Healthy Working Lives

cipd

A guide for employers
March 2012

MANAGING A HEALTHY AGEING WORKFORCE
A NATIONAL BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The UK's ageing working population presents both an opportunity and a challenge for employers. Despite the continuing economic downturn, it is predicted that UK employers will need to fill an estimated 13.5 million job vacancies in the next ten years but only 7 million young people will leave school and college over this period. Migration alone will not fill the gap – particularly with the Government pledging to reduce net migration to tens of thousands a year. Increasingly, employers will have to rely on older workers to fill these vacancies.

At the same time, older workers are increasingly looking to extend their working lives, with more than 50% of workers aged over 55 planning to work beyond the state retirement age (CIPD 2010b). Financial reasons are most commonly cited as the motivation behind delaying retirement, but older workers also cite wanting to continue to use their skills and experience and enjoy the social interaction of the workplace as key factors.

The removal of the Default Retirement Age in October 2011 was designed to help employers and employees alike adapt to these economic and social trends that are transforming the workplace and the labour market.

However, evidence continues to show that many employers are not responding to the UK's changing demographics. Failing to act in a coherent and strategic way to the challenges and opportunities presented by the increased ageing of the population – and the workforce – which will continue for decades, risks future economic success and threatens business performance. Those organisations that do respond appropriately will gain significant competitive advantage in terms of recruiting and retaining talent and supporting the well-being and engagement of employees of all ages. They will also protect themselves from potential damage to their brand and compensation costs associated with age discrimination claims.

Lack of awareness about prevailing changing demographics and lack of expertise appear to be the main reasons why employers fail to drive this agenda or only to respond to it on a piecemeal and uninformed basis.

This guide is designed to trigger action by anyone responsible for employing people, including HR and occupational health professionals, board members, line managers, trade union representatives and older workers themselves. It provides practical and simple guidance to help slow starters catch up and for those already engaged with the agenda to improve the way they respond to it.

The tips and recommendations it contains – which take into account the needs of different-sized organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors – are based on findings from in-depth focus group discussions with employers, HR practitioners, health and safety, diversity, and employment and training experts which were carried out in England and Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives and the CIPD Scotland.

It also draws on a large body of research and development work by many organisations, and particularly the CIPD's surveys of employers and employees.

It is in the interests of employers to *sit up and take notice* and to lose no time in taking appropriate action.

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THE UK'S AGEING WORKFORCE

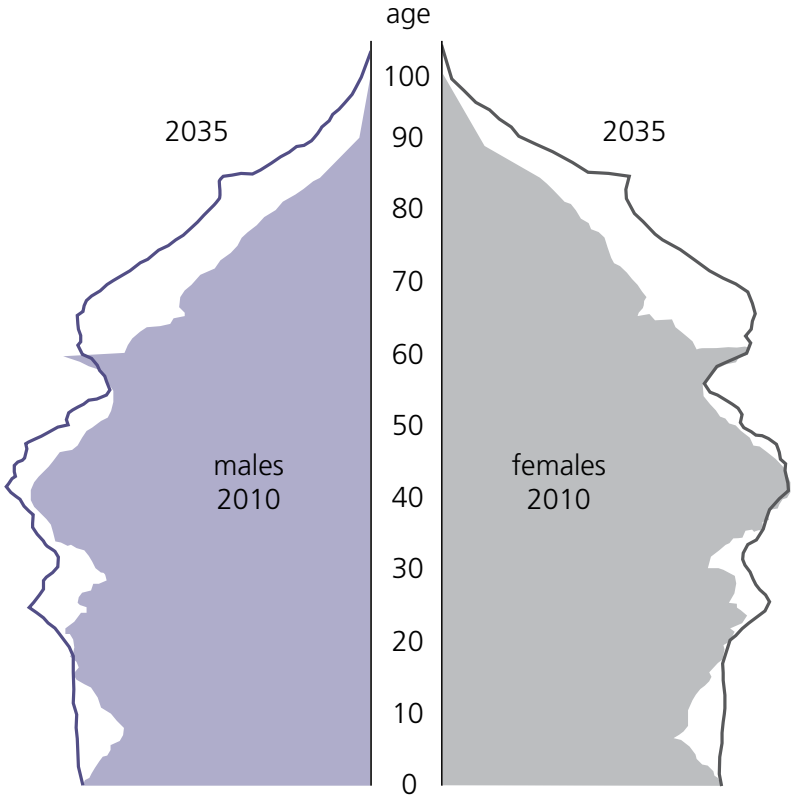
SOME KEY FACTS

- **The 'war for talent' is hotting up:** even in today's tough economic times, employers report serious problems in recruiting good people with the right skills (CIPD 2009).
- **We are running out of workers:** current employer plans suggest that we will need to fill 13.5 million job vacancies in the next ten years, but only 7 million young people will leave school and college (UKCES 2010/GADa).
- **Immigration will not fill the gap:** current net immigration is around 200,000 people per year (ONS 2011b) and the Government is committed to reducing this.
- **Older people are the main untapped source of labour:** unlike migrants, they already live here, and their numbers are growing. By 2020, 36% of the working population will be over 50 (Government Actuary's Department a).
- **People are living and keeping fit for longer:** most of today's 65-year-olds will live beyond 80, and some will live beyond 110 (Government Actuary's Department b).
- **The dependency ratio is deteriorating:** whether retirement is paid for through occupational or state pensions, the money to pay for it comes from the current workforce. In 2008, there was a ratio of adults under and over pensionable age of 3.2. By 2033 this will be 2.8 (ONS 2009).
- **More and more people want to work longer if the conditions are right:** surveys regularly show that most older workers would work longer if they enjoy their work and could work more flexibly (McNair et al 2004).
- **Compulsory retirement is now illegal** except in very special and justifiable circumstances.
- **Age discrimination is against the law.**
- **Projected higher structural unemployment rates** triggered by the economic downturn which started in 2008 will not satisfy forecast longer-term talent needs identified by the UKCES skills gap.
- **The UK population is projected to continue ageing** with the average (median) age rising from 39.7 years in 2010 to 39.9 years in 2020 and 42.2 by 2035 (Office for National Statistics 2011a).
- **The number of people aged 90 and above** is projected to more than triple by 2035, the number of people age 95 and over is projected to more than quadruple, and the number of centenarians is projected to rise from 13,000 in 2010 to 110,000 in 2035, a more than eightfold increase (Office for National Statistics 2011a).
- **Fewer than half of employees** are paying into a workplace pension scheme, and in the private sector this figure is only about one-third (CIPD 2011c).
- **The proportion of older workers aged 55 and above** planning to work beyond the state pension age is 54%, according to a recent survey (CIPD 2010b).

Facts like these cannot be ignored. They present challenges and opportunities.

Figure 1: Estimated and projected age structure of the UK population, mid-2010 and mid-2035

Source: Office for National Statistics (2011a)



SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO RESPOND?

Three steps to managing an ageing workforce

In the next ten years competition for talent will intensify as the population, and the workforce, ages, and the supply of potential young entrants shrinks as a proportion of the total labour market. This talent challenge will prevail despite high unemployment and difficult economic circumstances.

How will your organisation respond? How will you develop and maintain your organisation's skills and talent needs, hold on to key older workers, attract new younger and older people and make the best use of the diverse pool of highly skilled and motivated unemployed?

We recommend you take three key steps.

STEP 1 – BUILD THE BUSINESS CASE

'You have to convince the board that taking the right action will improve business performance, how doing nothing will be an unaffordable risk and what safeguards make sense.' (Focus group participant)

CIPD survey evidence and focus group testimonies make it clear that the boards of organisations are often unfamiliar with the significant workforce changes described by facts included in this guidance and no strategy to respond to the implications they carry.

To get their buy-in for strategic action, they need a well-argued business case with estimated costs and

savings related to relevant responses, including the risks of failing to act.

Board support is key to progress and sustaining business performance. Board members need to know:

- why managing an ageing workforce makes business sense, what the underlying issues are and the implications of ignoring them
- the shape and age profile of their organisation's workforce and how future trends in talent management and development will affect succession planning
- the skills and knowledge available in their workforces; how this skills and knowledge base will be managed to meet the needs of the business; and the comparative costs of doing this in different ways, for example improving the retention of older workers versus recruiting and training new entrants
- that their organisation is making the best use of the knowledge and skills of all its employees, including the older ones.

STEP 2 – ADDRESSING THE MYTHS

Stereotypical thinking – both conscious and unconscious – about age and what people can or can't do influences the way people at work are managed and the way people themselves behave. It is essential to make sure that stereotypical age-based assumptions do not stop the good management of people and their full participation at work.

'To me, work is about being part of something; having something to point to and say, "I can take credit for that."' (Focus group participant)

Check approaches to each of the following management challenges to remove the hidden age barriers that hinder good age management and make the implications of change clear to improve the way decisions are made:

- the motivation of older workers
- performance management
- flexible working
- recruitment
- skills and training
- health and well-being.

Cover the concerns and questions stakeholders sometimes raise about older workers, which include:

- What can they really contribute to business success?
- Are they really motivated to work?
- Do they want to change and develop, or just to be left alone?
- Are they sufficiently flexible and adaptable to changing demands?
- Are they willing to train and develop further as needed?
- Aren't they unproductive because of health and performance issues?

In covering these, point out that everyone is different. While the trends are that increasing numbers of older workers want to work longer and delay retirement, others can't wait to go.

STEP 3 – TALENT MANAGEMENT

'Our hospital was facing skills shortages – gaps in staffing of nursing and consultant positions, which we could not fill because there was no local housing for new recruits here in the south-east, and local transport was poor. We put up posters throughout the hospital, inviting people who would like to work in innovative ways to come and talk. The result was a flow of local older health care professionals who had retired, or expected to retire completely, coming forward to offer to work part-time, or on a casual basis. Their contribution was just what we needed, to retain the skills and fill gaps in our rotas.' (Focus group participant)

Organisations that ignore the ageing of the workforce do so at their peril. They risk failing to attract, retain and engage the people they need to survive. Businesses need to be thinking positively and creatively about workforce ageing to keep up with competitors.

While you won't be able to make all the relevant changes in your organisation yourself, you will be playing a very important role in drawing attention to the issue and stressing their importance. You can help to trigger change by talking to other people to raise awareness about the need for action. All of us are ageing, and we all have an interest in helping organisations improve how they manage an age diverse workforce.

Tracking change will be important to show success. Knowing how things are getting better is pivotal to maintaining traction. Encourage your organisation to decide what indicators to use to measure impact and change – ones which should be rooted in the business case. Stress the need to keep a note of what is done and how it helps to improve business performance and the recruitment and retention of older workers, and always keep policies and practices under review to make sure they deliver.

Monitoring the age profile of your organisation to see how things are changing is common sense and provides the hard management data on which to make judgements about succession planning patterns of sickness, accidents, recruitment, participation in training, grievances, and so on, and to spotlight age-specific issues that need attention. Attending to these issues appropriately is good management, not age discrimination!

The following sections explore these issues in more detail, and provide evidence to support you in making the case for action.

STEP 1 – BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE

'For our directors, the ageing workforce is something they think they can deal with tomorrow. We have to convince them to think about it today.' (Focus group participant)

The following background information will help shape your business case for action.

WHAT OLDER PEOPLE CAN CONTRIBUTE AT WORK

All organisations need to recruit, motivate and retain the best possible talent, but in the past many employers have often overlooked older workers, assuming that they are likely to be less productive and more difficult to manage compared to younger workers.

However employers with experience of managing older workers commonly report the following advantages:

- **Experience:** older workers have made their mistakes, had their successes and know how things work. Their networks of contacts and goodwill, with colleagues, customers and suppliers, have often taken years to build, and are difficult and expensive to replace.

  A small print company saw its business double as a result of recruiting an experienced accountant as their part-time financial manager. The accountant used his network from his previous jobs to help drum up business and, according to the general manager, brought in more than his annual salary in new sales within a month. (Flynn and McNair)

- **Flexibility:** many older workers who are approaching the state pension age would like to gradually reduce their working hours before completely retiring. Phased retirement can offer the 'best of both worlds' to employers since they enable the organisation to retain critical skills at reduced cost.

  Many large companies are now advertising project jobs through their retired employee associations in order to find workers who have the background knowledge and skills to learn the job quickly. (Flynn and McNair)

- Knowledge: long-serving workers have a great deal of precious organisation-specific knowledge which organisations can retain access to through careful approaches to extending working life opportunities for older employees so they can pass on their knowledge and experience to younger colleagues, maybe by acting as mentors. Research shows older workers have an appetite for mentoring (Penna 2008).

  A medium-sized engineering company found that having its engineers spend their last few months before retirement working alongside colleagues in a structured programme to document their knowledge, increased productivity and helped retain business-critical tacit knowledge.

  Other organisations have found that mixed-age work teams can enable older and younger workers to support and learn from one another. (Flynn and McNair)

- **Loyalty:** older workers are less likely to change jobs regularly than younger colleagues and they often have a stronger commitment to the organisation. Trends suggest younger people develop closer affinities with their co-workers, professional colleagues and social networks. It is important to note, however, that the motivation of older workers can be increased by giving them positive recognition of their contributions and participation in training opportunities. On the other hand, when older workers feel sidelined, or that their experience and expertise is not valued, they may leave prematurely or stay on but become disruptive.

'Our removal firm has developed a training programme to keep staff in work as long as possible. First, I get them an HGV licence while they're still young so that they still have a job when they can no longer lift heavy things. Then I get management training for those who want it, so they can work from the office rather than out in the road. It's all incremental, but what we are trying to do is to move people from physically demanding to mentally challenging work as they age.' (Focus group participant)

- **Employee engagement/customer service:** although there are many strongly committed young employees, employers generally say that older workers are more reliable and hard-working, more likely to stay to see the job completed and to go out of their way to ensure that customers' needs are met (Carnegie United Kingdom Trust 1996). Such facts show how employers cannot afford to ignore workforce diversity and why responding to it makes sense.

Chartered occupational psychologist Dr Sheena Johnson (Manchester Business School) investigated how the changing age demographic of workers may have implications for health and well-being of employees in service organisations. Dr Johnson surveyed 273 customer service employees and managers working in a national retail organisation about customer-related stress, dealing with conflict and their health (physical, mental and emotional). Dr Johnson explained:

'Older employees experienced fewer negative customer behaviours and were more diplomatic and better at keeping calm. Overall, being older and more experienced meant they were better at dealing with customers' varied needs.'

WHAT IS MAKING SOME EMPLOYERS SLOW TO CHANGE?

Many organisations are paying attention to age issues, including national 'blue chip' employers as well as much smaller organisations. Even in the face of the recession, the number of older people in work continued to rise. Nevertheless, many older people have not been able to stay in work for as long as they would like. Feedback from our focus groups shows a number of specific reasons for this:

- **Short-term pressures:** although many employers will face skills and labour shortages in the future, many remain pre-occupied with day-to-day issues (including short-term contraction) and fail to think about longer-term issues as a result of being time-poor.
- **Stereotypes about age:** although much more progressive views about the value of older people are growing, many organisations still hold outdated stereotypes, often based on the experience of working with older people in the past and perceptions about physically demanding work, and historical aspirations about early retirement.
- **Failing to ask:** often there is little open and regular discussion between older workers and managers about aspirations to extend working life and possible diverse retirement options. The thinking and behaviours of line managers and older people themselves can be stuck in a time warp and they need to be both encouraged and given the confidence to discuss this.
- **Valuing qualifications over experience:** older workers are more likely to have acquired their skills on the job rather than through formal education. Organisations which use qualifications as a proxy for skills when recruiting will miss valuable potential knowledge and experience by default.
- **Uncertainty over the law and pension rules:** although the Government has sought to make it easier for employers to allow older workers to draw their pensions while staying in work, individuals and line managers are largely uncertain about their organisations' pension rules.

DRAWING UP THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ACTION IN YOUR ORGANISATION: SOME TIPS

Tailor the facts to your organisation's goals and circumstances:

- Set out important background information, including 'essential facts' about:
  - the ageing of the labour market and the war for talent
  - the business advantages of employing older people
  - the legal background about age discrimination, and the abolition of the Default Retirement Age.
- Summarise the expected future skills needs and changes facing your business.
- Highlight the importance of the growing 'grey market' for services and products. (Those in the 50–64 age group are likely to have the highest excess income (ILC-UK 2010).) Keeping older people economically active for longer boosts their spending power.
- Consider ways in which reforming work and retirement practices might help the organisation meet corporate social responsibility goals, which are becoming increasingly important.

Helpful suggestions from some experienced employers include:

- Use information sources such as the Government's Age Positive website and the European Union's database on age management practices at **http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/populationandsociety/ageingworkforce.htm** to find examples of employers benefiting from age diversity policies.
- Cite examples from within your own workforce of older employees whose experience has been an asset to the organisation.
- Set up an older workers' employee network to identify better ways of using older workers, and introducing flexible approaches to retirement.
- Search websites such as those of the CIPD, Acas and various charities concerned with age issues and work, such as Age UK, the Age and Employment Network (TAEN) and ENEI (the Employers Network on Equality and Inclusion).

CASE STUDY: RETAINING TALENT TO SUSTAIN BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

As HR manager of a construction company, I began to realise how many craftsmen were within five years of retirement. Having all of these retire at the same time would create real problems for the company, since it takes several years for a new recruit to complete an apprenticeship in a skilled trade. Furthermore, retirement will shrink the supply of supervisors and trainers to manage new apprentices. It was clear we needed a strategy:

- First, I took the issue to the board of directors, stressing that the labour shortage problem was not just an HR issue, but one which would affect the company's ability to win and complete future contracts.
- Second, I looked in detail at the skills set in the organisation. Many of the builders' skills have remained the same since the Romans built viaducts. Older builders who were unable to continue with physically demanding work could therefore still contribute to the organisation by passing their knowledge on to younger workers.
- Third, I asked the occupational health manager to assess the health risks facing older builders. He reported that most of the risks faced by older builders (accidents, back injuries, and so on) are faced by all builders. Reducing such risks would reduce days lost amongst the workforce as a whole.
- Fourth, I convened a working group of older builders to make recommendations on how we could encourage workers like them to delay retirement. The group reported that long working hours, travel and physically strenuous tasks were particularly difficult for older builders and would be amongst the main obstacles for the company in terms of extending working life.
- Fifth, in partnership with the local further education college, we developed a programme to train our older builders to train and supervise new apprentices.
- Finally, we extended the apprenticeship programme to recruit and train potential builders of all ages, not just younger people. We found that the programme was particularly popular among older people in areas with high unemployment.

This strategy did not solve all of our labour problems, but it was a key part of keeping, bringing in and bringing on talent. (Flynn and McNair)

STEP 2 – ADDRESSING THE MYTHS

'Ageing is universal, but it's not uniform.'

'We all age in different ways and at different paces.' (Focus group participant)

'Most employers now see older workers as an asset, not a cost.' (MacLeod et al 2010)

There are many misconceptions about older workers. One is that they are all alike, whereas people tend to vary more in their aspirations, talents and potential as they age. It is essential that employers understand the various reasons why people want to put off retirement or work flexibly as they get older, as well as what motivates them and how ageing affects people's health and well-being, if they are to get the best out of an ageing workforce.

Survey and focus group research for this guide identified the significant management issues that frequently block essential change on managing an ageing workforce successfully:

- older people's motivation
- performance management
- flexible working
- recruitment
- skills and training
- occupational health.

OLDER PEOPLE'S MOTIVATION

'When I was still in work, I couldn't wait to retire. Now, I miss it. I miss my colleagues and the challenge of work. I had never considered reducing my hours and staying a bit longer, but now I wish I had.' (Focus group participants)

Many attitudes to older workers are shaped by yesterday's experiences of yesterday's 'older workers' in yesterday's jobs and their expectations about work.

But these are out of date and, as a result, many business decisions made today are fundamentally flawed.

Myth	Facts
Older workers can't wait to retire.	Evidence shows increasingly people over 50 who are in work would be willing to continue working past 'normal' retirement age (whatever that may be). However, they often want to phase gradually into retirement, taking up new interests and coping with new responsibilities (such as caring for elderly relatives). By enabling workers to retire gradually, employers can benefit from retaining knowledge, networks and experience, and from having a more flexible workforce (McNair et al 2004, Loretto et al 2005).
Older workers are more expensive than young ones.	Where older workers are paid more than younger colleagues this has sometimes been used to justify compulsory retirement ages to save money. This is discriminatory and no longer legal. Furthermore, the law prohibits pay scales longer than five years.
Most employees retire at state pension age anyway.	Most people retire at a date which suits them and their employers. The average retirement ages of men and women are converging, and rising, and most women already retire after their state pension age. The state pension age is also changing on a phased basis for women.

Figure 2: Those who plan to work beyond the state pension age (%)

Source: CIPD Employee Outlook: Focus on the ageing workforce (CIPD 2010b)

	All	Men	Women	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Yes, I plan to work full-time with the same employer	10	11	8	8	8	8	11	12
Yes, I plan to work part-time with the same employer	11	6	15	2	5	7	8	23
Yes, I plan to work full-time with a different employer	3	3	3	10	5	3	4	1
Yes, I plan to work part-time with a different employer	4	3	4	2	2	5	4	3
Yes, I plan to work full-time for myself/my own company	4	5	3	1	1	5	6	5
Yes, I plan to work part-time for myself/my own company	7	7	7	2	6	9	6	8
Yes, I plan to work as a freelance consultant	3	4	1	4	4	2	3	2
No	29	31	26	21	28	32	37	18
Don't know	25	23	28	50	42	30	21	8
Not applicable	5	5	4	–	–	–	–	18

KINDS OF OLDER WORKER

The approach of the possibility of retirement changes the way people think about working. While people want different things broadly speaking, preferences fall into at least five categories. It is sensible to consider these kinds of personal preference in line with business needs to decide solutions regarding how to engage staff, ways of working and the implications for training and so on:

- **Aspirers** – some older people continue to seek new challenges, through promotion or changed roles, well into their 50s and beyond. If employers think that everyone over 50 is waiting for retirement, and ignore these aspirants, they will fail to make use of a major motivated source of skills and knowledge.
- **Stayers –** many older people are content in their work and keen to carry on working, although they may not know for how long.
- **Downsizers** – some older people have an appetite to carry on working longer but on a reduced time basis. They are interested in flexible ways of working and flexible retirement. Yet others have an appetite to carry on working in a different and perhaps less challenging job, for example one with less responsibility. Such appetites offer opportunities to businesses to both retain skills and knowledge and provide development scope for other talent.
- **At risk** – some older workers have been in the same organisation for a long time, doing a job which they understand, in a context in which their skills and limitations are understood. Some may have done little or no training for many years. If redundancy hits, some of them will find getting a new job very difficult, especially if they have no formal qualifications, poor literacy and numeracy skills or other skills with little currency. Such vulnerable older workers will be likely to have an appetite for refreshing their skill sets to make themselves more employable.
- **Leavers** – some older workers want to retire sooner, rather than later. Finding out why this is can give organisations important insights about any underlying management problems and how to resolve them. Debriefing is important to ensure that a valuable older employee is not being lost unnecessarily and that appropriate arrangements are made to retain important knowledge and skill sets, for example through mentoring arrangements.

LEARNING FROM SURVIVORS

Looking back on past trends, the evidence shows the shape of the workforce begins to change after 50, and even more after 60. By 65, most older workers have opted for partial retirement of some kind, leaving a highly motivated and loyal group, some of whom have worked on into their seventies and beyond.

Looking at the differences between the 'stayers' and 'retirers' can tell us a lot about what makes work attractive to older workers, and how managers can encourage productive people to stay and continue to contribute.

People choose to stay longer in work for four broad reasons:

- **Engaging work** – a sense that their job is interesting and important, often linked to pride in doing a good job (at whatever level).
- **Social** – social contact with other people is good for well-being, whether they are close friends in the workplace, clients, customers or suppliers.
- **Status** – the opportunity to use one's skills and knowledge, and have this recognised, by workmates and the wider public.
- **Money** – older people rarely put money at the top of their lists of reasons for staying in work, and it is rarely the only motivator, although it matters greatly to some and going forward will be an increasing driver for working longer.

The 'survivors' are also more likely to report that:

- their **work is valued**, and they are treated fairly and with respect
- they can **manage work–life balance** in a way which suits them, often through part-time or flexible working
- their **managers have a clear vision and commitment** to the organisation
- they are **consulted about change**
- their **work involves some, but not too much, stress** (experiencing 'excessive stress' less than weekly).

These facts give us an important clue about what kind of working environment will encourage older people to stay, and to be active positive contributors to the business.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

'We need culture change, to make it possible for employees to discuss openly their concerns about health and job security.' (Focus group participant)

Performance management is the most important of all the issues because it is about finding the best match between the skills, talents and aspirations of individual workers and an organisation's needs. Recent CIPD research (CIPD 2010c) shows that HR managers recognise that performance management systems will need to be robust to work well in the face of the extension of people's working lives.

There is some evidence that, as people approach what is 'assumed' to be their retirement age, performance management eases off (McNair et al 2007). Line managers avoid tackling difficult issues with people who will be leaving soon anyway, and older employees are left to 'coast'. Yet older employees often complain of not being sufficiently challenged or supported. Workers aged over 65 are less likely to have informal

conversations with their managers about their performance or a formal performance appraisal than younger workers (CIPD 2011b).

As a result issues about poor performance can be swept under the carpet and ignored to the detriment of the individual as well as work colleagues. Discussions about performance will always be very sensitive, especially if there is no history of trusting relationships between individuals and managers, or there are fears of redundancies or downsizing or where discussions are infrequent and irregular.

Research for the CIPD shows that, in general, older workers tend to be more engaged than younger colleagues with their employers. The main drivers for engagement are: having the opportunity to share views upward; being kept informed about what is happening in work; and seeing management processes as fair and just. Good performance management is therefore crucial to keeping older workers feeling engaged and valued (CIPD 2011a).

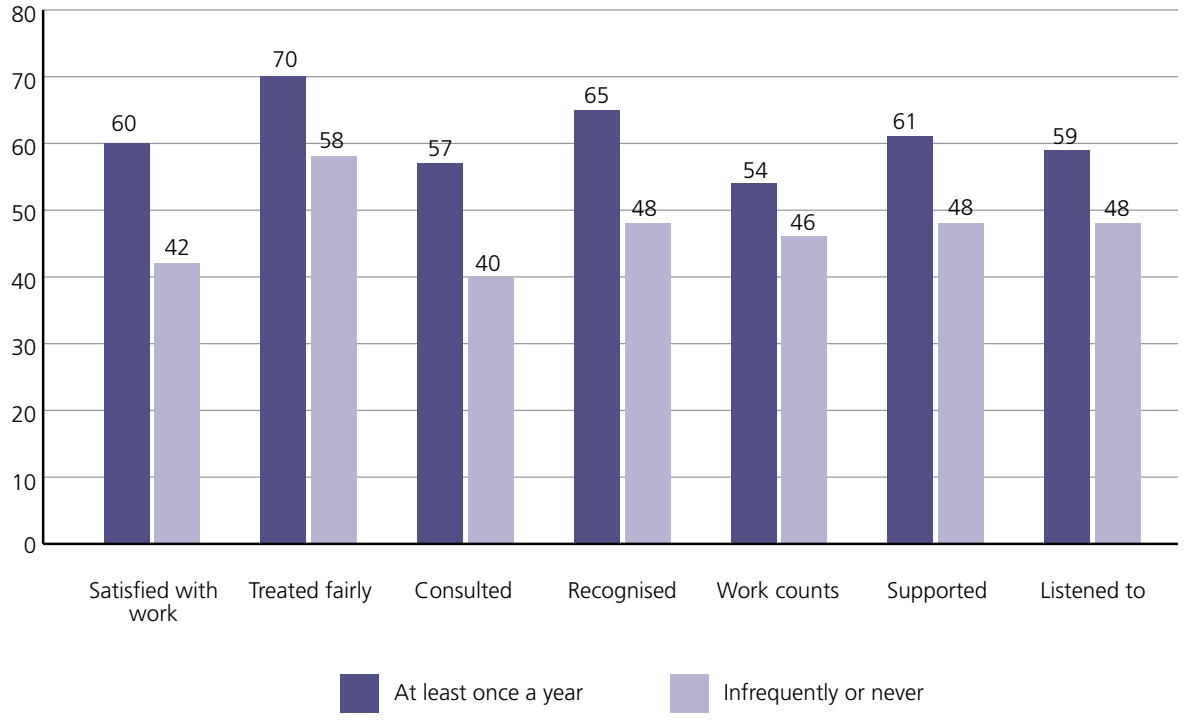
'I do a lot of mentoring now. I really enjoy it. The thing is, I would have never thought of taking this role had I not talked with my boss about my job and my future with the company.' (Focus group participant)

The removal of the Default Retirement Age means employers that fail to manage performance effectively will be more vulnerable to age discrimination claims if there are disputes over employee capability.

Myth	Facts
Performance management of older workers is not necessary and insulting as they've been doing the job for years and will be retiring soon.	Performance management is not supposed to be a negative process: its aim is to improve the match between an individual's talents and aspirations and the business needs, and this is important for people of all ages. Doing it well requires trust and depends on open and honest conversations between employees and managers. Only in this way can a manager understand what motivates a particular individual, what their aspirations and plans are, and how they might be developed and supported, in the interests of the organisation. Often such discussions can spotlight underused skills and ambitions.
Older workers avoid performance management.	According to CIPD research (CIPD 2011b), older workers who are formally performance-managed at least once a year were more satisfied with their jobs and their managers than those who infrequently or never had such discussions.
Discrimination law prevents me from asking workers about their retirement plans.	The reverse is true. Acas guidance encourages employers to have regular discussions with all employees about their future aims and aspirations. The important thing is for managers not to single out older workers for such conversations just to ask specifically about their retirement plans (Acas 2011).
Without a Default Retirement Age, I will have to dismiss older workers.	When the Default Retirement Age was in place, only 16% of employers actually forced anyone to retire because they had reached their employer's retirement age. This is partly because most firms did not have a formal retirement age, and most have relatively few older people, so retirement is a relatively rare occurrence (Metcalf and Meadows 2010). However, more often it was because the formal appeal procedure provided by the law allowed employer and employee to discuss the options constructively, and most employers agreed to a work extension as a result.

The CIPD's summer 2011 *Employee Outlook* survey found that those older workers who experience formal performance management at least once a year are more likely to feel positive about their work and their employer.

Figure 3: Performance management is positive for older workers (%)



Source: Secondary analysis of data drawn from the CIPD *Employee Outlook* survey summer 2011 (CIPD 2011b/e)

FLEXIBLE WORKING

'Working half the week has been great. I can spend time golfing and relaxing. When I start work on Wednesday I feel refreshed and ready for work.' (Focus group participant)

Many workers prefer to work more flexibly as they approach retirement, gradually adjusting their work–life balance and enabling them to manage caring responsibilities for older relatives (which affect many people in their fifties and sixties) while doing the same kind of work they are used to. Many employers have found that offering flexible working, including part-time and homeworking, has helped to retain experienced staff who would otherwise have chosen to retire. NHS trusts, transport companies, retail firms and others are offering flexible working to older workers who want to phase gradually into retirement, extending their working lives while pursuing other interests.

Other retention options include changing the job itself. Some people prefer to hand over stressful managerial roles for example in order to return to more 'front-line' jobs, or to take on roles as mentors, trainers or in quality assurance, which use, and respect, their experience. Re¬configuring a job may also interest those who enjoy particular aspects of their work and not others and be a viable way forward for the business regarding added value. Flexible response to retaining talent and skill can be as creative and innovative as a business needs to be and ideally should be an agreed solution that balances the needs of the business and the employee.

Myth	Facts
Organising flexible working is expensive and time-consuming.	Organisations are increasingly offering part-time or flexible work arrangements on an inclusive basis to recruit and retain talent. Ninety-one per cent of employees have access to flexible working in one form or another (Stewart and Rowlatt 2011). Where employers have successfully introduced flexible working for groups of workers such as working parents, for example, it provides insights into the value of flexible working more generally. Many employers responded to pressures in the economic downturn by developing more opportunities for flexible ways of working to meet business needs and sustain economic performance.
Flexible working is only for parents with caring responsibilities for children.	Managing caring for elderly relatives alongside paid work is a challenge for many older workers. Many leading employers are extending the opportunity to work flexibly to all employees – not just those with childcare responsibilities – for this reason (CIPD 2005).
I don't have to consider flexible working options.	The law requires employers to seriously consider requests for flexible working from people with children aged under 17 or a disabled child under 18, as well as those employees who care for an adult who is a spouse, partner, civil partner or relative; or who, although not related to them, lives at the same address as them.

RECRUITMENT

'We recruited retired people to drive coaches. We sponsored them to train for their HGV licences, and then hired them for day trips and special events. We benefit from a flexible supply of drivers to pick up when demand is high or to cover for sickness, and their safety record is as good as their younger colleagues. The drivers say they enjoy trips around the country and the flexibility in when they work.' (Focus group participant)

After the age of 50, those who find themselves unemployed for whatever reason have very real difficulty getting back into work, regardless of their qualifications and experience. Typically, if they apply for a job at their previous level they are rejected in favour of younger people, and if they apply for less senior jobs they are regarded as 'overqualified' (and sometimes a threat to current employees). As a result, many highly qualified people find themselves in semi-skilled or unskilled jobs which make little use of their skills and experience.

Despite legislation, it is clear that age discrimination in recruitment remains widespread and many employers are failing to draw on the full pool of available talent. Many older people have extensive, but undocumented, experience, which is difficult to demonstrate to a new employer.

Myth	Facts
Young people are a better investment because they have a longer working life ahead of them.	A worker in their fifties is likely to stay longer with their employer than one in their twenties. While the former may eventually retire, the latter is more likely to find a promotion elsewhere.
Older unemployed people have unrealistic expectations.	People who have not been actively seeking work for a long time can easily misjudge their value to employers, especially if they have not changed jobs or organisation for many years. On the one hand they may have an overinflated view but it is far from uncommon for older job applicants to be happy to take on much less demanding roles than they are capable of doing. Others are willing to bring high skills and knowledge to bear on a previously low-status role. Employers need to ensure that their recruitment processes do not reject older applicants by default (this is illegal) and that they consider fairly what older candidates have to offer in terms of knowledge, skills and experience.
There aren't any good older people out there.	Many people who are not in work in their fifties are not registered as unemployed. However, three in ten of such people would like to be back in work. Unlike the registered unemployed, they may believe, because of repeated rejections, that they will never find a job. They do not appear in the statistics as unemployed and they do not search job advertisements. Nevertheless, there are significant numbers with real value to offer. When an employer is having difficulty in filling job vacancies, it is in their best interest to make sure they are not neglecting such sources of talent.
Older unemployed people are unwilling to take jobs which are outside their previous experience.	Many unemployed older people are keen to try something new and some will consider anything. What gets older unemployed people back into work is the chance to show an employer what they can do. Some of the most successful strategies have involved linking training to trial employment and work experience in real jobs in real organisations (sometimes in occupations they have never considered before). Although apprenticeship is commonly associated with young people, more than one in ten people starting an apprenticeship are over 45, and they are rather more likely to successfully complete (The Data Service).

CASE STUDY: B&Q

B&Q has demonstrated the business benefits of taking a strategic approach to managing an ageing workforce.

In the late 1980s, after realising that its sales staff did not reflect the diversity of its customer base, the company staffed its Macclesfield store with solely over 50s (note, this would be illegal now). In 1991, the company worked with Warwick University to conduct a survey of the Macclesfield store, benchmarking it against four other B&Q Supercentres.

The results helped to further validate the business case for an age-diverse workforce:

- Profits were 18% higher.
- Staff turnover was six times lower.
- There was 39% less absenteeism and 58% less shrinkage.
- There was an improved perception of customer service and an overall increase in the skill base.

This work helped lead to a cultural change as managers began to acknowledge the success of this initiative and proactively started to recruit older workers into their teams.

To support its efforts to improve how it manages, develops and retains older workers, B&Q:

- has successfully operated without a retirement age for over 15 years and provides flexible retirement options
- uses an online selection process for store-based roles and a standard application form for other roles to ensure it recruits people based on their ability, not age
- provides a range of contract types that offer hours to suit all individuals and has removed age-related criteria from its rewards and benefits
- offers flexible working to everyone, irrespective of age, length of service or caring responsibilities
- has developed a development framework for all customer advisers that offers them choice and flexibility around how and when they learn
- continues to regularly seek feedback and views from its workforce via its employee information and consultation forum called Grass Roots, and employee sessions with B&Q's CEO
- encourages all its stores to employ a diversity champion.

You can find out more about B&Q's age diversity work at: **www.diy.com/diy/jsp/corporate/pdfs/age.pdf**

SKILLS AND TRAINING

Employer surveys consistently find that negative perceptions about the currency of older workers' skills stops them being considered as potential employees. But one in ten 50-year-olds says that their skills and knowledge are not being fully used in their present job, and the proportion doubles by 70 (McNair 2010).

Everybody, regardless of age, needs training to keep up to date. But older workers are less likely than younger colleagues to take part in training, either because they are not offered opportunities or are not encouraged to take part (McNair 2010). Furthermore, they may not put themselves forward for a wide variety of reasons, including for example previous negative experiences of training.

Myth	Facts
Older workers don't have relevant skills.	Older workers in general are less likely to have formal qualifications than their younger colleagues, mainly because, in the past, many young people were not encouraged to take qualifications. However, most have often learned informally from a lifetime's experience, including invaluable informal know-how, networks of contacts and practical shortcuts. Good training enables older people to build on this foundation of knowledge and experience.
Older workers have experience, they don't need training.	Experienced workers are valuable, but just like those with formal qualifications, they need training throughout their careers in order to keep their skills up to date and relevant to a changing environment.
It is not cost-effective to train older workers.	This view is refuted by employers themselves in joint CMI/CIPD research evidence (Managing an ageing workforce: how employers are adapting to an older labour market 2010). When an employer invests in an employee's training, they naturally expect a return on their investment through increased productivity. However, the time it takes to see a return for most training, such as short courses, is less than a year. More extensive training of older workers can also be worthwhile. A worker of 54 who completes a formal qualification will have at least another decade in work to use their new skills. Formal training can also provide an opportunity for older workers to pass on their experience and tacit skills to younger workmates.
Training older people is expensive.	Not all training is expensive, and much of the training which employers and employees value most is short and focused on the current or prospective job, where the payback period is relatively short.
Older workers are reluctant to take part in training.	Older workers in general are less likely to take part in formal training, especially in long and qualification-based courses. When training is offered, and is seen as relevant, older workers are as keen and successful as younger ones, and one recent survey found that fewer than one in ten older workers refused training when it was offered. This suggests that failure to train is often the result of not being offered training (McNair 2010).
If you train people, they leave for a better job elsewhere.	Older workers are much less likely than young ones to change jobs, and so they are less likely to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge to leave the organisation. Research shows clearly that workers of all ages see an employer's investment in their training as a sign of commitment, which they generally reward with greater loyalty (CIPD 2011a).

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The recent review by Dame Carol Black concluded that work was generally good for both physical and mental health and well-being. …Overall, the beneficial effects of work were shown to outweigh the risks and to be much greater than the harmful effects of long-term worklessness or prolonged sickness absence.
(Black 2008)

It is a commonly held view that many people believe that it is unfair to expect older workers to stay longer in work. But mounting evidence shows that many want to and, increasingly, need to do so. Although we all age and our physical and mental capabilities decline, the effects vary greatly between individuals: some 70-year-olds can do things which some 50-year-olds find impossible. Well managed, most people's capacity to work does not decline significantly before 65, and many remain very productive long after that (Meadows 2004).

Myth	Facts
Work performance declines with age.	Some physically demanding tasks become more difficult with age, but changes in work practices, technology and health and safety mean that there are now relatively few jobs which cannot be done by an averagely healthy 60-year-old. Mental abilities also change with age, though not necessarily for the worse. In tests, older and younger workers achieve similar results, but by different routes. While the ability to solve problems or think quickly declines gradually throughout adulthood, the ability to learn from past experiences increases throughout life. Performance problems which appear to be age-related may in fact be due to lack of support from managers, or unmet training needs.
Work is bad for older people's health.	Although some work damages the health and well-being of the worker, most work is good for people. Studies of older people show clearly that those who stay in work are healthier and often happier than those who retire early (Waddell and Burton 2006, Black 2008).
Older workers find work more stressful.	For most people, stress levels go down after the mid-40s, and some of the indicators of stress, such as short-term absenteeism, decline as people age (HSE 2007). Some degree of stress is positive: the most satisfied older workers are those who say they experience 'excessive stress' more than once a month, but less than once a week (secondary analysis of data drawn from CIPD 2011d). For those who do have problems with stress, measures such as changing working hours, training and providing support can help them manage workplace pressure (CIPD 2010a). However, older workers are less likely than younger ones to be offered support from their employers in dealing with problems of work–life balance (especially caring for elderly relatives). Changes in work hours or responsibility can help older workers reduce stress while remaining productive.
Older workers have more accidents.	There is no evidence for this. Older workers are generally less likely than younger workers to have occupational accidents, but accidents involving older workers are more likely to involve more serious injuries, such as those leading to death, than those involving younger workers (Griffiths et al 2009).

Myth	Facts
Older workers spend a lot of time on sick leave.	In general, older workers are less likely to take time off through ill health. However, for those who do have health problems, the absence is likely to be longer, making it still more important to manage return-to-work support (Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives 2011).
Managing disabled older workers takes a lot of management time.	Most disabilities require little, if any, additional management. Although 29% of workers in their fifties and 37% of those in their sixties have a disability which is certified under the Disability Discrimination Act (ONS 2011c), many of these go entirely unnoticed, and some are temporary. Of the remainder, most people can stay economically active with only minor adjustments to their working conditions.
Once people have left for health reasons, they don't want to return.	Three in ten economically inactive people in their fifties would like to return to work (ONS 2011c), but once out of work it is extremely difficult to return.

MANAGING ABSENCE AND SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

The ageing workforce is an important factor behind the business case for investing in employee well-being. Employers need to ensure their absence management policies and practices are effective in both preventing and managing ill health and absence for all employees.

LINE MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY IS KEY

How people are treated and managed on a day-to-day basis is central to their well-being and engagement. The behaviours of line managers will, to a large degree, determine the extent to which employees will go the extra mile in their jobs, are resilient under pressure and remain loyal to their organisation. Good line management can be crucial in supporting well-being, spotting early signs of mental health problems and initiating early intervention, while poor line management may exacerbate or even cause stress and other mental health problems through an unhelpful approach or behaviour.

Joint research and guidance by the CIPD and the HSE highlights the core management behaviours needed by line managers to prevent and mitigate the effect of stress at work. The guidance highlights four areas of competence:

- managing and communicating existing and future work
- managing emotions and having integrity
- managing difficult situations
- managing the individual within the team.

You can access the line management behaviour and stress at work guidance at **cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/guides/line-management-behaviour-stress.aspx**

GET THE BASICS RIGHT

CIPD research suggests that the most effective interventions for managing short-term absence are return-to-work interviews, trigger mechanisms that identify high levels of absence and the use of disciplinary procedures for unacceptable absence. Employers also need good data on absence to enable them to identify patterns and trends of absence and respond appropriately.

The most effective absence management interventions include:

Short-term absence:

- return-to-work interviews
- trigger mechanisms to address high levels of absence

- use of disciplinary procedures for unacceptable and non-health-related absence
- restriction of sick pay
- line managers take primary responsibility for managing absence.

Long-term absence:
- occupational health involvement
- return-to-work interviews
- trigger mechanisms to review attendance
- rehabilitation programme
- changes to working patterns or environment.

You can see the CIPD *Absence Management* survey report at **cipd.co.uk/research/_absence-management**

EARLY ACCESS TO OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT

Occupational health involvement is consistently identified by CIPD research into absence management as the most effective intervention for managing long-term absence. Increasingly it is recognised that early intervention and access to occupational health services provide most effective return on investment. Employers such as BT and the Royal Mail now refer employees with musculoskeletal conditions and mental health problems to occupational health on day one of absence because they recognise that these conditions are likely to be recurrent or long term.

RETURN TO WORK AND REHABILITATION

Line management behaviour will also play a large part in determining whether employees coming back to work after ill health make a successful and lasting return to work.

The CIPD, Healthy Working Lives and the British Occupational Health Foundation have produced guidance on the behaviours needed by line management to support employees' returns to work and rehabilitation: **cipd.co.uk/binaries/5244_Return_to_work_guide.pdf**

It is important to understand the implications of an ageing society and workforce, and to manage it. It is also important to try to anticipate future skills and knowledge needs, to monitor what is changing and whether the direction is right for the organisation and its employees.

Of course, it is important that monitoring the impact of policy does not take too much time and energy. However, if nothing is measured, you will never know what has changed, what parts of your strategy are working and what you can learn from the things that went less well.

Things you might want to monitor include:

Environment	Do you understand the shape of the labour market in your field(s), including its age profile? Is the supply of good applicants changing? Is public policy on employment of older people changing? Are legal changes affecting older workers and their employment?
The age profile of your workforce	How many people are there in each broad age group? How many are in a 'retirement zone', from the early fifties onwards, where the option to retire becomes a possibility?
Leaving and recruitment patterns	How many older people do you recruit or retire? How many people are choosing to stay after 'normal' retirement age? Is the pattern changing?
Aspirations for retirement	What do your older workers want to do in the last decade of their working lives? When did your organisation last review the approach made to retirement and check it is delivering to business needs?
The nature of the skills and knowledge which older workers represent	Are there mission-critical or safety-critical skills which you are likely to lose when key people retire, and how are you going to prepare for this? Are there unused talents which you could capitalise on?
Strategies for retention	Are managers making good use of flexible working and other strategies to retain older people?
Stakeholder views	What do the stakeholders think about the changes – board, HR, occupational health, line managers.

When you have assessed these, what are you going to do?

CHECKLISTS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

The following checklists are designed for six 'stakeholder' groups. Each one explains why an ageing workforce needs attention and provides some key questions you need to be able to answer.

HR PROFESSIONALS

An ageing workforce and a shrinking supply of young people leaving school and college make retaining, recruiting and managing older workers a growing priority for most organisations. HR professionals have a key role to play in supporting better management of older people and in informing other stakeholders, including board members and line managers, about the issues.

You need to make sure you:

- understand the age profile of the workforce, in your organisation, nationally, locally and in your industry, and the implications of this for your future workforce
- have communicated these implications to all relevant stakeholders in the organisation: including the board, senior managers, line managers, trade unions and employees
- are confident that your recruitment practices do not discriminate against people on grounds of age
- check that performance management and appraisal systems identify the future aspirations of your older workers
- train line managers to consider developmental and career and working options for older workers.

BOARD MEMBERS AND SENIOR MANAGERS

The population, and the workforce, is ageing rapidly, and the proportion of younger labour market entrants is shrinking. This phenomenon has been growing from the end of the last century and is becoming a serious business challenge that requires a strategic business response. Competition for talent will intensify over the next decade. Organisations will need to become very savvy at developing and maintaining their human capital to sustain business performance. The retention of valued older workers and the attraction of highly skilled and motivated unemployed older people will become a business imperative. Board members need to make sure they spend serious time considering these issues and be sure they:

- understand the business case for better management of an ageing workforce and the risks of failing to do this
- receive regular reports on the age profile of their organisation's workforce, the workforce in the related economic sector more broadly and the implications for the future supply of skills
- understand the human capital value of the skills and knowledge of the existing workforce, what this needs to be in the future and how to make sure this is protected and achieved regardless of natural wastage, including retirement
- require reports and plans for maintaining the organisation's talent base to supportive long-term business goals and objectives in a cost-efficient way.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

As the workforce ages, and the supply of new young entrants shrinks, retaining productive older workers will become increasingly important for organisations. Ill health and disability are the principal reasons why people leave work earlier than they would like. Regular assessment of employees' health (both physical and mental, including issues such as relationships with managers) can help identify problems before they become critical and negotiate more appropriate ways of working and job change. You need to make sure you:

- understand the implications of an ageing workforce, for your organisation and the health of its employees
- have routine processes in place to identify problems of physical or mental health (including relationships with managers) for all employees before they become critical

- have routine data on health issues for all employees which enables you to spot problems and causes and any patterns related to different age groups
- train line managers to understand how to identify and manage health problems in their teams and how to get specialist help
- have processes in place to enable those with health problems to remain productive.

LINE MANAGERS

The workforce is ageing, and the supply of new young entrants is shrinking, so finding good people is going to be increasingly difficult. If organisations are to remain productive, they will need to make better use of older workers, keeping existing ones productive and engaged, and making effective use of the large pool of skilled and motivated unemployed older people. Line managers have a key role to play in ensuring that all team members – including older workers – are developed and motivated and engaged in what they do so that everyone's talents are nurtured. To achieve this you need to:

- understand the implications of an ageing workforce for your organisation
- make sure your approach to appraising team members and managing their performance is aligned to their personal needs as well as longer- and short-term business needs
- place sufficient value on the experience and knowledge people gain as well as formal qualifications
- consider how flexible ways of working can meet both business objectives and employees' needs in practical ways that sustain performance by discussing options and agreeing practical solutions with them: for example, part-time, homeworking, seasonal, consultancy, 'zero hours' contracts, and so on.

TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVES

Since the workforce is ageing, and the supply of new young entrants is shrinking, employers are increasingly likely to want and need to retain older workers. The last ten years has seen a shift in the aspirations of older workers. Whereas in the past most wanted to retire at the first possible opportunity, many more now want to extend their working lives but often by working more flexibly (CIPD 2010b). After 60 in particular, many prefer part-time work, and some want to move to less stressful jobs. In order to represent your members effectively, you may need to:

- understand the implications of an ageing workforce generally, for your particular economic sector and the implications for the organisations where your members work
- understand the aspirations and attitudes to work of the workers you represent
- be able to help shape and inform the progress of flexible ways of working in ways that make business sense.

OLDER WORKERS

Personal aspirations about working longer are changing for many different reasons, and the concept of retirement is changing too.

We are all living longer and in the future deciding to retire in our sixties means being out of paid work could last for two or three decades or longer. For most people this will mean spending much longer in retirement than previous generations. Currently most people in work in their fifties and sixties are saying more and more frequently that they would like to delay retirement, by staying in work longer, but working on a more flexible basis, perhaps working part-time, from home, freelance or self-employed. Such opportunities are increasing and people have more choice about extending their working lives than they used to. Pivotal to this choice is that it is now illegal for an employer to force anyone to retire simply because they have reached a particular age.

In making your personal choice it is important for you to think about what you want from your future working life and how you might negotiate this with your employer. You should think about the following and weigh up your preferences and needs and explore possible options that might work for you with your line manger. In planning your future working life:

- check your employer's policies and practices and find out what other employers in your field offer to get a feel for what might be possible
- talk about the experiences of people who have retired to find out if not working is what you think you would want
- consider – now that retirement is no longer compulsory – how long you would like to stay in work
- take into account your future financial independence, caring responsibilities, personal aims and ambitions, and so on
- if you want to carry on in paid employment of some kind, consider what would you like to do
- would you prefer voluntary work
- do you want or need to acquire new skills or study for a qualification
- do you want to pass on your skills and knowledge to someone else as a mentor
- don't assume your employer will not entertain keeping you on in your job for longer or be prepared to talk to you about other options.

When you have an idea of your preferences, consider how your employer might be able to meet them by offering them solutions they might find attractive. Be your own best advocate and remember you won't get what you want if you don't ask, but you need to be prepared to negotiate and discuss options thoroughly before deciding.

WHAT SORT OF OLDER WORKER ARE YOU?

In the ten years or so before retirement, many people rethink what they want from work, and consider changes. Sometimes they don't believe their employer would welcome requests for change and don't want to be 'difficult'. However, when employers and employee have honest conversations about this they often find solutions which suit both of them. You might want to consider which of these categories you fall into, and discuss this with your manager.

- **Aspirer** – you may want a new challenge, through promotion or a new role. You might like a new role which builds on your experience and knowledge of the business: as a mentor of new staff, supervising apprentices or a role in quality assurance. If you are in your early fifties you probably still have at least ten years ahead of you (and it could be a lot more). Sometimes managers forget that older workers may still have many years' work ahead of them and you will need to convince them that you are not just waiting for retirement and that you have real skills and knowledge to bring to the business.
- **Stayer** – you may be content with your present job, but would like to stay longer. Growing numbers of older workers are doing this and it is now illegal for an employer to force anyone to retire simply because of their age. If you are a 'stayer' you need to talk to your manager about how and when you would like to retire, and how that matches the organisation's needs to make sure you get what you want.
- **Downsizer** – you may want to retire gradually, perhaps by reducing responsibility or moving to part-time work. This may suit the needs of the business, helping to keep your skills and knowledge but reducing the costs. It may also help the handover of roles to the next generation.

(CONTINUED)

WHAT SORT OF OLDER WORKER ARE YOU? (CONTINUED)

- **At risk** – some people spend many years in the same organisation, doing a job which they understand, working with people who know them well, but with few or no qualifications. This may be fine if the job survives, but if reorganisation or redundancy hits, such people can find that they are unable to show what they can do to a new employer and end up unemployed for a long time. If you think you might be at risk like this, you may want to think about doing some training to bring your skills and qualifications up to date and to be able to show your commitment to a new employer.
- **Leaver** – you may feel that you want to retire sooner, rather than later, because you are tired of the job or the organisation, or because you have some interest or responsibility outside of work to pursue. In this case you need to check carefully on the financial implications of retiring early and then talk to your manager about how to arrange this.

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