Understanding workplace design for older workers

Valerie Woods, Ozhan Oztug & Peter Buckle
University of Surrey
The investigation

Suitability of current workplace design for older workers in 2 industrial sectors (office & manual)
The investigation

The perspectives of older workers & the management views of employing an older workforce
The investigation

The match between older workers’ capacities, abilities & expectations, and organisational requirements & strategies.
Objectives

• Identify strengths & weaknesses in the suitability of current workplace design for older workers
• Identify organisational issues that must be addressed
• Suggest areas for further research & technical development that might overcome any current barriers
Plan of work

• Literature update review

• Workplace study
  To explore the following aspects of workplace design:
  (i) task requirements – cognitive & physical
  (ii) psychosocial factors – social support
  (iii) individual capacity - strength
  (iv) environment - access
  (v) work organisation - training
  (vi) workplace culture – career opportunities
• Workplace study methods

Focus groups with workers

(i) 40-49 years
(ii) 50-59 years
(iii) 60 years +
(iv) Retired workers

Qualitative analysis of transcripts

Interviews with Occupational Health & Human Resource personnel
Potential benefits for older people

• Raised awareness & potential for pro-active removal of age barriers at the workplace

• Better designed workplaces & work systems

• Greater recognition of the value of older workers
Potential benefits for organisations

• A better understanding of needs of older workers & what they require at the workplace to ensure equal rights at work & opportunity for all

• Information on jobs & tasks to be redesigned

• Guidance for attracting/retaining older workers

• Increased knowledge of strategies, polices, support to meet their workforce requirements

• Appreciation of advantages of age diverse workforces
Potential benefits for society

• Prioritise future research that will:

  Overcome age barriers

  Inform inclusive organisational strategies

  Enable the older workforce to maintain sustained levels of productivity and health into later life
Progress to date

- Ethics approval granted by University of Surrey
- First pilot study conducted & data analysed
- Data gathering methods have been modified
Organisations selected for study participation

- Major supermarket chain
- Food manufacturer
- Car producer
- Social service provider
- Insurance company
- Education provider
Some early ‘findings’

Case study 1: Food manufacturer

- Factory environment
- Mainly male workforce
- Manual handling work
- Shift work
- Long tenure
Early emergent themes

Older workers (50+)

- Perceptions of organizational culture
  - Current culture
  - Future expectations
  - Motivations
    - Motivations to work
    - Motivations to leave

- Health issues
  - Concerns
  - Benefits
    - Health limitations

- Perceptions of capacity
  - Cognitive ability
  - Being less tolerant/patient
  - Efficiency through experience
  - Difficulty with shift work

- Coping with job demands
  - Workload sharing
Thank you for listening

Contact Details

Prof. Peter Buckle
p.buckle@surrey.ac.uk

Dr Valerie Woods
v.woods@surrey.ac.uk

Robens Centre for Health Ergonomics
University of Surrey, Guildford GU2 7TE
+44 (0) 1483 689213