

Global Health Workplace Awards Summit

Abstract

Sustainable Work Ability of Aging Employees

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Aging in general increases the individual's interest to quality life (QOL) and quality of work life in particular (QOWL). The factors affecting QOL are numerous and may or may not modify each other's impact. The main determinants of QOL for ageing people differ from the respective determinants among younger people, particularly in the view of increasing importance of health and psycho-social factors instead of stronger emphasis to material and financial aspects among younger people.

Extensive research on quality of working life (QOWL) among ageing workers with respect to conditions, and interest to continue at work to older age, speak for similar trend as in the case of general quality of life (QOL). The factors may be "internal" derived from worker's individual characteristics and personal life and health situation, or "external" determined by work environment factors. Interestingly the interest of ageing workers to continue at work depends on a multiple battery of factors and trends:

A. **Internal factors** constitute for example the following:

- Health status, particularly NCDs
- Competence and skill in relation to job demands
- Physical and mental work ability
- Family and social network
- Motivation and interests (competing interests and obligations)
- Level of pension benefits vs. income from employment

B. **External factors** may be derived from the job itself, workplace or more generally from work life

- Increasing emphasis to qualitative rather than quantitative aspects of work
- Age management culture
- Physical working conditions, particularly physical and mental work load
- Support provided by occupational health services
- Pension benefits vs. level of income from active work
- Social environment and particularly respect to ageing individuals and.

Major national and tripartite efforts for extension of working careers and improving QOWL of ageing workers have been implemented in European countries, including Finland. Numerous action models and mini-interventions are available for prevention. Such effect is not easy to demonstrate after short – term interventions, but a longer "incubation time" and multidisciplinary approach can generate a positive effect. Thus combined programmes considering internal and external factors are needed.

Promoting sustainable work ability needs interventions at several levels of society and toward numerous social, psychological, educational, rehabilitation, occupational health and financial aspects. While need for comprehensive and multidisciplinary approaches is growing, unfortunately several factors in the modern work life lead the development of occupational health services to more fragmented direction. There is a universal need to develop comprehensive occupational health service for all sectors of economy and for all working individuals in Europe. For this, more intensive guidance from the EU Commission is needed.

References: Ilmarinen J. Promoting active ageing in the workplace.

<https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/articles/promoting-active-ageing-in-the-workplace>

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