



EEO TRUST
NEWSLETTER
June 2006 No. 35



Grey matters – retaining the value of older workers

As the composition of the New Zealand population changes, our workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse, reflecting the determination of employers to find and keep skilled, committed people who will add value to their business. But is this flexibility enough to enable businesses to prosper as the pace of New Zealand's demographic change accelerates?

Like other developed countries, New Zealand's labour force is ageing rapidly. Around 61,000 people aged 65 and over are in paid work now compared to a predicted 102,000 in 2021. Half of the labour force will be older than 42 in 2012 compared with a median age of 39 in 2001 and 36 in 1991.

The EEO Trust recently ran an

online Work and Age Survey, gathering information to assist employers to recruit and retain the skills, experience and energy of older people, and exploring what people want from work as they get older, and what workplace conditions would encourage them to stay in paid work longer.

The response to the survey was strong, with 6,484 submissions. Most respondents were in the 45-64 age group and most, including those aged over 65, were still in paid work, with only seven per cent of respondents saying they were retired. Women made up two-thirds of respondents.

Interestingly, most of the retired respondents (78%) said they would

like to still be in the paid workforce.

What would help people stay at work longer?

The survey asked people what workplace conditions would encourage them to continue working past their expected retirement date. Quality part-time work and flexible working hours were the most popular options.

However, when asked what would have encouraged them to stay in paid work longer, retired people rated the ability to work from home comparatively more highly.

EEO Trust Chief Executive, Dr Philippa Reed, says that this and previous

research conducted by the EEO Trust shows that employers who offer some flexibility in working hours and work location are well placed to attract skilled people and build effective, committed workforces. "Our surveys exploring the work experiences and preferences of parents and disabled people also found that flexibility is the number one factor that would enable them to make a more effective contribution to the workplace," she says.

For most working people, the ideal transition from full-time work to retirement involves part-time work or more flexible working hours. In contrast, those who are already retired mostly went straight from full-time work to retirement and their ideal transition to retirement would have involved moving to a less demanding job before full retirement.

The survey asked respondents about their employers' retirement planning initiatives. Most respondents said their employer did not offer anything or they

did not know what was available. The main initiatives offered are seminars on retirement planning and flexible working hours but these were mentioned by less than 20% of respondents.

When is it time to stop working?

Most respondents said they would like to retire between 60 and 64, although respondents under 45 were more likely to want to retire at a younger age. People working in production and manufacturing were more likely than those in other occupations to want to retire after 65.

People's expected retirement age is older than their ideal retirement age with 58% of respondents expecting to be at least 65 before they retire.

Retired respondents were most likely to have retired between 55 and 64, although a quarter had retired between 45 and 54.

While working respondents thought finances would be the main factor

influencing their decision on when to retire, retired respondents cited health as the main factor in their retirement decision. Nearly half said they had retired for health reasons, compared to only 11% for financial reasons. Sixteen per cent said caring responsibilities was a main factor and a quarter gave other reasons, the main ones being redundancy, lack of job opportunities, employer attitudes to older workers and moving town.

What qualities do older people bring to work?

Younger people were less likely to perceive the strengths of older people in the workforce than older people themselves, but more than half of all age groups strongly agreed that older people are reliable.

Most people also agreed that older people provide good customer service, have good communication skills, are committed to their careers, have skills in training people, show initiative and are able to create a good atmosphere in the workplace. Respondents were less likely to agree that older people have good technology skills.

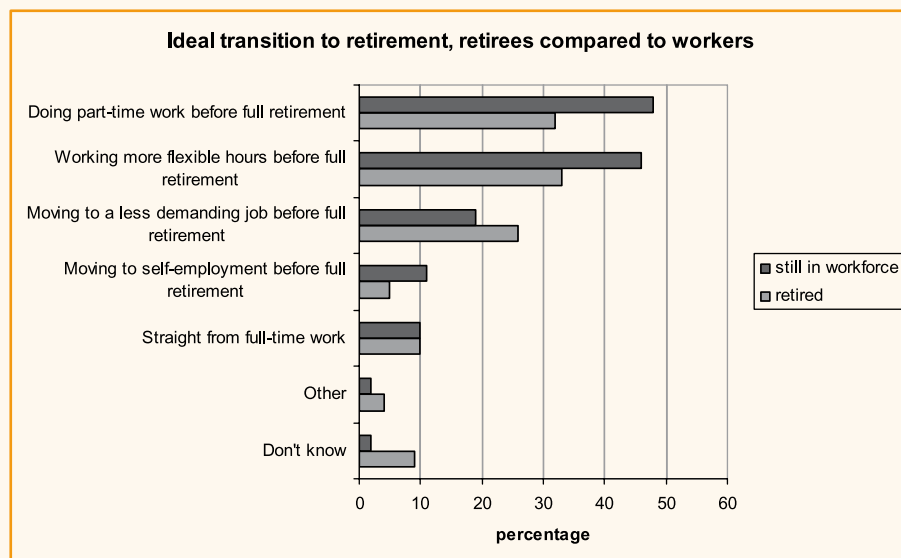
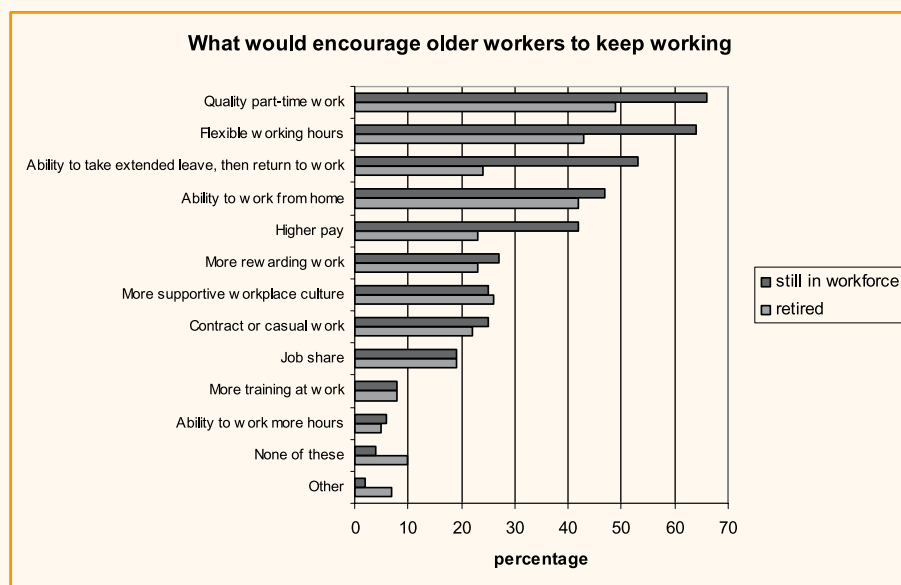
Do age differences cause problems at work?

About one in three respondents said they had experienced or witnessed difficulties at work due to people being different ages. A minority of respondents (15%) said they would feel uncomfortable working for someone younger than them.

About one in three respondents also said they had experienced discrimination at work due to their age. People aged over 45 were slightly more likely to report discrimination than those under 45 and men were slightly more likely than women to report age discrimination.

Respondents' comments on age discrimination indicate that both older and younger age groups feel excluded and under-valued when they are in a minority in a workplace. All age groups felt they missed promotion opportunities because of their age.

Older workers were more likely to report feeling discriminated against in training and development opportunities, and were more likely to report age-related harassment or bullying.



Both older and younger workers felt they were discriminated against in the area of pay because of their age. Younger people said they were paid less than older people doing the same work or reporting to them, while older people said younger people got jobs instead of them because they were cheaper to employ. Older people also felt they were underpaid because employers knew it was harder for them to get another job.

Dr Reed says that while the survey

was developed primarily to explore the experiences and expectations of people as they get older, it highlighted that people of all ages can feel excluded or under-valued at work. "New Zealand's best workplaces create a culture of tolerance and flexibility so people can reach their potential at work regardless of their age or background."

For a full report of the survey findings go to www.eeotrust.org.nz.

Creating versatile workplaces for older people

- Quality part-time work
- Flexible hours
- Ability to take extended leave
- Working from home
- Rewarding work
- Supportive workplace culture
- Option of less demanding work before retirement

Extending the working lives of Australians

Some of the findings of the EEO Trust Work and Age Survey can be compared to similar research undertaken in Australia by Business Work & Ageing which concluded that "there is a real opportunity to extend the working life of the current group of workers aged 45 years and over".

The research found that the average expected retirement age of Australians is 61 and more than 65% of respondents were interested in "a flexible pathway" to retirement.

Australian respondents said they would delay retirement if they could achieve better work-life balance, had a greater sense of belonging at work and had greater access to learning and development opportunities at work.

More information at www.businessworkageing.org.

Flexibility magnet for health professionals

A shortage of trained, experienced health professionals demands that a South Island company, INSIGHT Specialists in Assessment and Rehabilitation, offers irresistible working conditions.

The company was set up in 2003 by Katie Hodge and Robert McIntyre who had left the corporate world with the goal of creating a work environment where people would thrive.

Frustrations with corporate management was the main motivator for their decision, as well as a determination to provide high quality rehabilitation services to people who had suffered a traumatic brain injury, with a focus on providing the service in remote and rural locations.

"We didn't want a huge management structure," says Ms Hodge, "and we didn't want managers who weren't health professionals. What we did want is a healthy, fun work environment where people felt like they could make a difference."

INSIGHT is based in a converted Christchurch house and also has an

office in Nelson. It employs 40 staff and contractors around the South Island. Children are welcome in both offices and all staff have maximum flexibility. Much of the consultants' work involves visiting clients in their homes to assess their needs and help with rehabilitation.

"With this type of work, people can do a lot of the work from home so we provide laptops and phones," says Ms Hodge. "People need to work an agreed number of billable hours, but apart from that they can do what they like, where they like."

A number of the team are on extended leave or parental leave, confident that their jobs will be available when and if they choose to return to INSIGHT. Four weeks annual leave is standard and everyone also has a day off on their birthday.

Most of INSIGHT's staff have been employed through word of mouth recommendations although the company does some recruitment advertising. Ms Hodge says their Nelson-based clinical psychologist, Lea Galvin, was recruited earlier this year through a

flyer handed out at a conference.

Ms Galvin uses a wheelchair and has been impressed by INSIGHT's willingness to support her to do her job well. "They've been incredibly good," she says. "They're equipping one of the cars with hand controls for me and the flexibility is fabulous."

"Katie and Robert are always available on the phone and are incredibly respectful. They understand that people have different ideas and philosophies that enrich the whole team."

According to Ms Hodge, despite the degree of flexibility and wide geographic spread, INSIGHT has a great team spirit. "We're very team focussed with fortnightly staff meetings and a strong emphasis on training."

INSIGHT's employment practices obviously pay off. In less than three years it has successfully built a motivated team of health experts and become recognised as an excellent service provider by its main client, ACC.



Anita Mittal and Michael Desouza

Travelling the world in Penrose

Industrial Penrose is an unlikely prelude for the relaxed welcome you receive when you find your way to Comacc's front desk. And a tour of the office reveals that friendliness is not confined to the reception area. Meeting Comacc's staff is like taking a brief tour of the globe; people from China, India, Russia, Transylvania, South Africa and the Pacific work alongside each other in sales, training and programming roles.

When Steve Nathan and his father, Peter, started their payroll business they knew they needed smart, committed people who could provide innovative people management solutions to clients. Now, 16 years later, they employ 40 permanent staff and 12 temps in their Auckland office, and another three people in Sydney.

Their workforce is ethnically diverse, not by design but purely because the Nathans employ on the basis of skill and attitude, not race or culture.

One of Comacc's newest employees is Anita Mittal who recently joined the telemarketing team. Comacc recruited Ms Mittal through an Auckland Chamber of Commerce and Industry

programme, which matches mothers with employers who can provide work that suits their family commitments.

Ms Mittal was born in India and arrived in New Zealand in 1998 after 16 years working in corporate roles in the US. She spent a number of years out of the paid workforce so she could look after her two daughters. With both of them well settled in school she was ready to return to paid work.

Ms Mittal knew it would be difficult to find work near her home that would fit around the school day and allow some flexibility for family emergencies. She says she would never have taken a job which meant she had to neglect her children but she didn't expect to find an employer as supportive as Comacc.

"They consider you as an individual and respect everyone regardless of who you are or where you come from," she says. "That's very important to me. It's also a relaxed atmosphere, unlike some of the corporate jobs I've had, and that contributes to people's productivity."

Ms Mittal had no previous experience in telemarketing but has taken to the job, going out of her way to make

sure customers are satisfied. Her role involves developing relationships with customers and setting up appointments for Account Manager Michael Desouza.

Mr Nathan was happy to employ Ms Mittal on the basis of her personality and attitude, and also because he believes that women with young children are excellent employees. "They are very committed because they are focussed on their financial futures."

He invests heavily in upskilling staff and endeavours to offer opportunities for growth within Comacc.

Ms Mittal is intensely loyal to Comacc. "Steve gave me an opportunity when I needed it. When you get such a response you want to put your heart into your job."

Mr Nathan says the wide variety of nationalities and cultures working together at Comacc add value to the business. He encourages understanding through team meetings and social gatherings although his natural respect for everyone, regardless of their background, probably sends the strongest message of all.

Choices for Women – matching talented mothers with employers

The Auckland Chamber of Commerce Choices for Women programme has successfully matched 37 women with employers since it began in June last year.

Chief Executive of the Chamber, Michael Barnett, says the programme grew out of the Chamber's recognition that skills shortages continued to be a serious constraint on business growth. "Our New Kiwis programme was one way of addressing the skills shortage but skilled migrants are not as readily available as they were five years ago," he says, "so we needed

to find another labour supply.

"Women on the DPB were an obvious place to look, particularly with the Working For Families package making it more attractive for women to return to the workforce."

Work and Income refers skilled women on the DPB to the Chamber's Employment Division, which interviews them to ensure they match the criteria before taking them through a week-long training programme to identify their skills and ready them for the workplace.

"We're looking for women with qualifications and some work

experience, usually in administration," Michael Barnett says. "Once we've identified their skills, we help develop their CV, train them in interview skills and help them with personal presentation. The biggest issue for women returning to the workforce is confidence and our training programme is largely about developing their confidence and motivation."

The Chamber introduces the women to employers who are prepared to offer part-time and full-time work, and acknowledge family commitments.

Boosting wellness to improve productivity

Valuing employees, looking after their health, and ensuring they are able to perform at optimal levels are some of the steps employers can take to improve staff morale and performance.

Medibank Private reports that in Australia employees with "poor" health take up to nine times the annual sick days of workers with "good health", while a UK study found that employees who were members of a fitness club felt more satisfied with their jobs and were absent from work for fewer days than non-members. Fitter people also tend to be less stressed and are able to deal with stress better than those who are not fit.

Employers can encourage wellness and improve productivity through various levels of wellness investments:

- Install a water-filter system and remind staff to keep hydrated.
- Buy fruit once a week for a communal snack bowl.

- Purchase pedometers for staff and set up a 10,000 step per day record sheet.
- Contract an OSH nurse to conduct full medical examinations such as hearing, eyesight, blood and cholesterol tests.
- Offer paid wellness days.
- Set up corporate sports teams and provide a grant for sports-related memberships or equipment.
- Offer cessation programmes or treatment for smoking, alcohol, drugs.
- Hold seminars on nutrition, stress, or other wellness issues.
- Offer health insurance and confidential EAP services.

See the March issue of EEO Trust's Work & Life Bulletin for more detailed ideas on how to set up your own health and wellness programmes.
www.eeotrust.org.nz/awards/bulletin.cfm

Online EEO resources

Last year the EEO Trust added an online library catalogue to its website. More than 5000 publications and articles are available. Members

of the EEO Employers Group can borrow these resources, while all users can search the catalogue and access the electronic articles.

The EEO Trust has also recently added a series of toolkits to its website, including:

- Guidelines and checklists on recruiting new staff and the interview process
- Information and guidance on harassment and bullying in the workplace
- Recommendations for employers on how to tap into the talents of disabled people
- Sample staff surveys to explore their needs around parenting and relationships
- Guidelines for workplaces on how to help mothers who are breastfeeding
- An overview of employment legislation relevant to employers.

In addition, the toolkit section includes two interactive calculators; a staff turnover calculator and a workforce profile tool.

See www.eeotrust.org.nz/toolkits