



OLDER WOMEN WORKERS – WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Presentation by Nonie Kirker

KEY MESSAGES

- Organisations need to retain and development older workers
- Capitalise on their experience
- Overcome stereotypical attitudes
- Promote life long learning



THE BIG PICTURE

- Ageing population
- 65 years young!
- Lack of participation in training & development
- Lack of opportunity?



STEREOTYPICAL ATTITUDES

Definition:

- A fixed idea about how a certain type of person looks or acts



WHO IS AN OLDER WORKER?

- Chronological age
- Cognitive age – (perceived age)
- Physical age
- Organisational age



OLDER WOMEN WORKERS

- Dramatic increase
- Women more likely to stay in workforce longer than men
- Family commitments
- Double jeopardy
- Recruitment opportunities?



THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- To explore effect of stereotypical attitudes on older women workers' self-efficacy towards undertaking training and development.



METHODOLOGY

- Exploratory study
- Case study framework
- Qualitative – semi-structured interviews with 11 older, female workers
- Thematic analysis



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TARGETED:

- Training and development opportunities within the organisation
- Perception of their own identity within the workplace
- Stereotypical attitudes
- Future development expectations.



DATA ANALYSIS: THEMES

- Self-identity
- Women and careers
- Influence of stereotypical attitudes
- Training and career development for the future



THEME 1: SELF IDENTITY

- Positive self-image

“I distinctly feel – I care a little less about how people see me. I was a lot more conscious of my peers in the past. And as an older person I can walk around .. feeling comfortable and confident. I guess you start to relax a lot more about who you are as you’re older and I think in that sense it’s an advantage”.



THEME 1: SELF IDENTITY (CONTINUED)

- Confidence

“Confidence in my own ability and belief in myself. All the networks I’ve established over the years that’s a huge strength.... “

“I’ve been through a learning curve of coping with different personalities so I think I bring a certain wisdom to the way I deal with people and relate to them which I didn’t have 10 or 20 years ago”.



THEME 1: SELF IDENTITY (CONTINUED)

- Experience

“Advantages to me is definitely experience – you have more arrows in your quiver to draw from because you’ve been through situations, you gain judgment as you get older. So you’re able to rationalise things there as well.....So you tend to draw on your experience to do the job really”.



THEME 1: SELF IDENTITY (CONTINUED)

- Longevity

“You really, really fundamentally understand the place and you know all the people...you certainly know how the organisation works, you know who to go to, you know all the systems in the organisation you feel comfortable.”

“Sometimes I suppose people think you’re part of the furniture if you’ve been around too long, that’s part of longevity in the job rather than being older.”



THEME 2: WOMEN AND CAREERS

- Career interruptions

“When I came back into the work force I needed.. sort of computer skills ’cause that was all fairly new to me ’cause I left the workforce for a quite a long time...”



THEME 2: WOMEN AND CAREERS (CONTINUED)

- Family commitments
 - Balancing career & home life

“I guess the other thing is am I taking on too much because at this age we’ve got family, no grandkids yet but that will probably happen? And my mum’s still alive so at some point dealing withso - yeah there’s all of those things to consider. Young people don’t have all those dependants, you know wouldn’t even think about that.”



THEME 2: WOMEN AND CAREERS (CONTINUED)

- Ageing appearance

“You look in the mirror and you’re getting older and you think it’s the same person and there’s all these wrinkles and stuff... I look at particularly the new women around the place and they’re flash and out there...”



THEME 3: INFLUENCE OF STEREOTYPICAL ATTITUDES

- Stereotypes affected job seeking behaviours

“Yes, that’s stopped me applying for jobs – the trauma of going for jobs and really feeling that I wouldn’t have a show anyway because of my age, has stopped me.”

“I feel that I’m qualified for the job But don’t feel comfortable because of my age.”



THEME 3: INFLUENCE OF STEREOTYPICAL ATTITUDES (CONTINUED)

- Stereotyping

“..I think they tend to go for a younger person thinking probably they are more capable, more flexible you know, where as we know the older ones not going to flit off here there and everywhere and will be more loyal. I think there’s greater confidentiality with older ones.”

“It can be quite challenging dealing with younger people because they have different ethics and values.”



THEME 4: TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE FUTURE

- Career development

“Really comfortable and I really just love the input, I love the learning and finding new ways to do things. So there’s been no level of discomfort with any of it really. And some of it pushed me to a higher level if you like, I think because of what I’ve learnt. It’s been a little bit challenging, well the study was certainly challenging, because I hadn’t done any study for a long time so the study was a challenge but it was a good challenge.”



THEME 4: TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE FUTURE (CONTINUED)

- Training

“Sometimes I just need a more comprehensive course because a lot of the time at my age I’ve learnt a lot of the preliminary or beginners skills needed to do Excel or Word or Power point and the leap to the next stage is quite a steep one. And I would like....a course that ...took into account my skill set that I’ve got now.”



THEME 4: TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE FUTURE (CONTINUED)

- Stay or go?

“I’d never be able to sit at home you know I’ll be 60 next year yah! because I suppose my work is important to me, so I really enjoy it and it’s important that I’m in a collegial atmosphere.”



FINDINGS

- Positive self-image (experience)
- Longevity in the workplace
- Stereotyping
- Specific barriers for women
- Positive about training and development



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS?

- Provide networking opportunities
- Provide mentoring opportunities
- Tailor training to suit older learners – one size does not fit all



KEY MESSAGES

- Capitalise on their experience
- Overcome stereotypical attitudes
- Promote life long learning



AGE DOES NOT DEFINE WHO WE ARE

