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Workplace Preparedness for an Ageing Workforce: A Case Study

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Workplace Preparedness for an Ageing Workforce: A Case Study

Abstract

Design/methodology/approach

A questionnaire survey of workplaces was undertaken in the Fife region of Scotland, which in economic and demographic terms is representative of wider Scotland and other nations in Northern Europe. Descriptive analysis was undertaken to give insight into concerns and actions taken regarding ageing workforces.

Purpose

For many nations, their workforces are ageing. The motivation of this paper is to explore the concerns and attitudes of employers to employing older workers and what information they require.

Findings

Most workplaces perceive more advantages to employing older workers than challenges. Many have adapted training and work practices, but many have not. The majority surveyed believe that existing policies and strategies are sufficient. This points to the need for national and local government and employer associations to become more active to persuade workplaces to better manage future workplaces.

Research Limitations/implications

Generalisability is problematic and the small sample restricted the scope of statistical analysis.

Practical Implications

We were unable to judge the severity of how an ageing workforce impacts on workplace performance, as employers found it difficult to conceptualise and identify the impact of ageing from market and economic pressures.

Social Implications

Resulting from population ageing the workforce of many societies are becoming older, this will impact on workplace relations and the social identity of those over the age of fifty years.

Originality

Little research has been undertaken to assess workplaces awareness of, and how to adapt to, an ageing workforce and research is required to inform and guide management strategy of employers.

Key Words

Older Workers, Workplace Adaption, Preparedness for Change

Introduction

Many national populations are ageing. In Europe and Northern America in 2019 while 18% of the population was aged over 65-years, by 2050 it is projected to increase to 25% (UN, 2019).

Arguments are made that population ageing will put unprecedented stress on public expenditure (pensions, health and long-term care), which if no action is taken, might increase the public debt burden by 180% of the GDP in G20 advanced economies, and 130% in emerging economies, by 2060 (Rouzet *et al.*, 2019). In response, many nations have encouraged individuals to extend their working lives beyond ‘traditional’ retirement ages and have actively pushed this through a range of policy measures including raising the age of state retirement benefit eligibility (Phillipson, 2013). Furthermore, many older workers, as Bennett, Beehr and Lepisto (2016) point out, have a desire to work beyond retirement ages, primarily for economic and social reasons and to feel valued even although they might well prefer more flexible working conditions and hours. Governments have also sought to highlight the ‘business case’ of extended working lives to employers, highlighting the knowledge, skills and ideas that older workers bring (Bowman *et al.*, 2017; Flynn, 2010; Taylor and Walker, 1998).

Despite these worker- and employer-focused policy drivers, the average effective age at which workers withdraw from the labour market continues to be well below the normal age for receiving a full old-age pension in many countries (OECD, 2020a). While in some instances this could reflect individual choice not to extend working lives, the literature cautions against taking a highly individualised view of late-working-life. The extension of working lives is not a “one-way street”. Rather it reflects an interplay of factors (individual, organisational and state), with the push and pull factors to extend working lives affecting workers in markedly different ways (Egdell *et al.*, 2020; Lain *et al.*, 2019; McLaughlin and Neumark, 2018; Ni Leime *et al.*, 2017; Phillipson *et al.*, 2019).

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3 The aim of the paper is to contribute to the knowledge base specifically to assess the issue of
4 ageing workforces, which many countries are beginning to experience and will experience over
5 the coming decades. We hope to expose the awareness and preparedness to undertake strategic
6 change to introduce or modify workplace management strategies and policies and how change
7 to a more age accommodating and welcoming workplace can be facilitated. In this paper we
8 draw on findings from a quantitative survey undertaken in 2016 into understanding and
9 management of an ageing workforce and older workers amongst workplaces in a region of
10 Scotland (United Kingdom (UK)). The survey was conducted as part of a larger study which
11 involved qualitative research and is reported elsewhere (Egdell *et al.*, 2017, 2020). To
12 conceptualise our work, this paper draws on Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1977,
13 1986, 1991).

14
15 For the purposes of this study, in line with the UK government definition, older workers were
16 defined as those in employment over the age of 50 years (DWP, 2014a, 2017a). The UK
17 government has sought to facilitate and encourage the extension of working lives through the
18 removal of the Default Retirement Age (HM Government 2011), increased state pension ages
19 (DWP, 2017b; HM Government, 2014) and awareness of the benefits of employing older
20 workers amongst the business community (Altmann 2015; DWP, 2014b, 2017a). While the
21 employment and retention of older people has risen (DWP, 2020), older workers in the UK
22 face many challenges in the workplace especially regarding recruitment where their prospects
23 are poor (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2018). Prejudices and
24 stereotyping persist in the minds of many employers in the UK (Egdell *et al.*, 2020; Fuertes *et*
25 *al.*, 2013; Loretto and White, 2006a, 2006b; Porcellato, 2010; Taylor and Walker, 1998). These
26 challenges have prompted Phillipson, Vickerstaff and Lain (2016) to argue the need for pro-
27 active policy formation.

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Conceptualising Age, Employment and Value

In this paper we focus upon the role that employers - and employers' own perceptions of age - play in the facilitation of the extension of working lives. While employer focused government drives, campaigns and programmes have promoted the 'business case' of extended working lives, their effect on changing employer attitudes and behaviours towards older workers has been limited (Flynn, 2010; Muller-Camen *et al.*, 2011; Taylor and Walker, 1998). The literature continues to report a disjointed labour market for older workers with many facing age-based discrimination in the workplace, sometimes overtly or more subtly through employer policies and cultures. There are beliefs in circulation that older people are less motivated, reluctant to engage in training, lack contemporary skills, have lower qualifications than younger employees, are less physically able and have lower levels of stamina, are more truculent regarding acceptance of change and taking commands from younger managers, and generally lack flexibility in thinking and attitudes (Axelrad and James, 2016; Kroon *et al.*, 2018; Kullmann, 2016; Ng and Feldman, 2012; Porcellato *et al.*, 2010; Zheltoukhova and Baczor, 2016). There is often little evidence to support these stereotypes, for instance Nicholson *et al.* (2016) and Kooij (2015) argue that declining health has little or no impact on performance and peoples' jobs and the work environment can usually be easily adjusted to accommodate those with poorer health. Kniffin *et al.*, (2020) show that other older workers have adapted by reinventing how they work, even in times of severe stress. Further authors such as Abraham and Hansson (1995), Akkerman *et al.*, (2018). Arnold (2018), Taneva and Zacher *et al.*, (2018) and Thrasher *et al.*, (2018) point to self-regulation strategies adopted by older workers to accommodate changes in their capabilities and the nature of their work and their workplace. Success in this accommodation often depends on the workers personal resources formed by their human capital, work experiences and the social capital of their social networks (Freund, 2008; Gayen *et al.*, 2010, 2019). Referring to these personal resources Hobfoll *et al.*, (2003)

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2
3 argue that the degree of resource influences the extent to which older workers can control and
4
5 shape their environment to fulfil their goals.
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8 It is to be remembered that older workers are a heterogeneous group with widely ranging skills
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10 and abilities (which may change with age (Light *et al.*, 1996; Morack *et al.*, 2013)) as are their
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12 workplaces and the management policies applied in these workplaces. This is typified in the
13
14 construction sector which employs a high proportion of older workers and in which there is
15
16 growing concerns about future skill shortages. However, employer awareness of the impact of
17
18 population ageing on the sector is lacking (Marley, 2015). This can be compared to the health
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20 sector, whose workforce is also ageing, where the implications of the ageing workforce are
21
22 being considered (Working Longer Review, 2014). Many large organisations have developed
23
24 age management policies and practices to combat age barriers and/or promote age diversity,
25
26 and to maintain the capability of workers. These policies cover recruitment, learning and
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28 continuing development, job flexibility, health protection and promotion, workplace design,
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30 benefits packages, employment exit and the like (Naegele and Walker, 2006; Nicholson *et al.*,
31
32 2016). Acceptance of drives, campaigns and programmes promoting the 'business case' of
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34 extended working lives has largely occurred in these larger organisations (Muller-Camen *et*
35
36 *al.*, 2011). However, age management policies and practices, and engagement with the business
37
38 case of extended working lives, are not uniform and have not diffused to small and medium
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40 sized enterprises (SMEs), which employ most people in developed economies. Due to fewer
41
42 human and capital resources, SMEs find it difficult to develop and apply effective age
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44 management procedures such as the introduction of flexible working practices (Atkinson and
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46 Sandiford, 2015; Fuertes *et al.*, 2013). The differences amongst older workers are also reflected
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48 in their ability to apply and engage in self-regulation of their work and its environment as
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50 demonstrated by Thrasher *et al.*, (2018).
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3 Employers can be pre-emptive in helping workers develop personal resources which can
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5 facilitate their proactivity, flexibility, and engagement, which consequently enhance ability to
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7 self-regulate work and the workplace. This involves bolstering HR resources and practices,
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9 notably training, building autonomy, knowledge sharing and developing teamworking, flexible
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11 practices (Wood *et al.*, 2012). Kooij (2015) found that adopting such practices builds self-
12
13 efficacy and empowers the receiver of these practices and as Von Bonsdorff *et al.*, (2018)
14
15 shows is beneficial to accommodating workforce ageing. However, this type of interventionist
16
17 training is often confined to high performing and larger organisations and Canduela *et al.*,
18
19 (2012) and Lindsay *et al.*, (2013) have demonstrated that older workers often face difficulties
20
21 and inequalities and accessing and benefiting from workplace training especially in private
22
23 organisations. Further some of the strategies advocated to build personal resources by those
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25 such as Freund (2008) may not be very helpful to older workers, especially those which
26
27 advocate selection of those with attributes of self-efficacy and flexibility, especially for
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29 workers who are loyal and been with the organisation for many years, it would be difficult for
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31 recruiters the forecast skill requirements far into the future.
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38 To accommodate the changing age structure of societies and address impending skill shortages
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40 it is essential that the notion of age management does not remain the province of large
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42 organisations but is diffused to other organisation types, while realising that one set of
43
44 procedures and policies will not suit all workplaces. Bespoke age management strategies need
45
46 to be developed, but for this to occur there needs to be awareness amongst employers and a
47
48 resource and information base will have to be developed and made available to organisations.
49
50 Fuertes *et al.*, (2013) indicate effectiveness of awareness raising in changing employer attitudes
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52 towards older workers. The assessment of the level of employer awareness and to understand
53
54 what resources are needed is the motivation for this work.
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3 To conceptualise this apparent disconnect between employer attitudes to an ageing workforce
4
5 and the implementation of policies to manage age, this paper draws on Bourdieu's Theory of
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7 Practice (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986; 1991). Bourdieu's conceptual tools represent an increasingly
8
9 dominant perspective in sociological research generally and have had an increasing role in
10
11 ageing research (Bowman *et al.*, 2017; Gilleard, 2020). Bourdieu's widely known 'forms of
12
13 capital' – cultural, economic, social and symbolic capitals – offer tools for understanding the
14
15 stakes in the social world. Individuals are stratified in society through possession of different
16
17 types and volumes of capital. Cultural capital, the most conceptually developed form in
18
19 Bourdieu's work, explores the cultural and educational resources individuals possess. Existing
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21 in three forms – as *embodied* skills and innate knowledge; *institutionally* in the form of
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23 qualifications and degrees which assert claims to an individual's cultural capital; and
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25 *objectified* in the form of artefacts such as music and books (Bourdieu, 1986). These forms of
26
27 capital are symbolically mediated within social fields which then attribute value to the forms
28
29 of capital. Individuals engage with multiple social fields – such as a field of education, a labour
30
31 market or a field of cultural production – all of which value the forms of capital differently.
32
33 Previous work in Bourdieusian sociology has emphasised how individuals attempt to become
34
35 'subjects of value' and attempt acquire symbolic legitimacy or respectability in social fields
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37 (Skeggs, 1997; 2004). Within the labour market, employers are key 'intermediaries' in
38
39 assigning this legitimacy to employees. As has been argued by Gilleard (2020: p5), age-related
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41 distinctions – such as those between 'the "fit" and the "frail", the "active" and the "inactive",
42
43 those "adept in using ICT" and the "digitally excluded" – can be important area to explore
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45 through Bourdieu's theories. This article therefore aims to explore employers' perceptions of
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47 employees' age in the workplace and thus how these perceptions alter the symbolic value of
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49 employees' labour power.
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Method

Fife as a local authority region in the east of Scotland was chosen for a case study of employers to understand their attitudes to, and management of older workers and their preparation for the medium future. The Fife region is broadly representative of Scotland comprising of rural populations and large urban populations, making up almost 7% of the Scottish population. The Fife population is ageing. Of the Fife population in 2018, 21.7% were aged between 45 and 59-years, 17.9% were aged between 60 and 64 years and 8.8% were aged over 65-years. By 2028 this is projected to rise to 18.8%, 20.1% and 11.6% respectively; and by 2043 to 19.4%, 18.4% and 15.7% respectively (National Records of Scotland, 2020). The business base in Fife is broadly similar to that in the rest of Scotland. The largest employing industries in Fife in 2019 (by employee jobs) were Wholesale and Retail Trade, Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles; Human Health and Social Work Activities; and Manufacturing (Nomis, 2021). Of the 9,900 business sites in 2020, 88.6 per cent of sites employ between 0-9 people; 9.6 per cent of sites employ between 10-49 people; 1.5 per cent of sites employ between 50-249 people; 0.4 per cent of sites employ more than 250 people (Nomis, 2021).

To gather data an online questionnaire was developed in the SurveyMonkey platform (SurveyMonkey, 2020) and used in a survey representative of the range of organisations in Fife. The questions were developed from questions used in the literature including Barnes *et al.*, (2009), Metcalf and Meadows (2010), Jensen and Møberg (2012), Mercer (2015), Gringart *et al.*, (2013), and Taylor and Walker (1998) as well as other surveys, notably the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS, 2013) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2014). The questionnaire contained questions relating to:

- The nature of the organisation (size, industry sector, type of work and age profile of the employees).
- What proportion of the workforce is older than fifty years?

- What age, the employer considered an older worker to be?
- Awareness of ageing and the degree to which workplace policies to accommodate ageing were being adopted or developed.
- Advantages and challenges of employing older workers (tick box lists of 24 statements)
- Policies and working practices available to older workers (tick box list of 10 policies)
- Policies available to older workers relating to obtaining training and development (seven tick box statements).

A further 16 statements were given on a five-point Likert item scale to ascertain employer's attitudes view of older workers ability to undertake workplace tasks and 12 statements were given in a tick box format to determine what policies would need to be changed if the number of older workers increased substantially. Also asked was in a redundancy situation would being an older worker feature in the selection criteria, what guidance information had been sought and from whom and what further information is required.

To identify organisations to invite to complete the survey and their contact details, the following sources were consulted: the Financial Analysis Made Easy (FAME) database (FAME, 2016) which contains comprehensive information on companies in the UK and Ireland; the Fife Business Directory, available through the Fife Council website; and the Green Business Fife Directory. In total 1260 emails containing the survey link were sent directly to organisations in Fife, of which were 1052 successfully delivered. In addition, a range of organisations representing organisations in Fife were asked to distribute the survey to their members, and the survey was advertised using Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. 199 completed surveys were returned of which, due to missing responses in key questions 143 are used in the current analysis.

Of these respondents 7.7% came from the public sector, 67.8% were in the private sector and the remainder were in the voluntary sector or social enterprises. 81.8% were described as single

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3 independent organisations and 16.8% reported that they were part of a larger multi-site
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5 organisation. The type of organisations covered a wide gamut of industries, with the most
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7 frequent being in manufacturing (15.6%), education (14.2%) and health and social care
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9 (14.2%). Organisations ranged in size from one to 9,000 employees with a median size of 13.5
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11 employees.
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15 The data was extracted to IBM SPSS (2020) for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics is
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17 used to present summaries of the responses and form scores to reflect workplaces concern of
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19 workforce ageing, their consideration of advantages and challenges of older workers, number
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21 of flexible working practices available to older workers are and what training needs of older
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23 workers are. These scores are used in the application of hierarchical cluster analysis using a
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25 median method with squared Euclidean distance to group organisations into homogenous
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27 groups according to their responses to workforce ageing. The groups were then compared to
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29 ascertain their awareness and information and resource needs controlling for industry sector,
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31 organisation type (public, private or voluntary) and organisation size by number of employees.
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38 **Results**

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40 Taking the UK government definition of older workers (Department of Work and Pensions,
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42 2014a, 2017a), with respondents were asked to state approximately the proportion of their
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44 workforce who were aged over 50 years. The mean response to this question was 60.6%, clear
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46 indication of the magnitude of ageing. The variation across workplaces is indicated in Table 1.
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49 Ageing in the Fife region is most severe in large organisations, those in the public sector and
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51 in the education and health sectors.
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54 **<Table 1: About Here>**

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57 When asked at what age do you consider an employee to be an older worker, 139 answered
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59 this question of which 61.9% and 28.8% stated over 50 and over 65 years respectively and
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3 9.4% stated they had no criterion. There was no statistically significant variation from these
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5 proportions when organisation type, sector and size were considered.
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8 The responding workplaces were asked on a five-point Likert item scale if they considered that
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10 their workforce was getting older, was an ageing workforce presenting a challenge, were they
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12 aware of a need to support older workers, if they had established policies directed to support
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14 older workers and were they developing such policies. The responses ranged from strongly
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16 disagree to strongly agree. 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their workforce
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18 was getting older and only 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their workforce was
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20 ageing, the rest did not know. 40% agreed that ageing was presenting a challenge in their
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22 workplace, 33% disagreed and the rest did not know. However, only 47% were aware of an
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24 increased need to support older workers and only 29% had established policies of older workers
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26 (37% did not consider that they had policies). Similarly, only 24% agreed that they were
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28 developing policies for older workers, while 36% disagreed that they were developing policies.
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30 Again, here was no significant variation by organisation type or sector, but those which were
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32 medium or large sized organisations agreed that their workforces were ageing and required
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34 support significantly more at the 5% level than micro or small organisations (Pearson χ^2 was
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36 used to assess significance). Considering the correlation between the responses to these
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38 questions it seems that experience of an ageing workforce is significantly correlated with a
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40 realisation that this will present challenges to the workplace, which engenders the awareness
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42 that support for older workers is required. Consequently, from this awareness is the
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44 establishment of workplace policies for ageing and the consequent review and development of
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46 policies. The matrix of Spearman Rank correlation coefficients is displayed in Table 2.
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54 **<Table 2: About Here>**
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56 Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was applied to resolve these question scores
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58 into two factors, labelled workplace strategy and policy action (abbreviated to action) and
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3 concern over workplace ageing. These accounted for just over 65% of the original variance and
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5 the factor loadings are displayed in Table 3.
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8 **<Table 3: About Here>**
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10 Enquiring into the advantages of employing older workers the responses given are presented
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12 in Figure 1. Respondents frequently listed experience reliability, skills and knowledge, a role
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14 model and mentor for younger workers, loyalty, and productivity as advantages of older
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16 workers.
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20 **<Figure 1: About Here>**
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22 The respondents reported the challenges of employing older workers and these are shown in
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24 Figure 2. The major challenges reported seem to be difficulty in adapting to new technology
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26 and older workers' dislike of taking instructions from younger people. It is to be noted that
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28 more advantages were reported than challenges.
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32 **<Figure 2: About Here>**
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34 To summarise the lists of advantages and challenges of older workers, the incidences of each
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36 given by an individual organisation are summed to give two scores. Another score was formed
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38 by summing the types of flexible working practices available to older workers in the
39
40 organisation. These practices included the availability of part time working, flexible working
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42 time, compressed hours, ability to work from home, job sharing, availability of special leave
43
44 and phased retirement. A training score was also created to reflect training and development
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46 policies of the organisation by summing if there was a regular review of the training needs of
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48 older workers, if managers encourage older workers to take part in training, if older workers
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50 were encouraged to have a role as mentors and were individual learning styles catered for.
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52 These scores have been standardised on a scale of 0 to 1 (including the concern and action
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54 factor scores) and how these vary by industry sector, workplace type and size are presented in
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56
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59 Table 4.
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<Table 4: About Here>

From Table 4, concern scores tended to be higher than action scores and action is highest amongst public sector organisations and lowest among primary extractive and manufacturing and retail and professional services organisations. Regardless of the nature of the organisation, respondents gave higher advantage scores than challenge scores, the advantage score is more than 4.5 times higher than the challenge score. Training available to older workers becomes more available with increasing organisation size and in micro organisations there seems less emphasis on training of older workers. Remembering that these scores have a maximum of 1 there is scope for more provision of flexible work and training practices in all organisations for older workers (it is noted that in the voluntary sector the training practice score is notably higher than other sectors).

The scores summarised in Table 4 were used to classify respondents into groups by applying hierarchical cluster analysis using a median method, (as the distribution of some scores were skewed) and taking Euclidean Squared distances as a distance measure. From this application three distinct clusters emerged whose centroids are displayed in Figure 3. Of the organisations 62 were categorised as having positive attitudes to older workers and the other organisations were categorised as negative (which embraced negative and ambivalent attitudes). Our interpretation of the clusters formed are that organisation differ little in the training and flexible work practice scores and perceptions of advantages and challenges of employing older workers. Those workplaces whose action score is relatively high perceive more advantages in employing older workers than organisations with less concern of ageing. The drivers of the clusters appear to be in the level of concern and actions taken and the cluster groups can be considered to be “concerned but think actions are suitable”, “concerned but taking little action” and “concerned and taking action”. Of the organisations surveyed the percentages in each cluster were 26.1%, 53.5% and 20.4% respectively.

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<Figure 3: About Here>

The percentages in each cluster by organisational attribute is given in Table 5. The highest percentages in the desirable cluster of being concerned and acted are large organisations, those who are voluntary sector organisations and those in the retail and professional sector.

<Table 5: About Here>

Respondents were asked where they had sought support or information regarding employing older workers only 54% reported that they had sought any information. For those who did get information the main sources of advice were from specialist human resource consultants, occupational health, business consultants, the UK Advisory Conciliation and Advisory Service (ACAS) and trade unions (see Table 6). There was little variation in levels of information seeking across the clusters. However, those in the ‘concerned and action taken’ group, made much more use of human resources advisors, health services and a regional initiative (Healthy Working Lives Fife Health Promotion) than other clusters. When asked what further information would be helpful only 57% responded. The answers are tabulated as part of Table 6, these are rather unspecific and mostly of a general nature and there is a resistance to pay for it.

<Table 6: About Here>

Discussion and Conclusions

Workforce ageing is a growing issue. In this case of workplaces in the Fife region of Scotland it was found that only 20 percent of the organisations who participated in this study had concerns that their organisations were ageing and had taken action to adapt workplaces and engage with employees. However, there is relatively little engagement with information seeking in relation to workforce ageing which might be a vital issue for future workplaces.

The results reflect a continuing gap between awareness of issues around the ageing workforce and action. Using a Bourdieu-inspired lens draws attention to the role of employers’

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2
3 perceptions have in shaping attitudes towards age and value. Employers are key
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5 ‘intermediaries’ in assigning value within the labour market, therefore the persistence of age-
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7 related stereotypes have real effects in terms of hiring decisions, succession planning or age-
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9 management. The findings demonstrate how older workers are valued, in Bourdieu’s terms, for
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11 their ‘embodied cultural capital’. Embodiment, as Bourdieu (1986: p18) asserts, implies ‘a
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13 labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time’ and the survey responses indicate this
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15 investment in ‘time’ that older workers have undertaken are positively valued as sources of
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17 ‘experience’, ‘loyalty’ and ‘mentoring roles’. Yet these stereotypical views of older workers
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19 that reflect a view that they have little choice in the labour market and represent an immutable
20
21 form of value. Indeed, corollary with ‘experienced’ are notions that adaptability, especially
22
23 regarding technology, is something you cannot get from an older worker. Furthermore, while
24
25 the findings clearly show that employers are aware of the potential problems of an ageing
26
27 workforce, the lack of action reflects a lack of incentive to do anything. A slack labour market
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29 coupled with ideas of older workers as ‘loyal’ and having little bargaining power. The
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31 ‘embodied’ form of cultural capital represented by older workers is a more reliable source of
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33 labour power reflecting the information asymmetries that exist in ascertaining the value of
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35 younger employees potentially possessing *institutionalised* forms of cultural capital but lacking
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37 in *embodied* – and an investment in time – forms of cultural capital.
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44 From our results we conclude that only around one fifth of organisations understand workplace
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46 ageing and acted accordingly. A little more than one quarter of organisations seem unconcerned
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48 of the potential impact of workforce ageing and think that existing workforce management
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50 practices will be sufficient and over half of the sample identify as being concerned of
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52 population ageing but do not think workforce management policies need to be adapted or only
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54 small adaptations are required. Large organisations seem to be more concerned of ageing and the
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56 need for action in terms of strategy and policy development, which might be because they have
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3 access to more resources, especially professional human resource input. But these organisations
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5 are only a small proportion of the labour market. This raises concern regarding small and
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7 medium sized organisations especially in the private sector. There needs to be a societal
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9 response, probably by national and local government and employer associations to raise
10
11 awareness and provide guidance and assistance on how workplaces need to adapt to the
12
13 challenge of ageing and what strategies and policies would be effective. Of interest is that most
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15 of the public sector organisations (who have the highest proportion of older workers) report
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17 little concern of workforce ageing and if this will cause issues existing workforce management
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19 strategies and policies are sufficiently robust to mitigate challenges. One might speculate that
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21 the lack of concern from public bodies might reflect more worker favourable conditions and
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23 pension arrangements when compared to the private sector.
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28 However, this study has its limitations the most important being is the small numbers of
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30 organisations taking part in the study, which has inhibited statistical analysis. Another issue is
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32 that the study is a case study, however, the workplaces included as typical of the region studied,
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34 which in turn is fairly typical of the whole of Scotland. To give some wider context Scotland
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36 and Fife is similar in an economic and demographic sense to many nations of Northern Europe.
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38 The survey was conducted in 2016 and since then (five years later) the population and hence,
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40 the workforce continues to get older and for those born on 1st January 1953 the eligibility age
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42 for the state pension for men was 65 years and for women it was 62 years and nine months
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44 while for those born five years later the eligibility age has risen to 66 years for both sexes. In
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46 Fife the Scottish Government's (2021) estimates of percentage of those aged 50 to 64 years
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48 described as economically active has risen from 65.3 percent in quarter three 2016 to 72.5% in
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50 quarter three 2020. Further, older workers have lost their jobs and increased job insecurity as a
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52 result of the labour market crisis precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Crawford and
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54 Karjalainen, 2020). While less likely to have been placed on furlough during the pandemic than
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3 their younger colleagues, in May 2021 those aged 45 plus were less likely to have returned
4 from furlough than those under 45 (Handscomb et al., 2021). This situation highlights the
5 continued requirement for more research to help employers understand the implications of an
6 ageing workforce and what strategic interventions are required. These developments highlight
7 the continued importance of the work and points to the requirement for more research to help
8 employers understand the implications of an ageing workforce and what strategic interventions
9 are required. This paper contributes by exposing issues to be investigated.

10
11 By use of a survey we were unable to judge the severity of how an ageing workforce impacts
12 on workplace performance, as employers found it difficult to conceptualise and identify the
13 impact of ageing from background market and economic pressures. There could be concern
14 that respondents gave socially desirable responses, so inflating the proportion classed as having
15 positive attitudes to older workers. However, the qualitative research conducted as part of the
16 larger study that this quantitative survey data is drawn upon yielded findings which support
17 those given in this paper (Egdell *et al.*, 2020). In the qualitative research semi structured
18 interviews were conducted with managers and employees. They revealed that age management
19 procedures are negligible for many workplaces because of the view that older workers are
20 performing satisfactorily and hence there is no need to invest in or adapt workplaces. This view
21 might prevail because managers think about employees as individuals rather than defined by
22 their age and most workplaces were small and did not have formal HR departments. Few of
23 the participating managers and some of the employees believed that the ageing of the
24 population would require changes to policies, practices, and procedures, despite
25 acknowledging demographic ageing. From these findings it was argued that any adaptations if
26 made will be reactive, rather than proactive or preventative (Egdell *et al.*, 2020).

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28 The conclusions are that employers need to become more involved in planning and adapting to
29 the future in terms of an ageing workforce. There is a need to value older workers and adapt
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workplaces and policies to allow them to engage to their full potential. For this to happen national and local government, employer associations and trade unions need to engage in facilitating an attitudinal change amongst employers and to assist in adaption to the ageing workforce. But this is not happening and there is little evidence that many workplaces are undertaking strategic planning to prepare for employing older workers. This lack of preparedness will impact many workplaces throughout the world, but especially in Northern Europe and poor workforce planning will damage the performance of many organisations and will lead to unnecessary stress and dissatisfaction amongst both employers and workers. This will require continuing work to raise awareness of ageing in workplaces and provide information and advice to employers to facilitate their adaption and understanding that, because older workers are not a homogeneous group, solutions need to be tailored to the needs of their workforces.

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Tables

Table 1: Those aged over fifty years in workplaces by size, type and sector.

Enterprise Attribute		N	% of workforce aged over 50 years
Size	Micro & Small	52	49.0%
	Medium	62	59.7%
	Large	26	84.6%
Type	Public	11	90.0%
	Private	97	51.1%
	Voluntary	35	77.1%
Sector	Primary/Manufacturing	47	60.9%
	Education & Health	40	66.7%
	Retail & Professional	54	55.8%
Overall Mean		143	60.6%

Table 2: Spearman Rank correlation coefficients

	Workforce getting older	Increased need to support older workers	Ageing workforce presents challenges	Established policies	Developing policies
Workforce getting older	1				
Increased need to support older workers	0.238**	1			
Ageing in workforce will present challenges	0.300**	0.225**	1		
Established policies	0.042	0.359**	-0.099	1	
Developing policies	0.059	0.404**	0.204*	0.540**	1

*significant at the 5% level

**significant at the 1% level

Table 3: Factor Loadings

Questions	Action	Concern
There are established policies in this workplace to address the effects of an ageing workforce	0.855	
We are currently reviewing and developing policies in this workplace to address the effects of an ageing workforce	0.819	
This workplace is aware of an increased need to support older workers	0.640	0.414
Population ageing will present challenges for this workplace		0.821
The staff profile of this workplace is getting older		0.740
% of variation accounted for	36.3%	28.8%

*Loadings less than 0.3 have been suppressed to enhance visual understanding.

Table 4: Mean scores with standard errors in brackets by workplace attribute

Workplace Attribute		N	Scores					Flexible Work Practices
			Action	Concern	Advantage	Challenge	Training	
Size	Micro & Small	52	0.51 (0.024)	0.52 (0.024)	0.57 (0.041)	0.13 (0.018)	0.26 (0.042)	0.26 (0.038)
	Medium	62	0.50 (0.019)	0.52 (0.019)	0.57 (0.035)	0.12 (0.018)	0.46 (0.044)	0.31 (0.030)
	Large	26	0.47 (0.038)	0.42 (0.033)	0.47 (0.050)	0.11 (0.019)	0.36 (0.063)	0.37 (0.065)
Type	Public	11	0.59 (0.054)	0.47 (0.049)	0.56 (0.098)	0.13 (0.028)	0.32 (0.080)	0.40 (0.102)
	Private	97	0.48 (0.016)	0.52 (0.016)	0.54 (0.0280)	0.13 (0.0135)	0.30 (0.033)	0.27 (0.026)
	Voluntary	35	0.52 (0.029)	0.45 (0.030)	0.59 (0.054)	0.08 (0.022)	0.51 (0.056)	0.36 (0.045)
Sector	Primary & Manufacturing	47	0.49 (0.021)	0.49 (0.025)	0.54 (0.0345)	0.08 (0.019)	0.36 (0.050)	0.25 (0.036)
	Education & Health	40	0.53 (0.027)	0.48 (0.026)	0.55 (0.057)	0.08 (0.019)	0.42 (0.055)	0.32 (0.041)
	Retail & Professional	54	0.48 (0.025)	0.52 (0.23)	0.56 (0.038)	0.13 (0.0176)	0.31 (0.044)	0.34 (0.039)
Overall Mean		143	0.40 (0.014)	0.50 (0.14)	0.55 (0.024)	0.12 (0.011)	0.35 (0.028)	0.30 (0.023)

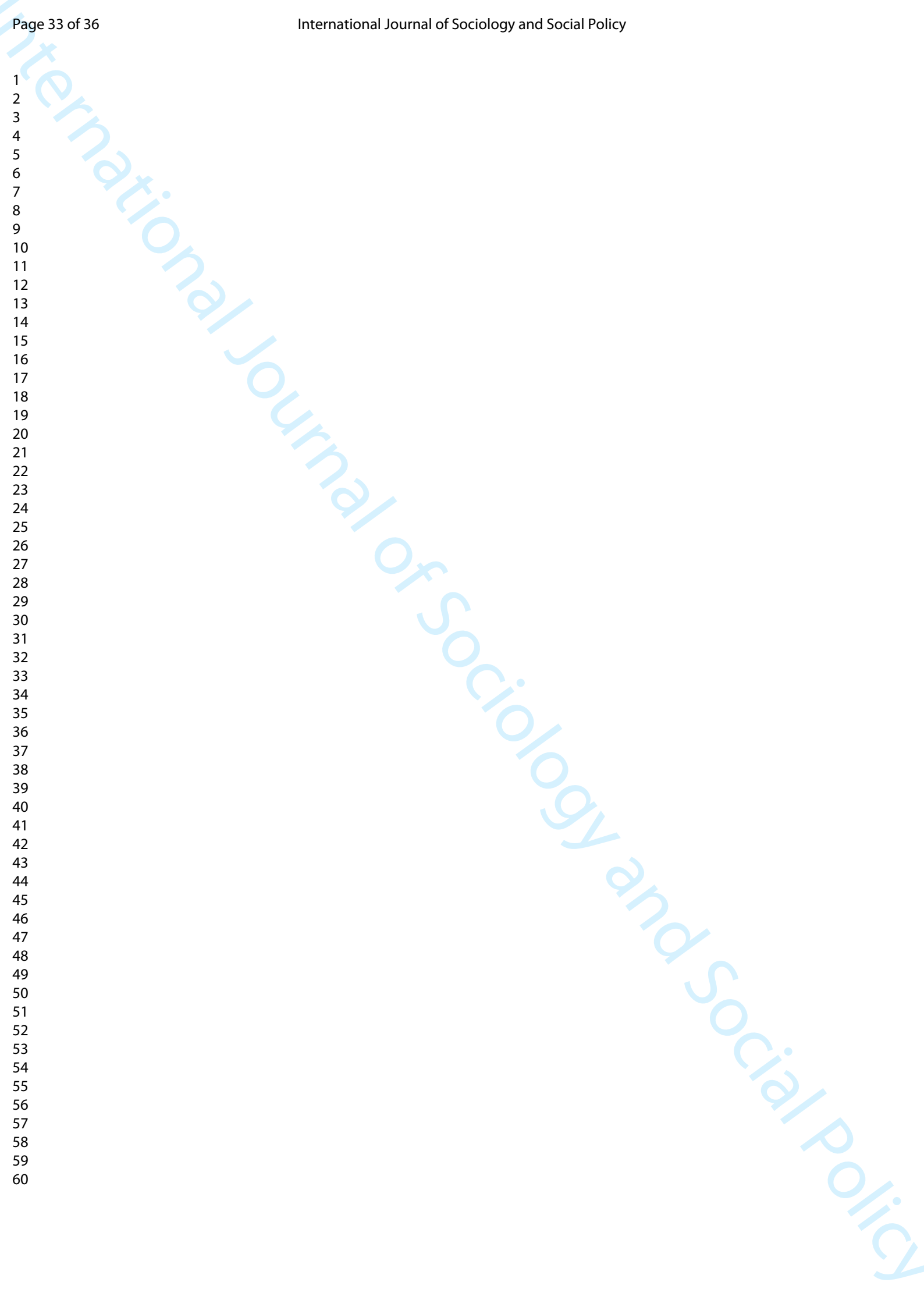
Table 5: Clusters by workplace attribute

Workplace Attribute		N	Unconcerned and consider actions suitable	Concerned little action	Concerned and action taken
Size	Micro & Small	52	25.0%	55.8%	19.2%
	Medium	61	27.9%	55.7%	16.4%
	Large	26	23.1%	46.2%	30.8%
Type	Public	10	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%
	Private	97	20.6%	59.8%	19.6%
	Voluntary	35	31.4%	42.9%	25.7%
Sector	Primary & Manufacturing	47	25.5%	55.3%	19.1%
	Education & Health	40	32.5%	50.0%	17.5%
	Retail & Professional	53	20.8%	54.7%	24.5%
Overall		143	26.1%	53.5%	20.4%

Table 6: Information Sources and information sought.

Information/Advice Sources	Unconcerned and consider actions suitable	Concerned little action	Concerned and action taken	All	Further Information/Advice sought	Unconcerned and consider actions suitable	Concerned little action	Concerned and action taken	All
Consultant	28.6%	26.8%	25.0%	26.9%	Advice and guidance on workplace health, safety	35.1%	11.4%	24.1%	20.3%
External Lawyer	4.8%	17.1%	6.3%	11.5%	Occupational health assessments and visits	18.9%	11.4%	17.2%	14.7%
ACAS	19.0%	24.4%	12.5%	20.5%	Workplace health and wellbeing assessments	18.9%	10.1%	20.7%	14.7%
Trade Union	23.8%	17.1%	18.8%	19.2%	General provision of information and resources	24.3%	20.3%	31.0%	23.8%
Employer Association	4.8%	4.9%	18.8%	7.7%	Local employer association sharing practice	8.1%	6.3%	13.8%	8.4%
Occupational Health	28.6%	29.3%	25.0%	28.2%	Communities for knowledge sharing	2.7%	6.3%	3.4%	4.9%
Charity/Third Sector	4.8%	7.3%	0.0%	5.1%	Workplace training regarding ageing	18.9%	13.9%	17.2%	16.1%
Citizen's Advice Bureau	4.8%	2.4%	6.3%	3.8%	One to one tailored support	18.9%	5.1%	13.8%	10.5%
Professional Body	0.0%	17.1%	6.3%	10.3%	Focussed training and awareness	16.2%	3.8%	13.8%	9.1%
Government Department or Agency	4.8%	14.6%	18.8%	12.8%	Paper or web-based toolkit	13.5%	19.0%	27.6%	19.6%
Healthy Working Lives Fife Health Promotion	19.0%	9.8%	25.0%	15.4%	Web based information	18.9%	22.8%	27.6%	23.1%
Health Service	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	5.1%	Email support	16.2%	15.2%	10.3%	14.7%
Fit for Work Scotland	4.8%	7.3%	12.5%	7.7%	Information pack	13.5%	16.5%	44.8%	21.7%
Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives	0.0%	2.4%	6.3%	2.6%	Free information	21.6%	24.1%	37.9%	26.6%
Specialist HR consultant	33.3%	24.4%	37.5%	29.5%	Confidential information	16.2%	13.9%	24.1%	16.8%
Internal HR	14.3%	14.6%	31.3%	17.9%	Other	8.1%	5.1%	3.4%	5.6%
Other Internal Advisor	19.0%	12.2%	12.5%	14.1%					
Number Responding	21	41	16	78	Number Responding	24	38	20	82
Percentage of all respondents	56.8%	51.9%	55.2%	54.5%	Percentage of all respondents	64.9%	48.1%	69.0%	57.3%

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Figures

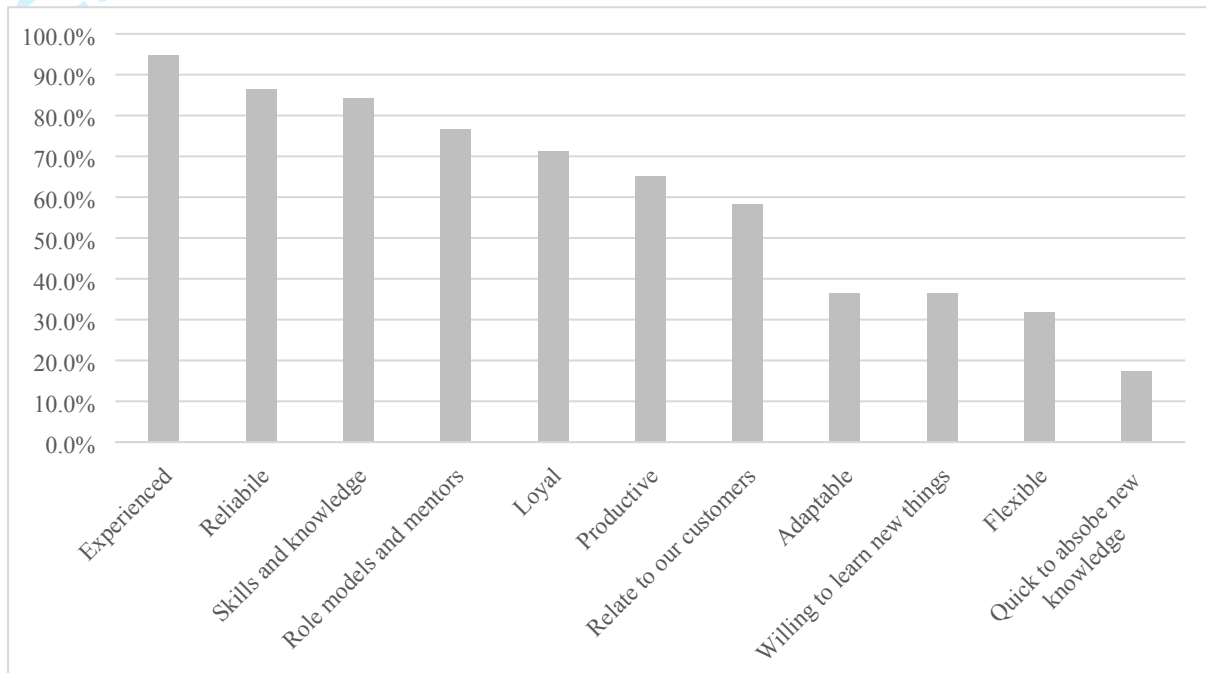


Figure 1: Advantages of employing older workers.

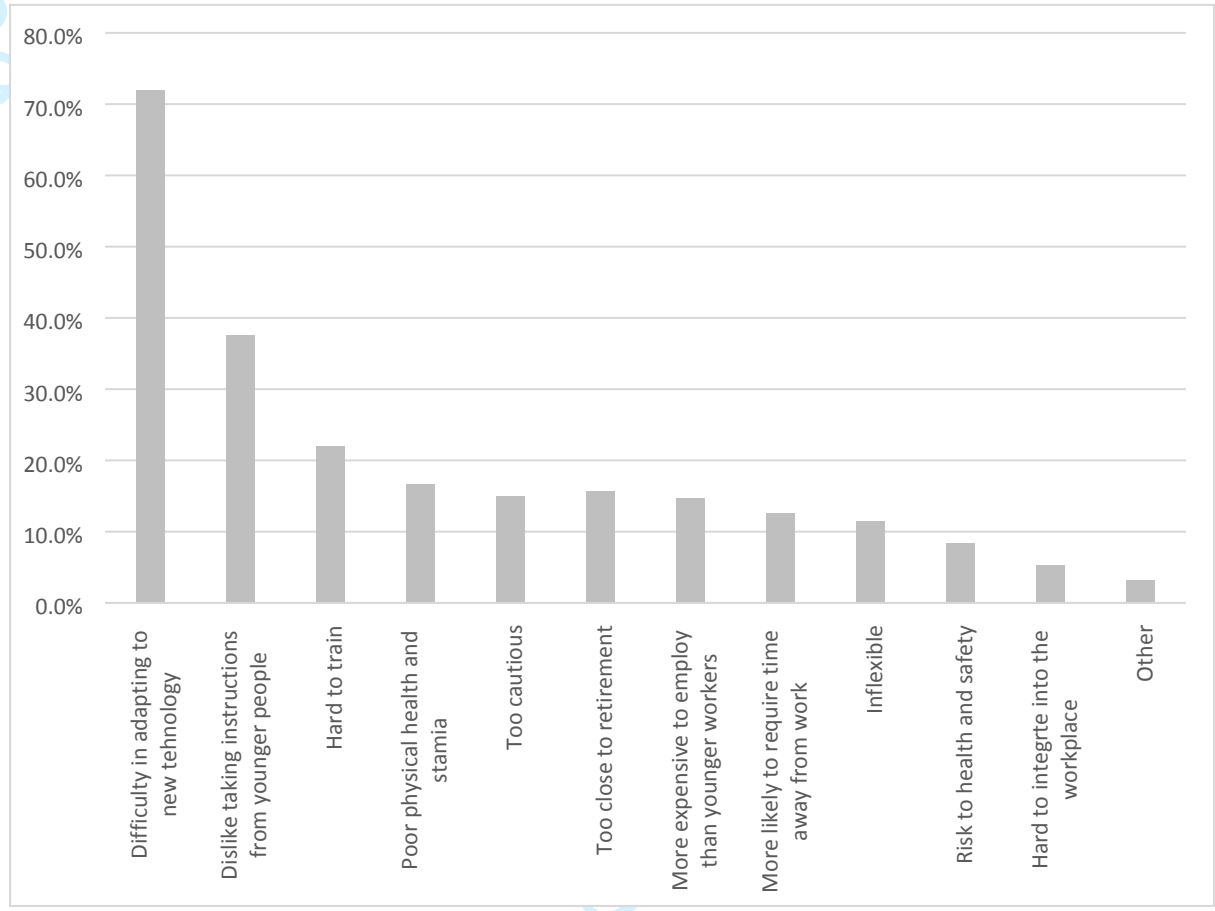


Figure 2: Challenges of employing older workers.

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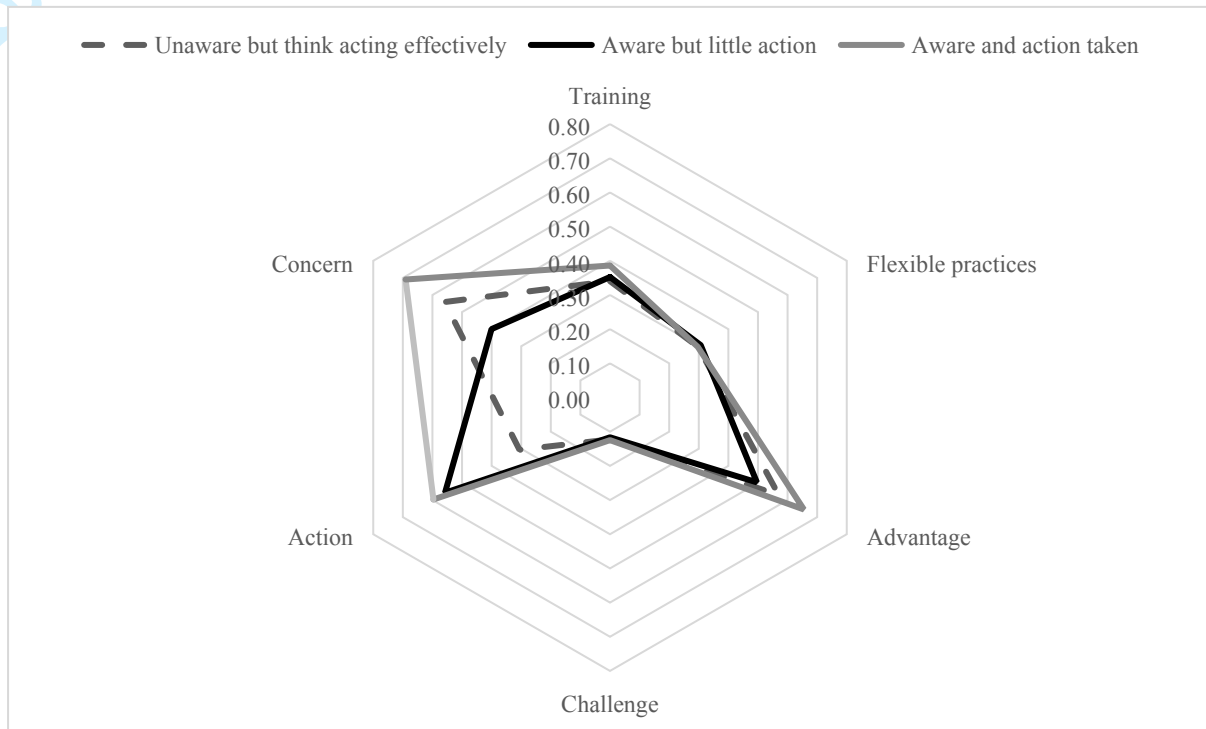


Figure 3: Radar plot of scores by cluster

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