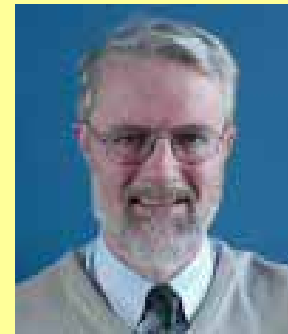


Workplace design for the older worker

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Thanks to Valerie Woods, Ozhan Oztug, David Stubbs



'Workability' and the ageing workforce

- *Government aims to achieve 80% employment within a generation. Currently it is 75%.*
- *A significant part of the increase will come from higher participation of workers from the over 50 group*
- *2.8 m people aged between 50 and state pension age do not work, 1.25 m of these were long term sick or disabled*

Against this background, this study sought to investigate the suitability of current work system designs for older workers



Potential benefits :

- A better understanding of needs of older workers and information on workplaces, jobs, tasks that need to be re-designed
- Raised awareness & potential for pro-active removal of age barriers at the workplace
- Greater recognition of the value of older workers and appreciation of advantages of age diverse workforces
- Increased knowledge of organisational strategies, policies, support to meet their workforce requirements and guidance for attracting/retaining older workers
- Enable the older workforce to maintain sustained levels of productivity and health into later life

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The investigators sought to obtain the views and experiences of:

- *Older workers*
- *Human resources & Occupational health management*



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In particular....

...the ergonomics match between older workers' capacities, abilities & expectations, and organisational requirements & strategies.



This led us to explore many aspects of workplace design including:

- task requirements – cognitive & physical
- psychosocial factors – social support
- individual capacity - strength
- environment - access
- work organisation - training
- workplace culture – career opportunities



We undertook focus groups with workers in three age bands:

40-49 years

50-59 years

60 years +

and held interviews with recently retired workers and Occupational Health & Human Resource personnel

The method selected was that of semi-structured interviews around the general theme of 'what is it like to work as you get older?' with preset 'prompts'.

The recordings were transcribed and analysed using qualitative analytical software QSR NUD*IST.

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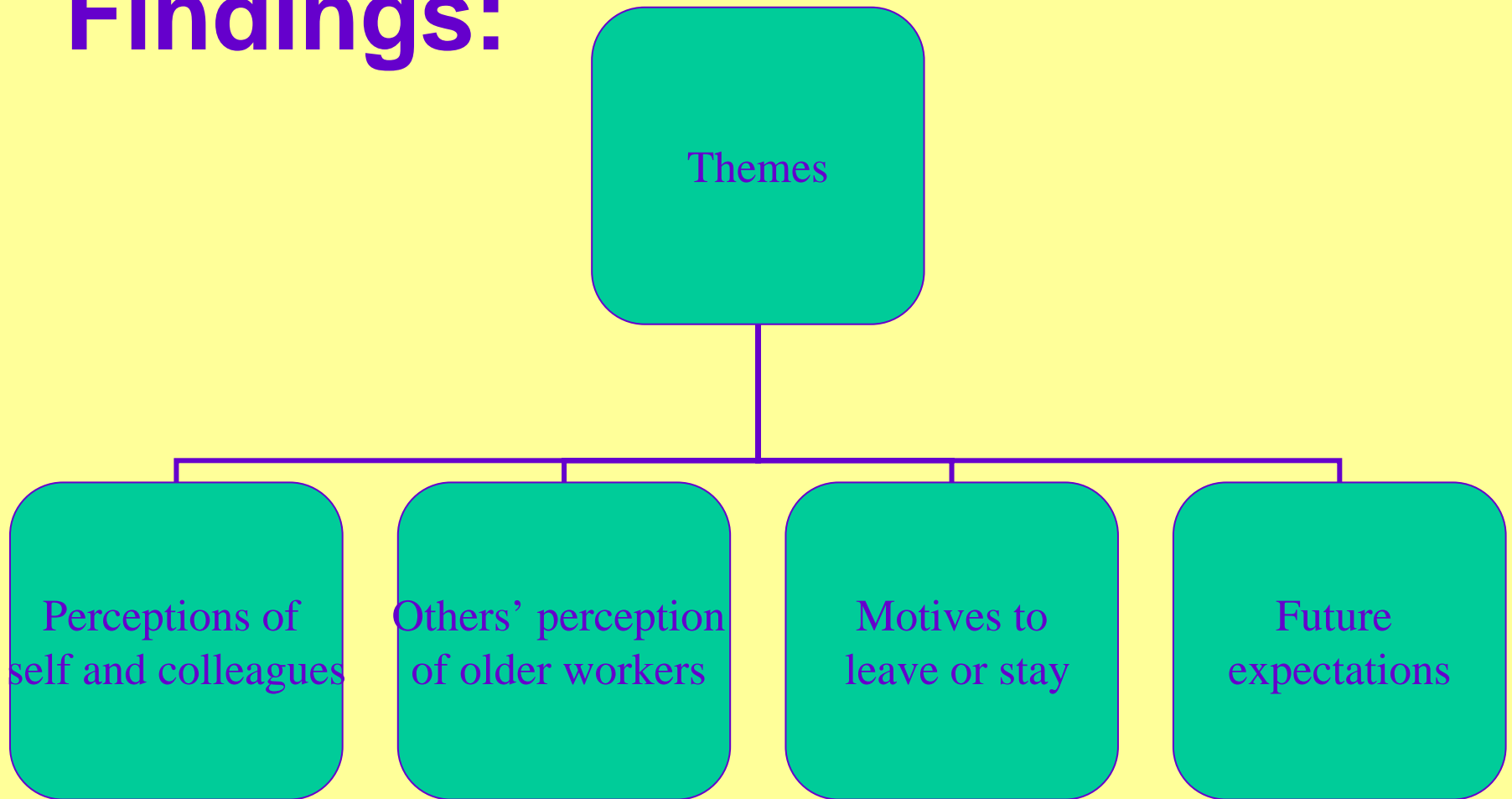


Organisations/groups that participated in the study were:

- Major supermarket chain
- Food manufacturer
- Social service provider
- Cleaning sector



Findings:



Perceptions of self and colleagues

The other thing I find wrong is that as you get older, although you might get there eventually, it takes a bit longer to take things in. You can't be as quick. Twenty years ago I was quite sharp in the brain and now it takes a bit longer.

Some of the things that are killing me off with age ... pressures, I don't take them as I used to, and the hours. That is what I find difficult as I've got older, the pressure of the work and the physical hours of the shift work.

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Perceptions of self and colleagues

- *I'm lucky that the two people I work with will take a fair bit off my shoulders on the heavy stuff.*
- **Are they a similar age?**
- *No. They're in their 40s. They've both got health problems – back, legs, knees – that sort of thing, but with their age they're able to take some of the weight a bit from me, which I'm very grateful for, but it puts more work onto them.*

Others' perceptions of older workers

- *Being carried by younger workers:* *In some where else people I work with are older, so therefore, it feels as if I am doing more than them. All right, you are carrying out tasks, and I have done more tasks than what they are doing. (Social Services_40-49)*

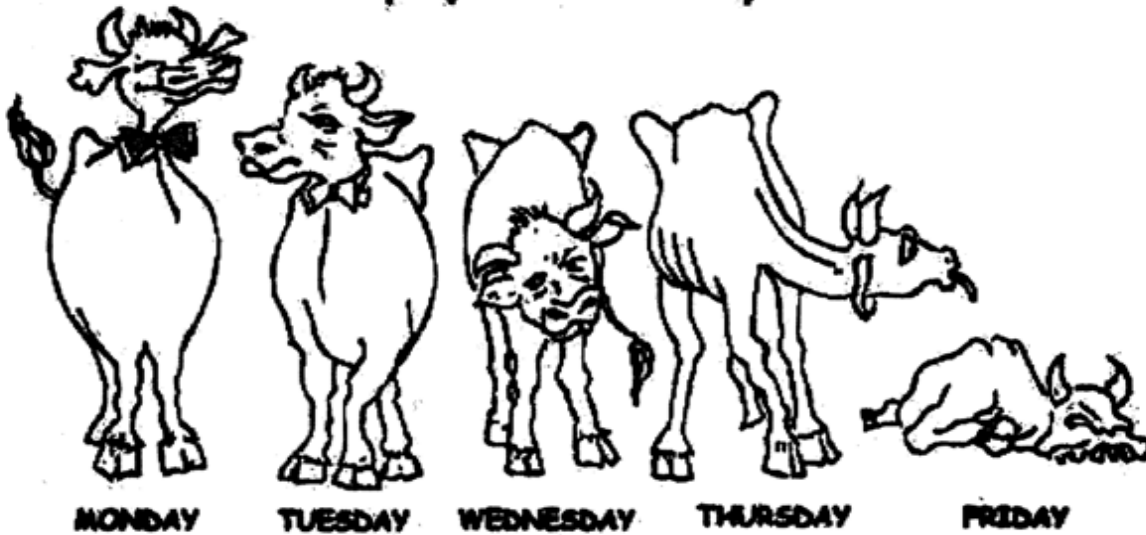
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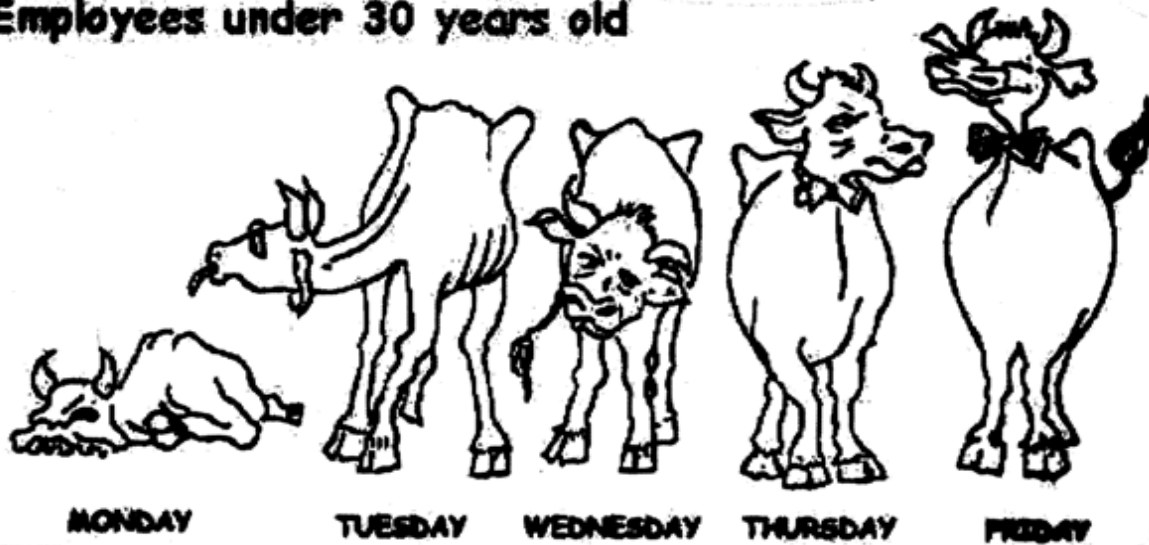
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Employees over 50 years old



Employees under 30 years old



At least they understand each other on Wednesday

With
acknowledgements
to Prof. Juhani
Ilmarinen

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Motives to leave or stay

- *I would certainly have gone at 60 if I could have afforded to. As I said, 18 years ago, I took out an investment plan. If you remember, 18 years ago insurance companies weren't allowed to give you advice like they do nowadays. If hindsight had prevailed, I could have been retired now, but my investment plan takes me until I'm 65.*
- *I had a word with the pensions fellow here and in all fairness he said 'With this pension, really and truly you cannot retire.'*

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Motives to leave or stay

- *I don't want to go, I don't want to retire, don't want to be home, I am bored if I am not sick. (Cleaner_50-59)*
- *Not just speaking for myself, but speaking for the majority of workers, if there wasn't so much stress from management, yes the workers would stay on. If they go there in the community, the workers, every worker and I am not just saying, I mean you obviously see it, everybody sees it's the stress from the management. (Social Services_40-49)*

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Motives to leave or stay

- *But what I have also noticed as well is that on some occasions, some of the blokes that you see now, that you haven't seen for two or three years, they look younger now than when they worked here because ...they're getting sleep, they're getting sleep, they're getting regular sleep*

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Future expectations

Sometimes you get penalised for being here 25 years. And you see, our situation, our roles have changed so much, not through our choice ... You get that new equipment, new computers, new packages and things. You've got to move with the times with them.

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Future expectations

I think if your management sat there and listened to their workers, every worker, they would probably work alongside them a lot better. I think they need to treat everyone as individuals as well and not as like everyone is the same. (Social Services_40-49).

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Concluding points

- Many older workers want to and/or must work
- Clear themes have emerged that will need to be addressed if the government is to meet its employment targets without increasing the health burden
- Our knowledge of the abilities of older workers needs to be implemented *rapidly* into job design
- Older workers have valuable knowledge and skills but this value is rarely assessed
- Organisations will need to disseminate good practice and share experiences

Thank you for listening

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