

EKA

ATHENS LABOR UNIONS ORGANIZATION

SAATT

Supporting Active Ageing through Training

Dr Christina Theochari

London, 25-26 October 2011

Content

- ▣ Definition of active ageing
- ▣ Working conditions
- ▣ Working conditions and older workers
- ▣ Older workers' vulnerabilities
- ▣ "Could do the same work at 60 ?"
- ▣ Risk factors
- ▣ Agenda for a human resources policy for older workers
- ▣ EKA's contribution to SAATT project - Strand 1

Definition of active ageing

Active ageing is defined by the World Health Organization (W.H.O.)
as

“the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. It allows people to realize their potential for wellbeing throughout their lives and to participate in society according to their needs, desires and capabilities, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they need assistance. While this definition includes the notion of continuing activity in the labor force, it also encompasses continuing participation of older people in society.”

World Health Organization (2002) *Active Ageing - A Policy Framework*, p. 12.

Working conditions

Working conditions have greatly evolved in recent decades in developed countries.

This evolution has been accompanied with the appearance of new forms of work organization that may be sources of stress and health risk for older workers.

Working conditions

Workers are exposed to new demands due to evolutions of the labor market, productive processes and relationships between firms such as:

- increase of international constraint,
- use of subcontractors, (Schmidt, 1999, Swinnerton and Wail, 1995).
- constraints in terms of work rhythm,
- greater versatility etc.

Working conditions

In parallel to this transformation of work, health burdens and problems caused by the working environment are increasing in all sectors of activity having as result:

- **Physical risks** at work, although primary sector jobs, which are often associated with heavy physical workloads, are becoming rarer.
- **Stressful work**, responsible for a growing number of work-related health problems.
- **Psychological problems**
- Levels of job satisfaction declined at the ending of 20th century. (Hamermesh, 2001)

Working conditions and older workers

There is a well documented evidence showing that the participation of older workers in the labor market is constrained due to their health situation which is deteriorating due to job stress.

If we classify occupations according to the pace of withdrawal, seems that where there is a demanding task with high physical exertion rates the rates of withdrawal are high in contrast to work with less stress (Morschhauser 2005).

As populations are ageing, these issues are particularly worrying in terms of the health, labor force participation and Social Security expenditure.

Working conditions and older workers

- Difficult working conditions that are detrimental to health reduce the productivity of older workers, increase their absenteeism rate and the probability of them losing their jobs, and incite them to leave the employment market as soon as possible (Blanchet and Debrand, 2005).
- More particularly, current characteristics of work organization and resulting forms of stress are to be taken into consideration along with other institutional, financial, contextual or family-related variables.
- Health status and working conditions are important variables that explain early retirement (Lumsdaine and Mitchell, 1999).

Older workers' vulnerabilities

- ▣ According to a survey of the Finnish Institute of OHS in 2003, workers aged between 55-64 years, 50% of men and 60% of women had **chronic diseases**.
- ▣ The **Musculoskeletal Syndrome** worsens with age.
- ▣ A quarter of respondents had psychological symptoms and mental disorders.
- ▣ 40% out of the total of workers with chronic diseases, said that their condition caused to nuisances at work (Ilmarinen 2006).
- ▣ According to data from EUROSTAT, 17% of the age group 55-64 in the 15 Member States stops work due to **"illness or disability."** This reason is the third cause after the "normal" retirement and "early retirement".

"Could do the same work at 60 ?"

- ▣ The relationship between age, health and remain to work was examined the European Survey of the Dublin Foundation on working conditions in the EU (2006), workers under 60 asked if they "Could do the same work at 60 ?" , the most important obstacle for not been able to do that was their health situation.
- ▣ Substantial numbers of Europeans do not feel confident about being able to remain in their current job until the age of 60.

(Dublin Foundation survey on working conditions in the EU, 2010)

Risk factors

There are three groups of risk factors (Ilmarinen 2006 and Ilmarinen / Tempel 2003):

♣ Intense physical activity

- static muscular work,
- lifting and transporting loads,
- repetitive work, bending or
- turning of the body.

♣ Work environment where there is stress or it is dangerous

- wet or dirty environment,
- risks of accidents,
- changes in temperature hot-cold.

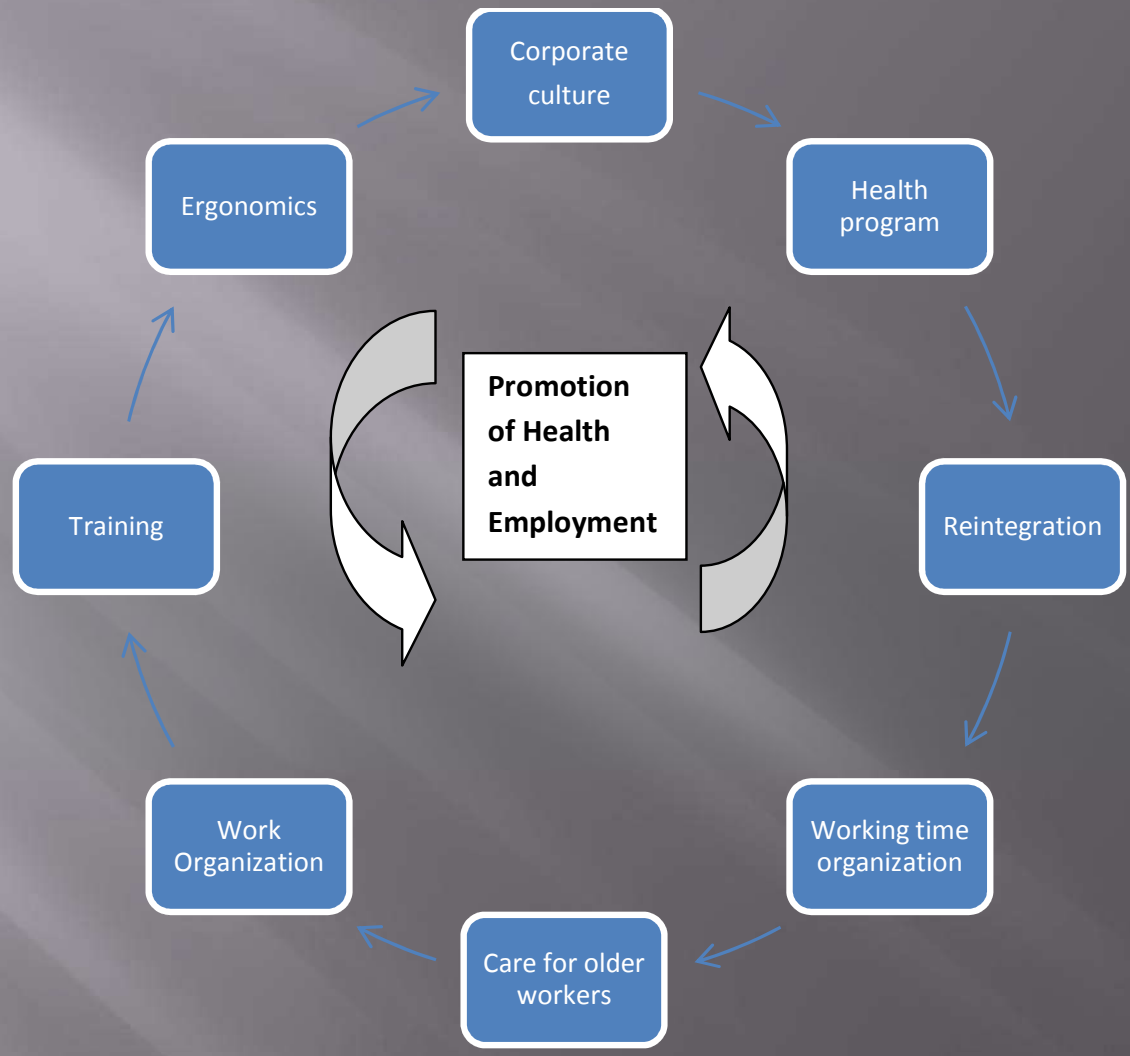
♣ Poor organization of work

- conflicting roles,
- fear of poor performance,
- lack of degrees of freedom and possibility to influence,
- lack of career prospects or unsatisfactory recognition from superiors.

Agenda for a human resources policy for older workers

Such a program should include:

1. Ergonomic design of workplace
2. Implementation of health programs
3. Training
4. Organization of work
5. Development planning and development approaches of the new staff
6. Organization of working time
7. Reintegration
8. Corporate Culture
9. Developing a holistic strategic integration



1. Ergonomics

- ❑ The ergonomic design of the working environment, is a classical approach to OHS and a prerequisite for adapting work to human action.
- ❑ The goal is to adapt the technology, equipment and working environment in general the physical abilities of people to avoid discrepancies.
- ❑ At the same time factors such as health and other specificities of individual workers, should be taken into account.
- ❑ The ergonomic design **is extremely important for older workers** as well as the effectiveness of reflexes and physical strength and speed are reduced.
- ❑ **A workplace design that reduces stress on the elderly who have problems is a good platform also for young people protecting their health.**

Examples

In cases of poor vision 50% more lighting for the ages 40-55 and over 100% for 55 and older. Increased contrast of surfaces, regulate temperatures (hot, cold), use of acoustic signals in combination with instructions for slippery floors etc.

2. Health programs

Like the ergonomic interventions so that health at work is an important factor and affects all employees. In this respect more importance should be given to workers **from the middle age and older**. Such a program would include:

- Regular monitoring of health status of workers.
- Education about health issues related to work as the correct way of sitting, lifting weights, to prevent musculoskeletal disorders, etc.
- Activities of wellness, existence and operation of spaces for sport.
- Develop strategies for dealing with stress and the phenomenon of exhaustion (burnout).

3. Training

Older workers should be involved in planning training programs because of accumulated experience.

These programs will need to break the bias related to the alleged inability of older workers to learn new things related with developments in their work.

Knowledge of older workers and communication in education, should be taken into account.

To improve workers' skills is not enough formal education.

It is also necessary the transfer of knowledge among generations in the workplace through the process of observation and testing.

4. Organization of work

An important element in maintaining the skills of workers is to avoid the monotonous work that leads to physical fatigue and loss of skills.

5. Organization of Working Time

- ❑ The working time implies a multifaceted action plan. This is connected with the space and working time and sharing. For example, a very concentrated work hours and constant shifts, especially prolonged and frequent during the night is "critical" in relation to health and age.
- ❑ Older workers need more breaks which contribute to the impairment of stress at work to which is most vulnerable.
- ❑ The shift workers over 40 are at increased risk of drowsiness and affected more than younger coronary heart disease and depression.
- ❑ For health promotion in the workplace is appropriate to limit shifts and reducing the absolutely necessary.
- ❑ This means providing opportunity for employees working in shifts at night to return to daytime work.

6. Reintegration

- ❑ Older workers due to the presence of musculoskeletal or cardiovascular disease are forced to be absent due to illness.
- ❑ These chronic diseases can be initiated by the younger age of the employee.
- ❑ There still are some cases where 'disability' at work in the sense that the physician certifies the non-employment on the job.
- ❑ To maintain the employment of these individuals is needed strategic reintegration of these people in other jobs that meet their needs.

7. Corporate Culture

A key element of a “**corporate culture**” is good and collective behavior of the administration.

The behavior of supervisors have key impact on performance and work capacity of workers.

In business there must be long-term strategies to strengthen cooperation, reliability, participation, positive attitude to employee suggestions for improvements, **avoiding discrimination and age discrimination.**

8. Developing a holistic strategic integration

It is necessary to provide **a holistic integration strategy** for the individual actions to fit into a frame and be effective and sustainable.

This requires:

- To review working conditions in relation to **the ability to work, the effectiveness of employees and maintaining health.**
- To promote education/training especially in the workplace.
- To create jobs for older workers and hiring workers without age discrimination.
- To reject stereotypes on age and contacted a strategy of brands of all the above.

EKA's contribution to SAATT project

Strand 1

- ▣ One of the tasks of the project is the issue of Health and Safety for older workers. Measures regarding the adjustment of working environment to the needs of the elderly and the combination of this with Active Ageing Policy and Collective bargaining.
- ▣ At the first stage of the project, a meeting will be organized by EKA in February 2012 in Athens, on the basis of a training material produced (strand 1) where reps from Trade Unions and workers will identify key issues affecting older workers and best practices in meeting those needs.

Thank you!