

Employment of the older worker

A Project from Massey University
funded by the
Public Good Science Fund

February 2001

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Employment of the Older Worker Survey.....	2
Employment of the Older Worker: The New Zealand Employers' Perspective	27
Comparative data.....	51

Introduction

Information about the employment of the older worker in New Zealand has been gathered through two large surveys recently undertaken. This booklet contains:

- details of a survey of older workers aged 55 years and over who were members of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union
- details of a survey conducted with employers through the New Zealand Employers' Federation.
- data comparing the results of the workers' survey with the employers' survey.

You may have participated in one of the surveys carried out by researchers at Massey University and funded by the Public Good Science Fund or you may be interested in the information provided.

The Employment of the Older Worker study is now in its third stage. The experiences and barriers faced by mature job seekers are being gathered with the co-operation of four mature employment support agencies in Invercargill, Christchurch, Palmerston North and Whangarei. The information will complement the growing picture we have of older workers in New Zealand.

For further information about the Employment of the Older Worker Study contact Professor Judy McGregor, College of Business, Massey University. Private Box 756, Wellington, New Zealand. Phone (04) 801 2794 extension 6395. Email J.H.McGregor@massey.ac.nz

Employment of the Older Worker Survey

Introduction

A survey of older workers in New Zealand was conducted in 1999 to improve understanding of attitudes about older workers and to allow unions, employers and policy agencies to plan ahead and respond to changes in the workforce.

The study was carried out by researchers at Massey University and was funded by the Public Good Science Fund. The study had the support of the largest union in New Zealand, the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union and the co-operation signalled the salience of the issue to the union. The union's database was used to identify members 55 years of age and over. Questionnaire surveys were sent to those identified at their home addresses to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. A two wave questionnaire design was used.

The questionnaire comprised mainly structured questions with only about 6 of 40 questions containing unstructured options. Many of the questions contained Likert-type scales and asked workers whether they agreed or disagreed with particular statements as set out in the survey. The questionnaire canvassed demographic details such as age, gender, ethnicity number of dependents including children and older adults and information about jobs including number of jobs, hours of work, length of employment and nature of employment contracts. Workers were asked about redundancy and voluntary changes of jobs in the past five years.

The survey asked a range of questions to test the respondents' views of the older worker and to explore stereotypes. Included in these questions was a question asking respondents at what age they believed job performance was likely to decline for men and women in both manual and professional occupations. A set of questions asked workers about social policy and labour market conditions in the future and another section of the survey explored age discrimination at work. The importance of work and work practices and retirement issues were canvassed and the effectiveness of performance appraisal systems examined.

The following summary is a descriptive account of the results of the survey reporting the frequencies of responses plus discussion of some of the major findings. More detailed statistical work will follow this summary. The information is reported in percentages for ease of reading and because the responses to some questions differ in overall number.

Response rate

A total of 3980 surveys were sent out. Once those not within the age range or those who had retired were eliminated, the adjusted sample was 3911. A total of 2137 valid responses were received, representing a response rate of 54.6%. The high response rate was a surprise given the somewhat pessimistic prior predictions by the EPMU staff based on the results of previous, recent postal surveys the union had experienced. The over 50% response rate and high number of replies indicates that the nature of the survey examining employment issues for older workers had high relevance for its target audience. The New Zealand survey

represents one of the largest recent studies of older workers undertaken and provides a significant depth and breadth of data about workers' attitudes and lived experiences in the workplace.

Sample

The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union has approximately 54,000 members of which 77% are men and 23% are women, according to their latest demographic details available in 1997. In terms of age profile the union's statistics suggest that 5.6% of its members are 55 years and older (3059), but 12.2% of members do not list an age (6664). The union's own demographic details on ethnicity show that 6.2% of members (3399) list themselves as Maori, 6.2% (3369) as Pacific Islander, 29.5% (16032) as European, and 57.1% (31109) as no ethnicity specified. The union spans a number of industry classifications while four industrial classifications; printing, publishing and recorded media manufacturing 17%, basic metals products manufacturing 14%, machinery and equipment manufacturing 15%, and communication services 14.5% account for 60.5% of membership.

Demographics

The relative age of the union's demographic statistics make it difficult to suggest the sample who responded are strictly representative of the union membership. But it is safe to say that the sample of respondents by gender is fairly typical of union membership in that 23.6% (496) of the 2137 respondents were female and 76.4% (1604) were male. A total of 60.2% (1287) indicated they were Pakeha, 8.7% (186) indicated they were Maori, 5.8% (123) indicated they were Pacific Islander (Niuean, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Maori). The average age of respondents was 59 years old and of those who replied 73% were aged between 55-60 years, 25% were aged between 61 and 65 and two per cent of respondents were aged between 65-72. The two oldest respondents were 72 years old.

In terms of marital status, 75.7% of workers who replied said they were married with less than 5% of respondents indicating they were single. The remainder listed their marital status as either de facto, separated/divorced or widowed. To questions about financial dependency 17% said they financially supported children and 11% of the sample financially supported elderly relatives or other adults. The respondents were more or less evenly split between having one (47.8%) or two (48.8%) incomes with 3.5% indicating they had more than two incomes.

The majority of the workers who answered the survey had one job (91.9%) while only four per cent indicated they had two jobs. Less than one per cent had three or more jobs. A total of 43.4% of the sample said they worked forty hours a week and 57% indicated they worked forty or less hours a week. Somewhat surprisingly, 43.8 % indicated they worked more than 40 hours a week with 34.7% clustered in the 40-50 hours. The majority of workers, 92.8%, worked in one job for more than 30 hours per week.

The questionnaire asked workers how long they had worked for their present employer and there was a spread of tenure across the years with 15.1% indicating 5 years or less, and a further 16.6% between six and 10 years which meant just under a third, 31.7% of the sample,

had worked for their present employers for the past decade. A further 20% said they had worked for their present employer for 15 years with 12% more indicating they had worked for the same employer for 20 years. Between 21 and 30 years with the same employer was indicated by 22 % of the sample, a further 8.8% between 31 years and 40 years and the remaining small percentage had worked for the same employer between 41 and 49 years.

Asked about their employment status 74.9% of the workers who replied indicated they were employed under a collective employment contract, 11.4% said they had individual employment contracts, one per cent indicated they had a verbal contract, 4.2 % indicated they were under the old award, 3.5% said they had no contract and 4.9% were not sure. The majority of the respondents 94.7% said they were not temporary workers on fixed term contracts, as opposed to 5.3% who said they were. Asked if they had been made redundant in the past five years and if so, how often, 87.4% of the workers replied that they had never been made redundant, 10.4% indicated they had been redundant once, 1.8% twice and less than one per cent three or more times. Asked how many times they themselves had decided to voluntarily change jobs in the past five years 85.6% of the sample said never, 8.6% said once, 2.7% said twice, 1.3% said three times, .3% four times and 1.6% five or more times. Almost a quarter of respondents (23.8%) indicated that they had their hours of work cut back compared with 76.2% who had not had their hours of work reduced.

Age issues and attitudes

The survey asked workers a number of questions about age to explore differences and similarities between actual age and felt age. The first question asked respondents to indicate whether they were younger, older or about the same age as their co-workers. The majority, 78.2% said they were older, 13% said they were about the same age and 8.8% said they were younger than their co-workers. Respondents were also asked whether they felt, looked and acted younger, older or about the same age as their co-workers. The responses are indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Feel, look and act by comparison with co-workers.

	Feel %	Look %	Act %
Younger	15.6	14.5	16.8
Older	31.5	52.7	29.0
About the same	52.9	32.8	54.2
	100	100	100

Asked how they would describe themselves as either young, middle-aged or elderly, 86.3% described themselves as middle-aged, 7.8% as young and 5.9% as elderly.

The workers aged 55 years and over who answered the survey were asked if they would like their workmates to be younger, older, around their own age, of a mixed age group or no particular preference. A third of respondents said they had no preference, 62 % said mixed and about five per cent said younger, older or the same age.

Stereotypes

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements under the theme of “views of the older worker” that explored common stereotypes about older workers.

A five point Likert-type point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used in the survey and the results are reported here with the two categories “strongly disagree” and “disagree” collapsed into one. Similarly the two categories “strongly agree” and “agree” are collapsed into a single agreement category for ease of presentation. Items 1-16 are presented as items that workers agreed with in terms of percentage while items 17-26 respondents disagreed with by percentage.

Table 2: Views of the older worker.

	Older workers are more likely to:	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
1.	Be reliable	96.6	2.2	1.2
2.	Be committed to the job	93.9	4.1	2.0
3.	Be loyal	92.5	5.6	1.9
4.	Be productive	90.3	7.5	2.2
5.	Be a good example for others	87.8	8.6	3.6
6.	Be willing to stay longer in the job	83.2	8.5	8.3
7.	Have better people skills	82.2	13	4.8
8.	Have better customer skills	81.5	13.8	4.7
9.	Fit in with the organization	80.5	14.9	4.6
10.	Offer employers a better return on investment	79.2	16.5	4.3
11.	Be better team workers	76.5	17.0	6.5
12.	Be better performers	72	24	4.0
13.	Be ambitious	42.1	36.5	21.4
14.	Resist change	49.4	15.9	34.7
15.	Have problems with technology	48.8	18.3	32.9
16.	Have higher levels of stress	40.6	23.9	35.5
17.	Have more accidents at work	3.6	12.1	84.3
18.	Be away from work sick	9.7	13.1	77.2
19.	Be less motivated	12	15.3	72.7
20.	Be less creative	12	17.9	70.1
21.	Be less willing to train	23.6	19.3	57.1

	Older workers are more likely to:	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
22.	Have lower expectations	27.3	15.7	57.0
23.	Be less flexible	22.4	22.8	54.8
24.	Be difficult to train	19.7	26.8	53.5
25.	Be less willing to work long hours	38	15.8	46.2
26.	Be less promotable	36.7	19.7	43.6

Job Performance

Respondents were asked at what age did they believe that job performance was likely to decline with respect to manual and professional occupations for both men and women. Interestingly the results showed that more workers 55 years of age and over who answered the questionnaire felt that female job performance declined earlier than male job performance in both manual and professional jobs. The findings show that of the total responses, 18.6% felt that the job performance of men in manual jobs declined by the age of 54 years with 9.8% indicating it had, in fact, declined between the ages of 50-54 years. For women in manual jobs, 31.3% of respondents felt their job performance had declined by 54 years with 15.4% indicating it had declined between the ages of 50 and 54 years.

Table 3: Perceived age of job performance decline in manual occupations by gender.

	Male %	Female %
0 – 49 years	8.8	15.9
50 – 54 years	9.8	15.4
55 – 59 years	21.0	22.2
60 – 64 years	25.4	18.7
64 – 74 years	18.2	10.7
75 plus	0.9	1.0
Age has no effect	15.8	16.0
	100	100

A less marked pattern occurs in the results of the perceived age of job performance decline in professional occupations. The findings, however, shows some respondents believe that female job performance declines earlier. For men in professional jobs, 6.1% of the respondents said job performance declined between the ages of 50-54 years compared with 7.7% who felt female job performance declined in the same years. While 13.7% felt male job performance declined between 55-59 years, 16% felt female job performance similarly declined. Almost half the sample, 46.2% felt male job performance declined between the ages of 60-69 years compared to 40.4% who felt female job performance declined in the same years.

Table 4: Perceived age of job performance decline in professional occupations by gender.

	Male %	Female %
0 – 49 years	5.4	7.2
50 – 54 years	6.1	7.7
55 – 59 years	13.7	16.0
60 – 64 years	23.5	23.8
64 – 74 years	22.7	17.6
75 plus	8.9	7.0
Age has no effect	19.7	20.7
	100	100

Perceptions of characteristics associated with different age groups

Respondents were asked to think about workers in different age groups and indicate which groups best illustrated a number of qualities and factors ranging from innovation and creativity, loyalty, computer experience etc. In general about a quarter of those who replied said the 21 characteristics were not age specific.

The results showed that the older workers who responded strongly associated “*computer experience*” with younger workers, and to a lesser extent “*enthusiasm*”, few of the 21 characteristics were seen by the respondents as being associated with workers aged 60-75 years although more than 10% listed “*loyalty to employer*”, “*judgement*”, “*business knowledge*” and “*credibility*”. More than 50% of respondents said “*loyalty to the employer*” was associated with workers aged 45-49 years of age and the characteristics of “*strong work ethic*”, “*people skills*”, “*professionalism*”, “*business knowledge*”, “*credibility*” and “*leadership*” were also strongly associated with this age group.

The characteristics of “*high levels of motivation*”, “*project management skills*”, “*innovation*” and “*creativity*” were strongly associated with the 30-44 year age group.

Table 5: Characteristics identified with age groups.

	% Workers	15-29 yrs	30-44 yrs	45-59 yrs	60-75 yrs	All Ages
1.	Computer experience	63.3	21.3	3.0	0.4	12.0
2.	Enthusiasm	29.4	30.5	11.3	1.9	26.8
3.	High levels of motivation	11.8	45.3	18.9	2.1	21.8
4.	Creativity	17.7	39.0	13.9	1.0	28.4
5.	Innovation	12.9	42.8	16.6	0.9	26.8
6.	Adaptability	15.5	35.9	23.7	2.4	22.5
7.	Project management skills	3.3	44.0	32.4	2.7	17.6
8.	Flexibility	13.8	29.7	31.7	3.5	21.3
9.	Confidence	11.0	29.2	27.4	5.2	27.2
10.	Team spirit	6.3	29.2	26.2	3.1	35.2
11.	Excellent personal presentation	3.8	27.8	32.0	5.5	30.9
12.	Customer focus	3.9	24.0	31.8	3.4	22.6
13.	Communication skills	4.5	24.9	40.3	4.9	25.4
14.	Leadership	1.9	31.7	41.4	3.9	21.4
15.	Professionalism	1.3	21.0	45.4	6.7	25.5
16.	People skills	1.9	20.1	47.3	7.2	23.5
17.	Business knowledge	2.0	24.8	44.8	10.4	17.9
18.	Credibility	1.3	16.3	44.7	10.3	27.3
19.	Strong work ethic	2.0	20.4	49.4	7.5	20.2
20.	Judgement	0.7	13.8	50.8	11.7	23.1
21.	Loyalty to employer	1.5	9.1	53.7	13.0	22.6

The 21 characteristics are presented here with 1 being most strongly associated with younger workers. From 11 onwards the characteristics were more strongly associated with older workers.

The survey asked respondents a number of questions about social policy and future labour market conditions. They were asked whether they agreed, disagreed or “neither”

with a number of statements about contemporary and future policy and conditions. The five point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” was collapsed into three: “agreement” (“strongly agree” and “agree), “disagreement” (“strongly disagree” and “disagree”), and “neither” categories for reporting the results.

More respondents agreed rather than disagreed that pay should increase automatically with length of service, that early retirement should be encouraged to improve job opportunities for the young, that youth employment should be a greater priority than employment of older workers, that employers should apply last-in first-out when deciding who to lay-off, and that more older people should work in the best interests of their own generation.

Table 6: Contemporary employment issues.

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
Pay should increase automatically with length of service	65.3	14.4	20.3
Employers should apply last-in first-out when deciding who to lay-off	52.6	16.3	31.1
Earlier retirement should be encouraged to improve job opportunities for the young	49.8	9.7	40.5
It is in my generation’s best interests that more older people work	47.7	24.3	28.0
Youth unemployment should be a greater priority than unemployment of older workers	44.9	19.4	35.7

Looking to the future more respondents were pessimistic than optimistic about unemployment and the availability of more jobs, increased job choice, increased job satisfaction, more job stress and future job prospects, higher real pay levels, the possibility of company superannuation.

Again, in relation to the future, more respondents were optimistic than pessimistic about greater opportunities to demonstrate initiative in future, that there would be better rewards for individual merit, better health and safety conditions on the job, better training provisions, more flexible working provisions, improved equal opportunities and the better use of non-monetary rewards.

Items 1-9 represent percentage levels of agreement while items 10-16 show a greater percentage of respondents disagree with the suggestions.

Table 7: Future employment issues.

		Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
1.	There will be more job related stress	79.5	9.0	11.5
2.	My generation will face much greater challenges than did my parents' in building a rewarding, secure career.	77.9	10.3	11.8
3.	There will be better health and safety conditions on the job	66.6	12.0	21.5
4.	There will be better training opportunities	56.0	17.8	26.3
5.	There will be improved equal opportunities	50.5	22.3	27.3
6.	There will be more flexible working provisions	47.6	19.1	33.3
7.	There will be better rewards for individual merit	45.8	22.6	31.7
8.	There will be greater opportunities to demonstrate initiative	45.5	25.0	29.4
9.	There will be better use of non-monetary rewards	34.6	35.6	29.8
10.	There will be more job satisfaction	25.9	30.2	43.8
11.	Companies are more likely to provide Superannuation	30.1	15.6	54.3
12.	There will be more job choice	22.6	21.3	56.0
13.	My job prospects will be good in the future	20.0	21.8	58.2
14.	Real pay levels will be much higher	22.9	17.8	59.3
15.	There will be much less unemployment	22.6	15.3	62.1
16.	There will be more jobs available	18.5	17.3	64.1

Age Discrimination at Work

Positive discrimination

A number of questions in the survey related to positive and negative age discrimination. Workers were asked whether they had ever received more favourable treatment at work than other workers because of their age. Only 7.7% answered “yes” with 92.3% stating “no”. While 7.7% of the total sample indicated they had experienced more favourable treatment at work than other workers because of their age, a marked gender difference was evident in the responses with 8.8% of males answering “yes” to the question compared with 4% for women.

Respondents were asked in an unstructured question to provide brief details of the more favourable treatment on the grounds of age and 92% (148 people) of those who said “yes” to positive discrimination replied. A content analysis of these replies shows two pronounced themes. The first of these was favourable treatment in relation to physical activities on the grounds of age- help with heavy lifting; excused from long, 12 hour shifts; lighter duties, not rostered on nights or working outside in extreme weather conditions. One worker described it as *“assistance with old aches and pains”*. The responses indicated that favourable treatment in relation to physical activity was both formally condoned by employers and part of the informal work practices with workers helping each other and assisting older workers. For example, one respondent said, *“My work involves heavy lifting...and I spend excessive time welding-given a break, allowed to go home early if working long hours. Not compelled to work both weekend days”* and another wrote *“ If heavy lifting involved, or similar situations, younger workers always tell me to stand aside-no problem, very good.”*

The second theme which was apparent in answers from workers who said they had received favourable treatment at work on the grounds of age related to recognition of their experience, knowledge and skill base that had been built up over the years. Reliability and loyalty were specified by some workers as reasons why they were favourably treated on the grounds of age. Workers indicated that their common sense, stability and customer handling skills had engendered respect and trust from employers and co-workers. One respondent indicated that *“younger people have tended to treat me favourably as well as management because of my experience gained only through being in the job for a long time. An example is being sent to “pour oil on troubled waters” in certain face to face situations with customers”*. Another wrote, *“been given some jobs because of dependability of good results”* while another said *“a tendency to leave the grumpy old “B” alone to get on with the job without having to be supervised.”*

Negative discrimination

A higher number of respondents, 11.6%, said they had received less favourable treatment at work than other workers because of their age and 94.5% or 226 people described the discrimination. A slighter higher percentage of women, 13.6%, than men, 10.7%, reported negative age discrimination. Again content analysis was employed as a methodology to code these replies and several themes emerged. The primary theme noted by many of the respondents who said they had received less favourable treatment on the grounds of age

related to opportunities and selection for training. Typical of the responses were the following:

Wouldn't train me on computers because of my age, too expensive at my age to train was the answer.

Think you are getting too old to learn new skills and tend not to give opportunities to extend you.

Younger personnel favoured in computer knowledge.

I feel I am being bypassed in favour of younger people for technical training courses of a highly technical nature.

On a number of occasions not allowed to do training courses even though I applied to do so- was not given reasons, can only assume it was my age.

Due to my age I was not considered to do a limited electrical course at tech.

Too old to go on training courses for new equipment.

Just assumed I would not be interested in retraining.

Access to work-related courses (probably though too old to waste money on!).

Fewer training opportunities. All "perks" are given to those whom the company thinks it will get a return on. Younger staff appear to fit this category.

The company tends to spend money on younger staff on training and trades courses, after gaining these the younger move on to better themselves.

Too old to invest in (upskilling).

Less willing to send on courses. The thinking is to train a younger person and have him for 30-40 years rather than an older person and have him retire in 10-20 years

Training is usually given to younger workers.

Younger persons given jobs with new technology-not my opinion but heard and seen it applied by management.

Maybe they thought I was too old to give me an opportunity to train.

Restriction on re-training on computers. Managers remarks: people over the age of 35 cannot be retrained.

The second most pronounced theme in the unstructured comments from respondents who said they had received less favourable treatment on the grounds of age related to promotion. Some respondents indicated they had not only not been promoted but they were, in fact, demoted.

Overlooked in promotion. Repeatedly asked when you are going to retire.

By passed for promotion for less capable younger workers.

I've seen two very capable older tradesmen receive less points in an appraisal scheme than younger tradesmen who were less capable, less qualified and less knowledgeable. Typical Blue Eyed Boy Syndrome.

Middle-aged women were more likely to be made redundant and less likely to be promoted.

Missed for promotion due to advancing age.

Application for supervision jobs has been turned down, obviously because they need younger person.

Demoted. Given the hardest job possible.

Age-a barrier for promotion.

A third pronounced theme in the written replies from respondents concerned workplace culture. In some cases age discrimination was explicit and in others implicit. There was a consistent subtheme relating to workplace culture concerning gender.

Age discrimination from younger managers who believe they are smart and clever and failure to address this issue by senior management. Implied- "when are you going to retire" on a regular basis.

Periodically being hinted to, when am I going to retire? Or getting a "bit long in the tooth" for this job.

Younger bosses prefer younger people.

Discrimination would be extremely hard to prove in my workplace. It is done with such subtlety that it would be extremely hard to prove.

Difficult to prove but age limits now appear to be an important factor in corporations. Those in the older age group that survive do so using a network of key executives (grapevine) to hold their position.

Being told that if women of mature years left the workforce that would solve unemployment.

My employer has made it very clear that the company would prefer younger staff. It is company policy, in fact, to encourage anyone with more than 15 years service to leave.

Prejudice is ripe for older people but is denied.

Older workers are treated like a cancer because they are seen to take younger workers' places. This is openly stated at one of our team meetings.

My present employer has restructured out all those over the age of 61 as early retirement.

Managerial age discrimination.

General bigotry.

New Zealand employers put more emphasis on young graduates rather than experience.

Following restructuring after takeover it was noticeable there were no new appointments of supervisory nature for those over 55.

Being told by a personnel manager (age 36) after being invited by a Divisional general manager to apply for a position in his department, "You must admit at your age, you will have difficulty relating to younger employees" (I was 49).

Asked to take early retirement.

Less pronounced as themes were cut backs in hours of work and availability of overtime, as well as discrimination at recruitment time.

The survey asked older workers if any of their workmates had experienced age discrimination at work and if anyone close to them, for example friends, parents or relatives had experienced age discrimination at work.

Just over 10% indicated workmates had experienced age discrimination at work and a slightly higher percentage 11.8% indicated friends, parents or relatives experienced age discrimination.

Work Climate

Respondents were asked about work climate and the extent of their agreement against a five point scale which has been collapsed here for reporting into a three point scale. The majority of respondents agreed that at their work people of all ages worked well together, that the contribution of older workers was valued but that their employer generally preferred to hire younger workers.

Table 8: Work climate issues.

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
At my work people of all ages work well together	87.9	5.5	6.7
At my work the contribution of older workers is valued	71.0	17.7	11.3
My employer generally prefers to hire younger workers	50.2	28.2	21.6
Where I work they try to retain older workers	35.4	38.2	26.3
At my work older workers would not be able to keep up	12.3	12.6	75.1

Importance of Work

Respondents were asked about the importance of work and while 13.5% said they worked because they wanted to, compared with 26.2% who said they worked because they had to, 60.3% said “both” to the question.

A number of statements relating to the salience of work were put to those who completed the survey. A five point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” has been collapsed to a three-point scale. While strong support was evident for the idea that work is something people should be involved in most of the time (67% agreement), there was also majority agreement for work being only a small part of life (57.3%), and the statement that other activities were more important than work (54.4%), and minority support only for the idea of a person’s life goals being work related (28.9%), and the notion that work offers the main satisfaction (22.8%). Items 1 to 3 show the strongest agreement by percentage while items 4 and 4 the strongest disagreement by percentage.

Table 9: Work salience.

		Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
1.	Work is something that people should get involved in most of the time	67.0	12.9	20.1
2.	Work should only be a small part of one’s life	57.3	16.2	36.5
3.	I have other activities more important than my work	54.4	26.2	19.4

		Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
4.	A person's life goals should be work related	28.9	21.0	50.1
5.	My main satisfaction in life comes from my work	22.8	20.6	56.6

Retirement

Work practices and retirement issues were a major focus of the survey. Respondents were asked about the age they planned to retire. More than half the respondents, 51.1%, indicated they planned to retire between 65-69 years, 37.7% planned to retire between 60-64 years, and 5.8% indicated they would retire at aged 70 plus.

Asked about the importance of various factors in their decision about when to retire, more respondents rated health (95.9%) followed by financial security (94.2%), having other activities to keep them occupied after retirement (88.4%) and eligibility for government superannuation benefit (85.4%) as important.

Table 10: Importance of factors in decision to retire.

	Important %	Neither %	Unimportant %
Your health	95.9	1.4	2.7
Financial security	94.2	2.2	3.6
Having other activities to keep you occupied when you retire	88.4	5.0	6.6
Eligibility for government superannuation benefit	85.4	7.8	6.8
Still being able to perform competently in your job	82.4	9.6	8.0
Stress associated with your work	62.3	21.1	16.6
Desire for a change in lifestyle	58.7	20.9	20.4
Your partner's decision about when to retire	55.1	25.7	19.2
Wanting to provide opportunities for younger workers	50.2	26.6	23.2
Wanting to retain social contact with colleagues in your workplace	36.5	27.0	36.5
The loss of status or prestige	18.2	25.8	56.0

Sixty percent of the respondents answered the question “thinking back have you always planned to retire at the same age?” in the negative. Of those who had changed their mind 81% said they were now planning to retire later, while 19% said they were now planning to retire earlier. Those planning to retire later were asked to rate how important 10 factors were in their decision against a five point scale from “very unimportant” to “very important”, which has been reduced here to a three point scale. More respondents, 87.2%, rated having to save for retirement, the increasing cost of living 84.4%, changes in the law about compulsory retirement 75.3%, and enjoying work 69.7% as important.

Table 11: Importance of factors in decision to retire later.

	Important %	Neither %	Unimportant %
Having to save for retirement	87.2	7.0	5.8
The increasing cost of living	84.4	10.5	5.1
Changes in the law about compulsory retirement	75.3	13.0	11.7
Enjoying work	69.7	13.3	17.0
Having to support my partner	58.8	24.4	16.8
Opportunities to continue working	56.7	22.9	20.4
Partner planning on retiring later	24.9	38.1	37.0
Having to care for older parents or relations	19.7	37.0	43.2
Increasing cost of tertiary education	18.7	35.6	45.7
Having to care for younger children	17.4	35.1	47.5

Upskilling

Workers aged 55 and over who replied to the survey were asked against a five point scale how important it was for them to upskill both for their current job and for future jobs. The results are reported against a collapsed three point scale.

Table 12: Importance of upskilling.

	Important %	Neither %	Unimportant %
In your current job	58.0	17.0	25
For future jobs	50.5	21.2	28.3

Performance Appraisal

A total of 46.5% of respondents said they had a performance appraisal system at work compared with 39.3% who said they did not have a performance appraisal system and 14.2% who said they were “not sure”. Asked how often they were reviewed, 46.5% said every 12 months, 23.6% said every six months, 8.4% every three months, 1.9% every 18 months and 19.6% “other”.

Respondents who had a performance appraisal system were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of five statements about performance appraisal. More respondents disagreed than agreed with the statement that “the performance appraisal system is effective”, but were generally positive about other aspects of performance appraisal.

Table 13: Performance appraisal.

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
The performance appraisal system tells staff the areas they need to improve in	78.1	10.5	11.4
The performance appraisal system provides me with good feedback	58.1	19.3	22.6
The performance appraisal system is used to manage poorly performing staff	50.5	20.0	29.5
The performance appraisal system is effective	35.7	19.2	45.0
The performance appraisal system is used to retire older workers	17.5	25.3	57.2

Discussion

Demographics

Despite current accepted wisdom that employees are likely to face significant career mobility over the span of their work life, with as many as seven career changes predicted by some commentators, a pattern of stability emerges from the findings. Many of the respondents, 22%, said they had worked with the same employer between 21-30 years while a further 8.8% had worked between 31-40 years. The majority, 85%, said they had not voluntarily changed jobs in the past five years indicating again that older workers “stay put”. Overall the results do not indicate a wholesale shift in the industries covered by union membership towards what has been called “the flexible workforce” (Cooper, 2000).

Nor did the findings necessarily support notions of a “short-term employment contract culture” predicted by some as the future for tomorrow’s organizations (Cooper and Jackson, 1997). Almost three quarters of the respondents were employed under a collective

employment contract and the vast majority, 95%, indicated they were permanent employees. While downsizing and the rapidity of change accompanying the restructuring of New Zealand industry, particularly manufacturing, about 10% only of respondents indicated they had been made redundant. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the survey canvassed the experiences and opinions of those in employment. These respondents still in the workforce, particularly those indicating longer job tenure with the one employer, were generally not subject to the 'early exit' trend in the labour market in the 1990s which has influenced debate about ageism at work. A dramatically different profile could emerge from older workers not currently employed but actively seeking a job.

The findings suggest either that notions of career mobility may less apply to employees than self employed, supervisor or management ranks, or that career mobility/switch is less likely among workers aged 55 years and over. This could be a consequence of perceived difficulty by employees themselves in gaining a new job if a worker is aged over 55 years. This later point clearly needs more research investigation to explore the motivations and experiences of older employees regarding potential employment change.

The survey findings did support overseas evidence about a 'long working hours culture' with about a third of respondents working over 40 and up to 50 hours a week. This compares with a British study in 1995 (DEMOS, 1996) which found that 25% of British male employees worked more than 48 hours a week. The 'long work hours culture' is presumed by some to have a negative social impact particularly when workers feel compelled by financial pressure or organizational practices to put in extra hours, even though workers themselves might feel grateful for extended hours or overtime. Some of the respondents indicated in unstructured comments about discrimination that they were working longer to "make ends meet".

Perceptions of age

While chronological age or biological ageing are important factors in any analysis of the employment of older workers, self-perception criteria such as how people feel, act and look equally provide data on attitudes of older workers themselves. The survey showed a difference between actual age and felt age. While workers said they looked older (52.7%) over half said they felt (52.9%) and acted (54.2%) the same by comparison with co-workers. This suggests that measurements of age by chronological means only does not take into account self perception by older employees themselves. It also suggests a potential intergenerational site of tension and resentment of older workers of ageist labels. The vast majority, 95%, of respondents said they either had no preference in relation to the age of co-workers or preferred mixed ages suggesting that older employees are relaxed about the demographic profile of their workplaces.

Stereotypes

A strong feature of the finding was a high level of agreement with a number of statements concerned with "dependability" of older workers. For example, 96.6%, 93.9%, 92.5% and

90.3% of respondents respectively agreed with the statements that older workers were more likely to “be reliable”, “be loyal”, “be committed to the job” and “be productive”.

Two common stereotypes attached to older people relating to change and to technology were, however, confirmed by the results. A total of 49.4% agreed that older people were more likely to resist change compared with 34.7% who disagreed. A similar majority, 48.8% agreed with the statement that older workers were more likely to have problems with technology. Both these stereotypes are familiar from the international literature about stereotypes and older workers.

In the response to what forms of discrimination workers suffered, reference was made by a number of respondents to employers not granting older workers computer training opportunities. Again in the survey results 63.3% of respondents felt computer experience was a characteristic identified with the 15-29 year age group with 21.3% stating it was associated with those aged 30-44 years. Only 12% of respondents indicated it was associated with all ages. It is clear, then, that older worker respondents in this survey expressed technophobia in relation to a number of questions, which has profound implications for future training of older employees.

However, respondents did not agree with stereotypes that older workers suffer greater absenteeism, 77.2% disagreed that older workers are more likely to be away from work sick, or that they were more difficult to train or less willing to train. In fact respondents indicated they agreed with the statement that older workers were more likely to offer employers a better return on investment (79.2%). Older workers views on the question of the return on investment match the arguments made in the ‘business case’ for the employment of older workers, namely (1) the return on investment in human capital, (2) the prevention of skills shortages, (3) maximizing recruitment potential, (4) responding to demographic changes and (5) promoting diversity in the workforce (Walker, 1995).

The findings from employees in the New Zealand survey were, therefore, are at direct odds with overseas findings about employers’ attitudes. In general it has been found that employers think that older workers are less productive, have less relevant skills, are more prone to sickness and absenteeism and produce a lower rate of return on investment (Taylor & Walker, 1993, 1995; Trinder et al, 1992). It will be interesting to examine the attitudes of New Zealand employers in this regard and the results from a complementary survey of employers’ attitudes will be available later in 2000.

Job Performance

A vast body of literature has been devoted to what Loretto *et al* (1999) describe as “one of the principal recurring debates, that of performance declining with age” (p.15). Griffiths (1997) provides a useful summary of the scientific literature on the subject and states that most reviews and meta-analyses report little consistent relationship between ageing and work performance. While age may be a poor proxy for performance, though, many of the studies have different methodological starting points. It is clear that some physical attributes such as

eye sight, hearing and physiological systems deteriorate with ageing along with energy levels and tolerance for working in extreme conditions.

Griffiths (1997) poses the question, “given the evidence for some age-related deterioration in various physiological and cognitive systems, why might work-based and population-based studies of the relationship between age and performance suggest different results?” (p.200). Various moderating and compensating factors are said to be the answer. For example, older workers compensate for a decline in cognitive ability with an increase in job knowledge and skills (Salthouse & Maurer, 1996).

While the scientific literature may not support age as a proxy for job performance, what do older New Zealand workers themselves think? Respondents were asked to indicate at what age they considered the performance of an employee might decline. The question was similar to a question asked in an overseas study of university students (Loretto *et al*). In the Scottish survey the categories used were manual occupations and non-manual occupations whereas in New Zealand the categories were manual and professional occupations. The response categories were divided into males and females employed in manual and professional occupations respectively and the replies are profiled in Tables 3 and 4.

Overall around 80% of New Zealand respondents believed that there is an age-related decline in performance of both manual and professional occupations. In the case of manual occupations respondents felt male job performance began to decline at the ages of 55-59 years with less than 20% (18.6%), respondents believing it began before those years. Respondents felt that in the case of manual occupations female job performance began to decline earlier with 31.3% indicating it declined at the ages of 54 years and less and 22.2% between the ages of 55-59 years. This trend was less marked in the perception of job performance decline by age for professional occupations. Some differences and an important similarity were noted between these results and the Scottish study where 460 business studies students at the University of Edinburgh aged between 17-29 years were asked similar questions.

A higher proportion of Scottish respondents overall, 96%, believed that there is an age-related decline in performance of manual employees, while only 68% thought this of non-manual employees. There was greater congruence of results in the New Zealand study between the numbers who believed there was age-related performance for manual and professional occupations. New Zealand respondents also felt that performance declines began later.

The similarity between the two studies is most apparent in relation to gender. Both young Scottish university students and older New Zealand workers perceive performance amongst female workers begins to decline at a younger average age in manual occupations. One interpretation of this is that ageism among these groups is more pronounced in relation to women than men.

Loretto *et al* said the Scottish survey findings supported the notion that woman are faced with the ‘double jeopardy’ of age and sex discrimination and this ‘double jeopardy’ equally appears to underline older workers’ perceptions of female job performance in New Zealand. Further analysis of the overall respondents reported here by gender would be useful to

indicate whether both older male and older female workers have similar ageist attitudes about older women who work in manual jobs in particular or whether there is a gender difference that is not apparent in descriptive data based on aggregated findings.

The results overall suggest a disjunction between scientific studies on age and job performance and public attitudes. If popular orthodoxy promotes the view that job performance declines with age this undermines strategies for investing in older workers in general. For women, who live longer and will have to work longer for financial security by comparison with men, the stereotype that women's job performance deteriorates sooner is of concern (McGregor *et al*).

Performance Appraisal

The question of job performance is inextricably entwined with how the performance is measured. A surprisingly high percentage of respondents, 39.3%, indicated they did not have an appraisal system with a further 14.2% who indicated they were not sure. While the validity and efficacy of performance appraisal are strongly contested areas of scholarship, the findings here show that for more than a third of respondents informal job performance measures apply. The subjectivity inherent in the informal culture is generally expressed by bias and stereotypes which form the basis of ageism.

Of the respondents who did have a performance appraisal system, more disagreed (45%) than agreed (35.7%) with the statement "the performance appraisal system is effective". A more optimistic picture emerged, though, from questions relating to feedback, areas of expected improvement and the use of performance appraisal in the retirement of older workers.

Discrimination

The survey results showed that more than ten per cent (11.6%) of respondents reported that they had suffered some form of disadvantage at work because of their age. It appears that this discrimination is not formally reported and does not show up in the level of official reporting about discrimination at work on the grounds of age. The Human Rights Commission's own analysis of age complaints in the July to June period between 1998 and 1999 shows a low level of age related complaints overall-only 37 individual complaints (Human Rights Commission, 2000; Appendix 1). Only a very small number were reported in the job which was a particular focus of inquiry in this survey. The Human Rights Commission reports that there were no complaints from people aged 65 years or more, and of the 13 complainants aged between 50 and 64, five complained of discrimination at recruitment, seven in the job and one at termination/ retirement.

The apparent level of discrepancy between official complaints and the higher than anticipated level of reporting in this study could be attributed to a number of factors such as worker ignorance that on-the-job discrimination can be complained about, or that the level of disadvantage, for example, a commonly cited example of not being selected or allowed to go

on computer training, is not perceived by employees as warranting a formal complaint. Workers may, too, be desensitized by a general workplace culture that is ageist and feel vulnerable about job security if they complain. The degree of acceptance of the disadvantage experienced that was evident in many of the written responses may reflect a feeling by workers that they have no option but to accept the treatment of them by supervisors and managers. The findings suggest that some older women workers perceive a double disadvantage of age and sex. This confirms other overseas work (Itzin & Phillipson, 1993) that suggests women are never the right age.

Overseas studies (Hayward, Taylor, Smith and Davies, 1997) in which the views of older workers were canvassed reported a widespread perception that many, although not all, employers tended to be prejudiced against the employment of older workers, making negative assumptions about their capabilities. In a British study, a major shift in employers' attitudes was seen as essential and Government support was requested to this end. In the New Zealand study there is some evidence that it is at the supervisory and middle management level that some workers feel there are negative perceptions and this may be an area that New Zealand employers feel further education to improve age discrimination in the workplace is needed. Supervisors' attitudes have been found to be particularly important overseas (Tuomi *et al*, 1997).

Training

A major issue emerged from the survey findings concerning training of older employees. First, a majority of respondents 58.0% recognised the importance of upskilling in their current job, and despite the 'stay-put' nature of the sample of older workers, 50.5% also said they felt upskilling for future jobs was important. A majority of respondents also disagreed with the commonly-expressed stereotypes that older workers were "difficult to train" (53.5% disagreed). A sizable majority, 79.2%, agreed with the statement that older workers offered employers a better return on investment. Looking at future employment issues 56% of respondents agreed with the statement "there will be better training opportunities".

In some contrast to these views are the reported experiences of workers who stated they suffered age discrimination at work on the grounds of age particularly in relation to training opportunities. A particular feature of this ageism was training in computer technology. The survey also reveals that older workers believe they are more likely to have problems with technology and associate expertise in computer technology with younger workers. As Griffiths (1997) notes training is connected to age and work performance. The New Zealand findings from this study support international research that shows other older workers reporting lack of professional development as an area of concern (Ilmarinen, 1997).

There are serious implications in the lack of training and professional development of older workers for employers, trade unions, the workplace generally and for society. First, the absence of training opportunities is likely to manifest itself in a less than optimum performance, second, older workers are likely to find themselves less technically knowledgeable than others who have undergone training, and third, morale problems will

become apparent when a particular group of workers is 'ghetto-ised' in relation to professional development. The "business case" argument for the economic benefits of the employment of older workers, is substantially undermined when employers regard the return on investment from training employees as lower for older workers. Employers' attitudes can become a self-fulfilling prophecy with demotivated older workers who under perform, have poorer appraisals, receive more mundane jobs and assignments, and do not maintain high levels of productivity.

The training of older workers has received specific attention overseas (Warr, 1994). It has been suggested that older workers may learn in different ways and that training methods need to be adapted specifically for those aged 55 and over. For example, computer training needs to be adapted so there is more time for learning acknowledging that some older people may take longer to acquire new skills and to reduce the anxiety factor.

The issue of motivating older workers to participate in both in-house and external training and professional development also needs consideration. Cost barriers, negative perceptions of workers on the return on their investment in time and money, lower educational levels, colleagues' attitudes, poor managerial support, and inflexible training methods may all act singly or collectively as disincentives to older worker participation in training and personal development.

Unions clearly have a role in facilitating participation and a positive culture for continuous learning by all employees including older workers. Research shows, for example, that four ideas from overseas studies are important when working toward a societal ideal of life-long employment learning for older workers. These ideas concern maintenance, experience, compensation and environmental support (Park, 1997). First, older workers have jobs that are, by and large, characterised by maintenance functions and age-related, declining cognitive ability is only important in jobs characterised by transition functions. Second, the issue of experience at work shows that age-related decline in employment performance is less likely to be apparent when the task is characterised by experience, so "use it or lose it" becomes a protection mechanism. The compensation theory suggests that complex knowledge structures increase with age and compensate for any decline in cognitive ability. The idea of environmental support suggests a need to understand the cognitive demands of a job and whether older workers have adequate resources and environmental support. All of these provide a more detailed insight into complex question of support for continuous learning at work.

"Exit" age and retirement

The study confirms that a large number of New Zealanders are planning to stay in the workforce longer. Of the 2137 workers who responded, 60% or 1282 said they had not always planned to retire at the same age. Of those who had changed their minds 81% said they were planning to retire later and important factors contributing to their decisions were predominantly "push factors" such as the cost of living and saving for retirement rather than "pull" factors such as the intrinsic enjoyment of work. The study was undertaken against a

socio-political backdrop of Government policy expressed through the Office of the Retirement Commissioner by heavy publicity about the need to save for retirement. As this report was being written the Office's controversial television "scare" advertisements were screening. More research could explore whether an unforeseen consequence of such publicity has been that the public believes it needs to work longer thereby postponing retirement, rather than to necessarily save more money earlier and retire at the traditional age.

The raising of the traditional "exit" age in New Zealand, sanctioned by the change in the human rights legislation which effectively abolished compulsory retirement, has profound implications for unions, employers and for national policies. At a general level Griffiths (1997) comments that it seems likely that the answer to the question 'how do we maintain the active participation of older people at work?' lies in an examination of national and organizational policies and practices, together with a review of current knowledge and research about the relationships between work, age and health and productivity. She suggests that to employ older workers gainfully for longer "we need to optimize their working environment, avoiding those work characteristics that pose a threat to their physical or psychological well-being" (p.198).

For unions the challenges will include the retention of older worker members, ensuring that services and representation offered by the trade union movement are relevant to the changing demographic profile of the workforce. It may be necessary for unions to take the initiative in pushing for more suitable equipment and conducive working environments and working on attitudinal change. For employers a range of strategies will be necessary if employees stay at work longer. Employers may have to rethink, for example, attitudes towards the return on investment they get on older workers, their selection for, and involvement in, workplace training and the relationship between age, health and work productivity. Both unions and employers will be compelled to think about both the design and management of work as the workforce ages. There is clearly a good deal of thinking and planning to be done in relation to the issue of new technology including computerised technology and the ageing of the workforce. This is underscored in the survey itself when workers aged 55 and over said they most associated computer experience with young workers at a time when new wealth creating enterprises and concepts such as the "knowledge" economy are being inextricably linked to technology uptake and diffusion.

Conclusion

In conclusion the results of this large study of employees aged 55 years and over reveals a more complex picture of workplace attitudes than was previously evident in the New Zealand context. Some of the significant features of the study include higher than anticipated ageist discrimination, stereotypes about declining job performance and women in particular, evidence that older workers will stay longer in employment, particular issues relating to training and technology and a general pessimism about future employment issues counterbalanced by a preference for a balanced view of the salience of work by employees themselves.

The comprehensive scope of the survey across the union's occupational sectors and its large response rate suggest the results can be reliably reported, even if the interpretation of research results are always open for argument. The findings suggest that policy agencies, employers and trade unions will need to further develop understanding about age and employment and plan for new forms of work organisation. Future demographic patterns in the workforce will mean changing stereotypes about older workers, changing the design of work and the work environment and changing training and skill development. Much work remains to be done to maximize the participation and potential of older employees in the New Zealand context.

References

Cooper, C.L. (2000). Towards short-term contract cultures: the future impact on women in management. In M.J. Davidson and R.J. Burke *Women in Management: Current research issues, Volume 11*, Sage: London.

Cooper, C.L. and Jackson, S. (1997). *Creating tomorrow's organizations: A handbook for future research in organizational behaviour*. John Wiley and Sons: Chichester and New York.

DEMOS (1996). *Time Squeeze*. DEMOS: London.

Griffiths, A. (1997). Ageing, health and productivity: a challenge for the new millennium *Work and Stress*. Vol.11, No.3, 197-214.

Hayward, B., Taylor, S., Smith, N. and Davies, G. (1997). "Evaluation of the campaign for older workers." The Stationery Office: London.

Human Rights Commission Age Complaint Analysis supplied for this report March 2000.

Ilmarinen, J. (1994). Aging, work and health. In J. Suel and R. Cremer (Eds.) *Work and aging: A European perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp.47-63.

Park, D. (1998). Aging, Cognition and Work. Paper presented to Work and Aging Symposium. 24th International Congress of Applied Psychology, San Francisco, August 9-14.

Tuomi, K., Ilmarinen, J., Seitsamo, J., Huuhtonen, P., Martikainen, T., Nygard, C-H. and Kolockars, M. (1997) Promotion of the health and work ability of aging workers. Summary and conclusions of questionnaire studies in 1981-1992. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health*, 23, Suppl.1 : 66-71.

Walker, A. (1995). Investing in Ageing Workers – A framework for Analysing Good Practice in Europe.

Warr, P. (1994). Age and job performance. In J. Suel and R. Cremer (Eds.) *Work and aging: A European perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp.309-322.

Employment of the Older Worker: The New Zealand Employers' Perspective

Introduction

A survey of New Zealand employers was conducted in 2000 to provide understanding of employers' attitudes to older workers and knowledge about work-place practices relating to older employees. The study was carried out by researchers at Massey University and funded by the Public Good Science Fund. The project had the support of the New Zealand Employers' Federation and the co-operation resulted in a sample of employers drawn from the membership database of four regional groupings that provided a representative spread. A two wave questionnaire design was used and the survey booklet contained a letter of endorsement from the chief executive of the New Zealand Employers' Federation, Anne Knowles. The letter indicated that employers needed quality information about older employees in their workplaces. Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were preserved in the mailing out process and in the survey design. Aggregated results only are used and no individual company can be identified.

The employers' questionnaire was the second large mail survey canvassing attitudes about older workers undertaken by the research team. A previous mail questionnaire was conducted with the help of New Zealand's largest union, the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union and was aimed at improving attitudes about older workers to allow unions and policy agencies to plan ahead and respond to changes in the workforce. The studies were conducted after the changes to the Human Rights Act that signalled the end of compulsory retirement and banned age discrimination in employment.

The employers' questionnaire asked 21 questions exploring company background, the personal position of the respondent, views about older workers, labour market policy and human resources. Many of the questions contained Likert-type scales and asked employers whether they agreed or disagreed with specified statements as set out in the survey. Other questions asked respondents to rate the extent of change and effectiveness of the human rights legislation. Some of the questions were similar to questions that had been asked previously in the older worker's survey answered by employees. For example, questions relating to stereotypes and a question asking at what age they believed job performance was likely to decline for men and for women in both manual and professional occupations were asked of both employers and older workers aged 55 years and over. The survey, therefore, provided an important opportunity for comparative data contrasting the views of older workers themselves with employers. New information was also sought from employers relating to human resource policies and age.

The following summary is a descriptive account of the results of the survey reporting the frequencies of responses plus a discussion of some of the major findings. More detailed statistical work will follow this summary. The information is reported in percentages for ease of reading and because the responses to some questions differ in overall number.

Response Rate, Sample and Demographics

A total of 2154 employers were supplied by four regional groupings of the New Zealand Employers' Federation. These groupings and the number of employer addresses supplied were:

- Employer and Manufacturers Association (Central) - 400
- Employers and Manufacturers Association (Northern) - 1000
- Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce - 381
- Otago/Southland Employers Association - 373.

From the addresses supplied 91 were culled for a variety of reasons including wrong addresses, no longer in business, relocation and so forth. A total of 2063 surveys were eventually sent out to employers and 1012 replies were received giving the survey a valid response rate of 49%. The high response rate was similar to that achieved in the first study of older workers and indicates the salience of the issue to employers and reflects the positive endorsement of the New Zealand Employer's Federation. Respondents were asked to identify their industrial classification and manufacturing (28.1%) was the major grouping, followed by health and community services (9.4%) retail (6%) transport and storage (5.8%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (5.4%) and construction (5.4%).

The majority of employers who replied to the survey were larger employers in the New Zealand context bearing in mind that 93.7% of employers employ 10 or fewer people. The responses indicate that nearly 30% (29.72%) of employers who answered the survey had between 4 and 49 fulltime staff whereas about 60% (61.77%) employed between 50 and 499 staff and 8.52% employed over 500. Looking at fulltime employment, employers indicated that 60.84% of their fulltime staff were male compared with 39.16% of women. The figures were reversed in relation to part time employment with 31.47% men and 68.53% women employed. Statistical analysis was conducted to see if the larger companies and the small group of very large employers distorted the data. In general the analysis showed that the larger companies did not skew the data on gender and on age. They are included here in the findings and corroborate the views of employers with lesser numbers of staff. Where the size of employment makes a difference to the findings this is noted in the results.

The study asked respondents whether in the past two years the number of employees increased, decreased or stayed the same. In general, employers indicated that they had increased staff. If company size is considered those with between 50-100 staff were more likely to have increased in employment size in the last two years versus both the larger and smaller companies in the sample. Employers with 500-plus staff who participated in the study were more likely to have shed staff in the same time frame.

Table 1: Recent changes in staff numbers

Increased	43.6%
Decreased	29.8%
Stayed the same	26.6%
Total	100 %

Employers were asked whether employees aged 55 years and over in their organizations were more likely to be on shorter term contracts. Very few answered “yes”, 2.7%, compared with 97.3 % who said “no”.

Respondents were also asked if employees in their organizations were retiring later from work because of changes to the human rights legislation. A total of 29.4% of employers indicated they were, with 70.6% answering in the negative. Analysis does show a size effect in the area of later retirement. Proportionately more larger than smaller employers reported that employees were retiring later from work.

Skills

The survey asked a number of questions about available skills and skills shortages. First, the employers were asked whether their organization faced a skills shortage and almost half of those who responded 49.3% indicated they did while 50.7% said they did not. Employers who indicated that their organizations faced a skills shortage were asked to identify what had caused the shortage from a list of five reasons including an “other” category inviting unstructured responses. Employers could tick all the categories that applied.

Table 2: Reasons for skills shortage: Count of times mentioned

Training has not kept pace with skill requirements	172
Skilled older employees have left the organization	94
We cannot recruit employees with the necessary skills	396
The pace of technology change	99
Other	65

In the unstructured “other” category several themes emerged such as the removal of apprenticeship schemes, the difficulty of attracting IT-qualified staff in a global environment of computer skill shortage, the national shortage of registered nurses and work culture factors such as the difference between old and new work attitudes and lack of commitment by workers.

Employers were asked to rate the extent of change on a number of workplace features following anti-age discrimination contained in the Human Rights Act. The workplace features were recruitment and selection, training, career development, performance-related issues, promotion, wages and salaries, performance appraisal systems, retirement-related issues, personal grievances, redundancy and superannuation. A five point Likert-type scale from “very significant change” through to “no change at all” was used in the survey and the results are reported here with the two categories “very significant change” and “significant change” collapsed into a single “change” category for ease of presentation. Similarly the two

categories, “ little change” and “no change at all” are collapsed into the single “no change” category. Only *retirement-related issues* and *recruitment and selection* were identified by more than ten percent of employers that responded to the survey as workplace features that changed as a consequence of the legislation.

Table 3: Employers’ rating of the extent of change on workplace features following anti-age discrimination legislation

		Change %	Neither %	No Change %
1.	Recruitment and selection	10.9	17.7	71.4
2.	Training	4.6	21	74.3
3.	Career development	5.9	22.6	71.5
4.	Performance-related issues	9.3	19.7	70.9
5.	Promotion	4.1	24.5	71.4
6.	Wages and salaries	3.2	24.3	72.5
7.	Performance appraisal systems	7.7	20.8	71.5
8.	Retirement-related issues	19.6	16.6	63.7
9.	Personal grievances	4.5	22.1	73.4
10.	Redundancy	6.5	21.7	71.7
11.	Superannuation	7.2	22.3	70.4

Performance Appraisal

The survey asked a number of questions of employers about performance appraisal systems including whether or not they were used and questions relating to their perceived effectiveness and use in the workplace. A total of 82.3 % of employers who answered the survey indicated they had a performance appraisal system with the majority indicating their employees are reviewed every year (66.8%) with 22.5% reviewed every six months.

The 817 employers in the survey who indicated they had a performance appraisal system were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of five statements about performance appraisal. A sizable majority thought their performance appraisal systems were effective.

Table 4: Performance appraisal

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
The performance appraisal system is effective	80	11.3	8.7
The performance appraisal system is used to manage poorly performing staff	57.4	13.5	29.1

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
The performance appraisal system tells staff the areas they need to improve in	91.7	4.4	3.9
The performance appraisal system is used to retire older employees	4.0	8.7	87.4
The performance appraisal system provides good feedback to the employee	89.7	6.7	3.7

Organizational Work Practices

Discussion about older workers and their retention in the labour force often centres on whether organizations offer a “work friendly” environment with organizational work practices and employment conditions that attract, suit and retain older employees. The survey asked employers if their organization had any of the following: flexitime, gradual or phased retirement, job sharing, job redesign to suit individual employees, provision of training specifically for individual employees, part time or casual work for individual employees, subsidized medical benefits, employer superannuation schemes, extended leave or holiday provisions for individual employees and job reassignment for individual employees. Respondents were asked to tick all boxes that apply. Employers were also asked if they intended to introduce any of the organizational practices or work features listed that have been mentioned in commentary and research as features that can enhance an “older friendly” workplace environment. A total of 981 employers answered the question about whether they had the specified work features and a total of 206 only indicated that they intended to introduce any of the features in the next year.

Table 5: Organizational work practices

Does your organization have:	Number of times mentioned by respondents	Does your organization intend to introduce any of the following in the next 12 months?	Number of times mentioned by respondents
Flexitime	301	Flexitime	26
Gradual/Phased retirement	113	Gradual/phased retirement	26
Job sharing	270	Job sharing	36
Redesigning jobs to suit individual employees	330	Redesigning jobs to suit individual employees	52
Provision of training specifically for individual employees	690	Provision of training specifically for individual employees	82
Part-time or casual work for individual employees	732	Part-time or casual work for individual employees	55

Does your organization have:	Number of times mentioned by respondents	Does your organization intend to introduce any of the following in the next 12 months?	Number of times mentioned by respondents
Subsidised medical benefits	441	Subsidised medical benefits	24
Employer superannuation schemes	476	Employer superannuation schemes	36
Extended leave/holiday provisions for individual employees	569	Extended leave/ holiday provisions for individual employees	24
Job reassignment for individual employees	365	Job reassignment for individual employees	55
TOTAL NUMBER OF MENTIONS	4287	TOTAL NUMBER OF MENTIONS	416

Views of the Older Worker

Part Two of the survey asked employers for their views of the older worker in order to explore perceptions about age and common stereotypes about older workers. Employers were first asked to identify which age category best represented their view of the term older worker and the categories presented listed chronological age between 45 years of age and 75 plus at five year intervals.

Table 6: Which age category best represents the employers' views of the term "older worker"

Age	%
45-49 years	2.1
50-54 years	8.1
55-59 years	23.2
60-64	39.5
65-69	21.8
70-74	3.2
75 plus	1.0
	100

Employers were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with 26 statements about older workers which addressed common presumptions and stereotypes. These ranged from the notion that older workers have more accidents at work, to older workers resist change and have problems with technology. A five point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” was used in the survey and the results are reported here with the two categories “strongly disagree” and “disagree” collapsed into one. Similarly the two categories “strongly agree” and “agree” are collapsed into a single agreement category for ease of presentation. Items 1-19 are presented by percentage as items that employers agreed with in relation to older workers while items 20-26 presented by percentage as statements respondents disagreed with in relation to older workers. Despite this form of presentation in nine cases (9,10, 13-19) the “neither” response was proportionately larger than the “agree” or “disagree” responses indicating that a majority of respondents in those cases did not see the features described in the statements as age-sensitive. Positive views of the older worker from employers related to “dependability” factors such as reliability, loyalty and job commitment and negative factors relate to problems with technology and “adaptability” factors such as resisting change, flexibility and being less willing to work long hours. More employers also did not perceive older workers to be ambitious.

Table 7: Views of the older worker

	Older workers are more likely to:	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree%
1.	Be reliable	83.6	11.3	5.3
2.	Be loyal	81.2	16	2.9
3.	Be committed to the job	65.9	18.5	5.6
4.	Be willing to stay longer in the job	61.6	32.2	6.8
5.	Resist change	60.1	22.8	17.1
6.	Be a good example for others	56.4	36.9	6.7
7.	Have problems with technology	55.4	28.4	16.2
8.	Be productive	52.5	37.4	10.1
9.	Fit in with the organization	44	48.9	7.2
10.	Have better people skills	42.2	47.3	10.5
11.	Be less flexible	39.3	33.4	27.3
12.	Be less willing to work long hours	39.1	32.3	28.6
13.	Be better team players	32.5	36.5	30.9
14.	Have better customer skills	34.9	51.9	13.2
15.	Be less willing to train	32.5	36.5	30.9
16.	Be less promotable	32.4	41	26.6
17.	Be difficult to train	27.4	47.6	25
18.	Be better performers	26.1	60.6	13.3
19.	Offer employers a better return on investment	25.5	59.8	14.7
20.	Be away from work sick	7.1	36.8	56.2
21.	Have more accidents at work	3.8	42.1	54.2
22.	Be ambitious	9.4	43.2	47.5
23.	Be less motivated	14.6	40.4	44.9
24.	Have higher levels of stress	20.4	43.4	36.2
25.	Have lower expectations	31.3	33.6	35
26.	Be less creative	22.4	43.8	33.9

Job Performance

Employers were asked at what age did they believe that job performance in older workers was likely to decline with respect to manual and professional occupations for both men and women. Interestingly the results show that more employers who answered the questionnaire felt that female job performance in manual work declined earlier than male job performance. A less marked pattern occurs in the results of the perceived age of job performance decline in professional occupations.

Table 8: Employers' perceptions of age of job performance decline in manual and professional occupations

Age	Male %- manual work	Female %- manual work	Male %- professional	Female %- professional
0-49 years	12.7	17.2	3.0	3.8
50-54 years	15.9	18.8	5.5	6.7
55-59 years	27.0	23.8	14.5	16.1
60-64 years	21.8	19.6	27.8	25.3
65-74 years	11.1	8.9	27.8	26.0
75 plus	0.5	0.5	1.3	1.6
Age has no effect	10.9	11.3	20.1	20.5
	100	100	100	100

In the manual work area 12.7 % of employers felt male job performance declined up to 49 years while a higher proportion, 17.2% felt female job performance declined in these years. Again more employers 18.8% felt the decline was related to 50-54 age bracket for women compared with 15.9% of employers who associated job performance decline with men of that age. The mean age group for manual job decline for women is slightly lower than for men, about a quarter of an age group and this difference is significant.

Perceptions of Characteristics Associated with Different Age Groups

Employers were asked to think about workers in different age groups and indicate which groups best illustrated as number of qualities and factors ranging from *innovation* and *creativity* to *computer experience* and *customer focus*. The findings show that the employers who responded strongly associated *computer experience* with younger workers, and to a lesser extent *enthusiasm* and *adaptability*. Few of the characteristics were seen by employers as being associated with older workers in the 60-75 years age group except for *loyalty to employer* which approximately 10% of respondents associated with older people. The characteristics that more respondents felt were less age-specific and related to all age groups were *excellent personal presentation* and *team spirit*. *Innovation, creativity, high motivation*

and *project management skills* were associated by a greater percentage of respondents with those aged between 30-44 years of age. *Business knowledge, credibility, judgement* and *strong work ethic* were associated with employees aged between 45-59 years of age.

Table 9: Characteristics associated with age groups

	%Workers	15-29 yrs	30-44 yrs	45-59 yrs	60-75 yrs	All ages
1.	Computer experience	66.9	19.9	1.1	-	12.1
2.	Enthusiasm	35.2	28.5	3.3	0.4	32.6
3.	High levels of motivation	14.9	48.0	6.4	0.3	30.3
4.	Creativity	27.8	40.0	3.5	-	28.7
5.	Innovation	20.0	48.4	5.1	-	26.5
6.	Adaptability	29.8	35.3	10.8	0.3	23.8
7.	Project Management skills	1.2	40.4	34.9	0.2	23.3
8.	Flexibility	24.5	33.1	16.5	1.2	24.7
9.	Confidence	8.3	37.2	19.9	2.0	32.6
10.	Team spirit	8.0	37.8	15.4	1.2	37.8
11.	Excellent personal presentation	2.6	36.8	20.5	1.7	38.1
12.	Customer focus	2.6	37.9	25.1	1.1	33.3
13.	Communication skills	1.7	31.3	33.8	2.6	30.5
14.	Leadership	0.6	31.3	39.3	1.2	27.6
15.	Professionalism	0.3	24.5	38.8	3.7	32.7
16.	People skills	0.4	25.7	39.9	2.7	31.2
17.	Business knowledge	0.4	20.4	51.6	5.7	21.8
18.	Credibility	0.1	19.2	48.5	4.7	27.5
19.	Strong work ethic	1.1	25.4	45.0	3.3	25.5
20.	Judgement	0.3	18.4	48.0	5.4	27.9
21.	Loyalty to employer	0.3	10.7	50.3	10.6	28.1

Labour Market Policy and Human Resources

The survey asked employers a number of questions about social policy and future labour market conditions. They were asked, for example, whether they agreed, disagreed or had no opinion on a number of statements about contemporary and future labour market policy and employment conditions. The five point scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” was collapsed into three, an agreement category that encompassed both “strongly agree” and “agree” and a disagreement category that included both “strongly disagree” and “disagree”.

The section of the study was divided into “now” and “future” categories and these are presented here as two separate tables. Employers strongly disagreed with suggestions that pay should increase automatically with length of service and last-on, first-off lay-off policies. More employers agreed than disagreed with the statement “It is in my generation’s best interests that more older people work”, but a greater percentage, 41.7% of respondents, had no strong opinion.

Table 10: Contemporary employment issues

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
Employers should apply last-on first-off when deciding who to lay-off	9.6	8.1	82.2
Pay should automatically increase with length of service	7.0	7.8	85.3
Early retirement should be encouraged to improve job opportunities for the young	20.5	19.2	60.3
Dealing with youth unemployment should be a greater priority than unemployment of older workers	36.4	23.9	39.7
It is in my generation’s best interests that more older people work	33.1	41.7	25.1

Looking to the future more employers agreed that disagreed with statements suggesting there will in the future be better health and safety, better rewards for individual merit, more flexible working conditions, better training opportunities, improved equal opportunities, greater opportunities to demonstrate initiative and better use of non-monetary rewards. However, on the negative side a majority of the employers also agreed that there will in future be more job-related stress. Employers strongly disagreed with suggestions that there will be less unemployment, that there will be more jobs available, that companies are likely to provide superannuation and that real pay levels will be much higher.

Table 11: Future employment issues

		Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
1.	There will be better health and safety conditions on the job	78.3	16.0	5.7
2.	There will be more job-related stress	69.1	23.1	7.9
3.	There will be better rewards for individual merit	68.3	22.1	9.6
4.	There will be more flexible working conditions	67.9	19.3	12.8

		Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
5.	There will be better training opportunities	64.8	26.3	8.9
6.	There will be improved equal opportunities	62.3	26.4	11.3
7.	There will be greater opportunities to demonstrate initiative	55.7	31.6	12.7
8.	There will be better use of non-monetary rewards	52.5	34.0	13.4
9.	There will be more job choice	33.6	36.0	30.4
10.	There will be more job satisfaction	24.7	58.6	16.7
11.	There will be much less unemployment	6.7	19.1	74.1
12.	There will be more jobs available	12.3	32.8	61.3
13.	Companies are more likely to provide superannuation	20.7	21.3	58.1
14.	Real pay levels will be much higher	20.1	27.3	52.5

Human Rights Legislation

Two questions in the employers' survey related to age discrimination provisions and the human rights legislation. The first asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed or had no opinion about 11 statements relating to the legislation and the second question canvassed the effectiveness of the human rights legislation in relation to a number of workplace practices and job-related features. In Table 10 results are reported with the two agreement categories of "strongly agree" and "agree" and the two disagreement categories "strongly disagree" and "disagree" collapsed into single agreement and disagreement categories. More employers agreed than disagreed with the statements relating to autonomy of employment, age discrimination legislation increasing the number of older employees, voluntarism in relation to age, the labour market should be left to its own devices, and the legislation improves prospects for older employees. More employers disagreed than agreed with statements about positive discrimination, and employers' choice regarding retirement ages of workers, and the prospect of greater protection for older employees. In relation to three statements; there should be greater protection for older employees, the legislation is not working in practice and the legislation creates tension among different age groups, more respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. However, it is important to note that 38.9% of employers who responded to the survey agreed with the statement that the Human Rights legislation is not working in practice.

Table 12: Employers' perceptions of age and human rights legislation

		Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
1.	Employers should have complete choice in who they employ	80.3	10.7	9.0
2.	The age discrimination legislation will increase the number of older employees	54.7	29.0	16.3
3.	The labour market should be left to its own devices	49.8	24.1	26.1
4.	A voluntary approach (code of practice) would be more effective	45.6	26.9	30.6
5.	The human rights legislation improves prospects for older employees	41.4	33.1	25.4
6.	The legislation is not working in practice	38.9	42.0	19.1
7.	There is legislation for gender and ethnicity so there should be for age discrimination	38.0	29.7	32.2
8.	The legislation creates tension among different age groups	32.3	35.7	31.9
9.	Concerns about age discrimination are best dealt with by introducing further legislation encouraging positive discrimination	8.5	25.0	66.5
10.	Employers should be able to retire workers at an age set by the employer	34.6	15.1	50.4
11.	There should be greater protection for older employees	19.4	42.1	38.4

Respondents were asked to think about organizations in general, rather than their own particular organization, in their responses to how effective the human rights legislation had been in preventing particular work place practices and employment consequences. The scale ranged from “very ineffective” to “very effective” with “neither” as a mid point and the findings are presented here with the ineffective and effective scales collapsed from two categories to one category in each case. Respondents were categorical about the human rights legislation preventing age discrimination in job advertisements and more employers felt the legislation had been effective in preventing age discrimination in dismissal/redundancy decisions. More employers, though, felt the legislation had been ineffective in preventing age discrimination in recruitment. In relation to the other six statements more respondents were equivocal, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the legislation’s effectiveness.

Table 13: Effectiveness of the human rights legislation in preventing:

	Ineffective %	Neither %	Effective %
Age discrimination in dismissal/redundancy decisions	25.1	36.6	38.4
Age discrimination in recruitment	40.2	26.0	33.8
Age discrimination in job advertisements	15.0	18.7	66.3
Age discrimination in training	23.7	49.1	27.2
Age discrimination in promotion decisions	31.7	48.6	19.7
Age discrimination in the attitudes and behaviour of managers	33.0	37.1	29.9
Age discrimination in remuneration	24.7	55.6	19.9
Age discrimination in the attitudes and behaviour of staff in the workplace	26.6	47.2	26.1

Employers were asked whether they disagreed with a number of statements regarding human resource policies and age. Again the categories were collapsed to provide one agreement category, one disagreement category and the “neither” category. The majority of employers agreed with statements such as *appraisal systems should ensure that they provide appropriate feedback, induction programmes should be available to all employees, all employees should have the opportunity for skill updating, and recruitment decisions must take into account experience not just qualifications*. Perhaps surprisingly, a majority of employers disagreed with the statement that *job descriptions should focus only on skills and competencies rather than personal attributes*.

Table 14: Human resource policies and age

	Disagree %	Neither %	Agree %
Recruitment documents should not refer to age	34.1	6.6	59.3
Recruitment decisions must take into account experience not just qualifications	2.2	1.9	94.9
Job descriptions should focus only on skills and competencies rather than personal attributes	63.0	8.0	29.0
Recruiters should be encouraged to recruit irrespective of age of applicant	10.6	9.0	80.4
The recruitment of older employees should be encouraged	18.9	54.0	27.1
Alternatives to full-time work should be provided where practicable to attract all types of employees	14.3	24.3	61.3
Benefit programmes (excluding actuarial considerations) should be flexible and apply equally to employees	6.9	18.2	75.9

	Disagree %	Neither %	Agree %
Training programmes should be available to all workers irrespective of age	4.0	3.5	92.5
All employees should have the opportunity for skill updating	2.1	3.0	94.9
Induction programmes should be available to all employees	0.5	2.4	97.1
Those responsible for performance appraisal should be trained in performance ratings and competence-based analysis	3.6	8.1	88.3
Appraisal systems should ensure that they provide appropriate feedback	0.2	1.1	98.7
Performance appraisal should have programmes in place that provide opportunities for employees to meet required levels of performance competency	1.0	4.1	94.9
Support programmes for retirement should be an integral part of any human resource system	7.8	19.4	72.9
Employees should be supported in making the transition from work to retirement	7.5	17.0	75.5

Discussion

Demographics

The large response rate of nearly 50%, over 1000 employers spread throughout New Zealand, to the survey signifies the salience of age and employment issues. As the Equal Opportunities Trust notes:

Employers can expect to see a significant ‘greying’ of the workforce over the next 25 years as the baby boomer generation ages, people stay healthy and more active for longer, older workers job-hunt as businesses downsize and there is an increasing need to work longer to save for retirement (p.1).

The high number of employers who replied to the employment of the older workers survey was matched by the interest shown by workers over 55 years of age in an earlier, related study in the same research project. In that study 2137 members of New Zealand’s largest union (54.6%) answered some of the same questions and other questions about their attitudes and experiences at work.

The sample that responded to the employers’ survey were located across industrial classifications with a specific representation, 28.1% in manufacturing. The sample of employers who responded were clearly those whose businesses were growing in terms of employment numbers rather than downsizing with 43.6% increasing staff numbers and 26.6% maintaining the status quo in the past two years compared with less than a third of the sample,

29.8% who had decreased staff numbers. Only a tiny number of employers, 2.7%, indicated that employees aged 55 years and over were more likely to be on shorter term contracts. This finding confirms the results of the union-based study and is at variance with the concept of a marginalised older work force, and a “short term employment contract culture” predicted by some as the future for tomorrow’s organizations (Cooper & Jackson, 1997).

The study confirmed other reports that many employers suffer from skills shortages in their businesses with 396 respondents indicating that they could not recruit employees with the necessary skills and 172 indicating that training had not kept pace with skills requirements. Lesser reasons identified by 99 and 94 respondents respectively were the pace of technology change and the loss of skilled older employees. While the loss of skills among older workers was not a major underpinning of the skills problem some employers who answered the unstructured section of this question queried the job commitment and work ethic of younger employees.

Human rights legislation

Three questions in the study referred to the human rights legislation as it affects age discrimination in New Zealand. An amendment to the Human Rights Act removed the upper limit for retirement and age was added to the act as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

The first question asked employers to rate the extent of change on workplace features following anti-age discrimination legislation. The pattern of the findings was that over 60 per cent of employers who responded indicated no change to a number of common workplace practices. Only retirement related issues and recruitment and selection were identified by more than 10 per cent of employers that responded to the survey as workplace features that changed as a consequence of the legislation. On the one hand the findings suggest that the predictions of gloom in some industry quarters about the effects of anti-ageist legislation are misplaced in view of the status quo picture that emerges. Another interpretation is that employers already had positive workplace environments where age was not a ‘problem’ that needed to be legislated for, while yet another possible reading of the data is that employers have a pragmatic and functional approach to workplace features regardless of the age of their employees.

The second question relating to the Human Rights Act examines in general employers’ perceptions of age and the law. It explores more conceptual matters such as the employers’ autonomy in employment, the degree of regulation desirable in the labour market through to attitudes about inter-generational tension and positive discrimination. Not surprisingly the majority of employers 80.3% were in strong agreement with the suggestion that “employers should have complete choice in who they employ”, and a lesser majority agreed that the labour market should be left to its own devices (49.8%). A total of 54.7% indicated that the age discrimination legislation will increase the number of older employees showing that there is strong employer awareness of the “greying” of the labour market. This finding is significant if it is considered desirable that employer awareness of issues relating to older workers matches older employee expectations. In the union survey many older workers said that they had now changed their minds about when they would be retiring with many planning to work

longer. There was strong disagreement, 66.5%, with the suggestion that *concerns about age discrimination are best dealt with by introducing further legislation encouraging positive discrimination* and a clear majority of employers (50.4%) disagreed with the suggestion that *employers should be able to retire workers at an age set by the employer*.

The third question relating to anti-age discrimination asked employers for their views about the effectiveness of the human rights legislation in preventing discrimination on the grounds of age in connection with a number of work practices such as redundancy, training, promotion decisions and attitudes and behaviours (see Table 11). Two clear findings emerge from the results to the question. First, 66.3% believe that the human rights legislation has been *effective* in preventing age discrimination in job advertisements and 40.2 % believe that the law has been *ineffective* in preventing age discrimination in recruitment. What is interesting here is the public nature of job advertisements and the monitoring of situations vacant advertisements by the media in which they are published to also ensure that employers are complying, and the private nature of recruitment which is either conducted in-house or through agencies whose processes and practices are confidential to their clients. It is important to note that the findings are not saying that there *is* age discrimination in recruitment, rather that a majority of employers who answered the survey believe the human rights legislation is not effective in preventing discrimination in recruitment. Clearly, though, this is a significant finding for it points to the difference between covert and overt age discrimination in employment. Job advertisements are by their very nature in the public domain whereas the recruitment process itself is conducted generally as a confidential process behind closed doors.

Performance appraisal

Conventional human resource management theory espouses the benefits of performance appraisal as both a process and a tool to motivate staff, communicate clearly expectations of individual employees, provide feedback about performance, identify training and development needs, set goals, monitor performance and control productivity. It should be acknowledged, though, that the validity and efficacy of performance appraisal systems are strongly contested areas of scholarship (Lawson, 1995). The findings show that the majority of employers who responded to the survey had performance appraisal within their organizations, 82.3%, with most of them conducting the interviews every year, 66.8%, or every six months, 22.5%. Again, the findings show that employers were positive about the effectiveness of their performance appraisal schemes with 80% of those who had them agreeing with the statement that the system was effective. Even more of those who conducted performance appraisals agreed that the system told staff the areas of work they needed to improve in, 91.7 %, and that performance appraisal provided good feedback to staff, 89.7%. There was a similar level of disagreement among respondents with the statement that *the performance appraisal system is used to retire older workers* (87.4%). On the issues of the use of performance appraisal as a management tool, 57.4% of those employers who had performance appraisal systems agreed with the statement that *the performance appraisal system is used to manage poorly performing staff* compared with 29.1% who disagreed and 13.5% who neither agreed nor disagreed.

The same set of questions relating to performance appraisal was asked of the related study of respondents who were engineers' union members aged 55 years and over. A less optimistic picture emerged from these workers than from the sample of employers. A surprisingly high percentage of respondents, 39.3%, in the workers' study indicated they did not have a performance appraisal system with a further 14.2% who indicated they were not sure. Of the respondents in the workers' study who did have a performance appraisal system, more disagreed (45%) than agreed (35.7%) with the statement *the performance appraisal system is effective*. It needs to be noted that there is no relationship between the two samples. But nonetheless it is intriguing that the same set of questions asked during the same period of two groups, over 1000 employers and over older 2000 employees produces quite different majority perceptions of the effectiveness of performance appraisal.

Flexible work practices

Flexible work practices have long been advocated by those who suggest demographic pressures will force organizations to retain older workers or attract them back. For example, the EEO Trust suggests a range of flexible work options that employers can offer older workers including phased retirement, job-sharing, contract work at peak times, and mentoring junior employees (p.1). And Rudman (1999) suggests "organizations will want to attract older people back into the workforce simply to meet their needs for labour, and will do this by devising new types of career patterns and new roles in which older workers can contribute their skills and experience to the organization" (p.58).

However, the findings suggest a more conservative approach to flexible work practices than this. Less than a third of employers indicated that they currently offer flexitime and only about 11% of the sample indicated that they offered gradual or phased retirement. About 25% of employers who responded offered job sharing. The provision of part time or casual work was noted by over 700 employers but it is intuitively reasonable to suggest that the provision of part time work is driven by work functionality relating to the cost effectiveness of an organization's labour force rather than by human resource policies aimed at retaining or attracting older workers. Similar analysis can be made in relation to the provisions of training for individual employees which was mentioned by over half, 690, of the respondents.

The conservative nature of the employers to flexible work practices that may appeal to older workers is confirmed by the small number of employers who indicated that they would introduce flexible work practices in the next 12 months. The findings reveal a disjunction between text-book theory based on demographic projections and prediction about the future of work, and work-place reality as experienced and perceived by employers. At least for the present many employers are not being compelled to embrace commonly-cited flexible work practices to accommodate, retain or attract back older workers. This may reflect the current state of supply and demand in the New Zealand market place which, in general, favours employers. It could be argued, though, that the findings also indicate a need for continuing education of employers as the workforce ages to increase their levels of preparedness for the 'greying' of the labour force if there are valid economic arguments to retain older workers who might be attracted by flexible work practices.

Stereotypes

A variety of stereotypical assumptions have commonly attached to older people including older workers. Rudman (1999) describes these as fallacies such as the belief that “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” to the assumption that, after a certain age people are simply waiting to retire and collect their pensions.

The first stereotype examined in the study concerned the age that workers are perceived as “old”. Employers who responded to the survey were asked to identify which age category best represented their view of the term older worker and the categories listed chronological ages between 45 years and 75 years plus. About a third of employers regarded those between 45 and 59 years as “old” with a further 39.5% indicating older workers were those aged between 60-64 years, and 26% indicating older workers were those aged between 65 and 75 years plus. What is interesting about the third of employers who think 45-59 years is “old”, is that a large number of older workers themselves in the workers’ survey indicated that they had changed their minds about when they would retire and were now planning to retire later. It is clear that some workers both want and need to stay at work longer. Some employers believe that they may be “old” at least twenty years before the workers concerned will actually leave the workforce, assuming that they exit at 65 years. The employers’ study only examined perceptions in relation to chronological age while the workers’ survey examined self perceptions of how people felt, acted and looked in addition to biological age. The workers’ study showed a difference between actual age and felt age which over half the workers aged 55 years and over indicating they felt and acted the same as co-workers who might be younger, peers or older than themselves.

When employers were asked for their views about older workers positive views emerged relating to “dependability” factors of older workers such as reliability, loyalty and job commitment. Productivity was also a positive association. Negative factors related to older workers having problems with technology and “adaptability” factors such as resisting change, flexibility and being less willing to work long hours. About 60% of employers who answered the survey felt older workers were more likely to resist change, 55.4% felt they were more likely to have problems with technology, 39.3 % be less flexible and 39.1% be less willing to work long hours. Another question in the study asked employers to indicate which age group they associated with particular characteristics such as computer experience, flexibility, innovation and so on. A total of 66.9% of employers indicated that they associated computer experience with those aged between 15-29 years with a further 19.9% indicating the age group 30-44 years. Less than 2% of respondents associated computer experience with those aged 45 years and over, although 12.1% of respondents indicated they associated computer experience with all ages.

Technophobia and resistance to change were two stereotypes confirmed by older workers themselves in the worker’s study. We now have two complementary studies with large samples of workers and employers where the majority of those who replied believe that older workers are more likely to have problems with technology and are more likely to resist change. This has significant policy implications for New Zealand’s drive to be a knowledge

economy with commonly cited characteristics such as workplace responsiveness, computerization, and technology uptake as well as an entrepreneurial culture.

The majority of employers did not believe that older workers are more likely to be away from work sick or have more accidents at work and this finding contradicts some of the overseas studies (Taylor & Walker, 1994). While this reflects a positive view of older workers by New Zealand employers a less than enthusiastic picture emerges from the findings in relation to what has been called the business case for the employment of older workers. Only 25% of employers felt that older workers are more likely to offer a better return on investment with 14.7% disagreeing and 59.8% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This contrasts markedly with the views of older workers in the engineer's union study where 79.2% of workers aged 55 years and over who answered the survey felt older worker offered a better return on investment. A similar contrast occurs when the suggestions that older workers are more likely to be less willing to train and be more difficult to train are compared across the studies. Older workers are much more positive than employers on training questions.

While it might be commonly assumed that areas such as ambition, motivation and creativity are not age-sensitive, more employers agreed than disagreed that older workers are less likely to be ambitious, motivated and creative, which again has a bearing on the essential human capital underpinnings for economic growth that is linked to human capital in an information age.

Job performance.

A vast body of literature has been devoted to what Loretto *et al* (1999) describe as “one of the principal recurring debates, that of performance declining with age” (p.15). Griffiths (1997) provides a useful summary of the scientific literature on the subject and states that most reviews and meta-analyses report little consistent relationship between ageing and work performance. While age might be a poor proxy for performance, though, many of the studies in this area have different methodological starting points. It is clear that some physical attributes such as eye sight, hearing and physiological systems deteriorate with age along with energy levels and tolerance for working in extreme conditions.

Griffiths (1997) poses the question, “given the evidence for some age-related deterioration in various physiological and cognitive systems, why might work-based and population-based studies of the relationship between age and performance suggest different results?” (p.200). Various moderating and compensating factors are said to be the answer. For example, older workers compensate for a decline in cognitive ability with an increase in job knowledge and skills (Salthouse & Maurer, 1996).

While the scientific literature provides one perspective, the attitudes and beliefs of employers are an important consideration relating to ageing and job performance. The employers who answered the survey were asked to indicate at what age the performance of an employee might decline in manual occupations and professional occupations with gender identified. The question was similar to that asked in a Scottish study of university students (Loretto *et al*, 1999). In the Scottish survey the categories used were manual and non-manual occupations whereas in New Zealand the categories used were manual and professional occupations. The

question was the same as that asked in the union study of workers aged 55 years and over. The replies from the employers are profiled in Table 8. The results showed that more employers who answered the questionnaire felt that female job performance in manual work declined earlier than male job performance. A less marked pattern occurs in the results of the perceived age of job performance decline in professional occupations. The mean age group for manual job decline is slightly lower than for men, about a quarter of an age group, and this difference is significant.

The gender difference reported in the employers study is mirrored in the complementary survey of older workers in New Zealand and in the Scottish study of younger university students. So what does this mean? First, it could suggest that there *is* in fact an earlier decline of job performance for women in manual work. A more likely interpretation is that the stereotype that women's job performance declines earlier in manual occupations is more strongly subscribed to. This means that ageism is more pronounced in relation to women than men. Loretto *et al* said the Scottish survey findings supported the notion that women are faced with the "double jeopardy" of age and sex discrimination. Interestingly, in the gender analysis of the older workers study the results show quite clearly that more males over 55 years of age believed women's job performance declined earlier than women who answered the study. Because the gender was not identified in the employers' study it is impossible to say whether a similar gender bias exists in this study. Nonetheless, from the two studies there is clear evidence of an unfortunate stereotype in the New Zealand workplace about female job performance. Women live longer and many have indicated that they will have to work longer for financial security by comparison with men and because of Government's upwards indexing of pension payments. At the same time it is apparent from these findings that manual female workers face discriminatory attitudes. Overall, the results show that public opinion may not be as enlightened as scientific studies that show age is not a proxy for job performance suggest they should be.

Employment issues

The survey's findings on a number of questions relating to present and future labour market conditions with implications for older workers show that older workers cannot expect any favouritism in the labour market. First, employers strongly adhere to pay for performance principles rather than pay being indexed to length of service with over 85% disagreeing with the suggestion that pay should automatically increase with length of service (Table 10). This fits with other results in the survey that reinforce employer autonomy such as the notion that employers should decide which workers to lay-off when necessary. Over 80%, for example, disagreed with the statement that *employers should apply last-on first-off when deciding who to lay-off*. Employers were more evenly divided over the issue of inter-generational employment availability with 39.7% disagreeing with the suggestion that *dealing with youth unemployment should be a greater priority than unemployment of older workers* compared with 36.4% who agreed, although a clear majority, 60.3% disagreed with the suggestion that *early retirement should be encouraged to improve job opportunities for the young*. More employers agreed than disagreed with the statement that *it is in my generation's best interests that more older people work* but an even larger percentage neither agreed nor disagreed. The pattern of responses show that by and large employers do not view older workers in the current employment climate

differently from other workers. Again this points to the pragmatic and functional nature of the current employment environment.

While there may be few surprises in employers' attitudes to current issues a more surprising picture emerges from the findings of future employment issues. Employers were asked for their levels of agreement or disagreement with a number of issues ranging from health and safety to pay levels and job choice. Interestingly, nearly 70% felt there will be more job related stress in future. While this might simply reflect the reality of the pace of change at work, nonetheless it is a worrying result. There is clear evidence in overseas scholarship that the common causes of work-related ill health are musculoskeletal and, increasingly, stress-related (Griffiths, 1997). She quotes other studies, Goedhart, 1992) that suggest it may be that high levels of work-related stress induce an increased rate of ageing, which itself could lead to the development of various diseases.

In this section of the study employers agreed that there will be better health and safety conditions, better rewards for merit performance, more flexible working conditions, better training opportunities, improved equal opportunities, greater opportunities for initiative and better use of non-monetary rewards. They disagreed with the prospects of less unemployment, more jobs available and higher pay levels. The relatively high agreement with the future prospect of more flexible working conditions ran counter to both their own limited participation currently in flexible work practices and to the relatively low percentage of respondents who indicated that they plan to introduce these practices in the next twelve months.

Human resource policies

Again there was a surprising finding in the results of employers' attitudes towards contemporary human resource policies and age (Table 14). Running counter to current human resource management theory, a majority of employers (63%) disagreed with the statement that "job descriptions should focus only on skills and competencies rather than personal attributes". Only 29% of respondents agreed with text-book best practice on this issue. The questions can be asked, to what extent employers do focus on personal attributes in the selection process and how far this prejudices older workers. More research is clearly needed in this area particularly as a majority of employers also indicated that the human rights legislation had been ineffective in preventing age discrimination in recruitment. The third study in the large Employment of the Older Worker project, of barriers faced by older job seekers to be conducted in partnership with the Mature Employment Support Agency in 2000-2001, may provide additional insights in this area.

A clear majority of employers agreed with human resource policies such as recruitment documents not referring to age, regard for experience as well as qualifications, alternatives to fulltime work, training irrespective of age, skill updating and induction for all, and training for those conducting performance appraisal. Again there was some difference between general attitudes about progressive human resource policies as indicated in the responses to this section of the survey and the number of employers who indicated they were currently practising them or who plan to introduce these organizational work practices in the next year.

Conclusion

The results of this large study of employers about older workers reveals a complex and multi-layered picture of workplace attitudes and human rights as it relates to ageism than was previously apparent in the New Zealand context. Some of the significant features of the study include perceptions of older workers that they are change resistant and have problems with technology but are “dependable” and productive. The stereotype that women’s job performance in manual occupations declines earlier than men’s is evident in the employers’ study just as it was in the older workers’ study. Other significant features include the relative infrequency of flexible work practices currently, even though employers acknowledge these positively in principle. The human rights legislation is seen by a majority of employers as being effective in advertising but ineffective in preventing age discrimination in recruitment. A majority of employers believe job descriptions should include personal attributes in addition to skills and competencies. This finding runs counter to current human resource theory. The other surprising feature is the prediction of more job-related stress which is bad news for older workers. Overall the results indicate that employers’ do not reveal pervasive prejudices about older employees, but see older workers in the context of their overall work environments in which they are treated the same as other employees. Whether employers’ could, or should, do more can be debated.

What utility can the study have for employers? The comprehensive scope of the survey across industrial classifications and by geographical region suggests the results can be reliably reported even if the results are always open to interpretation. The findings suggest first, that employers and workers will need to find ways of bridging the current divide between theory and practice as it relates to flexible work practices that are conducive to older workers staying in the workplace. The good news from the study is that in principle employers support such flexibility. The challenge, though, is devising mechanisms for their introduction which might prompt new forms of work organization or changes to the design of work and work patterns. The continuing promotion of best practice employers and publicity by the New Zealand Employers’ Federation will be helpful in this regard. Similarly there is work to be done on the relationship between age, health and work productivity particularly if employers think job-related stress will increase.

Perhaps the most urgent finding from this study, and the related survey of older workers aged 55 years and over, concerns the issue of training and technology. There is clearly a need for a good deal of thinking and planning about the role of older workers in relation to new technology and computerisation. At a time when the workforce is ageing and many older workers say they will stay at work longer, Government policy has been to embrace the concept of a “knowledge economy” which is heavily predicated on information technology and innovation. In light of employers’ perceptions about older workers and technology reinforced by the views of older workers themselves, there is clearly a significant policy issue that needs to be addressed. Who takes responsibility for training of older workers in new technologies including computer technology so that the potential of *all* employees is maximized? Employers, for example, may have to rethink their selection of older workers in workplace training and the payback on investment they receive from training. The training of older workers has received specific attention overseas (Warr, 1994). It has been suggested

that older workers may learn in different ways and that training methods need to be adapted specifically for those aged 55 and over. For example, computer training needs to be refined and reviewed so there is more time for learning to acknowledge that some older people may take longer to acquire new skills and to reduce anxiety factors.

In general the study reveals that employers have robustly pragmatic attitudes towards older workers in general and see their workplace involvement as part of the labour force “mix”. More work needs to be done, though, to maximize the participation of older workers in New Zealand and to reduce the barriers that prevent them from reaching their potential.

References

Cooper, C.L. and Jackson, S. (1997). *Creating tomorrow's organizations: A handbook for future research in organizational behaviour*. John Wiley and Sons: Chichester and New York.

EEO Trust News, “How to make the most of older workers”, July 2000, No 23, p.1.

Goedhart, W.J.A., (1992). Ageing and the work environment. *Ageing at Work: proceedings of a European Colloquium*, Paris, June 1991, (Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, pp. 57-66.

Griffiths, A. (1997). Ageing, health and productivity: a challenge for the new millennium. *Work and Stress*. Vol.11, No.3, 197-214.

Lawson, P. (1995) Performance management: An overview. In M. Walters (ed) *The Performance Management Handbook*. Institute of Personnel and Development. The Cromwell Press: Wiltshire.

Loretto, W., Duncan, C. and White, P.J. (2000) Ageism and employment: controversies, ambiguities and younger people's perceptions, *Ageing and Society*, Vol.20, pp. 279-302.

Rudman, R. (1999) *Human Resource Management in New Zealand*, (3rd Ed) Longman: Auckland, p.58.

Salthouse, T. A. and Maurer, T.J. (1996) Aging, job performance, and career development, in J. E. Birren and K.W. Schaie (eds) *Handbook of the Psychology of Aging*. Academic Press: San Diego and London. pp. 353-364.

Taylor, P. E. and Walker, A (1994). The aging workforce-employers' attitudes towards older people, *Work, Employment and Society*, 8, p. 569-591

Warr, P. (1994). Age and job performance. In J. Suel and R. Cremer (Eds.) *Work and aging: A European perspective*. London : Taylor & Francis, pp.47-63.

Comparative data.

Introduction.

The two large surveys, one of older workers aged 55 years and over, and one of employers, were individually conducted studies and did not use matched or related samples. For example, there was no attempt to survey the employers of the workers who had previously responded. Both surveys were confidential and anonymous. However, similar questions were asked of the two groups to examine stereotypes about older workers and views about job performance. It is useful to compare the findings when the same questions were asked during much the same time period of the two groups which comprised over 1000 New Zealand employers and over 2000 older employees. Such comparison allows for a view of the degree of similarity or divergence in the perspectives of workers and employers.

Differences- Performance Appraisal.

The same questions on performance appraisal produced quite different responses from older employees and employers who replied to the two studies. A sizeable majority of employers considered their performance appraisal systems were effective while less than half the number of older workers were as enthusiastic about effectiveness. Similarly, a higher proportion of employers felt their performance appraisal system provided good feedback to employees, than the proportion of older workers who responded positively to this question.

Table 1: Comparison of perceptions about performance appraisal

	Older workers- Agree %	Employers- Agree %
The performance appraisal system is effective	35.7	80
The performance appraisal system is used to manage poorly performing staff	50.5	57.4
The performance appraisal system tells staff the areas they need to improve in	78.1	91.7
The performance appraisal system is used to retire older employees	17.5	4.0
The performance appraisal system provides good feedback to the employee	58.1	89.7

The findings show that in general employers have a more positive view of the benefits of performance appraisal than workers. This is important in view of the conventional human resource management practice of using performance appraisal as both a management process and a tool of motivation, communication, and to identify staff development needs. While

performance appraisal is a contested area of scholarship, it is widely suggested that it is the tool which management should use to remedy performance drop-off and to set goals for future productivity. Implicitly, at least, performance management is acknowledged as the appropriate human resource mechanism to ensure older workers sustain performance and productivity. The findings suggest that employers may need to better communicate to their workers the rationale for performance appraisal. Employers may also need to monitor their feedback loops to ensure that performance appraisal systems are delivering on the promises held out for them.

Differences- Contemporary Employment Issues

Both surveys asked the same set of questions about social policy and future labour market conditions. However, older workers and employers had different perspectives on a number of contemporary employment issues. For example, nearly two thirds of workers felt pay should automatically increase with length of service compared with less than 10 per cent of employers. And while over half of the older workers agreed with the notion of employers applying last-on first-off in redundancy situations, again less than 10 per cent of employers were in agreement with the concept. To a lesser degree there was divergence between the two groups over whether youth unemployment should be a greater priority than the unemployment of older workers and whether it was in society’s best interests that more older people work.

Table 2: Comparison of perceptions about contemporary employment issues

	Employers Agree %	Older Workers Agree %
Employers should apply last-on first off when deciding who to lay-off	9.6	52.6
Pay should automatically increase with the length of service	7.0	65.3
Early retirement should be encouraged to improve job opportunities for the young	20.5	49.8
Dealing with youth unemployment should be a greater priority than unemployment of older workers	36.4	44.9
It is in my generation’s best interests that more older people work	33.1	47.7

The results suggest that employers subscribe to general notions of employer autonomy, believe in performance-indexed reward rather than tenure-based systems, and have a pragmatic and functional view of the labour market. The results suggest that employers do not see older workers as different from other workers but the findings imply that there is a greater

need for communication about the merits of performance-based pay if that is the preferred reward mechanism of employers. Older workers are more than twice as likely to support the encouragement of early retirement to make way for younger employees. A majority also believe that youth unemployment is more important and that society benefits when more older people work, which suggests that workers may adopt a more general, societal view of current labour market forces.

Similarities-Work-Related Stress

Looking at future employment issues one of the significant features of the findings of both surveys was the high measure of agreement with the idea that there will be more job-related stress in future (69.1% agreement in the employer’s study and 79.5% agreement in the older workers’ survey.) Griffiths (1997) notes that common causes of work-related ill health are increasingly stress-related. She cites Goedhart (1992) in support when she states that “ it may that high levels of work-related stress induce an increased rate of ageing, which in itself could lead to the development of various diseases” (p.199). Both employers’ groups and trade unions need to be aware of the general view that stress is likely to increase in future. This is particularly relevant when many older workers indicate that they intend to stay at work longer and delay retirement. Griffiths (1997) states, “ any efforts to keep older people at work will clearly have to pay particular attention to minimizing work stress, musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular disease” (p.199).

Similarities-Stereotypes

Interestingly a large number of the common stereotypes about older workers were held both by older workers and by employers. Two negative stereotypes held in common were older workers are more likely to resist change and older workers are more likely to have problems with technology. While employers recorded higher majority perceptions by proportion, a majority of older workers confirmed these two commonly assumed views of older workers.

Table 3: Comparison of negative stereotypes

Older workers are more likely to:	Employer Agree %	Employer Neither %	Employer Disagree %	Older Worker Agree %	Older Worker Neither %	Older Worker Disagree %
Resist change	60.1	22.8	17.1	49.4	15.9	34.7
Have problems with technology	55.4	28.4	16.2	48.8	18.3	32.9

The common findings relating to problems with technology were confirmed in both surveys by the results of a questions that asked which characteristics respondents associated with particular age groups. A majority of employers (66.9%) and a majority of older workers (63.3%) associated computer experience with the 15-29 year old age group.

On the positive side the top three views of the older worker by majority percentage were confirmed by both employers and workers. These related to “dependability” factors of reliability, loyalty and commitment.

Table 4: Comparison of positive stereotypes

Older workers are more likely to:	Employer Agree %	Employer Neither %	Employer Disagree %	Older Worker Agree %	Older Worker Neither %	Older Worker Disagree %
Be reliable	83.6	11.3	5.3	96.6	2.2	1.2
Be loyal	81.2	16	2.9	92.5	5.6	1.9
Be committed to the job	65.9	18.5	5.6	93.9	4.1	2.0

While many stereotypical views of the older worker were shared by older workers and employers alike there was one significant difference. A very low percentage of employers felt that older workers were ambitious (9.4%), compared with a much higher percentage of agreement with the view that older workers are more likely to be ambitious recorded in the older workers’ survey (42.1%).

The general similarity of perceptions about older workers among the two surveys has a number of implications, First, there is a general sense of value revealed in the “dependability” findings which indicates that employers have a sense of worth about the reliability of older workers. Second, the findings confirm important policy implications in relation to workforce training. To maximise productivity it is clear that older workers need to remain comfortable with, and equipped to cope with new technology and computer technology in particular. The findings demonstrate that employers, employees and society in general need to acknowledge that fewer older people are chosen for technology training at a time when many older people are planning to work longer. Both workers and employers acknowledge the stereotype of technophobia and age in the workplace and the challenge for policy-making is to address relevant training for older workers.

Differences- Training

Clearly training was a factor in the technophobia expressed by older workers. A surprising number of older employees felt that they were by-passed in selection for technology training because of their age. A comparison of the findings of the two surveys on the training question shows divergence between the views of older workers and employers. More employers agreed with the views that older workers were more likely to be both difficult to train and to be less willing to train. Over 50% of older workers disagreed with both statements while 30% and less of employers disagreed with the views.

Table 5: Comparison of views on training of older workers

Older workers are more likely to:	Employers Agree %	Older Workers Agree %
Be less willing to train	32.5	23.6
Be difficult to train	27.4	19.7

Again, these views should be of concern to policy agencies. The “greying” of the labour market and indications that older people intend staying longer in the workplace challenge New Zealand’s aspirations to be a knowledge economy. The human capital potential of relevantly trained older workers needs to be harnessed and exploited.

Similarities- Job Performance Decline

Debate about declining job performance and age is a constant theme in popular commentary on work and in research. What is significant about the two studies in relation to views on job performance decline is the gender bias revealed by both employers and older workers. The results from both surveys showed that more employers and more older workers who participated in the two studies felt that female job performance in manual work, and to a lesser degree in professional occupations, declined earlier than for men.

Table 6: Comparison of perceptions of job performance decline indexed to age

Age	Worker study. Male % manual	Worker study. Female % man.	Worker study. Male % Prof.	Worker study. Female % Prof.	Emplyr study. Male % Manual	Emplyr study. Female % man.	Emplyr study. Male % Prof.	Emplyr study. Female % Prof.
0-49	8.8	15.9	5.4	7.2	12.7	17.2	3.0	3.8
50-54	9.8	15.4	6.1	7.7	15.9	18.8	5.5	6.7
55-59	21.0	22.2	13.7	16.0	27.0	23.8	14.5	16.1
60-64	25.4	18.7	23.5	23.8	21.8	19.6	27.8	25.3
65-74	18.2	10.7	22.7	17.6	11.1	8.9	27.8	26.0
75 plus	0.9	1.0	8.9	7.0	0.5	0.5	1.3	1.6
No effect	15.8	16.0	19.7	20.7	10.9	11.3	20.1	20.5
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The double jeopardy of ageism and sexism is a serious issue, particularly when there is evidence that many women will have to remain longer in the workforce in view of their well-reported lesser financial security and as a consequence of government policy to increase the age-threshold at which older people are entitled to state-funded universal pension payments.

Further analysis of the findings by gender show a marked difference in the gender bias displayed about declining job performance. Respondents in one of the two surveys only, the older workers’ survey, were asked their gender. Both the majority of men (65.7%) and women

(61.5%) who replied believe that male job performance declines by 64 years of age. However, when considering female job performance, the majority of men (59.2%) believe that performance in manual occupations declines by 59 years. The majority of women, on the other hand, (61.1%) believe that female job performance declines at a similar age to men (by 64 years). Furthermore, considerably more women believe that age has no effect on performance, particularly for women.

When the data was analysed to consider the perceived age of job performance decline of men and women in professional jobs with responses separated by gender, a similar picture emerges. Considerably more women believe that age does not affect job performance. Those that do believe age impacts on performance consider that the age of decline is similar for men and women. Men, by contrast, consider that female job performance declines at a younger age than it does for men. Gender data is available only from the older workers study. Gender was not asked of respondents in the employers study. The results from the older workers study show that discriminatory attitudes about older women workers in relation to job performance are more likely to be held by men than women. Older women workers are clearly marginalised by discriminatory attitudes and work place practices that prevent females aged 55 and over achieving their full potential in the workplace.

References

Goedhart, W.J.A. (1992). Ageing and the work environment. *Ageing at work: proceedings of a European Colloquium, Paris, June, 1991*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, pp.57-66.

Griffiths, A. (1997). Ageing, health and productivity: a challenge for the new millenium. *Work and Stress*. Vol. 11, No.3, pp. 197-214.