

Work and Ageing:

An Age-related Durable Employability Policy

A policy of aiming at mental growth and reduction of age-related risks

As we entered an era in which older workers will have to remain in work longer, the time is ripe for a properly through-out age policy. There needs to be a change in the way we view older people. Current policy towards older workers is geared towards 'sparing' them. Starting from the assumption that older persons get tired more quickly, all sorts of **standard** rules have been introduced whereby less is demanded of them and more concessions are made to them. This applies to extra days, annual leaves, shorter working days, separate raters etcetera. These 'sparing' measures are expansive, are detrimental to the image of older people and make them less attractive propositions on the labour market.

'Green' risks and 'grey chances'

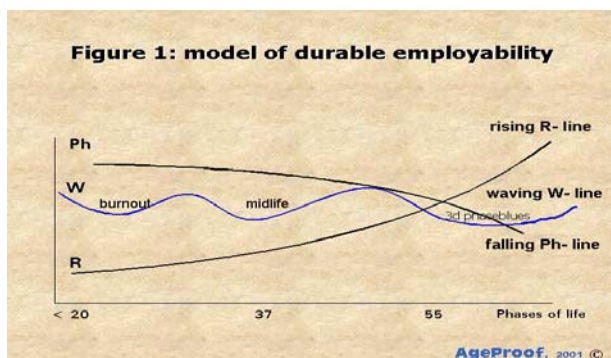
Current policy ignores the strength of older workers and the existence of 'green' risks i.e. health and safety risks to which young workers are substantially more vulnerable than their older colleagues. These safety risks can be not only physical but also social and financial. To take an example: young foreman up to the age of 25 are between three and five times more likely to have an occupational accident than their older colleagues. Responsibility combined with inexperience leads to a high stress burden. Letting a young recruit from the unemployment pool, with limited life experience loose on dangerous work is an example of 'age-oblivious' reintegration policy.

But what does the model consists of? Physical strength decreases with age, no question. But that is not the whole story. While older people may be less physically strong and healthy, they have other useful characteristics which are under-exploited. The physical and psychological characteristics which a person develops over time can be charted statistically in an PhRW (Physical/Risk management/Well being) 'capability profile'. What this boils down to is that as the Ph-line of older workers declines, the R-line (also social safety) rises. The W-line is characterized by three dips: the first is burn-out (often around the age of 30), the second is the mid-life crisis (beginning in men around age 37) and the third is third-phase-blues (see Figure 1).

Age Policy

Each age thus has its own limitations and occupational risks, but also its own strengths. The AgeProof-model is geared towards finding the optimum balance for each age, taking into account the specific strengths and risks of each phase in the course of life. The model breaks with the traditional policy adapted towards older workers, which basically shunts them to one side through a series of 'sparing' measures.

What can employers now do with the data provided by the 'capability profile' and the AgeProof philosophy on age policy? A first step could be to identify age-related occupational health and safety risks and, in this way, incorporate the age factor into the risk inventory. Both the work (the load) and the worker (load capability) are subject to change. When introducing the age factor in the design, policy becomes dynamic. Better recognition of the changes in worker's career allows a policy to be devised for altering the work and the organization of the work. For example, give a mid-lifer a new challenge and set new 'growth' tasks for older workers so that they do not become worn down by unremitting stress. In short, try to replace tasks that are burdensome or that eventually become burdensome by tasks which people find stimulating and which they are good at.



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