Timewise Roundtable Partners' Briefing: Age Friendly Workplaces

In association with the Centre for Ageing Better

Focus

- To share key learnings from Half the Sky's research: *Maximising the opportunities of the aging workforce*
- To share examples of good practice from Lloyds Banking Group
- To hold a group discussion and share insights and thoughts from partner organisations

Research highlights

- The research focused on gathering evidence for three key areas: managing age diversity; flexible working and age bias in recruitment

- Managing age diversity:
  - Productivity and creativity are improved by age diverse teams.
  - Diversity requires inclusion, supported by communication.
  - Managers need equipping as there are still taboos and stereotypes in place.
  - Tailoring PMR process to suit older employees (eg mid-career reviews) would support retention and progression.

- Flexible working:
  - Older workers may be less aware of flexible rights due to not having 'grown up' with the new legislation.
  - Employers need to provide structural support for flexible working and hiring.
  - Managers, as well as HR, need to be equipped to deliver and support flexibility.
  - Templates and processes for hiring need to reflect flexible options.

- Age bias in recruitment:
  - It is harder to change biased minds than to de-bias processes.
  - Organisations need to consider the language used in job adverts (software exists to support this).
  - Blinding applications has been proved to improve age diversity.

- Five actions to take
  - Be flexible about flexible working
  - Develop age-smart managers
  - Bust some myths about age
  - Keep talking about careers
  - Hire age-positively

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Good practice highlights

- Outputs from focus groups have highlighted that:

  - Line managers feel older workers won't speak up about retirement/slowing down, but older workers fear they may be discriminated against if they do.
  - Organisations therefore need to create a culture in which it's not risky for employees to talk about future plans.
  - Older workers benefit from a menu of options, in which flexible working is key. Some may want to reduce hours; some may want to reduce responsibilities; some may want to retrain, some may want to formally leave but come back and work on individual projects.
  - Flexible working allows employers to address these preferences.

- Examples of good practice include:

  - Reverse mentoring
  - Agile working and hiring
  - Returners programmes and apprenticeship programmes targeted at older workers
  - Staged retirement
  - Alumni and retired affiliates programmes, through which former employees are invited back on a project basis
  - In-house secondments to gain new skills

Discussion highlights

- What older workers value in the workplace is broadly similar to what everyone values, such as: meaningful work, autonomy, social contact, equality of opportunity and flexibility. For example, there is no evidence that they are keener on remote working than anyone else.

- Partners noted that some of the work cited by the speakers is being carried out already, but only in pockets. There is a need to bring it all together and have proper structures in place for equipping managers and designing flexible roles.

- The alumni programme was seen as an interesting concept which would allow employers to pull in extra support at peak times in their cycles. It was felt that launching such an initiative would clearly demonstrate an organisation's commitment to supporting older workers.

- It was raised that this would also help surmount a key barrier for employees: a scepticism that the support being offered is genuine. Some employees fear that such initiatives are just words or box-ticking; strong comms would make it clear that it is taken seriously and so break down the reluctance to start conversations.

- Facilitating open and honest conversations was seen as an important point in its own right. It was felt that employers need to change the way they talk about, and to, older workers, both in terms of lifestage factors and flexible working requirements. Training managers to have these conversations would help create successful outcomes.

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- A concern was raised that some managers feel uncertain about what they can talk about when discussing age related issues, following the legislation on age bias; again, training would support this.

- It was also noted that the removal of the mandatory retirement age, whilst a positive step, has taken away a marker for discussing future plans. There was a consensus that introducing mid-career reviews would help mitigate this.

- There was broad agreement that a mid-career review is more compelling than 'talking about retirement' as the outlook of 50+ workers may vary enormously. Whereas some may be looking to reduce their hours, others may feel they are still at the height of their careers and have no intention of slowing down.

- There was a debate around the timing of mid-career reviews. Some felt that career planning needs to be an ongoing process that starts as soon as an employee enters the building.

- There was a discussion about flexible hiring and whether partners felt this was being managed successfully. It was felt that while many organisations do have strong policies in place, the culture has not always caught up with the policy.

- An example of overcoming this is an organisation who has set flexibility as the default position for hiring, requiring managers to justify any posts which are not advertised as flexible. The same organisation specifies which kinds of flexible working are available for each job, rather than simply stating a willingness to consider it.

- It was felt that for this kind of initiative to be successful in the long term, leadership teams need to provide managers with the tools to make it work, and managers need to embrace it rather than implementing it out of obligation.

- It was also felt that flexible roles need to live up to their descriptions, and that job design is key.

- The discussion concluded with an emphasis on the importance of demonstrating the business case for focusing on older workers: specifically, what will it deliver for your organisation?

- It was suggested that any decision-making process should start with examining the management information, looking at data such as productivity, sickness and retention rates, and considering ROI.

- It was agreed that showing evidence of the benefits that this focus can bring to the business, makes lasting culture change more likely, which will in turn lead to embedded benefits for employees.

- It was concluded that driving structural change, such as designing jobs to incorporate flexibility, would not just support today's older workers, but would also bring wider-reaching and longer-term business benefits. With 88% of Generation X and 92% of Generation Y either working flexibly already or wishing they could, flexible working is an increasingly important element of a future-facing organisation's talent strategy.