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Cognitive Health Issues in the Workplace

Karen Devereaux Melillo

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UMass Lowell Gerontology
Community-Engaged Research

Cognitive Health Issues in the Workplace
Karen Devereaux Melillo, Director

Center for Gerontology Research & Partnerships; Regional Consortium of Community-Engaged Gerontology Researchers
Aging Workforce Demographics

- Nearly 50% of all pre-retirees expected to continue working into their 70’s and 18% into their 80’s (Brown, 2003).
- 55-75 year-old segment of workforce expected to grow by 11M (about 25% of total workforce) over next 10 years (Toossi, 2009).
- Experiences of older adults who continue to work after retirement age addressed in recent years’ literature.
- 2nd career option highly attractive to workers in the 2nd half of their life (Survey by MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures, 2008).
**Major Factor for Decision to Work in Retirement**

Among retirees who plan to work in retirement, the major factor is as follows:

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*Base: Pre-Retirees Who Plan to Work in Retirement, n=1020*

Question 6a: “Which of the things we just talked about is the ONE major factor in your decision to work in retirement?”
Cognitive Health in Older Workers

Is this a problem?

- The cognitive health of older workers and its impact on job demands, new learning, and safety in the work environment have not been well studied.
- This area of research is critical if we are to understand and impact this growing workforce.
The Social Ecology Model of Health Promotion (McLeroy, Steckler & Burdine, 1992) is applicable for promoting cognitive health in older working adults and in promoting healthy, safe working environments for older adults (Melillo, 2013).

- Limited research-based evidence in Human Resource literature could be found.
- Concerns center on how to avoid litigation and compliance with ADA.
What does research have to say?

Healthy workplaces: WHO global model for action

- Enterprises expected to go beyond their legal requirements and act more responsibly
- Creating workplaces healthy for all employees
- No existing comprehensive scheme for good practice

Areas for potential research can be identified through the five inter-related levels of inquiry:

- Intrapersoanal
- Interpersonal
- Institutional
- Community, and
- Public policy
### Table: Factors to Enhance Workplace Climate for Older Workers

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Adapted from Bol and Visser (2011); Koopman-Boyden and MacDonald (2003); Loy (2011); and Work Safe Alberta (2006).

Intrapersonal

Areas for Investigation

- Assessment of individual physical and mental health and its effect on cognitive well-being and learning
- Family history of cognitive loss, genetic predisposition
- Response to life stressors
- Life style habits
Interpersonal

Areas for Investigation

- Family caregiving stress and responsibilities
- Social support
- Job stress
- Work life balance
- Socioeconomic status
- Culture and ethnicity
Institutional Areas for Investigation

- Work place health programs
- Physical work environment
- Psychosocial work environment
- Learning environment
- Shift work
- Safety climate & safety culture
- Policies to protect workers’ safety, health, and well-being
- Cost-effectiveness of workplace safety & health programs
- Management philosophies
Community

Areas for Investigation

- Access to physical activity resources
- Media campaigns for promoting well being
- Community access to healthy food choices
Public Policy

Areas for Investigation

- Administration on Aging
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- National Institute on Aging
- National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- AARP
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- Executive Office of Elder Affairs (Mass Gov.)
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Community-Engaged Research

Promoting Interprofessional Collaboration

- Healthy workplaces: A WHO global model for action
  Five keys to healthy workplaces identified:
  1. Leadership commitment and engagement
  2. Involve workers and their representatives
  3. Business ethics and legality
  4. Use a systematic, comprehensive process to ensure effectiveness and continual improvement
  5. Sustainability and integration

Questions?

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