

The Argument for Age Management

Chris Ball, chief executive of TAEN – the Age and Employment Network makes the case for age management as a vital skill for forward thinking organisations

The challenge of population change is stark: one in three workers will be over age 50 in 15 years time. Companies cannot afford to disregard one-third of the workforce, especially as in future there will be fewer young people to fill jobs. Companies excluding older people from their recruitment pools and failing to train older workers, will therefore have limited choices of talent, yet older people commonly feel neglected in the job market.

Keeping older workers fit, skilled and in every way able and willing to make an economic contribution, is what age management is all about. That is why it is important for businesses to understand its basic principles.

Maintaining the capability and willingness of workers to remain in work beyond ages at which they previously retired will be of central importance in coping with population aging. This will have to be accomplished while ensuring organisations achieve their business objectives. The term *age management* has been coined to describe the raft of interventions and approaches devised for this purpose.

Age management can take place at different levels, targeting measures at the individual, the enterprise or the labour market. Sometimes *age diversity* is used as a label for these kinds of interventions, but diversity is only one aspect of the bigger picture which age management encompasses. Age management at the enterprise level refers to managing an age *diverse*, though increasingly *aging* workforce.

Age management crosses a range of disciplines, including demographics, learning

and development, occupational health, work design, career planning among others. But the emphasis must be on prevention rather than cure – the prevention of de-skilling workers and avoidance of work-related health problems, although remedial measures may be needed as well, particularly where preventative interventions have not already been considered.

It is important to remember that age management focuses on the whole working life, not just on older workers. It seeks to achieve outcomes by applying a life-course perspective. It is therefore, inevitably, long-term in nature and definitely not a quick fix. Age management links individual interventions into a holistic programme that can be used to address business needs.

There is no right or wrong method of age management, though with a variety of approaches combinations may turn out to be particularly successful and therefore become accepted as best practice. The role of the HR professional will be to lead the drive for age management and judge the relevance of interventions. The term age management describes a developing sub-discipline of HR management, much as reward management, diversity management or employee relations are accepted as specialist areas today. For the approach to flourish in any organisation, leadership of committed HR professionals will be crucial.

Age management is not purely and simply about preventing age discrimination, changing attitudes and promoting age diversity, although it encompasses these actions. But age management implies reaching beyond the conventional policy

NEWS IN BRIEF

Employee engagement necessary for corporate success

Research by Towers Perrin demonstrates that employee engagement is essential for corporate success and is essentially the product of four factors:

- The perception of a fair reward system
- The belief that ideas are listened to
- The experience of learning and development
- The conviction that senior management cares about staff

The research examined responses from 90,000 workers in 18 countries. It reveals that the majority of workers are withholding the full range of their abilities. In the UK, only 14 per cent are "fully engaged" with their work. This has implications for the success of UK businesses as the research compared two groups of organisations based on engagement levels. Over 12 months, companies with highly engaged staff outperformed those with less engaged staff by a considerable margin. Those with highly engaged employees saw an average increase in operating income of 19.2 per cent, while those with below-average employee engagement saw it fall by an average of 32.7 per cent.

More information from www.towersperrin.com

Skills shortages a challenge to UK manufacturing

A survey by Russam GMS questioned 400 interim managers in manufacturing and found that 86 per cent feel that a skills shortage could hinder the progress of the sector.

Head of manufacturing practice at Russam GMS, John Wilson, said of the skills crises: "It is an issue that needs addressing now if UK manufacturing companies want to retain their competitive edge in the future". The survey shows that the skills shortage appears to be particularly pronounced at managerial level.

More information from: http://www.russam-gms.co.uk/media_a.cfm

Many employers are failing to tackle ageist policies

Recent research released by Cranfield School of Management in association with Personnel Today magazine shows that a quarter of the 582 senior managers in the UK were aware of a policy or practice in their organisation which could be perceived as discriminatory on the grounds of age.

Of particular concern in the light of our lead article this month (The Argument for Age Management by Chris Ball of TAEN) is that one in 10 respondents felt that their board or senior management were the cause of ageism in the workplace.

The research also revealed that stereotypical views of both older and younger workers still prevail, with older workers seen as being loyal, reliable, better at time-keeping, and younger staff as being ambitious and having new ideas, but also as unskilled and less likely to stay in a particular role.

Emma Parry, research fellow at Cranfield School of Management, said: "The research shows a lack of commitment at senior management and board level to stamp out ageism in the workplace. The message to business is clear: age discrimination is illegal. HR professionals need board and CEO-level support to stamp out age discrimination for good."

Flexible working set to increase

The emergence of "virtual jobs" and "virtual communities" is changing how companies attract and retain skills staff. Smarter organisations reduce costs by adopting remote working as a regular employment solution.

This is according to Ken Sheridan, managing director of Remote Employment, who also believes that the "green agenda" will increase homeworking, which will make it much easier for families to combine work and caring responsibilities. Flexible working at senior level is becoming more acceptable, which will encourage more men to ask for flexible arrangements, enabling them to participate more fully in family life without a cost to their career ambitions.

More information from www.remoteemployment.com

New International Innovative Employers Award

Over the past eight years the US based AARP has run an award programme for companies in the United States with the best HR policies for employees aged 50+.

TAEN – the Age and Employment Network - is now linking with the AARP to provide UK employers with the chance to enter a new international version - the AARP International Innovative Employer Award. It is intended to recognise employers who have demonstrated innovative workforce or human resources policies and practices that address issues relevant to employees of all ages but in particular to those in mid and later work life.

The UK winner will receive an invitation to the prestigious awards ceremony in Chicago on 6th October 2008. International recognition and an increased public profile will be just two of the hallmarks of achievement and the

programme of events will provide opportunities to network, gain knowledge and contacts with a wide range of business leaders in the US.

In this the first year of its new International Innovative Employer Award, the AARP is linking with TAEN and other similar organisations in Singapore, Germany and Japan, to found a multinational award that allows age positive policies to be show-cased in a genuinely global context.

The closing date for entries is the 30th April.

For more information please follow the link. http://www.aarpinternational.org/conference/conference_show.htm?doc_id=542056

For information or advice from TAEN contact us on info@taen.org.uk

For more information about all IPA services - visit www.ipa-involve.com



Involvement & Participation Association

42 Colebrooke Row, London N1 8AF

Tel: 020 7354 8040 Fax: 020 7354 8041

E-mail: involve@ipa-involve.com Website: www.ipa-involve.com

IPA Bulletin, ISSN 1472 – 5363