

## **Current Age Management Developments in Europe: Reflections on Gothenburg Conference June 2007**

### **Age Management and the ESF 'Equal' Programme**

Through the 'Equal' stream of the European Social Fund, more than 200 development partnerships (DPs) have been running across Europe aimed enhancing older people's employment. (Many more - nearly 2,000 in all - have covered other areas.) Meanwhile, other research initiatives have considered aspects of work and the ageing population, from a range of perspectives. All of these were the focus for the 'Competence 50+' conference on age management in Gothenburg this June.

### **The Gothenburg Conference**

Many of the Competence 50+ presentations referred to workplace initiatives. (If these are taken to constitute the 'macro economic' limb of age management, age management at the company or organisation, 'micro economic' level, is perhaps easier to embrace.) Many presentations described *innovative projects* (a particular criterion for grant of Equal funding). The result was a series of provoking and relevant exemplars which could lead the way in assembling greater understanding of good practice.

### **Perspective on Age Management Developments**

In a scene setting opening presentation, Anne Marie Guillemard of the University of Paris-Decartes, rebutted demographic determinism as a way of opting out of 'age management.' Demography may change the 'name of the game,' but there was emphatically a human element in the way companies and organisations responded. 'Changes in the age structure dictate neither practices nor policies,' was her message.

She illustrated her argument by reference to 'age cultures.' It was possible to distinguish between '*a culture of the right to employment for all age groups,*' (eg in Scandinavian countries) and a society where there was '*a culture of the right to an early exit,*' (eg in France and Italy). This difference in cultures translated into different appreciations of 50 year old workers – in Scandinavia, she argued, older workers are more appreciated than in continental Europe, where a genuine cultural revolution was needed.

She pointed to the way average ages of retirement contrasted. In Sweden average retirement age is 63, in France it is 58. Demographic changes *alone*, however pressing they became, would emphatically not bring changes in the way older people's skills and knowledge were deployed in the workplace. (By implication, changes could be in tune with the values we in TAEN believe in, or they may be completely the opposite.) Guillemard argued that we should aim for cultural values more in line with Sweden than France, where high levels of social protection for those in work and an unwillingness of employers to hire workers not be easily shed in downsizing, have contributed to a culture of early exit from the labour market.

### **Example of Finland**

Finland provides a paradigm to note. A national five year plan adopted in 1998 – 2002 for people aged 45+, treated older people as an important national resource. Reports suggest that the emphasis moved from managing through age- related measures to managing age diversity at public and company levels. As part of this a dynamic 'life course' perspective had been adopted instead of a static age-group perspective. One outcome has been an increase in the proportion of Finland's 55-64 cohort in work.

### **Where Age Management Should be Heading**

Guillemard's view is that age management has to be *preventative*. It has to be related to a human resources management approach along a *life cycle*, maintaining the ability of the individual to continue in work. It works by timely and appropriate interventions. Guillemard offered the following ingredients as essential elements of an age management approach.

- Redesigning the professional life-course.
- Developing training programmes in line with a special focus on workers over 40.
- Improving working conditions, especially health and safety, leading to enhance work ability, improve well-being and sustain work life.
- Recognising experience as an asset and transferring skills and knowledge from older to younger generations.
- Social dialogue had to be the key to launch age management.  
(Management had to start with a discussion involving all actors.)

In Guillemard's view, approaches offering employees security along a *life-course*, with career paths incorporating transitions, need to replace the notion of 'a job for life.' *Flexicurity*, would be favoured instead of security in a specific job.

'*Management by age criteria*' would give way to '*management of diversity and synergy of all ages*.' European states would have to move from curative social programmes (eg welfare programmes of various kinds) to preventative labour

market and health policies. These included investing in human capital and mobility, learning and qualifications, and mentoring.

This at least was the gist of what Anne Marie Guillemard had to say on the subject. As an attempt to set the scene for a conference on age management, it was a worthy contribution. It was, however, only one of a number of thoughtful contributions. Many of these clearly merited attention by a wider audience than even the well attended conference provided. In the end, the ability of the Competence 50+ conference organisers to disseminate these ideas and the readiness of practitioners to lead their organisations in embracing change, will determine how influential it has all been.

### **Formation of European Age Management Network**

In this context the formation of a European age management network could be particularly significant. It will be interesting to see how this develops and in particular how far it is able to raise interest among main stream employers against the background of some indifference to age management issues in UK companies. It was reassuring to see that a number of the Equal projects appeared to have achieved such engagement.

For a conference of this kind, it is impossible to give more than a flavour of the wide range of seminars, presentations and plenary sessions that were organised over the two full days. The following table summarises the focus of a number of the reports.

### **Summary of Selected Dialogues and Seminars at Competence 50+**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Subject Matter</b>	<b>People</b>
A European Age Management Network: The Way Forward	Discussion of infrastructure for sharing ideas on age management across Europe.	Helen Tubb and Pat Irving (Belgium and UK)
The Economics of Age Management – the offensive versus the defensive model	Economic analysis of business practices, and comparison of economic benefits of taking age conscious approach to management affects profitability.	Claes Malmquist (Sweden)
Understanding Learning in/for work: Implications for older workers	Theories of learning as they are applied to older workers – could lead to greater integration of older workers in learning.	Tara Fenwick (Canada)
Conditions of work and Employment for Older Workers: Understanding the Issues	As title suggests – examination of conditions for older workers – highlighting the conditions considered most relevant.	Naj Gosheh (ILO)

<p>Good Practice in Age Management: Developments in Companies in the European Union</p>	<p>Re-visiting of companies covered in survey some ten years ago – most had retained extended good practice though in some cases, individual managers had move on and commitment had waned. Most common features were in training and flexible working. More reports now on health initiatives, fewer on recruitment and redeployment.</p>	<p>Robert Anderson (European Foundation, Dublin)</p>
<p>Lifelong Learning and Vocational Education and Training</p>	<p>Examination of gap between school (college?) based learning and vocational (work place) based training. Argues for de-schooling of vocational learning.</p>	<p>Robert Hoghielm (Sweden)</p>
<p>Turning Back the Clock: The Rebirth of Ageing Workers</p>	<p>Seeks to make case for older workers not to be excluded from training programmes and argues for approaches meeting their specific needs. Looks at role of vocational training institutions.</p>	<p>Stylianos Mavroumoustakos (Cyprus)</p>
<p>Energetic Ageing – Vattenfall Reduced working hours....(short title)</p>	<p>Work done in company, Vadenfall Nordic. Looks at opinions of older workers around working time, work load and pensions trade off scheme.</p>	<p>Trude Furunes (University of Stavanger, Norway)</p>
<p>Energetic Ageing – Vattenfall Work Environment indicators... (short title)</p>	<p>Companion to above, competence transfer programmes introduced as part of plan to improve working conditions, reduce sick leave, reduce work load etc of older workers. Positive outcome including raising of age of retirement.</p>	<p>Reider Johan Mykletun (University of Stavanger, Norway)</p>
<p>Mentoring – a tool to successful integration and retention of the workforce</p>	<p>Aarhus region of Denmark – 140 workplaces implemented mentoring function, 1100 tutors trained as mentors. Function of mentors developed. Best practices demonstrated.</p>	<p>Helle Bonde (Denmark)</p>
<p>Then Benefit of Mentoring</p>	<p>Focuses on older employees in civil engineering. Looks at how mentors and mentees responded, what are expectations? Good practices?</p>	<p>Paul de Haas (Netherlands)</p>
<p>Mentorship based on mentee's needs and wishes</p>	<p>A particular (seemingly very well thought out) approach to mentoring, explained and tested. Organisation does not demand mentees tell what kind of mentoring support they seek – differing needs taken into account.</p>	<p>Kerstin Ljungstrom (Sweden)</p>

Working after 50? Contradictions and Antagonisms	A sort of all issues 'wash up' think piece.	Roland Gauthy (ETUI-REHS, Brussels, Belgium)
A New Management of Ages in Response to Demographic Ageing	Calls for an age management approach which replaces 'management by ages' as major criterion for adjustments in favour of labour market 'life-course' approach. (See main comment).	Anne-Marie Guillemard (France).
Health and Work in an Ageing Europe	Argues attitudes of employers are main age barrier not health. Accepts that there are high risk occupations, police, fire fighters, pilots etc, where health may be an issue, but outlines case for health controls and tests of capability to accurately filter out workers at risk, rather than mandatory early retirements.	Per Erik Solem (Norwegian Social Research, Norway)
High Demand Jobs and Age Related Diversity in Work Ability	Looks at 'high demand jobs,' as above, calls for 'on-employment' medicals more frequently ie more continuously. Reports on methodologies to factor in known changes in human capacities in relation to age – argues that more needs to be known in relation to variations in human capacities, reference norms etc.	Judith K Sluiter (Caromel Institute for Occupational Health, Netherlands)
Know How Transfer for SMEs	This is a method apparently adopted by a small university based consulting company, Nova. PE, to assess competencies of older employees. Provides a framework for SMEs to analyse their age and knowledge structures, win 'knowledge bearers,' and organise knowledge transfers.	Kerstin Alms and Christian Riese (Rhur University Germany)
Transfert de savoirs expérientiels	Skill transfer tools headed by French consultancy firm ITAQUE.	Robert Diez (ITAQUE France)
Mentoring: Mobilising, Retention and Appreciation of Competence 50+	Mentoring is the most frequently mentioned concept in the discourse relating to older workers and competence. Presentation explored various dimensions of mentoring carried out by older workers and explores advantages.	Tarja Tikkanen, International Research Institute, Stavanger, Norway
How to Make Use of the Elderly?	Difficult to understand – basically straight forward argument about the role of older people and some dilemmas for society.	

Age Diversity in the Workforce	Describes the work of NHS Employers in helping NHS organisations improve for compliance and beyond. Well known to us, but her presentation covered age profile, impact of workforce ageing, how NHS Employers has helped employers and some of the innovative practices.	Carole Smith (NHS Employers, UK)
Assistance System for Age Differentiated Work Design and Employee Assignment	Focuses on ergonomic design of work and tools to prevent work related diseases and avoid unnecessary ill health related retirements.	Holger Rademacher and others, Darmstadt University of Technology, Germany
Age-Based Work Systems in German Automotive Industry	Changing attitudes of employers to older employees, development of indices to describe characteristics of work including measuring lifting, weight bearing and posture. Also questionnaires to measure social support, performance, mental health and other complaints, work ability and health status. Aim is to develop a life span approach to design of work and work systems. Very impressive presentation, with significant players and people involved.	Markus Buch and others, University of Kassel, Institute of Industrial Design and Ergonomics, Kassel Germany.
A New Concept for Improving Work Ability of Elderly Workers in Danish Workplaces	Very interesting Occupational Health research, looks at work capacity of workers in specific jobs and how capacity changes with age. Considers healthy effects of leisure time activities. Calls for more radical strategy including specific training sessions designed to match the capacity of the worker and the job demands. Focusing on training the individual – ‘fitting the man to the task instead of the task to the man,’ an interesting reversal of a well accepted paradigm, emphasises need to get workers to change lifestyles to lower risk of life style diseases. Recognises some problems in this and plumps eventually for a mixed approach combining traditional ergonomic approaches, specifically designed physical training and cognitive behavioural therapy.	Karen Sogaard (National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Copenhagen Denmark)

Lifelong Learning and Older Workers	Provides a brief over-view of supporting lifelong learning for multiple generations of workers.	Tara Fenwick, University of Alberta, Canada
Lifelong Learning for Older Workers	Based on work in the European Foundation, shows that whilst attention should be on paid to lifelong learning and continuous training, older workers require compensation for the years when they have had little investment in their employability. Appropriate methods to maximise learning among older workers include enhancing motivation by minimizing competitive desk based learning. New skills should be based on existing skills and practical learning appears to be much better than class based formal techniques.	Robert Anderson (European Foundation for Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin)

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