

Good practice in integrating aging workers

– examples from some European countries

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Preface

This collection of case studies was initiated by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (project No. 0161/Contract No. 97-3030-26). The project was co-ordinated by the National Institute for Working Life in Sweden, Department for Work and Health. Project leader was prof Åsa Kilbom. After a period of illness prof. Kilbom tragically died.

The case-studies of good practice described in this report were published in: Molinié A-F. Age and working conditions in the European Union. Annex - Case studies. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: Luxembourg; 2003.

This report adds the comments and reflexions to the case studies found in the original report in 1999 to the European Foundation. Some references have been updated.

I would like to thank all contributors of cases from the different countries. I would also like to thank all companies and organisations who were willing to forward their experiences of successful integration of older workers in working life.

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Table of contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Aim	5
Other examples of good practice documented in the literature	5
The present case studies	7
Methods and limitations	7
Context	7
Age related problems	8
Actors	9
Process	9
Actions	9
Evaluation	12
Discussion	13
Recommendations to employers and others acting for aging workers	16
Recommendations for further studies of good practice for aging workers	16
Summary	17
Sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)	19
References	21

Appendix	Case descriptions	Appendix page No.
<i>Case No.</i>		
1	Ways to keep older people at work. A report from Swedish Steel	1
2	The "Older Worker Training" project at the Sydkraft Group in Sweden	5
3	Older workers in production – senior work teams at Volvo in Sweden	9
4	Project "45+" at the Thorax Centre of Uppsala University Hospital in Sweden	15
5	Promoting work ability in a food factory in Finland	21
6	Home care work and aging in the city of Helsinki	26
7	The social security service, Vestfold county in Norway	30
8	The Norwegian State Housing Bank	33
9	Siemens company in Norway	36
10	Senior development within the National Commission of the Danish police	38
11	Experience comes with age – That's why we are looking for finance people age 50+ in a Danish bank	43
12	Physical fitness and maintenance of work ability in Siemens company in the Netherlands	45
13	Age-conscious personnel policy at OWASE companies in the Netherlands	47

Introduction

The European population is aging. The proportion of older people is increasing. During the period 1994-2004 the proportion of the population aged 50-64 years, i.e. the oldest group in the work-force, in the different European countries have increased from 14.9% to 17.6% [1].

On the other hand there is a decline in the mean exit age in the work-force, i.e. workers retire at a lower age than before. The employment rates have thus declined during the last decade among the older age groups, e.g. among 55-59 year old men in Germany from 78% in 1983 to 64% in 1994; in United Kingdom from 76% to 67% and in France from 60% to 56% [2].

The working population in the European Union will soon stop growing in size and then gradually start decreasing. The timing and intensity varies in different Member States. About one quarter of the states has already entered this phase. The costs for early retirements have increased. The economic support from state funds to workers seeking early retirement has, however, been reduced in many countries during the last years. It is thus of importance to activate non-employed groups in the societies. The largest labour reserves are to be found among the older generations. *“It is therefore of vital importance to preserve and strengthen the employability of the older generation in work so as to prevent their exclusion from the labour market”* [3, p 11].

Most, if not all, countries in the EU have oriented their policies towards a retention of older workers in the labour force. This is a dramatic and 180 degree turnaround from the previous employment policies when early exit from the labour market was dominating. *“This is proving to be a particular challenge for governments as they introduce measures to encourage later retirement and the reintegration of older workers into the labour market”* [4, p. 1]. Efforts in policies and practices designed to improve opportunities for older workers and to extend working life have developed significantly over the last decade [5].

Referring to the above description of the situation, there are good reasons for the society as a whole but also for the employer and the unions to stimulate and facilitate aging workers to remain in the workforce and to contribute with their abilities in the work-life. ”Business-like” arguments for employing (and retaining) aging workers have been formulated, e.g.: return of investment in human capital; prevention of skill shortages; maximising recruitment potential; responding to demographic change; and promoting diversity in the workforce [6]. The reality has shown however, that the actions for such stimulation and facilitation are insufficient.

One way of stimulating employers to employ and retain aging workers could be to give examples from the working life of successful attempts to engage and develop the capacities of aging workers. Such good examples could stimulate and give ideas both to authorities, employers, employees and their organisations regarding what to do in order to make better use of the whole workforce and give them possibilities and motivation to enjoy a full work life career up to ordinary retirement.

Consequently, the European Council called in its ”Resolution on the employment of

older workers” of 1995 that the European Commission should promote the exchange of information and good practice concerning the employment of older workers across the EU.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions initiated in 1994 a project in this context. One part of this project was to look at aging issues from the labour market side - ”European project on Combating Age Barriers in job Recruitment and Training”. One other part was to look at aging issues from the work organisation side. This was accomplished by documenting examples of good practice with regard to handling aging issues in working life. Such examples from Germany and France have been collected by S Volkoff at Créapt [7] and by K Kuhn at Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz [8].

As one part of this European project, the European Foundation in 1997 gave the Swedish Institute for Working Life, prof. Åsa Kilbom, the commission to collect such examples from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Aim

The aim of this project and publication was to collect and to spread the knowledge about successful attempts to employ, retain and develop the work ability and capacities of aging workers. These good ideas will hopefully inspire employers, employees, unions and others who are concerned about the issues of aging workers in today’s and tomorrow’s work life.

The present publication is the report from this commission. It describes some examples from the working life in the 90-ties, in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, where aging workers situation has been improved in different aspects, mostly with benefit both for the employee, the employer and, in the long run, also the society as a whole.

Other examples of good practice documented in the literature

The main report from the above mentioned project ”European project on Combating Age Barriers in job Recruitment and Training” has documented and published 167 examples of good practice in integration of older workers in 9 European countries [9,10]. Four main guidelines were stated in the research report as an excerpt from the case studies described in the portfolio:

- backing from management is crucial
- benefits of a supportive human resource environment at the company
- commitment from the aging workers involved
- careful and flexible implementation.

The conclusions drawn by S Volkoff from cases collected in France can be summarised as follows [7].

Based on results from a survey of French companies, there is an obvious lack of consciousness and concern about aging of the workforce and actions needed. Actions undertaken at companies with a higher level of awareness were subdivided by:

- actions targeted at deficient employees, usually cases of ill health. Such actions were creation of ”light ” jobs and designing specific workshops

- actions aimed at a global improvement of work conditions (for all employees), e.g. improving work station ergonomics, reducing physical demands, early recognition of health problems and reductions of working time
- actions facilitating local and individual strategies. The focus of such strategies is to encourage and facilitate for the worker to use his/her own experience to develop and change work methods. Examples of such changes can be to seek time and effort saving movements, anticipate future operations, agree with colleagues on suitable task distribution etc. The success of such initiatives depends on the room for manoeuvre that the workers, supervisors and others have, which in turn depends on the company's policy for human resources management. Such initiatives also included work reorganisation and training.

In his report, Volkoff also points at the difficulties of implementing good solutions in small companies.

The conclusions drawn by K Kuhn from cases collected in Germany can be summarised as follows [8]:

- general policies related to health, such as work organisation, working hours, career development and integration of all ages in working groups while setting demands related to capacity.
- different approaches used by the studied companies, emphasising alternatively personnel management, learning and company cultures.

It is emphasised that no company exists that uses an optimal mix of these instruments.

In 1995 the DG V at the European Commission funded the Eurowork Age project which aimed to identify and disseminate examples of best practice in initiatives aimed at promoting the retention or reintegration of older workers. But, as a complement to the above mentioned similar project funded by The European Foundation, the Eurowork Age included mainly projects and organisations that provided vocational training, job-search training, career guidance, advice to employers regarding age-aware personnel policies etc [11].

A report condensing experiences from both of these EU projects, with inclusion of a few case studies has been published [12].

A number of case studies of elderly workers in different companies can also be found in books, conference proceedings a.s.o. [13-15].

Publications of experiences of good practise in countries outside the EU are sparse. Studies from more traditional research settings, mainly from Japan, have been published [16].

The present case studies

Cases are referred to in the following text by numerals corresponding to the numeration of cases in the appendix:

1. *Ways to keep older people at work. A report from Swedish Steel, Borlänge*
2. *The "Older Worker Training" project at the Sydkraft Group in Sweden*
3. *Older workers in production – senior work teams at Volvo in Sweden*
4. *Project "45+" at the Thorax Centre of Uppsala University Hospital in Sweden*
5. *Promoting work ability in a food factory in Finland*
6. *Home care work and aging in the city of Helsinki*
7. *The social security service, Vestfold county in Norway*
8. *The Norwegian State Housing Bank*
9. *Siemens company in Norway*
10. *Senior development within the National Commission of the Danish police*
11. *Experience comes with age – That's why we are looking for finance people age 50+ in a Danish bank*
12. *Physical fitness and maintenance of work ability in Siemens company in the Netherlands*
13. *Age-conscious personnel policy at OWASE companies in the Netherlands*

Methods and limitations

Thirteen examples of good practice were collected, four from Sweden, three from Norway, two from Finland, two from Denmark, and two from the Netherlands. The examples were identified by contacting people who were active in projects concerning aging workers - researchers or representatives from companies. No survey was done among organisations or employers regarding the existence of such good examples. No selection process was done as all identified cases are reported here. No non-successful cases were reported, as no such were asked for. These thirteen examples of good practise are therefore not representative for the situation among aging workers in these countries. These are neither representative for existing activities in this context, with successful or non-successful outcome.

Context

Mainly large companies/organisations with more than 1000 employees were described. This overweight for large enterprises could reflect the fact that they have more activities in these issues or that their activities have become more known outside the company, e.g. through contacts with engaged consultants or researchers. Specific study or intervention groups, however, often consisted of one sub-department, typically with 20-50 workers.

Both private enterprises and state or community owned organisations including both manufacturing and service activities were represented. Some companies could be described as belonging to the "high-tech" sphere, others to the "blue collar" or "white collar" sectors and others to health care or other human service sectors. Some cases covered practically all employees at the enterprise (cases 4, 13) but other cases only specific occupational groups (e.g. home care workers (case 6), electric power line fitters (case 2)). One case started with aging managers at the company, but was eventually extended to all employees (case 9). Both males and females participated. No specific gender aspects were described, however.

The age-related activities at the different companies/organisations were mainly accomplished during the 1990-ies.

Age related problems

Age related problems at the different companies or organisations were of differing qualities. Most problems were related to consequences of the aging process per se but also to changes in the working conditions and methods, or to new demands on workers e.g. for flexibility, extended knowledge and polyvalence. Some of the problems among the aging workers in the reported cases were as follows.

Problems with learning/training, flexibility or adaptation to news (cases 2, 3, 7, 8, 9)

New technology and equipment, e.g. for network service, were introduced in Sydkraft energy group in Sweden (case 2). This put new demands on training of the service fitters, whereof 66% were above 45 years old. They were not always considered to be able to or interested in learning these new technologies or to be flexible to the new conditions. Similar difficulties perceived by the management in learning new things were reported at the Volvo car assembly plant (case 3). The duties of the caseworkers, whereof 70% were above 45 years old, at the social security service in Norway were rapidly changing from specialised and simple routine work to a more customer oriented service work that put new demands on diversity in competence and group work (case 7). New information technology was added to this and increased demands on efficiency due to budget reductions. The older employees became tired and would strive for early retirement. Similar problems were at hand at the Norwegian State Housing Bank (case 8). Stagnation particularly among the managerial staff was a problem at the Norwegian Siemens company (case 9). The company wanted more mobility and development of the employees among those 47% who were above 40 years old.

Low productivity in tempo-work (case 3)

At the Volvo car assembly plant the regular production rate was set to 111%, i.e. somewhat higher than what could be expected to be "normal" for a male assembly worker between the ages 20-30 (case 3). The aging workers found it hard to keep up with this tempo. They were sick-listed and were difficult to rehabilitate back to their ordinary job. There were few opportunities for light work available at the modern and "slimmed" assembly plant.

Problems to endure shift-work (cases 1, 4)

At SSAB Steel plant in Sweden more than 1100 workers, whereof 55% were aged 45 or above, did have to work on shift (case 1). Older workers had more difficulties in enduring this than younger workers. Long periods with night shifts were regarded as most problematic. Older health care workers at the Uppsala University hospital in Sweden found it hard to wind down and had difficulties in sleeping after late night shifts (case 4). They did not get rest enough, especially if they had to wake up to work the next early morning shift. Older physicians and other health care workers therefore had difficulties in enduring shift work, late nights and being on call.

Poor health (cases 1, 2, 6, 12)

Poor health was a major problem in many cases. Musculoskeletal disorders were common among older steel-workers at SSAB Steel (case 1) and the aged service fitters

at the Sydkraft energy company (case 2) and the home-care workers at the city of Helsinki (case 6). Cardio-vascular disorders among aging workers were also problems at SSAB Steel but also among older workers at the Dutch Siemens company (case 12).

High rate of sick leaves (case 3)

High rate of sick-leaves was specifically mentioned as a problem at the Volvo car assembly plant (case 3). Probably this was a problem also in other companies, however not mentioned in the case-reports. High rates of sick-leave did lead to lack of work-force at the Volvo car assembly stations, even when there was a gross surplus of work-force on the plant as a whole.

High rate of early retirements (cases 1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13)

High rate of early retirements as a problem was mentioned in many cases. This would lead to a loss of competence for the company/organisation. It could also cause a lack of workforce, when there were few young workers to hire. High rate of early retirements is also costly for the society and insurance systems.

Actors

The initiatives for the aged-worker related activities were not always stated, but often emanated from central organs/organisations like the top management of the company or the Ministry of social welfare and economy.

The projects were most often planned by the management group in co-operation with the company health department, union representatives and possible external consultants, e.g. from a local university. The role of these external consultants or other experts is, however, not possible to conclude from the reports. Worker representatives were less often mentioned in the case studies as included in the steering groups (cases 1, 6, 10). A few of the projects were regarding their initiative, implementation and success depending on one or a limited number of very active enthusiasts. Their central role can not clearly be seen in the documentation, but can be understood from information obtained from other sources.

Process

The projects could typically be separated into 5 phases: 1) identification of the problem; 2) planning; 3) study of the magnitude of the observed problem (via questionnaires, interviews); 4) action (discussions, seminars, training, improvements of work environment etc); 5) evaluation (in a few cases).

Seminars were a common method both to collect information from and spread information to the participants. Seminars were also used to discuss urgent issues and to influence the attitudes and opinions of the delegates. Seminars were further used to stimulate development and personal growth among the employees. Such seminars were sometimes followed by more individual discussions between supervisors and employees.

Actions

The actions (in some cases, proposals for actions) that were described in the case studies could be separated into those concerning the workers, the work itself, and policy matters or the organisation of work.

Workers

Health monitoring and medical treatment/rehabilitation (cases 1, 2, 4, 5, 12)

Health monitoring and medical treatment or rehabilitation are parts of the traditional occupational health activities at workplaces. Such activities were also included in most activities concerning aging workers, but not always well described in the case studies.

Physical training (cases 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12)

Physical training was probably the most common action oriented towards the individual aging worker. Most training was accomplished during working hours. One of the reported cases used physical training as the main action, together with health monitoring, in order to reduce cardiovascular disease among the aging workers at Siemens in the Netherlands (case 12). Also the Finnish cases used physical training as an important tool in order to improve the work ability among the aging food-processing workers and the home care workers (cases 5, 6). The aerobic capacity was found to be low among many of the aging workers, which could be a restricting factor in their work ability.

Career planning (cases 7, 8, 9, 10, 13)

Individual career planning was an important action in the Norwegian cases. These were called by different names - "senior dialogues" or "milestone dialogues". These discussions were usually lead by the supervisor or closest manager, except in the Siemens case where it was lead by an organisational psychologist (case 9). The "milestone dialogue" at the Norwegian Housing Bank was planned to take place every 5th year and would end in an agreement form of future training arrangements, guest working at other departments at the Bank (or outside the Bank), changes in tasks or duties or in working hours (case 8). The supervisors were trained for conducting such dialogues and both parts were equipped with a guide for the dialogue. Career plans put emphasis on the importance of individual solutions and flexibility in actions for aging workers. Career plans can also support and enhance personal growth and development. Properly done it also secures that no one will be "forgotten".

Education and training (cases 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13)

Education and training of different abilities was another commonly used action involving the individual aging worker. The contents of the education and training were in most cases not described in detail, however. The Finnish food processing industry provided a very much goal oriented educational programme including training of handling new production methods, training in team work and also a vocational degree in "food processing" (case 5). At the Dutch OWASE companies individual educational and training programs were discussed during the yearly planning discussions between the management and the employee (case 13). "Refresher courses" for those with basic education long time ago and special technical educational programmes were at hand. A special "employees council" had the responsibility to see that no age discrimination was at hand in the educational and training activities. A couple of the cases described specific training for the elderly workers in computer use (cases 10, 13). Regular educational programmes were at hand but also extended programmes where more time and attention was paid to the questions of the participants.

Mental training for flexibility, personal growth, creativity (cases 2, 5, 7, 8, 9)

A special form of training had the aim to increase the mental flexibility and preparedness for changes among the aging workers. The aim was also to enhance personal growth and development. Such training had thus close connections to the individual career planning. The usual methods were mainly seminars with a small group of workers and a seminar leader. Most of the activities oriented to the older managers at the Norwegian Siemens company were aimed at increasing the "constructive leader mobility and development" (case 9). Training of "creativity" during special, seminars was tried in the Sydskraft energy company in Sweden (case 2).

Preparation for retirement (cases 9, 10)

A few companies offered the aging employees specific "training" for future retirement. The contents of such preparations were not described, however.

Work

Improvements of equipment, environment or methods (cases 1, 2, 5, 6, 13)

Improvements of equipment, environment or methods were mentioned in several cases. These actions were seldom described in any detail, however. Visual and hearing aids, ergonomic improvements of work-places and equipment were described at the Swedish SSAB steel works (case 1).

Work organisation/policy

Working hours (cases 4, 7, 8, 10)

Reduction or flexible working hours were described or proposed in a few cases. At the Academic hospital in Uppsala/Sweden flexible working hours were introduced in one of the clinics (case 4). Instead of fixed schedules it became the responsibility of the staff to schedule the work a month ahead.

Retirement and sick-leave policy (cases 1, 4, 7, 13)

One common suggestion was flexibility of the retirement and sick-leave policy, regarding retirement age and phasing out. The financing of such solutions are crucial, however. The Swedish SSAB steel company describes how workers now can be on part-time sick leave instead of full-time sick-leave, which is beneficial for all parts (case 1). The Dutch OWASE company has introduced a special savings system with both individual and collective savings in order to finance full or gradual retirement between 55-70 years of age (case 13).

Reduced or improved conditions for shift-work (cases 1, 4, 10)

Shift-work is often described as demanding especially at high ages. Adaptation of the shift-scheme was one of the specific actions at the Swedish SSAB steel works (case 1). The occupational health care department together with the union and workers representatives made elaborate studies of shift-work and its problems. Three new schemes were suggested. These were all tried during a huge field study where all workers participated and in the end were asked to evaluate which one to prefer. Older workers preferred to have short periods of night shifts, sacrificing the possibilities to long

periods of days off work.

Distance work, temporary job rotation, guest work (cases 7, 8, 10)

The Norwegian State Housing Bank supported the employees to do guest working at other departments at the Bank or outside the Bank in order to "widen the employees' horizon" and increase flexibility (case 8). Similar temporary changes or rotation of job were described e.g. social security office at Vestfold in Norway and the Danish police forces (cases 7 and 10).

Permanent horizontal or downward change of work (cases 9, 13)

Permanent change of job and duties were also suggested, among others at the Dutch OWASE company (case 13). Workers above 45 years of age have the possibility to take a lower position without having the corresponding cut in the salary. A special "internal mobility bureau" has been institutionalised.

Mentorship (cases 4, 7, 8, 13)

Senior, more experienced workers, who educate junior and less experienced or trained workers, is called "mentorship". Such transfer of competence from the aging workers to the younger are described in a few cases. There are, however, no specifications of this in the described cases.

Specific teams for senior workers (case 3)

The Volvo car assembly company describes an elaborate policy for retaining aging workers who have difficulties in keeping up with the tempo at the car assembly line, or who otherwise have reduced capacity at work. These workers join special "senior teams". These teams have same responsibilities as ordinary workers but have somewhat reduced production norms. These teams seem to function well and reduce the sick-leave, early retirements and costs for the company. The system is expanding.

Specific recruitment of senior workers (case 11)

Only one of the studied cases report specific recruitment policies regarding aging workers. This is a Danish bank that specifically hires older and more experienced bank workers. The aim is to meet the demands of the increasing group of older customers who demand middle-aged or older advisers at the bank-office.

Evaluation

Specific evaluations of the actions and their outcomes were not always conducted. All reported evaluations described a positive and successful outcome of the actions. The evaluated conditions that were described and reported were mainly:

- health outcome (cases 1, 2, 12)
- fitness, muscle strength (cases 5, 12)
- work ability (cases 5, 6)
- sick leave (cases 2, 3, 5)
- early retirements (cases 1, 2, 5)
- flexibility, attitudes, motivation for changes and responsibility (cases 1, 5, 7, 9)
- productivity, quality (cases 3, 11)
- economy (case 3)

Discussion

The aim of this project and publication was to collect and to spread the knowledge about successful attempts to employ, retain and develop the work ability and capacities of aging workers. These good ideas will hopefully inspire employers, employees, unions and others who are concerned about the issues of aging workers in today's and tomorrow's work life.

The contexts of the cases were diverse covering the span of modern working life. Small companies or enterprises with few employees were lacking, however. This is a shortcoming as a high proportion of the employees are working in small enterprises. This shortcoming is shared with most of the other reported case studies mentioned above. Ideas from some of the actions in these larger enterprises reported in this collection of case studies could hopefully be applied also to smaller enterprises.

The problems among the aging workers and the companies that were formulated in the present case studies were mainly the same as reported earlier, e.g. health, functional or motivational problems, changes in the demands of the competence profile, loss of competence due to early retirements [7, 8].

The main motivating factors behind the actions related to aging workers can be derived from these age-related problems. The most obvious factor is the threat of lack of work force. During the 1990:ies there has been a gross unemployment in most European countries. There is, however, lack of work force in specific branches and occupations, e.g. high skilled technicians, health care workers. Another factor is that employers need employees who are flexible, polyvalent, self governed and who take responsibility in order to meet the new and rapidly changing demands of the market and customers. Many customers, especially those, who are somewhat older, prefer experienced and senior "consults" or advisers, e.g. at the bank office or at the hospital (case 11). Another motivating factor is that employers need to make use of and further develop the investments that already are done in the competence of the aging workers. The humanitarian aspects, including the responsibility for the aging workers welfare should also be mentioned as an important motivating factor.

A previously less described aspect is that recruitment of elderly workers makes the workforce more dynamic and flexible. The elderly workers are more close to ordinary retirement. If the market-situation changes and develops into a surplus of workforce, this surplus will successively diminish due to the retirements. In an opposite situation, workers close to retirement can be asked to postpone retirement for a period or do some extra work after retirement. A workforce consisting of mostly younger employees is more rigid as these problems have to be handled with dismissals and overtime work, respectively.

The actors and the processes reported in the case studies were mainly traditional, i.e. top-down directed actions. However, in some projects representatives for the workers and/or their unions were called upon to a steering committee or an idea generating group (cases 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10).

External consultants or researchers were often included in the process. This follows from the fact that in many cases these external experts were those who reported the case

in this project of case studies. This could also follow from the fact that these cases could be regarded as "pioneering" projects, where there were no or little experience to build on, which is why companies and organisations needed to seek external support. The publication of case studies like these will hopefully diminish the need for external experts in future actions in these contexts.

The actions for improvements of the situation concerning aging workers in the different cases showed a considerable spread. Actions were oriented towards the individual aging employees, e.g. training, education, and career planning. Other actions were oriented towards the workplace or work-process, e.g. improvements of the ergonomics. Finally many actions were oriented towards the policies and the organisation of the work, e.g. reduction or flexibility of working hours or shift-work, mentorship, and job rotation. These actions resemble those reported from other similar case studies [7-10]. These actions were also in coherence with recommendations given at a workshop in Brussels on these issues [15]. Some actions were quite comprehensive, covering both the individual employees, the work, the organisation of work and policy matters (cases 1, 5, 13). One of the cases considered specific recruitment of senior workers (employees at a bank), who were regarded as more fit as bank advisors for middle-aged or elderly customers (case 11).

Activities outside the enterprises on the societal level, e.g. national rules and regulations for early pensions, information and guidance etc, were not covered in this project, but can be found in other reports [5, 11].

Evaluation of the impact of the activities was not always done. This is a common phenomenon also in connection with activities related to other issues than interventions aimed at integrating aging workers. Lack of evaluation is a weakness in interventive actions like those reported in this project. Recommendations for further or more widespread actions are depending on such evaluations. *Further studies on aging workers should more systematically evaluate both the process and the outcomes of the actions.*

However, all reported evaluations were in favour of the beneficial value of the efforts. The evaluated parameters considered mainly aspects related to the individual employee, e.g. increased physical capacity or motivation for change and training (cases 1, 5, 6, 9, 12). Fewer measures considered impact on the work or organisational level; increased productivity and quality and decreased rate of early retirements (cases 1, 2, 3, 5, 6). Experiences and indirect information, mainly the fact that the "pioneering" activities did spread to other departments in the company or to other enterprises, could be seen as informal evaluations with positive outcomes (cases 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13). The "survival" of the actions could be seen as a parameter in the evaluation.

It should be mentioned that the successes of actions that are described in this report, in many cases are dependent on the situation on the labour market. Where there is a surplus of labour force, the motivation and enthusiasm is probably lower, than where there is a shortage.

Support from management and supervisors were crucial for the success of the projects, as stated in some cases (cases 2, 3, 6, 10). Similar conclusions were underlined also in

other case-study projects mentioned earlier [9, 10, 15]. This is an expected and common finding and conclusion when doing interventive activities in work places. Managers and supervisors are not only the key-holders of resources in the company, but are also prime interpreters of the company policy in most aspects. Ideas that are contradictory or irrelevant to these key persons are difficult to introduce and implement. Some companies explicitly informed and tried to convince managers and supervisors (cases 2, 7).

The motivation and commitment of the workers was another crucial factor for project success (cases 5, 6, 10). Action-research (case 10) or large-scale activities where all workers are participants (cases 1, 6) are examples of methods for involving and motivating large groups of workers (participatory approach). The necessity of support from workers was also stressed in other case studies [9, 10, 15].

Conflicts between younger and older workers were sometimes mentioned in the case studies (cases 1, 6, 7). Diverging interests and preferences for solutions were sometimes reasons for these conflicts. It was underlined in some cases that it would have been unfair (and perhaps unethical) against the younger workers to exclude them from e.g. health promoting activities (cases 6). Such segregation could also be a potential source of new conflicts between younger and older employees. Still another aspect is that actions aimed solely to older workers could stigmatise aging workers. This would counteract the strivings to illuminate the values and capacities of aging workers. However, there are different ways of handling age differences in work life. The experiences from the Volvo case study were in favour of age-homogenous senior work teams (case 3). Perhaps this is the optimal solution when work-pace and demands on capacity are difficult for older workers to fulfil. It could be so especially in situations where a team is dependent on each individual worker's performance. Feelings of being an "outsider" could then easily develop, with negative effects on self-esteem, wellbeing and secondarily also on health. It was shown that homogenous senior work teams with somewhat reduced demands made senior workers feel "at home" and eventually catch up both in tempo and quality.

It has previously been underlined that many actions for improving health and the working conditions in order to enhance sustainable working capacity should start early in life and possibly comprise all age categories at work [15]. It is often non-optimal, and sometimes too late, to start health promoting activities close to retirement, when disorder-processes perhaps already have progressed (too) far. Such activities should probably have different profiles in different age groups. All age groups should be engaged in health promoting activities (e.g. physical training). All should have optimal working environment (e.g. ergonomics) including psychosocial conditions. Younger workers could perhaps learn good working techniques and practices from their senior mentors. Younger workers could on the other hand forward their fresher knowledge to the more aged in the team. Education and training should be life long and reflect the needs in different phases of the working career. Working hours should reflect the needs and the capacity at different phases of life. Mothers and fathers of young children should have possibilities to reductions in working hours in order to take care of the new generation. Older workers should also have possibilities for reduced working hours as a form of "phasing out" from ordinary work life. Every one should have discussions with

their superior regarding these issues, ending in a "career plan" that is evaluated and revised at regular intervals.

Participatory activities where both generations could meet and discuss and a not too hasty time-schedule could have a potentiality to over-bridge such age-group conflicts and make younger generations aware of the relevance of work and age also for themselves.

Change of focus from aging workers to a life phase orientation illustrates how aging policies may inspire the general personnel policy in companies.

Experiences from the different examples in this project stresses the importance of flexibility when designing actions to improve the working conditions and capacity among aging workers. Aging is also a very individual process. Differences between different human capacities tend to increase with age [15, 17]. People become more different when they are older. This should reflect activities related to aging workers. Homogenous or age-integrated teams were discussed above. Many of the cases introduced flexible working hours and retirement age (cases 4, 7, 10, 13). Individual career planning was another form of flexibility that was tried (cases 7, 8, 9, 10, 13).

Recommendations to employers and others acting for aging workers

Based on the reported case studies, the following recommendations could be given to those who plan activities in order to develop their aging worker policies:

- use facts about aging and work, avoid myths
- strive for flexibility regarding choice of actions
- strive for individually flexible actions as a complement to general actions
- optimise actions related both to workers, work itself and policy/organisational aspects
- secure support from management and supervisors
- secure motivation from employees
- avoid age group conflicts
- consider to include all ages, stressing different actions for different age-groups
- every one should have a "career plan" discussed with regular intervals
- be prepared that these processes may take time

Recommendations for further studies of good practice for aging workers

The issues of aging workers have been put on the agenda during the last decades. Many studies of age related problems have been reported, including collections of cases of good practice. There are, however, aspects still not very much attended to. One of them is the specific conditions and possibilities in small enterprises. Most employees work in small enterprises, with typically less than ten employees. What are the specific problems related to aging workers in small companies? What does good practice look like in small companies?

Another neglected factor is gender aspects among aging workers. Are the problems the same among female and male aging workers? Are optimal solutions the same for both genders?

Future studies should also give more focus on evaluation of the process and long-term follow-up of the actions undertaken. Did the actions taken survive ?

Another question for evaluation is how case studies like these are used in practice.

Summary

Good practice in integrating aging workers Examples from some European countries

Allan Toomingas, MD PhD

Åsa Kilbom, MD PhD professor

The population is aging in many countries, including in Europe. There is also a decline in the mean exit age in the work force. The costs for early retirements have increased. There are thus good reasons for the society as a whole but also for the employer and the unions to stimulate and facilitate aging workers to remain in the workforce and to contribute with their capacities in the work-life. The reality has shown however, that the actions for such stimulation and facilitation are insufficient.

One way of stimulating employers to employ and retain aging workers would be to give examples from the working life of successful attempts to engage and develop the capacities of aging workers. The aim of this study was to collect such case studies from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Thirteen examples of good practice were collected both from private enterprises and state/community owned organisations.

Age related problems at the different companies or organisations were of differing qualities. Most problems were related to consequences of the aging process per se but also to changes in the working conditions and methods, or to new demands on workers e.g. for flexibility, extended knowledge and polyvalence.

The actions that were described could be separated into those concerning eg:

- health monitoring and medical treatment/rehabilitation or physical training
- career planning
- education or mental training for flexibility, personal growth, creativity
- improvements of equipment, environment or methods
- working hours (reduced, more flexible)
- retirement policy (part time work, phasing out, flexibility regarding age)
- reduced or improved conditions for shift-work
- mentorship
- specific teams for senior workers
- specific recruitment of senior workers

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The issues of aging workers have been put on the agenda during the last decades. Many studies of age related problems have been reported, including collections of cases of good practice. There are however aspects still not very much attended to. One of them is the specific conditions and possibilities in small enterprises. What are the specific problems related to aging workers in small companies? How does good practice look like in small companies?

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Future studies should also give more focus on evaluation of the process and long-term follow-up of the actions undertaken.

Sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)

Lyckade exempel att integrera äldre arbetstagare i arbetslivet Exempel från några europeiska länder

Allan Toomingas, MD PhD

Åsa Kilbom, MD PhD professor

Befolkningens ålderssammansättning går mot högre åldrar i många länder, inklusive i europa. Många utträder ur arbetslivet långt före ordinarie pensionsålder. Kostnaderna för förtidspensioner har ökat. Det finns därför goda skäl för samhället i stort och även för arbetsmarknadens parter, arbetsgivare och den enskilde individen att underlätta för äldre arbetstagare att kvarstå i arbetslivet och där bidra med sina förmågor till samhällsverksamheten. Verkligheten har emellertid visat att sådan underlättande stimulans varit otillräcklig i de flesta fall.

Ett sätt att stimulera arbetsgivare att anställa och behålla äldre arbetstagare vore att beskriva exempel från arbetslivet där man lyckats nyttja och utveckla äldre arbetstagares kapaciteter. I denna rapport beskriv några sådana lyckade exempel från Sverige, Finland, Danmark, Norge samt Nederländerna. Tretton exempel har insamlats från både privat och offentlig verksamhet.

Ålderrelaterade problem i de olika företagen och organisationerna var av varierande karaktär. De flesta problemen var kopplade till konsekvenser av åldrandet i sig, men även till förändringar i arbetsförhållandena och metoderna eller till nya krav på arbetstagarna, tex på flexibilitet, nya kunskaper och mångsidighet.

De åtgärder som beskrivs kan indelas i sådana som berör:

- hälsokontroller, medicinsk behandling eller fysisk träning
- karriärsplanering
- utbildning eller mental träning för ökad flexibilitet, kreativitet och personlig utveckling
- förbättringar i utrustning, arbetsmiljö eller arbetsmetoder
- arbetstider (minskade eller mer flexibla)
- pensions policy (deltidsarbete, nedtrappning och flexibilitet angående ålder)
- minskat skiftarbete eller förbättrade förhållanden
- mentorskap
- speciella senior team
- specifik rekrytering av seniora arbetstagare

Baserat på erfarenheterna från de beskrivna fallen kan man ge följande rekommendationer till arbetsgivare och andra som verkar för äldre arbetstagare:

- bygg på fakta om åldrande och arbete, ta håll på myterna
- sträva efter flexibilitet rörande valet av åtgärder
- sträva efter individuell flexibilitet som komplement till generella åtgärder
- optimera balansen mellan åtgärder som omfattar den enskilde arbetstagaren, arbetet i sig samt policy och organisatoriska aspekter
- säkerställ stöd från ledning och arbetsledare
- säkerställ arbetstagarnas motivation för att delta

- undvik konflikter mellan ålderskategorier
- överväg att inkludera alla åldersgrupper, med betoning på olika åtgärder för olika åldersgrupper
- varje person bör ha en "karriärplan" som tas upp till omprövning med jämna mellanrum
- var beredd på att processerna kan ta tid.

Äldre frågor inom arbetslivet har fått ökad uppmärksamhet under det senaste decenniet. Många studier om äldre i arbetslivet har rapporterats. Det finns emellertid många problem kvar att belysa. En sådan är de specifika förhållandena på små företag. Hur ser de goda lösningarna ut för sådana företag? En annan mindre uppmärksam fråga är gender aspekter på äldre arbetskraft. Ser problematiken ut likadant för kvinnor som för män? Är optimala lösningar desamma för bägge könen. Framtida studier bör även i högre grad betona utvärdering av processen samt göra längre uppföljningar av effekterna än hittills kunnat göras.

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Case 1**Ways to keep older people at work - A report from Swedish Steel, Borlänge**

Bertil Grönqvist, Former Chief Medical Officer

CONTEXT

SSAB Tunnplåt (SSAB Strip Products) is part of Swedish Steel (SSAB) and consists of two steel works located in Luleå and Borlänge. This report describes some efforts at the Borlänge plant to keep older employees in good health and, if possible, in work up to the regular retirement age of 65. At present (1998) this plant has about 2500 employees and produces steel sheets and coils.

In the steel industry with all its environmental problems like heat, noise, vibration, dust, and fumes, the health of the employees has always been of great interest.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

Our focusing on the older part of the workforce, who of course were subjected to the general infirmities of old age like muscular-skeletal and cardio-vascular disorders, started at least 15 years ago. At that time Swedish steel industry was going through extensive structural transformations. In 1982 over 300 workers at the Borlänge plant were offered early retirement with a pension when they were 58 years old or older. The acceptance of the offer was at the worker's own free will. Ten of them refused to retire because they wanted to keep on working. All the others accepted and are included in the following study.

Some questions were raised on what would happen to the physical and mental health of these retired workers when they stopped working prematurely. No earlier scientific reports on this subject could be found. In co-operation with the Department of Family Medicine at Uppsala University we carried out a detailed study of the physical and mental health of the retired workers two years after retirement. As a control group we used the 300 oldest workers still working.

We were surprised at the result which revealed that the early retired workers had much better physical and mental health than those still working even though the retired workers were on an average six years older than those in the control group.

We now focused our attention on how to improve the health of older workers. It was not acceptable that those still at work had so much poorer health than the retired workers who were six years older. This triggered a number of steps to improve the health of the employees with the focus on the older workers.

With age a lot of physiological functions change for the worse, e.g. vision - the need for more light and deteriorating near point sight -, hearing, muscular strength, general fitness, and ability to work shifts. On the other hand a lot of mental abilities are improved such as responsibility, self-esteem, active interest in work, and experience.

Improvements of work environment and individual health check-ups.

We started with improving the working environment in many ways with special consideration for older employees. We improved the lighting at the workplaces, investigated near sight and gave spectacles to employees who needed it for special work, e.g. work at display units. We equipped conference rooms with hearing loops for the hearing impaired and we facilitated and sometimes rebuilt ergonomically unsuitable working places. Special devices for packaging steel coils and sheets as well as for driving overhead cranes were introduced. These measures were combined with rotation on several different kinds of work to avoid overstraining the muscles, joints, and ligaments. To this we added individual health check-ups and rehabilitation specially aimed at cardiovascular risk factors and musculoskeletal disorders. But we also discovered several other ailments or disorders like high blood pressure, diabetes type II, overweight, bad physical fitness etc. To smokers we explained the medical consequences of smoking and helped curing them of their habit. All this led to an improvement in the general health of workers.

Age dependent ability for shift work.

It is known that older people have difficulties in working shifts and recently there have been several papers published focusing on this problem.

In shift work older workers seem to adapt their metabolism and melatonin secretion *in an inferior way* compared to younger people. At the beginning of the 90's an extensive discussion started at SSAB about the existing shift schedules, e.g. long periods with night shifts. (Each shift at SSAB is 8 hours long). The workers, especially the old ones, were very unhappy with these shift schedules. The Occupational Health Service had several meetings with groups of workers and employers and explained the basic medical principles of a sound shift schedule. Among these were clock-wise rotating shifts, i.e. morning shifts, afternoon shifts, and night shifts, in that succession. Each shift period should not comprise more than a few days, for instance two or three days only. Then you could have one or several days off, before you go on to the next period, e.g. a few afternoon shifts followed by one or several days off before the period with a few night shifts which should be followed by three or more days off.

The younger workers who generally have no difficulty working in shifts prefer doing so with long periods of shift at the same part of the day. This means that they can have long periods of time off, especially after their night shift period. This period off from work can be spent building or working on their own houses, practising their hobbies, taking occasional extra jobs, etc. The older workers, on the other hand, often prefer few night's shifts in succession, although this encroaches on their former long periods of time off.

These differences in attitude made it important to create an understanding between the age groups especially by making the younger workers understand the biological differences between young and old workers and by informing them about the medical problems that they would face in the future.

Company and union initiatives.

Subsequently the unions and the workers introduced several working teams aiming at constructing a good shift schedule taking into special consideration the older workers. Three different schedules were framed based on the basic medical principles mentioned above that the shift periods with work on the same part of the day should be short. But the union and the company would not decide which of these schedules was to be brought into action. So the employer and the unions agreed to a full-scale trial. From April 1996 to January 1998 about 1000 workers tried out these three different shift schedules. In November 1997 we accomplished an extensive study of which schedule was best for the health and well being of the workers. This was done through a questionnaire made in co-operation with the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Uppsala University. The scientific evaluation was followed by a decision-making vote among the workers. About 70% of the votes were cast for the schedule that proved to be the best one according to the scientific evaluation, and from February 1998 all workers use this type of shift schedule.

This process towards a good shift schedule is quite unique, both as regards its size and its democratic design. I do not give particulars about the structure of the shift schedule that was introduced at SSAB. The amount of days off or at work on different shifts mentioned above must be regarded as theoretical only. What must be stressed, however, is the great importance of not neglecting the democratic though laborious process towards an appropriate shift schedule taking into account the basic medical principles as well as the wish of the workforce.

FURTHER - WHAT HAS TO BE DONE?

The ergonomic optimisation of the places of work, individual health service, and good shift schedules is not enough to keep all the older employees at work up to regular retirement age. One of the most important measures was shown to be the option of reduction in the working hours for older employees, at least from the age of 58.

The social insurance's, collective as well as local and individual agreements and working rules must be designed to allow part-time and half time work for shift workers. In the 1980's the Swedish National Health Insurance for instance stated that when half time sick-listed you had to work four hours a day. But the practical consequences of this and the prevailing set of rules on the labour market made it impossible for shift workers to be half time sick-listed. There was also some reluctance among employers to organise work to allow half-time work. But with time state regulations have grown more flexible and the attitude of the company has softened. Many shift-workers who a few years ago would have been full-time sick-listed now for example work full-time one or two days, are then free from work one or two days etc, i.e. are only half-time sick-listed. This has proved a good way of organising work for many older employees and given them the opportunity to work up to regular retirement age.

COMMENTS

One of the most important steps to allow older people to work up to their regular retirement age is to organise work so as to permit part-time and half-time work and - for shift workers - to try to design a shift schedule that takes into account the wishes of the workers as well as the basic medical principals. Social insurance, state regulations, and

central and local agreements must also be adapted to allow that type of work. And a pedagogical problem must not be neglected - to make the younger workers understand the bio-logical differences between themselves and the older workers and to make them realise that they will also face medical problems in the future.

The "Older worker training" Project at the Sydkraft Group

Lage Björnsström, project leader, Sydkraft

CONTEXT

The Sydkraft Group is organised into four areas of activities - Electricity, Gas, Heat, and Services - which together make Sydkraft into a complete energy group with more than 6,000 employees. Within the group, there are around 60 active companies, whereof around 30 have their own staff who are involved in the sale, distribution and production of electricity, natural gas, gasohol, heat, solid fuels, information technology, contract work, service and maintenance, network services and telecommunications and consultation services.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

Sydkraft is generally characterised by a high age structure and the most noteworthy is that of service-fitters. As well as the problems involving age, there are severe musculoskeletal problems within this work group. An example from one of the subsidiaries shows that 66 % of fitters are over 45 years, and in 5 and 10 years this figure will increase to 76 % and 88 %, respectively. Apart from this, the over 55 group will of course increase, so that in 10 years, 56 % of all fitters will be over 55 years. In this particular company, there are also around 50 fitters with physical limitations for certain work tasks.

The possibilities of re-assignment within the company are very limited.

New technology with respect to network operations and technical aids for installation work will also put new demands on training. This involves a great deal of work since not everyone has the desire or ability to learn new technologies, or change at all when facing changing work conditions.

Based on the above, a corporate project started in 1996 with the following tasks:

- to identify the implications of the current situation with regard to physical limitations and cases for rehabilitation
- to develop proposals for measures such as health care programs and long term planning for groups of older fitters.
- to implement and follow up rehabilitation measures.

PROCESS AND ACTORS

The project was begun by cataloguing the situation in five subsidiaries with respect to age structure and physical limitations for various work tasks.

A three-day seminar of ideas was held for 15 older fitters, of whom most had some kind of health problem.

The purpose of the seminar was to discuss how one can make use of the knowledge and work life experience of the older workers, suitable work tasks when "you grow older" and how to maintain good health, or regain health when you have been suffering from ill health.

Many good ideas were put forward during the seminar.

The steering committee for the project "Older Worker Training" decided that three of the suggestions from the seminar participants should be further developed as sub-projects, namely rehabilitation, creativity, and health training.

The Rehabilitation Project

Seventeen fitters participated in the Rehabilitation Project. The project involved cataloguing ill health, not just to note the symptoms, but to discover the reason behind them. Concrete measures to improve health were also discussed with the fitters.

Three external companies active in the area of rehabilitation were given the task of implementing the project.

After the implementation of measures such as adapting tools, vehicles, work clothes, and initiating suitable training programs, all the fitters are back at work full time. Many still occasionally experience pain in their limbs, but they now have insights into how to prevent the injuries from becoming worse.

The Creativity Project

Five younger and five older fitters participated in the Creativity Project. The purpose of this project was to prevent ill health and create a pleasant working environment through promotion of creativity and inventiveness.

We worked on the following factors:

- to increase self-confidence
- to provide support and encouragement
- to break routine thinking
- attitudes and values
- to identify obstacles and point to opportunities
- creativity and inventiveness training
- how creativity is rewarded
- to find channels to disseminate new ideas and suggestions among groups of fitters.

The working method was based on:

- traditional knowledge of how one learns through experience, exchange of thoughts, and tolerance of mistakes.
- making room for reflection and analysis of the experiences one has gained.
- being allowed to act as consultant for each other.
- negative criticism and "know it all" attitudes are banned.
- attempting to create a climate of trust where one encourages and supports each other, which leads to increased self-confidence and involvement both in projects and in the day-to-day work situation.

The following conclusions could be drawn from the creativity project:

- that the degree of creativity and scope of a project is not of decisive importance, but the insights and knowledge one acquires about one self and the organisation is at least as important.
- that there is a great need among fitters to be recognised and to be encouraged.

- that the mixing of workers of different age was extremely enriching, where the young represent enthusiasm and new thinking, and the older workers have invaluable knowledge and experience.
- that the enthusiasm of the young workers caused a heightening of the activities, interest and power to act among the older workers.
- that it is important to keep the flame alive through further efforts of a similar kind when newly awakened inventiveness and active energy otherwise risk dying for lack of nourishment.

The Health training project

The health training project lasted one year and had 13 participants. Most of the participants were over 50 years old and suffered from ill health. The project was started in September 1997 and ended in September 1998. The purpose was to create knowledge among the participants about the importance of their life styles to their health, for example, the importance of diet, alcohol, tobacco, exercise, medications, and negative and positive thoughts.

Each week during the entire year, a light form of physical training was carried out in a heated pool, or in a gym. The purpose was to achieve greater agility and strength in the limbs, and also to increase calorie consumption since most of the participants suffered from excess weight.

Attendance at all classes was almost 100 %. The reason was "peer pressure" and positive experiences on the mental and physical level.

At the start of the project, the participants underwent a fitness test and a medical examination. After six months, new tests and examinations were performed. All the participants had improved almost all their test results.

COMMENTS

The staff of fitters is a gratifying group to work with. They are not accustomed to having any attention paid to their situation.

It is important that the supervisors of the participants are in agreement with why the project is implemented, and that they provide support to the participant when he returns to his regular environment. Herein lie perhaps some of the greatest difficulties for the implementation of the project. Supervisors have been informed and influenced through "internal marketing" through various media, e.g. Intranets, newsletters, and working environment training.

The trade union has provided good support, largely due to the fact that a union representative was part of the steering committee and that he was used as a "sounding board" for ideas during the period.

A high work potential is found among fitters, one that is not utilised due to shortcomings among the management, which in turn are caused by fears that have tended to increase during the last few years.

An important task for a successful company will be to create insights among the co-workers about how they can preserve good health or regain health if they are suffering from ill health.

It is important to have an open climate where values are discussed, and that the company management clarifies its values to employees, customers, owners, suppliers, in other words everyone that they have any contact with.

Case 3

Older workers in production – senior work teams at Volvo

Robert Lundgren, VOLVO PASSENGER CARS INC. - Volvo Torslanda Plant

CONTEXT

The Volvo Torslanda Plant manufactures, paints, and assembles the passenger cars Volvo S70 and S80. Within the Volvo Torslanda Plant's Final Assembly, production takes place on two separate assembly lines where the new work places for seniors are also found.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

In production, a time study instrument called MTM is used. In an agreement between the company and the local union (Metal), the production rate has been determined to be 111% (= regular production rate). This means that each employee is expected to perform at an activity level that is 11% above what is normal for the human body. It can be added that what is normal is a male assembly worker between the ages of 20 and 30. As workers aged, changes occurred in the workplace and new co-workers arrived, the number of sick leaves increased. During rehabilitation to return to the workplace, individual workers described their problems as insurmountable.

We know that muscle capacity decreases throughout a person's working years by an average of 30%. In other words, what is an easy task for a 25-year old is more difficult for a 50-year old. Of course, we must add issues such as feelings of being left out, less education, unfulfilled expectations ("lighter/easier work"), and greater difficulty learning new things.

The consequences were that workers were forced out of their jobs and this occurred primarily through sick leaves (for those who could not find other work). The number of employees who did not contribute to production grew, and there were insufficient opportunities for light work available outside production.

Company initiatives to preserve older worker capacity

The company has no special policy for older workers. The policy is rather an expression of the company's desire to employ staff taking into consideration sex and age, in order to reduce the development of any particular minority in the work place. The personnel policy of the plant establishes that "a work climate is to be built where each co-worker can feel satisfied and be stimulated to contribute actively to our development."

We know that all people are not alike, do not have the same ambitions, values, or goals for their work. We also know that people can grow with the right type of work and in the right type of organisation, just as the wrong type of work and the wrong organisation/team can end with sick leave. Creating content and introducing a rapid rate of change may be seen as positive steps by a large portion of the work force, while for a smaller portion this may be viewed as a threat/stress factor. We know that human beings often have a reduced need for change as they age.

Process and actors

Initiatives step by step

The idea of senior work teams developed several years earlier when the project leader was given the task of rehabilitating workers on long term sick leave so that they could return to the work place. After about a year with not very good results from this rehabilitation, the situation was analysed and the idea for this project was born.

Experiments were carried out under simplified conditions, but they had to be suspended. The manager in charge was subject to negative pressure from his superior and from colleagues. Afterwards, two facts of importance were identified for this negative development: 1) the idea was not sufficiently entrenched within the management of the company; 2) we had surplus staff in production.

Two years after a hiring freeze there was an over-all surplus of staff but a shortage in the production departments. At this stage, something radical had to be done. No new people could be hired until we had handled the surplus in a positive manner.

A decision was made by the company management to introduce senior work teams.

Discussions took place between the parties involved regarding:

- which individuals should be recruited to the senior work teams
- recruitment of team leaders
- a policy for seniors, with respect to recruitment, work tasks and salary conditions
- work tasks for staff replaced by seniors
- introduction and training of seniors.

The roles of the participants in the various stages

An analysis was done of the entire situation and a proposal for senior work teams was presented by the project leader. The final assembly manager issued an order that surplus workers were to be included in senior work teams as per the proposal. The appointed product plant manager negotiated with the trade union, co-ordinated, appointed leaders for the senior work teams and followed up on the activities. The project leader recruited staff, developed/followed up and supported the activities. The top safety ombudsman contributed to the development of the work place, the activity and to the recruitment of staff. Discussions took place between the human resources department, production, company health care, and trade union representatives.

Company activities/initiatives

For older individuals with various types of work impediments and individuals on sick leave there are now a number of different alternatives available:

- Component Shop
- Car Assembly Resource Team
- Senior Work Teams

In order to get an opportunity to work in the Component Shop, in a Car Assembly Resource Team and in Senior Work Teams, long and loyal service (15 - 25 years) is required, or documented medical reasons.

Since good worker relations is the single most important incentive for an individual's happiness in a work place, it is important to create a homogenous work place/group for all employees.

The Component Shop

In 1992, the Assembly Plant made efforts to develop preparatory work tasks and increase the status for the preparatory assembly workers. The work began by constructing a Component Shop in the proximity of the Assembly Plant. The work is done while sitting and can be planned and organised by the assembler to a greater degree than work on the assembly line.

This would be a work place where work rotation, responsibility and involvement would be the guiding star for all employees. The following would be done away with: name calling, low status, monotonous work tasks.

Since its start in 1992, the Component Shop has grown so that in October 1994 it had more than 200 employees. The work consists primarily of ordering material, pre-assembly, quality control and operating forklifts. The demands of the job and the maximum work requirement are as high as for the assembly line. Via a signalling system, assemblers on the line announce when they require new material and then the work team in the Component Shop has only 10 minutes to deliver, since we work according to the principle "just-in-time."

Car Assembly Resource Team

When it became obvious to the Assembly Plant that the Component Shop could not absorb all loyal long-service employees that existed, the Car Assembly Resource Team was started and it now has over 200 employees. The resource group is an organisation whose task it is to provide surplus older staff with meaningful employment in the form of service work. In step with the plant's efforts towards an efficient structural change with emphasis on the core process and elimination of most of what the car buyer does not pay for, a number of groups within the plant have become superfluous. Since its start in August 1992, the resource group has absorbed work that was previously done by outside companies. Work such as cleaning, painting, light office construction, pallet stand construction and all types of work that was previously done by consultants.

Senior Work Teams

A Senior Work Team consists of 10 - 15 individuals with the same rights and duties as any other work team, but not with the same production demands. It was estimated that the assemblers who were left without work tasks for one reason or another (age or medical reasons), should be able manage about 75 % of the regular work requirement. We also estimated that the work rate itself is not of crucial importance to each individual. One must not forget the importance of a homogenous work team.

Senior Work Teams were created as a result of the rehabilitation program, when we realised how difficult it is to rehabilitate people to return to the same job that caused the sick leave.

At first, "seniors" were recruited primarily from the Car Assembly Resource Team. They are now more used to offer rehabilitated individuals a work place. Senior Work Teams are also gradually being used more to provide jobs as a preventive measure to

individuals who would otherwise have gone on sick leave. We have always had individuals who for various reasons no longer can carry out their work. We will also always in the future have staff arriving at the stage when they no longer can do their work in a fully satisfactory manner. We would be fooling ourselves if we believed that we could continue to push these "problems" onto somebody else and still remain credible.

Since the customer pays for the product and for nothing else, we ought to make sure that the number of productive people is greater than the number of non-productive, and not increase the non-productive portion to the detriment of hiring new staff. The purpose is to ensure a dignified work place on the production line for staff with work impediments, or rather: personnel with reduced work capacity.

In other words, it is important not to specifically separate this group from the core activities, regardless of whether it is in production or in another department.

Recruitment takes place mainly within the same organisation (e.g. product shop) and it must be personnel that cannot manage a full workload for documented medical reasons or purely due to age.

Within each "senior area," an autonomic car assembly team (responsible for assembly, quality and economy) is created, with the same objectives and goals as any other work place, but with the difference that their combined maximum work output is measured according to a lower requirement, e.g. 75 %, compared to the regular work requirement.

Health care

In our efforts to reduce ill health among our co-workers, we have created a number of systems and routines. Company health services work closely together with these work places and deal with issues of ill health. We routinely work to improve both the physical and the mental and social work environments. We have created a rehabilitation routine and various rehabilitation programs. As a tool for early discovery of ill health, we have introduced employee welfare rounds. We have formalised the role of fellow worker support, which we hope will reduce ill health.

Education and training of older workers

The company does not have a specific program for older workers, but each worker together with his/her supervisor designs his/her own development plan with various activities.

Outcome - project results

Today, we have several senior teams with over 50 individuals who previously did not do any productive work, but who at best cleaned up or helped out with various tasks that did not contribute anything to the product. Naturally, it is costlier for the production department to have 50 individuals instead of 35-40 who perform a full work load. But over-all for the company it is even more expensive to let 50 "seniors" stand "outside." Consequently, what we save here is not having to absorb the cost of a new employee, not having to train 35-40 individuals, and not leaving 50 seniors outside.

Today, we are in the process of creating a routine so that in the future we can offer individuals with reduced work capacity the opportunity to continue in production in a "senior team." We recently started a new production line for the new model S80 and

already from the start we planned special work places for personnel with reduced work capacity. The number of employees will therefore increase in these work places.

Our next step is to foster an attitude, a mentality where nobody is allowed to be discarded, to have to be on disability pension, not even to have to go on sick leave - "the principle of zero faults." An example of this is the myth that it is hardly possible to rehabilitate a person who has been absent for more than two years. In 80 % of cases this is caused by an incorrect life style and difficulties in handling, processing and experiencing the meaning of one's life and work. This is what we often call psycho-social "illness." Therefore, we work on extending/expanding rehabilitation and education activities. In the rehabilitation shop of the assembly plant, a 35-year old immigrant woman who had been on long-term sick leave for nine years was rehabilitated back to the line. A 50-year old woman, who had been on sick leave for seven years, was also rehabilitated back to the assembly line. Both individuals were expected by those around them to be pensioned off. Both of them succeeded because the company had created unconventional opportunities - work places for seniors.

When we began our work with senior work teams at the end of 1993, the work requirement rate was 75 % of the regular requirement, but now we have a work production rate that is closer to the production average. This naturally gives rise to one thought: *The importance of working in a homogenous work team and of not being left out.*

EVALUATION

After six months (spring 1994), 30 individuals were in assembly work on the production line in senior teams. Attendance was better than anywhere else for the same age category in final assembly. Costs were reduced by about SEK 10 million. The quality of the production work was above target. After another six months, a new work team started on the second production line and the total number of individuals was then 50.

Today in 1998, these individuals, apart from those who left the company for normal reasons (pension, etc.), are still with us and have absorbed extra work, so called additional tasks.

COMMENTS

To discover that one can no longer keep up (negative stress) causes pain in the back, neck, shoulders, arms, wrists and headaches. One day the body sends out a message: STOP, and the individual then goes to see a doctor to get help. When has a doctor put a patient on sick leave due to age? No, what will happen now is that more and more often, talk will be about pain in various parts of the body. Yes, the symptoms are pain, but the cause of the pain often does not revolve around what is primary but around secondary matters, and the result is extensive medical examinations and unsuccessful rehabilitation. Of course, the reason is not just that our muscle capacity is reduced with age, but there are also elements of being left out, not being able to meet expectations. Since the assembly tasks on the line are mostly performed by younger men in their 20's or 30's, it is also easy for these men, either consciously or subconsciously, to create a norm for the entire work place.

Furthermore, the assembly plant with its lines is not the kind of work place where one stays during one's entire working life. Those individuals who remain there may feel inadequate for "having missed the boat" - "I'm no good for anything else, can't advance," etc. An impression is that corresponding personnel in countries like Belgium and France are not in the same situation as in Sweden. The difference lies in work culture and work values. What we mostly consider a springboard (assembler on the line) towards development for other jobs within the company, is seen by assemblers in Belgium and France as the final goal. We have, and will surely always have, individuals who are perfectly happy where they are and who also do perfect assembly work, individuals who do not have the ambition to have a career, but who are dutiful and loyal towards their work place.

Many of these individuals who are now in rehabilitation have a great need to justify themselves. These are people who have developed aches and pains in their bodies for some reason they cannot understand, since they have always thought of themselves as healthy. But when these individuals end up with work tasks performed together with others who are compatible with them (age, years of employment and background), then these pains often disappear. It has been confirmed, that the work environment and in particular the work climate in a department play very important roles for the individual.

It does not really matter very much what you do. The most important thing is not to feel like an outsider, to be seen and recognised by co-workers, supervisors and relatives.

Certainly, negative effects will occur if we do not see and understand people's needs. Certainly, sick leaves will increase if there is no motivation, if expectations are not met. Certainly, older people are less likely than younger people to want to change, to want to learn new things. But, we can observe that this is absolutely not true for those departments/organisations that have understood that they must recognise human needs. In a work team that is homogenous, or where humility and understanding exist, all are allowed to work regardless of sex, age or nationality.

At NEDCAR in Born, Holland, the same phenomenon occurred as what we see in our senior departments. They had created a work team with personnel who had been made superfluous on the assembly line, personnel who for some reason no longer could keep up. They were brought together into one unit to do preparatory work tasks. Since these were advanced work tasks, they were not expected to accomplish much more than 50%. But this group became such a close-knit group and also constituted a homogenous work team (according to their background), and in time productivity there also improved, so that it later reached close to 90%.

Examples of similar senior team ideas are found in the education system, where in some places technical and computer training is arranged for girls only.

Case 4

Project “45+” at the Thorax Centre of Uppsala University Hospital

Margareta Åkerstedt, clinical supervisor, Uppsala University Hospital

CONTEXT

The University Hospital is both a university hospital and the county hospital for Uppsala County. The hospital has 10 divisions and 16 clinics. In 1995, the number of employees was around 8,000 individuals, whereof around 800 were physicians, 5,600 other health care professionals, and 1,600 other employees. The average age was around 41 years.

Project “45+” was carried out at the Thorax Centre, which is representative of the entire hospital with its 685 employees, whereof 92 were physicians, 544 health care professionals, and 49 other employees. It has the following departments and units: Anaesthesia and Surgery, Intensive Care Unit, ward units, out-patient clinics, laboratories, clerical offices, and administration.

WHY IS AGING AN ISSUE

The average age of the employees is high. In 1995 it was 41.3 years and will in 2010 be 55 years. Many exits due to retirement mean that valuable experience and knowledge disappear from the work place. The age composition in the organisation is already creating problems. Older physicians and health care professionals cannot endure working long shifts, being on call, late nights, and early mornings. The purpose of the project is “to increase preparedness in the face of future demands for changes in management, organisation and work routines, and to contribute to a good working environment and the development of employees who are 45 years of age or older.”

By examining, for example, the age breakdown one wants to arrive at changes that are necessary in order for the Thorax Centre and the hospital to be able to provide continuity in the supply of trained professionals. The target group for the project was all employees at the Thorax Centre who were 45 years or older, i.e. 213 individuals out of a total of 685 employees.

WHAT DO WORKERS ABOVE 45 HAVE IN COMMON?

The group “older individuals” is not uniform. Variations are great. Age explains only a limited number of differences in ability and interests. The differences are rather the result of the varying life and work conditions of the people. It is not possible to point to a general deterioration with increased age up to the age of retirement. There are many negative age myths about older people. They are often described as a lost generation when it comes to learning and mastering new techniques and information technology, since they were not raised with computers, computer games and the Internet like the young generation is. However, middle aged and older individuals can learn and develop during their entire working life. It is true, that older people often lack basic knowledge and their previous practice and school education may be inferior. This can mean that it will take them longer to learn new things. According to our impression, the most successful methods are based on an individual approach and active participation from the participants. For older people, the possibilities for discussions and the relevance to

the subjects own previous experiences are especially important. This means that the training can take more time.

A teaching organisation should make use of the entire staff's potential for knowledge and experience. The ability of a single individual to grow is the result of many interacting factors, such as basic theoretical education, previous professional experience, motivation, degree of specialisation, and personality.

The need for life long learning and ongoing improvement of knowledge has been emphasised for a long time. In order to achieve life long learning, it is important that the daily work is planned and leaves room for informal thinking. This will be facilitated by the opportunities for the employees to influence their work and communications. However, informal learning provides limited specific qualifications, so that informal and formal learning should be combined. Education should be clearly individualised, with much room left for each individual to affect its content.

When it comes to health, preventive efforts are the most rewarding. Such preventive work should be done with a broad life time perspective and should include advice both for work and leisure time. It is also necessary to apply a life time perspective on the consequences of working conditions. The health of the employees is an important factor for productivity. Simple measures can improve the work organisation and the ergonomics at the work place.

The organisation can do much by stimulating good dietary and exercise habits. Each individual's own responsibility for daily habits, such as choice of means of travelling to work and choice of hobbies can create a basis for good health and function for a long time ahead.

PROCESS AND ACTORS

The project organisation included the following groups:

- steering group
- management group at Thorax Centre
- union group
- idea group - this was the first working group. It was composed of all categories of professionals within the Thorax Centre. The participants were 45 or older.
- health group - consisting of personnel from the Thorax Centre, the Health Centre, County Health, and from the Centre for Care Research.
- scheduling Group - consisting of personnel from the Thorax Centre who had shown a particular interest in scheduling issues, and also supervisors.
- training and Education Group – consisting of personnel within the Thorax Centre who work with educational issues, as well as the project leader.

Methods

Project “45+” began in 1995. Methods that were used in the project were questionnaires, interviews, and discussions in the places of work. The groups each developed a questionnaire, had brainstorming sessions, did literature studies and listened to lectures, wrote reports and made plans for action. Those interviewed were fellow employees.

A questionnaire was sent to 213 individuals in the Thorax Division who were 45 years or older. The response, which was anonymous, was 84% (whereof 77% were women). Almost all respondents had worked for more than 11 years in the care system, and 70% had worked more than 20 years. The purpose was to get as many ideas and suggestions as possible. For this reason, space was left at the end of the questionnaire for individual comments.

When compiling the responses to the questionnaire, it was noted that certain questions needed additional information. Therefore, physicians interviewed physicians, nurses interviewed nurses, etc.

The results of the questionnaire and the interviews

The following is a selection of responses to the questionnaire and from the interviews that were most important for the continued efforts.

Training and Education

To improve training and education by crossing the boundaries between clinics worried many. The physicians felt that it cannot be done due to the limits of each speciality. The physiology assistants are too specialised. Among nurses and nursing assistants there is a certain amount of interest, even if most of them felt that they had found their place in the care system and function most efficiently where they are. Some felt that it could create stress to be placed in different departments and get the feeling of not belonging anywhere. Such matters can affect work negatively.

In order to make good use of the knowledge among older individuals that comes from a familiarity with work, mentoring was suggested: Younger employed staff would have a mentor to turn to for an extended period of time.

Educational development also provides a break and prevents burnout.

Working environment, health versus stress

Around 80% indicated ever-increasing stress in their daily work. This is not only due to an increased workload and faster work tempo. People feel uncertainty about their employment because so many have been laid off. New and more work tasks have been added. Unclear work tasks and unclear objectives for the work and the clinic also often create stress. Some have a feeling of not being adequate, not least when it comes to taking care of patients in a satisfying manner, and they feel bad when they cannot affect their work situation.

The increase in work tempo and the stressful working environment, the general situation of uncertainty, and increased individual competition lead to an increase in conflicts, both within each individual professional group and between various groups of professionals. There is too little time for communication. Communication is a prerequisite for the co-operation that is required by the current work situation. Around 50% did not exercise during their free time, but half of them would do exercise if they could do it during their working hours. Some felt that they did not have the energy to exercise, and that the one hour allotted per week for such activities, work

permitting, was felt to be a further stress factor. If they took advantage of this hour, this would increase the workload of their colleagues.

Work and work hours

Only 3% wanted to work evenings or weekends. More than one quarter did not get enough rest at night. Many among the older staff find it harder to wind down after late evening shifts and have difficulty sleeping. This is aggravated by the type of schedule where you work late nights and early mornings. It is impossible to get enough rest between the shifts. The work schedule plays an important role. Earlier retirement age and shortened work hours were a wish from older staff.

Proposal to the Thorax Centre

Teaching organisation

Continued training and education for the staff are beneficial for the survival and development of the entire organisation. The ability of older staff to handle changes in position and organisation can deteriorate if their knowledge is not up-to-date. A natural goal for continued learning is to maintain and develop professional competence. Learning may also involve acquiring more in-depth knowledge about how your organisation functions, to widen the network of contacts, and to attempt new tasks inside and outside your own organisation. Educational development must be a natural part of the planning of activities. Developments in medicine together with technological developments will make demands for different combinations of education and training in the care organisation.

Mentorship means working with the transfer of knowledge and experience between co-workers in the organisation. It is highly desirable to implement mentorship in the organisation. It would lead to a certain easing of the workload for older staff, and at the same time, the knowledge that comes with experience would be transmitted to younger staff and they in turn would share their newly gained knowledge with their mentors.

The following proposals were made:

- each manager is given the task of making a plan for education and training to be offered for the next 10 years, together with a cost estimate.
- during the coming two year period, each manager shall also set up individual educational plans for all of his/her staff in accordance with the so called wheel of training and education (professional, technical, strategic, personal, and communications training) based on the needs of the organisation.
- education and training development should be included in the work schedule.

Flexible work hours and retirement age

Flexibility is desired with respect to work hours and retirement age in order to enable optimum utilisation of individual differences. A lowering of the retirement age for care personnel would also mean that young personnel could enter the care sector. Various projects with respect to work hours have proved that freedom of choice and new solutions to work schedules are possible within the health care sector. It is not possible to select one single model as the best one, since wishes and needs are so different. Each department must decide which model is best suited to its activities and personnel.

The following proposals were made:

- a trial period with a 6-hour work-day should be started in a few departments.
- flexible retirement age should be tried.

Health-care

The greatest future health benefits can be achieved by preventive work - by investments in employment, in environmental development, in healthy living, i.e. efforts on aspects other than direct health care.

In order to inspire staff to improve their dietary and exercise habits and to emphasise each individual's own responsibility in this regard, we suggest that a health profile be developed and that opportunities be given for other personnel counselling with respect to health.

The following proposals were made:

- implement a health profile with follow-up.
- include health and exercise hour in the regular work schedule.
- offer various health and exercise alternatives, e.g. aerobics, Qi-gong, Tai Chi, strength training, swimming, walking, jogging, massage, etc.
- individual support in the form of discussions aimed at increasing self-confidence including a follow-up plan.

Work place groups

In work place groups, each group learns to handle conflicts and changes, and how to participate in the work to implement changes; first with the aid of facilitators, later in "self-operating" groups which develop into voluntary interest groups, e.g. scheduling groups, physical space groups, organisation groups, work environment groups, etc.

The following proposal was made:

- a pilot project with a work place group is implemented on a voluntary basis in one or two departments for later evaluation.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THE PROJECT STARTED?

The mean age at the hospital in 1997 was 44.3 years. Thus, in two years, it has increased by three years.

The Thorax Centre

Continued education

It is the ambition of all the departments to have regular departmental lectures. Work place groups have been formed in order to work on an education program for the 45+ staff. The program contains the same components that were brought out in Project "45+", i.e. personal input opportunities, communications between various professional groups, work place meetings, equality, internal control, etc.

Education in care sciences

Care seminars twice per semester have begun. There is a discussion going on with the Care Institute in order to begin 5 or 10 point courses in care science methodology.

Leadership

Discussions have begun regarding the principles and forms of a gradual and long-term change of management culture, attitudes towards management, organisational structure and the hierarchies. Thereby, a path can be prepared towards a change in generations among management, a change that maintains knowledge and satisfies the demands for continuity and renewal. This applies for example to the management of physicians.

Palliative Care Clinic

In another clinic, the Palliative Care Clinic (providing care at the end of life) where the mean age among the staff is 46 years, a project with flexible work hours was begun in May 1998. This means primarily abandoning fixed scheduling of work hours, and schedules are instead made from month to month. The common feature is that the staff has assumed responsibility for scheduling their work hours within the framework of a determined staffing objective. Experiences from flexible work hours are overall positive and personnel costs are not affected to any extent worth mentioning.

Case 5

Promoting work ability in a food factory in Finland

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CONTEXT

Saarioinen Ltd is a consolidated food manufacturing company which employs about 1 900 workers in Finland. The company includes four food factories, one of which concentrates on meat products, the other on broiler products and processed foods, the third on preserved foods and the fourth on ice cream products and desserts.

Finnish consumers rely heavily on domestic raw materials and products made of these. This confidence has, however, required planned work on quality improvement. All enterprises of Saarioinen Ltd have received a quality certificate and are thus part of a quality system.

Demand for domestic foods is growing quite slowly, and competition in food industry has increased. For these reasons Saarioinen Ltd has sought new opportunities through export which is especially directed at Sweden, the Baltic countries and Russia. In 1997 export accounted for 3 % of the total volume of sales and it is expected to double in 1998. During past two years large investments and development projects have been carried out within the company. The goal is to increase activities and market shares in a controlled way in 1998.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

As the labour force gets older and early retirement is on the rise, Finnish enterprises have experienced the need to ensure that aging workers cope with their work as long as possible. Together with occupational health care the enterprises are implementing actions that promote work ability, which focus on the worker, but also on the working community and work environment.

The workers of Saarioinen Ltd are between 17-65 years of age. 30 % of the workers are under the age of 30, 27 % between 30-39, and 25 % of the workers are 40-49 years of age. 18 % of the workers are over the age of 50. Women form the majority in the oldest age groups.

Despite the development of automation, the food factories still have plenty of operations, in which especially arms and the shoulder-neck region become overstrained. Nearly half of the absences were caused by musculoskeletal disorders. At most, the rate of absences has been about 10-15 %.

Our example is one of the enterprises of Saarioinen Ltd, namely the “Ruoka-Saarioinen” (Food-Saarioinen). It employs about 670 workers, 65 % of which are women. Of the women working at Ruoka-Saarioinen 22 % are over the age of 50. In the

1990s the enterprise has carried out projects aiming at e.g. maintaining work ability and decreasing absences caused by sick leaves.

At the end of 1980s the convenience food factory of Ruoka-Saarioinen suffered from a continuous labour shortage. The turnover of the employees was high, and skilled and permanent staff was lacking. Readiness for early retirement was increasing among the oldest workers. Musculoskeletal disorders were the most common reason for early retirement. Due to the great turnover, the age structure of the enterprise resembled a two-humped camel: the workers were either too young or aging. There were only few middle-aged workers.

The enterprise became aware of the costs of early retirement to the employer. The first project was started in collaboration with occupational health care and it aimed especially at maintaining the aging workers' work ability and at improving the working climate.

Maintaining work ability

On the initiative of the occupational health service a project was started in 1989, which aimed at improving the coping at work of employees' close to pension age in the processed food factory. The target group of the project consisted of 60 aging employees who were 49-54 years old. Before the project started the management and the staff were motivated to take part in the project. The project was not started until all staff groups were committed to action. The measures focused on working conditions, working community and the workers. Working conditions were examined by methods that included e.g. health education and counselling, videotaping of the work points and interview with the workers. The workers' health status was checked by the occupational health physician and a physiotherapist. An occupational health nurse interviewed the workers on issues related to their way of life. The project also included training for superiors and group discussions of the topic "content of the work in the future". Positive changes were apparent over a period of one year; feelings of stress had decreased, mental and physical work ability had improved and the number of satisfied workers had increased. As a consequence of the project sickness absenteeism showed a decrease, and the participants felt that especially the flow of information had improved significantly. On the basis of the results it was decided to expand the project to all employees over the age of 45 years. The project showed that it is important to concentrate on rather simple things such as losing weight, motivating oneself to exercise and solving work-related problems.

Remarkable was that pension costs declined when compared to national mean values since the campaign managed to prevent early retirements. Due to the project, 30 people of the initially 60 took part in a training programme in 1992 that supported coping with work. Three quarters of the training emphasised mental coping and one quarter focused on improving physical fitness.

Training in adaptation to production changes

In 1993 the food factory started to use plastic transport boxes instead of old styrox frames to deliver food to customers. As a consequence of this change the packing and dispatch departments were rebuilt.

Because of these changes there was a clear need to train the workers; it was necessary to inform them about the change and about the effects it would have on their jobs. It was also regarded as important to reduce the feelings of fear before the changes.

A large apprenticeship training programme was introduced. A follow-up was carried out in the form of questionnaires before and one year after the production change.

In the follow-up younger subjects reported a highly significant increase in their feeling of security regarding future and a significant improvement in their satisfaction with the working community. The flow of information, paradoxically, had declined. Stress caused by work did not increase. The perceived exertion at work had increased among older subjects. Nevertheless, the perceived work ability of both younger and older subjects improved whereas it decreased among a control group in the same factory. Therefore it can be said that the training maintained and improved the work ability of the subjects. The older subjects also benefited from training, even though not as much as the younger ones. The project also managed to reduce the relatively high figures of sickness absenteeism.

Educational training programme

A project to improve workers team-working abilities was organised in the factory. The programme was carried out from the end of 1995 to the end of 1997. The objective of teamwork is to form autonomous groups in which the workers' capacity for co-operation is one of the basic preconditions for success. Teamwork also requires the capacity to acquire a new way of working. The aim of the study was to investigate the effects of a 2-year training programme among workers in a food factory. Particular attention was paid to the effects of age on the changes in attitudes and work ability. Both the supervisors and the workers found that in particular the rate of independent initiative had improved. Sickness absenteeism was also reduced during the project. The increase in perception of team spirit and growth motivation were greatest among the oldest workers. The results show that this 2-year training programme had positive effects on workers of all ages but especially the positive changes among elderly workers were encouraged.

Physical exercise

The projects focusing on teamwork abilities also included an exercise intervention during winter 1997, which aimed at encouraging the workers of different ages to exercise on their own initiative. The project included initial and final tests that were used to explicate the workers' work ability and physical capacity. Of the 22-59-years-old workers 23 attended an exercise group for 10 times during which an individual plan was devised for every worker to better their condition and leisure time activities. The exercise group aimed at learning new working techniques that are of benefit in their work. As the exercise group terminated their action, it was found, that even though work ability did not show significant improvement during the project, the improvement

of muscular strength was obvious compared to a control group in the same factory, which did not increase their physical activity. The workers also expressed satisfaction at the group's actions and continued it on their own spare time. The economic outcome of the exercise group was also followed during the project, and it was found that because of the decrease in sickness absenteeism the exercise group paid for itself in about five months.

Setting up work groups to promote work ability

The experiences of the first project have encouraged Saarioinen Ltd to implement several new projects in the 1990s in collaboration with occupational health care emphasising work ability and age. Researchers from the university have also collaborated in the discussions and planning of some projects. A seminar that was held in spring 1997 in collaboration with an insurance company strengthened comprehensive commitment to the promotion of aging workers' work ability. The topic of the seminar was that of lowering retirement costs. The seminar discussed the common phenomenon of early retirement, its causes and the costs to the enterprise. This is an issue of great importance to Finnish industry, since in Finland it has been more common to retire early than in the OECD-countries on the average.

The seminar also considered the amount of absences and the cost caused by these to Saarioinen Ltd. The aim of the seminar was to develop an operational model to decrease rates of early retirement and absences due to sick leaves. The seminar resulted in a decision to start activities to promote work ability, which aim at supporting especially the elderly employees' coping with work.

Every enterprise of the company devised a plan for actions in order to promote work ability in the respective enterprise, and committed to take measures to reach these goals.

The measures focused on three different sectors, that is:

- on the worker: development of professional skills and attitudes, work ability and functional capacity
- on work: organisation of work, development of work environment
- on the working community: teamwork

A follow-up team was set up in each enterprise to plan and organise actions. The team included the managing director of the factory, the occupational safety representative, a representative of occupational health service and the staff manager. The teams have started their work and a follow-up study on their progress will also be conducted.

In-company vocational training

From the beginning of 1997 the Saarioinen Ltd has offered the employees an opportunity to complement their vocational education by taking a vocational degree in the food industries alongside their regular work. The training takes about a year and includes about 20 contact days as well as practical training and distance education. There have been three training periods and the fourth is about to begin in autumn 1998. The training has been attended by 54 workers, 38 of which have already completed their courses. The age of the attendants ranges from 20 to 54 years. 30 % of the attendants are under the age of 30. Attendance has been most general in the group of 30-44-years-old

employees, since 44 % of the attendants belong to this age group. 26 % of the attendants are over the age of 45. Thus it seems that interest in taking a vocational degree is quite strong among those over 45: these persons often have a lower basic education when compared to younger workers.

SUMMARISING COMMENTS

In the 1990s Saarioinen Ltd has carried out projects that have been directed at promoting the employees' work-related abilities, and also at promoting their work ability and health. These projects have shown that the oldest employees' coping with work can be enhanced e.g. through training and organised exercise. The oldest workers have participated actively in the training and as a consequence of this e.g. issues related to group spirit and growth motivation have been on the rise even more than among younger workers.

Sick leaves and early retirement rates have also decreased as a consequence of projects focusing on work ability. The latest project is seeking to promote work ability and to integrate it into the regular workday by means of a special work group set up for this purpose.

Work in the food industry is extremely strenuous and offers only few opportunities for the employees to take part in decision-making. However, in order to maintain work motivation, there is a need to perform more versatile tasks and, on the other hand, to gain a possibility to influence one's own work. The strong emphasis on developing organisational structures and the content of work is based on this. It is obvious that creation of new organisational models for work takes time, since changes require a new kind of organisational culture, and especially confidence in the workers' ability to make decisions concerning their own work. It seems that changing roles has been most difficult for the supervisors. The fact that as many of the employees and elected officials as possible take part in development work is considered especially important. Development work is a learning process, effects of which can be seen also on a larger scale as an increase in the employees' well being. This is a challenge for the personnel in all but especially in the sense of promoting health and work ability of elderly employees.

Case 6

Home care work and aging in the City of Helsinki

Tiina Pohjonen, M.Sc., Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

CONTEXT

The aging of population and a policy emphasising open services in the care of elderly people, have increased the work pressure within the social and healthcare professions and especially in home care work. Home care is a part of the municipal social services the main aim of which is to increase the possibilities of the elderly people to live in their own homes as long as possible. Apart from the increased number of customers, the intensity of the services has been grown as well. In 1995 in the Helsinki City municipal home care there were 79 elderly people customer visit per year, the number in 1997 was already 198. The people working within home care services is in relative and absolute measures the most growing professional group in the 1990's.

Even in the beginning of the 1980's, it was observed, that strain in the home care work was greater than in other female municipal professions on the average. Home care was classified as an occupational group characterised by a high probability of decreased work ability and high prevalence of diseases. Later a follow-up study indicated that home care work is a women's high-risk occupation for the aging workers, meaning that the requirements of the work exceeds the individual capacity.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

The aging of the population is also reflected in the age structure of the social- and healthcare personnel. The average age of the workers is 42 years and every 5:th (21%) is more than 50 years old. The proportion of those aged less than 30 years being only 11%. Due to economical factors, it is not very likely that the amount of personnel in the care professions will increase during the coming years. This meaning that the average age of the personnel will be even higher than today. The work will become extremely hard if the elderly customers in open care will need more intensive care without a simultaneous development of the working methods and the capacities of the personnel. The consequence of this is likely to worse the health of the workers.

Of the 13.200 Finnish home care workers, every 10:th is employed by the City of Helsinki. The average age is 42 years and 42% of them is more than 45 years. Most of them are women (98%) and usually they retire earlier (at age 59) than other occupational groups. The main reason for early retirement is musculoskeletal diseases. Even tough the high strain of home care work has been known for a long time, very little has been done to make thing better. Because the working environment in this case is the private home of the customers, it is very difficult to try to influence the working environment and methods.

PROCESS AND ACTORS*Negotiation issues*

In the beginning of 1990 the City of Helsinki contacted the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) which had a leading role in the "Finn Age - respect for the aging program". Especially occupational health care services and safety organisations were worried about workers' coping. Concrete solutions were demanded for improving

the work capacity and a decrease of the strain of the work. The target area was chosen taking into consideration the geographical area of the City, where the houses are old and where there were many defects in the ergonomic conditions. Also the employees (n=144) within the area had more musculoskeletal symptoms and diseases than workers on average.

Initiatives and steps

A management team which approached the question from different aspects was appointed. The representatives included members from executives of the Social Center of Helsinki City, employees representative, health care personnel, work safety organisations and the researcher from FIOH. Based on the discussions it was agreed upon to execute intervention research where the effects of physical exercise on work capacity and the effects of the ergonomic measures on work strain would be clarified. The main principle was to execute the measures within ordinary working units, and not just focus on aging workers. The study was financed from the City budget which gave permission to use working hours for development work.

Actors involved at various stages

In the first step an analysis was made to survey the current situation, measuring the work ability, the strain of work, and the characteristics of the work experienced by the employees. Measurements showed for example, that every fourth of the employees over 45 years of age had higher cardio-respiratory strain during the working hours than the recommended maximum level for an 8 hour working day. Also the musculoskeletal capacity of the workers was lower than the age-related reference among women.

With the help of the researcher, the working units started analysing the baseline results and began studying solutions for developing the work. In the physical exercise group the employees participated in controlled and supervised physical exercise twice a week. The interventions lasted one year and they were carried out during paid working hours.

Evaluation procedures

Interventions were carried out in 1993, when the signs of a recession were high and the number of workers was strongly reduced. In spite of this, the work units participated very actively in the physical exercises and work development. The research showed that it is possible to develop the working methods and the equipment although the work environment is a private home. After ergonomics changes it could be observed, that the straining work postures decreased significantly. The professional skills were also increased implying more potential for individual decision making more possibilities to regulate the work-pace, and the possibilities to more effectively use own resources.

Physical exercise prevented the decrease of the functional capacity and work ability despite the workers' age. Physical exercise affected the work ability so clearly, that it was decided to carry on the exercise program during paid working hours also after the intervention period was finished.

Company initiatives

In Finland aging is a problem especially within the municipal sector. On the average, the proportion of Finnish workforce over 45 years is 37%, but in the municipal sector it

is 42%. In the City of Helsinki the situation is even worse, as about 50% of the employees (n=38 800) are more than 45 years old. The average age of the employees is 42 years and the largest groups are between 50 and 51 years old. The actions to maintain and to improve work ability are targeted to the whole personnel and there is no separate age policy in the City administration. During this year each department funds a group which co-ordinates the execution of the activities targeted on work ability improvements. The organisation and responsibility of the actions are in the hands of the management of the each department.

The home Care Service research project was the first project within the City of Helsinki, which systematically tried to find solutions to improve the working methods and work ability. After this pilot project, there have been a number of development projects, in which especially physical exercise has been a key factor in promotion of a better work ability. Since 1996 the Work Ability Index has been used in the evaluation of the work ability in the City's Human resource reporting and accounting. In 1997 2,5% of the whole personnel belonged to the poor work ability group and 13,4% to the average work ability group. This means that approximately 1000 employees of the municipal workers in the City of Helsinki had difficulties to cope with the requirements of the work. In the home care service branch this percentage was even higher (31,6%).

Partly due to the results of the study and the aging of the employees, the home care resources were increased with 230 workers for the years 1998-2000. All this happened during a period when the number of municipal workers was decreased on the average.

The effectiveness and the quality of the customer service have been improved by procuring mobile phones to all of the workers. In addition teamwork has been developed and the use of assisting services such as grocery deliveries has increased. The quality aspects of the home service have been defined, and the maintenance of work ability has been seen as one of the essential ways to ensure quality. In the quality handbook mentions that exercise and health guidance can activate both the workers and the customers to maintain and improve their health. After this study, another exercise project in the home service was carried out. It investigated the effects of physical exercise during the working hours on working productivity. Exercise did not reduce productivity as measured in number of customers or home-help visits.

COMMENTS

The model for developing work and work ability used in home care work can be considered applicable at least to the female dominated basic service sector (for example cleaning and kitchen work). Early rehabilitation should focus on every worker, not only the aging workers.

There are at least three key prerequisites for feasible and successful interventions carried out in the work places:

- the project must have the unreserved support from the top management and the line management
- the actions must be carried out in small regular work units
- the measures of the interventions must be based on the needs of the workers.

In Finland actions to maintain work ability have focused mainly on separate parts of the work ability. Developing human resources and work hasn't been considered as part of personnel policy or management systems. The roots for maintaining work ability are in the occupational health services and therefore the target for actions has been the health of individuals and above all their physical capacity, rather than developing the work methods or the organisation. Comprehensive developmental actions which would consider simultaneously both the resources of the individual and the factors of the work are rare. However, from the aspect of aging workers such a comprehensive approach is the only way to maintain and improve work ability.

The Social Security Service, Vestfold County in Norway

Per Erik Solem, psychologist, Norwegian Social Research

CONTEXT

The Social Security Service of Vestfold County consists of 15 local offices, a county office and a technical aid station for disabled persons, and employs 300 people. The County Social Security Service is part of the National Social Security Service, which employs a total of 7000 people. Considerable changes are taking place and are expected to take place in the near future. Traditionally, casework in the social security service has been specialised and split up in simple routines. Over the last two decades the caseworkers have met increased demands on breadth in their competence. The organisation of work is changing as more group work and project organisation is introduced. Decisions are increasingly decentralised, and the public is demanding higher standards of service. The public wants more information, counselling, prevention and follow-up, and not only acceptance or rejection of applications for social security allowances. New information technology is a central part of the changes in the work role. At the same time, budgets have been reduced and the demands on efficiency have increased. All together this has increased the pressure on the employees, and many older workers were tired and would choose the earliest possible option for retirement.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

The Vestfold Social Security Service has an old work force; 50% are above 50 years and 70% are above 45. The administration sees two main challenges for the next 10 years; -to adapt working conditions to an aging work force and thereby benefit from the vast competence of older workers and -to recruit new workers and secure their growth in competence.

PROCESS AND ACTORS

From the early 1990-ies the central authorities have promoted senior personnel policies for government employees, and in 1996 the Ministry of Labour and Administrative Affairs sent out a guide for competence development for mid- and late career employees (45 +). The National Insurance Administration then decided to carry out a pilot project in the county of Vestfold for a later possible implementation in the social security services nation wide. The Work Research Institute was asked to evaluate the pilot project. The project was divided in two parts. Phase one focused on awareness raising through seminars, discussions at the workplace, and collection of proposals for measures to be implemented in phase two. During the process the focus was changed from senior personnel policies to a life phase orientation. One reason was that at some local offices the senior focus was considered to be discriminating; why were those below 45 years excluded from adaptations of working conditions? With the actual age distribution of the work force it seemed unfair to exclude, at some offices, the one or two employees not being old enough.

Phase two will focus on implementation of suggested measures to improve working conditions.

There is a steering group for the project with representatives for three different unions, management at three levels (local, county and national) and external consultants; Centre for Senior Planning and Work Research Institute. It was planned to set up working groups at each local office, but only one such group was established. Of the 15 local offices in Vestfold, six accepted the invitation to take part in the pilot project. In addition one department of the county office took part.

The Work Research Institute completed the evaluation of phase one by March 98 (Lahn & Karlsen, AFI-notat 3/98). The evaluation is based on the participants' written evaluation of the seminars, interviews with participants and managers, including managers of local offices not taking part in the project.

Company initiatives

The main elements of the project's phase one was:

- a to-days seminar for first line managers
- a to-days mid-life seminar for workers aged 45-57 years
- a to-days senior seminar for workers aged 58 and over
- meetings at the local office level between the manager and the employees to sum up the seminars and discuss implementation of measures proposed at the seminars
- senior dialogues between manager and employee to develop an individual career plan
- a suggested measure of working as a guest at another department or enterprise was implemented before the end of phase one.

The aim of the guest-worker system was to counteract burnout and to stimulate fresh thinking and growth. The system gives the option of, during a period of 2 weeks to 3 months, working at another workplace inside or outside the social security service. Employees were encouraged to try work outside the social security service. During the autumn 1997 10 employees (out of about 60 included in the project) did work as a guest at another workplace; five at other offices of the social security service, and the other five worked at job centres or in private business.

OUTCOME

The main aim of the pilot project's phase one was awareness raising. The evaluation report sums up the results as positive. At the individual level a greater awareness concerning the life situation and career opportunities was rated as helpful. The older workers considered their capacities and learning abilities in a more positive way. Even younger workers changed their attitudes towards older workers and were looking more positively on seniors at work. Managers were more aware of age and challenges connected to aging. The evaluators see a basis for the development of a life phase oriented personnel policy, but hold that to achieve success it will have to take some time. Too quick and restless measures may be counterproductive. Even if implementation mainly was planned to take place in phase two, the participants were somewhat disappointed about the practical outcomes. They felt locked up in a situation with personal responsibility for high amounts of work. Those who found room for a period of guest work reported to have learned from it, to have been able to contribute to the host and to have been stimulated and inspired. They also reported some practical problems yet to be solved.

Some of the proposals for measures from phase one are listed below:

- guest work and other kinds of variation at work, e.g. to get new tasks or exchange tasks with a colleague.
- adapted working hours (flexible schedule)
- home work (implemented at one local office by August 98)
- take a walk in open air during working hours
- gymnastics groups
- attend at least one course each year
- after 20 years of employment, be offered to take guidance tasks (guiding juniors)
- combination of pension and work (gradual retirement).

COMMENTS

The project is not yet completed. It is too early to establish what effects it may have, and if it will spread to the social security service nation wide. The success of measures to adapt the working situation of older workers will probably depend upon more general changes in the working context, such as flexibility of work organisation and sufficient staffing. If, for example, the worker is confronted with the same or even a higher pile of uncompleted cases when he returns from a period of guest working, no gains may be achieved. Under a high pressure the personal responsibility of getting the work done in time is hard to cope with unless the organisation takes care of the employee's work while he is away. That requires a flexible organisation with sufficient resources.

The change from senior focus to a life phase orientation during the process illustrates how senior policies may inspire the general personnel policies.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank

Per Erik Solem, psychologist, Norwegian Social Research

CONTEXT

The Norwegian State Housing Bank is an executive body for governmental housing policies, and gives home loans and grants. About 50 per cent of new homes in Norway are funded by the State Housing Bank (1997). The Bank employs 350 people and has five offices around the country. In 1997/98 the Bank was reorganised to meet changing conditions, to improve service and relations to customers, and is increasingly market-oriented. During the reorganisation employees are moved around in the system, with new affiliation to departments and superiors. This naturally creates some insecurity, not least among older workers. However, the senior policy project is independent of the reorganisation process, it is not developed as a part of or a response to reorganisation. But in a situation where changes are expected to continue, the older workers are considered to need special attention through an active senior policy, particularly because of a relatively old work force.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

More than half of the work force (54%) is above 40 years. This proportion is calculated to increase to 75% during the next 10 years. Traditionally the Bank has not been particularly youth-oriented in recruitment, even workers close to 60 have been recruited. In the personnel policy guidelines from 1994, a paragraph on senior policy is included, stating that it is a benefit for the company to have employees with a long and solid work experience. The senior policy project described in the following, has its background in the intention to use the competence and experience of older workers in the best interests of the company and to promote individual growth through new challenges and options. There is a general trend in working life towards early retirement. To balance an orientation among older workers towards early retirement the company has seen a need to focus on motivation and stimulation for development and growth even in the last part of the career.

PROCESS AND ACTORS

The senior project was initiated and implemented by the human resources management (HRM) department. Planning started in 1996. It was decided to start out with a pilot project and the district office in Bergen with its 55 employees, was chosen. All local leaders and union representatives were invited to discuss the plans, and they supported the pilot project. The design and measures were worked out by the local HRM officer in co-operation with the Centre for Senior Planning. It was decided to start in a small scale and to take action without a too long period of planning and negotiations. Rather than collecting long lists of proposals and wishes in a long process with a risk of the whole project coming to nothing, they chose to demonstrate feasibility by quick action. Seniors (45+) were invited to a senior seminar limited to 12 participants (about 50% of all 45+ in the Bergen office), and the list was full within half an hour. The first seminar was held in June 1997. Still a pilot project, in 1998 one seminar is carried out at another local office and the third seminar is scheduled for the autumn 1998. The top management of the Bank is strongly supporting the pilot project and in a couple of months it will be formally decided if the senior policy actions will be implemented on a

permanent basis in all divisions. Most probably the senior policy paragraph of the personnel policy guidelines of the Bank will be revised to include more active formulations on implementation of senior seminars, “milestone dialogues” and individual solutions negotiated through the dialogues. The next step will be to create senior policy measures designed for employees in leading positions.

In addition to participant evaluations of the seminars, the HRM department will continuously evaluate methods and effects, and in particular follow up the implementation of the negotiated individual arrangements.

Company initiatives

The senior policy includes three main elements.

1) The senior seminar for employees aged 45+. The format is: duration of two days, located outside the workplace and with a mixture of plenary sessions, small groups and individual work. The focus is on reflections concerning the individual work history, life situation and preferred changes for the future. Both cognitive and affective involvement is encouraged. Part of the seminar is a preparation for the milestone dialogue, which is preferably conducted within the next month.

2) The milestone dialogue is supposed to take about two hours and includes the individual worker and his or her superior. A HRM officer is present if the worker prefers that. The milestone dialogue is (as the senior seminar) planned to take place every 5th year, and is additional to the yearly dialogue between workers of all ages and their superior. The superiors are briefed in advance about how to conduct a milestone dialogue, and a commitment is created. Both the superior and the worker are equipped with a guide with themes and questions and an agreement form to be filled in and signed.

3) Individual solutions negotiated in the milestone dialogue are stated in the agreement form together with who is responsible for implementation. Examples of negotiated actions are; different kinds of training arrangements, guest working at other departments of the Bank or outside the Bank, changes in tasks and duties, changes in working hours, and mentorship.

OUTCOME

One result of the actions taken is raised awareness on senior policy issues throughout the company. The HRM department has by this work acquired a more active attitude towards older workers and formulated senior policy guidelines according to that. The former guidelines had more of a disengaging and patronising undertone. It is too early to see any long term effects, but one immediate result is that all the 24 senior workers (45 -62 years) who by now have participated in seminars and milestone dialogues, have signed an agreement with their superior on individual solutions.

COMMENTS

Probably, this small scale and quick action pilot approach will, by showing it's feasibility, spread throughout the organisation and even outside as the HRM department already have presented it for other companies. The actions taken are concluding with individual arrangements. Finding individually preferred and adapted solutions through

an open dialogue would increase the probability for success. However, this requires flexibility in the organisation and real options for implementation of a great variation of solutions.

Siemens company in Norway

Per Erik Solem, psychologist, Norwegian Social Research

CONTEXT

Siemens AS is one of Norway's leading electrotechnical concerns and employs about 3.000 people at 26 sites throughout the country. About 1/3 of the employees are engineers or engineering scientist, and 84 per cent of the work force are male. Siemens AS was established in Norway in 1898 and is a wholly owned subsidiary company of the German concern, Siemens AG. There has been a long tradition in personnel policies for employees to be expected to have their whole working career inside the company. In 1987 a new career system with two parallel career ladders was implemented, and a professional ladder was added along with the administrative ladder for advancement. Professionals did not need to take administrative responsibility in order to advance. This, together with too little mobility among the key people, is the immediate background for introducing the system of Constructive Management Mobility described below.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

Towards the end of the 1980-ies the company was concerned about aging of the work force. There was a low internal mobility. Some parts of the firm were in a steady market situation and employees tended to stagnate. The company wanted more mobility and development of employees, particularly among managerial staff. The proportion of older workers is as the national average (47 per cent above 40 years and 22 per cent above 50 years (1997)).

PROCESS AND ACTORS

Actions were initiated and implemented by the Department of Management Development and Training. External expertise on organisational psychology was engaged to develop a training program in co-operation with the company's own expertise. An inquiry was sent to all employees at the four top levels of the career ladder (consisting of 12 levels), as the structure was most frozen at the top levels. They were asked if they would like to take part in a program of Constructive Management Mobility. Mainly leaders aged 55 - 64 enrolled. The first program was run in 1989 and has since then been repeated every year. The mean age of the participants was 56 years in 1989 and has gradually decreased to 45 years in 1998. In 1993 a similar program for non-managerial staff was introduced (TIPTOP - Senior Resource), and a program for all employees, irrespective of age, started in 1996 (Active Reorientation Process).

There is a continuous evaluation of the program and a scientific dissertation is in process.

Company initiatives

Constructive Management Mobility

This program has a format of three two-day meetings over a period of eight months, with a mixture of plenary sessions, group work and individual work. Between the first and second meeting there is a three-hour's dialogue with an organisational psychologist, focusing on individual interests, options and resources. Between the second and third meeting there is a dialogue with the personnel director, focusing on alternative job

opportunities in the company. During the whole process the workers are invited to reflect upon their work and life situation in order to end up with an individual action plan for further development and changes. Various techniques and methods to stimulate personal growth are used. Each program has 12 -15 participants who throughout the process belongs to one of four small groups, so called coaching groups. The members of each group are recruited from different divisions of the company.

TIPTOP - Senior Resource

The format is two seminars lasting two days each, and three seminars lasting one day each. There are about three weeks between each seminar and the whole program takes four months. The participants are given exercises to work on between the seminars. Non-managerial staff with more than ten years of experience are invited. Each program has 12 - 15 participants. The program focuses on practical challenges of work and the working situation. The aim is to improve competence and to give incitement. It is not intended to increase mobility.

Active Reorientation Process

This is a one and a half-day's seminar open to all employees, and is part of the effort to create a learning organisation and readiness for change.

The company also offers a three day's preretirement preparation program for employees aged 58 years plus.

OUTCOME

One year after completing the program of Constructive Management Mobility two thirds of the participants have experienced a major change in their job, i.e. they have new tasks or have changed jobs, and in some cases moved to another division of the company. About ten per cent have found a new job outside the company and few (3 per cent) have taken early retirement.

Participants report they have taken more responsibility for their own development, have increased their competence, and have become more open for changes. The company considers participants to have improved their ability to work in teams which they see as important for meeting future challenges.

The program of Constructive Management Mobility has attracted interest from other companies and a few external participants were accepted for the 1998 program. Plans to establish this program as a separate business for external participants are under discussion.

COMMENTS

The programs of Siemens are interesting because of the long experience and gradual expansion over a ten year's period. There are ample indications on the effectiveness and success of the programs. The dimensions and content seem to require organizational resources that are not available in most companies.

Senior development within the National Commission of the Danish Police

Søren Steen-Jensen, Senior ConsultTM

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CONTEXT

The Danish Government wants to keep the senior employees on the labour market. The Minister of Labour has concretised his intention in a statement regarding the introduction of a senior policy, the establishment of a Senior Political Initiative Committee and finally, an effort to arm the employment system in being much better at guiding and informing unemployed workers above 50 years old. The Ministry of Finance and the Danish Federation of State Employees have taken the initiative to complete this project.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

The wish to keep the senior employees (50+) on the labour market for more than the present retirement age of 60 years is based on two conditions:

- expected problems with the financing of increasing transfer payment
- problems with the recruiting of young employees due to the small age classes.

It is a fact that more and more employees want to leave the labour market either because of the “push model” or the “pull model”. The effects of the “push model” can shortly be described as physical or psychical wear down, and the “pull model” can be described as a “dream” about another life situation with new degrees of freedom and new possibilities.

Irrespective of the sympathetic intentions, measures particularly aimed at the “push model” have not yet resulted in a decisive breakthrough in an effort to solve the two problems: demography and retirement pattern.

An effort to play down the “pull model’s” strength by offering other working conditions, functions and working hours has not changed the situation radically. According to the authors’ opinion, the missing results are due to the fact that the importance of the psychosocial working environment as well as the target group’s opinion of the same has not had any influence on the preparation of the measures. The measure described in the following is based on action research and breaks this pattern by including representatives from the target group in order to create a “common language”. It also includes a frame of reference that should define the real causes of early retirement irrespective of whether the causes should be identified within the physical or within the psychosocial working environment.

The process thus breaks with the traditional opinion of the management’s sole responsibility and exclusive right to formulate problems and solutions of the same. On the other hand, the clear connection to the employees’ working day means that the proposals for solving the problems in advance are ensured a high degree of organisational acceptance and joint responsibility for sustainable solutions and implementation.

Furthermore, the process creates new learning, reveals myths and promises and makes the dialogue goal-oriented. It also creates a better commitment, a better use of resources and a new sense of responsibility for the results in general. Finally, the process means that if the learning is based on the organisation, the organisation will be able to solve future problems containing elements outside the realm of experience.

The National Commission of the Danish Police: Senior political status

The term senior policy is relatively new within the Danish police but in practice, it has existed under the term “light work” (work which is not physically demanding), special duty etc.

The demographic development shows that the group of senior employees within the Danish police will increase until year 2005 from 2,161 – 3,880 (79%). Internal and external studies show that senior employees within the National Commission of the Danish Police want to participate in senior political measures, and that the implementation of a goal-oriented senior policy would be a lucrative investment. Moreover, internal studies show that the physical and particularly the psychosocial working environment is a heavy burden.

PROCESS AND ACTORS

The pilot project was completed in Frederikshavn police district in 1997. The police district has approx. 150 employees.

The project’s action plan included the following phases:

Preliminary phase:

- preliminary work
- information
- establishment of steering group
- preliminary study

Pilot phase:

- innovation phase (innovation seminar)
- fact-finding
- testing and preliminary evaluation

Implementation:

- implementation
- final evaluation and reporting

In the preliminary phase, a questionnaire study was made among all employees in Frederikshavn police district. The purpose was to reveal the following:

What do the employees think about their own retirement? When do they want to stop working? What can make them postpone their planned retirement? What proposals do they have for their own senior activities that would make them want to stay longer on the labour market?

In the study they were also asked to look back upon the last year and consider whether conditions like reorganisation, changes in structure, technological and administrative rationalisations, increased demands on efficiency and productivity, insecure employment and finally, the physical and psychosocial working environment have changed their opinion about when they have decided to leave the labour market. This part of the study tries to identify a number of organisational variables and their influence on the retirement pattern.

In the qualitative part of the study, we asked the respondents to make proposals for job enlargement in the middle and the last part of their carrier. The respondents' answers in the qualitative part of the study served as a basis of defining and presenting proposals for the following practical pilot project.

The pilot phase is based on more recent experiences within senior development that shows that it is possible to find solutions containing elements outside the realm of experience if it is a "down-up" process instead of "top-down". Previous studies show that many senior employees have a large development potential regarding their own job and the creation of new organisation and work structures, which breaks with the traditional barriers taking the general interest into consideration. In other words a "sustainable development".

A total of 20 interested volunteers participated in the seminar phase with the purpose to define possible solutions containing elements outside the realm of experience within the senior field. Moreover, the seminar also included a description of proposals, documentation for sustainable solutions, expected results, possible consequences and finally, economy. Afterwards the results were tested and evaluated. The participants ranged from 35 to 58 years of age, and included employees from operative and administrative functions including doormen and the deputy chief constable. The seminar took place over 3 days with the participants sleeping overnight.

Proposed actions

As a result of the seminar, the participants introduced their proposals for representatives of the management, the Consultative Committee, the relevant unions, the Ministry of Finance and the Danish Federation of State Employees. The concrete proposals may be grouped under the headline: the need for innovation and a disciplinary open dialogue concerning the distribution and planning of work. As the participants realised that they included a number of organisational variables which have been "protected" so far, they suggested to establish a so-called "free station". The purpose of the "free station" was to make use of the employees' knowledge and experience by allowing a higher influence on their own working situation (decision space) including consultation before implementation of organisational changes. In other words, the employees should be regarded as conscious and responsible partners in the dialogue concerning the future development within the police. The project "free station" can be regarded as a proposal for the establishment of a permanent "laboratory" which, according to requirements, should define and test solutions containing elements outside the realm of experience not previously observed. In other words, a draft proposal for a continued dynamic process including discussion and reformulation of job demarcations, e.g. proposals for a

“national police”. Finally, concrete proposals for the development of qualitative co-operation methods between the police and the surrounding world were presented.

At the present moment (October 1998), the concrete testing/implementation of the 18 senior political action areas completed in Frederikshavn police district is expected to start. The proposals are described in a senior political index of ideas prepared by the innovation group. The index of ideas describes the following action areas:

- courses – which consider the interest of the senior employees – with main focus on data processing
- technology – which is homogenous as regards operation and contents.
- job rotation – leading to a meaningful life
- mental training – which improves the senior/retirement life
- vocational supplementary training – up-to-date courses
- flex time/part time – with the possibility of working 2/2 – 1/2 and 1/3 time
- home working – with the possibility of having a PC workstation at home
- exemption from shift work
- exemption from management positions without loss of prestige
- a “stand by police” system – with the possibility of living as a retired employee
- a “national police” – where all employees can carry out the same functions
- leave of absence agreements – with the possibility of retraining/education for 2 years
- external senior jobs – agreements with other companies**
- mentor/supervisor – culture and experience for younger employees
- senior club – contact between retired employees and workplace
- senior crises/senior health – follow-up on violent events
- senior accept – accept of strong and weak points
- senior interview – the work period up to retirement age

Other concrete proposals include follow-up and documentation of knowledge and experience. In other words prevention of future mistakes.

A member of the innovation group acts as “the grounding element” in the testing phase after having completed a police training course as a “process consultant”.

The authors have conducted a seminar for the “process consultants” within the police. They have also prepared a senior political manual which should help the “process consultants” with the future work concerning the implementation of the process in the other police districts.

COMMENTS

Action research as a method contributes to release creative powers among the employees. The process creates a strong psychological contract between the participants, which means that they strengthen each other’s effort. A long number of research results show that action research is a methodological necessity for involving the employees actively in an open process with the purpose to acquire knowledge and find useful solutions, e.g. within staff policy. Participation and training in the methodical intake (action research) has given the senior development process within the police a qualitative lift. The method is particularly strong in connection with innovation and accept of changes. It creates a mental space which leads towards a consensus by

means of a dialogue concerning the qualitative aspects as a reference point for the decisions at action plan level. Nowadays, employees want to know why changes are necessary. A dictate to changes at action plan level without clear qualitative grounds have only incidental and very often limited motivation power.

Moreover, it is our opinion that the applied intake, action research, can be used within all organisational *innovation processes* where the intention is to clarify and define solutions not previously observed.

The economic effect of senior political measures may be described as a range of positive aspects. It goes without saying that as long as the psychological and physical wear down is reduced, the need for treatment and help among retired employees will decrease. Absence due to sickness means pressure on the other colleagues, a vicious circle leading to further wear down. Finally, wear down leads to a considerable reduction in the job performance which again leads to a negative influence on the working environment (particularly colleagues) in general. A reduction in the job performance (60%) combined with a subsequently early retirement will be a heavy burden on both institution and society if the retired employee is not self-supporting. A maintenance of the job performance at 85% and a few years postponement of the retirement as a self-supporting retired employee will reduced the expenses on society and institution considerably.

It is our opinion that the police will get far within the initiated senior development process. Moreover, it will serve as a model for other public institutions in the future where initiatives within the senior political field are needed. The important element is especially the top management's deep and lasting interest in the project.

Experience comes with age – That's why we are looking for finance people age 50+

Jette Nielsen, MD, National Institute of occupational health, Denmark

CONTEXT

Realkredit Danmark is one of the biggest finance houses in Denmark. In 1995 the firm had 1,200 employees the average age of 40 years. They were allocated to 4 regions and 25 local offices. The firm's share of the market is 27 percent, and they serviced about 600,000 customers. The balance in 1996 was 1,387 millions Danish crowns, the solvency was 12,9 percent and the costs were 0.34 percent.

In 1995 Realkredit Danmark was honoured with a price due to their high level of customer service and development of their products.

The public esteem of the firm was still increasing as they started to recruit employees at the age of 50+. This was a new signal from this sector: During the last years the sector had been struggling with the demographic problem of increasing age of the employees. The traditional attitude to solve this problem had been based on economical solutions for early retirement and by firing the older employees.

WHY IS AGE AN ISSUE?

During the late eighties the firm had reduced the staff due to the financial crisis and the structural changes. During the nineties the picture had changed according to changes of the law and according to low interest rate. These had led to an increased demand of workforce, which was met by engaging substitutes. But this model was not suitable at the long run. Permanent work tasks demanded a permanently employed staff, which could be integrated in the firm. Furthermore, the type of tasks of the firm had changed in a manner that demanded more direct customer service and advising to customers. Earlier only 30 percent of the customers directly contacted Realkredit Danmark. In the new financial system about 56 percent of the customers directly contacted the Realkredit Danmark. Finally, it became important to have a broader age distribution of the staff, because the middle-aged and elderly customers preferred to talk with middle-aged advisors.

The list below includes the reasons why they want the 50+ years old persons:

- many unemployed within this age group
- need of more employees for direct customer service
- broader age distribution within the firm
- natural retirement within a limited time period
- matching the age of the customers
- more direct contact with customers
- experienced employees advising and already educated and trained from previous job
- local knowledge
- stability
- quickly adopted to the job

PROCESS AND ACTORS

At the society level the discussions of senior politics were ongoing and within the firm they had just started to discuss these problems. The idea of engaging 50+ years was created by the managing director Kjeld Jørgensen. Together with the personnel manager, Inger Lise Meldgaard, he planned the recruitment programme and introduced it to the firm.

The list below emphasises the headlines of the recruitment programme:

- advertising in national news papers
- limited demands, special customer service and advising
- fixed salary
- recruitment procedure
- introduction
- education/training

IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOME

About 1,400 applicants responded. The distribution of the genders was fifty to fifty and only 1/3 was unemployed. A total of 58 persons were engaged. The distribution of age was from 48 to 59 years of age. After a short period of training they were allocated to 24 local offices all over Denmark.

The attitudes and reactions among the other employees were moderate to negative. After an introduction period the attitudes changed and became positive. The permanently engaged staff experienced their new colleagues as very competent and with high ability to solve the problems in the new tasks.

Primarily the idea was to achieve a high flexibility within the firm. The elderly employees were a good alternative to the substitutes and to permanently engaged staff, which was engaged in a young age. Secondary, when the firm engaged seniors they got personnel with a time-limited carrier. The seniors are closer to retirement than the young ones than the permanently engaged staff.

The new type of task had previously been served in other types of financial institutions.

Furthermore, the newspapers, radio and television stations told the story and emphasised the positive attitude towards seniors and this gave everybody a good support.

Inger Lise Meldgaard says that it has been a success for both the younger and elderly employees.

Only very few of the 58 seniors have left the firm and most of them are well integrated. The firm needed qualified finance people with work and life experiences, who also had experience in the new type of tasks.

Case 12

Physical fitness and maintenance of work ability in Siemens company in the Netherlands

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CONTEXT

Physical Fitness is an important aspect of work ability. Lack of physical exercise as well as several other risk factors like smoking, increased blood pressure, work stress, high cholesterol, increase the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). At the Siemens Nederland Company 1.3% of the workforce of about 2.400 employees suffered from CHD over a period of 4 years (1987-1991). The total costs of subsequent sick leave were HFL. 3.000.000, --. Based on literature data and reports by the Netherlands Heart Foundation about the relationship between a lack of physical exercise and an increased risk of CHD, it was decided to do a pilot study on employees with an increased risk of CHD based on their risk profile.

AGE-ASSOCIATED ISSUES

CHD is an age-associated disease. Atherosclerosis increases with age and subsequently the risk of a CHD. There is epidemiological evidence that physical exercise diminishes the degree of atherosclerosis and therefore the risk of CHD. Besides, physical exercise may have several other favourable effects as well, like decrease of blood pressure, decrease of body weight, decrease of the risk of diabetes mellitus. Based on the Framingham Index it was found that in the age group of 35 - 55 years employees with a high physical capacity virtually no association between risk of CHD and age existed. However, in the group with a low physical capacity the risk of CHD increased significantly with age. Furthermore, there is also a relation between lack of physical exercise and age. Many elderly people tend to give up physical exercise.

PROCESS AND ACTORS

Negotiation issues.

Costs of sick leave due to coronary heart disease are an important aspect for negotiations.

Initiatives and steps

The initiative for implementation of a training programme was begun by Siemens Occupational Health. Based on information from experts in physical exercise a programme of 9 month was determined. The budget for 29 persons was settled at HFL. 51.000, --. Upon approval by the Board of Siemens Nederland, selection of the employees was started. A group of 29 employees was selected based on the individual scores of the Framingham Index. A first group of 15 employees started in October 1993 and a second group of 14 employees a few months later. The training period of 9 months was divided in 5 sub periods.

Before the programme started maximal physical endurance capacity was measured in each individual. This test was repeated after 2 and 6 months of training respectively, as

well as 2-3 months after finishing the training programme. 19 of the 29 employees participated in the whole training programme. The programme consisted of cycling, running, and rowing with an intensity of 3 one-hour sessions per week. The loads were adapted to the physical capacities of the individual employee. Stepwise increase of physical loads was achieved based on successive measurements of physical capacity.

From those who left the programme for various reasons the majority had remained on a higher level of voluntary physical exercise. At the end of the programme aerobic power had increased in nearly all the participants. The increase varied between 3% and 58%. Maybe even more important was the average decrease of the Framingham Index score from 181/1000 to 53/1000, a decrease in risk of CHD of 70%.

Company initiatives

Policy

It was decided to extend the training programme to employees with lower but still elevated risks of CHD. A total of 10 groups of 10-15 employees were also invited for the training programme.

Actions aimed at work demands

No interventions on work demands were included in this programme.

Actions aimed at adapting workers.

All employees were encouraged to perform more physical exercise. Contracts of Siemens company with fitness training schools enabled employees to participate in physical exercise at reduced costs. This was not specifically addressed towards elderly employees but comprised all employees.

OUTCOME

Absenteeism is an important marker of the health of employees. The average figure at Siemens Nederland decreased from 4,3% in 1993 to 3,1% in 1997. Also a marked decrease in cases of CHD was observed.

COMMENTS

A good physical condition is probably an important indicator of health and work ability. Fitness programs, encouraged by companies, may have beneficial effects on health of the employee as well as on productivity and absenteeism. For elderly employees a good physical condition is of even more importance than for younger employees. Therefore, elderly employees should primarily be encouraged to participate in fitness programmes.

Age-conscious personnel policy at Wavin as part of the OWASE companies in the Netherlands

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CONTEXT

Wavin is the largest synthetic-processing company in Europe, with around 4200 employees. Most of the Dutch employees work in departments located in Overijssel (northeastern part of the Netherlands). The core business of the company is the design, production and sales of synthetic pipe systems. Wavin began as part of the Dutch Waterworks Company Overijssel. Initially, the company produced pipe systems for its own use. However, an increasing interest of other companies for the synthetic pipes led the Waterworks Company to split off the production department in the 1950s. It now operates independently under the name of Wavin. Wavin developed rapidly, both in size and number of activities. In addition to the production of synthetic pipe systems, management initiated the manufacturing of other synthetic products including boxes and trays, tubes for food, window frames, flexible packing, glass fibre-strengthened pipes, etc.

For several years, for strategic reasons, the management decided to fully concentrate on the core business of the company again: the production of synthetic pipe systems. Consequently, most of the other manufacturing activities were completely or partly taken over by external partners. Most of these companies are still located on the same grounds as the present Wavin departments. Among the employees, there has always been a strong feeling and need to belong to one big Wavin family. Many of the external partners expressed their desire to implement a number of Wavin systems and conditions, especially concerning conditions of employment. This was also supported by the employees' council of Wavin. This wish for co-operation recently resulted in the foundation of the OWASE (Overijssel Wavin Social Unit).

AGE ASSOCIATED ISSUES – PROCESS AND ACTORS

For elderly workers in The Netherlands, the possibilities for voluntary early retirement have diminished rapidly over the last years, due in part to the high costs involved. As a result, aging issues have become an important point on the agenda of many companies, including the Wavin management. For example, more flexible regulations for retirement had to be developed for Wavin employees. Moreover, it became clear to the company that an increasing shortage of young and qualified persons in the labour market created a need for the company to retain its experienced older workers for economic reasons. Consequently, attention to this group has been given high priority. In addition, the company has always been characterised by its 'social atmosphere' in which care for the employees is given special attention.

Company initiatives

All companies participating in the OWASE jointly decide which issues will be handled collectively. Several issues have already been formulated:

- a basic framework for the collective labour agreement (with possibilities for the companies to add company-specific agreements)
- a standard pension system
- an internal mobility bureau
- an age-conscious personnel policy
- issues at the level of the social policy, beneficial for employees in all age groups, but especially for employees with high seniority.

Several of the age-associated initiatives will be discussed in detail below.

An age-conscious personnel policy

System of flexible retirement

With the lifting of the voluntary early retirement regulations, the need to develop other more flexible regulations for (early) retirement arose. It was stated that this should be a mutual responsibility of the employers and employees. The essence of the present flexible retirement system is that each employee can decide at what age he or she will retire (within the boundaries of 55-70 years) and that each employee will take responsibility for saving money and time for this retirement system. The employee has three ways to save:

- a collective part: from the age of 35 years, all employees give up three free days a year, or an equivalent part of their salary, to fund the possibility of retirement at the age of 62 years (all workers are allowed to work up till the age of 70 years).
- a 'small collective' part (optional): a department or team can decide to create extra savings for their retirement. For example, they can decide to save a number of extra hours worked.
- an individual part: individual employees can save a part of their gross salary for their pension.

All the financial savings are paid into an individual bank account. From the age of 55 years, the employee can use the money in the account to retire earlier, to start a part-time pension ('gradual retirement') or to increase the amount of his/her retirement pay (for example, a break in pension contributions due to temporary unemployment or non-transferability of pension rights due to a change in job during the employee's career may have adversely effected the employee's pension).

The present state of affairs:

- a number of employees already used the new system to retire earlier or start part-time pension.
- many employees are taking advantage of the saving options, especially the collective and individual parts.
- employees have a less rigid picture of their retirement age. They are now more in the 'driver's seat'.

Individual working careers

The companies participating in the OWASE have decided to give all employees aged 45 years or older the possibility to take a lower position without suffering the financial consequences. When an employee younger than 45 years of age takes a lower position,

a reduction is made in the salary according to the collective labour agreement. However, for employees aged 45 years or older, the employer compensates for a part of the decrease in salary. The employer pays an increasing portion of the difference as the age at which the employee accepts a lower position increases. Two prerequisites have been formulated in this system. First, the decision to change to a lower position is made on a voluntary base (claimed by the trade union) and is acceptable for both employer and employee. Second, the difference between present and future position is equal to or less than three levels.

The present state of affairs:

- up to date, none of the employees have made use of the possibility to change to a lower position.
- the system has been accepted by the employee councils and trade unions. Among the employees, the system is the talk of the town. Opposition is decreasing.

Combating age discrimination for education and training

The companies participating in the OWASE made several agreements with the trade unions concerning education and training. In an annual discussion between the employee and the management, future developments of the company and the individual will be handled. During these conversations, attention will be paid to possibilities for a horizontal change in position within the company, a change in career, and flexible retirement as well as internal and external mobility. Moreover, matching educational and training programmes will be discussed. The outcome of the discussion is an educational and training programme for the employee at the company level.

On this issue, the trade unions explicitly have reserved a task for the employee's councils. In case an employer discriminates against a certain group in the company by not providing them the possibilities for education and training, workers can report this to the employee's council. The companies' record data on the ratio of employees aged 40- and 40+ in the company, as well as the ratio of their educational and training programmes. If there are discrepancies in these ratios, the employees' council can take action.

Policy issues

Risk assessment and evaluation of working conditions

At the level of safety, OWASE complies with the national legislation. Many potential risk factors are now assessed and reduced to acceptable levels. At this time, extra effort is put into ergonomics and identifying factors that can pose a long-term health risk. For employees who will stay with the company for many years, this kind of research will be especially beneficial.

Different shift-work schedules

In several companies, employees are given the possibility to switch from a three crew schedule to a five crews schedule on a voluntary base. This only takes places in those departments where this switch in schedule also is beneficial for the production process. At this moment, it seems that in particular the five crew schedule with a forward rotation after two days leads to a reduction in sick leave figures.

Hiring policy

Policies already in place ensure that, at the start of their career, employees are told that frequent job rotation within the company and development of their employability will be stimulated by the management. To accomplish this, new employees are trained within different working places in the companies. In this way, employees get familiar with the different processes within the companies, increasing the possibilities for job rotation in the near future.

Internal mobility bureau.

By request of the management or individual employee, an internal bureau mediates in case of a wish for an internal job rotation and matching educational and training programme.

Reintegration of (partly-) disabled employees

In case of (partly-) disablement of employees, the company in which the employee worked at the time he or she became disabled finances a supplement. This amount is paid into a fund. Therefore, the (new) employer only has to pay a part of the salary. In this way, the (partly-) disabled employee remains flexibly employable. In most cases, however, the employer of the company in which the employee worked at the time he or she became disabled, makes a strong effort to find or create a suitable job for the disabled employee within that own company.

Individual care

All companies participating in the OWASE initiated a mutual project to solve the problems of sick leave. The companies are investing money in the prevention of sickness absence. For example, a number of companies have organised training sessions for the middle-management to teach them how to hold sessions with the workers in which issues like working conditions and health risks are discussed. In this way, the middle management is involved at an early stage.

Decentralised activities

Besides initiatives at the central level, specific measures have been introduced at the company level to keep employees motivated and employable up to older ages. Examples of these initiatives are:

Autonomous teams

Companies that introduced autonomous teams on the working floor have made clear to the teams that the main issue is co-operation. It is not necessary that all team workers can perform all jobs in the team, but rather that the team as a whole can do all the jobs. Within these teams, every worker has to find a place best suited to his individual needs and capacities. Experience shows that younger employees have great solidarity for the elderly colleagues in their team.

The role of mentor for the elderly employee

Several companies have given their elderly employees the role of mentor or internal technical trainer, in order to use and transfer the specific experience and knowledge of this group to the younger workers.

Specific research on the position of elderly employees

One of the companies studied the employability of elderly workers, and found increasing problems within this group. Based on these results, a specific educational programme has been developed.

Additional educational programmes on technical knowledge

Several companies have developed specific educational programmes on technical knowledge, such as:

- “refresher courses” for employees who received their basic education long time ago.
- “intake programmes” bridging the gap between regular educational programmes for those persons who have limited employability and want to/or are required to increase their employability by means of educational programmes.
- “educational programmes” in particular practical training sessions in the own working situation of which several are now also examined.

Educational programmes on handling a computer

Employees who are not used to working with a computer can choose to take part in regular educational programmes or extended programmes in which more time and attention is paid to specific questions from the participants. Although initially started for all employees, elderly employees seem to have a strong preference for these programmes.