



UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF NEW ZEALAND'S AGEING WORKFORCE

A FUTURE OF WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

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1. Executive Summary

Like many countries, New Zealand's workforce is ageing. New Zealand has among the highest rates of employees aged over 55 years of all OECD countries, which is expected to rise further in the coming years. This study aims to gain a better understanding of the needs of New Zealand's mature-age workers, particularly how management practices impact on the retention, productivity and wellbeing of our ageing workforce.

The findings of this report are informed by 1238 survey responses completed by workers aged 55 years and over employed in organisations throughout New Zealand. Analysis of the data revealed a 1.5 year difference between ideal and realistic retirement ages and a generally stable mature-age workforce, with less than 20% currently considering quitting their job. The large majority of respondents were free from health issues and were happy overall with the quality of their life.

The perceived prevalence of age discrimination for respondents in this study was relatively low. However, the findings did indicate concerns that biases held by managers are affecting decisions about mature-age workers and approximately one in four respondents disagreed that there was a strong appreciation of the value of older workers in their organisation.

The study shows that HR practices most commonly present in New Zealand organisations include aspects relating to training and development, manager training, compensation management and some aspects of job design are less common. Recognition and respect for mature-age workers, and flexible work options, were considered the most important HR practices by respondents.

Thematic analysis of free text data revealed that flexible work, job design and the challenging or meaningful nature of work were factors that would enable the continued employment of mature-age workers. Personal factors that most commonly determined the ability or desire of mature-age workers to continue working included their continued good health, and financial responsibilities.

The findings of this study indicate that New Zealand's mature-age workers experience relatively high levels of wellbeing and relatively low levels of age discrimination. While it appears that HR practices in New Zealand organisations fare well in regards to flexible working arrangements and performance appraisals, New Zealand organisations and their mature-age workers could benefit from an increased focus on training to reduce perceived biases and age-discriminatory behaviour of managers, and benefit from greater focus on job design to accommodate the needs of mature-age workers.

2. Introduction

Like much of the industrialised world, New Zealand's workforce is ageing with rising participation rates of mature-age workers. Among OECD countries, New Zealand recorded the second highest employment rate of people aged 55-64 years in 2012 and 2013, and third highest of people aged 65-69 years in 2012 (OECD, 2014). In June 2014, 22% of workers in New Zealand were aged 55 years or over (Statistics NZ, 2014). Government figures predict that this proportion will rise to 25% by 2020, with many likely to remain working beyond 65 years. Indeed, the proportion of the labour force aged 65 or over (currently 5%) is expected to increase to 13% by 2036 (Statistics NZ, 2012).

A range of reasons are likely to be causing workers of the industrialised world to have a longer working life. Factors operating at a societal or industry level, such as the increasing availability of quality part-time work and flexible work arrangements, improved health at older ages, delayed childbearing leading to older parenting ages, a national superannuation scheme that commences at 65 years of age and allows individuals to remain in employment, and a lack of alternative superannuation options are likely to be having an effect (Alpass & Mortimer, 2013; Jackson et al., 2013; McPherson 2012). So too are factors operating within the organisational or work context, including HR practices, the workplace climate, age discriminatory behaviour, perceived organisational support, and support from co-workers and managers (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Davey, 2014; Hennekam & Herrbach, 2013; Mountford, 2013; Naudé et al., 2009).

In order to gain a better understanding of the current situation in New Zealand, the New Zealand Work Research Institute (NZWRI) and research partners from the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (EEO Trust), Massey University, and the University of Waikato, conducted a study that asks: How do organisational systems, processes and practices for managing mature-age workers impact on the retention, productivity and wellbeing of individual mature-age workers, and how are these outcomes influenced by the presence or absence of age discriminatory behaviour? The study involved an online survey of individual workers aged 55 years or older, working across a variety of roles within New Zealand organisations who are members of the EEO Trust.



3. Method

The study involved the use of an online questionnaire survey of mature-age workers (aged 55 years or over) from a range of levels and different job types within participating organisations. A list of approximately 32 EEO Trust organisational members (usually HR or diversity managers) who wished to participate in the Mature-Age Worker Survey was provided to the researchers. These organisations were taken from the cohort of 272 organisations which participated in the earlier 'Engaging an ageing workforce' survey, undertaken by NZWRI in collaboration with the EEO Trust. These managers distributed an invitation to participate in the survey to some or all workers aged 55 years or over within their organisations. Respondents who wished to participate (the survey was voluntary) then clicked on a URL link and were taken directly to the survey. The survey was completed online and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Respondents submitted their completed surveys directly to the researchers who analysed the data using SPSS. In total, 1238 respondents from the 32 organisations completed the survey.

4. Results

4.1 Sample demographics

Of the 1238 respondents, 412 were male (33.3%) and 826 were female (66.7%). Approximately half of the respondents were aged 55-59 years, while only 2 respondents were over 75 years of age (see Table 1).

Age	N	%
55-59 years	594	48.0
60-64 years	427	34.5
65-69 years	179	14.5
70-74 years	36	2.9
75-79 years	2	.2
Total	1238	100.0

Table 1: The number and percentage of respondents by age

Three-quarters of the respondents were married or living with a partner at the time of the survey, 16.9% were separated or divorced, while 4.8% were widowed and 4.4% were single. 82.6% (n=1022) of the respondents identified their ethnicity as New Zealand European, while 9.4% of respondents identified themselves as other European (n=116), and 5.3% of respondents identified as Maori/Cook Island Maori (n=65). Less than 2% of respondents identified as Indian (n=16), Chinese (n=12) or Pasifika (n=8).

Respondents were employed in a range of organisations throughout New Zealand. 89.5% (n=1108) of respondents were employed in large organisations employing more than 200 staff. 9.0% (n=112) of respondents were employed in medium-sized organisations (20-199 employees), while only 1.5% of respondents (n=18) came from small organisations employing fewer than 20 people. As shown in Table 2, approximately one-third of respondents were employed in healthcare and social assistance (29.7%), while another third of the respondents came from financial and insurance (17.5%) or administrative and support services (12.3%).

Of the 1238 respondents, 37 (3.0%) had been working in their current organisation for less than one year. Over one-third of the respondents had been employed in their current organisation for between 1-10 years, while approximately half of respondents had been working in their current organisation for between 11-40 years. 48 (3.9%) respondents had been employed in their current organisation for more than 40 years.

The significant majority of respondents were permanent employees in their organisation (n=1132, 91.4%), while few respondents were temporary/fixed-term employees (n=54) or contractors (n=22). Two-thirds of respondents (n=841, 67.9%) worked 40 or more hours per week. Only 4% (n=51) of respondents worked less than 20 hours per week, while 29.7% (n=346) worked between 20 - 40 hours per week. Of the 1238 respondents, 792 (64%) were non-managerial employees, 124 (10%) were first-line supervisors, and 250 (20.2%) were mid-level managers. A further 72 (5.8%) were senior managers/executives. The majority of respondents (n=813, 65.7%) worked as members of a team all of the time, while much fewer worked as members of a team for only a portion of their working week. Only nine respondents reported never working as a member of a team.

Industry Sector	Number of respondents	%
Health care and social assistance	368	29.7
Financial and insurance services	217	17.5
Administrative and support services	152	12.3
Education and training	104	8.4
Public administration and safety	79	6.4
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	72	5.8
Information media and telecommunications	55	4.4
Professional, scientific and technical services	46	3.7
Retail trade	23	1.9
Arts and recreation services	22	1.8
Other industry sector	99	7.9

Table 2: The number and percentage of respondents by industry sector

4.2 Retirement, reduced hours and quit intentions

The survey asked respondents a number of questions about their retirement intentions and future plans in relation to their work. These questions were asked to gauge the extent to which the sample were considering retirement and their personal ability to do so, planning to move to part time work, or quitting their job in the coming years. We also examined whether these future work intentions differed between the groups within our sample.

4.2.1 Retirement intentions

Respondents were asked at what age they would like to retire and at what age can they realistically retire. The mean ages and difference between each are shown below in Table 3. The difference score of 1.5 years suggests a marked disparity between ideal and realistic retirement ages. The preferred retirement age is nearly one full year beyond the traditional retirement age of 65 years, while the realistic retirement age is nearly two and a half years beyond the traditional retirement age. The difference score of 1.5 years is the mean period during which respondents are continuing work beyond the time they would like to retire, and is largely a financial choice.

At what age would you like to retire? Mean (sd)	At what age can you realistically retire? Mean (sd)	Difference between 'like' and 'can' Mean
65.9 (5.7)	67.4 (5.6)	1.5 years

Table 3: Retirement intentions of mature-age workers

4.2.2 Reducing work hours

Respondents were asked whether they planned to reduce their work hours or go part-time. The data were split fairly evenly between 'yes, plan to reduce work hours' (37%), 'no' (34%) and unsure (30%). The age of the respondent was not significantly associated with whether they planned to reduce their hours, nor was organisational level (management, supervision, non-managerial).

4.2.3 Intentions to quit

Respondents were asked a series of questions that sought to determine whether they intended quitting their job (Table 4). The findings suggest that the mature-age workforce is fairly stable overall, with under 20% seriously planning to quit their job.

Statement	Agreement
Thoughts about quitting this job cross my mind	'Often' or 'Always' 19%
I plan to look for a new job within the next 12 months	'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' 13%
How likely is it that, over the next year, you will actively look for a new job outside of this organisation?	'Moderately likely' or 'very likely' 11%

Table 4: Intention to quit

4.3 Wellbeing and satisfaction

This section considers a number of wellbeing and health factors that might impact on mature-age workers' workability and retention in the workforce.

4.3.1 Life satisfaction

Respondents were asked a set of questions concerned with their perceived life satisfaction. The majority of mature-age workers in our sample appear happy with their life conditions and quality of life. Life satisfaction was positively correlated with job satisfaction ($r=.326$, $p<.001$) and performance ($r=.189$, $p<.001$), and negatively correlated with age discrimination ($r=-.119$, $p<.001$) and intention to quit their job ($r=-.267$, $p<.001$).

4.3.2 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured using Warr et al.'s widely used single-item measure: 'Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied do you feel with your job as a whole?' Responses were obtained on a 7-point scale bounded from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied). This particular measure has been used with other New Zealand national population surveys thereby enabling normative comparisons. The mean value of 5.53 (SD=1.40) is approximately in-line with that found for two national population surveys of New Zealand employees (2005 mean= 5.45, SD=1.39; 2009 mean=5.95, SD=1.43) in studies by Macky and Boxall (2008), suggesting that mature-age workers are not notably different from the general working population in relation to their contentment with work. Unsurprisingly, job satisfaction was negatively related to intention to quit the organisation ($r=-.54$, $p=.001$).

4.3.3 Injury, health and disability

Respondents were asked whether they had on-going injury, health or disability issues that affect them at work. While the large majority answered no to this question and were therefore free from injury, health or disability-related factors impacting their work performance and experience, almost 17% were affected by such health problems. Respondents' perceived experience of symptoms of ill-health was found to be very low, with a mean rating of 4.5/5 for a list of 13 common symptoms of physical ill-health over the past six-months. Interestingly, physical health was positively related to job satisfaction ($r=.26$; $p<.01$) and performance ($r=.12$; $p<.01$), and negatively related to intention to quit ($r=.11$; $p<.01$).

4.4 Attitudes and behaviours towards mature-age workers

Respondents were asked about their experience of age discrimination in the workforce. Overall, the perceived prevalence of age discrimination was relatively low. Just 2% reported experiencing age discrimination several times a week or daily during the past 12 months, with a further 17% experiencing age discrimination at least now and then. This finding is in-line with the reports from employers and HR managers in the 'Engaging an ageing workforce' survey', where managers and employers perceived the level of age discrimination to be low in their organisations.

However, as Table 5 indicates, there are some concerning areas of age discrimination amongst the organisations represented in the survey, including biases held by managers that affect decisions about older workers. Furthermore, a concerning proportion of respondents disagreed that there was a strong appreciation for the value of older workers at their organisation.

Age-discriminatory attitude or behaviour	Aggregated 'agree' (%)	Aggregated 'disagree' (%)
A strong appreciation of the value of older workers	38	25
Widely held negative stereotypes about older workers	20	46
Biases held by managers that affect decisions about older workers	23	40
Age-neutral management decisions and practices	47	17
Age-discriminatory behaviour regarding job assignments	16	46
Age-discriminatory behaviour regarding opportunities for individual promotion	21	39
Age-discriminatory behaviour regarding performance evaluation	13	48
Age-discriminatory behaviour regarding opportunities for personal and professional development of employees	20	46
Age-discriminatory behaviour in the daily leadership of older workers	15	50

Table 5: Age discrimination perceived by respondents

Groups associated with higher levels of discrimination included female respondents ($r=.095$; $p<.01$), and those in lower level organisational roles ($r=.12$; $p<.001$). Perceived age-discriminatory behaviour was also related to negative outcomes for the organisation, being negatively related to job satisfaction ($r=-.209$; $p<.001$) and productivity ($r=-.089$; $p=.038$), and positively related to intention to quit ($r=.261$; $p<.001$).

4.5 HR practices supporting mature-age workers

4.5.1 HR practices engaged in by respondents' organisations

Respondents were asked to what extent their organisation currently engaged in a wide range of human resource practices to support mature-age workers. Figure 1 shows the proportion currently engaged with or highly engaged with for each practice, as perceived by the survey respondents. These items include seven areas of practice: flexible working arrangements (blue), job design (green), employee training (yellow), management training (red), performance evaluation (purple), compensation management (orange), and recognition and respect (pink). These areas are denoted by colour (as shown above) in Figure 1 below.

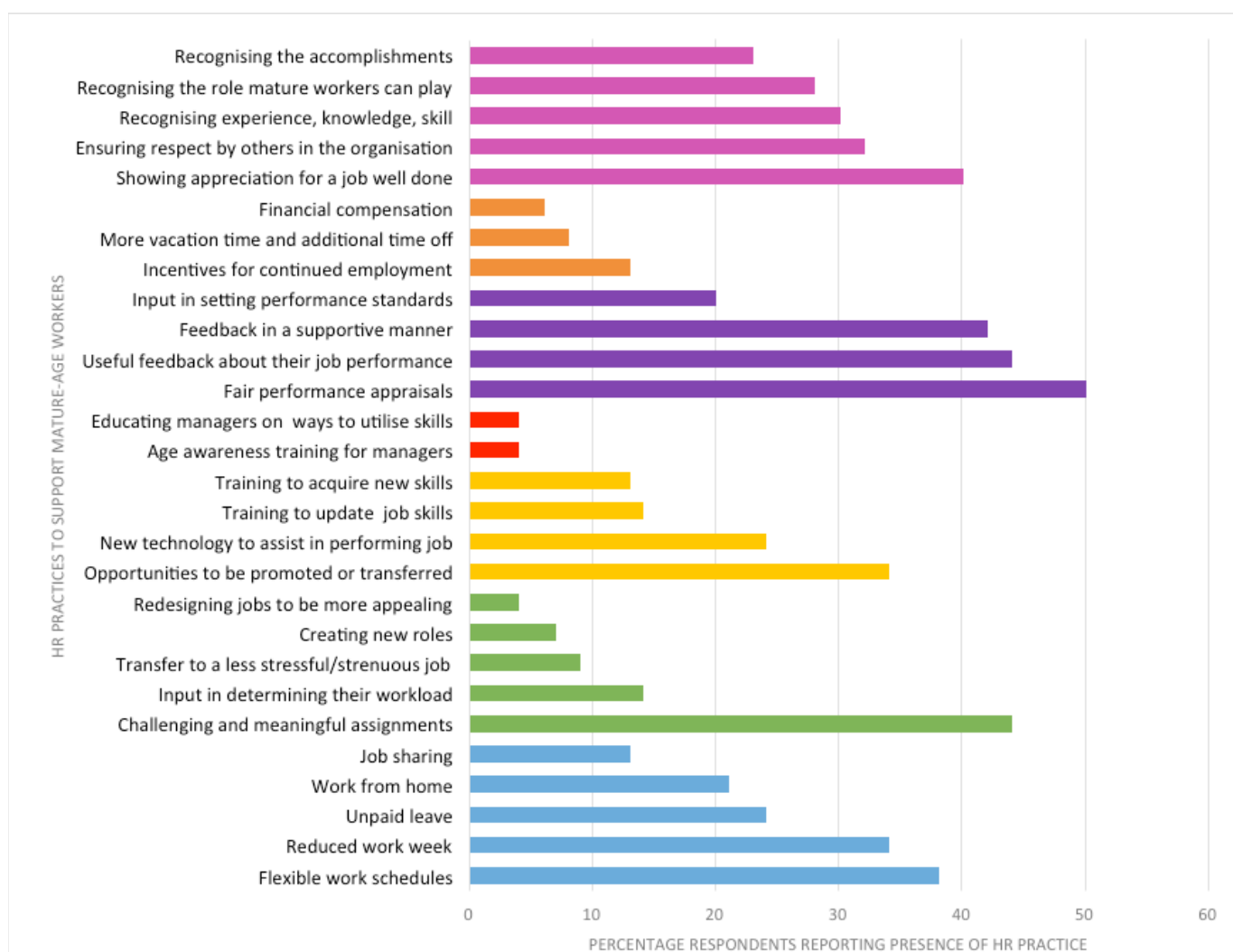


Figure 1. HR practices respondents' organisations currently engage with

The findings show that respondents rated their organisations as fairly strong on most flexible working, performance management and recognition and respect aspects, but weak on areas associated with manager training, compensation management and some aspects of job design.

4.5.2 Respondents' rating of HR practice importance

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of importance that a subset of HR practices from the above section have for their engagement and retention in the workplace (Table 6).

HR practice	Mean importance (scale:1-5)	Proportion rating practice as 'important' or 'extremely important' (%)
Recognition and respect	4.3 ($\sigma=1.0$)	81
Flexible work options	4.0 ($\sigma=1.2$)	68
Compensation options	3.8 ($\sigma=1.3$)	57
Job design options	3.7 ($\sigma=1.4$)	51
Training and development opportunities	3.6 ($\sigma=1.3$)	51
Performance evaluation	3.5 ($\sigma=1.3$)	50

Table 6: Respondents' ratings of importance of HR practices

Recognition and respect outweighed other practices as most important to respondents. The other highly rated practice was flexible work options – in line with the findings from the ‘Engaging an ageing workforce’ survey. The relatively high rankings for compensation options and job design are in contrast to the perceived provision of these practices in respondents’ organisations.

4.5.3 Respondents’ qualitative responses regarding desirable practices

Respondents were asked to provide free text responses to a question asking what personal, job and organisational factors that would enable them to continue working within their organisation as they age. Analysis of the free text data revealed a number of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that enable mature-age workers to continue their employment, many of which were similar to the areas of HR practice featured in Figure 1. The key themes and related sub-themes that were identified from the free text data are summarised in Tables 7, 8 and 9 below. Note that these factors include both factors enabling the continuing employment of mature-age workers, and non-present factors that would be required in order to prevent the exit of mature-age workers.

As shown in Table 7 below, the most important organisational factor that respondents believed would enable them to continue working in their organisation was flexibility, with over half of the respondents who answered this question (n=1135) reporting their desire or need to work from home, have the opportunity for flexible or reduced hours, or the opportunity for extended or flexible leave. Some 15% of respondents mentioned features of the workplace as enabling them to continue working in the organisation as they aged. Having a comfortable and safe working environment was important to many respondents, while others mentioned more specific features, particularly relating to mobility and ergonomics. Having sufficient resources and the appropriate technology to operate efficiently in the workplace also emerged as of importance to mature-age workers. The stability of their job was recognised as important by 135 respondents, many of whom acknowledged the potential for age discrimination and job insecurity created by frequent restructuring. A further 113 (10%) respondents raised a number of financial, health-related and comfort-related benefits, while 102 (9%) respondents acknowledged the importance of continuing training and development opportunities.

Theme	N (1135)	%	Sub-themes	
Flexibility	597	52.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working remotely Glide time 	Reduced hours Extended/flexible leave
Workplace features	170	15.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comfortable/safe work environment Ergonomic features (desks, chairs, occ. health) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobility features (lifts, accessible facilities) Sufficient resources/tools Technology
Stability	135	11.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remuneration Freedom from discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliable work/extended contracts Protection from restructuring
Benefits	113	10.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff benefits/discounts Facilities KiwiSaver/super Medical/health insurance Gym memberships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking Health checks Counselling Wellness programmes
Training and development	102	9.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study support Training for/during change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development Up-skilling opportunities

Table 7: Organisational factors supporting the ongoing employment of mature-age workers

Respondents also reported a range of job-related factors that would enable them to continue working in their current organisation (see Table 8). Approximately one-quarter of respondents (n=286, 25.2%) reported that aspects of job design would enable them to continue working in the organisation. Respondents explained that, as they age, they will require a reduced workload, less physical activity, and/or a workload that allows for more time seated. Desirable shifts and reduced travel also emerged as important. One in five respondents mentioned the importance of the nature of the work itself, using words such as interesting, challenging, and meaningful to explain the type of work that would encourage them to stay, while 120 respondents reported factors relating to their experience as mature workers, such as the desire to be given responsibility and opportunities to use their skills and knowledge. A further 14.1% of respondents mentioned aspects of their team environment as encouraging them to continue work, while 1.8% specifically mentioned the importance of strong leadership and communication.

Theme	N (1135)	%	Sub-themes	
Job design	286	25.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload reduction • Less physical activity • Sedentary work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and assistance • Desirable hours • Reduced travel
Nature of work	231	20.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety • Interesting • Challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful • Satisfying • Stimulating
Interaction	160	14.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleague/customer interaction • Sense of belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive culture • Teamwork
Recognition of experience	120	10.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to use skills/knowledge • Autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility • Trust • Respect and appreciation
Management	20	1.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direction and clarity

Table 8: Job factors supporting the ongoing employment of mature-age workers

Some 856 respondents reported personal factors that supported their ongoing employment. Of these, approximately half acknowledged that their health was the primary determinant of whether they would be able to continue to work (see Table 9). One in five respondents reported that they continued to work for financial reasons particularly needing to support dependents or ill family members, having to pay a mortgage, or wanting to save for travel. Another 146 respondents (17.1%) reported work-related factors that supported their personal circumstances, such as being allowed flexible leave to look after family members or attend medical appointments. Enjoyment and work that suited their lifestyle was the primary cause of 75 respondents' (8.8%) continuing employment, while 25 (2.9%) acknowledged that the support of family members allowed them to continue working. Few respondents (n=35, 4.1%) also reported that location, either living close to work or staying in New Zealand, has enabled them to continue working for their current organisation.

Theme	N (856)	%	Sub-themes	
Health	418	48.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-related illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness
Money dependencies	177	20.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependents • Mortgage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family health • Travel
Work Support	146	17.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work flexibility • Extended leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive management
Enjoyment/Lifestyle	75	8.8		
Location	35	4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living close to work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying in New Zealand
Family Support	25	2.9		



5. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of New Zealand's ageing workforce; mature-aged workers' perceptions and experiences of work and factors that contributed to their workability and their retention in the workforce. This study was principally interested in the HR systems, processes and practices employed by New Zealand organisations for managing mature-age workers, alongside the retirement and future work intentions of those approaching retirement age. The study was also interested in how these outcomes are influenced by the presence or absence of age-discriminatory behaviour. Building on an earlier study by this research team that looked at managers' perceptions of organisational efforts to engage an ageing workforce productivity, the present study provided employee data on these factors that could be compared with responses from managers in the same organisation.

The finding that 1.5 years separates the preferred and realistic retirement ages of respondents suggests financial considerations, including retirement funds and superannuation value are keeping many in the workforce beyond traditional retirement age. It is important that organisations seek to maintain the productive engagement of employees at this stage through the use of supportive HR practices as some will be reluctantly remaining in the workforce.

Around two-thirds of respondents either did not plan to reduce their working hours as they aged further, or were unsure about whether they would go part-time. This finding may suggest that mature-age workers either feel there is not an option to reduce their hours within their organisation, do not need to reduce their hours, or cannot afford to do so. An alternative explanation is that they derive much satisfaction from their role and would therefore not contemplate reducing their work hours. Certainly, job satisfaction in the present study was positively associated with ageing, with job satisfaction increasing as age increased. It appears, for the majority of this sample at least, that graduated retirement options are not being considered.

All indications from the present study are that mature-age workers have relatively high levels of wellbeing and health, as expressed in terms of life and job satisfaction and an absence of health, injury or disability that affects their ability to work. These findings suggest that given appropriate job design and working conditions, health and wellbeing factors do not impact

on the workability of most mature-age workers, who enjoy a high level of wellbeing, life and job satisfaction, and very low perceived symptoms of ill-health, enabling them to maintain their productive participation in work.

The relatively low level of reported age-discrimination among the sample in-line with the reports from the 'Engaging an ageing workforce' survey, where managers and employers perceived the level of age discrimination to be low in their organisations. However, perceived age-discriminatory behaviour remains a concern and worthy of close organisational attention as it was related to negative outcomes for organisations, including lower job satisfaction and productivity and higher intention to quit.

Turning to the key focus of this study, it is clear that respondents perceived HR practices that apply to the whole workforce to be most commonly in place, notably those related to flexible working arrangements, performance management and recognition and respect being provided in many organisations. This is a positive finding considering that both flexible working arrangements and aspects of recognition and respect emerged as factors that enable mature-age workers to continue employment. However, those initiatives targeting the engagement, performance and retention of older workers in particular were relatively uncommon in respondents' organisations.

Perhaps of most concern regarding the presence of HR practices is the finding that organisations appear poor on job design that might have enabled greater work retention and performance, including creating new roles and redesigning jobs. Indeed, job design was the most commonly reported job-level factor that enabled, or would enable going forward, mature-workers to continue employment. This finding suggests that retention of mature-age workers is likely to rise with increased focus on redesigning roles to be more appealing or less strenuous on ageing workers.

The perceived absence of training for managers in relation to mature-age workers is also of concern as management attitudes and their adoption of good practices needs to be informed through such initiatives. These findings should be considered in relation to those from the survey of employers, for whom the training of managers in relation to mature-age workers and compensation management were also perceived as low importance HR activities. Furthermore, managers ranked performance-based compensation and training for managers, along with job recruitment for older workers, as the least important HR activities, while flexible work arrangements and using older workers to mentor and train younger and inexperienced employees were ranked as the most important HR practices.

The availability of flexible working arrangements perceived by a relatively large proportion of respondents is a positive finding, as the ability to reduce work hours and avoid long shifts are important for mature-age workers and enable their continuing employment. Just 20% of respondents felt that their organisation engaged in the practice of working from home, although this figure may be distorted as other New Zealand studies by these researchers have found many knowledge workers work remotely informally or just one or two days per week, without a formal agreement.

Recognition and respect were rated as the most important HR practices to respondents, and also emerged as a factor encouraging respondents to remain with their organisation. This is an important characteristic of a healthy work environment and mature-age workers share this need with the wider workforce. Recognition and respect is also an outcome of good leadership and strong management competencies, and training for managers in managing mature-age workers can contribute to this.

Finally, the opportunities for training and development among the sample were found to be relatively low. International research has demonstrated the importance of training and promoting learning amongst older workers. Indeed, there is evidence that desirable outcomes such as employee engagement and retention have been found to result from efforts to ensure that qualified older workers have access to challenging tasks, assignments, and learning resources as "stretch" experiences. With this in mind, a concerted effort to provide learning opportunities for mature-age workers is recommended, especially as they tend to be employed in part-time, casual, or seasonal jobs, severely diminishing their likelihood of securing training and development.

6. Conclusion

In order to develop an understanding of the needs of New Zealand's mature-age workers, this study asked: 'How do organisational systems, processes and practices for managing mature-age workers impact on the retention, productivity and wellbeing of individual mature-age workers, and how are these outcomes influenced by the presence or absence of age discriminatory behaviour?'

The findings from data collected from 1238 workers aged 55 years and over employed in organisations throughout New Zealand, indicate that the overall wellbeing and health of New Zealand's mature-age workers is relatively high. While mature-age workers in New Zealand experience relatively low levels of age discrimination, the findings do indicate concerns around biases held by managers about mature-age workers.

There was significant alignment between several of the HR practices that New Zealand organisations engaged with and those respondents felt were important for their retention in the workforce, including flexible work arrangements and recognition and respect. However, while factors relating to job design were commonly reported as enabling the continued employment of mature-age workers, the presence of HR practices relating to job design was relatively scarce. Furthermore, opportunities for training and development were lacking for many respondents.

This report provides insight into the perceptions and needs of New Zealand's mature-age workers, highlighting a number of areas of good HR practice, as well as areas where there is room for improvement. In particular, New Zealand organisations employing mature-age workers are likely to benefit from an increase focus on tailoring job design and training managers about age-awareness and how best to utilise the skills of mature-age workers. This is particularly important as the New Zealand ageing workforce appears to have an expectation to work beyond traditional retirement age, and have high-levels of health and wellbeing, enabling their continued participation in work, given a supportive working environment.

Further research will examine in more detail the role played by occupational and demographic factors in the study findings, and in particular whether these factors interact with age in explaining outcomes amongst our sample. These findings will be presented in a follow-up report in 2016.

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