both for people in later life and for employers.

For people in later life

We are living longer and we are working longer. For many people, working in later life is essential financially, but remaining in work has other important benefits, as long as that work is suitable for the individual. Work is a major source of social connections and interaction. Meaningful work gives people influence over how their work is done, allows them to see their contribution and provides a sense of purpose and self-esteem (Black, 2008). It can support health through providing physical, mental and social stimulation (Waddell and Burton, 2006).

Despite these benefits, many older workers continue to leave work against their wishes (BITC, 2015). This is often caused by difficulties in making adjustments for health conditions or disabilities, the nature of particular job roles, poor treatment or a hostile culture at work (Buckle, 2015; Boumans et al, 2011). Older workers are likely to suffer negative social, health and financial impacts as a result of dropping out of employment, especially if they leave before they feel ready to retire.

Older workers need to find work fulfilling if they are to stay in employment. They are more likely to stay in work if they think that their work matters and creates value, their employer supports them and their needs are taken seriously (Bright, 2010; BITC, 2015; Kim and Kang, 2016; Buckle, 2015; Büsch et al, 2012).

For employers

There are clear benefits to employers of retaining older workers and keeping them engaged. Older workers' ability does not suddenly diminish in the period leading up to and beyond State Pension Age. On the contrary, older workers can make a substantial contribution to UK employers and the UK economy (CIPD, 2011; Kim and Kang, 2016). Many older workers may actually be more adept in their role because of the expertise they have gained; they often have highly developed communication skills and can confidently solve problems, handle tricky situations and contribute well in teams. Older workers often have unique insights and good judgement gained from their years of experience.

Like staff of any age, older workers who are fulfilled and supported in their work are likely to be more engaged and to go the extra mile for their employer. The benefits for employers who take engagement of older employees seriously include better retention, improved knowledge-transfer, better employee relations and lower recruitment and training costs (CIPD, 2014; Brown et al, 2014; Kunze and Menges, 2016).

Almost all employers have an increasingly age-diverse workforce. Managing diversity well and promoting effective intergenerational working brings together different perspectives and leads to greater productivity, effective talent management, innovation and problem-solving (CIPD, 2014; Brown et al, 2014; Kunze and Menges, 2016).

Conversely, if employers fail to address age discrimination, manage older workers effectively or support them to find fulfilling work, many experienced and knowledgeable staff will leave. Good management of older workers also protects employers from discrimination claims on the grounds of age (CIPD, 2011).

This report sets out what matters to older workers, and what employers can do to retain and engage them, and enable them to make their maximum contribution at work.

Methodology

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) was used to identify the most relevant and robust research studies that investigate what makes work fulfilling for older workers. This was guided by three research questions:

1. What do people over 50 value about work, and why are these things important to them?

2. How does this vary for different contexts or subgroups of people aged over 50?

3. How (if at all) does this differ from the rest of the working age population?

Most research in this area does not compare older and younger workers. It focuses either on older workers or on the whole working age population without comparing the views of different ages. Comparisons between age groups are only made in this report where evidence is available. There is much debate over what defines an 'older' worker, which can cover a starting point from anywhere between 45 and 65 (McCarthy et al, 2014). This report defines older workers as 50 and over because at this age functional capacities and workers' belief in their abilities begins to decline (Ilmarinen, 2016). This is also advantageous for extending working lives; it expands the possibility of putting preventative measures in place.

Over 7,000 publications were identified and assessed for quality, relevance and applicability to the research questions. These were drawn from academic databases, UK government departments and agencies, European agencies and organisations, employer organisations and forums and other organisations with expertise in employment, older people or occupational health.

This report is based on the 41 most relevant and best quality studies.

Full details of the research methodology can be found in the research methodology available on the Centre for Ageing Better website.

Report structure

The report is structured around three broad themes from the evidence about older workers' preferences about work. Employers should consider all three:

- **Work content** describes the nature and experiences of work that older workers value.

- **Work culture** discusses what is important to older workers about organisational beliefs, values and how people are managed.

- **Workplace adjustment** explains the different adaptations and practical measures that can help to make work more age-friendly.

3   Work content

The following section explores the topic of 'work content': what older workers value about their job roles and tasks. Older workers look for work that:

- is stimulating and presents new, enjoyable and challenging ways for them to develop their skills at work

- contributes to their personal identity, for example as an 'expert' who mentors other colleagues or through opportunities to interact regularly with colleagues, clients or members of the public; and

- makes a difference to the lives of other people.

When people feel work is **meaningful**, this helps to boost self-esteem and provide a purpose in life. Older workers who think their work matters and makes a difference in some way are more likely to remain in employment (Bright, 2010; BITC, 2015; Kim and Kang, 2016; Buckle, 2015; Büsch et al, 2012).

Older workers look for **roles and tasks that are interesting, challenging and fully utilise their skills and experience** (Guglielmi et al, 2016; de Lange et al, 2010; Nilsson et al, 2011; Buckle, 2015). Repetitive or administrative tasks can disengage some older workers and decrease their motivation in work (Harms et al, 2014; Hellemans and Closon, 2013).

Older workers look for **responsibility at work**. Greater freedom to make decisions leads to greater fulfilment from employment (Lowis et al, 2010).

Autonomy is very important. **Older workers want control** over the tasks they do, the order they do them in and how they complete them. Some also look for flexibility in where they work (see Section 4). Control can be more important than other aspects of work. Although many older workers cherish job security, some highly-skilled or entrepreneurial employees will opt for the more precarious but independent option of self-employment if they do not have autonomy at work (Harms et al, 2014).

When older workers feel more in control of their work they have higher job satisfaction, perform better in their role and are more loyal to the organisation (Oude Hengel et al, 2012; Timmons et al, 2011; Buckle, 2015; Gellert and Shulk, 2011; Brown et al, 2014).

For many older workers one of the main benefits from working in later life is the **social side of work**: contact with others, **team-based working** and **forming professional and personal relationships** formed through work (CIPD, 2014; Boot et al, 2016; Oude Hengel et al, 2012; Duffield et al, 2015; YouGov, 2015; Buckle, 2015; Boumans et al, 2011; Carmichael et al, 2013). Good social interaction helps staff to manage job demands effectively, bond with colleagues and maintain social networks (Brown et al, 2014). Older people frequently say social contact is one of the things

they miss most about work after they retire (Bright, 2010).

Compared to younger employees, some older workers place greater importance on being part of the 'social fabric' of their company (Bright, 2010). It is particularly important to certain groups of older workers. Some women are more likely than men to say it makes their work meaningful and strengthens their bond to their employer (Büsch et al, 2012). Older workers with mental health conditions report similar benefits (Nilsson et al, 2011).

Financial circumstances affect whether older workers are more or less likely to stay in work. More affluent employees who are less reliant on earned income or have access to early, generous pensions may scrutinise their jobs carefully to decide whether they want to stay in work. Older employees with the luxury of choice – particularly the highly-skilled or financially secure – are likely to leave unless work is sufficiently engaging (Duffield et al, 2015; Messe, 2012; Geuskens et al, 2012; Alden, 2012; Büsch et al, 2012; Boumans et al, 2011). Compared to men, older women are more likely to be the 'second earner' in a household because of relatively lower pay and more part-time working. Older women in households who are less dependent on their income may be more likely to look beyond income to decide whether they want to carry on working (de Preter, 2010).

What can employers do?

- Ensure line managers talk to older workers about their personal goals and aspirations, explore how these can best match with their job role and discuss how the job role contributes towards organisational objectives and purpose.

- Share out routine and challenging tasks equitably, making sure that older workers have opportunities to learn new skills and have variety in their work.

- Give older workers as much autonomy as possible about where, how, when, in what order and how fast they do their work.

- Design roles for older people that maximise social contact with colleagues, clients and members of the public. This could include introducing team-based working for part of each working week for older workers who work remotely and might otherwise feel isolated.

4 Work culture

The following section summarises evidence on the theme of 'work culture': the behaviours, management styles and values of employers. Older workers consider work fulfilling if:

• organisational values are closely aligned with their own

• their work environment is open, supportive, actively encourages inclusion of older staff members and directly tackles any implicit or explicit discrimination or harassment

• they work in effective mixed-age teams and have good relationships with line managers of different ages; and

• they have the same access to opportunities for training, development or promotion as younger employees.

The evidence shows that principles for managing older workers effectively apply to staff of any age, and opportunities need to be provided for workers of all ages. However, some issues are more important to older workers.

Older workers tend to seek out **organisations whose values align with their own**. Our beliefs can crystallise and become more precisely defined as we age (Harms et al, 2014). A mismatch between older workers' beliefs and their employer's values can make them more likely to leave work. On the other hand, a close fit helps to cement a sense of belonging and connection to an organisation (Timmons et al, 2011; Guglielmi et al, 2016; Harms et al, 2014). Older workers want to feel that their employer is ambitious and recognises their potential, if not they may leave to set up their own business to gain greater job satisfaction (Geuskens et al, 2012; Harms et al, 2014; YouGov, 2015).

Older workers value a **supportive, open organisational culture**. This means a workplace that provides transparent information about organisational goals and performance, ensures workers feel their opinions and experiences are valued and where individual needs are accommodated (Geuskens et al, 2012; Harms et al, 2014; Timmons et al, 2011; Buckle, 2015; Gellert and Schalk, 2011). In addition, older workers appreciate being able to influence the wider organisation by having the opportunity to make suggestions about change, have these taken seriously and, where appropriate, implemented (Buckle, 2015; Eurofound, 2012). Positive working environments mean older workers are more likely to perform at their best (Boot et al, 2016).

Older workers look for employers that do not have **inaccurate stereotypes and prejudice**, such as thinking that their skills may be outdated (Harms et al, 2014; ILC-UK, 2015; Pudrovska and Karraker, 2014; YouGov, 2015). Where age combines with other characteristics, specific problems can arise. For example, older women may experience more inappropriate behaviour from colleagues, line managers and customers, or not receive the same respect in leadership roles as older men (Pudrovska and Karraker, 2014; Geuskens et al, 2012).

Some older workers feel that managers need more support to **foster good relationships between them and younger workers** (CIPD, 2014). For example, older staff who report to younger managers are more likely to report negative emotions at work such as anger or fear (Kunze and Menges, 2016). Unresolved intergenerational conflict at work decreases productivity and reduces older workers' emotional attachment to their employer (Kunze and Menges, 2016). In contrast, organisations that **effectively manage mixed-age teams** have staff who work well together towards common goals and form strong bonds with each other (CIPD, 2014).

Effective and consistent HR practices help sustain older workers' motivation and can unlock ideas and willingness to contribute. This includes providing frequent one-to-one meetings and regular performance appraisals, verbal praise from managers and public recognition of good work, skills and experience (CIPD, 2014; Nilsson et al, 2011; CIPD, 2011; Buckle, 2015). Employees in the private sector in particular want more contact with line managers and more opportunities to discuss their development (Nilsson et al, 2011; CIPD, 2011).

Older workers want **equal access to formal and informal training** including vocational and professional development, and promotion opportunities (Timmons et al, 2011; Guglielmi et al, 2016; de Preter et al, 2010; Leppel et al, 2012; Bright, 2010; CIPD, 2011; NIACE, 2015; Buckle, 2015; Eurofound, 2012; Boumans et al, 2011).

Access to training and development increases older workers' job satisfaction, skill levels and performance at work (Leppel et al, 2012; Brusch and Büsch, 2013). The investment of time, money and resources signals employer recognition that older workers are still worth investment. In fact, evidence suggests that older workers are more interested in personal development - especially informal training - than downshifting to less demanding roles (NIACE, 2015; Besen, 2011).

Older women are more likely to report that they have been overlooked for promotion or training at work, and are more likely to leave as a result (Messe, 2012; Pudvrovska and Karraker, 2014).

Training older workers in appropriate ICT competencies maximises their potential and opens opportunities for career and skills development (Harms et al, 2014; Carmichael et al, 2013). It also reduces any gaps in knowledge compared to younger colleagues who have picked up ICT skills as part of the 'digital native' generation. Training should be tailored to older workers' learning preferences. This means using practical, hands-on tasks, accommodating those with less ICT familiarity and recognising people's existing competencies and experience (Cox et al, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c). Some (mainly high-skilled) older workers are tech-savvy and look for **opportunities to explore new, innovative ICT skills**.

Older workers want formal and informal **opportunities to coach, train and mentor younger staff**. Some are more likely to look for this than younger workers, and supporting the development of other staff can improve engagement (Guglielmi et al, 2016). Mentoring helps older workers to feel they and their skills are valued. This can also help maintain institutional memory and tacit knowledge (Guglielmi et al, 2016; YouGov, 2015).

What can employers do?

- Communicate organisational values, goals and performance transparently, and provide opportunities for all staff to contribute their opinions and ideas.

- Create a positive and inclusive culture that respects individual differences and shows zero tolerance for direct or implicit discrimination. This shows all staff that age is treated as seriously as other protected characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and disability. For example, provide line managers with equality and diversity training, including a specific focus on age.

- Identify and address situations where age combines with other characteristics. For example, older women may be disproportionately subject to inappropriate behaviour from colleagues, line managers and customers, or may not be given equal respect in leadership roles as older men.

- Apply effective HR practices to all staff, including older workers. For example, managers should discuss training goals and professional development, make sure staff feel supported by wider teams and colleagues and tackle any conflict that arises.

- Introduce mid-life discussions about career goals and aspirations that can be an effective tool to help employers improve training and development plans to fit with older workers' goals.

- Ensure that training and development opportunities are open and available to all staff, regardless of age. For example, consider monitoring training expenditure by age.

- Create opportunities for older workers to share their knowledge and experience with other colleagues, including training and mentoring of apprentices.

- Give older workers opportunities to share their views, knowledge and with other colleagues.

5 Workplace adjustments

The following section summarises evidence about 'workplace adjustments'. It explains the practical steps and adaptations that employers can take to make their workplaces more age-friendly. The evidence shows that:

- health and wellbeing has the biggest impact on the ability of older workers to stay in work

- without suitable adjustments, older workers with health conditions are unlikely to benefit from other positive elements of their organisation or job role

- flexible working arrangements or reduced hours help to make work more age-friendly

- ICT support (tailored to existing skill levels) can help older staff work from home, reducing commuting time which makes it more likely that they will stay in work

Health has the largest effect on older workers' decisions about continuing to work, over job satisfaction and job quality. **Physical, emotional and psychological job demands** that are too great can exacerbate stress and physical pain, forcing people to change roles or leave work altogether. (Geuskens et al, 2012; Brown et al, 2014; Nilsson et al, 2011; Eurofound, 2012).

Health **conditions can affect people of any age, however musculoskeletal conditions, stress and anxiety** are particularly common among older workers (BITC, 2015; Buckle, 2015). Musculoskeletal conditions can be exacerbated by activities such as heavy lifting, repetitive movements, using force and working fast or on night shifts (BITC, 2015; Buckle, 2015). Work-related stress is a particularly prevalent health condition and reduces the many other potential health benefits that can come with good work (Pudrovska and Karraker, 2014). Sexism in the workplace can be particularly directed towards older women in leadership roles which can lead to higher levels of workplace stress (ibid).

Among older workers there is a higher prevalence of cardiovascular conditions and some deterioration of eyesight, muscle grip, postural and balance problems, as well as developing occupational cancers (BITC, 2015; Buckle, 2015).

Some older workers feel that ageing-related health needs are not sufficiently considered by managers (CIPD, 2014). Helping older workers to accommodate long-term conditions and disabilities is important to make work viable and sustainable (de Preter et al, 2010; Hellemans and Closon, 2013; Duffield et al, 2015; Lowis et al, 2010; CIPD, 2011; BITC, 2015; Rudolph and Baltes, 2016; Pagán, 2012; Büsch et al, 2012). However, different people will need different levels of adjustment, with some needing none at all (Geuskens et al, 2012; Boot et al, 2016). Workplace adjustments that accommodate health conditions and disabilities signal that older members of staff are valued at work and encourages them to stay (Carmichael et al, 2013; CIPD, 2014; Harms et al, 2014; Pengcharoen and Shultz, 2010; CIPD, 2011; NIACE, 2015; YouGov, 2015; Pagán, 2012). Access to Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programmes and flexible working are all

effective support offers.

Caring responsibilities tend to increase for many older workers who often have responsibilities for children, parents or others. However, many organisations have no provisions in place to support carers. Private sector employers in particular are less likely to provide flexible working arrangements for working carers (CIPD, 2014).

Older workers who have **access to comprehensive support to help them care** find it easier to balance working and caring, are more loyal to their employer and are more likely to remain in work (de Preter et al, 2010; Carr and Kail, 2012; Timmons et al, 2011; CIPD, 2014; Harms et al, 2014; BITC, 2015; NIACE, 2015; YouGov, 2015).

Although women are significantly more likely to provide care for someone else, anyone can have caring responsibilities (Pudrovska and Karraker, 2014). It is important to provide all working carers with access to support such as flexible hours, special leave and permission to carry mobile phones at all times in case of emergencies. This is particularly important for job roles that do not normally allow staff to have a mobile phone on their person while on duty (de Preter et al, 2010; Carr and Kail, 2012; Timmons et al, 2011; CIPD, 2014; Harms et al, 2014; BITC, 2015; NIACE, 2015; YouGov, 2015).

Full access to flexible working arrangements helps older workers fulfil their potential at work (Timmons et al, 2011; Nilsson et al, 2011; de Preter, 2010; Oude Hengel et al, 2012; NIACE, 2015; Rudolph and Baltes, 2016; YouGov, 2015; Alden, 2012; Eurofound, 2012). However, older workers in the UK feel that access to flexible working arrangements is limited (CIPD, 2011; NIACE, 2015).

Transparency and a culture of respect for flexible working are important to support older workers to approach their employer to request changes without fear of losing their job (NIACE, 2015). Without such a culture, they may simply leave work (ibid.). Promoting flexible working as 'normal' throughout the organisation helps to avoid any stigma connected to ageing (Boot et al, 2016; Alden, 2012). Handling flexible working requests fairly also demonstrates that older workers' needs are taken seriously, which establishes greater commitment (Alden, 2012).

There is a strong evidence base that many older workers prefer **shorter working hours** (Timmons et al, 2011; Nilsson et al, 2011; de Preter, 2010; Oude Hengel et al, 2012; Pengcharoen and Shultz, 2010; CIPD, 2011; BITC, 2015; NIACE, 2015; Rudolph and Baltes, 2016; YouGov, 2015; Alden, 2012; Eurofound, 2012). Working part-time can improve older workers' health, while working overtime reduces their ability to continue working (Timmons et al, 2011; Oude Hengel et al, 2012). When they cannot reduce their hours, some highly-skilled older workers choose to work for lower pay in less challenging roles (BITC, 2015; Eurofound, 2012). This leads to substantial 'underemployment', where people's expertise is unrecognised and underutilised and employers lose valuable skills, expertise and workforce capacity. Many older workers also prefer to have a **shorter commute to work** (Bäckström et al, 2016; NIACE, 2015).

However, this is not true of all older workers, with many still valuing **full-time work with flexible working hours**. Without proper support, temporary work, fixed-term contracts or self-employment can create emotional strain and spur early labour market exit (Harms et al, 2014).

Adjusting job content and delivery can help people stay in work and continue to enjoy their job (Duffield et al, 2015; Carmichael et al, 2013; Besen, 2013; Buckle, 2015; Eurofound, 2012). For example, the physical demands of manual roles in the construction, engineering and logistics sector can be reduced by automating tasks and providing tools or equipment (Oude Hengel et al, 2012). **ICTs can help older workers work flexibly** and stay in employment. For example, providing assistive technology to employees working in heavy manual roles presents an alternative to strenuous physical activity (Harms et al, 2014; Carmichael et al, 2013). Solutions can be particularly effective when they are co-designed with older workers (Buckle, 2015).

What can employers do?

- Offer Occupational Health and wellbeing support to staff of all ages. Prevention and treatment of musculoskeletal and mental health problems will benefit the whole workforce. Older workers will specifically benefit from a focus on supporting cardiovascular conditions and limiting deterioration of eyesight, muscle grip, posture and balance.

- Promote flexible working to all staff across the organisation. Make it clear that requests are welcomed and will not affect individuals negatively. Provide clear and visible leadership support for this, and appoint champions (e.g. staff representatives, trade unions, Occupational Health or HR) to improve access to and implementation of flexible working policies and practices.

- Starting with an emphasis on what they can do, work with older workers and other workers with health conditions to make reasonable adjustments to speed, volume of work, physical strain, emotional pressures and psychological demands. Look at ways that ICTs or tools can help workers fulfil their duties. Jointly agree tailored solutions to maintain employees' effectiveness and sense of personal competence.

- Offer secure contracts to both older and younger workers, wherever possible.

- Provide equal access to flexible working and special leave for working carers. Provide managers with guidance that will help them understand the realities of balancing work and care.

6   Conclusion

The workforce, like the population as a whole, is ageing. To ensure that more of us can work sustainably for longer, it is essential that the work we do is fulfilling.

Factors that make work fulfilling for older workers are largely the same as they are for other ages. Older workers look for employment that is personally meaningful, flexible, intellectually stimulating, sociable and age-inclusive. They also value opportunities for learning, mentoring others and career progression.

However, there are some factors that become more important with age, in particular health needs and caring responsibilities. Older workers also tend to place greater importance on social interaction and teamwork.

Although what older workers want isn't substantially different from other ages, the support and access to opportunities they receive often is different. If employers fail to address age discrimination, manage older workers effectively or support them to find fulfilling work, many experienced and knowledgeable staff will leave.

There are clear benefits for employers in ensuring fulfilling work for older workers. These include improved staff engagement, retention, and institutional memory and knowledge transfer. Older workers are more likely to stay in work if they think that their work matters, their employer supports them and their needs are taken seriously. It is important that line managers are properly trained to manage individuals and teams fairly. Older workers should have the same access to training, progression, mentoring or leadership opportunities as workers of other ages.

Employers should provide all staff with full and equal access to flexible working arrangements, occupational health support and appropriate workplace adaptations. This will help the whole workforce, including older workers, to manage health conditions at work.

Promoting fulfilling work for older workers and managing age-diverse workforces effectively will benefit employers, today's older workers and all of us as we age.

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