Cognitive Health Issues in the Workplace

Karen Devereaux Melillo

University of Massachusetts Lowell
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
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

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

Social Ecology Model of Health Promotion

Research Approaches

- Areas for potential research can be identified through the five inter-related levels of inquiry:
  - Intrapersonal
  - Interpersonal
  - Institutional
  - Community, and
  - Public policy
Factors to Enhance Workplace Climate for Older Workers

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Adapted from Bal 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
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
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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Introduction

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

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Cognitive Health in Older Workers

Is this a problem?

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