



Career Snapshot

October 2010

Survey #1: Older Workers

This first survey of the **Career Snapshots** series, features members' views about older workers - their unique contributions, factors impeding their participation in the workforce, and the nature of the career and transition issues most relevant to them.

The recent [Intergenerational Report](#) from the Australian Government, highlights the need for people to work beyond the traditional retirement age. It signals that by 2050, nearly one-quarter of Australia's population will be aged 65 and over, and that there will be only 2.7 people of working age for every person 65 and over. (This compares to 13 percent and 5 people respectively today).

The report goes on to suggest that the participation of older workers in the workforce must increase and skills gaps must be bridged for Australia to prosper. While these sentiments are echoed by business, older workers still report significant barriers to their employability.

The findings of this survey support these views and offer additional important insights. Respondents are career professionals working in business, primary, secondary and higher education, VET, community organisations, industry associations and government.

Summary Findings

Age in itself can be and often is a barrier to employment.

57.1% of survey respondents indicated that discrimination against older workers is very or extremely widespread. Most - 83.8% - believe that discriminatory attitudes of employers and other employees impede the employment of older workers.

Although the issue of age discrimination is gaining more attention in the media, members' clients consistently relate experiences where potential employers have implicitly or explicitly stated that they are too old for the job for which they have applied. This can be couched as concerns about

Career Snapshots

is a series of surveys of CDAA members that focuses on Australia's most pressing career development issues. The results of the surveys provide the unique perspective of career professionals working directly with students, job seekers, employees and employers.



CDAA holds a unique position in the career development industry as Australia's only national, cross-sectoral career development association. We have built a reputation both nationally and internationally as the leading career association in this country and, through the work of our members, continue to contribute to quality employment and education outcomes for hundreds of thousands of Australians each year.

team fit, being overqualified, lack of up-to-date skills, inflexibility, slowness or unwillingness to learn or concerns about health and fitness.

While a change in employer attitudes is also being detected, respondents indicate that it is common for their clients to be:

- overlooked for training and rewards programs;
- encounter strong resistance to moving into entry level positions required for career change;
- considered not as productive as younger counterparts; and
- overlooked for career opportunities.

Unique contributions of older workers

According to respondents, the top four attributes that older workers bring to the workplace are:

- experience and knowledge;
- Maturity;
- strong commitment and work ethic; and
- reliability.

Also ranked highly were: advanced technical skills, commercial awareness, ability to mentor, loyalty, and flexibility.

While these attributes are commonly accepted, there is a disconnect expressed throughout the survey between what older workers offer and impediments to their continuing ability to make productive and meaningful contributions at work.

Older workers can hold themselves back as well

Despite having a wealth of experience and knowledge, the survey indicates that older workers can be restricted by factors including:

- lack of up-to-date technology skills;
- low levels of personal confidence;
- inability to market their transferable skills;
- poor career management skills;
- lack of knowledge about education and training opportunities; and
- inability to "re-invent" themselves and to tap into the broader employment market.

While a significant majority of respondents - 77.9% - do not believe that older workers are greatly restricted by outdated skills, many point to the inadequacy of computer literacy in particular, among their clients.

In addition, most - 84% - believe older workers see themselves as being locked into their current employment situation, generally due to the factors listed above and an unwillingness to risk career transition due to discriminatory attitudes.

Keeping older workers in the workforce – flexibility is the key

The top 3 factors that respondents indicate will encourage older workers to remain in the workforce are:

- flexible hours and work practices (85.3%);
- supportive workplace cultures (74.4%); and
- opportunities to mentor (69.7%).

It seems that both attitudinal change and shifts in management practices need to occur to engage older workers. Opportunities to work flexible hours, to job share, and to be employed in meaningful and explicitly valued work, commensurate with their knowledge and experience are important.

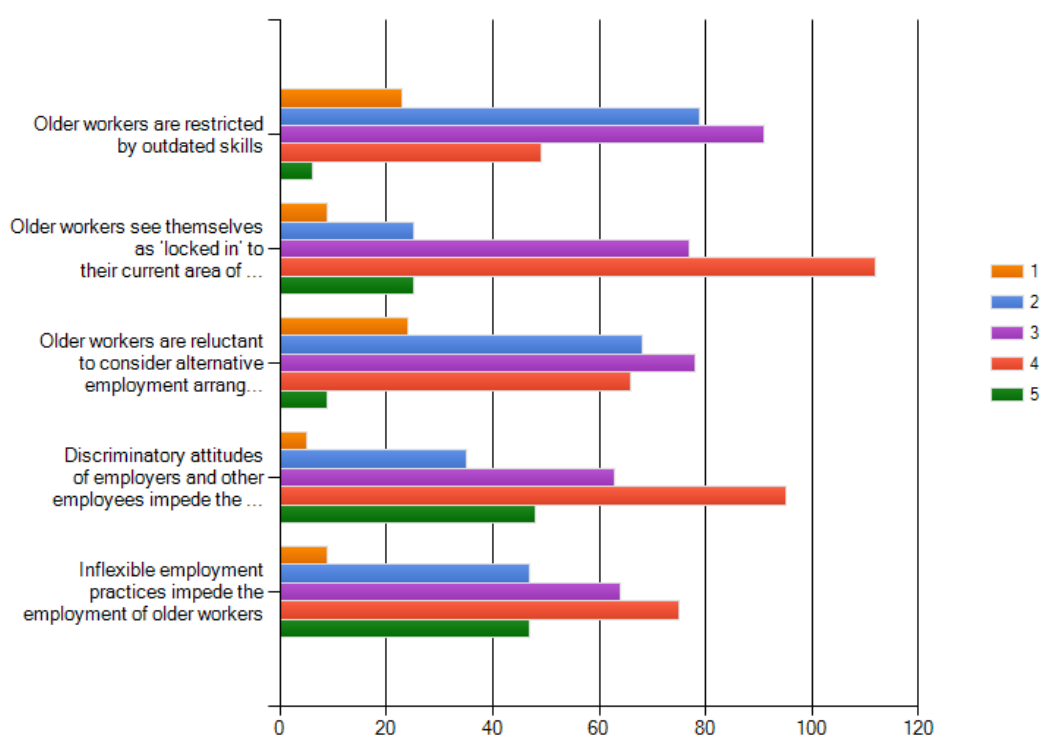
As well, older workers, like all workers, look for supportive working environments. There is widespread concern that this is not the case in many workplaces. They also value the opportunity to mentor and train younger workers.

Older workers need to become better at managing their careers

Most of the survey respondents - 79.1% - believe older workers do not manage their careers well. They believe that older workers are constrained by:

- being out of touch with education and training options;
- being tentative about their skills and abilities being sufficient;
- not understanding the benefits as well as having the skills of effective career management;
- lack of investment in planning their work lives;
- tendency to be fixed in their ideas of the types of work they will do or are suited to;
- being less proactive about asking for what they want from employers than their younger counterparts; and
- outdated attitudes about job mobility.

On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (a large extent) indicate to what extent the following statements are true:



What employers and governments can do better

Respondents are quick to point out that the factors affecting the participation of older workers in employment varies greatly among industry sectors as well as type of employment, for example – trades, semi-skilled, para-professional or professional.

However, strong themes to emerge from survey responses that suggest ways to improve the engagement of older workers lie in the provision of:

- greater flexibility in work arrangements;
- widely available career transition and career management seminars and workshops;
- greater investment in workplace training for this cohort;
- national system of career information and advice incorporating whole-of-career lifespan;
- campaigns to promote the benefits of older workers to employers and to improve career awareness among older workers;
- incentives for older workers to stay on, especially in areas of skills shortages and to contribute to the recruitment, training and mentoring of younger workers;
- talent management programs and policies that include older workers; and
- added incentives to employers to retain and train older workers.

Join Australia's strongest and widest network of Career Development Professionals

As a Corporate Member your business will gain access to:

- Weblink and logo on the Corporate Members page of the CDAA website
- Annual certificate of membership
- CDAA corporate membership logo
- Inclusion of your corporate logo in an issue of Career Connections e-news
- Annual subscription to the quarterly .Australian Career Practitioner (ACP) magazine
- Subscription to the fortnightly CDAA e-bulletin
- 10% discount on membership fees for Professional or Associate Memberships where the Corporate Member joins employees as individual members of CDAA
- Advance notice of, and access to Corporate Member rates for corporate CDAA activities and events
- Priority access to sponsorship and exhibition opportunities
- Advance notification of CDAA Awards, including the Employer of the Year



Corporate Membership

Annual subscription for Corporate Membership is \$550.00 (inc. GST)

**Become a Corporate Member today. Apply online at
www.cdaa.org.au/content/corporate-membership-application**

CDAA International Career Conference

CAIRNS CONVENTION CENTRE, CAIRNS AUSTRALIA 26-29 APRIL 2011



- ⚡ An exceptional conference program is on offer. The conference program starts from 4.30pm on Tuesday 26 April.
- ⚡ The program includes a number of highly acclaimed international and national speakers and keynotes – Professor Mark Savickas, USA; Dr Mary Sue Richardson, USA; Professor Leung Seung-Ming, Alvin, Hong Kong and Ms Ellen Fanning, Australia.
- ⚡ The pre-conference Masterclass with Prof Mark Savickas, sets the scene on Tuesday morning and is followed in the afternoon by three concurrent sessions themed for Researchers, Schools Practitioners and Private Practitioners.
- ⚡ The social program will include a casual, true Australian evening in the local Blue Sky Brewery and a themed 'Go Troppo' conference dinner on the Thursday evening.

What's it all about?
Career Development: Retrospective and Perspective

For complete information on the conference program, pre- and post-touring options, how to get there, what you need to do, access the website:

www.cdaa.org.au

More contact information:
Conference Organiser - T: +61 2 6288 3998 E: cdaa@ongconferences.com.au
CDAA National Office - Tel: 1800 222 390 (In Australia) Email: executiveofficer@cdaa.org.au