

Myth buster factsheet

Dispelling common myths around older employees

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Older workers are an important asset to any organisation, due to their wealth of experience and diverse perspectives. This factsheet will help you promote the benefits of an age-diverse workforce by dispelling negative stereotypes about older workers. It will assist you in ensuring older workers are not dismissed as 'too experienced', 'overqualified' or 'out of touch'.

Recruitment myths

MYTH | "Older workers will cost the business more for their experience"

FACT | Workers aged over 50 are five times less likely to change jobs compared with workers aged 20-24, reducing ongoing recruitment and training costs.¹

Research from the US shows that 90% of the Fortune 400 bosses feel that the return on investment of hiring mature workers is high. At the same time, a worker's pay should be based on the job role rather than chronological age.

MYTH | "It is not worth investing in an older person as they won't stay as long as a younger person"

FACT | Countries that provide a higher level of training to older workers have workers leaving the labour market at an older age.²

Furthermore, our Missing Million research suggests older workers are more likely to stay within an organisation than younger workers, who are more likely to seek promotion elsewhere.

MYTH | "Employing older workers blocks opportunities for younger people"

FACT | There is not a fixed number of jobs in the economy. The more employed people, the more spending power in the economy, and the more jobs can be created.³ Past attempts to reduce youth unemployment in Germany Denmark and France by encouraging early retirement have not worked.⁴

MYTH | "I am not comfortable about managing someone that is older than me – I think an older worker is going to be difficult and more challenging."

FACT | Research reveals that younger managers have strong misconceptions on the potential challenges of managing older workers. More flexible management styles need to be developed to respond to an age diverse workforce.

Attitude and behaviour myths

MYTH | “Older workers are too set in their ways and will not be able to adapt to change or be flexible.”

FACT | 85% of employers with older workers say that these employees are open to and adapt to change very well.⁵ There is no evidence to suggest older workers are less adaptable or flexible in terms of mind set than their younger counterparts.

MYTH | “Older workers just cruise along and are not really that focussed on their career.”

FACT | 91% of older workers surveyed still wish to progress in their careers⁶. Older workers are wrongly assumed to lack the desire to learn, which raises serious questions about how those over 50 are being portrayed in the workplace.

MYTH | “Older workers take more sick days”

FACT | Older workers are half as likely to take a sick day compared to their younger counterparts. Only a quarter of over 50's took time off in 2014 due to ill-health compared to just under half of those aged 20-30.⁷

In terms of health, the most significant decline due to ageing does not happen, for most people, before 65. Work can also play a positive role on health.⁸

Skills and training myths

MYTH | “Older workers aren't up to date with the latest technology”

FACT | Cisco research found no great correlation between age and confidence using technology – even less so for technology at work. Type of work

and level of employment are better predictors of confidence with digital than age.⁹

Many older workers have been in the workforce throughout the entire evolution of the computer. They have learned how to quickly adapt to the newest advances.¹⁰

In the digital sector, 70% of start-ups founded by older workers lasted longer than three years, compared to only 28% of those created by younger entrepreneurs.¹¹

MYTH | “Younger workers perform better than older workers”

FACT | A study of OECD nations concluded that verbal skills, communication and intelligence remain unchanged as a person ages.¹²

21% of UK private sector employers believe older workers are more productive; 68% believe they are equally productive as other age groups.

A study conducted by the Bureau of Business Management found that older workers performed to an “excellent standard” 71% of the time.¹³

MYTH | “Older workers aren't as innovative and creative as younger people – they're out of touch”

FACT | Studies conducted by Harvard University, Babson College and other institutions have conducted research on the link between innovation and age. Each study supports the statement that age-diversified work groups enhance innovation.

MYTH | “There is no business benefit in training older workers”

FACT | Organisations that provide a higher level of training to older workers retain their staff until a much later age, thereby reducing turnover costs.

Sources

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006. Labour Mobility Survey. Cat. No. 6209.0.

² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006. Live Longer Work Longer. OECD Publishing, <http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/8105111E.PDF>

³ Dr Ros Altman, 2015. A new vision for older workers: retain, retrain, recruit.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/411420/a-new-vision-for-older-workers.pdf

⁴ DwP, 2017. Fuller Working Lives Evidence Base.

⁵ BITC & ILC UK. 2015. The Missing Million: Recommendations for Action

⁶ BITC & ILC UK. 2015. The Missing Million: Recommendations for Action.

⁷ RIAS, 2015. 'The reliables: over 50's workforce saving British businesses the cost of lost sick days'.

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⁸ DwP, 2017. Fuller Working Lives Evidence Base.

⁹ Professor Simeon Yates, 2016. Digital Culture Clash. Institute of Cultural Capital and Cisco.

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¹⁰ P. William Marshall, 'More companies are hiring older workers' <https://www.diseco.com/blog/more-companies-are-hiring-older-workers>

¹¹ IPPR, 2014. Silver Cities, realising the potential of our growing older population. www.ippr.org/publications/silver-cities-realising-the-potential-of-our-growing-older-population

¹² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006) Live Longer Work Longer. OECD Publishing, <http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/8105111E.PDF>

¹³ <http://www.diseco.com/more-companies-are-hiring-older-workers/>