Exploring work and development options to reduce early labour force exit of mature aged Australians

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Abstract

Early labour force exit is a significant challenge associated with the ageing workforce in Australia and many other developed countries. A reduction and increased flexibility of work hours has been suggested to improve labour force participation of the mature aged cohort. However, little is known about mature aged workers' aspirations for transitional employment, and how demographic variables of mature aged workers influence these aspirations. In the current study, 1027 mature workers aged over 50 years and employed in regional areas of Australia were surveyed on their interest in transitional employment following retirement, and their aspirations for work conditions, training and development, employer/ employee roles and responsibilities, and incentives and benefits regarding transitional employment. A series of Chi square tests were conducted to identify demographic group differences according to timeframe until retirement, education level and occupation level. The majority of participants was interested in transitional employment, and were prepared to undergo training and development and work with management staff in order to achieve this end. Two general perceptions of transitional employment emerged. The first was transitional employment as an opportunity for learning and career development or change, which was most commonly aspired to amongst respondents with more than six years until retirement, a university education, or a professional/ managerial role. The second was transitional employment as it is more traditionally viewed: as a chance to continue on in one's current role at reduced hours post retirement. The remaining groups represented variations on this theme. Implications of the current study include the divergence of transitional employment and training and development aspirations amongst a mature aged cohort, as well as mature aged workers' perceptions of organisational management's roles in supporting transitional employment.

Introduction

The ageing of Australia's population has prompted an increased need to extend working life beyond the current retirement age. As of 2006, 13% of the Australian population was over the age of 65 years while 19% was aged 15 years or younger. By 2051, it is predicted that the proportion of Australians aged over 65 years will double, while only 15% of the population is expected to be 15 years of age or younger (ABS, 2007a). Foreseeable economic issues associated with population ageing include an increased dependency ratio, labour shortages, and skill shortages (OECD, 2005). In 2005, 32% of the workforce was considered mature aged, that is, 45 to 64 years of age (ABS, 2004). Mature aged workers will reach the minimum age for pension eligibility of 65 years within 20 years (OECD, 2006) however Australian workers who have retired within the last 5 years did so at an average of 60.3 years of age (ABS, 2007b). The three most common reasons for retirement included reaching retirement age or pension eligibility, ill health or disability, and retrenchment or lack of suitable work (ABS, 2007c). Industries with a higher than average composition of mature aged workers are likely to be the earliest and possibly most affected by labour shortages. These include education, health and community services, and electricity, gas and water supply (ABS, 2004). In addition, almost half of all employed mature aged workers aged 50 to 64 years hold management or advanced clerical position, which compounds the threat of labour shortage as potential retirees will also be highly skilled (OECD, 2005). The current study explores mature aged workers' aspirations for transitional employment, which Adams and Rau (2003) defined as any form of paid work engagement after retirement.

In the immediate term, extending the working lives of the current workforce and attracting retirees back to employment are viewed as part of the solution to the economic side effects of population ageing (Sheen, 2004; Murray & Syed, 2005). The ABS *Barriers to Employment* survey suggests that current employment conditions are not always favorable to mature aged workers. For instance, of Australians aged over 55 years who wished to obtain a job or work more hours, 34% cited ill health or disability as a barrier to employment, while 28% felt that employers would consider them too old to work (ABS, 2007c). Australians over the age of 55 years were interested in working an average of 25 hours a week, which suggests that part time and flexible work options may be particularly attractive to mature aged workers (ABS, 2007c).

Recent research has begun to investigate mature aged workers' preferences for employment and work conditions. Despite the low participation rates of mature Australians in employment, surveys of over 800 mature workers have demonstrated a very positive attitude towards continued employment, with an excess of 80% reporting a preference for work post retirement (Lundberg & Marshallsay, 2007; Pillay, Kelly, Fox & Tones, 2006a). Consistent with the ABS

(2007c) figure of 25 hours per week as the desired work time commitment of mature Australians, part time and flexible work options have emerged as a key preference over full retirement in the literature (Drew & Drew, 2005; Pillay et al, 2006a). Reduced hours may ameliorate the stresses and strains associated with work. In their qualitative study of post employment experiences of 20 retirees, Shacklock, Fulop & Hort, (2007) found that part time employment 2 to 3 days per week or short term project work appealed to all respondents due to benefits including a reduction of work pressure or stress and he enablement of free time for other interests or responsibilities. Given that illness, disability and care responsibilities are obstacles to employment for mature aged adults, flexible work conditions that accommodate these barriers may be effective in enabling a return to the workforce.

Although a reduction in working hours may reduce the impact of work related stress and time pressure, this solution does not address age stereotypes in the workplace and the lack of age awareness in HR policies. Both of these factors may serve to limit the career development of mature workers or encourage early retirement (Murray & Syed, 2005; OECD, 2006). Age stereotypes that refer to mature aged workers may be positive, as exemplified in the belief that mature aged workers possess a work ethic and experience that is superior to younger workers (Brooke & Taylor, 2005), which has often been demonstrated in objective studies (Murray & Syed, 2005). This belief may lead to job stereotyping, whereby employers hire mature aged workers for "mature aged worker jobs" with no scope for development (Loretto & White, 2006), possibly because they expect that the applicant's experience and work ethic will render training unnecessary. Negative age stereotypes for mature aged workers relate primarily to ability and willingness to learn, change and develop at work (Gray & McGregor, 2003; Gringart, Helmes, & Speelman, 2005). Negative age stereotyping is potentially more detrimental to the mature aged worker, as the ability to learn and adapt to change is arguably the single most important skill employees could possess in today's workforce (Thijssen, van der Heijden & Rocco, 2008). Negative age stereotyping has been linked to stereotype consistent behaviour in mature aged workers, negative affect and withdrawal from the workforce (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008), as well as failure to offer training and development opportunities or hire mature workers by the organisation (Encel & Studencki, 2004; Tougas, Lagace, Sablonniere, & Kocum, 2004). Due to the potential impact of age stereotypes on employee behaviour, organisational policy and employer actions, the promotion of realistic attitudes towards age now forms a significant component of strategies targeted at management of ageing issues in the workforce (Illmarinen, 2006; Mature Age Strategies Team, nd).

Studies have shown that age aware organisational policies encourage retirees to return to work (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008) and help to retain mature aged workers via acting as a disincentive for early retirement (Zapalla, Depolo,

Fraccaroli, Guglielmi & Sarchielli, 2008). One Australian study by Drew and Drew (2005) investigated mature aged adults' knowledge of organisational programs to retain mature aged workers, as well as the availability of mature aged worker programs amongst a sample of 31 organizations. Outcomes of their study indicated that a greater awareness of mature aged worker programs led to more positive attitudes towards the organisation, which in turn predicted more negative attitudes towards retirement. However, implementation of organizational policies was limited and fragmented. Only five of the organizations in this study actually had specific mature age worker policies, with the majority focused on recruitment and retention of mature workers. The most common specific programs included ergonomic redesign, flexible hours, mentoring, job sharing and training for mature aged workers. Retirement planning was also covered in some cases, and included stress management, various financial planning strategies, and planning for post employment life.

One issue often overlooked in the mature age worker literature is diversity within the mature aged cohort. For example, statistical research conducted in America (Chen & Scott, 2006), Australia (Knox, 2003) and the United Kingdom (Phillipson & Smith, 2005) has shown that reduced work hours prior to retirement in most accessible to employees who are in good health, possess a high level of education, draw large salaries, experience low occupational stress, and have the freedom to work flexible hours, while workers in physically demanding jobs are forced into early retirement as a result of occupational injury. Mature workers with low levels of formal education are also less likely to be in the workforce, and less likely to receive employer sponsored training compared to mature workers with tertiary qualifications (OECD, 2006). As a result of differing education and work backgrounds, mature aged workers differ in work and retirement aspirations. For instance, Pillay, Kelly and Tones (2006b) found that employees over the age of 40 years with post secondary school qualifications were more likely to report a need for and enjoyment of learning at work and sharing skills with colleagues, compared to employees who did not complete secondary school. Similarly, mature employees in physically demanding work tended to aspire to early retirement or less physically demanding work, whilst their colleagues in white collar roles were more interested in continuous flexible employment. Murray and Syed (2005) also argue that work values differ across age groups, and mature aged respondents from Lundberg and Marshallsay's (2007) survey indicated that they would prefer to assist in the mentoring and training of colleagues rather than participate in training themselves.

The Current Study

The research reported in this paper is part of a larger Australian Research Council funded linkage project[1] currently being undertaken by the Queensland University of Technology and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ). The aim of this study was to investigate the effect

of effect of retirement timeframe, education level and occupation type on mature aged workers aspiration and willingness to participate in transitional employment. As the peak body for all local councils in Queensland State (76 in total), the LGAQ is committed to the development and provision of HR reforms to meet the requirements of council employees. A recent survey of organizational demographics within the Local Government Association of Queensland, revealed that 59% of employees are over 45 years of age, 77% have 10 or fewer years of formal schooling, and 76% are employed in manual roles (Pillay et al, 2006b). The above demographic pattern can also be seen in other local governments in the country. These demographics are characteristically associated with early retirement, placing the all LGA including LGAQ at risk of skill shortages in the future. Hence this joint explorative study in anticipation of the need for innovative work options to encourage mature aged employees to delay early retirement is imminent involved local government employees from throughout Australia. The LGAQ, through its network with the Local Government Association of Australia administered the survey to all interested local governments in Australia.

Methodology

Sample

A total of 1,120 local government employees aged over 50 years participated in the study via an online national survey. The category of mature or older workers was based on the OECD definition of mature aged worker, which was 50 years of age or older (OECD, 2006). Within the mature aged cohort, three demographic variables were selected: timeframe until retirement (less than 6 years, more than 6 years), education level (University, Vocational Education and Training, School) , and occupation level (Professionals and Managers; Administrators; and Blue Collar—Technicians, Tradespersons, Operators, and Labourers) . These three variables were explored in the context of several issues related to transitional employment: working conditions, training and development, mutual roles and responsibilities of employees and employers, and incentives and benefits of transitional employment. Demographic characteristics of the whole sample are shown in Table 1. Job classifications were informed by the ASCO codes (ABS, 1997).

Participation was based on self selecting, entirely voluntary and anonymous. Eight point three percent (8.3%) of the sample was deleted prior to analysis due to non completion of demographic data, resulting in 1027 useable responses. Question one, "Are you interested in transitional employment after your official minimum retirement date?" served as a screening tool and respondents who indicated that they were not interested were excluded from the remainder of the

survey. A further 3.3% of the sample was deleted in this manner, leaving a total of 994 participants who were included in final sample.

Table 1. Sample distribution for the Transitional Employment Qualitative Survey

Total Sample Variable	Proportion of Sample (N=994)
TIME FRAME to RETIREMENT	
Less than 6 years until retirement (<6 yr)	59%
More than 6 years until retirement (>6 yr)	41%
EDUCATION LEVEL	
University (UNI)	47%
Vocational Education and Training (VET)	36%
Secondary School Only (SSO)	17%
OCCUPATION LEVEL	
Professional/ Managerial (P/M)	53%
Blue Collar (BC)	21%
Administration (ADM)	26%

NB. P/M workers were more likely to be university educated than other groups, BC workers were more likely to be VET educated than other groups, and ADM workers were more likely to possess secondary schooling only than other groups.

Procedure

The Transitional Employment Survey (TES) was designed as a result of several consultative interviews with local councils in Queensland. The survey has two sections: the first section sought demographic data about the participants, and the second section asked respondents questions that were thematically clustered around work conditions, training and development, mutual roles and responsibilities, and incentives and benefits with reference to transitional employment. A copy of the TES is available from the first author on request.

In 2005, the online survey was uploaded onto the LGAQ website which was accessible to its entire sister associations from around Australia. Through the Local Government Association (LGA) network, LGAQ invited participants to

volunteer to complete the survey. Given that the mature age cohort has been said to have less access and capacity to use the internet, special efforts were made to assist them with the technology capabilities. To encourage participants to complete the survey, reminders were sent to training and development staff at all local government to encourage their employees to participate. These reminders were also followed up by the training officers of respective local governments, encouraging the staff to use the council facilities to complete the survey. The survey was kept open for 6 weeks to ensure a sufficiently numbers of participants responded. The data were collected centrally by the LGAQ and coded for entry into SPSS for analysis.

Results

As the survey response options were nominal, data analysis involved computing Chi square statistics from two way contingency tables. A table was generated for each combination of demographic variable and all options for each question. In this way, the demographic variables served as independent variables, with all possible question responses as dependent variables. Where a significant difference in responses according to a demographic variable with more than two levels was found, follow up tests were conducted. This occurred in some instances for education level and occupation level. Follow up tests involved further contingency tables and Chi square statistics to compare all possible group pairings within the demographic variable to identify which groups were significantly different from one another. Responses were analyzed for each of the three main variables: timeframe until retirement, education level and occupation type. The results for the above variables are summarized into four tables based on the following themes: work conditions, training and development, mutual roles and responsibilities, and incentives and benefits. The summary tables included responses that demonstrate a significant difference between groups. Significant Chi square tests are reported in the text. Due to the large number of Chi square tests, the more stringent significance level of $p<.01$ was used in an attempt to control for type 1 error rate.

Work Conditions

Table 2. Preferred Work Conditions in Transitional Employment

Question	% All	Retirement	Education Level	Occupation Level					
	<6 yrs	>6 yrs	UNI	VET	SSO	P/M	ADM	BC	
Interested in transitional employment after official retirement date	97%	95%	89%	97%^{A}	94%^{A}	79%^{B}	97%^{A}	97%^{A}	78%^{B}
Interested in full time transitional employment	12%	9%	14%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Interested in flexible transitional employment	27%	-	-	36%^{A}	22%^{B}	20%^{B}	36%^{A}	15%^{B}	24%^{B}
Accept same salary rate in transitional employment	36%	-	-	29%	41%	42%	30%^{A}	49%^{B}	35%^{A}
Accept flexible salary rate in transitional employment	37%	-	-	45%	33%	30%	45%^{A}	28%^{B}	34%^{B}
Reskill if health/ skills prevents transitional employment	20%	16%	26%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Less work if health/ skills prevents transitional employment	52%	57%	49%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Intend to work for Local Government in transitional employment	57%	61%	52%	48%^{A}	64%^{B}	69%^{B}	50%^{A}	70%^{B}	61%^{B}

Intend for self employment in transitional employment	10%	-	-	14%[A]	8.3%[B]	3.2%[B]	15%[A]	3.6%[B]	7%[B]
Intend to work for a mixture of employers in transitional employment	23%	-	-	30%[A]	17%[B]	21%[B]	29%[A]	18%[B]	18%[B]
Do not require supervision in transitional employment	21%	-	-	26%[A]	20%	14%[B]	-	-	-
Would like supervision as required in transitional employment	49%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would be prepared to undertake the same work as I do now	40%	45%	35%	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would like a slightly different job in transitional employment	21%	-	-	27%[A]	20%[A]	11%[B]	26%[A]	14%[B]	21%[A]

NB. All χ^2tests significant at $p<.01$

[A, B] Significant difference between groups detected in follow up χ^2tests

A total of 97% of respondents demonstrated a willingness to participate in transitional employment. The data challenges the stereotypical notion that mature workers do not want to work. The most common perception of transitional employment involved a scaling down of employees' current work arrangement to part time employment (52%). Table 2 presents summary of group differences for interest in transitional employment. The result indicates that for time to retirement groups, employees with less than six years remaining until retirement ($\chi^2(1, 1027)= 15.133$, $p<.01$), for education level groups university and VET educated employees ($\chi^2(2,1027)= 72.043$, $p<.01$), and for occupational type groups professionals, managers and administrators ($\chi^2(2,1027)= 103.537$, $p<.01$) were most likely to select this option. In considering time remaining until retirement, employees with less than six years remaining until retirement preferred to work less if they experienced problems in employment due to their health or limited skills ($\chi^2(1,994)= 6.761$, $p<.01$). This group also desired to remain with the current employer-the local council ($\chi^2(1,994)= 7.502$, $p<.01$) and in a role consistent with their current job ($\chi^2(1,994) = 9.973$, $p<.01$) as their transitional employment. By contrast, employees with six or more years remaining until retirement were more likely to be interested in full time transitional employment ($\chi^2(1,994)= 5.108$, $p<.01$), and were prepared to re-skill ($\chi^2(1,994)=15.07$, $p<.01$) if their health or current skill level hindered continued engagement with transitional employment.

Education and occupation level group differences exhibited two fairly distinct response patterns. University educated and professional or managerial staff indicated an interest in flexible transitional employment ($\chi^2_{education}(2,994)= 24.360$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{occupation}(2,994)= 36.105$, $p<.01$) for flexible rates of pay ($\chi^2_{education}(2,994)= 18.828$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{occupation}(2,994)= 21.584$, $p<.01$), in a slightly different capacity to their current roles ($\chi^2_{education}(2,994)= 17.717$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{occupation}(2,994)= 13.087$, $p<.01$). This group also preferred self employment ($\chi^2_{education}(2,994)= 17.339$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{occupation}(2,994)= 25.680$, $p<.01$) or working for a mixture of employers. In addition, university educated respondents were more likely to request no supervision compared to other education groups ($\chi^2(2,994)= 11.882$, $p<.01$) . This first group fits in with the high status workers, as professionals and managers that comprise skill level 1 in the ASCO (1997).

The second response pattern was characteristic of VET or secondary school educated participants and blue collar employees, and included a preference for maintaining current pay rates ($\chi^2_{education}(2,994)= 16.045$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{occupation}(2,994)= 26.627$), $p<.01$) and remaining with the LGA in transitional employment ($\chi^2_{education}(2,994)= 30.419$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{occupation}(2,994)= 27.680$, $p<.01$). Responses of administrators were in between the high status group and the second group. Like the high status workers, they were interested in slightly different work roles and less likely than the second group to report an interest in maintaining their current rate of pay and remaining with the LGA in transitional employment. Similar to the second group, administrators were less likely to indicate a preference for flexible work, better pay options, preference for self employment or working for a number of employers, in comparison with the high status group.

Training and Development

Table 3. Learning and Development in Transitional Employment

Question	% All	Retirement	Education Level	Occupation Level					
	<6 yrs	>6 yrs	UNI	VET	SSO	P/M	ADM	BC	
I value my 'work-related' learning and life skills very highly	54%	-	-	61%^{A}	49%^{B}	49%^{B}	62%^{A}	48%^{B}	44%^{B}
I value my 'work-related' learning and life skills highly	36%	-	-	-	-	-	32%^{A}	43%^{B}	45%
I value my 'work-related' learning and life skills to a medium degree	7%	-	-	4.7%^{A}	6.9%	14%^{B}	-	-	-
Prepared to undertake training/development transitional employment?	89%	89%	96%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Are you interested in gaining new/additional formal qualifications?	52%	41%	70%	58%^{A}	53%^{A}	38%^{B}	-	-	-
Believe that employees with limited initial education are disadvantaged in taking up further learning/development for transitional employment?	33%	-	-	42%^{A}	25%^{B}	25%^{B}	-	-	-
Skills training/development for transitional employment be available throughout my work life	30%	25%	37%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skills training/development for transitional employment be available when required	37%	43%	31%	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would prefer to undertake advanced training/development	22%	19%	26%	27%^{A}	19%^{B}	14%^{B}	-	-	-
I would need no training/development	11%	12%	7%	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would need training/development as required	29%	27%	34%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Training/ development should be delivered during work hours	67%	-	-	61%^{A}	72%^{B}	78%^{B}	60%^{A}	77%^{B}	76%^{A}
Training/ development should be delivered during evenings	19%	-	-	-	-	-	23%^{A}	14%^{B}	15%^{B}
Training/ development should be delivered during other times	10%	-	-	13%^{A}	8.9%^{A}	3.2%^{B}	13%^{A}	5.2%^{B}	8.6%^{B}
I would prefer to undertake this training immediately	5%	7.4%	2.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would prefer to undertake this training as required	48%	44%	57%	-	-	-	-	-	-

NB. All χ^2tests significant at$p<.01$

$^{A, B}$ Significant difference between groups detected in follow up χ^2

Willingness to undertake training and development for transitional employment was high, as 89% of the respondents interested in transitional employment were prepared to undertake training in order to remain employed in some capacity. Consistent with the work conditions items, there were distinct response patterns according to time remaining until retirement, and education/

occupation level. Participants with six or more years remaining until retirement were more committed to obtaining new qualifications through the training and development ($\chi^2(1,994)= 80.198$, $p<.01$), while participants with less than six years remaining until retirement were not as willing and committed to undergo training and development ($\chi^2(1,994)= 17.605$, $p<.01$). Workers with six or fewer years until retirement requested training and development to be provided as required ($\chi^2(1,994)= 13.696$, $p<.01$), whereas workers with more than six years until retirement were more likely to indicate that training and development should be provided throughout working life ($\chi^2(1,994)= 15.434$, $p<.01$). In addition, workers who expected to retire in fewer than six years were more likely to indicate that they did not require training and development for transitional employment ($\chi^2(1,994)= 6.551$, $p<.01$). By contrast, respondents with more than six years until retirement indicated an interest in training in advanced skills presumably to enable career progression ($\chi^2(1,994)= 6.987$, $p<.01$) as required ($\chi^2(1,994)= 5.481$, $p<.01$).

Education and occupation group differences were observed for several training and development items. Compared to other education and occupation groups, high status workers were more likely to attach a very high value to their work related learning and life skills ($\chi^2_{\text{education}}(2,994)= 12.395$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}}(2,994)= 22.074$, $p<.01$), and indicated a preparedness to undergo training and development at other times (outside of work hours; $\chi^2_{\text{education}}(2,994)= 12.627$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}}(2,994)= 10.930$, $p<.01$). Conversely, high status workers were less inclined to indicate a preference for training and development during work hours than other education and occupation level groups ($\chi^2_{\text{education}}(2,994)= 18.275$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}}(2,994)= 29.644$, $p<.01$). Some education group differences were also observed in isolation of occupation group differences. University and VET educated respondents were more interested in obtaining additional qualifications than participants with secondary schooling only ($\chi^2(2,994)= 18.435$, $p<.01$) . In addition, university educated workers were more likely than other education groups to report an interest in advanced skills training ($\chi^2(2,994)= 13.916$, $p<.01$), and believe that limited education was disadvantageous to employees seeking training and development for transitional employment ($\chi^2(2,994)= 29.414$, $p<.01$). By contrast, workers with secondary schooling only were more likely to attach a medium value to their work related learning and life skills ($\chi^2(2,994)= 14.253$, $p<.01$). Occupation level differences were also noted in the absence of education level group differences. Professionals and managers were also less likely to attach a high value to their work related learning and life skills ($\chi^2(2,994)= 13.322$, $p<.01$), and more likely to request training and development during evenings ($\chi^2(2,994)= 10.122$, $p<.01$) than other occupation level groups.

Mutual Roles and Responsibilities

Table 4. Mutual Roles and Responsibilities in Transitional Employment

Question	% All	Retirement	Education Level	Occupation Level					
	<6 yrs	>6 yrs	UNI	VET	SSO	P/M	ADM	BC	
Council should assist in identifying transitional employment opportunities outside of Council.	54%	51%	62%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Council management should review staff recruitment processes for 50+ year olds	27%	25%	33%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Council management should meet with workers to discuss opportunities	41%	45%	38%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Council management should support workers in looking for transitional employment	26%	-	-	-	-	-	24%^{A}	35%^{B}	24%^{A}
Council management should assist workers in skill development	26%	23%	33%	-	-	-	23%^{A}	34%^{B}	27%^{A}
I would be prepared to commit to learn new skills, where possible	58%	56%	67%	-	-	-	58%^{A}	69%^{B}	55%^{A}
I would be prepared to commit to learn new skills from my colleagues	17%	15%	21%	16%^{A}	16%	27%^{B}	14%^{A}	27%^{B}	16%^{A}
I would be prepared to commit to share more information with management and colleagues	31%	35%	27%	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would be prepared to commit to improve work strategies within the workforce	32%	-	-	37%^{A}	33%^{A}	21%^{B}	-	-	-
I would personally undertake to assess other staff in their work	12%	9.5%	16%	-	-	-	-	-	-
I would personally undertake to represent the council when required	25%	-	-	33%^{A}	20%^{B}	21%^{B}	32%^{A}	16%^{B}	24%^{B}

NB. All χ^2tests significant at $p<.01$

$^{A, B}$ Significant difference between groups detected in follow up χ^2tests

The aspect of the survey enquired about mutual roles and responsibilities between employees and council management for supporting transitional employment. A very high proportion of the participants believed that the council should introduce a pre-retirement plan (93%) and assist employees in finding transitional employment options within the council (95%). By contrast, only 54% of respondents felt that the council should assist in sourcing transitional employment opportunities outside the council, however as Table 4 illustrates participants with at least six years remaining until retirement were more supportive of this option than participants who expected to retire in six or fewer years ($\chi^2(1,994)= 12.475$, $p<.01$).

When asked about the council management's role in supporting transitional employment for employees, the most common response was to "establish a retirement planning policy for all staff" (59%). Table 4 shows that the items "review staff recruitment processes for 50+ year olds" ($\chi^2(1,994)= 9.071$, $p<.01$) and "assist workers in skill development" ($\chi^2(1,994)= 10.244$, $p<.01$) were more popular amongst participants with six or more years until retirement, while participants with six or fewer years until retirement were more likely to respond to the item "meet with workers to discuss opportunities" ($\chi^2(1,994)= 5.359$, $p<.01$). Occupation group differences were observed for administrators responded favorably to the items "support workers in looking for transitional employment" ($\chi^2(2,994) = 11.047$, $p<.01$) and "assist workers in skill

development" ($\chi^2(2,994) = 10.428$, $p<.01$), than any other occupations group.

Participants were asked two questions regarding their role in transitional employment. First, they were asked what they would be prepared to commit to for seek transitional employment, to which the most popular response was "learn new skills where possible" (58%).. Second, participants were asked what they would personally undertake to do more of in transitional employment. The top three responses were "sharing skills with others" (75%), "training younger employees" (55%), and "assisting other staff to learn new skills" (55%).

Workers with six or more years until retirement were more likely to respond to the items "learn new skills where possible" ($\chi^2(1,994)= 13.538$, $p<.01$) and "assessing other staff in their work," ($\chi^2(1,994)= 8.869$, $p<.01$) while workers with fewer than six years until retirement preferred the item "share more information with management and colleagues" ($\chi^2(1,994)= 7.188$, $p<.01$). Education and occupation group differences were also observed for the items "learn new skills from my colleagues", favoured by secondary school educated and administration workers ($\chi^2_{\text{education}}(2,994)= 11.694$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}}(2,994) =21.751$, $p<.01$), and "representing the council when required", preferred by high status workers ($\chi^2_{\text{education}}(2,994)= 18.318$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}}(2,994) = 23.690$, $p<.01$). In addition, university and VET educated workers were more likely than workers with secondary schooling only to opt for the item "Improve work strategies within the workforce" ($\chi^2(2,994)= 13.959$, $p<.01$), while administrators were more likely than professionals, managers and blue collar workers to select the item "learn new skills where possible" ($\chi^2(2,994) = 12.707$, $p<.01$).

Incentives and Benefits

Table 5. Incentives and Benefits in Transitional Employment

Question	% All	Retirement	Education Level	Occupation Level					
	<6 yrs	>6 yrs	UNI	VET	SSO	P/M	ADM	BC	
Private health care subsidiaries an incentive for transitional employment	21%	-	-	18%	21%	29%	17% [A]	28% [B]	24% [A]
Flexible work hours an incentive for transitional employment	68%	74%	65%	72%	72%	61%	73%	65%	69%
Regular extended leave periods an incentive for transitional employment	31%	35%	28%	38% [A]	28% [B]	27% [B]	39% [A]	24% [B]	26% [B]
Opportunity to learn new skills an incentive for transitional employment	27%	25%	33%	-	-	-	-	-	-
To be respected and valued a benefit to transitional employment	51%	47%	57%	46% [A]	55% [B]	59%	49% [A]	60% [B]	47% [A]
To be needed a benefit to transitional employment	16%	-	-	-	-	-	14% [A]	24% [B]	13% [A]
Socialising a benefit to transitional employment	25%	-	-	-	-	-	26% [A]	34% [B]	17% [A]
General well being a benefit to transitional employment	54%	-	-	-	-	-	59% [A]	58% [B]	48% [A]
Maintain friends a benefit to transitional employment	21%	-	-	15% [A]	29% [B]	28% [B]	16% [A]	34% [B]	21% [A]

NB.All χ^2tests significant at $p<.01$

[A, B] Significant difference between groups detected in follow up χ^2tests

[1] The Australian Research Council encourages and support joint research with industry partners under it's ARC linkage research (Grant no. LP05615450) jointly conducted by the Queensland University of Technology and the Local Government association of Queensland as the industry partners

The top incentive to transitional employment overall was "flexible work hours" (68%). However numerous significant group differences were observed and reported in Table 5. Regular extended leave periods ($\chi^2(1,994)= 5.390$, $p<.01$) and flexible work hours ($\chi^2(1,994)= 8.037$, $p<.01$) were most preferred by employees who had more than six years until retirement, while opportunity to learn new skills ($\chi^2(1,994)= 7.264$, $p<.01$) was more popular amongst workers with less than six years until retirement. Education and occupation group differences were also observed for regular extended leave periods, and indicated that high status workers preferred this option ($\chi^2_{\text{education}}(2,994)= 12.205$, $p<.01$; $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}}(2,994)= 19.912$, $p<.01$). Private healthcare subsidiaries were more likely to act as incentives for administrators compared to professionals, managers and blue collar workers ($\chi^2(2,994)= 15.398$, $p<.01$).

Income emerged as the most significant benefit to transitional employment, reported by 73% of participants, followed by "to keep active" and "general well being", listed by 65% and 54% of participants respectively. "To be respected and valued" varied by timeframe to retirement ($\chi^2(1,994)= 9.308$, $p<.01$), education level ($\chi^2(2,994)= 11.106$, $p<.01$), and occupation level ($\chi^2(2,994)= 121.087$, $p<.01$). Occupation level (particularly the blue collar workers) impacted upon response to several incentives including "to be needed" ($\chi^2(2,994)= 14.610$, $p<.01$), "socializing" ($\chi^2(2,994)= 16.030$, $p<.01$), "general well being" ($\chi^2(2,994) = 7.120$, $p<.01$) and "maintain friends" ($\chi^2(2,994)= 26.314$, $p<.01$). Response to the item "maintain friends" ($\chi^2(2,994)= 26.314$, $p<.01$) was also affected by education level, as VET and secondary school educated participants were more likely to accept this item than respondents with a university level of education.

Discussion

As a whole, LGA employees over the age of 50 years displayed a very positive attitude towards continued employment after reaching 65 years, the age at which individuals currently become eligible to receiving the retirement pension in Australia (OECD, 2005). The majority of respondents viewed transitional employment as a continuation of their current role at reduced hours, which reflects the ideal of mature aged workers in the literature (ABS, 2007c). Unlike previously noted negative stereotypes, mature workers in the current study had a very positive attitude towards training and development, and were also committed to assisting other workers in their learning and sharing information. This finding concurs with Lundberg and Marshallsay's (2007) recent survey, and contrasts the negative age stereotypes regarding learning in Gringart et al,

(2005). Brooke and Taylor (2005) noted in their study that the value of mature aged workers maybe demonstrated by rehiring retirees for consulting work, as well as enabling mature aged employees to transfer skills and experience to younger workers. Findings detailing preferred council strategies to support mature aged workers are novel. They indicate a need to support the development and implementation of pre and post retirement policies, mechanisms for provided assistance and opportunities to discuss issues related to engagement in transitional employment. The main benefits and incentives of transitional employment pertained to income, flexibility of hours, and health, which are consistent with previous research (Lundberg & Marshallsay, 2007; Shacklock et al, 2007). There was some variance in transitional employment preferences by demographic groups. The following discussion illustrates a number of patterns that emerged from responses across the four themes. The overlapping nature of some of the responses has warranted the findings to be consolidated around the two major response patterns attributed to demographic variables measured in the study.

Timeframe until retirement

Mature aged workers who were reaching retirement age were more interested in participating in transitional employment than those who planned to work less than six years. This contrasts with previous research findings (Adams & Rau, 2003) which indicate that older age is negatively associated with acceptance of transitional employment. However, retirement proximity for the current study was not necessarily indicative of age. In the current study, the term "official minimum retirement date" was used, meaning the earliest possible date at which respondents became eligible for retirement pension and thus can exit the workforce , which would depend on a range of criteria such as job type, health status, financial security and availability of pension benefits, for example. Respondents with close and distant retirement proximity also reported different aspirations for transitional employment.

Close retirement proximity was associated with an increased likelihood to aspire to retain current employment arrangements within the LGA at a reduced time commitment. While this finding may suggest inflexibility to change, it is also possible that workers close to retirement have already found work arrangements that suit their needs and abilities, similar to outcomes of Shacklock et al's (2007) research. It is also possible that mature workers believe it is too late to make career changes, or that they have other goals such as traveling, which they want to achieve before they get too old. Responses to training and development items are consistent with work condition preferences. For instance, employees closer to retirement were willing to undertake training and development if necessary to engage in transitional employment. They were also more open to discussions with management regarding transitional employment, as well as sharing information with management and colleagues. Flexible hours and negotiated extended leave were viewed as key incentives for engaging with

transitional employment.

By contrast, distant retirement proximity was indicative of a different mindset regarding transitional employment. Specifically, this group appeared to view transitional employment as an opportunity for career change as they were less fixated on maintaining their current role or employer, and more likely to commit to reskilling, obtaining qualifications or advancing skills. This seeming greater openness to change may be reflective of a more expanded time perspective, in which goals such as obtaining an educational qualification would be more realistic amongst employees who anticipate longer working lives. For transitional employment, workers with a more distant retirement proximity reported that the council should assist with skill development and sourcing pathways for transitional employment within (different departments) and outside the LGA, as well as review staff recruitment processes for workers aged 50 or over. This cohort was committed to learning new skills to take up transitional employment, which was viewed as a key incentive. This group also viewed respect and value by peers and the management at work as a positive influence in seeking transitional employment. On the other hand, as noted above workers with fewer than 6 years until retirement appeared to view transitional employment as an opportunity to wind down and pass on their skills.

Education and Occupation Level

The transitional employment survey identified two general response patterns related to education and occupation levels of respondents. The first was the "high status" pattern, exhibited by employees who were university educated and working in a professional or managerial role. The second was the "other" pattern, demonstrated by administrators and blue collar workers, who were educated via vocational education and training, or secondary school only.

In general, the high status workers perceived transitional employment in a similar fashion to workers with distant retirement proximities, in that transitional employment was viewed as a second career opportunity, rather than a chance to wind down from full time work. This view resonates with the contemporary "portfolio worker' types where loyalty is traded for new and interesting opportunities (Handy, 2001). Being educated and having access to the right networks helps that professionals, managers and employees with high levels of education are privileged in transitional employment options (Chen & Scott, 2006), and possibly better equipped to start their own businesses (Phillipson & Smith, 2005). Consistent with these findings, high status workers in the current study indicated a greater interest in self employment or working for a mixture of employers, possibly as a consultant. High status workers were also more likely than other workers to exercise self direction in training and development for transitional employment.

The responses of 'other' status workers were more mixed, however in line with their lower level of education and lower skilled jobs, these participants appeared to be more dependent on the LGA for support in seeking transitional employment. This was particularly true for respondents with secondary schooling only or administrators. These respondents were more likely than participants who had completed vocational education and training to aspire to maintain employment with the LGA, and rely on the council for support in retraining and finding transitional employment. Some idiosyncrasies were also noted for blue collar workers, who together with secondary school educated respondents were the least receptive to engage with transitional employment. It was very encouraging to observe that almost 80% of blue collar and secondary school educated participants were interested in transitional employment, a figure consistent with previous research on white collar samples (Lundberg & Marshallsay, 2007).

Conclusions

While the current study carries important implications for research and HR practitioner particularly the need for forward planning to retained skilled and experienced mature workers. The study challenges the one size fits all negative stereotypes labeling the older workers as the finding suggest that older workers are interested to remain in the workforce longer but the conditions has to be appropriate. Job rotation and flexible employment provide options for developing workforce planning to address the mature workers phenomenon. The study also acknowledges some limitations. Firstly, the survey was conducted online and used self report methodology, and it is therefore difficult to determine the exact response rate. However, the comparatively small proportion of secondary school educated and blue collar workers suggest that these demographic groups were underrepresented. A previous survey of LGA employees in Queensland suggested that at least three quarters of mature aged workers were secondary school educated or employed in manual roles (Pillay et al, 2006b), which is much greater than the figures of 17% and 21% observed in the current study. Secondly, gender differences were not investigated as this was not the focus of the study. The decision to exclude gender was based on the inability to find consistent gender differences in transitional employment participation in previous studies (Adams & Rau, 2003; Chen & Scott, 2006), and the observation of a strong overlap between gender and job type in Pillay et al's (2006b) survey. However in the current study gender, and possibly other unmeasured variables such as health status, may have exhibited a unique effect on transitional employment aspirations, which presents options for further research. Third, the definition of "official minimum retirement date" was open to interpretation by participants, and expected retirement proximity would have likely varied according to a range of variables. Lastly, the study was conducted within a large, public, Australian organisation, and findings may not generalize to other organizations that do not fit this description.

Despite the above limitations, findings from the current study were consistent with previous research on transitional employment, and support the implementation of flexible work options to retain mature aged workers, as well as the provision of training and development and mentoring opportunities. As noted above the, treating mature worker as an homogeneous group is not accurate. Firstly, the retirement proximity and education/ occupation levels impact transitional employment aspirations, and secondly, mature aged workers' perceptions of council and management roles in supporting transitional employment. In the current study, questionnaire items focused on supporting mature aged workers, and very few items addressed how mature aged workers could benefit the organisation in return. Mutual roles and responsibilities in mature aged employment is an emergent area (eg. Brooke & Taylor, 2005; Loretto & White, 2006), a concept which has recently become embedded in age management strategies (Illmarinen, 2006; Mature Age Strategy Team, n.d.). For HR practitioners, the findings indicate that most mature aged workers are positive about staying in the workforce longer. The mature aged workers are a diverse group with different goals for transitional employment thus simple generalized stereotypes may not be useful. High status workers appeared to exhibit more self direction than other workers, evident in their desire for alternate employments, responsibility in training and development, and interest in representing the council. These workers may thrive in consulting and project work arrangements which offer challenge, flexibility and an opportunity to use their expertise. Some blue collar and vocational education and training educated workers may also benefit from similar arrangements, however these groups tended to be less committed to training and development than high status workers. Administrators and employees with secondary schooling only may benefit from additional employer support with respect to career options in transitional employment. For these groups, informal learning may enhance comfort and confidence with learning to broaden their skills.

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