

Flexible conditions for older workers – what are they and how can they benefit workers and their employers?

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The Challenge

- The ageing of the labour force is an aspect of overall population ageing - 40% of the New Zealand workforce is now 45 or older
- Effects of workforce ageing are being felt in labour and skills shortages and these are likely to worsen
- Costs of retirement income support and health care – fiscal benefits of extending participation
- Use of flexible working conditions can help older workers to navigate the transition to retirement

What are flexible work conditions?

Sources

- **The Health, Work and Retirement Study**

A large-scale postal survey of a nationally-representative sample of people aged 55 to 70. Face-to-face interviews in 2006 and 2008. Average age 64, retired, working full-time and working part-time

- **Workforce Ageing – An Issue for Employers**

A postal survey of NZIM members in June 2007– 20 face-to-face interviews in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch

Flexible conditions for older workers

❖ Part-time work and job-sharing

A supermarket manager needed someone to drive a tractor which brought in trolleys from the car park. He employed three men, all in their seventies, to share the task. The drivers "don't treat it like a race-track"

❖ Flexible working hours

An NGO in the health sector, with several nurses already in their sixties. Nurses can choose to work only 4 shifts a week. They can choose not to take on night duty or work in the community

Flexible conditions for older workers

❖ Shifting into relieving or casual positions

Workers become eligible for occupational pension and “retire”, but are hired back. “People retire and we say ‘see you Monday’”. Arrangements can incorporate a specified number of hours per month, on a very flexible basis depending on when special tasks arise

❖ Work from home or in a local office

Document processing which usually takes place in a centralised service centre can be carried out by retired workers who have access to branch offices

Flexible conditions for older workers

- ❖ **Monitoring health and advising on how to cope with physical demands**

Every 6 months a landscaping firm brings in a physiotherapist to educate staff about avoiding pain and strain in backs and knees

- ❖ **Providing an assistant for physical jobs**

An older worker with special skills had lost confidence in his ability to perform physical tasks, such as climbing into confined spaces. He was given an apprentice for these tasks. His role was to be the “brains” of the operation

Benefits for Employers

Combats labour shortages

Flexibility in the use of staff time

A vibrant and diverse – mixed age - workforce

Keeps the experience of older employees

Protects corporate memory

Creates new role models - mentoring

Reduced staff turnover and higher staff morale

Improved public image

Jack (69) built up a plumbing business which employs 14 staff. His eldest son has taken over the management and a grandson is working his way up. Jack still works in the business, mainly in a supervisory role.

I do a lot of pricing of jobs and that sort of thing. If someone rings up and wants a truck delivered or they need some gear, I deliver it, but I don't crawl under houses or work on roofs and I don't bend pipes anymore. I've put forty years of my life into this business and my preference is, in summer, if there are things to be done I turn up and if there are nice days then I don't have to. In the winter time, if it gets really cold I don't come either. I'm pretty satisfied with what I do.

Jerry worked in finance and then managed a sports club until he retired at 67. He takes on fixed term work if he can, because but prefers to spend his time on voluntary work and with his family, even though it means a drop in income.

I'm the sort of person who gets too deeply involved in my work. The grandkids used to come and Grandad was never home, always at work. I decided, what the hell, I'll retire and be able to see more of the family. What I enjoy about retirement is suiting yourself, fixing your own timetables. Some old lady wants me to do her tax return. I say, I can do that. Somebody else wants me to do a street collection. I say, I can do that.

Martha (70) and her husband moved to a new area when they retired. She developed a craft hobby and teaches her skill in a community programme as well as selling her work. This brings her extra income and great satisfaction.

I've got money put aside now to cover unexpected expenses. It's very rewarding when you see others attempt to do something and even though they're struggling, they're really focusing on their goals and that is very encouraging for me too. I am retired but I still want to be involved in community affairs, whether through the church or the (centre). I enjoy the freedom (of retirement). To be able to do whatever you want to do. It's a luxury not to look at the clock when you wake up in the morning.

James (66) had a long career in management. He now does relieving jobs, but is choosy and only picks “those I know I can do and can add value to.” He gets a lot of satisfaction from mentoring others, but no longer being in a competitive situation.

I keep my hand in, in the business community. It keeps the brain cells operating so I get positive feedback from doing that. I prefer to have the time because most of our children and grandchildren live overseas, to have the opportunities to travel so I've got that flexibility and I'm free to make decisions about whether I go fishing tomorrow or take the kayak out and paddle to Mana Island; so it's freedom of choice, more than anything else.

Benefits for Older Workers

Extra income - Reduces dependency and gives choices

Freedom to enjoy a mix of activities in “retirement” – paid and unpaid work, family, leisure, travel

Positive effects on health and wellbeing

Feeling of using wisdom and talents

How can we maximise the potential of older workers?

- Tackle barriers
- Create opportunities
 - A changed HR philosophy
 - Reciprocal work adaptation

Human Resources Philosophy



Depreciation model

worker's value to the organisation peaks early, reaches a plateau at mid career, then steadily declines

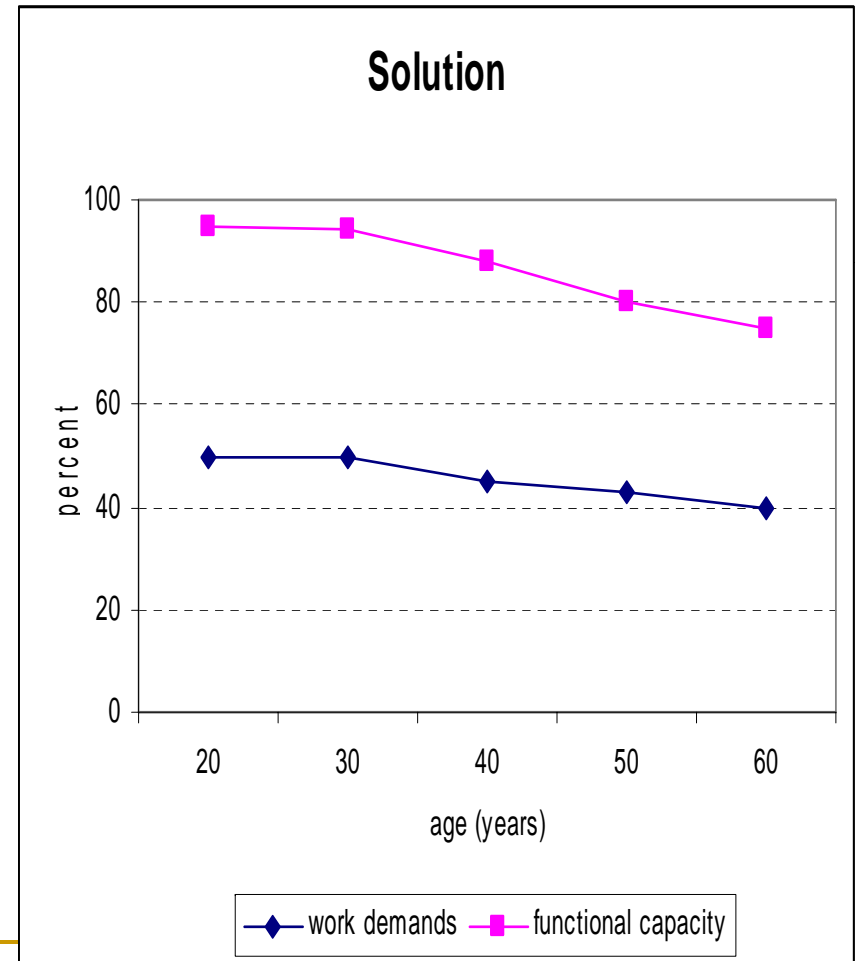
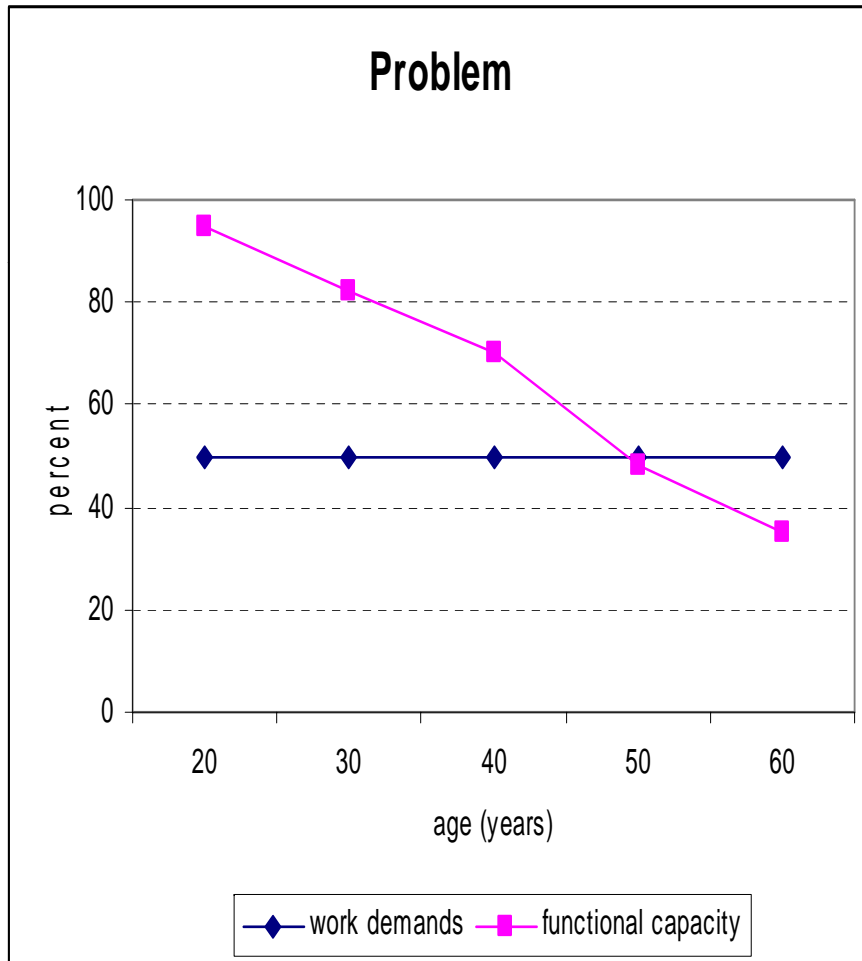
Ref. Yeatts, Folts and Knapp. (2000)

Conservation model

all employees, regardless of age, are viewed as renewable assets that can yield a high rate of return for long periods of time if they are adequately managed, educated and trained

Work Adaptation

– FINPAW Model



Benefits for Society and the Economy

Reducing the costs of an ageing population

Positive economic effects

Improved health and wellbeing for older people

Promoting continuing economic and social contribution by older people

Tackling ageism

Intergenerational solidarity
