Age and Employability
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This podcast presents current employability statistics of older workers in the United States, discusses relevant issues affecting the candidacy of older workers among various types of occupations, as well as reviews a variety of peer reviewed studies that have investigated the social stigma that can be associated with hiring older workers. There is also a brief discussion of federal legislation that has been passed to protect older individuals in seeking employment.

One of the most useful resources used in the investigation of older individuals and employability is the Sloan Center on Aging and Work of Boston College. This academic institution provides us with a variety of publications, statistics and survey outcomes on issues related to our aging workforce and the amount of older workers involved in employment, as well as business strategies for the age diverse workforce. The Sloan Center on Aging and Work may be accessed free of charge at www.bc.edu/agingandwork.

Two of the more recent fact sheets authored through this center addressed encore careers and bridging jobs for aging workers as well as business strategies for the age diverse workforce. While many of the findings are not surprising, it supports our initial understanding that the proportion of older workers in the workforce continues to increase and businesses continue to expect to have to hire or consider the candidacy of older workers from the labor pool. The Bureau of Labor Statistics show us that the age 55 and older labor force has generally showed consistent increases rising form 27.1 million to 33.1 million between 2007 and 2012 having an overall labor force participation rate of 40%. In a global survey of business executives, nearly one in three or 31% of firms expected to have a significantly higher proportion of older workers of 65 years and older within the next five years. Of concern, nearly one in three of these employers indicated that they did not believe their human resources strategies were effective in adapting to hiring older workers, and one in four conceded in having a lack of their ability to transfer knowledge from retiring staff to younger staff. The same survey also identified that business executives and benefit administrators have a strong desire to retain older workers/employees as well as attract younger employees.

While it is traditionally understood that employers will be less likely to hire older individuals in jobs that require substantial training and/or investment, a Forbes 2011 survey indicated that 32% of companies felt that they had made more progress in promoting age diversity, and 72% reported they had diversity and inclusion programs focused on age. So overall as summarized by the Sloan Center on Aging and Work, many employers recognize the importance of retaining older employees and have begun the process of setting goals for age diversity and inclusion, specifically redefining retirement age and offering age specific benefits. This fact sheet also identifies a variety of action steps and addresses issues relative to planning and encouraging older workers to remain in the workforce.

AARP conducted a survey of over 1000 HR Directors in 2011 and found that more than half of employers indicated they would try to keep older workers on as part time workers or consultants and would develop programs for older workers to transfer their knowledge to younger workers as

they enter the organization. Educational offerings appear to be more available for younger employees, where employers offer continuing education and development courses to approximately 50% of their workforce whereas only 30% of older workers are recommended to attend such programs. Of important notes, many small business owners indicated that they already offer or are agreeable to implementing the number of workplace adjustments to attract older workers. Some of these include part time employment, specific work or project work, contracting or consulting work, and working from home arrangements (Investors Group, 2012).

To specifically address the types of careers and how to bridge jobs, the Sloan Center on Aging and Work published a fact sheet in December 2012 indicating that many older adults would like to delay retirement while others who retire prematurely for various reasons would continue working in some capacity to supplement retirement income or meet increasing expenses.

A Transamerica Retirement survey conducted by Collinson in 2012 identified that the majority of workers in their 50's and 60's plan to work after they retire, with 52% reporting that they plan to work part time, and 9% full time. It was also found that fewer than one in five workers did not plan to work after they retire, indicating that the vast majority, nearly 80% of those in their late 50's or early 60's expect to continue to work in some capacity.

The 2011 EBRI Retirement confidence survey conducted by Helman, Copeland and VanDerhei found that many retirees left the workforce earlier than they planned, citing such reasons for leaving as company downsizing or closing, health problems of disability, having to care for a spouse or family member, changes in skills for their previous job, and a variety of other work related reasons. Some of these retirees also indicated wanting to pursue other types of work or other types of avocations or were just able to afford early retirement.

Of those workers who planned to work after age 65, they indicated needs of having to maintain health benefits, could not afford to retire and need additional income.

Important demographic characteristics identified in the surveys/studies conducted by Cahill, Giandrea, and Quinn in 2007, and Groeneman in 2008, identified that previous blue collar employees are now seeking encore or bridge employment at rates comparable to those at higher ends of the wage scale or white collar workers. The 2008 Met Life Survey identified that most of those in encore careers came from professional or white collar jobs have at least a college education and tend to live in cities and surrounding suburbs. This finding indicates that individuals who reside in more rural areas or small towns are less likely to be found pursuing work after retirement and have lower levels of education, if involved in bridge or encore employment in their older years.

Of an important note, nearly 2/3 of the older workers indicated that they were looking for ways to better balance work with personal life and having a friendly work environment was absolutely essential to the ideal job of 88% of workers. This implies that older workers who have established or completed successful careers, if choosing to continue to work or pursue an encore or bridge job place a high value on the acceptability of work arrangements whereas younger workers or individuals who feel it is imperative they work to survive would be more willing to accept unfavorable work arrangements. Some of the remaining highlights as identified in the

fact sheet addressing encore careers and bridge jobs include that many employers view mature workers seeking encore careers and bridge employment as desirable additions to their talent pool noting attributes such as reliability, leadership skills, and strong work ethics. In fact, a 2012 survey of hiring managers of 500 U.S. companies identified that 91% of hiring managers say mature workers are reliable and half of nonprofit employers see encore workers as highly appealing (Met Life/Civic Ventures Survey, 2008).

Another useful empirical source for investigating older worker participation in the labor force is the Bureau of Labor Statistics Monthly Labor Review publication. This publication contains a variety of topics, although routinely address older workers and their labor participation rates. The January 2008 issue had a specific article regarding increasing labor force participation and hours of work of older workers. Murray Gendell of Georgetown University coordinated this publication and noted that there were major changes in the movement of labor force participation rates, and full time employment of older workers occurring in the past dozen years. These data provide us useful background information and more importantly historical information regarding changes in retirement age and expected years of post-work retirement. Much of the data is organized by post-work retirement and gender. For example, between 1950 and 1955 the estimated average age of retirement for men was 68 with 12 years of expected post-work retirement. In 2005, the average age of retirement dropped to 62.6 years of age for men with nearly 20 years of expected years of post-work retirement. A more significant variable in these data is not necessarily related to age as it is expected years of post-work retirement where we see a continued increase between 12 years in 1950 to nearly 19 years in 2010. More drastically, are the increases among post-work retirement of women which average 13.6 years in 1950 to 1955, and now today fall somewhere between 21 and 23 years of post-work retirement.

There were also some important issues addressed such as the impact of older workers leaving the labor force. The data presented and displayed in this article continues to show that the United States labor force is aging and that the fraction of persons in the labor force age 50 years and older increased from about 1/5 in 1995 to about 1/4 in 2005, and is projected to reach about 1/3 by 2015. Consistent with the previous literature we reviewed, the work force is aging and for a variety of reasons. As is typically seen in labor force participation rates, rates declined at all ages beginning at 45 to 49 through 75 and older, and the magnitude of the proportional declines increased from small to very large as the age groupings increase. The data show however that in 1985 the pace of these declines slowed greatly and they were actually marked reversals of the declining trends at ages 60 to 64, with pronounced increases among 65 to 69 year olds (28%), and 70 to 74 year olds (34%). Of course it should be noted that the number of persons participating in the labor force ages 70 to 74 are much smaller so even milder, modest increases in labor force participation would yield higher percentages. The persistent declines at ages 45 to 49 and 50 to 54 are also consistent with the previous literature we reviewed, indicating that various incentives for early retirement and factory closings may have forced many of these aged workers out of the labor force before they were actually ready to retire.

In addition to notable increases in the labor force participation rate of men and women ages 62 and older, there were marked gains in the percentages of full time employment, especially among women ages 62 and older, and nearly 10% increased between 1994 and 2007. In fact, men age 62 to 64, 82% were employed full time, and 65 to 69 year olds nearly 70% were employed full

time. Those 70 and older were employed full time approximately 55% of the time. Women 62 to 64 were employed full time 68% of the time, and those age 65 to 69 approximately 53% of the time. Women age 70 and older were employed full time approximately 40% of the time. Overall, the statistical analysis and research conducted by Gendell in 2008 indicates that within the last 12 years there has been an increase in the supply of labor at ages 60 and older, and apparently in the demand as well. Gendell indicates that while it's difficult to judge the pace and extent of these gains, there is no reason to believe that these trends will not continue, therefore implying that the labor force participation rates of older persons in the U.S. economy is expected to remain prevalent.

Ellie Berger of the Department of Sociology of Nipissing conducted a study investigating aging identities specifically the degradation and negotiation in the search of employment. This specific study examined the relationship between identity and aging, and identity and work. This study investigated data collected from interviews with individuals age 45 to 65 in order to examine changes in identity that occurred during their search for employment. There has been an abundance of literature investigating relationships between identity and aging as well as work, but little research that seeks to understand the interconnectedness of aging, identity and work in relation to the job search process (Berger, 2006). This particular study focuses on older workers job search process and obtains information from qualitative interviews rather than the abundance of quantitative data available. One of the key aspects of this study is to try to understand certain individual's modes, behaviors and interactions throughout the search for employment. This study also examines a conceptualization of stigma that older people are particularly susceptible to internalizing stigmatization and being labeled as old or less valuable.

Previous literature has investigated the impact of plant closures and found that older women in particular have the greatest challenges to overcome after layoff occurs, particularly in relation to depression, shame and anger (Gilberto, 1997). Other studies have also identified older women's adjustment to unemployment, noting that these individuals typically have the greatest financial and psychological difficulties during periods of unemployment due to accommodation of age and gender discrimination (Rife, 1992). Other studies have shown that once older individuals become unemployed they experience higher levels of economic strain, increased morbidity, and incidents of suicide (Armstrong-Stassen, 2001; LeBlank and McMullin, 1997; and Taylor, 2003). Berger's research drew on data drawn from 30 semi structured interviews conducted with unemployed individual's age 45 to 65 who were actively searching for employment in the greater Toronto area. Regular meetings were attended at various job placement agencies that specialized in providing employment services to workers of all ages. Most of the participants were recruited through attendance through older worker programs such as computer training, interviewing skills, resume writing, etc. The sample consisted of an equal proportion of male to female and ages 45 to 54 and 55 to 65. Various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics were noted including education, personal income, length of time unemployed, occupational background, country of origin, and etc. For individuals interested in qualitative responses of the participants I would encourage that you see if you can access this particular study in the Journal of Aging Studies 2006, volume 20, pages 303 to 316.

This study found that the majority of individuals surveyed were able to successfully negotiate more positive identities through a variety of tactics. These individuals drew more frequently on

family and friends outside of specific employment programs, and altered their overall mental outlook by staying positive. These older workers did frequently indicate that they felt they were experiencing discriminatory actions by employers which the author contributes to potentially being a byproduct of being labeled as older through various governmental definitions and employment agencies. It should be noted that this research was conducted in Canada in which different definitions are used to identify and classify older workers. The author also indicated that it was clear that the search for employment was structured by age and in order to improve older individual's job prospects, older worker programs, and employers hiring practices need to be more sensitive to this fact.

Van der Heijden, and Colleagues in 2009 published a study regarding the age effects on employability, specifically the career success relationship in the Journal of Vocational Behavior. This study can be identified in the Journal of Vocational Behavior, volume 74, pages 156 through 164. This particular study investigated the similarity of the factor structure for self-reported versus supervisor rated employability for two age groups of workers, and then validated a career success enhancing model of employability across two age groups. One particular point of interest in the literature reviewed examined the relationship between career success and age, specifically investigating the person to environment fit for older workers. As is consistent with vocational rehabilitation literature, career development theories focus on the ideas that one's self-concept becomes more clearly defined with age and that career choice is a process of matching one's self-concept with images of the occupational world (Watkins and Subich, 1995). This would imply that older individuals that have more experience, seniority and developed skills over time will obtain a relatively better occupational fit and achieve higher occupational levels with more job control compared to younger workers.

While this study was primarily carried out to develop a model used to predict validity of employability in the light of career success among older and younger employees, for purposes of this podcast the examination on whether or not employee age moderates the relationship between self and supervisor ratings is of more importance. Overall, the research identified that for younger workers both self and supervisor ratings of employability related significantly to objective career success outcomes. Over 40 self-rated employability related positively to promotions throughout their career although supervisor ratings related negatively to overall promotions. Additionally, length of service appeared to be negatively related to both supervisor and self-related employability and positively to organizational specific promotions. This implies that there is a perceived lack of worth and employability among older workers, particularly in employment settings where human resource policies don't view older workers as long lasting valuable organizational assets. It is also important to note that empirical evidence suggests that perceptions of one's own career do not always correspond to external objective criteria (Poole, Langan-Fox, and Omodei, 1993).

One issue that tends to arise when discussing employability of older workers is computer skill acquisition or the ability for older workers to become knowledgeable of the personal computer and demonstrate those competencies within the workplace. A study conducted in December 2005 by Reed and Colleagues, investigated the impact of aging on self-advocacy and computer skill acquisition. In 2005, workers age 50 years and older represented the largest growing labor force segment in America and while the examination of the relationship between older workers

and technology is nothing new, researchers are beginning to focus more attention on the specific barriers older workers face when using new technology (Czaja and Sharit, 1993). The authors identified that little empirical evidence exists to validate whether age differences exist in computer performance although it does appear to be evident that older workers may in fact perceive themselves as being of low or little value in high-tech society. This particular study discusses self-efficacy theory to propose that age related differences and the amount of computer skills acquired can be explained by age related confidence and operating the computer technology. Previous research has shown that there is a positive relationship that exists between computer self-efficacy and computer related outcomes, thus implying that individuals who have a desire or interest in obtaining such skills are successful in technology performance.

There does appear to be a relationship between age and experience, specifically that older workers while performing their work prior to the technological revolution had less computer interaction thus explaining lower computer performance for aging workers (Ansley and Erber, 1988). The first hypothesis outlined by these researchers is that age is negatively related to computer skill acquisition. Kelley and Charness in 1995 hypothesized that age affects computer performance and examined a variety of age related abilities, experiences, and attitudes as potential explanatory variables. The hypothesis begins with the assumption that spatial abilities or perceptual speed declines with age, thus making word processing and information retrieval more difficult for older computer operators. These authors also indicated that based on biological deficits as we age we become more challenged in our ability to interface with computers, specifically reaction time, visual acuity, and spatial memory become more challenging in carrying out the requested work. Some previous research examined an indirect effect of age on computer self-efficacy and subsequent computer performance. Chisholm and Colleagues in 2002 hypothesize that individual characteristics such as age affected computer self-efficacy and skill obtainment. Their research identified that age only slightly impacted computer ownership but the study did not exam how individual characteristics affected computer usage. The second hypothesize presented by these authors is that age is negatively related to computer self-efficacy.

The authors note that empirical studies support the mediating effects of computer self-efficacy between previous experience and using computers in job performance, although failed to address potential effects of age (Henry and Stone, 1995). The third hypothesis brought forth by these researchers is that computer self-efficacy will mediate the influence of age on computer skill acquisition.

The participants for this study were volunteers solicited from more than 100 local organizations in the Midwest. Selected organizations dealt with employee issues were individuals who may not have had easy access to basic computer training. The participants received a three hour basic computer training session on word processing and spreadsheet software in exchange for their participation in the study, and the same trainer facilitated all 22 sessions. Ages of participants ranged from 17 to 86 years with the mean age of 51. The participants completed a series of questionnaires and objective skill assessments. The subjective and objective measures allowed the researchers to investigate various dependent variables based on self-report and objective performance measures.

The research found that computer self-efficacy did affectively mediate the relations between age and both objective and subjective measures of computer skill acquisition. What was found to be contrary to previous research is that individual's attitudes towards technological change had no significant effect on the age-computer self-efficacy relationship. The study results also indicated that people who have stronger positive beliefs about their computer skills are in fact better able to acquire these skills, and again this finding was supported by both objective and subjective measures of skill acquisition. There was a negative relationship identified between age and computer skill acquisition and the authors noted that while age significantly impacted both measures of skill acquisition age explains significantly more variance in the self-report measure, indicating that the older individuals become, the less computer skills they have.

Roop (1999) found that while behaviors improved after computer skill interventions affective outcomes remained relatively stable, specifically perception of older workers about their ability to use computers or technology. As supported in this study, older workers may report negative beliefs about their ability to operate technology despite relatively positive objective measures regarding their confidence (Reed et. al, 2005).

In closing, Zickuhr and Madden, 2012 conducted research for the Pew Research Center investigating older adults and internet use. It was found that 53% of American adults age 65 and older use the internet or email according to the 2012 Pew survey. This survey also found that 86% of internet users age 65 and older use email with 48% doing so on a typical day, and 1/3 of internet users age 65 and older use social networking sites such as Facebook.

In summary, statistics in empirical research has shown that the United States labor force is continuing to age and will continue to do so through 2015. The perception that older workers retire and remain out of the labor force is generally false where increasing percentages and ratios of workers are returning to work for various reasons. While research shows that employment discrimination and stigma still exist, employers are becoming more familiar with and becoming more receptive to retaining older workers in consulting and part time roles, as well as considering older workers as part of a viable applicant pool. Research has also shown that older workers tend to favor work environments that are closely related to their interests and skills and are less apt to, for lack of a better term, tough it out in occupational areas of noninterest. Of particular importance is the research that has demonstrated that older individuals are capable of obtaining and maintaining computer skills although age appears to be negatively related to computer skill acquisition. The most recent studies in 2012 indicate that individuals 65 and older are utilizing the computer to access email, social network, and navigate the internet.

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